**Norfolk Schools Forum**

**Minutes of Meeting held on Wednesday 17 November 2021**

**09:00 – 13:00 hours**

**Teams Meeting**

**Present: Representing**

Adrian Ball, Diocese of Ely Multi Academy Academies

Trust

Keith Bates, Eaton Hall Specialist Academy Special School Academy

Chris Caddamy, (Vice Chair) City College 16 – 19 Representative

Lacey Douglass Early Years Representative

Mike Grimble, Avenue Junior School Primary Maintained Governors

Bob Groome Association of Teachers & Lecturers

Glyn Hambling, Unity Education Trust Alternative Provision

Howard Nelson, Diocese of Norwich Diocesan Board of Education

Clare Jones, Boudica Schools Trust Academies

Peter Pazitka, SJB CMAT Academies

Joanne Philpott, City of Norwich School Academies

Sarah Porter, The Heart Education Trust Academies

David Shaw, Creative Education Trust Academies

Sarah Shirras, St Williams Primary Primary Maintained Schools

Joanna Tuttle, Aylsham High School Secondary Maintained Schools

Martin White, (Chair) Nebula Federation Primary Maintained Governors

Rebecca Wicks, The Clare School Maintained Special Schools

Michael Bateman Assistant Director, SEND Strategic Improvement & Early Effectiveness

Martin Brock Accountant, Schools, SEN, and Early Years

John Crowley Assistant Director Learning & Achievement

Sally Cutting Senior Accountant

Marilyn Edgeley Admin Officer

Dawn Filtness Finance Business Partner

Nicki Rider Head of High Needs SEND

Chris Snudden Director of Learning & Inclusion

**Apologies:**

Carol Jacques Maintained Nursery School

Sara Tough Executive Director Childrens Services

1. **Welcome and Apologies**

Members noted that it would have been inappropriate to meet face to face due to the number of covid cases in the county

Members were sad to note that Gerry Batty a former School Forum representative has died.

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Apologies were received from Carole Jacques. It was noted that Andrew Aalders-Dunthorne has resigned and an election will need to take place for an Academy Representative.

1. **Minutes of the Last Meeting and Matters Arising**

It was agreed the minutes were a true record of the meeting.

* **Joint letter to the government with other School Forums in the Eastern Region on insufficient funding for the High Needs Block.**

This letter has been emailed to the Secretary for Education.

* **Update on age groups of increased EHCPs**

A report was circulated previously to members.

1. **Consultation from the Department of Education.**

Officers said this consultation will have implications for the authority and for Schools Forum. The consultation is about the removal of funding supporting school improvement and the movement of the political agenda.

The funding would be reduced by 50% next April with the loss of the following 50% April 2023.

Officers urged School Forum Members to respond to the consultation.

If the Authority wants to carry on supporting school improvement it will have to go to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

Members noted that page 7 of the consultation lays out what the Government intend to do. Officers are compiling a regional response and a Directors of Children’s Services response. The consultation closes at the end of this month with an announcement Dec/Jan.

Officers will monitor this closely.

One criticism in the consultation is that LA’s (Local Authorities) have had these powers but not used them. Officers said Norfolk has used them and intervened when required and achieved positive results with schools improving and gaining a good ofsted result.

1. **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)**

**a. Early Years Block**

Following the Chancellor’s autumn Spending Review the DfE confirmed to local authorities that there will be additional funding for the early years entitlements worth £160m in 2022/23, £180m in 2023/24 and £170m in 2024/25. This is for local authorities to increase hourly rates paid to childcare providers for the government’s free childcare entitlement offers and reflects the costs of inflation and national living wage increases.

Officers went through the paper and highlighted points that were worth discussing.

Officer said they do not know exactly what the funding will be – so helpful to have a steer for the direction School Forum would like the Authority to go.

Comments:

* Members asked about the Early Years Recovery package and how quick this could come into effect. Providers will see money coming into early years and expect an increase.

Officers said the papers did not make it clear if this is additional money or the same money being counted more than once.

* Tough for Early Years at the moment with low numbers of children and the living wage increase.
* I think we should have a base rate plus a mandatory deprivation supplement.

Officer comment – yes previous discussions suggest same direction and reduce supplements and increase base rates.

* Agree regarding the need to be mindful regarding the transitional arrangements for removal of supplements.
* Difficult to make any comment or steer without knowing what is the level of funding as we would be in risk of robbing Peter to Paul! Base rate is key.
* There should be some kind of minimum growth factor.
* Concerned about Early Years recovery package – how quick can this come in to effect?

Officers said there are a lot of Budget announcements but unclear what is a one off or recurring amounts; difficult to unpick!

* There were no comments on the level of contingency.
* There were no comments on the SENIF Funding.

Officers said it was probably right to encourage a better base rate to get more two year olds into the system.

This item will be brought back to the January meeting.

**b. De-delegation/Central School Services Block**

The primary representatives have had a pre-meeting to discuss their votes – however they still wished a vote to take place today.

Voting took place and the following votes were recorded:

Decision 1a – Should staff cost budgets for the primary sector be de-delegated? (To be agreed by maintained primary representatives).

**Unanimous - Yes**

Decision 1b – Should staff cost budgets for the secondary sector be de-delegated? (To be agreed by the maintained secondary representative).

**The maintained secondary representative agreed for the de-delegation of Special Circumstances only.**

Decision 2 – To agree de-delegation of a contingency at an indicative rate of £0.79 per-pupil for 2022/23 from primary schools’ budgets, for a budget of £25k (to be agreed by maintained primary representatives).

**Unanimous - No**

The maintained secondary representative said that on a matter of principle it was unfair that secondary schools were not included in the contingency.

Others agreed it should be everyone’s concern.

Decision 3a – Should Free School Meals eligibility be de-delegated for the primary sector (maintained)? (To be agreed by maintained primary representatives).

**Unanimous – Yes**

Decision 3b – Should Free School Meal eligibility be de-delegated for the secondary sector (maintained)? (To be agreed by the maintained secondary representative).

**The maintained secondary representative agreed de-delegation.**

Decision 4a - The maintained special school representative is asked to decide on the buyback of services for all maintained special schools in the 2022/23 financial year.

**The maintained special school representative agreed to buy back services for maintained special schools.**

Decision 4b - The academy special school representative is asked to decide on the buyback of services for academy special schools in the 2022/23 financial year.

**The special school academy representative confirmed that special academies did not wish to buy back services.**

Decision 5 - The maintained nursery school representative is asked to decide on the buyback of services for maintained nursery schools in the 2022/23 financial year.

**Although not present at the meeting, the maintained nursery school representative agreed to buyback for nursery schools via email.**

Decision 6a – To approve a £500,000 centrally retained fund for pre-16 growth in 2022/23.

**Unanimous – Yes**

Decision 6b – To approve the pre-16 growth fund criteria as detailed in section 1.6 of this paper

**Unanimous – Yes**

Decision 7a – To approve the level of Admissions funding (£487,011).

**Unanimous – Yes**

Decision 7b – To approve the level of funding for Schools Forum (£30,000).

**Unanimous – Yes**

Decision 7c – To approve the level of funding for Fees to Independent Schools for pupil without SEN (£100,000).

**Unanimous – Yes**

**Action – Officers agreed to share with Forum Members a previous external evaluation of the service.**

Decision 7d – To approve the level of contribution towards the Director of Learning & Inclusion central budgets- Early Intervention and Achievement (£119,700).

**Unanimous – Yes**

Decision 7e – To approve the level of Termination of Employment Costs (£64,994).

**Unanimous - Yes**

Decision 8 – Schools Forum to approve funding for responsibilities held for all schools from Central School Services Block, including Teachers’ Pay Grant and Teachers’ Pension Employer Contribution Grant for centrally employed staff (£2,477,132).

**Unanimous - Yes**

**c. Fair Funding Consultation/National Funding Formula**

Officers said they wanted to discuss the position the Authority is in in relation to the 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. We would also be interested in your views on an additional 1% transfer. The deficit is growing exponentially with the biggest rise in one month just realised. At the meeting with the ESFA they felt we had provided a comprehensive picture. However they had no helpful suggestions. They asked in any future disapplication request to be very clear on School Forum reasons for supporting or not and reasons why.

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Forum members were asked to respond to the first 3 bullet points on the paper:

Comments:

* At headteacher briefings it was obvious that a lot of people did not understand these high level issues and this makes it difficult for them to respond to the consultation – it would be beneficial in the new year to have some finance training between School Forum and Educate Norfolk and the roll of the School Forum.

**Action - Sarah Shirras will take this back to Educate Norfolk.**

* From feedback early intervention comes up. It is fundamentally really difficult to keep seeing a massive deficit year on year. I appreciate the difficulties the LA is facing but I feel we are just putting good money after bad putting the additional % in there. Do we need to know money will have a good long term objective? Independent places seem to be causing the difficulties.
* All about early intervention and delivery of change – not sure of quality of independent places. Special Schools are doing a brilliant job.

Officers said early intervention was absolutely in their thoughts we have to invest more up front but we have to meet needs. We did invite the DfE to work with us in piloting some new approaches and how we hold on to youngsters in main stream. They were not in a position to do they but we will pursue it. They said it was impossible to dis-aggregate where the money goes. One thing they wanted to consider was how to get more money into schools earlier.

* Appreciate huge amount of effort on this but figures are mind boggling looking at the increase in costs. If we have 1% transfer will just pay for standing still. How much are you going to put into your predictions for cost rises? This needs to be built in.

Officers said they are doing some work locally and regionally around procurement of places.

* Will we see more support staff laid off if we do not support the transfer – lot of support staff reduced in last few years. Maybe we need to attract more support staff to help more children stay in main stream schools.
* On the 1% transfer – seems on the outturn that the 1% is forecasted in for every year what will be the DfE view on this – if we approve gives the message given the wider reforms that are needed in the SEND funding that we have this money in the sector to give away.

If the debt continues to grow thinking about the reforms that Stoke have had to do and the controls they have had to adopt to be eligible to get the extra funding what is the LAs view on this.

Officers said it is hard to know what the mood of the department is.

With the level of deficit – if regulation changes and it becomes an LA problem it will bankrupt a number of authorities and leaves our council under a potential threat.

**Members were asked to vote on continuation of the movement of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block for 2022-23**

**Yes 15**

**No**

**Abstain 1**

**At this point members of School Forum were asked give there views/decision on request for an additional 1% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block.**

A.Ball – No not right time to put 1% to supplement the High Needs Block.

B.Groom – No, by moving the 1% more support staff will be made redundant and compound the problem even more meaning not being able to meet need in schools therefore places rising in special needs schools.

G.Hambling – Key issue I am abstaining from a point of the 1% something I think in the longer term we are going to have to consider and put points to but in line with a strategic over view plan as we have been discussing. I totally understand the reasoning behind the request to make the big strategic decisions but challenging for us as a School Forum to determine whether it is right or not now based on NCC strategy. It is a decision which NCC will make, if they go ahead we will attempt to support as is.

C.Caddamy – Difficult to call for me as no effect on college. I do think any additional funding for schools to help early intervention which supports students to progress and not need those additional high needs funds when they get into a college is important but I think it is right for me to abstain on this one.

C. Jones - Abstain too complex.

D.Shaw – Mirror what Glyn said completely understand requirements but a No – across nation is an issue so should be an element of national funding not local funding.

R.Wicks – I agree too complicated is a national picture – abstain until I have further information.

H.Nelson – No – is a national issue size of deficit so large actually will not make a difference.

K.Bates – Yes will support on the point of view of giving a message to the DfE around schools being behind the LA application and supporting the application to be doing everything they can to alleviate the situation rather than us looking completely dis-united as a system. So I will be a yes.

L. Douglas – I will abstain as does not impact on me.

M.Grimble – Totally support what has been going on to try and address this issue but Schools Forum has been providing the half percent for year after year which is an indication that we are very positive to getting this issue sorted out concerns provision not there adequately outside maintained schools and basically money needed in schools to make sure those pupils are looked after as there have been times when complex needs not met in the high needs block and still in the schools. I think money better spent in the schools but continue to support the efforts and don’t think the 1% will make much difference so NO.

J.Philpott – No as so much financial uncertainty for schools so planning incredibly difficult and we are dealing with all the problems of SEN in schools and to have 1% going out will make a significant impact on schools and the children we are supporting and will not make a significant impact on the deficit so will have to be No.

P. Pazitka – No for much the same reasons 1% will not make a difference especially in primary schools where a systematic fix is needed for the deficit

S.Porter – No, school budgets already constrained and extra 1% would have a significantly negative impact in primarys’ and will impact on the SEN pupils – national issue as much as a local issue and needs a national solution.

S.Shirras – Impossible situation puts us all in and the insult I felt last year when the implication was that we as a school forum working with the LA did not understand the issues and that is just not the case, we go into intelligent open discussion about this and I am proud how we deal with this collectively so would hate for any of our decisions to look as if we don’t understand. This is not an individual schools issue it needs a national solution. As primary rep here I need to support the views of the consultation I wouldn’t be in support of it it but does not mean I don’t support the LA and schools forum trying to find a solution to this.

J.Tuttle – No – same reasons – as secondary schools representative if we could have seen evidence of a creative solution focused approach of a budget set within that recovery plan looking at a more creative approach then actually we may have said Yes. Would probably of changed our decision if the focus had been slightly different within that recovery plan.

M.White – Echo what Sarah has said as we both got caught in the middle of it as chair and past chair of schools forum – lack of understanding from DfE totally agree with what Sarah has said and to echo the thing that has been said again and again the problem with HN Block is a national funding issue and that is where it needs to be addressed and it should not be for schools to bail out the HN block when they so desperately need the money and need it more because of the problems with the HN block, too many of these special needs children are in main stream schools and that’s where the funding needs to be and that is reflected in the consultation that the LA has just completed.

**Forum Members were asked to vote on the proposed change to admissions appeals charges, so that all schools that are their own admissions authority are charged for the use of appeals services from April 2022**.

**Unanimous - Yes**

**d. Special Schools Review (feedback from consultation)**

A decision on the outcomes of the review will need to be made via Council Members and will add an extra burden on the High Needs Block. Officers asked for Forum Members’ views to help inform the next steps regarding this review.

Comments:

* The issue is re-distributing money in the High Needs Block (HNB) or putting extra pressure on the HNB which can’t continue in the way it is going.
* Reiterate issue about will there be a national funding formula for Special Schools – if so this may be a useful exercise for our knowledge but not practical long term.
* It seems leadership costs has caused more negative responses than anything else.
* There was quite a few unsure/need more info. responses.

Officers said they wanted to take this forward with Forum’s comments. If Members have any further comments after this meeting they can email them to Marilyn.

Officers said that they did think that this created a fairer system, it was comprehensively modelled on running costs – some nuances remain e.g. top-up funding for band D. Overall represents the cost of looking after these children.

* One contentious issue is leadership points.
* Some special Schools are all-through schools, the moving parts of a Special School are very multiple compared to a mainstream school and that explains the requirement for more leadership capacity. We can’t escape that a review like this has not taken place for 10 years. I hope we don’t kick this into the ‘long grass’.

Officers said they equally want to support mainstream schools to support a greater level of need.

* I support getting the level of care right – to be prudent need a short time period before this is reviewed again.
* Agree we need to be brave around deficit if this is what our Special Schools need it is the right thing to do.
* If it is more fair than previous model it needs to be taken on board.
1. **Date of next meeting**

19 January 2021 09:00 – 11:30 at Southgreen Park Mattishall