**Norfolk Schools Forum**

**Minutes of Meeting held on Wednesday 27 January 2023 at Easton College**

**09:00 – 12:30 hours**

**Present: Representing**

Adrian Ball, Diocese of Ely Multi Academy Academies

Martin Colbourne, City College 16 – 19 Representative

Steven Dewing Academies

Lacey Douglass Early Years Representative

Mike Grimble, Avenue Junior School Primary Maintained Governors

Bob Groome JCC

Glyn Hambling, Unity Education Trust Alternative Provision

David Hicks Academies

Tim Hillman (Sub) JCC

Carol Jacques Maintained Nursery School

Clare Jones, Boudica Schools Trust Academies

Howard Nelson, Diocese of Norwich Diocesan Board of Education

Peter Pazitka, SJB CMAT Academies

Joanne Philpott, City of Norwich School Academies

Sarah Porter, The Heart Education Trust Academies

Rachel Quick, The Wherry School Special School Academy

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

Martin Brock Accountant (Schools, SEND & EY)

Michael Bateman Assistant Director, SEND Strategic Improvement & Early Effectiveness

John Crowley Assistant Director, Learning & Achievement

Marilyn Edgeley Admin Officer

Dawn Filtness Finance Business Partner

Sam Fletcher Interim Assistant Director, Education Strategy & Infrastructure

Nicki Rider Assistant Director High Needs SEND

Sara Tough Executive Director Childrens Services

James Wilson Director of Quality and Transformation

**Apologies:**

Vicky Warnes JCC

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

Everyone was welcomed to the meeting, with Sara Tough initially Chairing until the appointment of Chair.

1. **Election of Chair/Vice Chair**

Members were asked for nominations for Chair. Martin White was nominated, there being no other nominations Martin White was duly elected.

Members were asked for nominations for Vice Chair. Glyn Hambling was nominated there being no other nominations Glyn Hambling was duly elected.

Officers requested that item 4 (c) was taken prior to item 4 (a) due to the implications of (c) on (a). This was agreed.

1. **DSG Safety Valve Update and Additional 1% SB to HNB Block Transfer vote**

Sara Tough provided an update on Safety Valve Program and explained how the decision School Forum takes for 1% transfer, and the decision already made on the 0.5% transfer, is linked to the Safety Valve process, and that the 1% transfer will require a specific vote. In summary covering that:

* Colleagues are aware of the Safety Valve negotiation the LA have been having with the DfE.
* The purpose has been to achieve a significant financial investment that enables us to facilitate the plan of work over six years to re-balance the spend for children with SEN and the DfE will pay off the historical debt.
* The deal requires 3 elements of financial commitments: DfE, LA, Schools Forum.
* The LA have agreed a figure with the DfE, but that requires ministerial approval.
* The LA has agreed a figure to contribute that has political support from the Council’s Cabinet.
* The Schools Forum contribution is the 1.5% block transfer that we have engaged the Forum and schools broadly about as part of our disapplication submission.
* The Secretary of State sign off is subject to a very clear positive vote from the SF.
* The vote needs to not just about the money, it’s also School Forum, in your strategic capacity, committing to work together to achieve the plan which has been presented previously (now to be known as Local First Inclusion).
* A ‘no’ vote would mean the system missing out on significant investment.

James Wilson and Michael Bateman then gave the background reminders on the aims and objectives of the Plan.

Members of Schools Forum raised queries / made comments in the following areas:

* Concern regarding potential job loss in schools as a result of a 1% transfer
* Timing of the announcements to schools of their budget shares
* Potential challenges of recruitment given potential limited resource pool in Norfolk and risk of de-stabilisation of schools
* Need for an understanding, including within Central Government, of the challenges faced in relation to training and the qualifications base of the sector, and that training needs to a high priority to improve skills across the whole sector with cross-support
* Positivity about the changes planned, a high level of trust is needed, and it’s important it works
* Communication with schools to ensure wide understanding and trust
* Confirmation sought regarding future reporting to Forum; 2024/25 is key year and progress needs to be understood
* Concern regarding the impact of the 1.5% on certain schools due to capping system

In response, the LA provided the following assurances / responses:

* Acknowledgement that the plan is bolder in respect of early intervention than Norfolk has seen before. There will be regular reporting to the Forum, with the Safety Valve already a standing item on every agenda going forward. Additionally, the Forum has significant representation upon the Executive Board set up to oversee the programme. The plan involves multiple stakeholders and needs to be a system plan, not just an LA plan
* The new job roles are designed to complement not duplicate those already in the school system, including with alternative qualifications and experience. That the roles are being designed to be attractive and to create further capacity into the system as a whole, with appropriate training. The plan brings more resources to the whole system than available without the deal. To date, new provision has attracted highly qualified staff and there are benefits to staff and taking skills with them and supporting one another
* The Green Paper sets a clear direction of travel around SEN support, the issue of training and a different role for the independent sector – the plan aligns with these themes and the LA hopes the Secretary of State does publish this in the spring as promised.
* The timetable for budget shares is as normal and presumes Secretary of State sign off of the additional 1% transfer.

**Decision:** **Support for Local First Inclusion plan and the LA disapplication for additional 1% transfer from Schools Block to High Needs Block**

**For: 19**
**Against: 1** (in favour of the plan but against the distribution methodology of the impact)
**Abstentions: 0**

1 vacancy – all appointed represented were present in full

1. **Dedicated Schools Grant**

*c) Early Years*

The authority has held a consultation on the Early Years funding model Autumn 2022 with the paper for consideration today containing a summary of the responses and the appendix of the paper providing all the comments provided.

The Early Years consultative group met to consider the responses and the Local Authority is keen for this group to continue. A meeting was also held with childminders (as they were unable to attend the consultative group) and they agreed to the proposals of the group.

Considering the feedback from the consultation the consultative group’s view was that there was not a strong case for radical change. The group examined the impact of possible changes to deprivation supplement rates and concluded it would be beneficial for the sector to maintain the existing budget but combine the two rates into a single rate.

The proposals are laid out in the Early Years paper.

**Schools Forum is asked to:**

* **Consider feedback from the early years formula consultation;**
* **Consider input received from the EY Consultative Group;**
* **Discuss the LA’s proposals for changes to the 2023-24 early years funding formula.**
* **Make a recommendation for the final 2023-24 early years formula.**

The Early Years Maintained Nursery Representative shared particular concerns regarding the impact of the specific proposal in relation to the Maintained Nursery Supplement and that there was not specific discussion with the three maintained nurseries prior to the proposal being published. The representative wanted colleagues to understand the implications for the nursery schools, that they feel that they do not have a voice, and that they feel that previous attempts to engage with the LA has been unsuccessful and so needs to raise concerns at the Forum. Particular concerns include:

* Significantly higher rates of pay, terms and conditions for maintained nurseries compared to PVI settings
* Lack of receipt of free school meal spending as a maintained nursery school and previous advice from the LA that it was not worth apply for due to only three schools
* Schools are in areas of deprivation but no no additional funding provided, and that this would be an option of the LA agreed to it.
* Rates for nursery schools are not rebated, unlike other schools, and these are significant amounts (e.g. £23k for Earlham from a £400k budget).
* In 2017 the maintained nursery classes had money removed by the DfE, not clear why, then the LA topped this up for which they we were grateful. Increases are fantastic but maintained nursery schools lose 1.5%, which for Earlham is half of that increase and is unsustainable.
* Nursery schools want to be part of the system change, are classed as good or outstanding, but are paid a pittance of funding and risk deficits in the future

The Chair acknowledged the amount the Maintained Nursery Schools’ Representative and her colleagues have invested, and interested to note what you are suggesting.

The LA committed to explore creatively how nursery schools can be involved in the Norfolk First Inclusion Plan and draw down some additional funding through this route.

Following enquiry from the Vice-Chair it was confirmed that the Maintained Nursery Representative was a member of the consultative group and that these concerns were not raised in this meeting. However, the DfE changes to the Maintained Nursery School grant were not known when the group met due to the timing of announcements.

The LA committed to listing members of any consultative groups or similar engagement in all future papers for ease of sight of Forum Members.

In relation to the rest of the paper, the LA did note in its introduction that the 14p increase for 2-year-old funding was not sufficient to cover National Living Wage and that providers are already reluctant to take children of this age.

The LA were asked to show the impact of the proposals for settings as they do for the Fair Funding consultation and associated papers has been done in the past as it is hard to make decisions without knowing the impact. The LA confirmed that they would, but that they were not included on this occasion as the nature of the proposals meant that changes would be broadly equal.

**Forum is asked to make a recommendation for the final 2023-24 early years formula.**

**Support proposals**

**For 16**

**Against 2**

**Abstain 2**

*4a) Proposed Schools Budget including central costs*

Dawn Filtness introduced the paper and highlighted key elements.

**Schools Forum is asked to:**

* **Note information provided for the 2023-24 Dedicated Schools Block allocations and other DfE grants (Sections 1 and 2);**

**Forum noted the information provided**

* **Note the funding announcements in relation to High Needs Block (Section 3);**

**Forum noted the information provided**

* **Note the latest updates to Norfolk’s DSG recovery plan (Section 4);**

The LA committed to providing version numbers on recovery plans in future following a request from a Member

**Forum noted the information provided**

* **Note the funding announcements in relation to the Schools Block (Section 5);**

A Member asked if the additional grant allocation would be rolled into the DSG but Officers were unable to answer this as there has been no indication from the DfE, but acknowledge it could happen.

**Forum noted the information provided**

* **Note the Maintained Nursery Supplement provided by the DSG and recommend the proposal to continue to provide additional protection (£29,896 for 2023-24) from the EY Block (Section 6);**

**For: Unanimous**

* **Vote on retention of 5% of 3- and 4-year-old allocations for EY central services (Section 6);**

**For: Unanimous**

* **Note the funding announcements in relation to the Central School Services Block (Section 7).**

**Forum noted the information provided**

* **Approve the following items from Central School Services Block:**
	+ Fees to independent schools for pupils with SEN (£100,00)

**For: Unanimous**

* + Contribution to Learning and Inclusion (£119,700)

It was confirmed by Sarah Shiras, as Interim Chair of Educate Norfolk as well as a Member of Schools Forum, that they were previously not a subscription organisation and do not want to be and want to be for every school but had had to take that approach due to no alternative funding source. She confirmed that Educate Norfolk have been looking into governance of money alongside the LA.

**For: unanimous**

* + Funding for the LA to meet responsibilities held for all schools including Teachers’ Pension employer contributions for centrally employed teachers (£2,499,893)

A question was raised about internal audits, whether maintained schools pay for their own and, if so, is this not a problem as those that need one may not choose to pay for one. It was also noted that each schools received a statutory visit and Members wanted to know who pays for this.

Officers confirmed their understanding was that statutory visits were to cover the duties for the LA of the Section 151 Officer rather than to cover audits of maintained schools.

Officers committed to exploring the issue further and the potential to ‘top-slice’ maintained schools funding in future years to ensure all maintained schools undertook internal audits as part of good financial management.

**For: Unanimous**

*4(b) Pupil Variations 2023-24*

Martin Brock introduced the paper.

Had one query from Steven Dewing around a potential additional class, which had been resolved.

Following a query Officers confirmed £711,000 was set aside towards the growth of schools expected with the new estates by the end of the year.

A query was raised as to whether the LA can request additional funding from the DfE if numbers increase further and Officers confirmed that this was not the case as pupil numbers are lagged and will catch up in the following year’s funding.

*4(d) Notional SEN Survey Feedback*

Michael Bateman introduced this paper confirming that new guidance was issued for 2023-24 in relation to the setting of Notional SEN and that the LA wanted to engage across Norfolk to identify the range of spend in schools compared to the existing budget amounts, and so the survey focused in this area. However, there was low feedback with minimal usable data.

Officers confirmed that the fourth bullet point in the paper was the key one, i.e. the proposal to defer any change until 24/25 and revisit this next year.

Following a query, Officers confirmed that the reason IDACI band E to A are the same in the formula is because the formula was set to try to replicate what previously existed in Norfolk for we had previously within the formula for SEN many years ago.

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

The minutes were accepted as a true record.

Members were asked to see notes on agenda page for conclusion of all matters arising.

Comments from Members were received in relation to the Catering item, including that providers increasing costs for meals but quality going down needs looking at, and that removing competition will not help this situation.

1. **Review Membership**

Officers reported that representation for mainstream schools remains broadly proportionate based on the October 2022 census data. This paper is for information only and no changes are required to membership at this time.

It was noted that NEU representatives are actually JCC and the LA will amend this in future documentation.

It was noted that Peter Pazitka and Howard Nelson have one more meeting before they leave Schools Forum. The Chair thanked them for all their work and contribution to Forum meetings over the past years.

1. **Future Plan**

From here on the Safety Valve Program will be called Local First Inclusion Plan locally.

1. **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is on 15 March 2023 – it was agreed that this be held in room JB031, Jubilee Building, Easton College (*but subsequently changed to 22nd March due to strike action at County Hall, Cranworth Room)*.

It was suggested an alternative venue may be required in future so as to accommodate sufficient IT access for Members attending and to enable presentations, or similar.

1. **AOB**

None