

Norfolk Schools Forum

Minutes of Meeting held on Wednesday 11 September 2019

09:00 – 12:00 hours

South Green Park Mattishall

Present:

Andrew Aalders-Dunthorne (Sub)
 Keith Bates, Eaton Hall Specialist Academy
 Chris Caddamy, (Vice Chair) City College
 Ian Clayton
 Carol Dallas, Taverham High School
 Mike Grimble, Avenue Junior School
 Glyn Hambling
 Carole Jacques (sub)
 Clare Jones
 Fyfe Johnston
 Adrian Lincoln (Sub)
 Howard Nelson
 Peter Pazitka
 Joanne Philpott
 Sarah Porter (substitute for Christina Kenna)
 Sarah Shirras, (Chair) St Williams Primary
 Joanna Tuttle
 Vicky Warnes
 Martin White
 Michael Bateman

Martin Brock
 Sally Cutting
 Marilyn Edgeley
 Alison Randall

Chris Snudden
 James Stanford

Representing

Academies
 Special School Academy
 16 – 19 Representative
 Academies
 Secondary Academies
 Primary Governors
 Alternative Provision
 Nursery Schools
 Academies
 Maintained Special Schools
 JCC (Secondary phase)
 Diocesan Board of Education
 Academies
 Academies
 Academies
 Primary Schools
 Maintained Secondary
 JCC (primary phase)
 Primary Governors
 Head of Education HN SEND
 Service
 Accountant
 Senior Accountant
 Admin Officer
 Head of Finance, Leadership
 & Governance Services
 Assistant Director (Education)
 Accounting Software Manager

Apologies:

Holly Bowman
 Alan Evans
 Dawn Filtness
 Bob Groome
 Christina Kenna
 Sara Tough

Nursery Schools
 Academies
 Finance Business Partner
 JCC
 Academies
 Executive Director Childrens
 Services

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting

2. Matters Arising

PE and Pupil Premium Grant

School Forum queried why maintained schools have been asked to account for PE and Pupil Premium Grant spend by Educator solutions.

Officers said that although this is not a statutory requirement it does help the authority keep up to date with revenue balances and correlate end of academic year and financial year. It can cost the authority money when schools academise if this information is not provided.

The chair summed up saying that there needs to be a simple mechanism for collecting this information and to investigate the impact on schools.

Action Officers will have further discussions on this and bring back to the next meeting. Mike Grimble and Martin White to join discussions.

Staff Costs

At previous meetings the point was raised that if a school is Red RAG rated they could get help with redundancy costs.

Officers reported that following a consultation in 2011 the authority adopted a clear policy on this issue.

A moderation panel along with Human Resources (HR) reviews each case of redundancy for budgetary reasons. This is a robust and thorough system that works well.

When a school is on the cusp of being Red RAG rated finance consultants work with schools and HR would be alerted.

Members pointed out that when a school has managed their budgets correctly they have no guarantee of being supported and could be penalised.

The authority will remove financial responsibilities from schools when needed.

Buyback of services for maintained special Schools

There are no special schools academising at this time so no longer relevant, however, this would have just been the usual buyback arrangement.

Cluster Balances and school 2 school support

At the last meeting members requested further information on the cluster balances held by the two teaching alliances and the School 2 School support and whether this is within the cluster balance regulations.

These were included within the Dedicated Schools Grant Outturn report in error, revised tables for balances have been provided.

3. Fraud Mitigation - Barclays Bank Proposed Changes

There has recently been an increase in the number of actual and attempted fraud attacks on school bank accounts which has resulted in the loss of thousands of pounds of public money. To assist schools to protect the funds in their care, the authority is seeking to increase the protection mechanisms that can be put in place to mitigate the risk of loss to come into force on 1 October 2019. (James Stanford has since confirmed that they intend to make the changes on 1st November to give schools time to put the required procedures in place.)

- Removed immediate payments functionality
Where a school has a need for an urgent requirement to make a same day payment, there is the availability of the NCC CHAPS system. Schools will be given instructions on who to contact to make CHAPS payments via the Schools Finance team.
- Increasing number of online authorised users to two people
- Single payments over £10,000 – copy to be sent in to School Finance Officer
- Looking at increasing cheque signatures up to £1000 to two signatures

It was highlighted that secondary schools frequently have a £10,000 sign off and this is an extra level of scrutiny for them.

Officers said the authority could look at increasing this for high schools but would want an assurance that any losses would not be covered by the authority and that the federation would carry out checks on their primary schools.

Forum noted the information provided

Action: Officers will discuss raising the threshold for the secondary school.

4. Pupil Place Planning and Variation

Feedback from Schools Forum on previous reports raised concerns largely related to place planning and the DfE Free School Policy with concerns over not the issue of how we grow a new school but why schools are sited in particular areas.

The report is provided to assist Schools Forum in understanding the financial implications, where the authority or other parties seek to make changes to the number of school places provided in an area.

Concerns were raised on the issue around free schools opening when not required, different from a place planning need, and the budget impact on existing schools.

Officers said that this was an historical issue and would not happen now.

In the past it was government thinking that surplus places created competition and were therefore thought to be beneficial. This is not the case now where there is importance of place need in addition to a need to show deprivation or performance issue in an area to warrant a new school. There is now a DfE score card to tell us how on track we are in place planning.

The case of White House Farm school being granted when St Clements has empty places – housing is being built and the authority had identified a need before permission was granted for a free school.

The authority will only fund places up to a certain amount the rest is the responsibility of the trust.

Members said that in future it should be made clear to new schools that there is no automatic right for funding to continue and the authority needs a robust process in place on decisions to fund or not.

Officers confirmed this was the case.

Forum noted the information provided.

Action – information for next meeting:

- **School investment programme**

- **Change in landscape and where pressures are**
- **DfE dashboard**

5. Early Years Entitlement for 2, 3 and 4 year olds

This paper is to update Schools Forum on the delivery and take up of the universal and extended early education entitlement for eligible 2,3 and 4 year olds.

The paper also seeks the recommendation of the Schools Forum to decide on whether the Local Authority should carry out a consultation during the Autumn Term 2019 on making changes to current funding arrangements for 3 and 4 year olds. All 3 and 4 year olds are entitled to 15 hours childcare and 30 for children of eligible working parents. The DfE also provides funding for some 2 year olds.

Providers received 95% of the government funding for 3 & 4 year olds and 100% of the funding for 2 year olds. The authority has statutory responsibility to make sure funding is used to provide free early years education there is an additional voluntary charge to families for non-educational items.

Take up for 3 and 4 year olds is 94% and 88.8% for 2 year olds these figures are above our regional neighbours.

SEN Inclusion Fund

Local authorities are required to have SEN Inclusion funds for all 3 and 4 year olds with special educational needs (SEN) who are taking up free entitlement regardless of the number of hours.

There are 4 pots of money not all statutory in place.

- SEN Inclusion Fund
- EHCP and Complex Need
- 2 year olds in Early Education
- Exception

Hourly Rate

There has been no change in the basic hourly rate since its conception in April 2017. £3.65 at present - the authority receives £4.30 an hour
£5.20 for 2 year olds

Although extra funding has been promised for Early Years this will equate to 2p per child.

The 30 hours entitlement and increase costs around the living wage and apprenticeships are having an impact on providers.

The authority therefore wishes to conduct a consultation with providers in the autumn term to remove the flexibility and quality supplements and just have a deprivation supplement. This could enable the authority to raise the basic rate paid to providers to £4.05 and we recommend school forum consider this proposal.

Members comments:

- Underspend a concern need for better communication
 - Some providers may lose out
 - Number of free schools not financially viable should be reflected
 - Removal of Quality supplement would mean no incentive to improve
- Response - *with number of providers this has not proved to be an incentive*

The funding for the increase would come from contingency money and underspend. Sally Cutting confirmed that the carry forward of any surplus would be part of the year end process and brought back to School Forum.

Members agreed the recommendation to consult with providers on making changes to current funding arrangements for 3 and 4 year olds.

6. Proposals for Fair Funding Consultation

Proposals for mainstream schools - the government has not yet released funding guidance for 2020/21. There has however been an announcement that councils will receive £14 billion extra funding - £700m increase for High Needs although this may be a one-off payment. It is estimated that Norfolk could receive £10m extra High Needs Block funding.

Also announced an increase to the minimum per pupil figure which it is estimated could amount to an extra £5.2m into our schools' block.

Although funding information has not been released the February deadline for budget shares will not change. We expect the deadline for application for disapplication to be end of November. If the estimated High Needs Block increase for 2020/21 is a one-off this alone would not make the High Needs block sustainable. We propose to consult on ½% movement from Schools Block to the High Needs block and to look at a disapplication to the Secretary of State of 1%

The condition of the £120m investment from the council makes the assumption of the ½ and 1% but officers realise it is difficult to ask schools to make a decision before funding information has been released.

Members highlighted that teachers payroll additional grant calculated on a school by school basis on November salary terms will need to be in November payroll.

It was proposed to move the October School Forum meeting date to 8 November to allow time to consult with schools after receiving the government funding announcements.

Schools Forum agreed the 8 November meeting date, but this has subsequently been changed to **15 November**.

7. SEN Transformation

An update will be provided at every school forum meeting following the same format as today and will always include:

1. Provide update in-year forecasting
2. Provide update on 5 year recovery plan

Plus a termly mini refresh of the HN block.

Members highlighted that the update does not include cost to Special School indirect tribunal costs where we are ordered to place but do not feel there is a need.

Personal Budgets

The paper includes a link to the Local Offer.

Norfolk is the highest user of personal budget in the region. The authority has limited influence over this apart from discussing with health colleagues for a second opinion.

5 Year Recovery Plan

No significant change to last update an additional £700,000 is around special school places.

Business case remains unchanged.

Positive – we are still on track

Negative – business as usual as far as exclusions are concerned

Members highlighted the fact that forecasting is not always accurate – officers said that there would be more detailed information next time and that there had been price increases from when contracts ran out and were renewed. Also government import and export adjustments where they move £6,000 for every pupil imported or exported was a factor.

Renewed contracts that may be at higher rates will be built into the forecast.

Government has announced a SEND Review and will look at any unintended consequences of the 2014 review.

Members highlighted the issue that children are coming from tribunals to a special school place when mainstream schools are saying they can provide what is required. The system should reinforce the message that many of these children needs can be met by mainstream school places.

Officers agreed that this would then help to reduce the number of children who need special school places going into high cost provision.

Officers referred to live tracking child by child which shows the whole package including transport.

Invest to Save work with maintained schools – members asked how this could be achieved without the funding?

Action: Officers will include background information in the next update.

8. AOB

- Appeal Costs and Norfolk's decision to have them when other authorities do not.

Request for information at next meeting:

- how costs are derived
- where money goes
- could there be a capping mechanism?

- Reinstatement of the Finance Consultative Sub-group – this group still exists but has only one school Forum member that attends.

This would technically be a sub-group of the Schools Forum.

Any School Forum member wishing to join the group should contact Marilyn Edgeley. Alison Randall will send out the terms of reference for review.

9. Dates of next meeting

15 November 2019 9am-12pm – South Green Park Mattishall