

# Norfolk Schools Forum

Minutes of Meeting held on Friday 10 May 2019

09:00 – 11:15 hours

South Green Park Mattishall

## Present:

John Banbury  
 Keith Bates, Eaton Hall Specialist Academy  
 Holly Bowman  
 Chris Caddamy, (Vice Chair) City College  
 Ian Clayton  
 Carol Dallas, Taverham High School  
 Alan Evans  
 Mike Grimble, Avenue Junior School  
 Glyn Hambling  
 Bob Groome  
 Clare Jones  
 Fyfe Johnston  
 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

Sally Cutting  
 Marilyn Edgeley  
 Dawn Filtress  
 Samantha Williams  
 Jane Blackwell

## Apologies:

Martin Brock  
 Christina Kenna  
 Chris Snudden  
 Sara Tough

## Representing

Early Years  
 Special School Academy  
 Nursery Schools  
 16 – 19 Representative  
 Academies  
 Secondary Academies  
 Academies  
 Primary Governors  
 Alternative Provision  
 JCC  
 Academies  
 Maintained Special Schools  
 Diocesan Board of Education  
 Academies  
 Academies  
 Academies  
 Primary Schools  
 Maintained Secondary  
 JCC (primary phase)  
 Primary Governors  
 Head of Education HN SEND  
 Service  
 Senior Accountant  
 Admin Officer  
 Finance Business Partner  
 School Finance Manager  
 Place Planning Manager

Accountant  
 Academies  
 Assistant Director (Education)  
 Executive Director Childrens  
 Services

## 1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting

## 2. Minutes of the meeting 15 March 2019 and Matters Arising

It was highlighted that schools have been asked to account for PE and Pupil Premium Grant spend by Educator Solutions - members asked if this a statutory requirement.

**Action: Mike Grimble to raise at the Finance Consultative Group meeting. Sally Cutting will also investigate this.**

### Staff Costs

At the last meeting the point was raised that if a school is Red RAG rated they could get help with redundancy costs – this only applies to maintained schools.

Sarah Shirras/Chris Snudden/Carole Human and Sally Cutting met to discuss however still have no clearer advice for schools.

Another meeting involving Alison Randall is planned for 9 July. Members requested this meeting be brought forward.

**Action: Marilyn Edgeley will re-arrange meeting date.**

Members highlighted that there is a perverse process with the balance control mechanism, the rules under the Scheme for Financing Schools needs reviewing, as not being able to carry a higher balance forward can cause an issue in the 3<sup>rd</sup> budget year.

### Maintained Special Schools Buyback

At the last meeting a decision was postponed as there was no representative in attendance.

The chair said that this emphasised the point of members sending a substitute.

Fyfe Johnston confirmed that Special School did want to buy back services from the central block.

However, he reported that three schools are in the process of academising and asked for clarification on the implications.

**Action: Sally Cutting to investigate.**

## 3. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Final Outturn 2018/19

The timeline for producing papers needs to be considered when meeting dates are arranged.

Dawn Filtness highlighted the following points:

- Overall DSG outturn position for all four blocks is £2.800m overspend for 2018/19 with a £10.8 cumulative overspend.
- There is a large movement in the Schools Block since reporting due to rates revaluations on Academy property that were not previously known. The £1.568m underspend is being used to fund the overspend on the High Needs Block.
- The total Early Years Block is underspent by £2.5m which is has been used to offset the overspend on the High Needs Block.
- The overspend on the High Needs Block has an overspend of £6.9m which is slightly lower than the authority forecast this is in relation to top-up funding to mainstream schools.

#### Members Questions:

- Early Years underspend, this is a large amount of funding to hold and then be transferred to the High Needs Block which is outside of what the Forum agreed – how was the budget originally calculated?
- SEN Inclusion and Complex Needs has a significant underspend and the mechanism for accessing this funding is not clear.

*The Early Years Budget was set with the introduction of the Early Years National Funding formula, the level of each budget and the rates paid were set following a full consultation with all providers of early education and discussed by schools forum.*

The SEN budget will not be adjusted next year, as the level is set as a result of a full consultation.

**Forum requested additional information on the criteria around accessing SEN funds and to bring this to the next forum in July.**

- **Further information was requested on the Cluster balances held by the 2 teaching alliances and the School 2 School support, and whether this is within the cluster balance regulations.**
- There was not a budget for Special Schools Milk £14,000 and Specialist Equipment £147,000 – Forum should be updated on a regular basis at a more detailed level so that elements like this are known prior to year-end.
- **Clarification was requested on the criteria around Personal budgets.**  
**Action: Chis Snudden**
- Education and Health Care Plans were introduced in 2014 to the educational sphere to offer choice and control to the family. However, some parents have unrealistic expectations and the Authority is trying to address this.
- Schools need clarity on their responsibilities under the SEN reform act.
- **Members requested figures on tribunals costs at future meetings.**  
**Action: Sally Cutting**

**Norfolk Schools' Forum agreed that they acknowledge and understand the Dedicated Schools Grant outturn position, specifically:**

- 1) **The £2.800m overspend on the Dedicated Schools Grant;**
- 2) **The current level of school and cluster balances.**

#### **4. Dedicated Schools Grant Recovery Plan**

This is the Authority's Recovery Plan, but School Forum were asked to review, comment and feedback to allow their views to be considered.

The draft financial model within the Recovery Plan was reviewed by NCC's Corporate Board alongside review of the capital investment programme, due to the size of the budgetary risk.

Future papers will now include links to any relevant NCC committee papers for ease of reference.

The planned transformation programme will see a change for mainstream school support and challenge inclusion as well ensuring more specialist school places. We need to ensure parents want to choose maintained specialist provision over independent schools and need to ensure we reduce travel costs.

The Authority has been successful in a Free School bid for capital costs of one of the new special schools to be funded by central government.

The DfE guidance advises that if the Recovery Plan is for longer than 3 years then the LA is required to provide detailed evidence to the DfE explaining the reasons. Officers said it will be up to the DfE to review the plan and feedback to NCC. NCC officers will ensure that School Forum will be involved in future dialogue.

The plan will need to be updated as plans progress, and officers will share this regularly with Forum.

Forum members were asked what questions they would like considered over the coffee break after which this item will continue to be discussed:

- Risks around the assumed savings and how they are calculated  
Answer: this is a net saving, as we open more maintained specialist provision and SRBs the children will be placed here instead of moving into high cost independent places.
- More information on demand management  
Answer: considers expectations around working differently, including parents increasing confidence that needs can be met in a mainstream school. Savings profiled for later in the programme as it is expected that it will take time to see impact.
- Alternative provision line on page 34  
Answer: This line includes the purchase of Alternative Provision in the private sector; a reduction in places is expected as the numbers of pupils excluded decreases.
- Growth rate, what growth has been built in?  
Answer: 112 children per year going into independent specialist provision if we did nothing.

#### Members Comments

- Plan does not include evidence of impact as requested at previous meeting on mainstream schools. This should include impact on staff as well as pupils i.e. training, sickness and recruitment. Training and recruitment a big challenge.
- All workstreams, not just capital investment, are important – want to see how they are progressing to give assurance about assumptions.

*School Forum will have a presence on the SEN Programme Board and be party to how the workstreams are progressing.*

- Members understand pressure on the Authority and must take some responsibility to keep our networks going.
- Move from independent is key but linking into this is quality so need for quality assurance
- Overspend/slippage could jeopardise plan so there needs to be regular monitoring and information.

*Chair and vice chair have regular meetings planned before school forum meetings with NCC Officers and will make sure this is on the agenda.*

- Make sure cabinet papers are available to Forum members.
- Clarity on our remit as a School Forum and when assumptions not correct we need to be informed. What we need to concentrate on and when we need to get the opinions of others to feed back into the process.
- What assumptions we can affect.

*Officers highlighted that Table 7 cumulative deficit on 29 is not correct and will need amending; the independent places on Appendix E 2023/24 should be 267.*

Comments made by members;

- Good that there is recognition of the situation and fact that there is a plan
- Credibility of delivering the plan – have you got a risk assessment.  
Answer: The Director of Finance recognises that this is a risk to the whole Norfolk County Council Budget as well as to the DSG.
- Research on the impact of children and staff
- The most overdue and welcome plan I have seen but most vulnerable to being so way out in its costings. But positive thinking behind it.
- Inclusivity of schools must be part of plan – how it is built in is a concern?
- Pressure on places in new schools will be from parents and the system and is a concern. Early Intervention must be built in.
- Thoughts about early intervention are good. Recruitment and retention is critical.
- Key that information to parents and carers that places in special schools are only for children who need them and in some instances a child may be more suited to what a maintained school can offer.

**Norfolk Schools' Forum agreed that they understood the key principles and assumptions of the recovery plan, including the timescales and expected scale of placements based on expected trends.**

## **5. Pupil Variance**

A decision is required as to whether to make retrospective adjustments to schools relating to pupil variations in the future. Forum are asked to look at the current pupil variations and to consider the financial and other effects of making retrospective adjustments to schools when making a decision.

This issue is about growth and how it is reflected through predictions and where those predictions become unrealistic.

The paper explains the current method and the impacts if a decision was made to adjust retrospectively where the adjustment would be made in the following financial year and could increase or decrease a school's budget for that financial year.

Comments:

Different situations where NCC are driving the change due to expected pupil growth and where the DfE decide on a new school. Policy needs to differentiate between the two.

The government stipulates that all schools must be treated the same.

Concern was raised about the apparent open-ended nature of the procedure and whether there should be time limits.

Forum asked for further information on categories of schools and how they are treated.

It is about preference of choice - we could say that when a free school is opened there should not be funding for unfilled places and define around placements within the catchment area.

Dawn Filtness suggested that a paper is brought to the next Schools Forum that details what is allowed under the regulations and clarifies the choices that Schools Forum have.

**Action: Jane Blackwell to bring a follow-up paper detailing what is allowed under the regulations with clarity about the choices that Schools Forum do have to allow Schools Forum to make appropriate decisions.**

## **6. Meeting Dates**

It was agreed that the Forward Plan will always include an update on the DSG Deficit Recovery Plan by exception as well as periodic full items.

**Forum agreed the meeting dates as set out.**

## **6. Dates of next meeting**

Friday 5 July 2019 – 9am-12pm – South Green Park Mattishall