

MINUTES OF THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING
Tuesday 24th OCTOBER 2019, 1.00PM

Present:

School Members:

Joanne Sanchez-Thompson, Chair (JST)	Learning for Life Education Trust
Sandra Appleby (SA)	Greenfields Primary & Nursery Schools/David Ross Education Trust
Debbie Bastin (DB)	Moulton Primary School
James Birkett (JB)	Wollaston School
Vanessa Bradley (VB)	Chiltern Primary School
Rob Hardcastle (RHa)	Hatton Academies Trust
Siobhan Hearn (SH)	Latimer Arts College
Lee Hughes (LH)	Peterborough Diocese Education Trust
Pat Kelly (PK)	Millbrook Infant School
Mike Kendall (MK)	Northgate College Trust
Cath Kitchen (CK)	Hospital Outreach Education
Jon Lake (JLa)	Althorp Partnership of Primary Schools
Kevin Latham (KL)	Executive Headteacher, Isebrook SEN Cognition and Learning College
Iain Massey (IM)	Sponne School
Angela Prodger (AP)	Pen Green Nursery
Paul Wheeler (PW)	East Midlands Academy Trust

Non-school Members:

Peter French (PF)	Peterborough Diocesan Education Trust
Rachel Hutchinson (RHu)	Holborne House Day Nursery (PVI)
Hayley Walker (HW)	Blackthorn Good Neighbours Nursery (PVI)

Observer:

Cllr Fiona Baker (FB)	Cabinet Member for Children's Services
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NCC Officers:

Colin Barratt	Strategic Estates Manager Schools and PFI, NCC
Gwyn Botterill (GB)	EHC Service Manager, NCC
Andrew Cadman (AC)	Head of Early Years, NCC
Alison Golding (AG)	Head of HR, LGSS
Paul Hanson (PH)	Democratic Services Manager (Secretary), NCC
Jon Lee (JLee)	Head of Integrated Finance LGSS
Beth Baines (BB)	Acting Group Accountant Schools Finance

Trade Union Officials (item 9 only):

Elaine Coe (EC)	NEU
Lorna Smith (LS)	Unison
Phil Robbins (PR)	NASUWT

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE FORUM MEMBERSHIP CHANGES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Steve Gordon, Toks Ikumelo, Sharon Muldoon, Sharon Pinson and Ron Whittaker.
- 1.2 PW declared an interest in the item concerning PFI energy subsidy as one of the academies within his trust is a PFI school.
- 1.3 The Secretary advised Forum that Hayley Walker, Early Years and Childcare Manager at Blackthorn Good Neighbours Nursery (Growing Together Northampton) had joined Forum as a representative of the PVI sector following the resignation of Sam Evans. Forum was also advised that, following the recent advert in the Friday Bulletin, Simon Bentley, Deputy Regional Operational Director at E-Act academy trust and Paul Wheeler, Finance and Operations Director at East Midlands Academy Trust had been elected to Forum unopposed. Forum was further advised that Caroline Grant had resigned from Forum and had been replaced by Kevin Latham, Executive Headteacher of Isebrook SEN Cognition and Learning College. The Chair welcomed Hayley Walker, Paul Wheeler and Kevin Latham to Forum.

2. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

- 2.1 Joanne Sanchez Thompson was nominated as Chair by PK and seconded by JLa. There being no other nominations, JST was elected as Chair for the forthcoming year.
- 2.2 James Birkett was nominated as Vice Chair by Debbie Bastin and seconded by Angela Prodger. There being no other nominations, JB was elected as Vice Chair for the forthcoming year.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2nd JULY 2019 AND OFFICER FEEDBACK

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd July were agreed as an accurate record subject to Andrew Cadman's role being amended to Head of Early Years and Chris Connearn's role being amended to Head of Learning and Effectiveness.
- 3.2 The Chair gave an update on the following actions:
 - A positive meeting between the Chair and Vice Chair, the Secretary of State for Schools, the Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP and some of the county's MPs, the purpose of which was to discuss funding, had taken place on 22nd July. The outcome of the funding announcement would be discussed further under item 5;
 - The item on Combined Budgets including the Fieldwork Family Support contribution had been deferred to the next meeting in order to enable a more detailed report to be presented to Forum; and

- Academy trusts in the county had been contacted and requested to share their balances.

4. WEIGHTED NUMBERS FOR NEW YEAR GROUPS/SCHOOLS AND PUPIL GROWTH FUND

4.1 The Chair advised Forum that this item had been moved up the agenda in order to accommodate the presenting officer's other commitments. CW introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- The report was presented to Forum for statutory reasons and a vote would be required for the application of weighted numbers;
- Funding for pupil growth is an additional cost to the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) which is reflected in the DSG allocation to the county through the growth funding allocation;
- Pupil number adjustments include a new school at Stanton Cross in Wellingborough, which will open with 30 pupils in reception in September 2021;
- Adjustments had also been made for:
 - Corby secondary – 8FE/1500 places total September 2021;
 - Duston area primary – 2FE/420 places total September 2023;
 - Buckton Fields primary – 2FE/420 places total September 2021;
 - Secondary SEN Wellingborough/East Northamptonshire – 27 places in first year, 145 in total – September 2020; and
 - Moulton area secondary – 8FE/1500 places total – September 2022.
- The secondary school planned for Daventry in 2020 (6FE/1100 places total) is now on hold;
- New year groups are set out in the report for Forum to approve as follows:
 - Radstone Fields, Brackley +30 - year 4
 - Monksmoor, Daventry +30 - year 2
 - Duston all through +30 - year 6
 - Hayfield Cross, Kettering +30 - year 5
 - Priors Hall +30 - year 6
 - Malcolm Arnold +60 - year 6
 - Pineham Barns +30 - year 4
 - Wootton Hall +60 - year 4 and +120 - year 11
 - Northampton International +60 - year 4 and +180 - year 11
- Forum received an update on the Pupil Growth Fund and noted that it could not be used to support schools in financial difficulty;
- Forum was asked to consider the creation of a falling rolls fund using schools block funding. This would allow the support of good and outstanding schools with temporary reducing rolls for whom a reduction in PAN would not be practicable. Suggested criteria were set out within the report. It was proposed to finance the fund by top-slicing the Schools Block through the AWPU;
- In response to a question from VB, CW stated the fund was intended to provide short-term relief while a permanent solution was found. The fund was only

intended to be used where it was expected that numbers would increase again;
and

- It was noted that only schools with a carry forward of less than the proposed funding of £39,900 would benefit from the fund .

4.2 At the conclusion of the discussion, the proposal regarding the proposed application of weighted numbers in individual schools funding formula allocations in 2020-21 and the weighted numbers presented were approved. The voting was as follows:

For - 16

Against - 0

Abstentions – 1

4.3 With regard to the proposed falling rolls fund, it was agreed that further information on the proposed falling rolls fund, including modelling a) the effect of the fund, b) the effect of reducing PAN and funding via the growth fund and c) neither, as well as the impact on the AWPU for all schools, be brought back to Forum for a discussion and vote in December.

Action: Chris Wickens, Jon Lee

5. 2019-2020 DSG BUDGETS AND MONITORING

5.1 JL provided Forum with an update on DSG budget monitoring and highlighted the following points:

- Appendix A showed the gross budget prior to recoupment for reference only. Appendix B showed the latest budget monitoring including recoupment and de-delegated carry forwards from 2018-19;
- De-delegated budgets had a balance of £0.39m, composed of redundancy (£282k), SIG (£77k) and Trade Unions (£29k). The PFI reserve balance was £3.1m (2017-18 £3.07m);
- The schools block showed an adjustment of £0.85m, due largely to further recoupment from academies;
- The high needs block showed an adjustment of £1.81m, due mainly to an increase in the grant for special free schools;
- The schools block is now forecast to underspend by £0.64m, while the early years block is forecast to largely breakeven with a marginal overspend of £0.06m and the high needs block forecast to overspend by £3.82m.
- Forum heard that the pressures in the high needs block were part of a national issue, the impact of which was now being felt in the county;
- GB explained that there had been a 30% increase in referrals for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and this appeared to be a clear trend within the county;
- Northamptonshire agreed to assess a higher proportion of EHCP applications than other areas (81% compared to 75%) because it did not wish to incur significant tribunal costs. Historically around 90% of assessment were completed

by the 20 week deadline. Because of the increase in demand, this figure had reduced to close to 50%. GB advises that the EHC team required some headroom in order to ease this pressure;

- In response to a question from RH, GB stated that the increase effected the whole 0-25 age range. AC advised that a significant proportion of responses from the early years consultation were in relation to SEN;
- The Chair suggested it would be helpful to benchmark Northamptonshire's performance in this area to statistical neighbours. GB stated that such data was not readily available and in any case there were significant variations in practice;
- In response to a question from RH, GB confirmed that 88% of children assessed received EHCPs. The main challenge faced by the service was timeliness as the Council had little capacity to undertake any work other than assessments;
- In response to a question from the Chair, GB confirmed that an inclusion network was operational, but that attendance had declined due to the fragmented nature of the sector and Multi-Academy Trusts choosing to organise their own ways of working;
- In response to a question from RH about the cost of out-of-county placements and special school top-up funding, JL advised that the change to the Resource Allocation System (RAS) had been implemented and the Authority was in the process of assessing the September pupil returns from Special Schools;
- GB explained that out-of-county schools were increasingly receiving top-up funding in addition to the £10k placements cost as a result of exceeding their pupil numbers. As the Council is a net exporter, guidance on the need to pay the £10k cost on an ongoing basis was being sought;
- In response to a question from VB, GB confirmed that the level of spend of high needs funding was a concern and this was an area the Council wished to look at in order to ensure it was being allocated and used in the best possible way.

6. DSG FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENTS 2020-21

6.1 JL updated Forum on the DSG funding announcements that had been made in July 2019 and reminded colleagues that the figures were indicative and were based on old pupil numbers. He highlighted the following points:

- The headline figures included an increase of £2.6bn for the schools block in 2020-21, £4.8bn in 2021-22 and £7.1bn 2022-23.
- Per pupil minimum funding levels would be set at £3,750 for primary in 2020-21 and £5,000 for secondary in 2020-21;
- A further £1.5bn was to be allocated to meet the additional costs of the teacher's Pension Fund;
- Teacher starting salaries were to increase to £30k by 2022-23;
- And extra £66m was allocated to early years in order to increase the hourly rate. AC advised this translated to c.£300k for the county, or an estimated extra 3p on the hourly rate;

- The high needs block would receive an increase of £700m nationally, but it was likely that this would include the £125m allocated in 2019-20. The true uplift would therefore be in the region of £575m;
- The uplift would have to cover costs such as growth in pupil numbers and protection of per-pupil funding, so would result in schools receiving a 4% increase on NFF allocations, before any adjustment for local circumstances;
- In response to a question from the Chair, JL advised that a transfer to the high needs block from the schools block would still need to be considered in order to help fund the deficit that had accrued.

7. SCHOOLS BUDGETS 2020-2021

- 7.1 JL provided an update to Forum on budget planning for 2020-21. He explained that the target date to release consultation to schools was 28th October. The consultation would take place via a letter emailed to heads and would close on 15th November. The Council's cabinet would be asked to delegate authority to the DCS to take the final decision after the schools forum meeting on 3rd December. The Council also intended to consult on the transfer from the schools block to the high needs block.

[post meeting note – the actual closing date for the consultation was set as 22 November 2019]

- 7.2 In response to questions, the following was confirmed:
- Without a transfer from the schools block, the expected uplift to the high needs block would translate into just £900k to fund all growth / demand in the high needs block;
 - A transfer of 0.5% would generate c£2.4m but would be dependent on the final DSG figure;
 - Forum were asked to consider if the deficit should be paid off over two years or one year and was advised that this represented an opportunity to put in place a strategy to ensure the high needs funding situation did not escalate;
 - Concern was expressed that paying off the deficit in one year may lead some to conclude the underfunding in the block was not as serious;
 - The Chair read out an email submitted by a Headteacher from a Northampton Secondary School which challenged the proposal. Members agreed that the issue facing high needs funding was a national, and not a local, issue;
 - RH indicated that he might be reluctant to vote for a transfer again due to the increase in the cost of out-of-county provision. JL responded and advised Forum that costs were being monitored but that spending was essentially demand-led;
 - MK advised that the additional funding would not otherwise keep up with growth; and
 - SA stated that it would be helpful to understand what the proposal would pay for. It was agreed that more detailed proposals would be shared with Forum in December.

Action: Jon Lee

- In relation to the issue of mobility within the Forum, RH stated that the more the county council align with the NFF, the easier the transition would be.

8. PFI UTILITY SUBSIDY

8.1 JL provided an update to Forum on the PFI energy subsidy. He explained that Forum had previously agreed a reduction in the subsidy in the expectation that energy saving measures could be introduced in PFI schools. Although some progress has been made, overall progress has been limited. Forum was advised that it could decide to reinstate the subsidy partially or fully.

8.2 CB advised Forum that the contractor had employed an energy management advisor but that this person had left their post. Since then, limited progress had been made, although a new energy management advisory service had been appointed in order to produce an energy strategy for each school. Forum made the following points in response:

- The Chair explained that written representations from the Headteacher of a PFI school had been received on this subject;
- PF stated that he was sympathetic to PFI schools because of the high costs involved in the contract;
- In response to questions, CB explained that the Council had limited ability to compel the contractor to act on the issues;

8.3 It was proposed by PF and seconded by the Chair that the PFI subsidy should increase in 2020-21 by £0.19m (to reinstate the subsidy to 75% of its original value on the basis that a level of saving should be achievable by schools through the ongoing work). The voting was as follows:

For - 15

Against - 1

Abstentions – 1

Action: Jon Lee, Colin Barrett

9. MAINTAINED SCHOOLS DE-DELEGATION 2020-21

a) Trade Union Duties

9.1 AG introduced the report and explained that the Council is supportive of de-delegation and believes that it assists schools in meeting their legal obligations. Forum was advised that colleagues from trade unions were present to answer questions.

- 9.2 In response to a question from PK, EC confirmed that trade union officials were aware of which academy schools contribute to the de-delegated budget and those that didn't. Schools that contributed received priority assistance, while others were referred to the regional office for support. In response to a question about demand for trade union services, EC advised Forum that trade union facility time was fully utilised. Some recent cases had been referred to the regional office due to a lack of capacity locally. PR advised Forum that stress, anxiety and mental health issues all contributed to increased demand for services.
- 9.3 In response to a question from PK, AG confirmed that the budget was proportionate to the number of schools and matched demand for the service. In response to a further question from PK, AG confirmed that the proposals for unitary local government would have an impact on the structure of the facility. In response to a question from VB, EC confirmed that there was pressure on trade union colleagues to meet demand and that some of the larger MATS were not coterminous with the county area. Upon a vote being taken, Forum agreed to continue with the de-delegated funding of £2.10 per pupil from primary maintained schools. The voting was as follows:
For: 4
Against: 0
Abstentions: 0
- 9.4 Upon a vote being taken, Forum agreed to continue with the de-delegated funding of £2.10 per pupil from secondary maintained schools. The voting was as follows:
For: 1
Against: 0
Abstentions: 0

b) School Improvement Grant (SIG)

- 9.5 JL advised Forum that the budget was used to support school effectiveness. DB confirmed that, as a serving Headteacher of a partnership school, in her view the model worked well. Upon a vote being taken, Forum agreed to continue with the SIG de-delegated funding of £7.50 per pupil from primary maintained schools. The voting was as follows:
For: 4
Against: 0
Abstentions: 0

c) Redundancy Costs

- 9.6 Upon a vote being taken, Forum agreed to continue with the redundancy de-delegated funding and approved an increase of the rate to £5.00 per pupil from primary maintained schools. The voting was as follows:
For: 4
Against: 0
Abstentions: 0

10. SCHOOLS BLOCK CSSB 2020-21 BUDGETS

- 10.1 JL advised Forum that a vote was no longer sought on this item and a further report would be submitted to Forum for consideration and a decision in December. This was due to the clarity being sought from the DfE in respect of the indicative funding allocation for the CSSB.

11. EARLY YEARS

d) EYSFF Consultation Update

- 11.1 AC updated Forum on progress with the Early Years Single Funding Formula 2020-21 consultation and highlighted the following points:
- The first phase of the consultation ran from 5th July to 4th August. A summary of the outcome was attached to the report;
 - In preparation for phase two of the consultation, draft questions were shared with the sector in September. Forum was now asked to approve the plans for the second phase.
- 11.2 The forum reviewed the questions and the following comments were noted:
- **Question 1 (Quality Supplement):** AC advised Forum that very few local authorities still used quality supplement, largely due to demand for a higher base rate. No audit of the quality supplement had been undertaken since 2017. AP commented that it was important to ensure that the quality supplement is paid to the right settings. AC advised that such payments should translate into positive outcomes and inspections. RH commented that the removal of the quality supplement would cause settings to review how many qualified staff they could afford.
 - **Question 2 (Deprivation):** AC advised Forum that the feedback suggested the deprivation component should be left in the formula, but noted that it would have to be reduced by 4p in order to keep in budget. He advised Forum that the question of how deprivation was measured was an important factor. Child IDACI, setting IDACI and EYPP eligibility were all possible measures of deprivation. SA asked if the tools were available to model the effect of different measures. In response to a question from RH, AC confirmed that the response rate represented around 22% of settings.

- **Question 3 (Early Years Inclusion Fund):** AC advised that this was an area where there was pressure on the budget. One solution would be to raise the eligibility threshold. In response to a question from RH, AC confirmed that settings would be able to see the eligibility criteria prior to applying for High Needs Funding. In response to a further question from RH, AC confirmed that this was an area that had been identified as a training opportunity for settings.
- **Question 4 (Long Term Absence):** AC explained that a change to a maximum of two weeks funding was proposed, but suggested that exceptions could include children with complex needs and children from the travelling community.
- **Question 5 (The Provider Agreement):** AC explained that the new provider agreement would be more robust and would be audited more thoroughly.
- **Question 6 (Business Support):** AC explained that this question sought to ascertain the type of support to be delivered to settings.

Action: Andrew Cadman

12. SCHOOLS FORUM PLAN – 2019

12.1 The School Forum meeting dates for 2020 are:

- Tuesday 21st January 2020 – Nene Whitewater Centre
- Tuesday 17th March 2020 – Nene Whitewater Centre
- Tuesday 19th May 2020 – Nene Whitewater Centre
- Tuesday 7th July 2020 – Nene Whitewater Centre
- Tuesday 6th October 2020 – Nene Whitewater Centre
- Tuesday 1st December 2020 - Nene Whitewater Centre

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

13.1 There was none.