

SCHOOLS FORUM

A meeting of Schools Forum was held on Tuesday 10 October 2023.

Present: Lester Russell (Chair), Julia Armstrong, Cllr Carol Clark, Helen Danby, Cllr Lisa Evans, Lesley Graham, Helen Gregory, Richard Henderson, Claire Humble, Tristan Keates, Michael Little, Ryan Powner, Mrs K Riley, Graham Waller, Colin Wilkinson, Kay Wilkinson, Andy Bryson, Vanessa Housley, Joanne Mills and Elaine Redding.

Officers: Katie Gallagher.

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Susan Richardson (Chair), Andrew McClurg, Lindsay Oyston, Louise Spellman, Edwin Squire, Judith Stanyard, Andrea Swift and Eddie Huntington.

12 **Apologies for Absence**

13 **Declarations of Interest**

Members were invited to declare any personal or business interests they may have in any item included on the agenda.

No interests were declared.

14 **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27th June 2023 be approved.

15 **Matters Arising**

High Needs Funding

It had been reported that Mrs J Mills would discuss High Needs funding further at the November 2023 meeting, in line with the submission of the High Needs Funding report.

At this juncture, it had been agreed that Mrs E Redding, Interim Director of Children Services, would provide an update.

INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDRENS SERVICES UPDATE

Mrs E Redding explained that she had commenced her position in July 2023 and her focus was moving forward in a clear direction of travel away from the requires improvement judgement, which children's services currently holds.

It was reported that the Leadership team were reviewing the 'new normal' following the covid 19 pandemic and the potential increased vulnerabilities. With reference to education there were concerns regarding attainment gaps, which were above national

figures and an increase in permanent exclusions and elective home education. An appreciative enquiry approach had been adopted to look at these areas.

Mrs H Dalby joined the meeting.

It had been reported that the appreciative enquiry would be a collaborative approach and members of school's forum were invited to participate.

With regard to SEND, it had been reported that there would be a review of the current banding system. This would link to complexities and the current SEND reforms. Mrs J Mills leads on the reform pilot and would provide an update at the next meeting. In addition, it had been identified that there was a need for a different approach to look at allocation, approach, funding, and interventions of EHCP's. This would also be in line with changes in Early Years for 2025.

Schools' Forum members were informed that any new approach would need to be sustainable, and the focus would be that the lived experience for children to ensure that this would not be lost in the process. Schools' Forum members were asked to participate within the banding review.

Mr T Keates joined the meeting.

It was agreed that Schools Forum members would participate within the proposed groups. With the following members forming part of the working party.

- Mrs H Gregory
- Mr M Little
- Mr R Henderson
- Mrs J Armstrong
- Mr R Powner
- Mrs C Humble
- Mr A Bryson
- Mr G Waller

The working party would have a monthly conversation between October -January 2024.

Mrs E Redding and Councillor L Evans withdrew from the meeting.

16 Budget Monitoring, September 2023

Mr A Bryson provided members of the Forum with the current projected outturn position on the schools Budget based on information to the end of September 2023.

It had been noted from previous reports that the 2023/24 High Needs budget was set anticipating an in-year saving of £1.1m. However, based on a review of and increased expenditure on High Needs at quarter 2, it is now expected that this target will not be met. Instead, an in-year saving of £352k was now expected which will reduce the cumulative deficit brought forward from 2022/23 of £3.87m down to £3.51m instead of the budgeted position of £2.7m. It was reported that the revised position would be reflected in the medium-term financial plan.

Additional information was requested in the meeting on a variance that was included within the September Budgetary Control Report. With additional information on the breakdown of a £1.4m overspend being requested. In response, Mr A Bryson provided the below information.

The £1.4m overspend projected at quarter 2 was made up of the following:

£573k of this relates to young person remaining in high-cost placements post-16 (12 placements). Mainly resulting from Covid as the young person weren't really able to move on to other more mainstream college placements.

£475k of fee increases (incl. some backdated from 2022/23) £352k net cost of further new placements and package changes since the budget was set. Currently 136 placements although the original baseline budget was based on 129 placements which already including growth for an additional 5 placements (@ £54k each).

RESOLVED that the Budget Monitoring Report be received and noted.

17 Schools Funding Arrangements 2024/25

A copy of the Schools Funding Arrangements for 2024/25 report had been presented prior to the meeting for consideration. The Chair reported that there had been an amended report issued due to a technical error by the DfE. The error was due to incorrect processing of pupil numbers in the initial calculations. This error meant that the overall cost of the schools NFF was underestimated, and incorrect factor values were published in July.

Mr A Bryson reported that the paper was intended to inform the Schools Forum of the latest information regarding the 2024/25 national funding formula (NFF) for schools and High Needs which was published by the DfE in July 2023 but updated in October 2023 following the technical error being discovered.

A formal consultation would be undertaken follow the meeting to ascertain schools views. The results of this would be reported at the next meeting.

Mrs L Graham withdrew from the meeting.

18 Delegation, De Delegation 2024/25

Mr A Bryson reported that the funding for de-delegated services must be allocated through the formula but can be passed back, or de-delegated for maintained primary and secondary schools with school forum approval. It had been proposed by the local authority to de-delegate all of the areas covered within the previously circulated report.

It was proposed by the Local Authority that the decision be deferred to the next meeting to enable eligible voting members time to seek the views of their respective representative on the options open to them. It was agreed that this would be undertaken by Mrs H Gregory, Headteacher of Durham Lane Primary School.

A copy of the letter from the Trade Unions supporting the de-delegation of facilities time had also been circulated.

It had been noted that in the event of the proposal being rejected this would allow time to plan for the transfer of budgets and responsibilities.

RESOLVED that this item be deferred to the next meeting.

19 Any Other Business

There were no further items of business.

20 Date and Time of Next Meeting 14 November 2023

RESOLVED that the next meeting of Schools Forum would be held on 14th November 2023 at 1.30pm.