

SCHOOLS FORUM

A meeting of Schools Forum was held on Tuesday 14 November 2023.

Present: Susan Richardson (Chair), Julia Armstrong, Cllr Carol Clark, Helen Dalby, Cllr Lisa Evans, Lesley Graham, Helen Gregory, Richard Henderson, Michael Little, Lindsay Oyston, Ryan Powner, Lester Russell, Louise Spellman, Judith Stanyard, Colin Wilkinson and Kay Wilkinson.

Officers: David Leane, Graham Waller, Andy Bryson, Eddie Huntington, Joanne Mills, Elaine Redding and Katie Gallagher.

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Claire Humble, Tristan Keates, Andrew McClurg and Andrea Swift.

SCH/21/23 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.

SCH/22/23 Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2023 be approved.

SCH/23/23 Matters Arising

Working Group

Mrs S Richardson confirmed that she would be happy to participate in the Working Group if dates/times could be confirmed. It was agreed that the Working Party would meet on Tuesdays at 1pm, meetings would be held at EDC, Stockton Sixth Form College.

SCH/24/23 Delegation De Delegation Report

Funding for de-delegation services must be allocated through the formula but could be passed back or delegated for maintained primary and secondary schools with School Forum approval.

The authority was proposing the option of de-delegation i.e., central management, for all of the areas covered within the report for 2024/2025.

A report was presented and discussed at the previous meeting (held on 10 October 2023) so Members were aware of voting at the meeting. In the event of any of the proposals being rejected this would allow time to plan for the transfer of budgets and responsibilities.

It was recommended that the eligible Schools Forum Members representing maintained schools vote separately according to their sector on the proposals to de-delegate services set out in the report.

RESOLVED

- a) That the primary maintained Headteachers agree to de-delegate funds as outlined within the report for 2024/25
- b) That the secondary maintained school Headteacher agrees to de-delegate the funds for 2024/25 as outlined within the report.

(Elaine Redding left the meeting)

SCH/25/23 High Needs Update Report

(K Wilkinson left the meeting)

A report had been circulated that provided Schools Forum with an update on the financial position for High Needs, factoring in any recent funding announcements.

Mrs J Mills explained that SEN were delivering a better value programme and had recently been through a data exercise with the Department for Education (DfE). They had looked at the biggest demands on the service and how these could be mitigated to ensure that children's needs could be met.

Three projects had been suggested and these were: -

- ASD children and communication interaction and school avoidance
- Working with partners early to ensure that all partners wrap around care needs were met.
- Mainstream post 16 – looking at a satellite provision.

Quarterly meetings with the DfE would be undertaken and regular updates would be provided to Schools Forum.

A question was asked about high needs spending and the agency placement costs increasing by 64% in the last three years. It was noted that these had increased over time in schools, this was at a faster rate than the expansion of schools, as they could not open any more at the moment. There was a need for Stockton children to be educated in Stockton and work to reduce and decrease this had been undertaken. Looking at the numbers, there was a 'pinch' point in secondary special alongside parental preference. It was hoped that through the reform and change programme this would support 'right children, right schools, right costs'.

A further question was asked about the agency costs and it was noted that there were more children requiring support as well as costs being higher. Mr A Bryson indicated that they worked on an average of total costs with average children, the average cost was £55k per child, some places did cost a lot more than this. The Chair commented that there was a duty to provide what the children required.

The number of permanent exclusions had increased by 300% in one year and a question was asked about what the local authority was doing to reduce this. Mrs J Mills explained that numbers were subject to change and this was not as high as other

authorities within the Tees Valley. In the local authority there was not as much registered choice and the authority had applied for an alternative provision free school in line with Delta Trust. This would give 50 places for permanently excluded students. This would be in addition to the Pupil Referral Unit and would be 50 places that the school could commission. The Chair highlighted that it would be useful to have a package to support children following their early identification. Mrs Mills explained that there was an SEMH team that provide additional support to schools.

Mrs Spellman raised concern regarding the ability to resource permanent exclusions and the inclusion team were advising parents to apply for places whilst going through the process. There was no therapeutic work and as there was an increase in numbers there was concern regarding the students' prospects regarding their success. Mrs Mills agreed that part of the fair access process there was a right to ask which school was next. There were tutors and an Assistant Education Psychologist that did oversee the process. It was suggested that this could be discussed by Secondary Headteacher Group. Mrs Mills agreed to pick this issue up, not as part of this process, and would feed back to Mrs Spellman.

RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

SCH/26/23 Schools Funding Consultation

The Dedicated School Grant (DSG) to Local Authorities was allocated in blocks. There were blocks of funding for Early Years, Schools, High Needs and Central School Services. The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) used the national funding formula to calculate the blocks within the DSG that were allocated to local authorities. Local authorities currently had some flexibility in how this funding was allocated to schools, within the framework and constraints set out by ESFA.

A report was issued to Schools Forum on 10 October 2023 for discussion which was part of a consultation exercise undertaken on proposals for next year's funding arrangements.

The paper set out the results of the recent local consultation with maintained schools and academies which covered preferences for the schools funding formula and a 0.5% transfer from the Schools to High Needs block for 2024/2025. Schools Forum should consider the views of the schools responding before making their decision.

It was recommended that Schools Forum support the proposals for the schools funding formula for 2024/2025 noting that: -

- All Schools Forum members may vote on these proposals.
- The Local Authority was required to consult with Schools Forum on the funding formula, however the local authority retains the final decision on the formula to be used.

Schools Forum was asked to consider and vote on a proposal to transfer 0.5% (c £0.833m) from the school's block to the high needs block in 2024/2025 noting that: -

- All Schools Forum members may vote on this proposal.
- It was a Schools Forum decision on whether to accept this proposal. If Schools Forum did not agree, the DfE were able to decide if the Local Authority requests this.

RESOLVED

- a) That Schools Forum Members approve, funding permitting, to increase the formula factors in line with the National Funding Formula (Question1).
- b) That Schools Forum Members approve the proposal to set the MFG at the maximum of plus 0.5%, assuming the level of funding permits this (Question 2).
- c) That Schools Forum Members approve to adjust the Basic Entitlement AWPU if funding allocated to the LA was greater than that needed to fulfil the National Funding Formula (Question 3).
- d) That Schools Forum Members approve by vote, to support the transfer of 0.5% (estimated at £833k) from the Schools Block to High Needs Block in 2024/25 (Question 4).

SCH/27/23 Any Other Business

There were no further items of business.

SCH/28/23 Date & Time of Next Meeting, 16 January 2024

RESOLVED that the next meeting of Schools Forum would be held on 16 January 2024 at 1.30pm.