

**Minutes of the Suffolk Schools' Forum held at IP City Centre at 9:30 am
on Monday 13 October 2014**

Present:

11. Members with voting rights

Governors and PRU Managers	Alison Bowman, Earl Soham Primary School Pat Wilkinson, The Willows School (Chair) Pauline Lucas, Hillside School, Sudbury Denise Morcom, First Base, Ipswich PRU
Head teachers	James Leese, St Mary's Woodbridge Odran Doran, The Bridge School Paul Elstone, St James CEVA Middle School David Hutton, Northgate High School Dave Siddall, Westbridge PRU
Diocesan Representatives	
Early Years Providers	Amanda Havers, Tiddlywinks Nursery
14-19 Providers	Helen Wilson, Thurston Community College
Academies	Steve Lovett, Thomas Mills High School

12. Observers and Local Authority (without voting rights)

Observers	Gordon Jones, Chairman of Governors at Thomas Gainsborough School Sue Hargadon, Farlingaye School Sarah Rees, Great Barton
Local Authority	Lisa Chambers, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills Gavin Bultitude, Assistant Director, Resources and Support Leanne Minnican, Schools Business Partner Cheryl Sharland, Head of Inclusive Services Paul Senior, Consultant Sue Morgan, Head of Democratic Services (Clerk)

13. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Pat Chapman, Alison Coleman, Sue Cook, Wendy Donoghue, Lynn Eldrett, Andrew Fell and Hugh O'Neill.

14. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2014 and matters arising

There were no comments and no matters arising that were not able to be taken under Item 4 and Item 6 on the Agenda. The minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2014 were approved and signed by the Chair.

[It was agreed, on the proposal of the Chairman, that Paper F was taken before paper D, and that Paul Senior would do a short presentation prior to paper D.]

15. Reporting back from working groups and partner organisations

The Forum received updates from the Value for Money Group, the Safeguarding Board and the Children's Trust. The work of the Resource Allocation Group was covered in subsequent agenda items.

Value for Money Group

The Forum was informed that it had been formed and met. It had established that the impact on spend on pupil attainment had a stronger correlation at primary level than secondary. Although there were few studies on this it had indicated that for an additional investment of £100 per pupil, the pupil's progress equated to one term's difference, and increasing funding by £100 would equate to approximately one week's difference. In respect of school balances the group had identified some inconsistencies across schools' own assessments, and some schools were holding funds which were a very high proportion of their budgets.

Safeguarding Board

The attention of the Forum was drawn to the fact that the Annual report of the Local Safeguarding Children Board was on the website, and members should encourage all schools to look carefully at the impact of the report for their individual institutions. The Forum was also asked if it would be prepared to have the Safeguarding Board's logo on all its documentation as the Schools' Forum is a partner of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

Children's Trust

The Forum heard that the Trust had met last week and that at the conference in September there was strong support for a speech and language commissioner which would benefit schools. Stakeholders were meeting approximately every 6 weeks.

In respect of discussions, the forum:

- (a) Supported the local authority writing to the Chairman of all schools and identify where balances were high and ask what the intentions were for the balances;
- (b) Confirmed that it would not be appropriate to reintroduce balance controls;
- (c) Noted that schools had access to easy to use financial tools;
- (d) Requested to see further information on comparison between spend on SEN in Gloucestershire and Suffolk;

- (e) Noted that information relating to the Local Safeguarding Children Board was on the website;
- (f) supported the need to encourage all schools to look carefully at the impact of the report for their individual institutions.

16. Election Vice Chair of the Forum

Decision: On the nomination of Alison Bowman, seconded by Dave Siddall, Denise Morcom was elected as Vice Chair of the Forum for the period to July 2015.

17. De-delegation of Services

The Forum was introduced to Paper B which provided information on de-delegation of services and centrally retained Dedicated Schools Grant. The Forum was reminded of the voting rights as detailed in Paper B.

Members were keen to get a clearer understanding of the level of contingencies that may be required against deficit balances before coming to a decision on whether or not it considered these could be reduced. In response to questions it was confirmed that it was difficult to project the amount of closing deficits as the local authority does not have information on when schools may go sponsored. It was anticipated that although there may be more academies in the future there may not be as many big deficits.

The Forum was informed that the Value for Money Group wanted to look at highlighted areas in Annex A, and in particular behaviour support services. This would be a big piece of work but would not affect 2015/16 budget but would affect 2016/17.

Decision: The Forum agreed to:

- (a) Ask the Local Authority to look at the figures again with a view to reducing the contingency fund against deficit budgets if it presented a low risk to do so, particularly with regard to unknown academy sponsor conversion.
- (b) the Assistant Director (Finance) to e-mail members the additional information relating to contingencies and invite comments by the end of October 2014.
- (c) Delegate to the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Forum the decision about whether or not to reduce the contingency funding - taking into account comments of Forum members before doing so.
- (d) Continue de-delegation of Behaviour Support Services, support to ethnic groups and bilingual learners and staff costs supply cover.
- (e) To continue to retain the following services centrally:

- i. Admissions
- ii. Servicing of Schools Forum
- iii. Contribution to combined budgets
- iv. Centrally funded termination of employment costs

18. Suffolk School Block and Early Years Pro-forma

The Forum considered information relating to the Suffolk funding formula for Schools and Early Years as described in Paper C and in Annex A, B and C.

The Forum was informed that the Value for Money group had looked at the financial sustainability of early years' provision and had some concerns sustainability of early years providers based on these rates. The Local Authority was satisfied that the levels were satisfactory to meet its statutory duties with regard to early years provision. However, it recognised that there could be an impact of a provider stopped trading and further work would be undertaken and brought back to the Forum.

Decision: The Forum agreed by a majority show of hands to:

- (a) Approve the pro-forma for the Schools Block as shown at Annex B, and
- (b) Approve the pro-forma for Early Years as shown at Annex C.

19. Suffolk County Council Role in the financial monitoring of Schools

The Forum was introduced to Paper F which provided information on the outcomes of activity of the Schools Accountancy Team (SAT) following the Forum's decision that strategic plans should be used to assess the reserves position before further action was taken. The attention of the Forum was drawn to the quality and timeliness returns from schools and the direction of travel from the SAT in order to meet the Local Authority's statutory responsibilities.

In response to comments from those present, it was confirmed that the SAT had identified a number of actions by working with a few schools, that would support schools to improve their forecasting. The team anticipated taking proposals to the Business Manager Conference which would be attended by bursars and anticipated changing the toolkit in January. The correspondence with schools would be tailored for each school, feeding back information that had been provided by the school. The Forum was advised that written correspondence would seek to provide co-ordinated input from the local authority, but would generally be preceded by phone contact with the school to discuss the issues.

Decision: The Forum agreed

- (a) That information covering the discussions of the Forum should be sent to the Chair's of Governors, for information stating that they do not have to give the Local Authority feedback.
- (b) To endorse the Local Authorities action in asking for clarity about what schools are planning to do with their reserves.
- (c) Supported the Local Authority's intention to make the strategic toolkit more user friendly.

The Forum was adjourned at 11.07 a.m. and resumed at 11.25 a.m.

20. Working Together for Inclusion Action Plan

The Forum was introduced to Paper D which provided information on the Working Together for Inclusion Action Plan. The Forum was reminded that this was not an item for decision by the Forum, but members could contact Paul Senior and Cheryl Sharland if they had any comments or concerns regarding the commission report and action plan appended to Paper D. It was confirmed that stakeholders were due to be sent the SEND Strategy for 2014-17 for consultation on 3 October 2014.

Members commented on the scale of the work, concerns that the timescales may not be met, particularly in the light of shrinking resources, comparative models and recognition of good practice e.g. in PRU's, the need to differentiate between PRU's and other alternative providers of EOTAS, the need for consistency of language and terminology and support to find local solutions. It was suggested that a separate session around consultation was needed for Governors.

Decision: The Forum acknowledged that it was receiving the information in a consultative capacity and asked to receive feedback on the comments received from the stakeholder consultation.

21. High Needs – Special Schools place review

The Forum received an update on the pressures and demands on Special School Places in Suffolk and the information in Paper E. Members noted that less than 50% of needs were met in Suffolk, they expressed concern regarding to the process of recent changes to the pattern of attendance that had a knock on effect to other providers and members supported the review referred to in paragraph 22 of the Paper and the general desire to ensure adequate provision of special needs within Suffolk.

22. Forward Agenda

The Forum considered its Forward Agenda as referred to in Paper G and noted that the next meeting, due to take place on 11 December 2014 would only do so if there was sufficient business to transact. Officers would confirm or cancel the meeting as appropriate.

It was agreed that the Forum scheduled for Tuesday 13 January 2015 would be held at Kesgrave Conference Centre. Items would include:

- Feedback from working groups
- Annual review of the Suffolk Scheme for financing schools
- Final pro-forma sign off
- Review of Special School Provision
- Strategic Infrastructure

Other items to be added to the work programme included:

- Process for members of the Forum in relation to substitution;
- Role and decision making responsibilities of the Forum

The Forum also agreed that the RAWG on 8 January 2015 would be cancelled.

The meeting closed at 12:39