

**Draft Minutes of the Suffolk Schools' Forum held at Ropes Hall,  
Kesgrave Community Centre at 9:30 am on Tuesday 13 January 2015**

**Present:**

<b>Governors and PRU Managers</b>	Pat Wilkinson, The Willows Primary School <b>(Chair)</b> Denise Morcom, Parkside PRU, Ipswich <b>(Vice Chair)</b> Alison Bowman, Earl Soham Primary School Allison Coleman, Fairfield and Colneis Junior School Wendy Donoghue, Bacton Middle School Pauline Lucas, Hillside School Nick Wilding, Northgate High School (substitute for Upper/High vacancy)
<b>Headteachers</b>	Odran Doran, The Bridge School Neill Challis, Rushmere Hall Primary School Paul Elstone, St James CEVA Middle School Annie Hookway, Holbrook Primary School David Hutton, Northgate High School Dave Siddall, Westbridge PRU
<b>Diocesan Representatives</b>	James Leese, St Mary's CEVA Hugh O'Neil, St Benedict's Catholic School
<b>Early Years Providers</b>	Pat Chapman, Bacton Under 5s Amanda Havers, Tiddlywinks Nursery
<b>14-19 Providers</b>	Helen Wilson, Thurston Community College
<b>Academies</b>	Lynn Eldrett, Bungay High School Sue Hargadon, Farlingaye High School

**Observers and Local Authority**

<b>Observers</b>	There were no observers present
<b>Local Authority</b>	Matthew Hicks, Assistant Cabinet Member for Education, Children and Young People Gavin Bultitude, Assistant Director, Resources and Support Leanne Minnican, Schools Business Partner Cheryl Sharland, Head of Inclusive Services (for Paper D) Paul Senior, Consultant (for Paper D) Georgina Green, Manager, Social Inclusion (for Paper D) Michael Quinton, Service Accountant (for Paper D) Carole Murton, Service Accountant (Schools) (for Papers F and G) Susan Cassedy, Democratic Services Officer (Clerk)

The Forum agreed that, for future meetings, each individual report would provide information on voting rights for that particular item.

**1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lisa Chambers, Sue Cook and Nikki Edwards.

**2. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2014 and matters arising**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2014 were approved and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising:

Item 5 “High Needs – Special Schools Place Review”

A member questioned paragraph 21 of the minutes and asked what ‘50% of needs’ related to. Officers advised that most high needs students were in main stream schools and that it was the high cost students whose needs were less likely to be met in Suffolk.

**3. Reporting back from working groups and partner organisations**

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

**Value for Money Group**

The Forum was advised that the Group had continued looking at issues of comparative data and was advised that Gloucestershire County Council, which received identical funding, had a significantly higher level of attainment at Key Stage 2 and 4. The Group had noted the differences in funding formula and that the findings were inconclusive with each system being organised differently.

The Forum was advised that the Group wanted to carry out further work on behaviour services in preparation for decision making in 2015/16. The Group also discussed early years providers and the Forum was advised that the level of spend would have to increase as take up of early learning for two year olds had increased.

**Safeguarding Board**

The Forum noted that it had not received any feedback from the Board for a number of meetings. In recognising the importance of the Board’s work Members agreed that officers clarify who, from its membership, should be sitting on the Board to ensure it had the appropriate level of involvement in future.

## **Children's Trust**

The Forum was advised that the Trust Board was a non-decision making body which met every six weeks and sat under the Health and Wellbeing Board. Concerns were raised that the Trust Board appeared to be floundering.

### **5. Final Proforma sign off**

The Forum was introduced to Paper B, which provided information on the Schools Block Pro-forma and keeping the sparsity at £100k, and the Early Years Pro-forma.

Members were advised of the changes to the pro-forma since the October submissions, which were detailed in Paper B (with Annex A on a separate sheet).

The Forum was advised that the Sparsity Funding had been considered by the Resource Allocation Group which had recommended that it should be kept at £100k. The Forum was advised that with the exception of one school every schools budget was better off with sparsity than without as indicated in the diagram at paragraph 20 of the report. In response to Members' concerns regarding the budget of the one school which would be worse off, officers advised that the school was well aware of the situation and had been in the same position last year. It had been explained to the school that the situation was unlikely to change.

**Decision:** The Forum agreed:

- i) the prof-forma for the Schools Block – Annex A (separate sheet);
- ii) to delegate minor amendments to the Schools Block to the Chair and Vice Chair with any major changes coming back to the Forum for consideration/approval.
- iii) to keep sparsity at £100k, tapered to the number of pupils on role;
- iv) the prof-forma for Early Years – Annex B.

### **6. DSG Forecasted Outturn March 2015**

The Forum received an update on the DSG forecasted outturn, as set out in paper C, and the potential implications to funding in 2016-17. The purpose of the update was to ensure that the Forum was aware of both the risk to final figures and the long term risks. The Forum was advised that an underspend of £50,000 on the DSG was forecast for this year however, the following issues were highlighted:

- i) there was a significant overspend on the High Needs Block but there were reasonable steps in place to address this;

- ii) the increasing number of early years providers and the changes in the funding for the early years offer for two year olds would put significant pressures on the Early Years Block. This would result in there no longer being an underspend; and
- iii) there were currently underspends on the Schools Block however, this also may not continue. The Forum noted that there was now a small number of redundancy expense cases.

Officers confirmed that the Forum had the discretion to change the formula, splitting the DSG differently between blocks if required

*The Forum agreed to change the order of agenda items as follows:*

## **7. De-delegation of Intervention Fund**

The Forum was introduced to Paper E which advised that the Forum had requested the funding level for the schools intervention fund be reviewed in order to see if it could be reduced. Following the review however, it was recommended that the funding should remain at the 2014-15 level for 2015-16. Officers set out the three elements to the fund and advised that a proportion of the fund was delegated to academies on conversion.

Some members raised concern regarding the amount of additional contingency. Officers reminded members of the 'unknowns' and the unpredictability of events. The Forum was advised that although the local authority had not spent the money in the current financial year, it may need more money next year to ensure it was geared up to provide all necessary levels of intervention and support if required. It was pointed out that supporting intervention in just one failing school could cost thousands of pounds and that this level of contingency provided the flexibility required to minimise the impact on children's education.

It was questioned whether the local authority was being too prudent and members asked if mid-year re-allocation would be an alternative. In response officers confirmed, that although possible, it would depend on there being a budget to re-allocate from. Officers also pointed out the difficulties in coming back to the Forum requesting a mid-year increase in budget. Officers advised of the additional difficulty in that, under the rules of the arrangement, once the level was reduced it could not be increased again without a vote in favour from all the maintained schools.

**Decision:** The Forum agreed by a majority show of hands (6 in favour, 2 abstentions):

- i) to the continuation of the de-delegation of the Schools Intervention Fund for 2015-16 at the 2014-15 level;
- ii) to keep the fund at its current level and to de-delegate the funds so they could be used collectively for all maintained schools in Suffolk; and

- iii) to review the de-delegation of the Schools Intervention Fund next year by focusing on what the money had been spent on and the impact it had had.

## **8. Review of High Needs Provision**

The Forum was introduced to Paper D which provided information on the High Needs Block outturn for 2014-15 and the current pressures and demands on it.

The Forum was being asked to agree that the use of the additional £2.6 million, which the Forum had previously agreed should be allocated to special schools (minutes of the Forum's meeting on 15 July 2014), should now be allocated to a range of areas and provision to meet those pressures faced by the High Needs funding block.

A member challenged the change to the confirmed minutes of 15 July 2014 to include all high needs providers and expressed his concern that, as a result, special schools would now be receiving less funding than had previously been expected. The member stated that special schools had not been consulted or had the opportunity to debate and discuss the issues and had not agreed to the "Planned Actions" in paragraph 7.1 of the report. Another member, in recalling the discussion which took place at its meeting on 15 July 2014, considered that it had generally been understood that the additional funding would be allocated to a range of areas and not just special schools. Officers acknowledged the misunderstanding about what had actually been agreed and stressed the need for the additional allocation to be distributed amongst all high needs providers. Officers set out the serious problems PRUs would face on meeting demand and the resulting increase in out of county placements should this not happen.

Members considered that all young people in receipt of high needs provision deserved to benefit from the additional funding. The Forum accepted that the term 'special schools' had been used incorrectly in the minutes and that this had not been picked up as an inaccuracy when agreeing them at its meeting on 13 October 2014.

Officers confirmed that the additional funding had not yet been earmarked and that it was the intention to bring the exact distribution and time frames to the Forum's April meeting. Members were reminded that the exact distribution was the decision of the Local Authority and not the Forum's.

**Decision:** The Forum:

- i) noted the current pressures and demand on the High Needs Block for 2014-15, as set out in Paper D, and the direction that would be taken by the Local Authority working with high needs providers and mainstream schools to manage those pressures in 2014-16 and subsequent years; and

- ii) agreed that the additional £2.6million should be used for a range of areas and provision, as set out in paragraphs 8.1 and 8.2 of Paper D, in order to meet the pressures faced by the High Needs Block and not only to special schools as stated in the confirmed minutes of the meeting held on July 2014 but to all high needs providers

## **9. Annual Review of the Suffolk Scheme for financing of schools**

The Forum was introduced to Paper F. The paper set out the changes to the scheme which were DfE directed and therefore for information only. The paper also provided information on the annual review of Suffolk's Scheme for the Financing of Schools.

The Forum:

- i) noted the minor amendments made to Suffolk's scheme for the Financing of Schools (Scheme), as set out in Annex A of the report, in order to bring the Scheme in line with DfE 2014 statutory guidance;
- ii) noted the update to Annex A of the Scheme (as set out in Annex Be of the report) to take account of closed schools, schools which had converted to academy and school name changes between 1 October 2013 and 1 November 2014; and
- iii) noted that the revised Scheme would come into effect on 1 January 2015 and that the next annual review would take place in July 2015.

## **10. Monitoring of Schools**

The Forum was introduced to Paper G which was for information only and provided a summary of Monitoring by the Schools Accountancy Team during Autumn 2014.

In response to a Member's question officers advised that those schools causing financial concern were being monitored very closely.

The Forum noted the monitoring summary provided by the Schools Accountancy Team during autumn 2014.

## **11. New Strategic Toolkit**

The Forum was introduced to Paper H which was for information only and asked the Forum to note the changes to the new strategic toolkit.

In response to a question regarding paragraph 15 on the removal of the SNR tab, officers advised that the new SNR process should be cost neutral and that had been rolled out at the administrators' and bursars' conference where it had received a positive response. Members were informed that the timeframe for schools being notified of the new process would be early to mid-February 2015.

**12. Education and Learning Infrastructure Plan**

The Forum was introduced to the Education and Learning Infrastructure Plan (Paper I). The Forum was advised that this was a working document and discussion would continue with district and borough councils. The Forum welcomed the Plan and it was noted that developer contributions were critical.

**13. Forward Agenda**

The Forum considered its Forward Agenda and noted that the next meeting, which would take place on 21 May 2015. The Forum noted that discussion was needed on how the Forum was functioning to enable it to work more smoothly.

The meeting closed at 12.35 pm