

Minutes of the Suffolk Schools' Forum held at Kesgrave Conference Centre at 9:30 am on Thursday 7 July 2015

Present:

Governors and PRU Managers	Denise Morcom, Parkside PRU, Ipswich (Chairman) Alison Bowman, Earl Soham Primary School (Vice Chairman) Allison Coleman, Fairfield Infants School Pat Wilkinson, The Willows Primary School
Headteachers	Lawrence Chapman, Priory School Odran Doran, The Bridge School Paul Elstone, St James CEVA Middle School Annie Hookway, Holbrook Primary School David Hutton, Northgate High School Dave Siddall, Westbridge PRU
Diocesan Representatives	There were no diocesan representatives present
Early Years Providers	Pat Chapman, Bacton Under 5s Amanda Havers, Tiddlywinks Nursery
14-19 Providers	There were no 14-19 provider representatives present
Academies	Sue Hargadon, Farlingaye High School Steve Lovett, Thomas Mills Upper School

Observers and Local Authority

Observers	There were observers present
Local Authority	Councillor Lisa Chambers, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills Sue Cook, Director for Children and Young People Gavin Bultitude, Assistant Director, Resources and Support Leanne Minnican, Schools Finance Business Partner Michael Quinton, Service Accountant Cheryl Sharland, Head of Service Susan Cassedy, Democratic Services Officer (Clerk)

1. Welcome, Apologies for Absence

The Chairman welcomed the Forum members, local authority officers and observers to the meeting. Members were informed that apologies for absence had been received from Lynn Eldrett, Bungay High School (substituted by Phil Hurst, Thomas Mills High School), Hugh O'Neil, St Benedict's Catholic School, Bury St Edmunds, Nikki Edwards, Assistant Director Education and Learning and Geoff Dobson, Head of Strategic Finance.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2015 and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2015 (Paper A) were approved and signed by the Chair subject to an amendment to minute 6(ii) as follows:

Under 'Present':

Members noted that there had been observers present at the meeting on 21 May 2015. Officers reminded members that as it was a public meeting it would not always be possible/appropriate to name observers. Members agreed that if observers were present at Forum meetings that this section read 'There were observers present'.

Page 3, Item 5, under 'Decision':

Amend the first sentence to read: 'Following members voting six in favour and six against and the Chairman choosing not to use her casting vote the Forum decided to agree in principle to this paper, but was concerned about the proposed cost of the review.'

Page 4, Item 6, under 'Decision':

Amend the outcome of the vote to read: 'a vote of five votes in favour and four votes against'.

It was agreed that other matters arising from the minutes would be able to be discussed under other items on the agenda.

Matters Arising:

Agenda Item 3, Value for Money Group (VFM):

The Forum noted that the minute on the VFM had stated that a paper on the behaviour support service would be presented to the Forum at its next meeting (7 July 2015) setting out the direction for travel. Concern was raised by members that due deliberation by the Forum was necessary before making a decision on De-delegation at the meeting on 22 October 2015.

Officers explained that it had not been possible to present the paper at this meeting due to work pressures and apologised to the Forum. A member suggested that, when ready (no later than early part of the Autumn Term), the information be circulated to all Forum Members in readiness for the October meeting.

3. Reporting back from working groups and partner organisations

Resource Allocation Group (RAG)

The Forum heard that the RAG had raised concern about schools being under pressure to take on pupils with no additional funding due to SOR and considered that the policy should be changed to allow funding for additional pupils taken on mid-year. The Forum was advised that the funding framework for SOR had been applied consistently and the LA was reluctant to change for the remaining two waves.

Value for Money Group (VFM)

The Forum was advised that the VFM had not met since the last School's Forum meeting.

Safeguarding Board

Members, in having to once again raise concern about the lack of representation from the Safeguarding Board on School's Forum, heard that Ali Spalding, LSCB Manager had agreed to provide a list of representatives from all areas apart from Higher Education and that a report would be provided for the next Forum meeting.

The Forum was advised that the Safeguarding Board was to meet in July and a briefing would be circulated to members. The Vice Chairman informed the Forum that she was now a member of the Board and although she was yet to attend a meeting she would ensure that the Safeguarding Board reported back to the Forum in future.

Children's Trust

Members were unable to receive an update due to the Forum's representative on the Children's Trust, James Leese, not being present at the meeting.

5. Financial Context – Schools Funding

The Forum was provided with two PowerPoint presentations which provided background information for Paper B "Budget proposal – amendments to 2015/16 budget and implications for 2016/17". The first presentation provided the Forum with results from a recent independent secondary schools' survey (carried out by the sector itself, rather than the LA) on schools funding. The second presentation by the LA provided information on DSG allocation.

The Forum was advised that the In Year Fair Access Protocol (IYFAP) had received engagement from schools and support from CAHMS and, as a result, exclusion figures had gone down.

The Forum was advised that with regard to the High Needs block allocation, there was a relatively low spend and Suffolk was one of the lowest funded LAs compared to Norfolk received a further £10million. Member raised concern about a statement by Tim Coulson, Regional

Schools Commissioner, which provided false information regarding the cost of PRUs. The Member advised that the cost of PRUs in Suffolk were similar to the average costs for other local authorities. Officers clarified that there was no financial advantage of PRUs becoming Academies and that this would not be a solution to the problem.

In agreeing that survey results were more credible if carried out by the sector itself rather than the LA, the Forum requested that further independent surveys on schools funding be organised for primary schools, special schools and PRUs.

6. **Budget proposal – amendments to 2015/16 budget and implications for 2016/17**

The Forum was advised that the RAG had been adamant that money should be kept back to pay for Academy debts and it was noted that this had also reflected comments made at the last Forum meeting.

In response to a Member's comments regarding High Needs not seeing any real term increases of funding per pupil, the Forum was advised that RAG had stated that it was reluctant to put money in to the High Needs allocation until processes had been worked through and changes made in terms of provision.

In response to Member's concerns regarding the proposals on the growth policy, officers advised that LA officers had struggled to prioritise and they had focused on the areas where money was most needed, identifying absolute pressures the LA had to meet. In acknowledging there was no provision for LA schools, officers pointed out that all growth spend would be spent on Suffolk children in Suffolk Schools. The Forum was advised that in order to attract sponsors for new Academies money would need to be provided and that growth spend was not an incentive but would be needed to meet real costs.

Some Members stated that they could not vote in favour for anything that would reduce money coming in to schools. In response the Chair pointed out that it may be the prudent and sensible thing to do.

The Forum recognised the proposed revised 2015/16 budget would be the starting point for the 2016/17 budgets. The Forum also recognised that formal sign off of the pro-forma for 2016/17 by Schools Forum would occur at the October meeting and that these changes would form the starting point for the 2016/17 pro-forma.

Decision: The Forum:

- i) following a vote of 10 votes in favour and 5 against agreed, by majority, the proposed amendments to the 2015/16 Budgets as set out in the report.
- ii) following a vote of 6 votes in favour, no votes against and 9 votes abstaining agreed, by majority, the amendments to the growth policy set out in Annex A of the report. In doing so the

Forum noted that this would cost an additional £0.500million which was funded as part of the 2015/16 revised budget;

- iii) a) following a vote of 8 votes in favour, 6 votes against and 1 abstention agreed, by majority, to hold the £0.465 DSG underspend from 2014/15 in reserve as a contingency against Academy debt non-payment; and
- b) following a vote of 13 votes in favour, no votes against and 2 abstentions agreed, by majority, to allocate £0.782million to all schools through a non-recurrent increase to AWPU.

The Forum adjourned at 11:17 and reconvened at 11:30 am

At 11.30 am the Forum observed a minute's silence to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the 7/7 London bombings.

7. Medical Tuition and Exclusions charging policy

The Forum considered Paper C, a report on the medical tuition and exclusions charging policy. The report explained that during 2014-15 EOTAS budget was not able to recoup the funding that was required to offset the expenditure on this provision from some of the academies. The two main areas where the necessary funding had not been received were permanent exclusions and medial 1:1 tuition.

The Forum was advised that academies had the legal responsibility to provide education to pupils who were medically unfit for the first 15 days, after which it was the LAs responsibility. Members noted that any debt incurred since schools fully understood the process had to be clawed back. Officers advised that a small contribution was already made from the schools block and the proposals asked for a contribution from the specific school rather than top slicing all schools.

Decision: The Forum:

- i) in noting that there were still some legal aspects to be clarified before a new mechanism could be implemented, following a vote of 13 votes in favour, no votes against and no abstentions, agreed in principle, the revised approach to the clawing back of funds and the adjustments required to be made by the LA in respect of permanent and medical exclusions as directed by the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2013; and
- ii) in recognising the important difference between medical exclusions and permanent exclusion, agreed to request that careful wording be used in the new policy to make a clear distinction between the two.

8. DSG Outturn 2014/15

The Forum did not discuss Paper D, which was for information only.

9. School Balances 2014/15

The Forum received Paper E, which was for information only. Officers clarified that the previous paper's totals for Middle Schools only included totals for schools which were closing. The totals for Middle Schools in Annex A of Paper E however, included all Middle Schools and therefore the two totals differed.

The Chair left the meeting at 12.00 noon at which point the Vice Chair took the Chair.

10. Update on Specialist Support centres funding and consultation

The Forum received Paper F which was for information only. A member of the Forum raised concern about evidence to show that support centres were having the required impact and wondered if the schools could have provided the service directly. The Forum was also advised that an element of funding was given without any commissioned places.

11. Update on Developing the Schools Forum

The Forum was provided with an update on progress in the development of the Schools Forum. Officers advised that the Council was currently trying to secure the services of an appropriate person to take on the role of developing the Forum. The Forum was also advised that the Education Funding Agency had published a Schools Forum self-assessment toolkit. Questionnaires would be sent out to both Forum members and non-Forum members. The self-assessment results and questionnaire responses would be looked at to establish best practice.

12. Forward Agenda

The Forum considered its Forward Agenda and agreed that a standing item on High Needs provision be added in to Forum agendas in future; Officers clarified that the following items were expected to appear on the agenda for the 22 October Forum meeting:

- i) Pro-forma sign off for 2016/17 budgets
- ii) Agreement of De-delegation and central services for 2016/17
- iii) LMS Scheme
- iv) Information on the School Intervention Fund
- v) Behaviour support services

- vi) Monitoring and intervention work carried out by the Schools Accountancy Teams
- vii) High Needs Strategy

Forum Members requested confirmation of meeting dates for later in the year. Officers advised that this was being looked at and that all future dates would be when the Cabinet Member and Director were both available.

The Forum, in noting that it was Leanne Minnican's last meeting before going on maternity leave, wished her well. The Forum noted that Michael Quinton would be covering in her absence.

The meeting closed at 12.22 pm