

Unconfirmed minutes of the Suffolk Schools' Forum held at Kesgrave Conference Centre at 9:30 am on Thursday 14 January 2016

Present:

Maintained school governors (and PRU managers)	Alison Bowman, Earl Soham Primary School (Chairman) Allison Coleman, Federation of Fairfield and Colneis Schools
Maintained school headteachers	Odran Doran, The Bridge School Annie Hookway, Holbrook Primary School David Hutton, Northgate High School Dave Siddall, Westbridge PRU Louise Spall, Somerleyton Primary School
Diocesan representatives	James Leese, St Marys CEVA Primary School Hugh O'Neill, St Benedict's Catholic School, Bury St Edmunds
Early years providers	Pat Chapman, Bacton Under 5s Amanda Havers, Tiddlywinks Nursery
14-19 Providers	Helen Wilson, Thurston Community College (arrived during discussion on Paper E)
Academies	Lynn Eldrett, Bungay High School Sue Hargadon, Farlingaye High School (left during discussion on Paper E) Steve Lovett, Thomas Mills Upper School Julia Upton, Debenham High School (took over from Sue Hargadon at Paper E)

Observers and Local Authority

Observers	There were observers present
Local Authority	Gavin Bultitude, Assistant Director, Resources and Support Helen Carter, Interim Programme Manager Sue Cook, Director for Children and Young People Fiona Heath, Project Accountant Councillor Gordon Jones, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills Michael Quinton, Schools Finance Business Partner Cheryl Sharland, Head of Service Susan Cassedy, Democratic Services Officer (Clerk)

1. **Welcome and Apologies for Absence**

The Chairman welcomed the Forum members, local authority officers and observers to the meeting. Apologies for absence had been received from Pauline Lucas, Special School Governor, Hillside School, Paul Elstone, Middle School Head, St James CEVA Middle School, Pat Wilkinson, PRU Governor, Kingsfield PRU (appointment to be confirmed) and from the Local Authority Geoff Dobson, Head of Strategic Finance and Nikki Edwards, Assistant Director, Education and Learning.

Louise Spall, Headteacher, Somerleyton Primary School, was welcomed to the Forum as a new Maintained School Primary Headteacher representative.

2. **Minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2015 and matters arising**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2015 (Paper A) were approved and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendments:

Page 3, Item 4, second paragraph: change “2015-2016” to “2016-2017”.

Page 4, Item 10: Add under Member’s comments: “A Member raised concern about the length of the time the process was taking.”

Matters Arising

The Forum noted the retirement of the PRU representative Denise Morcom and that following a reshuffle it was hoped that Pat Wilkinson would be nominated.

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

Resource Allocation Group (RAG)

Members were informed that the RAG had not met since the last meeting.

Value for Money Group (VFM)

Members were informed that the VFM had not met since the last meeting.

Safeguarding Board

The Forum was advised that the issue surrounding school representation had been resolved and there was now full representation on the Board. The Forum was also advised that a meeting of school representatives had been postponed until late January.

Children's Trust

James Leese advised the Forum that he had been unable to attend the last two Children's Trust meetings. He advised that all headteachers should have received a letter providing information on the backlog in speech and language.

James Leese informed the Forum that due to other commitments he would be unable to continue as the Forum's representative. Annie Hookway volunteered to represent the Forum on an interim basis until an alternative representative was found and that she would attend the next Children's Trust meeting on 9 February.

4. 2016-17 Schools Block Submission

The Forum considered Paper B which requested sign off the pro-forma for both the Schools Block and the Early Years Block.

The Forum noted the changes to capping from 7.5% to 4.61%. The Forum also noted the changes to the deprivation factor with the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), used to allocate deprivation funding, having been updated to use 2015 data rather than the 2010 data previously used. It was noted that the schools which would be adversely affected by these changes would be protected through MFG. The number of schools affected was around 30 with cuts in funding of around 1.5% at most due to the MFG coming in. Officers stressed the importance of schools being aware of pupil numbers in planning for the future and that the money per pupil was to increase by approximately £100. (Now confirmed at £79.)

It was agreed that the modelling template for IDACI would be shared with the Forum as a matter of interest.

Gavin Bultitude raised the issue of split site costs which had been raised by Helen Wilson from Thurston. Helen's view is that this was insufficient, and Gavin Bultitude had some sympathy with this view although it was too late to change the Proforma for 2016/17. This would be looked at later for a possible 2017/18 change.

The Forum was advised that the funding model was likely to change significantly again next year, however there was no information currently on how this would look.

Decision: The Forum voted unanimously in favour to:

- i) sign off the pro-forma for Schools Block (Annex A); and
- ii) sign off the pro-forma for Early Years (Annex B)

5. Financial Pressures in Early Years

The Forum noted Paper C which provided information on the potential implications for the Early Years sector, particularly for the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) part of the sector, in the future. Officers advised that a second paper would be presented to the Forum

in May 2016 which would include data collected from PVI early years providers on the costs of providing early years places, with 60 providers willing to discuss their experiences further.

In response to a Member suggesting that the DfE should provide more funding to meet the identified pressures as the money was currently coming from schools, Officers advised that this was a simplification of the issue. Members were reminded that the DSG was not just for schools but covered 3 blocks, Schools, Early Years and High Needs and it was the Forum's role to look at balancing the DSG between the 3 blocks and consider good outcomes for all learners. The Forum was advised that it should be directing money to those areas that would have the greatest impact on children, and officers stressed the importance of Early Years education for all children and advised that they continued to lobby hard for fairer funding.

Members noted that the additional education/childcare hours would be provided in both mainstream and special schools. Members also noted that parents now had the option of deferring their child's entrance to foundation schooling by one year which could mean the demand for nursery places rising and the demand for foundation places dropping.

6. High Needs Block Update

The Forum noted Paper D which provided an update on the High Needs Block which had been requested by the Forum as a standing item.

The Forum was advised that the work that the LA had been undertaking was having a positive impact with the overspend in Quarter 2 having reduced to £2.5m with a further reduction forecasted in Quarter 3. Officers confirmed there had been some improvement following the investment, however it would take time.

It was confirmed that the formal consultation would take place between 14 March and 24 April 2016 when briefing sessions would be set up. Officers stressed that they were still in the information gathering stage and with regard to residential provision confirmed that this did need to be looked at however no decisions had been made.

Forum Members were informed that copies of the Children and Young People with SEN and Disabilities 2015-18 Strategy were available at the meeting for Members to take away.

It was noted that a consultation would start on specialist support centres.

7. Schools Forum Development

The Forum received Paper E which provided an update on the programme for development work to review the Forum's operation and processes. Officers agreed to reissue the table on page 13 of the report which indicated the current composition of the Suffolk Schools Forum as it contained some inaccurate information.

The Forum noted that there was no requirement to have both Head and governor representatives within each representative group of schools within the maintained sector and that this was just the custom and practice of the current Schools Forum. Officers clarified that the provisional alternative composition scenario options set out in Annex B of the report were only suggestions to consider and that further scenarios may also be considered. It was agreed that the 'status quo' should also be considered as an option.

A Member once again raised their concern regarding the length of time the process was taking and also highlighted that the effective voting influence of Academies using the existing methodology is lower than the proportion of pupils within Academies, and that the proportion of pupils in the academy sector was increasing, which should be considered for the future.

With regard to agreeing the process of immediately electing a member to represent maintained nursery schools as required by the regulations, the Forum was of the opinion that it had been non-compliant for some time and that it would be a manageable risk to stay non-compliant for one further meeting.

With regard to recommendation e) arising from the Schools Forum self-assessment toolkit review, Members were of the opinion that the issue of equal geographical distribution of representatives in the primary sector should be discussed further outside of the meeting. The Chair would contact all primary phase members to canvas views on the issue.

The Forum recognised that further face to face discussion was required in order to progress the project at a suitable pace. A member agreed to seek a nomination for the steering group from the Early Years sector the following week.

Decision: The Forum (with the exception of Helen Wilson as she had not been present for the whole of the discussion) took a vote on each recommendation and unanimously agreed:

- i) to begin the process immediately to elect a member for special academies as required by the regulations;
- ii) not to seek a member to represent maintained nursery schools at this stage;
- iii) the proposed amendments to the existing constitution as set out on page 6 of the report;

- iv) with the exception of recommendation e), the recommendations arising from the Schools Forum self-assessment toolkit review, as set out in Annex A of the report;
- v) that recommendation e) be discussed further outside of the meeting;
- vi) to ask officers to look at the proposed timetable and see if it could be compressed further;
- vii) the proposed questions for the survey phase as set out in Annex C of the report;
- viii) the following nominations for a small steering group for the project:
 - Alison Bowman
 - Richard Thomas
 - Annie Hookway
 - Steve Lovett

The Forum adjourned at 11.15 and reconvened at 11:40 am

8. Academy Debts

The Forum noted Paper F which provided information on the debt owed to the Council by academies as requested by the Forum at its last meeting.

Officers advised that services were recommended to take great care to ensure prudent financial control measures were put in place when dealing with traded services and that management of debt was dealt with on a case by case basis.

Officers agreed to feed back a Member's comment regarding the problem with late invoicing and the importance of Academies receiving invoices in the current financial year.

9. Update on the Comprehensive Spending Review

The Forum noted Paper G which provided an update on the Comprehensive Spending Review. Officers advised that overall the settlement was not as bad as expected however it did not keep up with the level of cost pressures or demand.

The Forum was advised that funding reform was set to continue and Government consultation on proposals would commence soon. Officers stressed the importance of all Forum Members individually responding to the consultation when published as it was believed that higher regard was given to the opinion of school heads and governors than local authorities. The Forum noted that there was already a commitment by the Government for all secondary schools to be academies by the end of the current Government and that this policy would have an impact on the Forum.

11. **Forward Agenda**

The Forum agreed the revised Forward Agenda as set out in Paper H.

It was agreed that an extra meeting would be arranged before May to deal with funding reform if this was required.

The meeting closed at 11.52 am