

Minutes of the Suffolk Schools' Forum held at 9.30 am on 27 November 2017 in the Conference Room, Landmark House, Ipswich

Present:

Non-School Members	Pat Chapman, PVI Helen Wilson, Post 16
Academy Members	Lyn Eldrett, Mainstream Dawn Carman-Jones, Mainstream Mark Kemp, Special Steve Lovett, Mainstream Dave Siddall, PRU Jo Stanley-Bell, Mainstream Colin Turner, Mainstream Julia Upton, Mainstream
Maintained School Members	Graham Alcock, PRU Allison Coleman, Primary Governor (Chair) Jan Hatchell, Special Dave Hutton, Secondary Head (Vice Chair) Gillian Mitchell, Primary Lil Newton, Nursery Louise Spall, Primary

Observers and Local Authority

Observers	There were observers present
Local Authority	Allan Cadzow Fiona Heath Adrian Orr, Deputy Assistant Director, Education and Learning Gordon Jones Judith Mobbs Katherine Bailey

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Amanda Havers and Odran Doran (substituted by Jan Hatchell).

2. Minutes of the previous meeting & issues arising

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 October 2017 were approved and signed by the Chair. There were no issues arising.

3. Draft funding proforma for schools' budgets 2018-19

The Forum considered Paper B, an information update on the planned implementation of the national funding formula for schools' budgets in 2018-19. Members heard that this would normally be a decision-making paper at this point in the year, but issues with the DFE indicative budget tool meant that the LA finance team had not yet been able to commence modelling the budgetary implications for individual schools.

Members noted that a final decision on the funding proforma for schools' budgets for 2018-19 would have to be made at the Forum meeting on 11 January 2018, with no opportunity for members to take the outcomes of discussions back to the schools they represented. It was therefore agreed that LA finance officers would make every effort to distribute papers ahead of the publication date for the next meeting, although members appreciated they would be constrained by DFE timescales.

4. Growth Policy – revision to funding of new schools

The Forum heard that although the current Growth Policy did not include diseconomies of scale funding for new schools, the first three year groups were typically funded at PAN for the first three years as they progressed through the school. Members considered proposed amendments to the Growth Policy, to formally add diseconomies of scale funding to support unfilled year groups, whilst avoiding being unnecessarily generous at the expense of other school budgets. The Forum was presented with four potential options, which were detailed in Paper C.

The Forum unanimously **decided**, with no abstentions, that with effect from the 2018-19 financial year, new primary schools would be provided with extra funds equating to the difference between estimated pupil numbers and 75% PAN for the first three year groups as they progressed through the school for the first 3 years. (Paper C, Option 2).

Members noted that this did not apply to secondary schools, which would be considered separately. The Forum heard that there were no current plans for new secondary schools in Suffolk.

5. Schools in financial difficulty

The Forum considered the de-delegation of funding back to the Local Authority for contingencies for schools in financial difficulties. Members heard that, partly because of the natures of schools that were undertaking academy conversions, the estimated magnitude of financial risk was quite static, even though the number of maintained schools was decreasing.

The Forum heard that funds de-delegated for this purpose were used to support schools that had encountered unexpected challenges leading to costs that could not have been predicted, for example to cover interim arrangements for leadership and governance, such as

Interim Executive Boards, not for schools that were in financial difficulties through general budget management, or for academy conversion deficits. The funds went directly to schools and were not set against any LA staffing costs.

Paper D provided the Forum with 3 funding options, and members also considered an alternative option, which was to retain 60% of the current level of funding.

Primary and Secondary maintained school members voted on this issue by phase. The decisions were as follows:

Primary phase

To retain 75% of the current level of funding (option 3) – 3 votes

To retain 66% of the current level of funding – 1 vote

No abstentions or votes for options 1 or 2

Secondary phase

To retain 66% of the current level of funding – 1 vote

No abstentions or votes for options 1, 2 or 3

The Forum therefore **decided** that:

- a) 75% of the current level of funding would be de-delegated from maintained primary school budgets in 2018-19; and
- b) 66% of the current level of funding would be de-delegated from maintained secondary school budgets in 2018-19.

6. High needs block position paper

The Forum noted Paper E, an information paper which provided details of the source of demand growth and cost pressures identified in the High Needs Block. It also included information on plans to bring High Needs Block spending within budget whilst supporting investment in early intervention and without destabilising place funding.

Members heard that the budget was likely to be considerably overspent in the current financial year and the situation was very volatile, as significant expenses could be incurred by individual children with little notice. Proposals in the cost management plan included extending the number of locally available specialist places by developing new provision or extending the capacity of existing providers.

It was agreed that rigorous admission arrangements would be required to ensure that new provision was used efficiently. The focus would be on early intervention to allow children to continue in mainstream education for as long as possible.

Members queried the national average FTE cost for alternative provision quoted in the paper (£18,000 per place). It was noted that this figure included the cost of provision in municipal situations where economies of scale applied, compared to the rurality of Suffolk.

8. Consultation paper for the reform of the high needs funding system

Members received Paper F, a draft consultation document on high needs funding reform which had been developed in partnership with the Forum's High Needs Working Group. The Forum, which was asked for its views on the paper, heard that officers intended to add some information about specialist providers to the paper, and then the consultation would be officially launched, probably in the next few days. It was planned that during the consultation period, an LA officer would visit every setting with a high proportion of children with high needs and also any other school that requested a visit. The outcomes of the consultation were expected to be implemented for the 2019-20 financial year.

Members agreed that they were pleased to see that the proposals were for equitable funding driven by the needs of learners rather than the needs of settings. However, they commented that the worked examples were confusing and needed to be clarified, and that modelling of the proposal outcomes would be very useful. The point was also made that very little early years funding was available to support early intervention.

9. School Forum venues and access

The Forum agreed that Landmark House was its preferred meeting room venue because it was easily accessible from the A14 and parking was available if booked in advance. However, it was noted that a room had already been booked in Endeavour House for the next meeting.

10. Forward Agenda

The Forum agreed its forward agenda (Paper G). A member asked for information on the disparities between charges to maintained and academy schools for union arrangements and facilities management and it was agreed that a response would be provided.

The meeting closed at 11:20 am