

Minutes of the Suffolk Schools' Forum held at 9.30am on Thursday 21 January 2021 via Microsoft Teams (and live streamed through YouTube) due to the current COVID pandemic

Present:

Non-School Members	Colin Shaw, 16-19 Provider Maria Kemble, Diocesan Pat Chapman, PVI Amanda Havers, PVI Sharon Waldron, Diocesan
Academy Members	Julia Upton, Mainstream Steve Lovett, Mainstream Darren Woodward, Mainstream Angela Berry, Mainstream Daniel Jones, Mainstream Andrew Berry, Mainstream Angela Whately, SENDAT Partnership Director – <i>on behalf of Sue Prickett, Special</i>
Maintained School Members	Allison Coleman, Primary (Chair) Alison Bowman, Primary Darron Jackson, Primary Gill Mitchell, Primary Karen Mills, Primary Ruth Coleman, Nursery

Observers and Local Authority

Observers	There were observers present at the meeting
Local Authority	Mary Evans Allan Cadzow Adrian Orr Gemma Morgan Christina Lewis Sonya Harban Michael Quinton Teresa Spilling Kylie Collins

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1.	Welcome – Virtual Meeting Etiquette	<p>The Chair welcomed members to Schools Forum.</p> <p>This meeting is a public meeting being live streamed as we are having to meet virtually, please therefore keep microphones muted and cameras turned off unless you are called to contribute.</p> <p>As Schools Forum members we are here to do the best for all pupils in Suffolk, we need to take a collaborative approach.</p>
2.	Apologies for absence	<p>Apologies for absence were received from: Sue Prickett, Paul Morton, Louise Spall, Angela Ransby, Lizzi Murphy, Dawn-Carman-Jones</p> <p>Angela Whately, SENDAT Partnership Director in attendance on behalf of Sue Prickett.</p>
3.	Minutes of the previous meeting & issues arising	<p>The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 November were agreed and signed off by the Chair.</p> <p>To note for future meetings names to be added in full rather than initials or to make sure initials differentiate where initials are the same for ease of reference.</p>
4.	Schools Block Funding Submission: 2021-22	<p>What is the Forum being asked to decide? This is an information paper only and contains details of the final submission of schools’ block budget to the Education, Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA).</p> <p>Reason for recommendation Previously the recommendation and as agreed by Schools Forum at the last meeting (26.11.20) is for Suffolk to continue to follow the National Funding Formula (NFF).</p> <p>Alternative options Suffolk could decide not to follow NFF and use different rates and factors, however, Forum have agreed to follow the NFF.</p> <p>Michael Quinton introduced this brief paper for information only which confirms the schools funding submission for 2021-22. At the last meeting in November, Forum agreed that Suffolk should continue</p>

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		<p>follow the National Funding Formula.</p> <p>Over the past 3 years Suffolk have advocated that Suffolk and its schools should be allocated funding through mirroring the funding formula.</p> <p>‘Table 1’ shows allocation in the schools’ block is 462,7m before de-delegation for LA maintained schools, although including 20.5m teacher pension grant and the teacher pension employer contribution grant. Overall, this year the financial increase funding for schools is 3%. Pupil numbers have dropped for the first time in a number of years, creating overall a decrease in the basic entitlement of 1.2m. In future years numbers should see the pupil numbers start to increase, we have a few new schools and housing developments in the pipeline therefore growth requirements will need to be looked at. Paper to come to Forum in April or June. Income deprivation affecting children index (IDACHI), data has been updated so we are using the 2019 data instead of the 2015 data. This has resulted in over 3,000 pupils being picked up under the various categories so there will be some fluctuation in individual school budgets but the overall increase in this area is 1.5m.</p> <p>Minimum per pupil funding, this is an important an important factor for Suffolk as we are a low funded local authority a lot of schools do not reach the threshold as in ‘Table 2’. A number of schools are topped up via the minimum per pupil funding, 105 schools (ranging between £1,800 to £358,000).</p> <p>Annex A –shows what unit values we will be using for 2021-22. Please share information with your primary and secondary schools so they can start doing some early planning on the annexes. Toolkits will be out to LA maintained schools before half term on 12 February and Academies should receive theirs before 28 February.</p> <p>No questions raised by Forum members.</p> <p>Chair thanked Mike and the team for all the work that goes into this and behind the scenes and also all the hard work that will now go into compiling all the packs for schools by 12 February.</p>

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5.	Schools Forum members Term of Office	<p>What is the Forum being asked to decide? Forum is being asked to agree to ‘term of office’ proposals for forum members following their election. Forum is also asked to agree an approach to manage arrangements with regard to long standing members of schools forum where there is no recorded election date.</p> <p>To agree the proposals for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The term of office as a member of Suffolk Schools Forum, following after election to be 4 years 2. The establishment of a time limited task and finish group to agree the arrangements for long standing members of Schools Forum. <p>Adrian Orr (AO) introduced this item.</p> <p>With the introduction of NFF there was an expectation that there would become a point when Schools Forums might not be needed, but that’s never been further from the truth and the life of Schools Forum will continue for many years. Ordinarily the LA would decide the term of office but given that we like to be collaborative with forum members we have put a proposal for a 4 year term of office. The rationale for the 4 year term of office is that after looking at forums around the country they were typically around 3-4 years. We are looking for agreement from Forum members for a 4 year term of office. We have a number of forum members who were appointed long before we were running elections and we do need to come up with an arrangement for how we manage that and how those forum members could stand for election again and the process that we will put in place.</p> <p>Second part of the paper is we would like to ask for volunteers to set up a term of office task and finish group, of 1 or 2 meetings to agree a set of arrangements for those Forum members who have not got a term of office. We need to ensure if they stand again, what the election arrangements would be or if they decide not to stand again how we put appropriate arrangements in place to fill those vacancies. Part of that Task and Finish Group</p>

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		<p>discussion is how we achieve a balance between school leaders, setting leaders and governors.</p> <p>Voting took place on the above proposal for a 4 year term of office.</p> <p>After voting 15 forum members in favour, 0 members against and 0 abstained.</p> <p>The following members stated their interest in being part of this Task and Finish Group: Andrew Berry, Julia Upton, Allison Coleman, Alison Bowman and Angela Berry.</p>
6.	Early Years Challenges and Sufficiency	<p>Since the introduction of the early years national funding formula (EYNFF), providers have operated in an increasingly difficult economic climate. The EYNFF saw Suffolk face a reduction in the resource available to pay providers for delivery of the governments funded entitlements. Since then, increases have been minimal, have not kept abreast of providers increasing operating costs and have yet to reach pre EYNFF levels.</p> <p>Christina Lewis (CL) introduced this item, which is for information, this paper was brought to Forum today to help members to understand the challenges faced by early years providers and to recognise the amazing response they have given in these very challenging times in supporting our youngest children and their families. This report was written before Christmas and this has now changed once more. I wrote the paper thinking we were going back to business as usual in January. Therefore, everything in the paper still stands but the challenges are even more acute now. Even though EY was one of the sectors that remained open for everyone, many parents chose not to send their children, due to Covid concerns or because of changes in their working pattern so they don't require the childcare and some settings have closed already. Knock on effect with the LA as this will mean we may not be able to meet our sufficiency going forward which will have a knock on effect with parents when they can get back to work the childcare may not be there, causing a whole system issue.</p> <p>Several questions were raised by Forum members.</p>

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		<p>Chair handed over to Amanda Havers as she has already indicated that she would like to provide some more information about the experience of Early Years Providers.</p> <p><u>Amanda Havers</u> Operational life for Early Years providers (and schools) has been extremely challenging since last March. As Schools Forum has a financial role, I would like to raise a few comments and questions about financial matters relating to the Early Years sector. Firstly, in relation to the paper. The reduction or loss of fee-paying families is significant because in many settings this money subsidises government funded places because the funding formula does not pay enough to cover costs. Providers appreciated the fact that Summer term funding was received whether they were open or closed. However, there has been no compensation or contribution for those who remained open. We have received no funding at all towards additional costs incurred as a result of the pandemic e.g., additional cleaning costs or partitioning so that we could operate in bubbles.</p> <p>How many settings remained open in the Summer? How many closed temporarily and what were the reasons? Can settings that stayed open have any financial acknowledgement for additional costs? How many children were displaced? Providers were asked to pass money to another provider if a child moved. Did this not occur? Was this additional funding out of the EY block? How much money was supplied for displaced children? How much money assisted key worker parents with their fees?</p> <p>The government announced that each setting's Autumn 2020 funding payments should be compared to their Autumn 2019 funding level and that settings should receive a top-up if the difference was more than 10%. SCC devised an application process for settings to apply for this top-up which was complex and I have a concern that those who needed it the most may not have applied. How many settings applied and how much money was distributed? SCC subsequently distributed the remaining money by doing the calculation comparison and paying one third of the difference. Why was only a third paid out?</p>

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		<p>It is right that some providers have accessed some of the coronavirus funding streams such as the Job Retention Scheme but this has not been easy and, please note, these have <u>not</u> covered all our costs.</p> <p>Some providers have restricted their offer to parents to make funded entitlements <i>effective</i> but some have done this to make funded entitlements <i>possible</i> to deliver. With increased cleaning and keeping staff static in bubbles, being open for long hours has become much more difficult.</p> <p>Christina has highlighted some of the changes in parental circumstances which will continue to challenge us in the months ahead. There are also others:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of additional costs due to the pandemic e.g. cleaning • Increased staffing costs due to rises in National Living Wage & National Minimum Wage (2.2%) • 2021/22 funding rates remaining relatively static or showing a small increase (<1.5%) <p>Please note these are only the financial challenges. We don't have time to mention all the other challenges relating to the impact of the pandemic on children, families and staff.</p> <p>Providers have appreciated the decision to fund children in the Spring Term who are <i>registered</i> during headcount week regardless of whether they are currently attending or not. This has definitely sustained some providers for this term at least. Throughout the pandemic, information from SCC has been free flowing and the support has been appreciated by providers. The online training offer and virtual contact with SCC staff has been a very positive output. It is more efficient and cost-effective for all parties and gives the opportunity for more people to engage and for broader networking. Providers would support this continuing into the future alongside the reinstatement of some face-to-face opportunities too. The last paragraph implies that these financial challenges will affect private businesses the most. This is not necessarily the case. It affects all types of providers from sole-trader childminders to large</p>

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		<p>charitable organisations. Examples in the last few months of providers closing with financial difficulties include a small committee-run charity and a large community trust which had a chain of providers.</p> <p>What can SCC do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the maximum amount of funding is passed on to providers • Consider carefully the percentage amount of the termly advance • Consider carefully how any additional funding streams are used and distributed • Ensure all funding processes are clear, transparent and as straightforward as possible • Lobby government for funding increases • Lobby government for equality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a) with other local authorities, - b) across all types of provision, - c) across the whole education sector <p>Early Years providers continue to demonstrate their commitment to providing early education in Suffolk, but we can only do this with support from Schools Forum members and Suffolk County Council.</p> <p>Christina will respond to Amanda with full answers to all her points raised. Although a couple can be answered straight away. The money used for first lockdown which was for displaced children for settings closing was roughly £400,000 in that period, but will confirm the exact amount, it did not come from the Early Years Block or DSG. It came from another funding source that Suffolk found to put into the sector to support over and above the normal funding. With regards to the recovery payments, the process that we used for that was agreed with the early year's consultative forum members. It was agreed it needed to be robust so those who really needed it received it and it was modelled on other LA processes as well. Appropriate applications made did receive the money. The reason one third of the difference was distributed is that that was the money that was left after we paid all the claims and all the recovery payment applications what was left was distributed. SCC did not keep any money back all money available has been passed through to providers from the autumn</p>

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		<p>term funding that we received from the DfE.</p> <p>Funding rates for 2021-22 we have the information now from the DfE we do have a provider's consultative forum meeting for the beginning of February and I will be putting forward a proposal as to how we will be using that funding and once agreed with the consultative forum that will be agreed with the sector more widely and on the pass through rate Suffolk only retains 3.4% of all funding which is likely to decrease next year if the consultative proposal agree to the proposal. Therefore, at the moment we pass through 97.6% of all funding.</p> <p><u>Pat Chapman</u> I would like Forum to consider the differences between the types of settings that early years has, as I represent the voluntary side of early years. They too have got additional worries/struggles such as many of them share buildings with other people. Very reliant on volunteers in particular their management committees. The voluntary sector is very reliant on fundraising and currently unable to do so.</p> <p><u>Andrew Berry</u> The importance of EY for the education sector in Suffolk and we cannot afford to lose provision. Do we have a clear picture of extent of which providers are suffering and those that are likely to have to close or reduce their provision? What as Schools Forum can we do about it? <i>CL: We do have a picture of what is happening in the sector and it's increasingly concerning. The third lockdown is having a significant impact. People who were fairly confident they could recover this term are now finding that the situation has changed and they can't. I do believe for the first time ever that Suffolk is heading towards a situation where we can't meet our sufficiency duty because we do not have resources available at the moment to be able to help these providers in a greater way than we already are. We are helping providers access any funding streams outside of our control but that does require a lot of effort on providers and a lot of them don't have the energy for that at the moment.</i></p> <p><i>AO: Andrew's point is absolutely right, early years is so vital to the educational journey that a child will take</i></p>

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		<p><i>and collectively we need to try and think how we might help the sector. Early Years Sector are in a very unique position with the challenges that they are facing. From LA position we know the vital role that this sector plays. In the first lockdown out of 540-550 providers 11 struggled to continue and this current lockdown is very different.</i></p> <p><u>Karen Mills</u> Following NAHT updated guidance today about EY funding – delay being notified about it and what we should be doing? <i>CL: Not aware of any further information about funding. There is information about the census and how that is going to be done. We have issued all the information about the funding for this term and the task is currently open and all providers are submitting their claims based on intended take up and not actual take up and believe that is what the census is going to be based on. Not aware of any top up funding for this term.</i></p> <p><u>Sharon Waldron</u> Do pre-schools factor into this? <i>CL: Yes its all early years provision, from all individual childminders right through to national chains, schools and maintained nursery schools.</i></p> <p><u>Alison Bowman</u> It appears that work patterns are likely to change for a lot of people once the pandemic is over which will have a long term financial impact. <i>This is something which we will need to keep an eye on.</i></p> <p><u>Allan Cadzow</u> Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) is constantly lobbying for a better deal for the Early Year sector. We have to lobby from every angle in order that issues are addressed.</p> <p><u>Andrew Berry</u> Do we need to set up a working group for this with the experts on Schools Forum to discuss? <i>Christina already has a group of EY providers who meet regularly.</i></p> <p><u>Darren Woodward</u></p>

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		<p>Is there a geographical issue as to where closures have been and where the biggest pressures are now? <i>CL: There is a geographical issue and we have just refreshed out childcare sufficiency assessment which is showing the latest data we have but it changes all the time, which is published on an annual basis, its currently going through approval process and then it will be published on website. We are seeing some pockets of acute need and those tend to be Forest Heath, Bury St Edmunds and Lowestoft areas, those are the three particular hotspots at the moment but assume that will migrate out to other areas.</i></p> <p>Mike Quinton commented there has been no further news on funding increases, it was more about the census.</p> <p>There will be support from Sonya Harban and the finance team about further finance information being shared as soon as its available.</p> <p>Chair commented that the early years sector is vital as a starting point for all children before they move on in their education journey. We are all appreciative of the hard work that early years providers are doing at this difficult time, and thanks to Christina and your team for all the support you are trying to give them.</p> <p>Cllr Mary Evans is happy to lobby on behalf of Forum over Early Years recognising the importance of it and the huge efforts by our providers, it's a fragile sector at the moment and we must do everything we can to keep it in place and not see providers in such struggling circumstances.</p> <p>Chair thanked Forum members for their comments / questions which has made this a really useful discussion.</p> <p>Action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AC, AO, CL to speak outside the meeting to see if a working group would be helpful.
7.	Budget Challenges for Schools as a result of Covid-	<p>Chair asked Forum members to share concerns/responses that schools have faced since the pandemic. This information will support the lobbying work being undertaken with local MPs and</p>

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	19	<p>direct with the Department for Education.</p> <p>Several questions and comments were raised by Forum members.</p> <p><u>Daniel Jones</u> What does it mean for schools funding in the future?</p> <p><u>Sharon Waldron</u> Covid costs, as a small primary, we have already spent £10,000 up to October for example on cleaning, PPE, supply staff, hand sanitizer stations, buying devices for pupils for home learning. Our wrap around care is struggling to be viable too.</p> <p><u>Julia Upton</u> We are suffering loss of income through loss of lettings. This income supported the development and maintenance in the school that won't happen as a result. This will store up more costs for buildings and infrastructure at a later date.</p> <p><u>Alison Bowman</u> Lobbying – wrote to Dan Poulter MP, regarding High Needs Group funding, reply received but did not address the Suffolk issue.</p> <p>Following the last meeting in November, Cllr Mary Evans wrote to MPs about High Needs Block and SEND funding which spelt out the situation in Suffolk where all schools are having to fund that deficit. Good response received from the MPs. Two SCC Cabinet Members have taken this up directly too. Therese Coffey MP has spoken with Gavin Williamson MP, Matt Hancock MP has written in response to Cllr Evans' email. Tom Hunt MP, as a member of the Education Select Committee, has taken it up and he has written to Gavin Williamson MP. Jo Churchill MP has arranged a meeting with Cllr Mary Evans, Allan Cadzow and Adrian Orr with Schools Minister Nick Gibb MP.</p> <p><u>Karen Mills</u> How do you keep up with the increasing need with a reduced budget?</p> <p><u>Maria Kemble</u> Staffing is 85% of our school budget and over 5</p>

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		<p>years have not replaced support staff. Have had to cut back on staff professional development, CPD for staff is the first thing that goes, staff go on CPD if free and if its inside the school day as otherwise unable to support as there is no cover available.</p> <p><u>Andrew Berry</u> Has anyone been able to access any additional funding so far? <i>(Some responses follow below)</i></p> <p><u>Darren Woodward</u> 1.3 million devices are distributed but it simply isn't enough. Be wary that the laptops from the DfE are relatively under powered and won't very easily go on to school networks when they return.</p> <p><u>Julia Upton</u> Managing year groups in bubbles, technology facilities in more places in the schools, devices have gone home for use, important spend at this time. Covid catch up fund has been promoted, however, the previous literacy/numeracy funding is subsumed into that catch up funding.</p> <p>Agreement that DfE laptops have been very basic.</p> <p><u>Angela Berry</u> New tasks and activities such as Lateral Flow Testing have added pressure and stress on staff. This is a further impact on the health and wellbeing of our teams. This will have a longer term impact on staff retention etc.</p> <p><u>Gill Mitchell</u> Our school received £700 towards Covid expenses but found it hard to meet criteria to claim. We got 6 laptops, all out and being used by disadvantaged home learners, once they are back in school we will use them as 1-1 devices for SEND intervention programmes.</p> <p><u>Mike Quinton</u> 66 schools approx. £250k on the Covid exceptional costs, but not much for Suffolk.</p> <p><u>Sharon Waldron</u> We got our devices but no licenses yet so still no use, we only got 3 devices and purchased a further 15</p>

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		<p>ourselves.</p> <p>Adrian Orr will collate questions and comments raised by Forum members as evidence of need to use in lobbying when highlighting the additional need in Suffolk created by relative underfunding.</p> <p>Action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO to compile questions and comments raised by Forum members. ALL to submit any further evidence to AO by email after the meeting.
8.	DSG Recovery Plan for Suffolk	<p>What is the Forum being asked to decide? To consider the attached draft DSG Deficit Recovery Plan, noting that it is still in the process of completion.</p> <p>Reason for recommendation Following the decision taken at the last Schools Forum for 0.5% of the School's Block to contribute to the High Needs deficit recovery, the work has begun to prepare the DSG Recovery Plan required by DfE.</p> <p>Gemma Morgan gave a short presentation to explain what each tab represents within the DSG template. This is a working document Gemma Morgan and Michael Quinton are currently working on this before submission to the DfE.</p> <p>No questions were raised by Forum members.</p> <p>Chair thanked Gemma for the clear presentation around this information.</p> <p>Action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To report back to Forum with a Termly Update
9.	Forward Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSSB – April or more likely June item. Sonya Harban to contact working group and work through saving suggestions for 2022-23. • Update on any outcomes from lobbying activity. • DSG Recovery Plan - Termly Update (Gemma Morgan) <p>Please email Adrian, Allison, Teresa or Sonya if you</p>

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		have any further items to add to the forward plan.
10.	AOB	None
11.	Date of the next meeting	The next meeting is confirmed as Thursday 15 April 2021, 9.30am Microsoft Teams (and live streamed through YouTube).
		Meeting closed at 11am.