

**Minutes of the Suffolk Schools' Forum held at 9.30am on Thursday 7 October 2021 via Microsoft Teams (and live streamed through YouTube)**

**Present:**

<b>Non-School Members</b>	Colin Shaw, 16-19 Provider Amanda Havers, PVI Sharon Waldron, Diocesan Maria Kemble, Diocesan Pat Chapman, PVI
<b>Academy Members</b>	Lisa Jones, Mainstream (on behalf of Dawn Carman-Jones) Julia Upton, Mainstream Steve Lovett, Mainstream Darren Woodward, Mainstream Angela Ransby, AP Provision
<b>Maintained School Members</b>	Allison Coleman, Primary (Chair) Rowena Mackie, Secondary Ruth Coleman, Nursery

**Observers and Local Authority**

<b>Observers</b>	There were observers present at the meeting
<b>Local Authority</b>	Rachel Hood Allan Cadzow Adrian Orr Julia Grainger Christina Lewis Ros Somerville Gemma Morgan Sonya Harban Michael Quinton Pete Mumford Teresa Spilling Barbara Barraclough

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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 via YouTube.</p>
2.	Apologies for absence	<p>Apologies for absence were received from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alison Bowman, Gill Mitchell, Darron Jackson, Daniel Jones, Andrew Berry, Sue Prickett and Dawn Carman-Jones.</li> </ul> <p><u>Substitute:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lisa Jones attending on behalf of Dawn Carman Jones</li> </ul> <p>If members are unable to attend, a substitute from your school/education setting can attend on your behalf.</p>
3.	Minutes of the previous meeting & issues arising	<p>The minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 June 2021 were agreed and signed off by the Chair.</p> <p><u>Page 5 - Acting as a mentor for new Forum members</u> Adrian Orr has received 1 volunteer so far. If other members are interested in mentoring new Forum members, please email Adrian.</p> <p><u>Page 9 - CSSB Paper (Nov 2020) &amp; Suffolk Learning Action completed.</u> Information was sent to Peter Collins.</p> <p><u>Page 13 - Additional information on SEN infographic</u> Gemma has received suggestions from members.</p>
4.	DSG Spend 2020-21 and 2021-22 Forecast	<p>Schools Forum are asked to note the DSG outturn for 2020-21, the forecast outturn for 2021-22 and the impact this will have on the DSG reserve position if both DSG funding and spending remain unchanged this financial year.</p> <p>Sonya Harban, CYP Strategic Finance Lead introduced this item. Firstly, apologies as the timing did not fit for the June Forum so this has been brought to you quite late, so for next year we will prioritise getting the outturn information to the June Forum meeting.</p> <p>We are hoping to share a paper at the November forum to discuss a potential redistribution of some of the remaining Early Years Block surplus, if information is received from the DfE in time.</p> <p>High Needs Block (HNB) overspend was ½ million more</p>

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		<p>than anticipated at quarter 3 due to a much higher increase in top ups over the last term than had been forecast. 3.3m increase in top-ups over the previous year. As you are aware Suffolk is underfunded, so the level of demand was not matched by the funding received in 2020-21. The outturn position means there is a slight improvement on the overall DSG reserve at the end of the financial year, but this is an artificial position until we get clarity on the Early Years recoupment from the DfE. We would move our surplus into our DSG reserve but we are aware that we will have to return some of the recoupment (estimated about 0.5m). HNB deficit increased from 10.3m to 14.9m. This is clearly a significant increase, but as a regional comparison it is worth noting the position for Norfolk County Council, we have a HNB deficit of 14.9m, Norfolk is 32m and they are significantly better funded than us and have been for the last few years.</p> <p>In 2021-22 we reported a position at quarter 1 to Cabinet of an overspend of 2.4m of which 2.9m was an overspend against DSG against SEND and there was 0.5m on CSSB which we are going to hold for the loss of CSSB next year and part of the Growth budget. Currently working on quarter 2 and we know that the SEND forecast has increased by a further 1.4m. Over the summer period this year 2021 there were 400 requests for HNF compared with 100 in the same period last year. In the Summer term there were 58 requests for HNF band changes of which 36 were the highest level of funded support and we had no such requests in the spring term.</p> <p>The predicted position at the end of the financial year is the DSG HNB deficit will be 16.9m which takes into account our projected overspend plus the 2.3m transfer from the schools block that Forum have agreed. Members who were on Schools Forum this time last year will recall that Schools Forum agreed to a 0.5% transfer from the schools block to offset the high needs block deficit every year for 5 years as this is the only sustainable way of managing the deficit without us getting a significant amount in funding that matches demand. This vote will take place next month as part of the budget settings paper.</p> <p>Amanda Havers commented from an early years perspective, who understands the use of surplus and underspend, but at a provider level there is not a surplus or underspend as its money that we have not as yet had distributed to us. Early Years providers have still incurred the costs whether the children have attended or not. This issue will be discussed at the EY Consultative Forum meeting at the beginning of November.</p>

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		<p>Darren Woodward - What financial forecast has been put into the provision of transport to attend the new provision schools those with SEND/mainstream into the new special provisions?  <i>SH: This comes from core funding and not DSG.</i></p> <p>Presuming the SEND central services from the LA goes would that get paid from the high needs block, do we know what percentage we take to cover that and how that compares with other LAs?  <i>SH: The HNB there's really specific guidance on what you can spend out of the DSG HNB element and what has to be paid from core funding. HNB DSG funds the places and some of the support in those places but the actual EHCPs and assessment comes from core funding so that is outside of this.</i></p>
5.	Approval of CSSB Savings and Budget 2022-2023	<p>Sonya Harban (SH) introduced this item.</p> <p>Schools Forum are required to formally vote annually to agree the continuation of funding for each service from the historical commitments element of the CSSB. On the assumption that paragraph 1 recommendation is agreed, the following recommendations are made (please note that descriptors of services are shown at Annex A).</p> <p>This is the third year of the 20% reduction of the CSSB historical elements of this part of the block which is applied by the DfE. At Forum in June, Schools Forum members agreed to the proposed initial savings at the meeting. This was just over 0.5m of what we needed to save as we need to find in total £847,000. This paper details how officers are suggesting we make the remainder of those savings. The proposed savings won't make an impact on the services currently provided through this funding stream to schools other than there is an increase of £90,000 of HNB commitments as these costs can legitimately be funded in that way.</p> <p>The savings that we are proposing put the risk of not meeting those on core SCC funding rather than the DSG. As part of the process of identifying these savings it is clear that any further savings would impact on the capacity of Education, Skills &amp; Learning (E,S&amp;L) particularly to undertake its statutory duties and it would also significantly change the early help offer provided those children and families in need. As part of that work we looked at the future savings of the CSSB and have</p>

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		<p>now put the whole of that as a cost pressure to core funding on the council's medium term financial plan. We are working with our cabinet members to see how we can make sure that they are covered corporately, because the impact it would have on the directorate as well as schools would not be sustainable. As with the poor SEND funding we are lobbying to increase funding to cover these costs as unfortunately the DfE's assumption is that the historical commitments will reduce over time and that's not the case for services that Schools Forum have agreed because these are about staffing and actually those costs go up because of inflation.</p> <p>The DfE guidance means that even if the savings are agreed we still have to vote line by line and we do have representation from the services here if there are any questions.</p> <p>Question raised by forum member:</p> <p>Darren Woodward – Is the core SEND Funding the same as previously referenced core funding?  <i>SH: Core budget is base budget within the local authority and not DSG.</i></p> <p>Adrian Orr commented that the CSSB element of the DSG is what replaced the Education Support Grant which came directly to LA to fund central services and statutory duties. This funding is put into the DSG to allow the LA to fulfil its statutory functions, but we are faced with these particular challenges as Sonya has shared that the historic funding element is being reduced by the DfE. And part of the underfunding in SEND is that historic elements are still locked into that element of the budget.</p> <p>Vote took place by all Forum Members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. to agree the described savings proposals of £0.313m?</li> </ol> <p>After voting <b>12 forum members in favour, 0 members against and 0 abstained.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. to agree the funding for the services described in Annex A delivered by the Education and Learning team of £0.872m</li> </ol> <p>After voting <b>11 forum members in favour, 0</b></p>

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		<p><b>members against and 1 abstained.</b></p> <p>3. to agree the funding for the services described in Annex A delivered by the Early Help team of £2.148m</p> <p>After voting <b>12 forum members in favour, 0 members against and 0 abstained.</b></p> <p>4. to agree the funding for the services described in Annex A delivered by the Virtual School for Looked After Children of £0.345m</p> <p>After voting <b>12 forum members in favour, 0 members against and 0 abstained.</b></p> <p>5. To agree the funding of any residual long-term redundancy costs of £0.023m.</p> <p>After voting <b>12 forum members in favour, 0 members against and 0 abstained.</b></p> <p>Thank you for voting on this paper this now concludes the voting.</p>
6.	Growth Policy and Funding Update	<p>Michael Quinton, Senior Accountant and Pete Mumford, Schools Planning Manager in Education, Skills and Learning team were in attendance for this item.</p> <p>This paper provides a brief update on school pupil growth in Suffolk and notes the future pressures of pupil growth with the new schools in the pipeline and expected increased expenditure in setting up these new schools.</p> <p>On pages 5 and 6 Pete Mumford and Joy Stodart have provided a pipeline of schools that will be experiencing growth and some of the new schools in the planning stage as well.</p> <p>Forum are being asked if it is appropriate to amend Suffolk's growth policy to include a falling rolls fund from 2022-23.</p> <p>The recommendation is being made due to a number of schools now facing falling rolls. This can lead to staff redundancies, larger class sizes, reduced funding to spend on resources and facilities and even school closures. We have had 3 school closures over the last 10 years where the class sizes had fallen to such an</p>

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		<p>extent that the schools were no longer viable. Financial support would be required to assist schools in any reorganisation and planning.</p> <p>Schools Forum also need to acknowledge the financial pressures facing Suffolk with regard to new schools, where the basic need cannot be met by the existing school infrastructure.</p> <p>The growth funding is resourced from the schools block which can be used for growth in pupil numbers, support additional classes and costs for new and expanded schools.</p> <p>To note that any growth funding for any specialist provision or early years providers needs to be funded by the respective blocks.</p> <p>Annex A in the paper sets out some exemplar LA policies that we will look at and see what fits best for Suffolk and what is affordable.</p> <p>Pete Mumford commented on the background of falling rolls, from around 2012 we saw an increase in the primary age population, a number of our schools being expanded or take additional pupils to meet that demand. From 2018-19 onwards we have seen a reduction back to the levels we saw pre-2012. What this has meant is a that a number of schools are now carrying surplus places within their role and 60% of schools are expecting to see a fall in roll between now and 2025. This can range from 1 pupil through to over 100. It might start to recover, but we are not sure of the impact of Covid-19 as yet on birth rates and that is something we will monitor over the next couple of years.</p> <p>With regard to growth, having seen a pause in housing development over the last 18 months for various reasons, we are now starting to see housing come through again and the number of housing applications coming through for approval which means our strategy in and around the county to migrate demand of pupils coming from those housing developments is now starting to impact on a number of schools. From page 5 of the report, you can see where our pipeline of growth is going to be in terms of new schools and expanding schools. This is mainly due to housing development; the demographic growth.</p> <p>Questions raised by Forum members:</p>

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		<p>Julia Upton: Is there consideration for new special school provision growth in the other pots?  <i>MQ: Specialist provision does need to be funded from the HNB; this growth pot is from the Schools Block. PM: We have been working with our planning colleagues so when we seek contributions from housing developments special education is part of our asks.</i></p> <p>Rowena Mackie: What type of school are self-identifying as being impacted upon by falling rolls?  <i>MQ: We have had a few schools (smaller and rural schools) who are facing more difficulty, funding isn't so good, smaller teaching/support staff resources. A number of schools requesting to reduce their PANs so they can manage more operationally in terms of organising classes.</i></p> <p><i>Darren Woodward:</i> Although there probably aren't many Requires Improvement schools in Suffolk, wouldn't precluding them if they have a falling roll make it harder for them to move back to Good? Paper D says they that the criteria would generally contain some of the below which isn't overly directive  <i>MQ: Joy, Pete and Mike have discussed this and will go away and look at it in further detail to see what discretion LA have.</i></p> <p>Steve Lovett: There is often a lag in funding i.e., the time it takes for increased income after numbers increase and feel that this lag provides sufficient time for schools to manage the reduced budgets as numbers fall.  <i>MQ: it is difficult for schools to plan, there is a lag in funding.</i></p> <p>Rowena Mackie: My question is not quite understanding why there is 12 new schools being developed regarding increase numbers but we are concerned about falling rolls in other centres, is this very much around a demography of where people are choosing to live so smaller village schools are struggling more, it seems like there is a double commitment to open a new school but keep a school open as well, so I am wondering about the social impact around some of those decisions that might need to be taken?  <i>PM: Yes, it is where the new housing is going and its going in the more built-up areas and the rural schools not seeing much housing coming through and because of that they are suffering more with the falling rolls as a</i></p>

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		<p><i>percentage of their roll rather than a number of other schools in those built-up areas. For us when we are talking about new schools, mentioned from page 5 onwards, they are significant developments, so a development of over 600 homes would likely require a new school because it's a community school and it's there to serve the community. We have had conversations with our Regional Schools Commissioner around the play off between that, in terms of building the new school, but what do we do if the periphery of the development have got surplus places and how do we manage that as we are conscious that what we don't want to do is make that school sustainability issues greater by building a new school on the development which might then become a more attractive option for parents and carers and further conversations are taking place.</i></p> <p>Sharon Waldron: Primary Schools don't receive information about confirmed numbers for their new Reception classes until May so very hard to budget for the impact of this in this time scale.</p> <p>Chair commented this is a good point and can understand how this has a big impact.</p> <p>Vote took place by all Forum Members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. to decide if it would be appropriate to amend Suffolk's growth policy to include a falling rolls fund from 2022-23.</li> </ol> <p>To confirm this is for Mike to go away and work up a proposal to come back to Forum.</p> <p><b>After voting 11 forum members in favour, 1 member against and 0 abstained.</b></p> <p>Following this vote it has been agreed to amend Suffolk's Growth Policy to include a falling rolls fund from 2022-23.</p> <p><b><u>ACTION:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposal to come back to Forum in January.</li> </ul>
7.	Forward Agenda	<p><u>November</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• De-delegation (voting for LA maintained schools)</li> <li>• Early Years Recoupment or proposals for delegating any surplus</li> <li>• School Budget Setting</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update on HNB Deficit and template (GM) (including the vote for a 0.5% from the schools block as agreed last year)</li> <li>• Revised induction Programme</li> <li>• Vacancies on Forum (Election)</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Re-election process for longstanding members (a small task and finish group took place for long standing members). There will be a re-election for the 6 longstanding members and this will take place after half term.</li> </ul> <p><u>January</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth paper (as modelling needs to be based on the October 2021 census information)</li> </ul>
8.	AOB	None.
9.	Date of the next meeting	<p>The next meeting is confirmed as <b>Tuesday 30 November 2021, 9.30am Microsoft Teams (and live streamed through YouTube)</b>.</p> <p>If members are unable to attend these meetings, there is provision in the terms of reference for you to send a substitute from your school/education setting to attend on your behalf, as it is important that there is a range of voices round the table whilst we make these important decisions for all schools and education settings in Suffolk.</p>
		Meeting closed at 10.20am.