

Minutes of the Suffolk Schools' Forum held at 9.30am on Thursday 9 May 2024 via Microsoft Teams (and live streamed through YouTube)

Present:

Non-School Members	Colin Shaw, 16-19 Provider Amanda Havers, PVI (Sub: Sophie Conway) Anne-Marie Price, RC Diocese (<i>on behalf of Maria Kemble</i>)
Academy Members	Andrew Berry, Mainstream Daniel Jones, Mainstream Gordon Jones, Mainstream Angelo Goduti, Mainstream Paul Fykin, Mainstream Matthew Ferrier, Mainstream (<i>on behalf of Wendy James</i>) Steven Dewing, Mainstream Sue Prickett, Special Angela Ransby, AP Provision (<i>Sub: Ashlee Jacobs</i>)
Maintained School Members	Allison Coleman, Primary (Chair) Susan Shields, Secondary (<i>on behalf of Robert Lenko</i>) John Tunaley, Secondary (<i>on behalf of Rowena Mackie</i>) Ruth Coleman, Nursery (<i>Sub: Karen Pringle</i>) Shelley Jackson, Special (<i>on behalf of Lizzi Murphy</i>)

Observers and Local Authority

Observers	There were observers present at the meeting
Local Authority	Cllr Andrew Reid Debbie Richards El Mayhew Adrian Orr Sonya Harban Mike Quinton Ros Somerville Gemma Morgan Christina Lewis Teresa Spilling Jacqueline Dyer

Item No.	Item Description	
1.	Welcome – Virtual Meeting Etiquette	<p>The Chair welcomed members to this meeting.</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"> • Robert Lenko (<i>substitute Susan Shield in attendance</i>), Maria Kemble, Wendy James, Darren Woodward, Emma White.
3.	Declaration of Interest	<p>Gordon Jones declared an interest on Paper C as the Trustee Director of Unity Schools Partnership with special responsibility for SEND.</p>
4.	Minutes of the previous meeting & issues arising	<p>The minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 January 2024 were agreed as an accurate reflection of the meeting and signed off by the Chair.</p> <p>Page 6: Pupil numbers re: forecasts for primary schools in 2024-25 and 2025-26.</p> <p>MQ reported that he had followed his action up with the infrastructure team, who are working on the data. MQ has asked for pupil projections and also graphical representation. MQ will share with Forum as soon as this has been received.</p>
5.	DSG Outturn	<p>Sonya Harban Strategic CYP Finance Lead updated members on the DSG Outturn which finished on 31 March.</p> <p>Overall, there was an overspend of £26.5m on the DSG in 2023-24, of which £27.7m was against the high needs block.</p> <p>The DSG reserve is now in a deficit position of £54.1m. There is still a statutory override in place that the LA does not have to account for that deficit in its main accounts as it holds them separately, however, it does impact on the cash flow of the LA and means Suffolk have to borrow more money. It does come at a cost to the Council, which is a concern and so we are working through ways of how to support that deficit.</p> <p>A full report will come to Forum in July which will be presented by Mike Quinton.</p>

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		<p>Questions raised by Forum members: Cllr Andrew Reid, SCC Cabinet Member for Education and SEND asked about a graph with predicted rise in the deficit <i>SH: It's not that our SEND service is massively overspent compared to our other statistical neighbours, or regional neighbours, it's our funding which is low in comparison. The HNB funding formula includes an historical element, which used to be about 32.5% of the HNB budget based on 2017-18, that percentage is reducing, but is taking a very long time to be removed from the funding formula. Suffolk tried to compress our spending to remain within budget in 2017-18, which other authorities did not do and we are still feeling the impact. We are providing the services that our children need, which comes at an additional cost, and funding is not keeping pace with that. In this financial year our additional income for 2024-25 is about £7m but as we have overspent by £27m those costs are not going down.</i></p> <p>Gordon Jones, Trustee Unity Partnership commented: There hasn't been enough money in high needs system since the Act, 10 years ago and without additional money this will not be resolved. Funding shouldn't be based on historical funding it should be based on current demand.</p>
6.	High Needs Funding	<p>This paper was introduced by Gemma Morgan, Head of SEND Funding and Provider Services.</p> <p>The first section talks about the end of year position for 2023-24 and an additional spend of £27m on top of last year, which was on independent, bespoke settings and top-up funding for newly created places as well as additional requests for funding. Independent placements are being used more due to increase in demand. Suffolk are looking at a 23% rise in demand in SEND over the next 3-5 years. This is working on predictions for 2024-25 for children who are already in the system, those who expect to come through the system and working on the percentage trajectories. Last year SEND was approximately £120m and this year predict £148m with a £48.5m overspend at the end of the current financial year.</p>

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		<p>In the paper you will see the number of children supported and the increase year on year. 741 new places have been created in the last 3 years, most of which has been due to the SEND capital programme. Over the last 4 years the number of children receiving high needs funding has increased by 56% and funding increased by approximately 11%. The increase in independent and bespoke provision has also been included.</p> <p>At the last meeting GM promised an analysis of autumn term high needs top up funding, including a moderation process. GM compared the autumn term from the previous year to see the increase (please refer to paragraph 27 on page 6). There was an increase of 25% from autumn 2022-23.</p> <p>Paragraph 28 shows the last 4 years as to whether there have been more requests for higher bands, which there has not been.</p> <p>Deficit Recovery Plan (Appendix) this has not been updated prior to this meeting, as awaiting the decision of Forum today. This is an ongoing document which we continue to update working closely with Sonya Harban and Mike Quinton to make sure this is accurate.</p> <p>Mitigation, this was raised at a previous meeting to see what we are doing to mitigate the overspend. GM met with the High Needs Working Group, a sub-group of Schools' Forum to seek views on what could make a difference. GM referred to the topics discussed with that group and the actions taken so far, as set out in the paper.</p> <p>Gordon Jones, Trustee Unity Partnership commented about the special needs units in mainstream schools and how successful they are in providing the right provision for pupils and also for schools.</p> <p>Sue Prickett, Chief Finance and Operations Officer at SENDAT asked if Confederation of Schools Trust (CST) implied that high needs funding was increased by 4.3% overall by central government and the LA would receive a minimum of 3% per head (aged 2 to 18)?</p>

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		<p>MQ: the whole quantum of funding for Suffolk includes all of the funding that goes direct to academies. Suffolk had £107m in 2023-24 and went up to £114m in 2024-25 which is a 6.3% increase.</p> <p>GM will include both sets of figures in the next paper.</p> <p>Steven Dewing, Chief Financial Officer, Sapientia Education Trust and Seckford Education Trust: SRB units have been beneficial and operate about 5 of them but have concerns over their sustainability and this needs looking at for the Trust providing because we need to keep it running.</p> <p><i>GM: We are already having conversations with these trusts regarding those units. Ros Somerville and Gemma are meeting with Steven and the CEO to discuss their concerns.</i></p> <p>Ros Somerville, Assistant Director Inclusion: We do lobby as a local authority. Councillors have done historically and continue to do so. We are part of the F40 group of local authorities who are the lowest funded across the country, as well as the lobbying undertaken by Suffolk Councillors and MPs. We are also part of the Delivering Better Value programme.</p> <p>Adrian Orr, Assistant Director Education, Skills and Learning: We are relentless around lobbying. The key issue as described by Gemma is the historic factor. We have been challenging the DfE very specifically around that formula element being changed rather than just saying there isn't enough money, giving them the rationale.</p> <p>Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Education and SEND: We have recently written to all Suffolk MPs encouraging them to engage in the F40 activity in Westminster. Briefing meeting with Chair of F40 and Head of Administration on Monday.</p> <p>Susan Shields, attending on behalf of Robert Lenko, Thurston Community College: 2023-24 budget of £89m forecasts for £120m, but then the budget for 2024-25 is over 100, only 100 million and forecasts already £148m. Why are the</p>

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		<p>budgets set so low? <i>GM: The budgets are not set at that amount. We have core budget and the high needs budget. This is the difference between the budget we have been allocated and known costs.</i></p>
7.	Increase in High Needs Bands and SEMH School Funding	<p>This paper was introduced by Gemma Morgan, Head of SEND Funding and Provider Services.</p> <p>This paper is a voting paper with two asks to Forum. The proposal is to increase the top up bands across the board by 3%. This would include Early Years, FE and also include AP funding. Along with this, do Forum agree to this increase in funding for SEMH schools.</p> <p>Questions raised by Forum members.</p> <p>Steven Dewing: Are we allowed to do this? Where does the money come from? <i>GM: The money is added to our overspend.</i> <i>Ros Somerville: Challenging situation, there is a recognition that our banding amounts haven't gone up since they were set. There is a statutory duty on the local authority to secure the provision that is set out in education, health and care plans. The bands are needs led and that band should indicate how much TA support is needed to deliver the provision set out in the plan.</i></p> <p>MQ: The DfE are looking at place funding, which hasn't been changed since 2013, which would then possibly mitigate these types of asks that LAs are asking forums to do.</p> <p>Chair commented that Forum have had many conversations at this group over the last 2-3 years that the amount per band hasn't changed for such a long time.</p> <p>Gordon Jones Why is the review date in 3 years' time? <i>GM: It was ensuring we didn't make a promise, to review year on year when we are unsure what our financial position will be, however, we can bring that forward if that's what Forum would like us to do.</i></p> <p>Sue Prickett:</p>

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		<p>Feels there should be evidence review annually and also concern regarding Mike's DfE place funding, need to be aware that by increasing the place funding the government are not abdicating responsibility for increasing high needs in order to mitigate what we are getting place funding wise.</p> <p>Andrew Berry, CEO, Titian: Did we get an answer to Steven's question about why 3% was chosen? How does that compare with other local authorities and what they're doing? what's the impact on schools of doing this or what's the impact on the local authority of doing this? <i>GM: Other LAs have different banding systems, so difficult to compare like for like. We have spoken with our statistical neighbours and there are different arrangements in each LA depending on their deficit position.</i> <i>SH: As the deficit increases it does put an increasing pressure on our revenue budget to fund more for our capital schemes which have been agreed. This has been discussed with our Section 151 Officer because that's where the impact is.</i></p> <p>Councillor Andrew Reid: This is a structural issue in terms of our financial position and it does impact the entire LA but is a systemic issue and a problem that every LA with responsibilities for this work faces.</p> <p>Susan Shields: As part of the lobbying effort, do you articulate the cost of capital to fund the deficit across the authorities i.e. how this is pushing authorities into further cost challenges? Perhaps the collective cost of capital across the group of authorities you work with from the deficits would show how counterproductive the lack of funding is. <i>SH: Will take Susan's point back and raise it with Louise Ainsley and maybe suggest as part of her role working with her fellow Section 151 officers.</i></p> <p>Ros Somerville reiterated that whilst it is a very concerning position, not agreeing this across the board equitably for all, won't prevent those individual conversations/situations that arise where there will need to be increase in funding and we won't then have the standard approach to that in the way that we do now, not agreeing won't necessarily save the</p>

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		<p>money.</p> <p>Christina Lewis, Head of Early Years and Childcare commented that it not just about schools, this is across all education settings and will also impact on early years providers. This money will also impact on those children who are being prepared to come into school.</p> <p>Allison Coleman as Chair of an infant school for nearly 25 years commented how many more children are coming into reception class with additional needs and has grown over that time.</p> <p>A vote took place by Forum Members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you agree an increase in the High Needs Top-Up Bands at a rate of 3% with a review date in three years ahead of academic year 2027/28? <p>After voting 17 forum members in favour, 0 members against.</p> <p>Chair acknowledged the points people have made about the fact that if there is an opportunity to do so, we will review it in a shorter time frame than that.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Do you agree to this increase in funding for SEMH schools? <p>After voting 15 forum members in favour, 0 members against.</p> <p>Due to a technical error, not all members could see the vote, therefore their votes were included from the meeting chat.</p> <p>Chair thanked everyone for their contributions around this difficult area. Teams are doing all they can along with lobbying. Suffolk are in this difficult position of funding and until its reviewed we will continue to have these conversations and do our best to manage the situation to meet the needs of the children in Suffolk.</p>
8.	AOB	None.

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9.	Forward Agenda	<u>4 July</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSG Outturn • SEND Provision Update • Early Years funded entitlements, hourly rates changes
10.	Date of the next meeting	The next meeting is confirmed as Thursday 4 July 2024, 9.30am Microsoft Teams (and live streamed through YouTube).
		Meeting closed at 10.30am.