

Agenda Item 2

Notes of the Schools Forum meeting 22 May 2019

Attendees

Members	Observers (representation)/Others
<p>Secondary headteachers: James Lamb Matthew Gardner</p> <p>Primary headteachers & Governors: Sue Brewer – vice chair Morwenna Dunstan Chris Axten-Higgs</p> <p>Special School headteachers & Governors: Richard Berry</p> <p>PRUs: Jo Simons</p> <p>Academies: Peter Elliott - chair Helen Rogerson Amanda Eastwood Jen Veal</p> <p>Special Academies: Mark Ruffett</p> <p>Non-school members: Mark Keating Louise Rowley Rachel Parish Helen Hazell</p> <p>16 voting members in attendance.</p>	<p>Observers: Phil Burner - SAPHTO Rob Benzie – SASH Ian Rowswell - SSE</p> <p>Officers: Julian Wooster - DCS Frances Nicholson – Lead Member for Children’s Services Faye Purbrick - Cabinet Member for Education & Council Transformation Annette Perrington Claire Merchant-Jones Dave Farrow Lizzie Watkin Alison Jeffery Jackie Cottey Michael Bryant Jamie Jackson, Democratic Services Sue Ford (notes)</p>

1. Apologies from members and observers

- **Members:** Paul Reddick, Claire Nurse, Alison Crudginton, Richard Culham, Naomi Philp and Barbara O’Keefe.
- **Observers/officers:** Robin Head – NEU.

The Chair welcomed the following new members/attendees:

Claire Merchant Jones, Strategic Manager – SEND

Mike Bryant from Democratic Services, who along with Jamie Jackson is taking on the Schools Forum administrative responsibilities, effective from the next meeting on 10 July 2019.

2. Notes of the last meeting

2a: 6 March 2019

Accuracy:

The notes reflect a true and accurate record of the meeting.

2b: Matters arising:

Item 3.2, SSE Update: The Forum requested a breakdown of budget/funding source and cost by service line for reporting requirements – to be covered under agenda item 3.

The Chair requested a structure chart of Children's Services following the integration of SSE.

Item 5, Final Individual School Budgets for 2019/20 – Somerset's ranking in respect of per pupil values can be established now that LAs have published final figures. The Forum requested that this information is provided at a future meeting.

Item 6: Growth Funding - A decision on the proposed changes to the growth funding criteria was deferred until the 22 May meeting, to allow for the inclusion of the additional amendment as described in the paper – to be covered under agenda item 6.

Item 9: Central Schools Services Budget - A decision was deferred on the Combined Budgets commitments for Head teacher/School Support (£129,500).

3. 2019/20 Budget and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit recovery plan process

Julian Wooster presented a paper which set out the proposed plan in respect of the LA's overall DSG deficit and DfE reporting requirements.

From 2018 to 2019, all local authorities with a cumulative DSG deficit of 1% or more at the end of the financial year must submit a recovery plan to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), showing how they will bring the deficit into balance in a three-year time frame.

In previous years the threshold was set at 2% or more; however, the decision to move the threshold to 1% is in recognition of the increase in local authorities recording a DSG deficit over the last two years.

Local authorities are required to discuss with their Schools Forum the detail of the plan, which will require Chief Finance Officer sign off before the plan is sent by 30th June 2019. The DfE has provided a recovery plan template to be completed which they will review by September 2019.

The proposal is to set up a working group, to include Schools Forum members in order to establish a plan which will meet DfE approval. An extraordinary meeting will need to take place before 30 June 2019 to sign off the plan.

The following points were noted:

- Some members did not feel comfortable that only a small number of Forum members are included in a working party; the view was that all members should be involved. It was agreed that a task group is established, and all discussions and recommendations are reported back to the extraordinary meeting, for all members to attend.
- It was proposed that the extraordinary meeting takes place during the week commencing 24 June 2019. The formal sign off must be completed by the Chief Finance Officer and she should therefore be involved in the process.
- It is the LA's responsibility to compile the recovery plan, in consultation with the Schools Forum, but there will be impacts for schools across all of the funding blocks (Schools, High Needs, Early Years and Central Schools Services).
- The LA needs to understand the Forum's appetite to reduce the deficit, given the issues around required savings within the Central Schools Services Block, as reported at the Forum meeting on 6 March 2019.

Summary/outcome:

The Forum noted the proposed plan in respect of the LA's overall DSG deficit for 2018/19 and DfE reporting requirements.

4. Arrangements for children and young people with Special Educational Needs

Annette Perrington presented a paper which provided an update on the outturn position of the High Needs budget following month 12 financial report, progress against the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) recovery action plan in relation to High needs and an updated position on the pressures within the system with related impact.

Annette apologised to the Forum for the late submission of papers.

The Forum was asked to note the outturn position forecast from the month 12 financial report and the proposals of activities against the High needs budget in support of the DSG recovery plan.

Section 1 of the paper provided details of High Needs demand pressures and the LA's strategic approach. The following points were noted:

- The introduction of Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) to replace Statements of SEN has resulted in a significant increase in assessment requests. The transition process has also identified a number of children in receipt of HN funding without a Statement of SEN. Some of this is linked to the previous Schools Action Plus funding process but not entirely.
- The number of permanent exclusions has increased in recent years, although they are in line with the national average. Obtaining numbers does not seem to be an easy process.
- The DfE's extension to the age range in terms of the LA's statutory duty to support SEND, along with increased participation has resulted in significant financial pressures, but the budget has not increased in line with this.
- The LA must address need and not demand; it should be able to defend tribunals with a good credible LA alternative.
- The most effective and best way to support SEN children is in mainstream provision, with the right level of support.
- There is currently more demand than LA capacity; the intention is to increase LA provision and reduce reliance on the independent/non maintained sector.
- Sky College is the only LA maintained provision in Somerset that supports Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) issues.
- The LA needs to be more flexible and take more opportunities to utilise alternative local provision at school transition levels and not solely when an EHCP is applied or at reception level.
- £4m is available for preventative measures. A significant amount of preventative funding is not accessible for early intervention as only 10% is available for primary, due to the demand in high year groups.
- Therapeutic support should be available locally without the need to place children in independent provision. Maintained special school places should be used effectively for higher band pupils and lower band children should be placed in mainstream provision.
- Mainstream schools need to be encouraged to be more inclusive, but they are also aware of targets in respect of results and behaviour, which is potentially conflicting.
- Some early years settings are not preparing adequate information for children entering school. Settings are often informed that it is not a statutory requirement and they do not need to co-operate.
- Statistics show that if primary children go into SEMH provision early, they will move back into mainstream at secondary level.

- Providing good speech, language and communication support will promote good reading skills, to enable access to the school curriculum. 80% of SEMH children have unmet speech, language and communication issues.

The primary focus for the High Needs budget is to balance the in year budget before addressing the overall deficit as the LA cannot keep adding to the overspend.

The overall DSG recovery plan needs to state that the LA will deliver, with some set provisos and assumptions, to avoid direct involvement from the DfE. The LA should avoid giving the impression that it is managing within its means, given the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review by Central Government. Other local authorities will be compiling different plans with different initiatives and there is no universal solution.

Doing the right thing strategically and taking collective responsibility is the right way forward in terms of improvements and activities.

Summary/action:

The Forum noted the outturn position forecast from the month 12 financial report and the proposals of activities against the High needs budget in support of the DSG recovery plan.

An email will be circulated to Forum members requesting expressions of interested in volunteering for the DSG deficit plan task and finish group.

5. Reports and Updates

5.1 Director of Children's Services

Julian Wooster provided an update on the following:

National news

On 14 May 2019, Ofsted published its education inspection framework for use from September 2019. It sets out the principles that apply to inspection, and the main judgements that inspectors make when carrying out inspections of maintained schools, academies, non-association independent schools, further education and skills providers and registered early years settings in England.

On 2 April 2019, DfE published departmental guidance for local authorities on Elective Home Education (EHE). It includes children with EHCPs and LA involvement. This replaces the 2007/2013 Elective Home Education Guidelines for Local Authorities.

The Timpson review on school exclusions was published on 7 May 2019 and explored how headteachers use exclusion, and why pupils with particular characteristics are

more likely to be excluded from school. The review gathered substantial evidence through submissions to the call for evidence and engagement with many organisations and individuals, including schools, local authorities, parents and children.

The DfE has published a response which sets out a programme of work to respond to the recommendations.

The Government's independent behaviour advisor Tom Bennett will lead a £10 million project to support 500 schools across England to develop policies like detention systems and new sanctions for pupils. The DfE has announced that the money will be used to identify lead schools for the network and fund their activities in supporting others, through staff training, the creation of centralised detention systems, and new sanctions and rewards schemes for pupils, with a focus on pupil attendance and punctuality.

The DfE has launched a ['Call for Evidence' survey](#) on the provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and for those who need alternative provision: how the financial arrangements work. This is in response to the many representations concerning the adequacy of funding for special needs. The DfE understands that the overall amount of funding available is the most pressing concern for many schools and local authorities. The total funding available for high needs will be carefully considered in the forthcoming spending review. This call for evidence is intended to focus on a related issue: how the current available funding is distributed, and what improvements might be made in future.

The deadline for responses is 31 July 2019 and responses are encouraged from head teacher representative groups.

Local news

The local area Ofsted inspection on SEN in Somerset is imminent. Nationally, 60% of LAs have been inspected and have received written statements of action; it has been a tough inspection process. Only Bristol, Torbay and Somerset have not had inspections in the South West.

Some slides have been prepared showing the activities Somerset does well and those that need improving.

5.2 Support Services for Education

Ian Rowswell gave a presentation which provided some information on SSE's 2018/19 outturn position and the plans for current reserves. This was in response to a request made at the previous Schools Forum meeting.

It's currently not clear what role the Schools Forum have in determining how any surpluses are used and it was proposed that such surpluses could be used to offset pressures such as the Central Schools Services Block reductions.

The Forum was also informed that the re-location of SCITT and SCIL is on schedule and both services should be operating from Dillington from September 2019.

Action: a request was made for clarity moving forward, regarding the role of the Schools Forum and use of any SSE surpluses. Ian Rowswell to bring a paper back to a future Schools Forum meeting.

6. Schools Forum Membership, Roles and Responsibilities

Sue Ford provided an update on the membership and vacancies on Somerset Schools Forum, along with a request for nominations for Chair and Vice Chair for the 2018/19 academic year.

Section 3 of the paper summarised the current membership and vacancies, along with the representative bodies responsible for filling vacancies. Details of current members with an impending end to their term of office were also included.

The paper also included details of the Forum's roles and responsibilities (paragraphs 4.1 to 4.4 refer); Dave Farrow presented this section and asked the Forum to consider the following recommendations:

- a) All Forum members should sit on at least one of the three sub groups supporting the Schools Forum. They are:
 - Technical Working Group
 - High Needs sub group
 - Early Years sub group.
- b) The Early Years and High Needs sub groups should be chaired by a Forum member, as is already the case with the Technical Working Group.
- c) Each sub group chair should lead on presenting relevant reports to Forum.

The following points were noted:

- The principal behind the proposal is reasonable; however, asking head teachers to sit on one of the Forum sub groups could be difficult in practice and a big

ask as it would mean being out of school for several meetings and a potential workload issue. The groups could also become quite large.

- Would it be an effective use of a head teacher's time if they only have a limited knowledge and awareness of the work involved.
- There should be Forum representation from all school groups and phases on the sub groups, to enable a full discussion and consistency.
- Discussion in smaller groups is more effective, as this is where the work and proposals are considered in detail and reliant on specific knowledge and expertise.
- The proposal for each sub group chair to lead on presenting relevant reports to Forum could be amended whereby the group concerned could nominate a group member.

Action: it was recommended that Dave Farrow considers a more detailed proposal, to be brought back to the Forum at a future meeting.

A request was also made for nominations for a new chair and vice chair for the 2019/20. An email will be sent out before the Forum meeting on 10 July 2019, requesting nominations for a new chair and vice chair for the 2019/20 academic year.

7. Budget Monitoring 2018/19 Month 12 Outturn Report and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Reserves

Lizzie Watkin presented a paper which confirmed the outturn position for the DSG in 2018/19. The overall position is a £2.736m overspend, excluding delegated schools budgets. The cumulative deficit brought forward was £3.966m and therefore the combined projected outturn is a deficit of £6.702m.

A summary of the DSG reserves was included in the paper along with detail for each of the DSG funding blocks. The paper also included the opening balances for each DSG block for 2019/20, where commitments have already been approved and requests for carry forwards are shown.

Summary/outcome:

The Schools Forum noted the 2018/19 outturn position of the Dedicated Schools Grant, excluding individual schools budgets.

8. Early Years Sub Group Update

Alison Jeffery presented a paper which provided an updated position of the Early Years budget for 2018/19 following month 12 financial report, along with changes in the proposals to utilise early years reserves and to the sustainability grant criteria to minimise the risk of an overspend.

The Schools Forum was asked to note:

- The early years budget position from the month 12 financial report
- Adjustments to planned spend proposals to keep a balanced budget
- Changes to the sustainability grant criteria and budget

The following points were noted:

- The sustainability budget was overspent by £27,630 and the criteria for 2019/20 have been reviewed to allow greater scrutiny for fairness and equitable. Details were provided in Appendix 2 of the paper. The overall budget has also reduced from £240k to £200k.
- Funding for 2, 3 and 4 year olds is initially provisional, based on the latest early years census data. A retrospective adjustment to the funding is subsequently made by the DfE when actual take up census data has been validated. This methodology and timing can make financial planning difficult.
- There needs to be more financial understanding within the Early Years sub group in terms of reporting, financial implications and in year funding adjustments. This will enable better planning and forecasting.

Summary/outcome:

The Forum noted:

- ***The early years budget position from the month 12 financial report***
- ***Adjustments to planned spend proposals to keep a balanced budget***
- ***Changes to the sustainability grant criteria and budget***

9. Growth Funding: Criteria for 2019/20 Academic Year

Dave Farrow presented a paper which summarised a proposal to amend the criteria for Growth Funding for 2019/20 academic year; the Schools Forum has the responsibility for deciding on the criteria.

In May 2018 the LA proposed a change to the growth funding which the Schools Forum approved; this paper makes some revisions to the previously agreed criteria, including the funding of liabilities arising during the period from when the new school has been constructed and handed over to the LA prior to the transfer to the sponsor.

The Forum was asked to decide on the Growth Funding criteria for 2019/20, as detailed in sections 3.3 and 3.6 of the paper. Amendments were set out in red text.

The following points were noted:

- Originally, the growth funding model predicated the primary sector as this was the main area of need. The model now incorporates secondary schools as there is now more requirement.

Summary/outcome:

The Forum approved the proposal to amend the Growth Funding criteria for 2019/20, as detailed in sections 3.3 and 3.6 of the paper.

Yes: 14

Abstentions: 0

No: 0

10. Theme Based Audit on PE and Sport Premium

Lizzie Watkin presented a report which summarised the outcomes of the Theme Based Audit on PE and Sport Premium issued for 2017/18 to Schools, and carried out during the Spring Term 2019, in a sample group of schools as part of the 2018/19 audit plan.

Internal Audit gave an overall opinion of Reasonable Assurance in relation to the areas reviewed and the adequate controls found to be in place to ensure that the funds are used effectively and appropriately in line with the conditions of the grant.

Within the sample of twelve schools:

- One School achieved Substantial Assurance
- Eleven schools achieved Reasonable Assurance

The Schools Forum was recommended to discuss the significant findings listed in the paper with inherent risks attached and consider the proposed actions detailed further in sections 2.4 and 2.5.

The following points were noted:

- The PE and Sports Grant is allocated to the primary sector only; therefore, the report applies to this phase.
- The local authority already provides comprehensive details on the grant, including terms and conditions.
- Some schools are not adhering to the required reporting requirement and evidenced decision making. There is a risk that the grant will be recouped by the DfE.

Summary/outcome:

The Schools Forum was asked to share the report with primary school colleagues. This will also be reiterated via SAPHTO.

11. Somerset Schools Forum: Academic Year Meeting Planner

The agenda included a meeting planner for forthcoming Schools Forum meetings, for information. Any comments should be directed to Michael Bryant in Democratic Services.

12. Any Other Business

The Forum was informed that a rural primary school head teacher is interested in becoming a member of the Schools Forum. Any expressions of interest should be directed to SAPHTO as it is the responsible body for appointing members.

Members were reminded to consider nominations for the roles of Chair and Vice Chair of Schools Forum for the 2019/20 academic year.

13. Future Meetings

2018/19 meeting dates

All meetings start at 1.30pm unless otherwise stated and the venue is Victoria Park Community Centre, Bridgwater

Wednesday 10 July 2019

2019/20 provisional meeting dates

Wednesday 9 October 2019 all-day meeting

Wednesday 27 November 2019

Wednesday 15 January 2020

Wednesday 4 March 2020

Wednesday 20 May 2020

Wednesday 8 July 2020

For Information

14. Internal Audit Plan

A summary of the schools 2019/20 internal audit plan, for information.