

SOMERSET SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of a Meeting of the extra- ordinary Schools Forum held at Long Sutton Golf Club, on Thursday 27th June 2019 at 10.00am

PRESENT

Primary headteachers &

Governors:

Susan Brewer

Morwenna Dunstan

PRUs:

Jo Simons

Academies:

Peter Elliott – chair

Barbara O’Keefe

Helen Rogerson

Paul Reddick

Jen Veal

Special Academies:

Mark Ruffett

Non-school members:

Louise Rowley

Rachel Parrish

Observers:

Phil Burner - SAPHTO

Lucinda Tuttiett – SAPHTO

Rob Benzie - SASH

Officers:

Faye Purbrick - Cabinet Member for Education & Council Transformation

Annette Perrington, Assistant Director Inclusion

Elizabeth Watkin, Strategic Manager - Finance

Jackie Cottey, Finance Manager

Dale Newland, Finance Manager

Jane Lock – County Councillor (Observer)

Julian Wooster, Director Children’s Services

Apologies for absence: Alison Crudginton, Claire Merchant-Jones, Dave Farrow, Mark Keating

1 **Welcome, Introduction and Apologies** – agenda item 1

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and highlighted that the Somerset DSG recovery plan needs to be submitted imminently.

2 **Feedback from the Task & Finish Group** - agenda item 2

The Assistant Director Inclusion, Annette Perrington, presented a number of slides to the Forum, noting: today’s meeting would update the wider forum on the work of the DSG Recovery Plan Task and Finish Group and would present the recovery plan to the Forum before submission to the DfE.

Further points raised during the presentation introduction included: the significant level of funding being considered; lobbying government; high needs funding pressures; collective responsibility for all children; and joint

commissioning.

The Assistant Director Inclusion, Annette Perrington, highlighted a number of key pressures including: Independent School placement requests; mainstream and special school capacity; and high rates of exclusion. The presentation then detailed the Central Schools Block historic commitments, and detailed a potential £2.63m gap in funding pending the introduction of the Hard funding formula

At this point the Forum were reminded of the importance of preparing for the 'hard funding formula', but that this had to be balanced alongside protecting services for the most vulnerable.

Action: Forum members requested opportunities for joint funding or trading be considered at the 9th October 2019 meeting.

The Director of Children's Services, Julian Wooster highlighted the need for a reduction in spend on Executive Officers.

The Assistant Director Inclusion, Annette Perrington, emphasised that the first 3 years of the plan would focus on 'in year' spend before beginning to tackle the cumulative deficit, noting that focusing on points of transition was a key medium-term activity, and highlighting the importance of reducing reliance on the independent sector as a longer term activity Further points raised included: the need for a planned reduction in the number of independent placements; noted that children with allocated high needs funding at band 1 and 2 are not appropriately placed in special schools and that children with these levels of needs can be accommodated in mainstream schools and the assumption that the DfE additional grant will continue.

Points raised by Forum members included: parental preference for specialist provision; seeking clarification that there would be no savings from the 2019/20 budget; and a request for an explanation of why there were no Early Years savings.

Officers responded to the points raised, noting: the only saving for the 2019/20 year was from the Central Schools Block; and that it was very difficult to realise any early year's savings as 97% of the funding is already delegated.

The Director of Children's Services, Julian Wooster, highlighted that the Task & Finish Group had agreed the priority was to resolve the in-year overspend before considering how to address the existing cumulative deficit and that it was unlikely this could be achieved within the timescales provided or at all. . The Forum was further informed that other Local Authorities had adopted a

similar approach, but the Secretary of State did have the power to suspend Schools Forums and directly manage funding.

Further points raised in discussion included: the potential to recoup schools surplus balances; using recouped moneys to reduce the cumulative deficit; ensuring the underlying funding issue is properly resolved to prevent the cumulative deficit increasing further; the importance of open communication from Academies regarding any surplus funding they may hold; and the potential for the DfE to mandate the use of surplus funding.

The Assistant Director Inclusion, Annette Perrington, highlighted discussion at the Task and Finish Group regarding top slicing schools' budget by approximately 0.68% to jointly commission Outreach funding. The deficit plan was based on achieving this and the Task & Finish group had indicated this should be explored.

A number of practical options were highlighted including:

Option 1:

Weighting/banding primary schools by size, with costs reducing by 10% by band and schools over 250 pupils making the 'standard' contribution. And that this would equate to a contribution of £18 - £30 per pupil.

The charges to be flat across all schools, regardless of support needs

The reduction for small schools to be paid by secondary schools, increasing their contribution to £36 per pupil.

Option 2:

A 25% additional contribution by Secondary Schools, equating to a charge of £25 per primary pupil and £37 per secondary pupil.

No weighting by school size.

Option 3:

A 50% additional contribution by Secondary Schools equating to a charge of £21 per primary pupil and £45 per secondary pupil.

No weighting by school size.

Points raised in discussion included: access to alternative provision in West Somerset and Frome; uncertainty regarding future funding; the inclusion of post 16 funding; additional charges for schools who are 'over' permanently excluding; the importance of a mechanism to ensure quality.

Outcome: the Forum agreed in principle to continue with the top slicing approach, but further requested the mechanism for delivery be subject to a further vote at the 9th October 2019 meeting.

The Assistant Director Inclusion, Annette Perrington, sought the Forums view regarding the reduction in the central schools block.

Outcome: the Forum noted its in principle support for an equal reduction over a three year period starting in Sept 2020 based on current budget assumptions

4 **Any other business** – agenda item 8

There was no other business.

CHAIR