

**Minutes of a meeting of the North Northamptonshire Schools Forum**  
Held as a Remote Meeting via Zoom at 1.00 pm on Tuesday 13th June 2023

**Present:-**

Members

Paul Wheeler (Vice Chair in the Chair)  
Sandra Appleby  
Lynne Bolland  
Lisa Bowyer  
Laura Clarke  
Marie Lally  
Nikki Lamond  
Annabel Moore  
Kathryn Murphy  
Angela Prodger

Officers

Sariya Bi	Senior Finance Business Partner
Neil Goddard	Assistant Director for Education
Salik Khan	Finance Business Partner
Yoke O'Brien	Strategic Finance Business Partner
Raj Sohal	Democratic Services Officer

**101 Apologies for non-attendance, Forum membership changes and declarations of interest**

Apologies were received from the following members: James Birkett, Victoria Bull, Peter Cantley (Peter French was in attendance as a substitute) and Robert Tite.

James Sherlock had joined the North Northamptonshire Schools Forum as a representative of the maintained primary sector.

Kathryn Murphy had replaced Siobhan Hearne as the representative of the maintained secondary sector.

**102 Election of Chair**

**RESOLVED that:** James Birkett be re-appointed as Chair of the North Northamptonshire Schools Forum.

**103 Election of Vice Chair**

**RESOLVED that:** Paul Wheeler be re-appointed as Vice Chair of the North Northamptonshire Schools Forum.

**104 Minutes from meeting held on 19 January 2023 and points arising/officer feedback**

**RESOLVED that:** The minutes of the meeting held on the 19<sup>th</sup> January be agreed as an accurate record.

**105 High Needs Block Funding**

The Forum considered a report by The Head of SEND, which outlined the SEND delivery programme and the High Needs Block outturn and predicted spend for 2023/24.

During discussion, the principal points were noted:

- A representative from the primary maintained sector suggested that the process for securing early help locality funding (EHLF) was not a transparent one, since when funding was granted or refused, the reasoning behind such decision-making was not provided. The member queried what criteria would need to be met in order to secure EHLF and requested greater transparency throughout the process.
- One member acknowledged that on a national level, statements and EHCP plans had doubled since 2015 and expressed concern that North Northamptonshire Council had not invested in line with this growth in need. Nevertheless, the member was encouraged by the fact that an additional £8 million top-up on early help mainstream funding had been forecasted and questioned how this had compared with prior recent years.

In response, The Assistant Director for Education clarified that:

- 29% of total EHLF applications were declined (279 applications had been received in total between October 2022 - May 2023). The criteria for funding applications was set against the graduated response and the local authority considered whether appropriate action had been taken prior to receiving applications for EHLF.
- Officers would provide members of the Forum with data concerning early help locality funding applications.
- The local authority sought to commission additional early help places and would undertake more detailed commissioning work in the imminent future. The broader budget remained a 'needs-led' one and would need to be spent as efficiently as possible, in order to meet required needs. The local authority aimed to manage a change that would improve the outcomes for children and the financial position of the EHCP budget deficit.

**RESOLVED that:** The report be noted.

**106 Permanent Exclusion Clawback 2022/23**

The Forum considered a report by The Assistant Director for Education, which outlined Permanent Exclusion Clawback funding for 2022/23.

During discussion, the principal points were noted:

- Members queried how a variation in clawback figures could exist if the number of pupils permanently excluded from schools remained the same.
- Members requested detail regarding existing trends relating to permanent exclusions and queried whether factors such as a rise in children's mental health issues had contributed to an increase in exclusions. One member suggested that work surrounding early intervention could potentially prevent such cases.

In response, The Assistant Director for Education clarified that:

- The clawback amount was determined by which point in the year it was calculated, on a pro-rata basis.
- The number of total permanent exclusions had risen since the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, which may have correlated to pupils' mental health.

**RESOLVED that:** The report be noted.

#### **107 Pupil Growth Fund**

The Forum considered a report by The Assistant Director for Education, which outlined the Pupil Growth Fund policy and rates.

The Assistant Director for Education clarified that the Forum would next receive an update regarding the growth fund budget at its October meeting.

**RESOLVED that:** The report be noted.

#### **108 DSG Outturn 2022/23**

The Forum considered a report by The Senior Finance Business Partner, which outlined the outturn position of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2022/23.

During discussion, the principal points were noted:

- One member queried whether 'catch-up expenditure' concerning the High Needs Block related to prior years or solely the 2022/23 financial year.

In response, The Senior Finance Business Partner clarified that:

- Towards the end of the 2022/23 financial year, joint funded agreements and invoices had come in and were not forecasted. Going forward, this expenditure would be monitored on a termly-basis. It did not include historical expenditure.

**RESOLVED that:** The report be noted.

#### **109 Maintained School Balances 2022/23**

The Forum considered a report by The Finance Business Partner, which outlined the maintained school balances, as at the 31st March 2023.

During discussion, the principal points were noted:

- Members acknowledged that the report demonstrated several schools had faced in-year deficits and queried whether the local authority had received schools' budgets for the next year and witnessed a trend in increasing deficits.

In response, The Finance Business Partner clarified that:

- The schools' balance analysis form had closed on the 9th June 2023. The local authority would analyse committed balances through a comparator exercise and upon submission of data, review deficit positions and necessary budget plans.

**RESOLVED that:** The report be noted.

**110 Urgent Business**

There was none.

There being no further business the meeting was closed.