

Minutes of a meeting of the Schools Forum

Held as a Remote Meeting via Zoom at 2.00 pm on Thursday 16th December, 2021

Present:-

Members

James Birkett (Chair)
Peter Cantley
Ron Hardcastle
Pat Kelly
Annabel Moore
Jo Sanchez-Thompson

Sandra Appleby
Joshua Coleman
Siobhan Hearne
Nikki Lamond
Angela Prodger

Officers

Ann Marie Dodds
Jo Hutchinson
Kelly Mills
Yoke O'Brien
Raj Sohal

Also in attendance –

Councillor Scott Edwards
Charlotte Franks
Richard Poole

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

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Lee Hughes (with Annabel Moore attending as a substitute), Peter Leaver, Paul Wheeler (with Joshua Coleman attending as a substitute) and Ron Whittaker.

It was also reported that Kevin Latham had resigned from the North Northamptonshire Schools Forum, as the special academy representative.

17 **Minutes of meeting held on 4 November 2021 and points arising/officer feedback**

RESOLVED that:

The minutes of the meeting held on 4th November 2021 were approved as a correct record.

18 **DSG Finance Update (Verbal Update)**

The Forum considered a verbal update by Ann Marie Dodds (Assistant Director for Education), outlining DSG finances. The Assistant Director explained to Forum

members that a more detailed report would be brought to the subsequent January meeting.

During discussion, the principal points were noted:

- The primary maintained representative questioned whether applications for high needs top-up funding were now being accepted, as previous guidance in March 2021 had stated that schools could not apply for additional funding in this area.
- Members queried what considerations were in place, around reducing the high needs overspend, in relation to out of county placements.
- One member expressed concern regarding the authority's proposed move to a cluster-based model, due to the fact that similar approaches had been taken in the past, leaving Forum members unaware of where funding had gone. The member emphasised that the North Northamptonshire Schools Forum would require full transparency going forward, regarding structural changes. Another member suggested that it could be helpful for the Forum to look at how other local authorities, in similar high needs overspend situations, responded using a cluster-based model; or other alternatives.
- Regarding the authority's capacity to drive forward a new agenda for SEND, members expressed concern regarding staff vacancies within the North Northamptonshire Council EHC team. Members stated that capable staff with strong expertise would be needed to forge a partnership and proceed with finding solutions to this issue.

In response, the Assistant Director for Education clarified that:

- It had become clear that there had been a number of arrangements and routes to access high needs funding, but there had not been parity across sectors in accessing this funding. The authority was in the process of carrying out work to understand how and where historical decisions had been made to award funding to schools. The Assistant Director explained that a number of questions existed around funding that had been provided through SLAs. The authority would need time to outline every line of funding.
- A SEND accountability board had been established, as a multi-agency partnership, to explore solutions. Regarding out of county placements, the authority was looking at arrangements, while maintaining a preference to move towards a cluster-based model to support SEND and alternate provisions. The culmination of this work would pick up in January 22, to explore how the overspend may be recouped. North Northamptonshire Council was not planning a collaborative approach with the West, but instead rather with schools across North Northamptonshire. Nevertheless, at the time of the meeting, no final decisions had been made.
- While services had experienced issues regarding lost resources, in the short term, the local authority would be investing £750k in the education health and care service, which would include 12 additional practitioners to pick up education health and care plans. The Assistant Director assured the Forum that

conversations regarding the pressure on the SEN agenda were taking place at every level within service areas of the local authority.

The Chair explained that a substantive agenda item on high needs funding would come to the forum meeting in January.

RESOLVED that:

The report be noted.

19 Feedback on Consultation Process

The Forum considered a verbal item by the Chair regarding the consultation process and its successes and failures. The Chair explained that the authority had received 33 responses to its schools consultation, which officers maintained had been good engagement.

During discussion, the principal points were noted:

- Responses to school consultations were often weak, due to time sensitivity.
- One member commented that the physical process by which the consultation feedback was returned could have been easier and would like to see more digital avenues for response in future. The member also expressed concern that allowing only one response for each school would limit participation.
- Another Forum member explained that schools often struggled to fully understand and grasp the complexities of what they had been requested to make decisions on. They also supported using a wider sample of views and ideas collectively, to include more people in these discussions.
- The Chair agreed that head teachers should be in positions to make informed decisions and shared concern that Forum members held an advantage over colleagues within their respective sectors. He suggested that the contact details of Forum members could be circulated to local head teachers, should they have any queries or require further information.

RESOLVED that:

The report be noted.

20 Feedback from Consultation - Votes

The Forum considered a report by the Assistant Director for Education, which summarised the responses received from the Schools' consultation.

The Assistant Director explained that the dominant feedback from the consultation opposed a 1.3% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block of the DSG. Therefore, the authority would not seek to pursue this transfer and instead proceed with the previously agreed transfer of 0.5%.

RESOLVED that:

The report be noted.

21 Funding Formula*

The Forum voted unanimously to agree the authority's preferred funding formula.

RESOLVED that:

The Forum agrees the funding formula.

22 Methodology to bring the budget into balance*

The Forum considered two options, proposed by the authority, to bring the budget back into balance.

The first option would be to apply the national funding formula with a minimum funding guarantee, adjusted for area cost.

The second option would be a cap on pupil increases, again with a minimum funding guarantee.

RESOLVED that:

The Forum agrees the first preferred option, to apply the tweaked national funding formula.

23 Funding of Outreach Services*

The Forum considered a report by the Assistant Director for Education, which outlined the proposed models for funding sensory impairment services and specialist support services.

Due to the fact that the Forum had decided not to transfer 1.3% of funds from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, which would have funded these services, the authority proposed that a traded model be adopted.

RESOLVED that:

The Forum agrees the adoption of a fully-traded model option for the funding of outreach services.

24 Split Site Funding Policy*

The Forum voted unanimously to agree the split site policy and rate of funding.

RESOLVED that:

The Forum agrees the split site policy.

25 Pupil Growth Fund*

The Forum voted unanimously to agree the pupil growth fund policy and rate of funding.

RESOLVED that:

The Forum agrees the pupil growth fund policy and rate of funding.

26 Permanent Exclusion Clawback Policy*

The Forum voted unanimously to agree the proposed change to the exclusion clawback policy.

RESOLVED that:

The Forum agrees the exclusion clawback policy.

27 Central School Services Block*

The Forum voted unanimously in favour of the authority's plans to fund services from the Central School Services Block.

RESOLVED that:

The Forum agrees the continuation of central services partly funded by the DSG.

28 De-delegation for Trade Union Facility Time*

The Forum voted in favour of the de-delegation of facility time in both primary maintained and secondary maintained sectors.

RESOLVED that:

The Forum agrees the de-delegation for trade union time.

29 De-delegation for School Effectiveness*

The Forum members from the primary maintained sector voted unanimously to agree the policy of de-delegation for school effectiveness, but abstained from voting to agree the rate of funding.

Officers assured the Forum that the adjusted rate would be brought back at a future meeting, for approval.

The Forum member from the secondary maintained sector also abstained from the vote to agree the de-delegation for school effectiveness. Similarly, officers would bring the adjusted rate back to Forum in January.

RESOLVED that:

The Forum does not agree the de-delegation for school effectiveness. This will return at a future meeting of the North Northamptonshire Schools Forum.

30 De-delegation for Redundancy Costs*

The Forum members from the primary maintained sector voted unanimously against the de-delegation for redundancy costs.

Officers assured the Forum that the authority would consider how to utilise the funds it held and would again, adjust its proposed policy, to be brought back at a future meeting.

The Forum member from the secondary maintained sector voted against the establishment of a de-delegated redundancy cost fund.

RESOLVED that:

The Forum does not agree the de-delegation for redundancy costs. This will return at a future meeting of the North Northamptonshire Schools Forum.

31 Schools Forum Plan

The next meeting of the North Northamptonshire Schools Forum would be held on 19th January 2021.

RESOLVED that:

The report be noted.

32 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.