

Minutes of a meeting of the Schools Forum

1.00 pm on Thursday 20th January 2022

Remote Meeting via Zoom

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

- Apologies were received from James Birkett and Siobhan Hearne.
- Ron Whittaker had resigned from the Forum, as a mainstream academy representative.
- Sharon Pinson had joined the Forum, as a primary maintained representative.

34 Minutes of meeting held on 16 December 2021 and points arising/officer feedback

RESOLVED that: The minutes of the meeting held on 16th December were agreed as an accurate record.

35 High Needs budgets 2022/23

The Forum considered a report by the Interim Assistant Director for Education, which outlined high needs pressures and the budget for 2022/23. Copies of the report had been circulated to Forum members prior to the meeting.

During discussion, the principal points were noted:

- The Forum noted that of the £2.4M projected overspend concerning high needs, 86% of this came from out of county placements. Members queried whether these placements related to cases where the local authority did not have specific expertise to meet children's needs, or if there were issues of capacity within the county for these placements.
- Members queried whether the local authority had planned for an overall increase in capacity for high needs places.
- One member expressed concern that since the High Needs Panel had stopped meeting, issues were building up and heavier reliance was being placed upon EHCPs, to meet children's needs. The member posited that this would be detrimental long-term, as these children would not be sufficiently funded.
- Regarding timescales of work, members requested an indication of when the task and finish group would be established to look at high needs issues.

In response, the Interim Assistant Director for Education clarified that:

- The local authority would need to utilise out of county placements, due to issues of placement capacity in North Northamptonshire. Although this was not

ideal, due to the incurred travel costs and inconvenience, it was necessary as local provision was full.

- Substantial work regarding the sufficiency of high needs placements within North Northamptonshire would be required. Officers would seek to plan future additional provision and establish a task and finish group, to look at funding and investigate how additional places may be created.
- Officers had proposed that High Needs Panel meetings should reconvene as soon as possible, since due to the significant overspend, a targeted and effective response would be required. The authority would seek to form a rounded approach, by looking at how high needs funding could link with other areas.
- High needs issues formed a high-profile piece of work and officers would endeavour to propose long-term solutions. The task and finish group would be established as soon as possible, to begin discussing its remit, and proposals from this group were intended to be acted upon by September 2022.

The Chairman suggested that it would be useful for Forum members to see the proposed terms of reference for the task and finish group in the imminent future, to identify and establish early priorities of the group.

RESOLVED that: The Forum noted the report.

36 Dedicated Schools Grant settlement

The Forum considered a report by the Strategic Finance Business Partner for Children's Services, which provided an overview of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) settlement, received by the local authority in December 2021. There had been an overall increase of £14M to the total DSG allocation. The authority had also received additional one-off high needs funding, amounting to around £1.89M.

The Strategic Finance Business Partner clarified that the report set out the indicative settlement North Northamptonshire Council had received from the Department for Education (DfE). This was not how the local authority would allocate funding to service providers but rather what was received from central government on the whole. The settlement demonstrated how the DfE had calculated the maintained nursery supplement. Further information on how the authority would calculate allocation to service providers would come to future meetings of the Schools Forum.

RESOLVED that: The Forum

a) Noted the report.

Approved the amendment to the proposed DSG CSSB expenditure, to align budgets with the confirmed 2022/23 DSG budget settlement.

37 2022/23 Primary and Secondary school budget options

The Forum considered a report by the Strategic Finance Business Partner for Children's Services, which outlined that the Schools Forum had agreed to transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs block of the DSG and set a minimum

funding guarantee of 2%. There was a £30K overspend of the approved Growth Fund. Therefore, officers requested the Forum to approve an increase to the Growth Fund.

There would be a projected shortfall to the Schools Block of £303k, after applying the national funding formula, with a minimum funding guarantee of 2%. Therefore, the Strategic Finance Business Partner set out three options for addressing this shortfall, by capping the minimum funding guarantee and scaling as appropriate.

During discussion, the principal points were noted:

- Members queried whether under the proposed changes schools that had previously lost gains under similar arrangements would again experience this. One member of the Forum expressed concern that these schools would again miss out on additional gains, due to the cap in their budgets.
- Members queried whether schools had ever challenged a 'sliding scale and cap' since this could be interpreted as unfair, as it would disproportionately affect some schools more than others. One member expressed concern that if such a challenge was put to the authority and questions of fairness were to arise, this could be costly long-term.

In response, the Strategic Finance Business Partner clarified that:

- In her personal view, the first option would be most appropriate as the financial burden would be shared by schools - since it was closer to the national funding formula and they would only lose 10% of their additional gains.
- It was possible that concerns regarding fairness could arise however, officers were following government guidance therefore, such challenges would be unlikely. It was the local authority's intention to not allow schools to lose more than 2%, to cap losses as well as gains.

The Schools Forum voted in favour of the second option, proposed in the report, to address the projected Schools Block shortfall – a 4.57% cap and 50% scale.

RESOLVED that: The Forum

a) Approved the increase to the Growth Fund.

Approved the second option to address the Schools Block shortfall.

38 Revised proposals for the de-delegation for School Effectiveness

The Forum considered a report by the Interim Assistant Director for Education, which outlined revised proposals for de-delegation for school effectiveness.

Forum representatives from the maintained primary school sector voted to accept the local authority's proposal, for a £12 de-delegated cost for school effectiveness.

RESOLVED that: The Forum agreed the proposed rate for school effectiveness.

39 Schools Forum Plan

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

- The next meeting of the North Northamptonshire Schools Forum would be held on 10th February 2022 - scheduled as an extraordinary meeting, to look at Early Years funding.

RESOLVED that: The Forum noted the report.

40 Urgent Business

There was none.

There being no further business the meeting closed.