.

**Schools Forum Meeting Minutes of 29th November 2023**

**held via Microsoft Teams**

**08.30 – 10.00**

*Approved 10 January 2024*

In Attendance

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| Ruth Bird – Chair | Jo Barak (JB) | Jody Gee (JGe) |
| Jeff Fair (JF) | Carole Herman (CH) | Scott Bowak (SB) |
| Sean Moriarty (SM) | Jinnie Nichols (JN) | Philomena Cozens (PC) |
| John Hunter (JH) | Marilyn Smith (MS) | Chanel Lassman (CL) |
| Claire Styles (CS) | Harriet Phelps-Knights (HP-K) | Robin Taverner (RT) |
| Nigel Hill (NH) | Pam Langmead (PL) | Lyn Wright (LW) |
| Rod Lane (RL) | Luke Bulpett (LB) | Sue Bardetti (SB) |
| Ruth Sturdy (RS) | Simon Wall (SW) | Charlotte Little (CL) |
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| **LA Officers** |  |  |
| Yannick Stupples-Whyley (YSW) | Andrew Page (AP) | Clare Kershaw (CK) |
| Gareth Honeyford (GH) | Carolyn Terry (CT) | Cllr Andrew Sheldon (AS) |
| Anita Kemp (AK) | Val Cleare (VC) - Minutes |  |
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| **Observers** |  |  |
| Nicola Woolf (NW) | Philippa Holliday (PH) | Ashley Milum (AM) |
| Nina Chapman (NC) |  |  |

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| **1** | **Apologies for Absence and substitute notices**  Apologies were received from Debs Watson, Dan Leonard, Richard Potter, Emily Welton, Jo Santinelli, S. Roberts and Cllr Tony Ball.  RB welcomed Charlotte Little (Church Rep) who joined Schools Forum for the first time today.  Carole Herman substituted for Dan Leonard and Pam Langmead for Richard Potter. Cllr Sheldon is attending on behalf of Cllr Ball.  Richard Potter had resigned from Schools Forum. On behalf of Schools Forum, RB thanked Richard for his contribution and commitment to the Forum.  Nina Chapman from Becket Keys School observed today’s meeting, along with Nicola Woolf, Philippa Holliday and Ashley Milum from ECC. |
| **2** | **Early Years Update – Carolyn Terry**  CT updated Schools Forum with the forecast budget requirement for 2023/24 of the two, three & four year old Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE), the progress of the roll out of the Childcare Reforms Expansion and the spend to-date on the agreed funding projects. The report also sought approval to increase the level of funding retained to recruit two new posts.  CT reported the take-up of the two-year-old FEEE during the Summer 2023 term was 2,840, which was 83.21% of the 3,413 eligible two-year-olds in the county. This take-up figure remains significantly higher than the national take up level for the Summer 2023 term of 73.9%.  The take up of the universal three- and four-year-old FEEE at the Summer term 2023 headcount was 25,735, which is 93.5% of the eligible three- and four-year-olds. This is slightly below the national take up % of 93.7%  5.1 Table 2 showed the financial implications. 5.3 Early Years Supplementary Grant was additional funding that the DfE gave to Local Authorities for Early Years settings for the Autumn and Spring. Analysis of the Autumn term we are still looking at the forecast and will report back at the next meeting in the New Year.  5.4 The Authority is proposing to increase staffing by 1.8 FTE posts at a cost  of **£68,300** to ensure the team has capacity to implement the Childcare  reforms. It is proposed to fund these posts by the Early Years Block.  Changes in statutory entitlement for SEN funding for younger children.  Currently need to fund children 3 / 4 year olds, DfE consultation over  Summer term – still awaiting outcome of the consultation, either by end of  November or early December. Expectation that we will be funding those  Children from a SEN point of view.  Supplementary grant – uplift. Significant increase for 2 year olds, increase  in maintained nursery supplement. Funding rates from April 2024 are due,  and more information on this will be shared in the January meeting. Also  funding for primary schools, wraparound childcare, and to understand what  we have to do and the process we need to go through. Bespoke package of  support will be put in, due to go live in September. Universal childcare pay  in advance. Growth of child minder places and set up £600 through visit  grant.  6.2 set out why asking to retain increased amount of funding from the Early  Years Block. From the project timeline, the DfE are allocating funding  sources for that project work. However, increased workload in funding does  mean we are going to need to increase the team. Request for two posts,  Entitlement Funding Officer, term time only, and SEN Inclusion Officer.  £68,00 to retain additional from the Early Years Block. Under Section 7  there is a summary of all the projects agreed to fund by the Early Years  under spend.  CT gave a high-level summary which included 4 Early Years  intervention partners who have been in post since September. The role for  them briefly is where we are getting applications in for SEND funding for  children. We have already had 30 applications diverted rather than some  funding through inclusion funding. They are also working with Early Years  settings around assessment and understanding what and how else to  provide support to those children. We have also increased the children’s  community development leads and business management consultant  capacity in the team because of sufficiency issues that the settings are  facing.  We have also rolled out the first tranche of support for the speech and  language club. Colchester was the first area where we rolled out into 7  settings from which there has been positive feedback and outcomes for  children. We would like to roll this out across the county. Following that  there will be a one-year review of the speech and language club, the  analysis of which has not been done yet.  The sufficiency grant is for settings that are struggling in areas where if they  were to close, we would have no other childcare options for those children,  areas of disadvantaged where families would not be able to access a  funded only place. This grant so far we have paid out £88,000 and we have  supported 5 settings. CT informed the call for this grant is increasing, so we  are looking at what we can do to support those settings. For example, one  setting could ot recruit and had taken on agency staff and wanted to keep  them, but the setting could not afford the agency fees. So, we were able to  use this grant to pay the agency fees for them to keep the staff. Listen and  Cuddle is a support website for parents. The website needs some upgrades  and improvements. We are looking to partner or commission somebody to  help with the development of the website to increase the reach to families.  That is due to start by the end of this term and we should have that in post  in the spring term.  With regards to recruitment and retention support, we have put together a  recruitment campaign focusing on 3 elements, make a change, build a  future and looking to encourage practitioners back to the sector those who  left during and just after Covid. Also encouraging awareness of childcare as  a positive career choice and child minders. We are also looking at  supporting childcare providers for their recruitment, so we have re-badged  the schools job sites to be Schools and Early Years. We get insight into the  vacancies that are not being recruited to. It is early days yet, but we are  getting positive feedback. This is an 11-month programme and keep  updates coming through.  Finally, Schools Forum Early Years Reference Group, continue to meet.  There is an increase in the numbers of children with emerging SEND.  Financial pressures still continue to be an issue and with the  announcement of the Minimum Living Wage is going up in April, it is a big  increase for younger age group as well which is another cost pressure.  Recruitment and retention is an issue. We have campaigned and we are  trying to support the sector.  **Questions**  SM – in para 6.2 that the Government has recognised extra work created  and is providing additional funding. Are you able to say how additional  funding compares to the extra £66,000 funding?  CT informed this is only for this year, for wraparound funding up to 3  years. We have £60,000 for this financial year. We are looking to bring  additional resources around communications and marketing, get information  out to providers, also within the team business management consultancy.  Funding is short-termed. It is only for the lifecycle of the implementation of  the childcare reforms. The workload is going to be constant. The ask for  those two posts is that they are going to be business as usual day-to-day,  right through to us applying the funding.  SM said that is absolutely fine and he had no worries about how you are  going to use the money. SM was just trying to get a feel between the  additional funding and the actual additional costs to deliver.  JF commented that he noticed under 8.1 on the difficulty of the finances  especially with the increase in the minimum wage which is significant  compared with the increase in the funding announced today about the £600  and childcare providers alignments for those who become new providers as  a new piece of funding. Is this the percentage overall that you are  anticipating being withheld from the block?  CT stated we are able to retain up to 5% and we always retain under 1%.  YSW confirmed based on the current retention we are currently about half a  per cent and this will take it to 0.6%.  **Recommendations**:  Forum noted the forecast outturn for 2023/24 at 5.1.   Forum approved the request to increase the level of funding retained for 2024/25 as set out in 6.3.  Forum noted the spend to-date on the agreed funding projects set out in 7.1. |
| **3.** | **School Funding 2024/25 – Yannick Stupples-Whyley**  YSW reminded everyone that a paper was brought to the September meeting informing of the provisional allocation announced in July and we agreed consultation to go out. When the consultation went live, the DfE came out with a revised indicative provisional allocation, as they understated the number of pupils in schools in October. It meant every Local Authority will have to have a reduction in their allocation due to more pupils in the system.  4.3 Table showed that based on July 2023 to October 2023 £10.5 million reduction to the provisional schools block allocation. The funding announced for the teachers pay rise through the teachers pay additional grant is not affected. Table 3 showed where the DfE have sought to make their reductions in terms of the National Funding Formula. All factors reduced other than free school meals and the lower IDACI for binary bands E and F and reductions go from 0.7% up to 1.3%.  The High Needs Block and Central Services Block remain the same and are not affected by the announcement in terms of the original proposal in 5.1 that we were consulting on the second bullet point to increase the London Fringe Allowance from 1.0156 to 1.0251 which is halfway between 1.0156 and 1.0345. Due to the reduction in funding and with approval of the Chair and Vice Chair you should have received an email informing of this change. We have changed the consultation proposal and London weighting will go up to 1.0173 which is the minimum we have to move it to for 2024/25. Also, we are set a minimum and maximum for each formula factor by the DfE, and we have a reduction in the provisional allocation of the key stage four basic entitlement value is very close to breaching. When calculating the final budget allocations should either Key Stage 3 go too low or Key Stage 4 basic entitlement go too high, we will have to adjust the Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 basic entitlement weighting.  In terms of the consultation opened on 2nd October 2023, we briefly redacted it on 10th October 2023 whilst we accessed the revised settlement and then we went live again on 13th October 2023 and closed on 5th November 2023. There were 23 responses. The 78.3% of responses received for the first question proposed. Chart 2 showed the second proposal increasing London weighting up to 1.0173. Of the 23 responses received 20 responses were received before the proposal was revised. In 6.7 the final proposals are to fund school losing the Essex Non-Fringe area cost to ensure all schools receive funding based on videographic cost pressures to increase the London fringe elements up to 1.017 speed.  YSW confirmed the Finance Review Group have reviewed the consultation response and our final recommendations, and they do recommend that the Schools Forum agree, so its the proposals that are shown under 6.7.  **Recommendations:**  Forum noted the revised provisional funding settlement for 2024/25.  Forum noted the results of the school funding consultation at 6.2 .  Forum agreed the recommendation of the FRG to approve the final proposed changes to the Essex Formula for Funding Schools for 2024/25 at 6.8. |
| **4.** | **Scheme for Financing Schools – Yannick Stupples-Whyley**  YSW presented the report to the Maintained members of the Schools Forum the proposed changes to the scheme for financing schools for 2024/25. The scheme sets out the financial relationship between the Local Authority and maintained schools. The Secretary of State may by a direction revise the whole or any part of the scheme from such a date as may be specified in the direction. The proposed changes are from 4.4 onwards.  The starting date for schools to submit a 3-year budget plan has been removed as the date has passed.  4.6 The DfE has renamed this section from Value for Money to School Resource Management.  The FRG has approved changes set out in the report.  **Recommendations:**  (Maintained Members only voted)  Forum Maintained members noted and agreed the updates to the Scheme from previous prescribed changes at 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8, which require no consultation.  Forum Maintained members agreed the Finance Review Group’s recommended changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools for 2024/25 at 4.4, 4.5, 4.9, 4.10 and 4.11. |
| **5.** | **Constitution and Membership of Schools Forum – Yannick Stupples-Whyley**  YSW presented the report which outlined the changes required to the Constitution based on the ongoing conversion of schools to academy status.  YSW also updated the Forum of attendance of members at meetings of both the Forum and the Sub Groups.  Table 1 showed the agreed Structure approved in December 2020.  Table 2 showed the ratio of pupils between primary and secondary school as at the May Census 2023. The ratio is 1.45:1 and requires no change.  Table 3 showed breakdown of pupils for primary and secondary between maintained schools and academies as at the May Census 2023.  The recent academy conversions have moved the primary pupil split in Table 3 between maintained schools and academies from 5 members each to 4 maintained members and 6 academy members. The preferred approach to achieve the change in primary membership is:  Cease the position of the next maintained member to come to their end of term and at that date elect a new academy member.  Table 4 showed all of those members coming to the end of their current term of office:  Luke Bulpett (10th July 2024)  Debs Watson (27th November 2024)  Lyn Wright (27th November 2024)  Ruth Sturdy (27th November 2024)  Jo Santinelli (27th November 2024)  It was noted we will need to make a change with Richard Potter’s resignation. So, there will be no vacancy within a primary academy headteachers.  Annex B showed attendance at Schools Forum and all of the Sub Groups.  **Recommendations:**  Forum approved the Authority’s preferred approach for implementing the required change to primary members at 3.10.  Forum noted members who will reach their end of term at 3.12.  Forum noted Membership at Annex A and Attendance at Annex B. |
| **6.** | **Future Plans for the School Meals Advisory Service**  **CONFIDENTIAL DECISION PAPER – SEE SEPARATE REPORT.** |
| **7.** | **Any other business, feedback from schools through Associations and from Schools Forum representatives on other Bodies.**  **CONFIDENTIAL FORUM BUSINESS – SEE SEPARATE REPORT.** |
| **8.** | **Any other business, feedback from schools through Associations and from Schools Forum representatives on other Bodies.**  **ASHE**  CH reported secondary schools are still very embroiled with issues of attendance and behaviour. There have been lots of discussions amongst local groups and the Local Authority about alternative provision and difficulty in capacity there. Also, there has been a lot of discussion about off site direction and managed moves. CH drew attention to the volume of complaints received by schools. The Local Authority has increased its capacity to deal with complaints through the safeguarding team, but schools are very much weighed down by parents knowing how to use systems which is creating a lot of work.  Another discussion which is continuing is around curriculum and the introduction of T levels. Many schools are going to have to specialise in T levels are beyond their capacity. This is both with regards to investment and also requirements for work experience. There is a fear for the sector that a group of young people who used to be accommodated in secondary schools with that mixed economy of qualifications, will not have anywhere to go, because the requirements for T levels at college are quite high. There is concern about the disenfranchisement of that group of young people who are not necessarily going to have any qualifications. We could end up with young people who become NEET because they have not got access to those and vocationally based courses that we used to be able to offer.  **EPHA**  HPK mentioned the teachers pay increase still continues to have an impact on school finances and anticipated increase for support staff again, which was very welcomed for schools but does not attract any additional funding. This therefore puts a huge pressure on school budgets, and schools are having to look at ways of balancing the books including reducing staff. There is a strain for both adults and children along with the minimum wage increases, which are likely to have a negative impact on school budgets.  We agree with CH with regards to the volume of complaints received. We are running free training, which includes complaints, training for staff and governors, and subsidies for coaching and counselling where there is a need. PHK expressed thanks to the Education Task Force for funding our recent annual small schools Headteacher Conference which was well attended and appreciated by those Heads. We are looking forward to the details and roll out of the ESSET Outreach offer.  **ESSET**  SW reported for us it is numbers of pupils and the demand and tribunals for places in the school staff recruitment which is becoming more challenging. SW stated Amazon are offering great work experience and supermarkets are offering term time jobs only along with decent discounts. We too have issues with complaints and parental expectations. We also have some issues with support from health for more tricky special needs children.  **PRUs**  JB informed we have just received a second new build and are operating out of two purpose-built provisions. We are still working through a backlog of permanent exclusions to bring into our centres. In the background we are also working with Ralph Holloway and his team on developing an Outreach offer, and hope that will start in the Spring term.  PC stated we are very much looking forward to engaging with the Outreach support work. PC will be pushing to do some work with primary in the North East and Mid. We continue to be oversubscribed and look forward to conversations with PL and CH about how we can reduce permanent exclusions.  **Early Years – Nurseries -**  no report.  **ESGA**  RB reported we have our meeting with PL on Monday over coffee and a chat. Attendance is looking good. In February we have our Conference, and along with CK have booked Bobby Seagull as our guest speaker and are looking for someone from the NGA as a guest speaker. Concerns are the same.  **Unions**  JF reported the funding situation is not good for the future. There are still a lot of issues and difficulties with staff morale.  **Unison**  MS reported about staff retention and impact on pupils. There is difficulty when staff are being paid more in the private sector than the public sector. We will be watching with interest on the school meals and impact on that. Concerns are the same as everyone else has said.  **Church Rep**  JS had sent apologies. Charlotte Little was welcomed to her first meeting as the new church representative. Comments have already been circulated about the increase in complaints for our school leaders which has trebled. Also, the wellbeing of our school leaders is a concern when they are trying to manage their situations.  **High Needs Review Sub-Group**  This group had not met.  **Finance Review Group**  Meeting was held on 13th September 2023.  Forum should note Terms of Reference for both HNRG and FRG.  Note the Agenda items 3, 4 and 8A.  Minutes at Agenda Item 8a  All were happy with these.  **Early Years Sub-Group** –  No minutes available in time for this meeting of 21 September 2023  **Any Other Business**  None. |
| **9.** | **Minutes of 27th September 2023 (Ruth Bird)**  The minutes were accepted as a true record of the discussions held. There were no matters arising. |
| **10.** | **Minutes Action Log (Yannick Stupples-Whyley)**  There are two items:  Early Years, Carolyn Terry   1. To bring proposals for allocating the surplus balance to the July / September meeting. YSW stated the Authority is reviewing the final adjustment for 2022/23 and will update Forum at the January meeting. In progress. 2. Cost benefit analysis of underspend proposals. This is still in progress. |
| **11.** | **Forward Plan**  YSW read this out and confirmed the dates of future meetings.  Regarding the January 2024 meeting, JF suggested after the report from Early Years, to have an update on funding levels being proposed by the DfE.  YSW confirmed they will be part of the DSG budget paper in January.  **Recommendation**  The Forum noted the dates of future meetings and that additional items as proposed by Schools Forum are included in the Forward Plan. |
| **12.** | **Any Other Business** - None. |
| **13.** | **Chair’s Closing Comments (Ruth Bird)**  RB thanked everyone for attending. Have a nice Christmas and see you in January 2024. |
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|  | **Date of next meeting – Remote, via Microsoft Teams.**  **Wednesday, 10th January 2024 at 8.30 am.** |