

SCHOOLS FORUM
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 July 2024

<u>In attendance</u>	
<u>Chair and Vice Chair</u>	
John Draper	Headteacher – Swaythling Primary
Harry Kutty	Headteacher – Cantell
<u>Primary Schools</u>	
Peter Howard	Headteacher – Fairisle Junior
PK Macbride	Primary Governor – Bannister
<u>Secondary Schools</u>	
Jim Henderson	Headteacher Woodlands Community College
Roger Peplow	Governor St Georges
<u>Academy</u>	
Sean Preston	Hamwic Trust
<u>Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)</u>	
Debbie McKenzie	
<u>Nursery</u>	
<u>Special Schools</u>	
<u>Non-Schools</u>	
Rob Sanders	Diocese of Winchester
<u>Observers</u>	
Councillor Winning	Cabinet Member for Children and Learning
<u>SCC Officers</u>	
Steve Wade	Finance Business Partner
Clodagh Freeston	Head of Education and Learning - Education
Juno Hollyhock	Service Manager - Special Educational Needs and Disability
Robert Henderson	Executive Director – Wellbeing (Children and Learning)
Darrin Hunter	Early Years Manager

Apologies

Mike Adams	Headteacher – Bitterne Manor Primary School
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1. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 20th March 2024 be noted and approved as a correct record.

2. **STANDING ITEM: LA UPDATE ON DFE/ESFA FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Forum considered the briefing paper of the Finance Business Partner, giving an update on DFE/ESFA funding, particularly focusing on 2023/24 schools balances, 2023/24 Outturn DSG update and 2024/25 unallocated balance.

The Forum noted that the paper contained an indication of decisions which it would be asked to consider at the next meeting. It expressed the view that information should always be provided to the Forum in a manner to ensure that any decisions could be made with adequate time and information to fully consider all options.

The Forum noted that the Local Authority was responsible for managing surplus balances in maintained schools and that the costs of items such as Schools Licences and Schools Admissions were already allowed for in the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB).

In response to questions, the Forum was advised that a balance could be left in the CSSB and carried forward to be used to give schools more than the national funding formula in 2025-2026, say limited to 10% either way of that formula.

In response to questions, the Forum was advised that if £245k were to be allocated to three Headteacher Conference Groups then everyone should be able to benefit and they could hold the necessary detailed discussions with input from the Local Authority that would not be practical for the Forum.

It was agreed that the Finance Business Partner would bring to the next meeting of the Forum in September 2024 two papers on deficit funding and options for allocation of the surplus. The papers would set out all of the options and any restrictions on how money for schools in deficit can be spent together with a draft of an amended Scheme for Financing Schools so that the Forum could vote on how to proceed.

The Executive Director – Wellbeing (Children and Learning) confirmed to the Forum that the Local Authority expected all schools with budget deficits to have a recovery plan and that such plans would be reviewed to ensure they were viable. Valentine Primary School faced academisation and any deficit would need to be paid off but it was hoped that a local solution would be realised instead.

3. **SURPLUS FUNDING**

The Forum noted that in previous meetings that the topic of growth funding had been included in the agenda. It had since been identified that the Department for Education criteria to qualify as growth funding had not been met so this would be considered a surplus going forward. As such this would be carried forward to the next meeting.

4. **RELEASE OF FUNDS FROM THE CENTRAL SCHOOL SERVICES BLOCK**

The Forum was concerned that having noted at the previous meeting that a proposed restructure of the Education Service had been agreed there now appeared to be a further restructure in progress and consideration would need to be given as to whether the Forum would be willing to authorise release of the next tranche of ring-fenced funds.

The Executive Director – Wellbeing (Children and Learning) advised the Forum that he would welcome a formalised method of receiving feedback about the quality of the Education Service through the Forum or the Headteacher Conference Groups. The restructure had been driven by the Local Authority's financial position and need to address historic overspends and there had been a number of changes of post and removal of the post of Deputy Director of Education. The focus would always be to

support schools to deliver the best education, improve attendance and reduce exclusions. There was a need to improve educational outcomes and deal with deprivation to narrow attainment gaps and get all children ready for skilled jobs within the city. There would be efforts to achieve a consensus about adopting the Education Partnership model and returning SEND provision into mainstream schools.

There would be a general focus on transformation within the Local Authority and there was a hope that change could be driven in the next year. While the pace of change might cause some concern the Education Service intended to work collaboratively with schools, look at co-production and evaluate marketing strategies. Creation of a new post of an Interim Director for Transformation of Education would increase the capacity of the Service to work with schools and could be in place by September 2024.

The Forum was concerned about possible lack of transparency about how large transfers from the CSSB would be used to top up funding shortfalls in that process and how those funds were originally intended to be used. Schools in deficit might question whether they should receive those funds instead. It was noted that in the past there had been mixed messages from the Local Authority.

Councillor Winning, the Cabinet member for Children and Learning, acknowledged that the pace of change was rapid but that it was agreed that the culture must be right and it was acknowledged that services required improvement.

In answer to a question the Forum was advised that the money being requested under this item of the agenda was separate and additional to the transfer of funds for School Licences and School Admissions previously discussed at item 4. This transfer would fund existing services.

The Forum noted that past education budgets for Admissions had not been reviewed for several years and pressures from increasing costs of staff, appeals (such as panel expenses couple with increasing requests for interpreters) and copyrights (where the invoice from Government exceeded the allocated budget) had increased in the meantime.

The Forum agreed that given it was now difficult to ascertain how monies were spent in the past in the future there would be a need for openness and it was agreed that the Executive Director would provide the next meeting with a presentation covering the education budget, DSG, general fund, income, statutory responsibilities and how the money allocated by the Forum was to be used.

5. **HIGH NEEDS BLOCK**

The Forum considered the briefing paper of the Interim Head of SEND on 2024-25 High Needs Block Funding and Cluster Model Progress.

In answer to a question she advised that the number of children having to go outside the city had reduced but was still higher than planned. There were still insufficient special school places. Early intervention would keep children on the EHCP pathway so

they could remain in mainstream education. All existing EHCP funding remained associated with the child in question and would go to the school.

6. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND CLOSING REMARKS AND DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

John Draper announced that it was his intention at the next meeting to resign as Chair of the Schools Forum and asked all members to consider whether they would wish to stand for that role. He reflected that the members of the Forum now worked more collegiately and there was a better understanding of financial matters. Schools as a group seemed to be in a better place than before and he looked forward to receiving further information in the autumn.

The Forum expressed thanks to John Draper for his service as Chair over a number of years.

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 25th September 2024 at 4pm.