

SCHOOLS FORUM

MONDAY, 18TH NOVEMBER, 2024

Present:

Geoff Cherrill (Maintained Special) – **Chairman**
Patrick Earnshaw (Academies - Secondary) – **Vice-Chairman**

Kate Carter, TEACH Academies Trust, Academies - Primary
Esther Curry, Coastal Learning Partnership, Academies - Primary
Kate Curtis, Talbot Primary School, Academies - Primary
Sean Preston, Hamwic Multi-Academy Trust - Chief Financial Officer,
Academies - Primary
Heather Spring, Twynham Primary, Academies - Primary
VACANCY, Academies - Primary
Vacancy, Academies - Primary
Mark Avoth, Bourne Academy - Principal, Academies - Secondary
Michelle Dyer, Avonbourne Academies - Principal, Academies - Secondary
James Sankey, Corfe Hills School, Academies - Secondary
Ben Doyle, Principal - St Peter's School, All Through Academies
Russell Arnold, The Quay School - Headteacher, Alternative Provision
Academy
Chris Barnett, Deputy Head - St Edward's School, Maintained Secondary
Phillip Gavin, Christchurch Learning Centre - Headteacher, Mainstream PRU
Vicky Peters, Priory View Preschool, Early Years
Linda Duly, Cuddles Day Nursery, Early Years
Vacancy (2), Catholic Diocese
Richard Wharton, C of E Diocese Representative

Also in

Attendance:

Councillor R Burton, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
Councillor S Carr-Brown, Chair, Children's Services O&S Committee

**Officers in
attendance:**

Steve Ellis, Management Accountant - Education
Cathi Hadley, Corporate Director Children's Services
Chris Lee, Interim Head of School Inclusion
Sharon Muldroom, Interim Director of Education and Skills
Tanya Smith, Head of School Planning and Admissions
Nicola Webb, Assistant Chief Finance Officer

11 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence

12 Declarations of Interest

None

13 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 September were approved as a correct record.

14 Finance Update – 2024-25 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Budget Monitoring and 2025-26 Financial Settlement, and School Block Transfer to High Needs

The Assistant Chief Finance Officer presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The report provided the latest DSG budget monitoring for 2024-25, with the DSG funding gap estimated at £44.5m (compared with the budget gap of £28m) and an accumulated deficit at March 2025 of £108m.

Due to the change in government, there had been a delay in the DfE issuing the DSG information for 2025-26. General policy announcements had been made to enable local authorities to consider their local mainstream formula and whether any disapplication of the expected regulations would be needed. The report included consideration of the local mainstream formula and a transfer of school block funding to high needs.

The deadline for disapplication requests remained according to the usual annual timescale of 18 November 2024. The DfE had accepted that consultation with schools and Schools Forum would not have concluded by that date.

The Forum discussed how a 1 percent transfer would be allocated and it was considered that it would be difficult without more information to be able to show modelling. The Forum supported being able to see the values in order to help make a more meaningful decision and therefore requested that a paper outlining the method to allocate be brought to the next Forum meeting on 13 January.

The Forum was asked to note the information in the report, and specifically the request to the DfE to disapply aspects of the expected regulations for 2025-26 as follows:

1. To allow a transfer from the school block to high needs of 1%.
2. To enable all schools to contribute to a transfer to enable the minimum per pupil funding levels to be reduced by close to 1%.

Following discussion, the School Forum did not support the request to allow a transfer from the school block to high needs of 1%

Voting: 3 in favour; 10 against; 1 abstention

Although it was not supported, it was noted by the Forum that the Council would be putting in the request to allow for the 1% transfer.

15 5 Year High Needs Forecast

The Management Accountant for Education presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The Forum was informed that the report set out the detailed forecast for the high needs block (HNB) of the DSG in 2024-25 and the following 4 years. The in-year shortfall in funding next year (2025-26) was forecast to be £60.2million before any contribution from schools block. A further increase to £70.7million in 2026-27 was expected before the increases to the shortfall begin to slow in 2027-28 and 2028-29. The Forum was advised that the cumulative deficit at the end of March 2029 was forecast to be £384.7million, assuming support for the transfer from the schools block.

The Forum questioned whether the Council had been able to discuss with the government the risks associated with the deficit and the impact on the long-term picture and what can and can't be allowed. There were ongoing conversations with government on this issue. A local MP had written to the Secretary of State for Education. In terms of the statutory override, it was anticipated that this may be extended beyond March 2026 as it would take some time to resolve the issues. The current issue was that local authorities were not allowed to borrow for revenue costs and therefore most of this was being funded by cash reserves. The immediate issue was that the cash reserves were likely to run out during the next financial year. A potential option to address this would be to change some of the rules around revenue borrowing.

It was noted that there needed to be some support to resolve the immediate issues until the expert panel had made its recommendations.

The Forum noted the current and forecasted positions.

16 Early Years Single Funding Formula 2025-26

The Head of School Planning and Admissions presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'C' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The Forum was advised that, based on a principle-based consultation, this report sets out a recommended early years single funding formula (EYSFF) for the financial year 2025/26. The recommendation demonstrated a balanced position of the funding available for distribution to the early years sector. It included support for disadvantaged children and those with additional needs and funding required for central Council functions.

A principles-based consultation reflected that the Department for Education had yet to release local authority funding rates. It was anticipated that details would be announced by mid-December. In the meantime, the Council held a consultation following agreement from the Early Years Sub-Group that an early principle-based consultation with the sector was preferred (i.e. as opposed to waiting for the DfE announcement). Consultation with the sector was held during October and closed on 5 November. 12% of providers engaged with the consultation. Overall, early years' providers were supportive of the proposed principles set out for the 2025/26 EYSFF.

It was suggested that the low response rate was thought to just be a reflection of people not having the full details for what they were being asked to comment on

RESOLVED that Schools Forum recommend the principle-based proposal for the 2025-26 EYSFF to Council.

Voting: Unanimous

17 Schools Forum Membership

It was noted that there were now six vacancies on the Forum. Members were asked to go back to their groups to seek nominations and volunteers for these positions. It was noted that it was important that these be filled in order to ensure all relevant groups were covered in the Forum membership.

18 Forward Plan

The Forward Plan for the Forum was noted.

The Forum was advised that an information sharing agreement had been circulated to all schools in order to help provide clear data by phase, sector and locality. This would be brought to the next Head Teachers meeting.

19 Dates of Future Meetings

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 13 January

20 Any Other Business - Innovation Fund

The Interim Head of School Inclusion presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appear as Appendix 'D' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. This item was included in agreement with the Chair as an additional item of business. The Forum received a summary presentation of the School Feedback on the Innovation Fund

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proposals. The Forum was informed that overall based on the Proposals provided in the presentation there was some support from schools to proceed with the proposals as a package of support. However, there were a number of schools who indicated that they may support the proposals but there were a number of concerns raised.

The Forum discussed the need to do something to make all mainstream schools more inclusive. It was noted that some of the proposals would be able to go ahead regardless of the level of transfer. This was seen as an invest to save initiative. If things continued as they were, the deficit would rise faster than the proposals outlined within the 5-year High needs report.

In response to an enquiry, it was confirmed that the training costs would be paid for and training provided to schools without an additional cost.

The Forum also enquired about the recruitment of the Inclusion Consultants and on what basis this would be. It was suggested that with short term contracts it may be difficult to recruit the right people and limit the recruitment pool.

An issue was raised that taking funding from mainstream would limit the ability for schools to provide SEND support and support for inclusion

The Forum noted that the costing of £2.8 million was partly through the Innovation Fund and that ongoing funding of roles would come from the 1% transfer moving forward. Schools would effectively be providing the funding for this moving forward. It was expected that this would contribute to a reduction in pupils being educated outside of local area and in high-cost provisions. There was some support in the broadest notions for young people staying within the system and saving money by them not moving out into high-cost provisions.

It was noted that this was brought to the Schools Forum in the interests of being open and transparent to facilitate a discussion. The Forum acknowledged the work of the Council in terms of coming up with creative plans to address inclusivity across BCP and the openness and transparency in bringing this to the Forum for discussion, to address things moving forward.

In light of this the Forum requested that a more detailed plan about the proposals and costs would be put in place and reported to the Forum at its next meeting on 13th of January to enable the Forum to make recommendations on the issue.

Duration of the meeting: 10.00 - 11.00 am

**Chairman at the meeting on
Monday, 18 November 2024**