



**CITY OF YORK SCHOOLS FORUM
Minutes of the Schools Forum meeting
held on Thursday 23rd January 2025
at 8.00am at Leyes Building**

Present:

Dave Hewitt (Maintained Secondary Headteacher Representative) Chair, Jemma Dunne (Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative), Andrew Daly (Academy Representative), Helen Winn (Academy Representative), Mark Hassack (Academy Representative), Steve Lewis (Academy Representative), Gail Brown (Academy Representative), Helen Dalby (Academy Representative) Adam Booker (Special School Representative), Ken Merry (16-19 representative)

In attendance:

Maxine Squire (Assistant Director, Education and Skills, CYC), Richard Hartle (Principal Accountant, CYC), Rachel Lanzilotti (School Improvement Advisor), James McGann and Helen Marshall Groot (Head of Governor Services, CYC, Coordinator and Clerk)

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

Lamara Taylor (Maintained Primary Representative) and Chris Nichols (PRU Representative).

3. Minutes of the School Forum Meeting 17 October 2024

Previously distributed.

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed to be a true and accurate record and were duly noted as approved.

4. Matters arising

a) Academy member – Update from YSAB

Andrew Daly to confirm to clerk.

b) Danesgate Outreach Model – Update from Chris Nichols

Chris Nichols had sent apologies and an update would be shared for the next meeting.

5. Schools Forum Forward Plan, Operation & Good Practice Guidance: Self Assessment Update

Previously distributed.

The Chair thanked Chris Nichols and James McGann for supporting the self-assessment. The website had been reviewed and relevant up to date information was in place. Recommendations to the Forum were noted;

- Utilisation of online platform Decision Time for sharing agenda and documents with Forum Members. It was noted that documents would continue to be shared publicly in advance of the meeting date via the Schools Forum page on the CYC website.
- Consideration of Forum meeting location considering the possibility of public observers.
- Minutes to be publicly shared within three weeks of the meeting date
- Induction pack to be created

In terms of representing the peer groups, it was noted that the primary and secondary maintained heads met regularly and shared meeting packs. Academy members provided mixed feedback and it was agreed that groups being represented received full feedback from meetings and any decisions made.

Action: Clerk to set up Schools Forum members on Decision Time.

6. Draft Constitution document

Previously distributed.

The Chair explained that following the good practice guidance it had been agreed that the constitution was due for formal review. The draft constitution had been shared and the Chair talked through the legal basis and purpose of School Forum along with the proposed membership structure, which included the additional academies member (to be confirmed). The constitution codified the good practice that subgroups would determine selection/election of members in their category. Appointments to the forum had a term of office of three years. It was noted that attendance had improved significantly over the previous year however, contained within the constitution was the disqualification of a member after failure to attend three consecutive meetings. Voting rights would continue to be dependent on the item and may be restricted to member categories.

Maxine Squire explained that Diocese of York Education Trust had approached the Forum requesting a representative member through their role as a body that has schools in the city. This was to have an opportunity to understand what was happening with school finance and share diocesan information. Maxine added that a formal invitation for a member to join from DYET would also require that the forum then extend a member role to the Catholic Diocese of Middlesbrough.

Members agreed that faith schools were well represented on the forum through existing membership. It was positive that the DYET wanted to engage with the wider city and forum members made a commitment that those representing church schools would ensure information was fed back. It was noted that all the forum information was in the public domain and representatives could attend, as meetings were open to the public. Maxine also explained that reintroduction of formal meetings between Diocese and Local Authority had been suggested to support the element of information sharing.

Decision: Forum members approved the formal constitution as presented.

Agenda items were taken out of order

9. SEND Banding – Update from Working Party

Previously distributed.

Maxine Squire explained that, as discussed at previous meetings, the working party had met twice to progress the work on SEND banding. Maxine proceeded to talk through the full proposal and rationale as outlined in the paper.

The current mainstream banding was broken down into sub bands however some were not providing the resource to aggregate in order to meet need and this was creating extra work for the panel appealing and reviewing banding decisions.

The proposal was to remove the sub bands and create new banding descriptors supporting inclusive mainstream provision with a focus on resourcing provision to meet need. Designed to align with the government narrative and report published by Public Accounts Committee the proposal would see an aggregation of resource rather than resourcing individual plans. This reflected a sensible approach based on what was known of the limitations of the current banding and consideration of providing an uplift into mainstream which was a safety valve commitment.

Maxine explained that a similar review of banding would be required in special schools who had more complex divisions in the banding. This required a more consistent methodology of what to commission and how that was resourced.

The current financial settlement around SEND was not sustainable however SENDCOs were positive about the current banding descriptors identifying need and the suggestion would be to supplement the band descriptors with a document outlining a range of options of provision that would meet the need. This would bring the focus on what provision can be delivered in inclusive mainstream, and then what sat above that. The financial envelope would not be set for the Exceptional band, as the highest level of need requiring significant support and beyond what could be expected from inclusive mainstream.

The proposal represented a move back to the intentions laid out in the Children and Families Act and SEN code of practice. It was noted that the YSAB SEND subgroup had engaged in discussions about a city wide joined up approach and establishing a clear description of what inclusive mainstream education looked like in York.

Maxine continued that engagement had taken place with the Parent Carer Forum with the main feedback being the lack of confidence in the mainstream system, as the SEND offer was inconsistent across York. Parents wanted a system where, regardless of the school or year group, teachers were all working consistently with kindness and empathy with children with SEND.

A forum member asked whether there was potential with the suggested unlimited funding bracket for exceptional provision that parents/ carers may believe that there was no limit to the funding that was available for individual children. Maxine responded that

each of the three band would contain descriptions of the type of support the funding could be used for - to meet a specific identified need in order to support educational progress. The majority of children falling into exceptional would most likely be in special education.

Forum members briefly discussed the cost of children going out of city for special provision and supported the prospect of clearer messaging of what can be provided in York.

A forum member asked about the SEND contingency fund remaining. Richard Hartle explained that fund picked up element 2 in those mainstream schools that have a disproportionate number of children with SEN and would not be affected by any changes to banding rates.

In response to a query Maxine explained that existing EHCPs would remain on the current banding with the proposal that new EHCPs from September would be under the new banding, and all EHCPs moved over gradually over the following year through the annual review process.

It was highlighted that the focus was to get the descriptors of provision right, and when children do and do not need the support of additional adult (for example intimate care needs and specific interventions). The funding was never intended to support every SEND child with a teaching assistant. It was important to get Section F of the EHCPs right looking at what the specific barriers there were to making educational progress. This would be a system wide piece of work involving the Educational Psychologist team, SEN team, Social Care, NHS and parents ensuring everyone used the same parameters.

In terms of next steps, Maxine explained that the forum working group would pass the draft provision statements on to the YSAB subgroup before returning the forum in May for final approval. CYC communication team had been contacted to put in place a comms plan.

Forum members were in agreement that the work on SEN banding was the right direction of travel and welcomed receiving final plans in May.

10. Safety Valve Monitoring Report

Previously distributed.

Maxine Squire presented the Q3 monitoring report, highlighting that 2025-26 was the final year of the Safety Valve agreement. As briefly discussed at the previous meeting, the Q3 report had indicated the proposal of disapplication from schools block to reinvest funds back into school and support inclusive mainstream provision. Members were all aware of the broader system issues and the costs for schools to put provision in place.

Richard Hartle explained that, looking at the high needs settlement, need was increasing at a faster pace than funding therefore York was unlikely to hit Safety Valve balance by the end of the agreement and therefore all options must be considered.

In response to a question about top-slicing funding from the schools block to support high needs expenditure, Richard explained that the proposed percentage would be 0.5% from all schools which would be retargeted back into the mainstream school system. The earliest that this could be introduced would be the 2026-27 financial year. Modelling would be undertaken and shared with the forum and all schools. This would also include DfE guidance on the disapplication process if the forum did not give approval.

Forum members were in agreement that it was important that sufficient time was available for a full and frank debate.

A forum member asked what information the modelling would provide. Richard responded that there were two elements, firstly what financial impact it would have on current year individual school budget allocations (assuming a similar settlement for 2026-27) and secondly what that funding, c£650k, would then be used for based on need, adding that it would be ringfenced and go back into mainstream.

Forum members from all provisions discussed the current budget constraints and the need to make efficiencies. While it was important to address the needs of funding SEND, it could not be ignored that money in schools was used for staffing, and it was necessary to accept that 0.5% would equate to a reduction in staff.

In response to a question Richard explained that the disapplication would need to be applied for annually.

A forum member queried whether reducing the money spent was a more sensible approach than funding to provide a new service. Maxine explained that, nationally, the only way to reduce expenditure on SEND was to reduce the number of EHCPs. After the 0.5% there would still be a gap on current expenditure however the intention and theory was to provide headroom in the high needs budget to invest in activity to reduce higher cost spend, and this would have to be demonstrated to DfE.

Andrew Daly highlighted that to be informed enough to frame the debate the work of the YSAB subgroups would need to come in as wider consideration would be required such as demographic changes and school spaces. It was a question of whether the city was delivering state funded mainstream education in most efficient way.

The next stages were noted; first stage of modelling would be presented at the May meeting, to be followed by a detailed discussion in July and decision in autumn.

Helen Dalby provided brief overview of how the funding from the disapplication in Middlesborough had been used, as well as the impact and success.

Maxine Squire left the meeting 9:15am

Request for feedback to DfE

The Chair explained that the forum had been invited to provide feedback on Safety Valve which would be an online discussion, and invited colleagues to join. Andrew Daly and Helen Winn agreed to participate and the Chair would circulate available dates.

7. Schools Budget and Dedicated Schools Grant for 2025/26 – including central services block

Previously distributed.

Richard Hartle assumed that colleagues had read the paper, and briefly highlighted the key headlines. The table in paragraph 7 provided the breakdown of DSG funding blocks and percentage increases. For the schools block there was an average 1.1% per pupil increase across York, compared to 1.6% nationally, a 4.3% underlying increase for early years funding and 6.6% increase for high needs (noted as lower than the annual 8% increase over recent years).

With regards early years, following agreement by the forum the decision had been taken that there was no need to consult with the sector, however following the release of the rates a LA decision was taken to provide information to the whole sector. Consultation had been run in December with only one response received regarding the disparity of base rates for under 2s. It was noted that there was no flexibility as age groups were ringfenced.

The mainstream school funding formula factors had been set out in Annex 1, along with explanation of how the pupil growth fund worked in Annex 2.

In relation to the recommendations:

Members of the forum noted the mainstream school funding formula factors and values for 2025/26, as set out at Annex 1.

Members of the forum noted that capping will again be required to maintain pupil growth fund expenditure within the cash limited budget.

Members of the forum had no additional comments on the LA's proposed Early Years funding rates for 2025/26.

Members of the forum had no additional comments on the LA's proposal for managing the 20% reduction in funding for historic commitments within the central school services block.

Members of the forum confirmed their continued agreement to maintaining the contribution to LA centrally retained budgets at the level of the on-going central services grant.

It was noted that the Council Executive had met on 21st January. Any comments or issues resulting from the budget would however be fed back to members prior to budget council on 27 February.

8. Early Years Entitlement Rates

Covered under item 7.

9. SEND Banding – Update from Working Party

Agenda item taken out of order

10. Safety Valve Monitoring Report

Agenda item taken out of order

11. Any other agreed business

There were no items of other business.

Date and time of meetings for the current academic year:

Thursday 8th May 2025 8am

Thursday 3rd July 2025 8am

It was agreed that the meetings for the remainder of the year would take place at the Leyes Building.

Action: Clerk to update website with correct details.

Meeting closed 9:27

Minutes to be approved at the Schools Forum meeting on 8th May 2025