



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), Lamara Taylor (Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative), Andrew Daly (Academy Representative), Jordan Cairns (Academy Representative Substitute), Mark Hassack (Academy Representative), Gail Brown (Academy Representative), Ken Merry (16-19 representative), Chris Nichols (PRU Representative)

In attendance:

Cllr Robert Webb (Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education), Maxine Squire (Assistant Director, Education and Skills, CYC), Richard Hartle (Principal Accountant, CYC), Matt Smith (Headteacher Huntington Secondary School) and Helen Marshall Groot (Head of Governor Services, CYC, Coordinator and Clerk)

1 Welcome / Apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Adam Booker, Steve Lewis, Claire Rigden, Helen Dalby, Jonny Uttley, Helen Winn (Jordan Cairns noted as attending in substitute)

2 Minutes of the School Forum Meeting 23 January 2025

Previously distributed.

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

3 Matters arising not otherwise on the agenda

Schools Forum feedback to DfE on Safety Valve

The Chair explained, by way of update from the previous meeting, that feedback via an online meeting with a representative from ISOS had been provided on the DfE Safety Valve funding by himself, Andrew Daly and Helen Winn. It was noted that ISOS had worked in partnership with DfE on the review of Safety Valve and it was not currently clear if the final report would be publicly published. ISOS had also completed a recent independent report on SEND. Maxine Squire explained that CYC would be used as a case study of best practice in the report if published.

Jemma Dunne entered the meeting 8:05

4 Poverty Proofing working group bid
Previously distributed.

The Chair introduced Matt Smith, Headteacher at Huntington Secondary School, and invited him to present the paper on poverty proofing.

Matt Smith explained that as part of the York Schools and Academies Board (YSAB) working group with a remit to address the disadvantaged gap across the city, poverty proofing had been a subgroup of that focus.

Matt Smith highlighted key aspects of the report, explaining that there was a significant knowledge gap in York schools of what it means to experience poverty. There was considerably more work to do to support schools not to exclude or treat differently those pupils with less financial resource and schools must respond to voices of those with lived experience of poverty. Matt Smith explained that Huntington School had commissioned a poverty proofing audit from Children North East (CNE) which had been a hugely beneficial process for the school and had generated a five year plan to action. Recommendations from the CNE had fed into work around belonging and inclusion, and had become a central feature of the School Development Plan.

Matt Smith outlined the proposal focused on a central remit of breaking the relationship between income and educational outcomes. The pilot phase would include six York schools which would build and train a team to facilitate poverty proofing team audits. In addition, the working group had identified the importance of evaluating impact, and had enlisted the support of York St John University to provide a rigorous evaluation approach. As part of the pilot, CNE would take all six audits and provide a summary of themes across the city so that educational leaders could reflect and move forward.

Two cost proposals had been provided for a full and abridged audit being requested from the Schools Forum, though work would continue to secure additional funding from other sources.

Andrew Daly explained that the remit of the YSAB working parties was to each provide information which would allow the Schools Forum to make decisions in terms of real actions. Archbishop Holgate School (AHS) had also commissioned a poverty proofing audit and the outcome had been transformative in terms of approach.

A forum member asked in what way had the work changed approaches for AHS and Huntington. Andrew Daly explained that the audit had generated a comprehensive and thought provoking report, going on to provide examples relating to attendance, uniform and school trips. While there was a balance to be had it had provided useful ideas of how a school could move forward. Matt Smith added that the recommendations took real account of student, parent and staff voice and signposted to effective resources to support work and actions.

A forum member asked if the six pilot schools had been identified and, in terms of sustainability, whether the work could be spread wider across York. Matt Smith explained the focus of the training aspect of phase 1, which would allow phase 2 to utilise the training approach and make the project sustainable in the city.

Maxine Squire explained that the Human Rights Board had expressed an interest in the project. As would be explained in a later agenda item, the direction of travel was to start thinking about York as four broad neighbourhoods, each with different needs. There was currently no rich data about lived experience of certain people in the city, including those living in poverty. A brief discussion took place relating to the disparity across different areas of the city.

A forum member highlighted that two positive experiences of the audit had been presented from secondary schools and asked if there were any examples of how the process worked in primary settings. Mr Smith explained that CNE had experience running the audit with primaries, however had conducted none in York, agreeing it would be helpful to have case study.

Ken Merry (post 16 representative) expressed an interest in York College being involved as it would be beneficial to have the broad understanding across all ages in education. Maxine Squire highlighted that NEET (young people, age 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training) were more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A forum member asked if this CNE model of training up colleagues was based on another successful model elsewhere. Matt Smith responded that this pilot was a model that CNE wanted to develop. It would create a 'York Hub (a group of local leaders who would be trained and have capacity to facilitate the audits) which would put the work into the hands of city to then extend a wider reach. In response to a further question it was anticipated that all schools could be supported in three to five years.

With regards the funding request Andrew Daly explained that YSAB had established seven task and finish working groups at the start of the academic year, and the forum would receive reports from all of these groups, however the majority would not be asking for funding, providing the example of the groups looking at demographics and fair admissions. Recommend change may be in the form of process however no cost.

A suggestion was raised to contact Joseph Rowntree Foundation to request funds and several members agreed that there were a number of philanthropic organisations who would be keen to support such a project.

Matt Smith was thanked for his presentation and left the meeting at 8:22

The Chair invited opinions on funding the project. In response to a question on the funding at the disposal of the Schools Forum, Richard Hartle explained that, as indicated in the budget paper shared in January, the available Central Services retained budget was £124k for 2025/26, though due to some other costs reducing this may be higher. In addition, there was a carry forward balance of unspent funds c£100k and if approved it would be these carry forward funds used to cover the poverty proofing project.

After further discussion it was agreed that if it was to progress then the full audit would offer more benefit and learning opportunities than the abridged. There would need to be a rigorous application process tying the responsibility to the school rather than to individuals.

The Chair invited members to vote on the request to fully fund the full audit option of the pilot 'Poverty Proofing the School Day in York'.

Decision : Forum members unanimously approved to fund the full audit of the poverty proofing pilot.

Andrew Daly provided a brief update and overview on the work of the other YSAB working groups. Significant and positive work was being undertaken collectively across all sections of education in York, which reflected many years of successful collaboration. York was a successful city however there was currently a negative rhetoric about the system, particularly multi academy trusts, with unacceptable personal attacks on individuals. The current negativity was not reflective of lived experience where both CYC and the MATs had worked collectively for the children of the city for a long time. Forum members discussed and agreed that positive news and collaborative work often sat under the radar and needed to be celebrated more to raise awareness.

Cllr Robert Webb (Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education), agreed that positive work should be publicised and recognised, for example taking Children Services from below good to outstanding and in the top 7% of LAs in the country. Press releases were shared however the press did not always pick up good news. Openness and repetitiveness was required to push the positives of what was being achieved as a city.

Forum members were in agreement to co-ordinate a positive press campaign. Andrew Daly to co-ordinate.

5 Danesgate Outreach Model –Chris Nichols

Postponed to later in the agenda.

6 SEND Banding

Previously distributed.

School Forum member received the paper which had been shared for information.

7 Safety Valve Monitoring Report

Previously distributed.

Maxine Squire explained that York had now entered the final year of the Safety Valve agreement. The monitoring report had been submitted and accepted securing the next tranche of funding. The main focus over the year would be on post safety valve options. In April 2026 the statutory oversight on DSG would time out and have to be publicly reported at which point the full extent of the deficits would hit. There was a £4b national deficit on high needs DSG which was unsustainable.

Chris Nichols entered the meeting 8:40am

Future accumulation of high needs must be covered by council budgets. The council had been sensible in spending and to get into position which met demand and while the situation had been carefully managed, the problem had not been solved. There was national

recognition however the changes required were not coming through at pace. The top slice and disapplication, which would be discussed under the next agenda item, was noted as a step that the majority of other LAs had already taken. York had resisted to date as it was acknowledged that it would put more pressure on a system that was already under pressure. There had been a clear steer from the DfE however that LAs would not be looked upon favourably if this step had not been taken. Maxine Squire added that it was important that any funds generated were used in a way to support a better system rather than putting money into a void.

Forum members extended thanks for the work completed under Safety Valve.

Danesgate Outreach Model

Chris Nichols provided a verbal update explaining that job descriptions for two posts had been written and shared to pay and grade, after which would progress to recruitment. In the interim a full model had been designed with provided more detail of roles and responsibilities and this was being finalised with an internal working party.

8 Post Safety Valve Planning

8.1 Background & Modelling for Schools Block top slice for High Needs

Previously distributed.

Richard Hartle presented the paper which covered the modelling of 0.5% off school budgets, potential timescales and technicalities of what was needed for approval with regards DfE regulations. This information was presented to provide an opportunity for colleagues to ask initial questions. Further detail would be provided in the report presented to the July Schools Forum meeting which would be the basis of a draft consultation to go out to all schools and academies. Consultation would run to end September with intention to bring to Schools Forum on 16th October 2025 where the LA would formally ask forum members to approve. If the proposal was supported it would move ahead, and if there was no agreement then the LA would pursue a decision from Executive Members on 4th November. If Schools Forum did approve then a disapplication request in regards to the minimal per pupil level (MPPL) would need to be submitted.

A forum member asked, if Schools Forum did not approve the proposal in October, what the timescale would be for submission. Richard Hartle explained that requests would need to be submitted to DfE by 18th November (based on the date set last year), and the final decision would take place as part of the normal budgeting process in January 2026. Should further information about the financial settlement from government be received by January that showed an improved financial position, then the decision could be reflected on, and changed.

Richard Hartle continued, explaining that the report had outlined the DfE regulations and Annexe 1 provided an extract from DfE guide about the background and process. The table included in paragraph 11 showed the position after the second year of the Safety Valve contribution, demonstrating York was still operating an in-year deficit of £1m. By the end of 2025/26 there would be a small surplus carried forward because of the Safety Valve contributions, however when those contributions ceased, there would be a significant shortfall.

Modelling 0.5% off schools block demonstrated that c£670k would be generated based on 2025/26 school funding allocations. Annexe 2 demonstrated comparison of a straight £30 reduction in Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) with no disapplication request which demonstrated an unequal distribution of impact, and the same AWPU reduction with adjustments to minimum funding guarantee, limit on gains and disapplication of MPPL which showed a fairer distribution.

Questions were invited.

A forum member commented that version 1 would disproportionately affect some schools and any solution would need to be equitable. A query was raised on whether models used by other LAs had been investigated. Richard Hartle explained that the majority of other LAs had followed a similar model.

A forum member asked whether the top slice would be an annual request. Richard Hartle explained that initially the intention was that it would be in place for both 2026-27 and 2027-28, though approval from Schools Forum would be required annually. It was noted that any future requests may be contingent on possible SEND reform. Maxine Squire explained that by using the funds generated to 'invest to save', the top slice may not be necessary in future years.

A forum member asked, given the current funding crisis, how schools would be able to afford the 0.5%. Richard Hartle responded that it was an understandable concern. It was hoped that early information would be provided from DfE to give clearer information on 2026-27 funding as that information and impact on funding position would be required for consultation.

In response to a further question, Richard Hartle explained that the situation would need to be reviewed in the round, considering both what the financial impact would be but also the potential impact of utilising that funding beneficially for the system. If the funds from the top slice were used for the benefit of mainstream schools currently managing expensive high needs pupils, this could have a positive impact on mainstream budgets.

8.2 School Clusters / York Inclusive Education Challenge

Previously distributed.

Maxine Squire presented the paper explaining that the intention was to consider how to support system change so that the funding generated from the disapplication was used to build resilience into the system. Through clusters that were based on areas, collectively decisions by both maintained and academy schools could be made based on what was needed in the neighbourhood.

In order to support decisions, CYC Business Intelligence Service had been asked to mock up area dashboards to show the detail of each area of the city; demographics, number of EHCPs, SEN support, health data and other issues neighbourhood issues, to help those areas to take decisions about what support was most needed in a systems focused way. Two elements of funding; from the top slice and SEN capital funding would then be used in the areas to make systemic change.

The report covered the mapping of the four neighbourhoods with c500k people in each (York Central, York North, York West and York East) and how that sat with the six cluster school model. The approach would be wrapped around the York Inclusive Education Challenge which was briefly overviewed.

Maxine Squire explained that the proposal was not finished, but was offered to the forum as a discussion piece in the spirit of co-production that could build on existing strong partnerships working across the city to get the most out of capital and revenue funds available.

Questions were invited.

A forum member asked if there was confidence that this would be an equitable model if funds were distributed equally across each cluster. Maxine Squire responded that the dashboards would be utilised to map need to ensure an equitable mix. Those areas with lower need may, for example, be in a better position to host capital development programmes and develop infrastructure.

A forum member asked how clusters would be managed so that every school had an equal voice. Maxine Squire responded that in-area teams would operate through a Headteacher board who may then set up specific task and finish groups which would focus on a particular inclusion lens, according to the dashboard.

A forum member asked how capacity would be built in for leaders to enact the proposal when there was an ongoing struggle to get intervention for children on a practical level day to day. Maxine Squire responded that it would be necessary to get coherence on how resources could be used in a more focused way in the public sector, including working with Public Health, Police, Early Help and the Wellbeing Teams. Examples of how this could work effectively in a neighbourhood were provided.

A forum member queried that with a six cluster model there would broadly be £100k revenue per cluster and asked whether the school wellbeing service would be paid from within that £100k. Maxine Squire explained that the funding for the school wellbeing worker service would be reviewed. There was a confirmed contribution from Health but also an overlap with the Wellbeing in Mind team.

A forum member asked if there was sufficient capital for allocation in each cluster area. Maxine Squire explained that there was approximately £3m capital (excluding section 106 funding) and a strategic plan for use of any capital was required.

Maxine Squire explained that the system could not sustain spot purchasing of alternative provision which was over double the cost when commissioned outside of the city. It would need to be assessed how the areas could build resilient infrastructure therefore providing schools with alternatives to options that were currently not affordable.

A forum member highlighted that approximately 80% of children in the city received a good education and good outcomes. There were issues in every school and it would be important

to ensure that the distribution was fair and equitable in targeting absolute need. Evidence of need and the current cost of AP would be helpful to consider in future discussions.

A forum member asked if there was a sense of the length of time the top slice would be required in order to achieve the desired outcome from the model. Maxine Squire responded that if invested in the right way, the funds would not be required past 2028. It was highlighted that three years previously YSAB had collectively developed the STAR centre at York High to reduce pressure on Danesgate. This had proven to be a successful project which had reduced permanent exclusions, and was now established for the future as Inspire.

A brief conversation took place about the importance of stakeholders understanding what was meant by ordinarily available provision.

Forum members thanked Maxine for the initial work on the proposal highlighting that the points raised regarding equity would need to be addressed and further clarity on whether there would be a four or six area cluster model was important. More detail would also be required regarding the funding allocation for each cluster.

An email would be sent to request colleagues' support for a working group, developing the cluster model further.

9 Any other agreed business

There were no items for AOB.

10. Date and time of meetings for the current academic year

Thursday 3rd July 2025 at 8.00am.

Meeting closed 9:34