

CITY OF YORK SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the Schools Forum held on Monday 13th April 2015 at 1.00pm

Attendance list:

Members:

Tracey Ralph	Maintained Primary Headteacher and Chair
Trevor Burton	Maintained Secondary Headteacher
Brian Crosby	Academies Representative
George Gilmore	Special School Representative
Nicola Fox	Maintained Nursery Representative
Caroline Hancy	Maintained Primary Headteacher
Tricia Head	Pupil Referral Unit Representative
Cath Hindmarch	Maintained Primary Headteacher
Lorna Savage	Maintained Secondary Headteacher
Bill Scriven	Maintained Secondary Headteacher (VA school)
Karen Tatham	Maintained Primary Headteacher

Observers / Advisors:

Richard Hartle	Head of Finance, City of York Council
Maxine Squire	Assistant Director, Education and Skills, City of York Council
Jon Stonehouse	Director of Children's Services, Education and Skills
Andy Wilcock	Category Manager, Procurement
Jeremy Smith	Schneider Electric
	Linda Brook

Salli Radford Coordinator and Clerk

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received, with consent, from Alison Birkinshaw – Further Education Representative, Andy Herbert – Maintained Primary Headteacher, Ken McArthur – Early Years Sector Representative and David O'Brien – Governor Representative. Cllr Looker was absent from the meeting.

3. Minutes of the York Education Partnership meeting of 8th December 2014

Previously distributed.

The minutes of the meeting of 8th December 2014 were agreed to be a true and accurate record and were signed by the Chair.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Role and responsibilities of the Schools Forum

Previously distributed. The information relating to responsibilities and membership requirements was noted. It was further noted that membership of the Forum would need to flex and be realigned as schools were re-categorised, with the Clerk agreeing to monitor this process and advise as appropriate.

Caroline Hancy joined the meeting at 1.10pm.

It was noted that terms of office for Forum members would be clarified by the Primary Heads' Forum and Secondary Heads' Group prior to the next meeting.

The Chair requested the inclusion of SEN provision and support as an item on the next agenda, agreeing to speak to Tricia Head and Jess Haslam prior to this.

6. Analysis of the 2015/16 Schools Budget

Previously distributed. Richard Hartle presented the report, drawing the attention of Forum members to Annex 1 which summarised the budgets described in the paper. Richard asked the Forum to consider the information provided and to request any further information they would like to receive prior to setting the 2016/17 Schools Budget.

In response to a question regarding the contingencies outlined in paragraph 7, in particular the split in allocation of General Schools Contingency between primary sector (£50,000) and secondary sector (£26,000), Richard advised that contributions were based on pupil numbers across the two phases but that, with the agreement of the forum, the fund was treated as one general contingency rather than two funds.

In response to a question regarding the continuing Carbon Reduction Commitment assigned to Danesgate, Richard advised that this was currently a statutory requirement for PRUs only, having previously been charged for all schools.

In response to a question regarding the costs for servicing the Forum detailed in paragraph 20 and whether these included any payment for headteachers' time to attend meetings, Richard advised that this was not included in the budget allocation. Richard confirmed that it was anticipated that all schools would at some time contribute to the forum and that the overall burden would be shared over time.

In response to a question regarding the level of the top-up threshold for SEN pupils, Richard advised that the threshold for PRUs would increase from £8,000 to £10,000 to match the existing threshold for Special Schools and ERPs from 1st April 2015. It was noted that the Additional Targeted High Needs Funding was allocated at the discretion of the Forum.

In response to a question regarding the trade union facilities time budget, Richard advised that this would be reduced to c50% of its 2013 level from September 2015.

In response to a question regarding the mental health support for schools referred to in paragraph 11, Richard advised that detail could be sought on this and included in the SEN information already requested for the next meeting.

In response to a question regarding the criteria for schools to access Nurture Group funding, referred to in paragraph 13, Richard advised that the LA currently supported two Nurture Groups. It was noted that Tina Hardman could provide further information.

In response to a question regarding the complex formula used to calculate the Additional Targeted High Needs Funding for Mainstream Schools and Academies, detailed at paragraph 10, Richard advised that this formula had been required from 2014/15 when previous arrangements involving schools bidding for contingency funds were ended. Richard advised that the new regulations were designed to recognise the variation in circumstances between schools as some schools experienced a high proportion of SEN pupils. It was noted that the new transparent formula had been agreed with the York Education Partnership and that schools with a disproportionate number of statements received additional funding.

In response to a question regarding the replacement of statements with EHCPs in the formula, Richard advised that the formula was based on the proportion of pupils requiring top-up funding, with this being any allocation over the £6,000 threshold.

In response to a question regarding the role of the Forum in considering specific allocations to individual schools, Richard advised that this was not permitted, though the Forum could consider outcomes as part of its consideration of the formula. It was noted that factors that could be taken into account were very limited, though some indicators could be adjusted. The meeting discussed this, with Richard advising that a very small number of schools were experiencing disproportionately higher numbers of high needs pupils. Richard further advised that the Forum could consider how to allocate funding through the main formula but could not take into account the number of statements or EHCPs as this was not permitted within the regulations.

In response to a question regarding the use of SEN data to allocate funding, Richard advised that only limited factors could be included in the main funding formula, including pupil numbers, FSM, EAL, low prior attainment and pupil mobility.

The meeting discussed SEN top-up funding, with Richard advising that previous consideration had shown that the current system worked for the majority of schools, with exceptional circumstances being covered by the additional formula used to calculate the Additional Targeted High Needs Funding for Mainstream Schools and Academies.

Richard acknowledged that the main funding formula could not specifically recognise SEN but, that the High Needs top up did take this into account.

In response to a question regarding a previous structure including a general SEN fund as well as an additional contingency, Richard advised that this dual approach was still operating as schools were funded for the first £6,000 of SEN support through the main funding formula, with costs above this threshold being met by the High Needs top up.

In response to a question regarding the value of the funds, Richard advised that this detail could be provided, though the High Needs top up fund was c£1.15M in 2015/16. This was discussed. The view was expressed that c£12M was allocated to schools to cover the first £6,000 of support per high needs pupil with no reference to the location of these needs.

The meeting further discussed the issues raised, with Richard outlining the mechanism by which basic and top-up SEN funding was allocated. It was noted that there was only limited flexibility in the mechanism allowed. The view was expressed that requests had been brought to the Schools Forum in the past and that current basic main formula high needs funding was not being allocated where needed.

Further discussion followed, with Richard advising that DfE analysis showed that FSM and low prior attainment indicators were reasonable proxies of SEN support needs for most schools, but the contingency recognised that despite this a small number of schools were less well served by the formula.

The Chair asked Richard to bring further analysis to the next meeting, whilst recognising that DfE regulations could not be changed.

In response to a question regarding the option to reduce the general SEN fund and lower the threshold at which the High Needs contingency could be accessed, the Chair suggested that the Forum be provided with illustrations of the impact on all schools. Richard advised that the level of funding maintained in the main funding formula worked well for the majority of schools, with the Chair requesting that this level of detail be brought to the next meeting.

In response to a question regarding Termination of Employment Costs detailed in paragraph 21, Richard advised that £383,000 had been retained from the DSG and that the LA could not increase this budget. It was noted that the fund covered redundancy and early retirement costs due to decisions made prior to 2013/14.

7. Funding for early retirement costs

Previously distributed. The Chair advised that, as secondary headteachers had been under-represented at the last meeting, reconsideration had been recommended. Richard Hartle presented the proposals, advising that the proposed contingency was for early retirement costs only and not redundancy costs.

The meeting discussed the proposals, with the Chair advising that the meeting that took place in June 2014 had expressed uncertainty about the costs of early retirement and what aspects of individual packages were included. Richard advised that this depended on individual circumstances.

The meeting further discussed the proposals, noting that the proposed contingency would be drawn from school funding and that a reluctance to establish a contingency was understandable as it would draw budget away from service delivery.

Richard advised that secondary headteachers had made representations to him following the decision at the last meeting. The view was expressed that schools were likely to move from achieving reductions through voluntary means to compulsory redundancies in the future.

The Forum agreed to uphold the previous decision not to create a contingency.

8. Review of 2015/16 Funding Formula values

Previously distributed. Richard Hartle presented the information, advising that this was being shared to stimulate debate in advance of 2016/17.

It was noted that York was the sixth-lowest funded LA based on national funding allocations for 2015/16, with a per-pupil allowance of £4,202.

In response to a question regarding the option of raising additional funds from Council Tax to add to this government allocation, Richard advised that this was possible though York did not pursue this option. Richard advised that the DSG was based on previous

LA expenditure on schools and had already been topped-up by c£4M by the LA when the DSG was first established.

In response to a question regarding additional funds contributed by the LA in addition to the DSG, Richard advised that the School Improvement Service and other support services were traditionally supported by the LA.

In response to a question regarding the allocation of any DSG funding to the LA for service provision, Richard advised that the de-delegations detailed in papers considered under item 6 illustrated de-delegations and central budgets managed by the LA. It was noted that central government provided DSG allocations for schools and that centralised support could be enabled by de-delegations. It was further noted that additional support and separate central functions were funded by the LA from its own revenue budget.

The meeting noted that the Schools Forum was the decision-making group for the DSG, whilst elected members were the decision-making group for the LA's own budget.

Richard referred the Forum to the Annex, which illustrated York's position in comparison to other LAs across a range of indices. It was noted that York's AWPU value remained unchanged. The meeting noted the high-level lump-sum payment made to York schools.

The view was expressed that Pupil Premium funding was not adequate to address need as public sector cuts impacted negatively on the poorest elements of society, with this funding requiring reconsideration. Maxine Squire advised that the Schools Forum would be challenged on attainment gaps if these were not being addressed.

In response to a question on the use of alternative indices to determine funding, such as the IDACI, Richard advised that York had traditionally kept funding allocations as even as possible. It was noted that, when last reviewed, it had been noted that the use of different indices would result in a different distribution pattern.

The Chair sought a view on next steps, with Richard advising that, following the forthcoming general election, a new National Funding Formula may be published and would be unlikely to permit much discretion.

In response to a question regarding the likelihood of Pupil Premium funding being continued, given that it was a coalition policy decision, Richard advised that it was unlikely to be removed though there was only one manifesto commitment to date.

In response to a question regarding the likelihood of continuation of the universal FSM entitlement for infants, Richard advised that, again, this commitment was not evident across all the major parties.

The view was expressed that there was inadequate understanding of the variety of issues facing schools across the city.

Richard asked the Forum to agree that if any additional resource became available it be targeted at the AWPU factors. Discussion took place, with the Forum noting that some schools were currently underfunded as needs were obscured by current funding criteria.

Jon Stonehouse advised that Cllr Looker would continue to lobby on behalf of York, as the city was not benefitting from “fair funding allocation”.

In response to a question regarding the increased allowance paid to secondary schools in comparison with primary schools for EAL pupils, Richard advised that this differential was in recognition of the greater degree of difficulty facing secondary schools in moving pupils forward. It was noted that pupils with EAL entering the UK education system within the last three years attracted additional funding.

The forum agreed to retain the current formula allocation pending any post election national formula announcement, with any additional resources by default being directed to the AWPU factor.

Andy Wilcock, Jeremy Smith and two other representatives of Schneider Electric joined the meeting at 2.20pm.

9. Water / sewerage billing review

Previously distributed. Andy Wilcock presented the proposal, advising that all schools were within the scope of the review. Jeremy Smith advised that Schneider Electric would provide audits and suggest cost-saving options, taking into account billing, accounts, water efficiency and conservation. Schneider would review data, visit sites and report back with recommendations in each case, with schools then being given the options to pursue the recommendations. Jeremy advised that Schneider would implement the work, making a charge from resulting savings, with no fees being payable until the point of savings being achieved. It was noted that fees were quantifiable and transparent.

Andy advised that the project had been approved by Legal Services and that Schneider had appointed a dedicated project manager for the LA.

Richard advised that the Forum was being asked to endorse Schneider’s approach to individual schools.

Andy advised that Gary Christie would lead on the project on behalf of the LA’s energy team, with Jacky Warren to provide follow-up.

The information was noted.

Andy Wilcock, Jeremy Smith and the other representatives of Schneider Electric left the meeting at 2.30pm. The meeting adjourned until 2.37pm.

10. Interim Commissioning Plan

Previously distributed. Maxine Squire presented the draft plan, which detailed the proposed move to sector-led school improvement arrangements. Maxine outlined the research that had been undertaken to determine what had and had not been successful in other LAs, with it being clear that the LA would need to invest in capacity to support sector-led improvement.

Maxine advised that research had identified what worked well in York and what needed to change. It was noted that a significant amount of DSG funding was currently used to support schools and that different models were in place across other LAs, with Teaching School Alliances delivering school improvement services in some areas and others focussing on cluster or phase networks.

If was noted that few LAs continued to maintain a large, subject-specific consultant team and that those that remained were under review. Maxine advised that school improvement partnerships were being developed in North Yorkshire and that the East Riding was using school improvement funds to pump-prime work amongst schools. It was noted that some York schools were working across LA boundaries as part of these emerging structures, with SLAs in place to enable this.

Maxine advised that the option of formation of a Schools Company had been considered, but at this time it was felt that the structures which currently existed through the School Improvement Commissioning Group, the clusters and the Schools Forum would be sufficient in the short term. Maxine advised that the Local Authority would continue to maintain a small central school improvement team to continue to deliver the LA's statutory duties, with this team to be funded from the LA's general fund rather than the DSG. It was noted that this would require a radical restructure of the existing team and that current strengths and structures had been considered alongside the key resources provided by the two teaching school alliances and their associated National Teaching Schools.

Maxine advised that cluster-led work was impacting positively and was enabling collaborative working, with this being reflected in comments in recent Ofsted inspection reports.

Maxine advised that the interim commissioning plan was providing structure that was simple, transparent and accountable as well as being designed to deliver positive results. The Forum was asked to consider the framework and associated costs, which included a saving of £160K against the DSG, various options about the use of this surplus were discussed including the option to be reallocated back to schools or clusters. The Chair commented that the reserve might usefully support recommendations arising from the outcome of the SEN place planning and spending review commissioned by the Forum.

In response to a question regarding the longevity of the proposed structure as schools required some certainty, Maxine advised that the proposals were designed to be sustainable.

The details of the interim commissioning plan were examined and discussed, including the work to be commissioned from the two teaching school alliances.

The Chair thanked Maxine for her research and development work and thanked the headteachers of the teaching school alliance schools for their support.

Maxine advised that it was proposed that the commissioning plan will be drafted each year and presented to the York Learning Partnership by the School Improvement Commissioning Group before being submitted to the Schools Forum for sign off.

The Forum discussed the option of topping-up cluster funding from £125,000 to £285,000 from the saving against the DSG, agreeing not to pursue this option as current cluster funding levels were adequate.

It was noted that the Schools Causing Concern budget held by the School Improvement Commissioning Group (SICG) had been under-spent during 2014/15 and that the surplus would be returned to the DSG.

In response to a question regarding capacity and the option of creating some spare capacity, Maxine advised of the need to invest in capacity to enable progress. Jon

Stonehouse advised that future discussions would be more straightforward and better-informed as new structures became embedded.

Richard Hartle advised that there were many uncertainties and suggested that an outline commitment be agreed as the plans would need to be revisited at a future date due to national turbulence.

The Forum discussed the draft plan, with Richard advising that a commitment could only be made for 2015/16 though the Forum could provide an indication of its future intentions. It was noted that longer-term commitment could be considered at any time.

The Forum further discussed the draft plan, with Maxine advising that there was considerable flexibility in the proposals. Given the volume of primary schools currently at Requires Improvement the Forum agreed to increase the proposed number of primary school-to-school support teams included in the draft plan by one. It was agreed that funding to support the interim commissioning plan would be provided from the DSG.

In response to a question regarding cluster funding, Maxine advised that the current top-sliced fund was c£125,000. It was noted that Bill Scriven would take a proposal to increase the number of clusters by one to establish a Catholic Cluster would be taken to the York Learning Partnership on 1st May. It was further noted that the cluster funding formula would be used to define cluster funding levels for 2015-16.

In response to a question regarding York Challenge Partner support for schools, Maxine advised that schools would be provided with one visit each year but could access further support via the LA's traded Services to Schools.

Linda Brook joined the meeting at 3.10pm.

11. New schools financial software

Previously distributed. Linda Brook invited feedback on the new school financial software and the reports that schools wished to extract from this. Forum members made suggestions for Linda to pursue.

In response to a question regarding information on Children's Centre funding, Jon Stonehouse advised that this could be provided by the LA, to include costs, use and outcomes.

In response to a question regarding the budget holder for the progress of vulnerable children, Jon advised that this responsibility sat with the Director of Children's Services.

Tricia Head left the meeting at 3.20pm.

Jon advised that further information on the Children's Centres could be provided, adding that consultations on a range of services were to be arranged.

The Forum discussed the reports they wished to access via the new software.

Linda Brook left the meeting at 3.25pm.

12. School budgets and balances monitoring – Spring term update

Previously distributed. Richard Hartle advised that the information had been circulated for information, asking whether the Forum wished to see this on a termly basis or at year-end outturn only. The Forum noted that academies were not included in the information. It was agreed that the information would be taken at the year-end only.

In response to a question regarding schools with a deficit budget forecast at the end of 2015/16, Richard advised that deficit budgets were approved by the LA and that an overview of these situations could be brought to the summer Schools Forum meeting. It was noted that some schools held cluster funds and that this might mask the true budget position.

The update was noted.

13. Schools Forum forward plan

Previously distributed. The plan was noted. It was agreed that Richard Hartle would update the plan to include consideration of SEN support in July 2015 and an update on School Improvement arrangements in December 2015.

14. Any Other Business

It was noted that governor representatives and the trade unions had requested to attend meetings as observers. It was noted that, as Schools Forum meetings were public meetings, there was no reason why they should not be invited to attend.

15. Date and time of the next and future meetings

7th July 2015
29th September 2015
14th December 2015

All meetings will begin at 1.00pm.

The meeting closed at 3.30pm.

Tracey Ralph
Chair

Date

ACTION PLAN FROM THE MEETING

Minute reference	Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale	Status
15	Review of membership to ensure compliance with regulations	Membership changes to reflect recent academy conversions	Salli Radford	7/7/15 and as an ongoing review	In progress
25	Clarify terms of office of Schools Forum members	Ensure that all stakeholder groups understand terms of office, that appointment processes are transparent and that succession planning is enabled	Chair of Primary Heads Forum and Secondary Heads Group	7/7/15	In progress
36	Information regarding SEN provision, including funding detail, is brought to the next meeting	Clarify funding mechanisms for SEN support across the city	Richard Hartle / Jess Haslam	7/7/15	In progress