

CITY OF YORK SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the Schools Forum held on Friday 3rd July 2020 at 9.00am via Zoom

Attendance list:

Members:

Trevor Burton	Academy Representative and Chair
Adam Booker	Special School Representative
Gail Brown	Academy Representative
Di Gomery	Maintained Secondary Governor Representative
Helen Gration	Early Years Sector Representative
Steve Lewis	Academy Representative
Lee Probert	FE Representative
Mark Richardson	Pupil Referral Unit Representative
Claire Rigden	Maintained Nursery Headteacher Representative
Jenny Rogers	Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative
James Rourke	Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative (Deputising for Debbie Glover)
Dee Statham	Academy Representative (VA)
John Tomsett	Maintained Secondary Headteacher Representative
Helen Winn	Academy Representative

Observers / Advisors:

Cllr Ian Cuthbertson	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education [from 9.14am]
Amanda Hatton	Corporate Director of Children, Education and Communities

Maxine Squire	Assistant Director, Education and Skills, City of York Council
Richard Hartle	Head of Finance, City of York Council
Salli Radford	Head of Governor Services, City of York Council, Coordinator and Clerk

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly Helen Winn and Mark Richardson who were attending for the first time, and James Rourke, deputising for Debbie Glover. Introductions were taken from all participants.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Brian Crosby – retiring Academy Representative, Andrew Daly – Academy Representative and Debbie Glover – Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative.

3. Membership update

Previously distributed. The update was noted.

4. Minutes of the York Schools Forum meeting of 6th February and 5th May 2020

Previously distributed. The minutes of both meetings were agreed to be a true and accurate record.

John Tomsett joined the meeting at 9.20am.

5. Action Plan and Matters Arising

There were no outstanding action points to report.

Matters Arising:

6th February 2020 – It was agreed that a report on the work of the f40 group would be taken to the next meeting.

5th May 2020 – There were no matters arising.

6. 2019/20 DSG outturn report

Previously distributed. Richard Hartle referred members to the final line of Annex 1, which recorded a significant cumulative deficit against DSG funding at the 2019/20 year end.

Richard outlined a number of planned underspends carried forward into 2020/21, including c400k remaining in the Early Years Block due to timing issues relating to anticipated claw-back and ESFA funding arrangements. It was further noted that funds remained in the Central Services Block relating to unspent SICF / School Improvement funds allocated on an academic year basis, with ring-fenced funds to be carried forward.

Richard advised that the High Needs Block included a cumulative carry-forward deficit of £6.251m. Concerns regarding sustainability were noted.

In response to a question regarding the recovery plan and whether it would be necessary to vire funds between blocks to support High Needs, Richard advised that costs would be analysed in order to identify more efficient ways to deliver support to young people. It was noted that the Inclusion Review would deliver this analysis but that in the meantime the Forum could consider the option to transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. It was further noted that the LA could request a transfer of 0.5%, with this request coming to the Forum for review. Richard advised that, should the request be refused or be above 0.5%, the LA could appeal to the Secretary of State for a final decision.

Richard advised that limited additional support might be available from the government and that Elected Members could assign budget allocation from general funds.

Adam Booker advised that the special schools partnership was well placed to manage the SEND population more effectively and would contribute to the response to increased budget pressure.

The Chair noted that any proposed virement of funds would need to be underpinned by sufficient detail when brought to the Forum. It was noted that any proposal relating to the 2021/22 budget would need to be initiated in September 2020.

In response to a request for clarification of process, Richard advised that the DfE had not requested a recovery plan from the LA due to a pending change to the regulations, though the LA was required to respond to DfE questions promptly. It was noted that a recovery plan would be required in time.

A Forum member observed that efficiencies totalling £6m would be difficult to comprehend, going on to ask which of the options or combination of options available the LA would be most likely to propose. Richard advised that efficiencies would be identified by the inclusion review. Maxine Squire further advised that the review would consider the level of in-year variance and the data collected by an analysis of EHCPs in order to understand the reasons for the significant variance, and was considering when it would be appropriate to build a case to request to cease EHCPs before the age of 25. Maxine outlined some background to the additional budget pressures already identified, advising of the need for greater understanding of changes to the landscape. The Forum noted that increasing demand from schools for statutory assessments impacted on the budget as each EHCP increased overall costs. Maxine advised of the need to consider what appropriate support looked like and whether this always required a statutory process.

Discussion followed, with Maxine advising that the LA would outline to the DfE the approach taken to manage pressures but would also need to point out that the system generated further pressures itself.

Helen Gration queried the Early Years Block adjustment lags and the point at which figures would be available to allow confirmation. Richard confirmed that the data would be available later in July. Helen went on to ask whether Early Years was included in the High Needs Block spend and whether this element would be significantly overspent in comparison to the carry-forward position, with Richard advising that the predictions were generally accurate.

Richard clarified that the only expenditure funded from the High Needs Block relating to Early Years was inclusion funding with a budget of £120k.

In response to a question regarding the number of children from outside York supported by the £1.8M out of area funding commitment, Richard advised that the average per-child cost ranged between £50k and £100k, and that the number of children supported was not significant.

Amanda Hatton sought to clarify the questions regarding efficiencies, advising that transport was being considered in detail and that the independent transport scheme was bringing a positive impact. Amanda advised that the LA was considering how to apply this and other initiatives to increase efficiencies.

The report was noted.

7. School Improvement Commissioning Fund Update

Maxine Squire provided a verbal report, advising that the Coronavirus pandemic had caused delays to some programmes and that the York Schools and Academies Board (YSAB) had agreed not to recoup funds assigned during 2019/20 but to allow this to be carried forward to support planned school improvement work during 2020/21. It was noted that the LA was working with the YSAB to allow a review of support needs at the beginning of the next academic year. Maxine advised that a full report would be brought to the September Forum meeting with an audit of spend during 2019/20 and would be followed by further discussion as required with the YSAB in order to plan for 2020/21.

In response to a question regarding the curriculum review at Danesgate and whether the curriculum and associated funding would be increased to enable provision to support those currently attending out of area facilities, Maxine advised that this was not within the scope of the review. Maxine provided further context relating to this group, with Mark Richardson advising that the review would consider costs of provision and transport costs associated with a non-traditional school day, with the aim being to better meet the needs of different cohorts.

The Chair noted that school improvement projects had been thrown askew by the Coronavirus pandemic, asking whether there was a timetable for new funding bids. Maxine advised that this information would be published at the beginning of the next academic year and that delays would be avoided where possible. It was noted that the LA was aware of emerging priorities and was keen for the YSAB to return to a normal cycle.

The Chair queried the emerging priorities, with Maxine highlighting the need to support children likely to struggle on their return to education, advising that some smaller teaching groups during the pandemic had benefitted some pupils. Maxine recommended a period of reflection on what had been learnt during the lockdown period.

John Tomsett, as Chair of the YSAB, highlighted the importance of assessing the priorities in the light of the pandemic and acknowledged that some pupils had engaged well during the lockdown period and had shown improved outcomes. John advised of the need to redirect funding as appropriate, with some priorities to be reassessed and potentially downgraded. Maxine advised that schools would be informed of this possibility and that the LA would make it clear that the YSAB would review and reprioritise as necessary. Maxine further advised of the need to capture evidence and to ensure that no children were allowed to fail when schools returned in September.

In response to a question regarding the strategy to increase online learning for those that engaged with this method of working, and whether this was being developed, Maxine advised that online learning was being discussed and evidence captured by the YSAB. Maxine further advised of the need to recognise that children were entitled, and required, to go to school, that children did not want to be socially isolated and that it was important to recognise that one-to-one provision did not fully prepare children for adulthood. Maxine stated that education that was over-personalised did not provide a clear route post 16 or 19 into adulthood and that children needed a better blend of learning. Maxine reassured the Forum that a range of approaches was being considered where appropriate and that some examples were available, with the LA keen to create a smooth transition pathway.

Adam Booker advised that the current situation offered an opportunity to repurpose the system following the experiences of closedown.

8. Inclusion Review update

Previously distributed. Maxine Squire highlighted the main points included in the report and invited questions. Maxine recognised that Early Years provision was not referred to but remained a crucial element of the review, particularly in relation to speech, language and communication needs which were supported in part by the inclusion fund. Helen Gration requested amendment of the report to reflect this.

Maxine stated that the review was moving into the final phase of its work, informed by the Local Area SEND Inspection in November 2019. Maxine advised that the resulting written statement of action had been judged to be fit for purpose and would drive improvement work as well as addressing the improvement areas identified by Ofsted. It was noted that the education team would work with health and social care to deliver the identified improvements and that EHCPs were currently overly dominated by factors relating to education. Maxine advised that the LA was refreshing the contribution that health makes to SEND children and work was beginning with colleagues in health to enable this to be taken forward. It was noted that the key partnership with parents would need to be reconsidered and refreshed and that York Inspirational Kids had been successfully commissioned to take on the parent participation and engagement role, representing a significant change. Maxine advised that since January 2020 the review had been working to understand the High Needs Block and how each EHCP was resourced at individual child level. It was noted that clear links between school expenditure and outcomes were being identified and areas in which SEND support was not delivering the strongest outcomes had been highlighted.

Maxine advised that Dan Bodey had refreshed the primary BAP protocols and would share this with schools before the end of the summer term. It was noted that Dan was also considering the primary behaviour support which was de-

delegated and would propose a different system as costs were currently not being covered.

Mark Richardson advised that Danesgate included a significant EHCP cohort, with there being a clear need to consider the identity of the school as there were currently, in effect, three schools within the Danesgate Community. Mark advised that he was considering the status of pupils as some attended Danesgate on dual placements. Mark outlined the work undertaken with the BAP, advising that culturally there had been a route to Danesgate then to Alternative Provision, with the aim of the new protocols being to empower schools. Mark referred to the £1.8m spend on out of area pupils, advising that this was being considered and would be made more efficient and effective. It was noted that a culture change would be required at the school and amongst the community and that the primary BAP had been highlighted as an area for further development.

Maxine highlighted the need to ensure that the right provision was in place for the right children, acknowledging some overlap between the three aspects of provision and the desire to ensure that the right children benefited from the right specialist support.

In response to a question regarding the evidencing of co-production across settings, Maxine advised that the LA was listening to the voice of children and that the Local Offer was ensuring that the voice of children and young people was carried forward into the process. Maxine advised that children had identified priorities for improvement in schools and broader life through the work being done by the Local Offer Officer.

In response to a question regarding increased involvement of health colleagues in EHCPs, which tended to be managed by education settings due to their ongoing contact with children, Maxine advised that the Local Area Inspection had helped with this and that specific actions around EHCPs had been identified. It was noted that the construction of each EHCP should include contributions from health and social care.. Maxine further advised that the Coronavirus pandemic had brought positive changes as the virtual processes had enabled more collaborative working.

In response to a question regarding the source of funding for aspects of support not delivered by schools, Maxine advised that this was drawn from the High Needs Block. It was noted that other financial contributions had not come through strongly unless the health care needs were dominant. It was noted that where therapeutic needs were identified the LA was ensuring that this was written into the EHCP and funded appropriately.

Helen Gration highlighted the need for a joint check at the two-year-old milestone, with Maxine advising that work was taking place to ensure that integrated checks were more effectively rolled out. It was noted that best practice had been identified in Early Years settings and that the intention was to continue to build from this.

9. Schools Forum forward plan

Richard Hartle outlined the forward plan:

September 2020

- 2021/22 budget preparation including the potential transfer to the High Needs Block
- Maintained school start budgets
- Maintained school 2019/20 outturn balances – delayed from July due to the pandemic
- Priorities and potential saving areas
- Update on the work of the f40 group
- Early Years summary of funding
- Early Years funding in the PVI sector (Helen Gration)
- SICF report and planning

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting would take place on 2nd February 2021 at 9.00am.

The meeting closed at 10.15am.