

CITY OF YORK SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the Schools Forum held on Tuesday 5th May 2020 at 9.00am
Virtual meeting facilitated through Skype

Attendance list:

Members:

Trevor Burton	Academy Representative and Chair
Adam Booker	Special School Representative
Gail Brown	Academy Representative
Brian Crosby	Academy Representative
Debbie Glover	Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative
Di Gomery	Maintained Secondary Governor Representative
Helen Gration	Early Years Sector Representative [from 9.35am]
Lee Probert	FE Representative
Claire Rigden	Maintained Nursery Headteacher Representative
Jenny Rogers	Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative

Observers / Advisors:

Cllr Ian Cuthbertson	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
Amanda Hatton	Corporate Director of Children, Education and Communities [from 9.18am]
Maxine Squire	Assistant Director, Education and Skills, City of York Council
Richard Hartle	Head of Finance, City of York Council
Jean Lewis	School Business Support Manager, City of York Council
Mike Barugh	Principal Accountant, 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.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from, Andrew Daly – Academy Representative, Steve Lewis – Academy Representative, Chris Nichols – Pupil Referral Unit Representative, Dee Statham – Academy Representative and John Tomsett – Maintained Secondary Headteacher Representative.

3. Covid-19 – discussion

The Chair invited comments and questions on the sole agenda item, the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on settings and options for future planning.

A number of points were made and queries raised by attendees. In summary, these focussed on the following areas:

Curriculum, transition and interventions

- The potential impact on Ofsted judgements of assessed Y11 and Y13 grades, particularly in schools which had been able to evidence rapid improvement up to the point of closure
- The challenge of planning for pupil transition into and between phases, with particular concerns for Y6 due to long period out of school
- The various approaches to remote learning for pupils with this being increased and feedback processes refined over time
- The variety of approaches to home learning amongst pupils was a general concern

- The impact on some pupils (including vulnerable groups) of a lack of access to IT equipment or broadband to facilitate home learning
- The extremely challenging assessment work to be undertaken for students in the English and Maths GCSE resit programme, due to the number of students working around the 3 / 4 grade boundary
- The challenge in evidencing the impact of interventions and projects funded via the YSAB due to school closures

Vulnerable pupils, SEND, pupil wellbeing and pastoral

- The challenge to schools in facilitating the provision of vouchers to families eligible for free school meals since closure, with initial engagement amongst families very low
- The impact the Covid Act in deregulating some aspects of NHS assessment processes for vulnerable children – this was being considered and planned for by LA officers
- The increase in parental anxiety focussed on SEND pupil post-16 transition
- The creative use of technology including Skype to facilitate SEND assessments
- The impact of the redeployment of colleagues in health services on assessment processes
- The general concerns relating to pupil mental health, particularly as the full reopening of schools was not anticipated in the shorter term

Logistics of wider opening

- The growth in pupil numbers across the three special schools would create additional challenge and would require additional provision from September 2020, regardless of physical distancing and other infection-control measures

- The challenges in recruiting teaching and support staff for September 2020
- Business continuity issues, for example contracts with suppliers including catering companies which would require ongoing monitoring and adjustment as schools moved to wider reopening
- Physical distancing (particularly in EYFS), deep cleaning and other infection-control measures which would present further challenge as the number of pupil attending schools increased
- The ongoing need for staff and pupils included on the “shielding” list to remain away from school as long as advised to do so and for their needs to be accommodated via alternative means
- Public Health advice had been very helpful and the helpline arranged by the LA appreciated by schools
- The collective approach being encouraged by the YSAB provided an opportunity to develop consistency and common agreements where possible
- Home to school transport was raised as a concern generally due to the potential impact of physical distancing on capacity and therefore costs

Financial

- Schools remained unsure whether significant fees paid in relation to 2020 exams would be refunded, though it was anticipated that this funding would be reallocated to support the assessment system to be developed to award grades
- Some schools had been able to make budget savings during the limited opening period, though these were often offset by other costs or by loss of income, with the final outturn impossible to predict at present
- St Paul’s Nursery had not charged fees during the key worker and vulnerable pupil provision period and this would impact significantly on income

- The impact of closure on post-16 providers in terms of lost income was significant and extended across a range of income streams

Early Years PVI provision

- PVI EY providers were experiencing significant stress due to changes to the government-funded furlough scheme and redundancies were anticipated
- A reduction in the number of children attending EY provision was anticipated in the future
- Discussion between the LA and EY providers was ongoing to help manage EY provision
- Helen Gration was able to offer support and advice going forward during a period of significant distress within the EY community

The Chair invited the LA officers attending to provide any further information to support discussion.

Amanda Hatton thanked all school leaders for working to establish new ways of working quickly and effectively. Amanda noted that the challenges had generated some improved working relationships and models. It was noted that work on the recovery phase was ongoing.

Amanda advised that the financial concerns raised had been noted and were shared, with the LA anticipating a deficit of c£20M in 2020/21. Amanda further advised that teaching and other relevant unions were meeting fortnightly with HR and Public Health colleagues. Amanda encouraged school leaders to refer to the public health helpline for advice on staffing as guidance was science-based and helpful.

With regards to recruitment, Amanda advised that there had been some positive moves across CYC in relation to key worker posts, with some agency staff converted to permanent posts including ten social workers. In addition, Assistant Director recruitment activities had been arranged.

It was noted that DfE guidance changed regularly and that this, along with the absence of some specific advice, had proved problematic. This had been fed back to the DfE. It was noted that the DfE had launched data collection with a 24 hour turn around and that the LA would continue to keep up pressure to ensure the context was understood.

It was noted that 454 laptops and dongles had been allocated to the LA for children, though there were currently c1,000 children assigned a social workers. Allocation of laptops would be prioritised for disadvantaged Y10s initially.

The Chair advised that fewer laptops had been provided than required to support Y10, with allocation being focussed by schools on those pupils without equipment at home. In response to a question regarding the allocation of laptops to pupils with a social worker even where a laptop was already available at home, Amanda advised that this was currently the arrangement, though the LA was working through the lists to check whether pupils already had access to a laptop. Amanda advised of the variety of issues to be taken into account to ensure assets were managed and distributed carefully. It was noted that Amanda was working on protocols with the regional DCS sub-group.

Discussion of the provision of equipment for disadvantaged pupils followed. It was noted that further work would need to be undertaken to ensure the scheme was effective. Amanda undertook to report back to the DfE that laptops without a dongle were not useful.

Richard Hartle provided an overview of the LA's financial position, advising that additional costs relating to the Covid-19 response would be significant and would present an issue going forward. It was noted that the LA continued to receive funding for educational provision and to distribute this as normal, with payments being brought forward where possible. Richard advised that Early Years funding presented a challenge and that this was being addressed issues alongside the DfE guidance. Richard further advised that maintained schools were being supported by the School Business Support and Schools Finance teams, which were advising on a number of issues relating to contracts and

procurement exercises. It was noted that school meals were a significant work area and that this would be reflected on further.

Mike Barugh advised that maintained school start budgets were due for submission against the background outlined, further advising of a DfE scheme to enable schools to reclaim costs directly related to Covid-19. Mike advised that timescales were not yet confirmed but that there would be a facility to reclaim costs and schools would be advised on this and encouraged to do so where appropriate.

Jean Lewis advised that catering contract queries were being raised by schools and supported by the team, with their being some complexity due to the variety of situations in schools, with this making modelling quite complicated. It was noted that schools were reporting additional costs relating to staffing and also a loss of income or loss of opportunities to make savings. It was further noted that the delay in implementation of some cost-saving measures would cause some schools financial difficulty in the future.

In response to a question regarding the start budget submission deadline, Mike advised that this had not changed and that maintained schools were encouraged to contact him if they were unable to hold governors meetings to approve their start budget in time.

Richard advised that statutory deadlines remained unchanged but that the LA could take a flexible approach. The start budget submission deadline of 11th May was noted, with Richard advising that the LA would review at this point and take a sensible view.

Maxine Squire advised that recovery planning and reopening was now a key focus, with further government guidance expected on the 10th May. It was noted that Derek Sutherland and the YSAB were leading on this work-stream. It was noted that the DfE had indicated the 1st June as the date from which wider reopening of schools would begin, with this to be phased by year group which would be mandated by central government. It was noted that an announcement from the Prime Minister was anticipated on 10th May and would provide further information on the beginnings of a return.

In response to a question regarding discussion of schools continuing to provide teaching through the summer holiday period, Maxine advised that this was not anticipated, though contact arrangements were expected to be in place for all children before the end of the summer term.

Maxine advised that a city-wide approach would be supported by the LA, with further information available on 10th May regarding physical distancing across cohorts. It was noted that schools would need to ensure that appropriate infrastructure was in place, including health and safety risk assessments and transport arrangements.

Discussion followed. It was agreed that future discussion of Covid-19 impact and planning would include all phases. Maxine undertook to ensure wider communication and input to YSAB meetings which were currently taking place three times a week in a virtual format. It was noted that a daily briefing was provided to school leaders.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting.

4. Any other urgent business

There was no other urgent business.

5. Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting would take place on 3rd July 2020 at 9.00am.

The meeting closed at 10.20am.