

CITY OF YORK SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the additional Schools Forum meeting held on Tuesday 28th September 2021 at 9.00am via Zoom

Present: Gail Brown (Academy Representative), Sharon Keelan-Beardsley (Maintained Secondary Headteacher Representative - deputising for Dave Hewitt), Steve Lewis (Academy Representative), Jo Olsen (Maintained Secondary Governor Representative), Lee Probert (FE Representative), Debbie Reay (Early Years Sector Representative - deputising for Helen Gratton), Mark Richardson (Pupil Referral Unit Representative), Claire Rigden (Maintained Nursery Headteacher Representative (VC)), Jenny Rogers (Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative), and James Rourke (Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative)

In attendance: Cllr Ian Cuthbertson (Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education), Maxine Squire (Assistant Director, Education and Skills, CYC), Richard Hartle (Head of Finance, CYC), Laura Conkar (ICT Client Manager, CYC) and Salli Radford (Head of Governor Services, CYC, Coordinator and Clerk)
Amber Ludlam, W Healey and H Stainsby (ESFA observers)

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

New member Jo Olsen was welcomed. It was noted that Dave Hewitt would attend future meetings as maintained secondary representative, with Sharon Keelan-Beardsley deputising on this occasion. Debbie Reay was deputising for Helen Gration.

It was noted that Laura Conkar would join the meeting at 10am to provide an update on the broadband contract.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Adam Booker (Special School Representative), Adam Cooper (Academy Representative), Andrew Daly (Academy Representative), Helen Gration (Early Years Sector Representative), Dee Statham (Academy Representative) and Helen Winn (Academy Representative). Amanda Hatton (Corporate Director – People, CYC) was unable to attend the meeting.

3. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

It was noted that no nominations had been received prior to the meeting.

Lee Probert was appointed Chair for the meeting. Elections were deferred to the next meeting.

4. Membership update

Previously distributed. The membership update was noted.

5. Minutes of the York Schools Forum meeting of 6th July 2021

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

6. Matters Arising

There were no outstanding action points to report.

Matters arising: None.

The meeting agreed to take items 7, 8 and 9 in the order 8, 9, 7.

8. Deficit recovery plan / Inclusion review

Previously distributed. Maxine Squire advised that the draft DSG recovery plan had been attached as an appendix to the paper, adding that the meeting provided an opportunity for the Forum to scrutinise draft plan and comment. It was noted that further work was ongoing to support the narrative that would accompany financial modelling. Maxine advised of the aim to bring in-year expenditure back into balance and to evidence the robust action being taken by the LA to mitigate pressures. It was noted that the deficit had increased from 2018 onwards, with this coinciding with an increase in the number of young people with statutory assessments as well as increases in care costs. It was noted that a significant number of plans were now running beyond age 18, i.e. to age 25. Maxine advised of the opportunity to reconsider provision, as this was not necessarily optimal in all cases.

Maxine advised that home-to-school transport costs had also increased and that the LA was therefore looking at eligibility and the policy for 16-19 transport. It was noted that this review included consideration of a contribution to charges. It was noted that central SEND services were also being reviewed.

Questions were invited. It was noted that the Forum was responsible for monitoring implementation of the inclusion review.

Richard Hartle advised that the LA held a significant deficit, with detail included in the paper. It was noted that the deficit totalled over £10m and that reviewing the balance of expenditure would help the general fund going forward. It was noted that Mike Barugh was working with Richard

on detail but that it was becoming more challenging to make an impact on the deficit.

Steve Lewis joined the meeting at 9.19am.

Maxine outlined joint working being undertaken with health colleagues to identify potential mitigations to pressures. It was noted that this included consideration of recommissioning work relating to ERPs to ensure the provision map was appropriate.

Maxine advised that the inclusion review consultation outcome had reinforced what was already known regarding pressures, with phase transfer from primary to secondary school a significant trigger point for requests for specialist places. It was noted that autism and SEMH were the main drivers for these requests and that a solution was needed.

Maxine advised that the implementation stage of the inclusion review would now follow:

- 1 Actions in Early Years
- 2 Primary to secondary phase transfer
- 3 Ensuring work was undertaken around the sufficiency of specialist places

It was noted that the LA would ask for support from settings to enable follow-up of the review and consultation process with implementation.

The Chair queried the timeline for deficit recovering, asking whether the LA would reach a break-even position in one or two years. Richard advised that the intention was to achieve an in-year balance by 2023/24, though this plan would not address the significant cumulative deficit.

In response to a question regarding the governance framework that would oversee implementation of the plan, Richard advised that the LA had not seen the requirements of the ESFA relating to the plan and had not yet

confirmed that the Forum would be part of the governance framework. Maxine advised that the LA would need to submit the plan to the ESFA who would then consider whether it was reasonable. Following this, the ESFA would agree a schedule with the LA. It was noted that the LA wished to make the plan robust, as there was a possibility that the ESFA would write-off the historic deficit, though the LA would need to show that it could bring the budget back into balance before a write-off could be considered.

The Forum noted this position.

In response to a question regarding the extension of the LA's People directorate to include education and high-needs provision to age 25 and whether this would provide the opportunity to benefit from cost savings for 18-25 group, Maxine advised that the move to an all-age directorate was viewed as positive. Maxine further advised that provision would become more integrated with Adult Services. It was noted that transition post-19 would benefit from more positive mapping, which would allow the LA to end some plans and have transition plans in place to address cost pressures and provide improved pathways to adult life. Maxine advised that this would enable reinvestment and overall cost reductions.

In response to a question regarding the potential result of costs being pushed to adult services, Maxine advised that current provision was not benefiting young people in the longer-term and that transition to adult provision would offer benefits. It was noted that this would also enable voluntary options to be explored, which could offer sustainable options for adult life.

A question was asked regarding the support currently available via mainstream education and the current limited banding, with particular reference to the significant demand for one-to-one support in schools and

early years settings. Maxine advised that a review of banding would be brought to the Forum. Maxine further advised of the need to consider what pre-diagnosis looked like in mainstream settings. Discussion followed.

In response to a question regarding continuation of the SEN contingency, Richard advised that this would continue, as it was a statutory requirement to have provision available, though it was an option to review the threshold, as this was currently c£200k. It was noted that allocations from the fund during the current year would be c£800k, with Richard advising that it was useful to review this as the fund was not acting as a genuine contingency.

Maxine advised of the intention to include a specific focus on early years in the review outcome.

7. Initial 2022/23 start budget

Previously distributed. Richard Hartle advised that the draft represented the first opportunity to consider the budget for 2022/23. It was noted that the total DSG funding did not include the Early Years block, as allocations had not been released at the time of writing.

The Forum noted the 2.7% increase in funding for York was significant but was offset by the removal of the Central Services block.

Referring to the Schools block, Richard advised that the National Funding Formula (NFF) factors remained unchanged following the city's move to the formula from 2018/19. It was noted that the LA proposed retaining the current formula for the next year. Richard advised that the detail on page 22 showed that rural primary schools might be positively impacted by changes to sparsity funding.

Richard referred to paragraph 13, which included detail of the 2.5% increase to funding for York schools, with this being less than the 3.2% national average increase. It was noted that a significant number of schools were on the lower funding floor and that there would be a disproportionate effect on York schools of the reduced per-pupil funding amounts that this group would receive. It was noted that the Growth Fund would continue, though it would operate with a capped limit.

It was noted that Early Years block allocations had not yet been announced, though the LA would pass funding on to providers subject to confirmation by the Forum.

It was noted that the High Needs block had been discussed earlier in the meeting.

Richard advised that the Central Services block had been reducing over time and was restricted to ongoing and historic commitments that had been agreed with the Forum. It was noted that this funding had been moved into DSG arrangements some years ago and was being reduced by 20% over time. Richard advised that the Forum would need to make decisions on the management of this reduction as it represented £400k from £1.97m. Richard advised that he had set out where Central Services commitments were during the current year for information. It was noted that during the last year some funding had been taken from the schools commissioning budget and from some LA services. Richard advised that this aspect of funding was open for debate.

It was noted that de-delegations had reduced over the years with one remaining relating to the primary behaviour support service. It was noted that a proposal would be brought to the Forum in the future regarding this.

Questions were invited.

The Chair advised that the recommendations included in paragraph 37 were for noting rather than decision at this stage. The Forum endorsed the LA's approach and to;

- support to the continuation of the pupil growth & infant class size funds under their existing arrangements (as at Annex 1), including cash limiting the budget as described at paragraph 16,
- support an increase in Early Years funding rates to providers in proportion to any increase in the Early Years funding allocated by government to the LA (paragraphs 17 & 18), and
- give their views on how the LA should manage the required £0.394m budget reduction in centrally retained historic commitment budgets for 2022/23, including any further information they would require, before the final decision needs to be made at the February meeting (paragraphs 22 to 29).

Laura Conkar joined the meeting at 9.45am.

9. Broadband provision update

Previously distributed. The Chair invited Laura Conkar to present the main points included in the update. Laura advised that:

- 1 the LA had approached the market with a specific set of requirements and had received three responses. Laura advised that this had showed that the price of the contract was fair and represented value for money.
- 2 the requirements had been based on a sustainable infrastructure. Laura advised that the fibre infrastructure in the city was the most sustainable system with low costs over time as the system could easily be upgraded.

- 3 a fully managed service had been sought to ensure cyber security and proactive monitoring.

Laura advised that all three points had been included in the process when approaching the market. Laura further advised that it had been explained to schools that a managed service was different to an internet connection with filtering and that additional services would need to be added to existing costs to enable comparison.

Questions were invited.

Laura advised that several queries had been received from schools regarding the minimum term of the contract, with this being three years. It was noted that per annum costs had been provided though the minimum contract term was set as the contract was between North and schools rather than via the LA. It was noted that this would enable schools to put a more bespoke service in place.

Debbie Raey joined the meeting at 9.50am.

In response to a question regarding the three year option and whether the LA would support schools with any contract issues, Laura advised that, should the experience not be acceptable after the escalation of any problems, the LA could support.

In response to a question regarding the position at the end of year three and whether schools would be responsible for procurement after that, Laura advised that they would, though there would be an option to extend under the contract with the provider. Laura undertook to double-check position with Legal Services. It was noted that the LA could extend the contract and it would be confirmed whether it was the same for schools. It was noted that the default position was to approach the market.

In response to a question regarding small schools, and the favourable contact rates available to them due to LA procurement process that might not continue at the end of the term, Laura advised that schools would not have this issue as the LA contract with the provider was for ten years. It was noted that schools could enter a contract for a maximum of five years but as the LA contract would continue there would be stability available beyond this point.

The Chair thanked Laura for the update.

Laura Conkar left the meeting at 9.55am.

10.Schools Forum forward plan

Richard Hartle outlined the forward plan:

February 2022

- 2022/23 budget setting paper
- Review of SEND contingency allocations
- DSG recovery plan / Inclusion review
- School commissioning budget update
- YSAB report on new priorities and support for the Education Futures Plan
- National DSG consultation
- F40 update (with budget report)

Maxine Squire encouraged Early Years and 16-19 representatives to bring items to the Forum.

The Chair proposed an interim update prior to the next meeting. Maxine and Richard would arrange this.

11.Any other agreed business

The Chair invited question to the ESFA observers for response outside the meeting. Salli Radford would also forward questions sent to her after the meeting.

There was no other business.

12. Date and time of future meetings

The next meeting would take place on **8th February 2022 at 9.00am.**

The meeting closed at 10.00am.