

# CITY OF YORK SCHOOLS FORUM

## Minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on Wednesday 12th July 2023 at 8.00am at West Offices

### Present:

Dave Hewitt (Maintained Secondary Headteacher Representative) Chair, Jenny Rogers (Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative), James Rourke (Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative), Glen Duxbury *deputising for* Andrew Daly (Academy Representative), Chris Nichols (Pupil Referral Unit Representative), Lee Probert (16-19 representative)

### In attendance:

Richard Hartle (Head of Finance, CYC), Maxine Squire (Assistant Director, Education and Skills, CYC) and Barbara Kybett (Governance Advisor, CYC, Coordinator and Clerk)

### 1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was noted that the meeting was not quorate. There was some discussion around the scheduling of Schools Forum meetings for 2023/24 and changes were agreed.

### 2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Adam Booker (Special School Representative), Gail Brown (Academy Representative), Steve Lewis (Academy Representative), Claire Rigden (Maintained Nursery Headteacher Representative (VC), Jo Olsen (Maintained Secondary Governor Representative), Dee Statham (Academy Representative), and Helen Winn (Academy Representative).

In addition, Cllr Robert Webb (Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education), and Martin Kelly (Corporate Director, Children and Education, CYC) had also sent apologies.

### **3. Membership update**

Previously distributed. It was noted that the terms of office for James Rourke (Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative) and Helen Winn (Academy Representative) were due for renewal. Helen Winn had already notified the Clerk of her intention to continue as an academy representative. James advised that the headteachers of the maintained primary schools were due to meet and he would raise the matter with them.

### **4. Minutes of the Schools Forum meeting of 10<sup>th</sup> May 2023**

Previously distributed.

Approval of the minutes was deferred until the meeting was quorate.

### **5. Matters Arising not on the agenda**

There were no outstanding action points to report.

Richard Hartle reported that the government had announced an additional grant for Early Years settings from September 2023. He provided details of the increased rates, which were significant, and would benefit Early Years settings in the city. He noted that there was a decision to be made on the funding formula for three and four year olds – he proposed to continue with the same funding factor proportions as were currently in place, which could then be revised for 2024/25. Richard noted that the allocation was an operational decision for the LA but comments from the Forum were invited. In response to a query, Maxine surmised that the significant increase to funding for two year olds had been implemented as part of a government incentive to support working families.

Members of Schools Forum supported the LA's approach to Early Years funding for 2023/24.

## **6. DSG outturn 2022/2023**

Previously distributed.

Richard referred to his paper which detailed the outturn for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2022/23. He highlighted that there was a net carry forward of deficit DSG into 2023/24 of £2.723m and he outlined the variances to the in-year position. He highlighted savings in the Central Services Block of £450k and advised that £250k of this would be needed for school improvement commissioning to fund expenditure until August 2023. Richard noted that changes had been made in preparation for reductions in Central Services Block funding; further details were included in the paper.

*Lee Probert arrived at 8.20am. The meeting was quorate from this point.*

The Chair asked what expenditure would be at risk in the next academic year given the significant reduction in funding. Richard responded that the LA had planned for savings in Central Services but levels of expenditure from the High Needs Block would present a challenge. He advised that, with contributions from the safety valve, the deficit would be offset by 2024/25; the main savings to the budget would be implemented from September 2023. Richard cautioned that, if the safety valve targets were not met, there was a risk of lower contributions from the DfE which would exacerbate the situation.

## **7. Maintained school balances 2022/2023**

Previously distributed

Richard referred to the table showing the maintained school balances at the end of the 2022/23 financial year. He noted that some schools had submitted deficit budgets and work was ongoing to assess these. Schools' committed and uncommitted reserves were identified in the table. Richard reminded the Forum

that the LA could reclaim uncommitted reserves in excess of 5% of core funding for secondary schools; the figure was 8% for primary and special schools. There was one school to which this reclaim could be applied but Richard advised that, given the uncertainty around income and expenditure at this setting, there were no plans to remove any excess funds. Richard advised that maintained schools' Start budgets for 2023/24 would be presented at the next meeting.

In response to a question, Richard advised that, in the unlikely event that a maintained school was unable to balance its budget, the LA may need to intervene and withdraw financial delegation from the school, although a school in this position would very likely be rated inadequate by Ofsted and probably issued with a compulsory academy conversion order. Richard added that all schools in deficit were expected to produce a recovery plan that demonstrated how they would return to a balanced budget position within three years.

A question was raised about schools holding uncommitted balances. Richard explained that it was unusual for schools to hold uncommitted balances which exceeded the threshold at which the LA could technically reclaim funds. The LA worked with schools to manage their surplus balances and to commit reserves to specific projects. Richard explained that if a school received a compulsory academy conversion order, the LA would take on any deficit on conversion. Schools choosing to join an academy trust would carry their deficit with them. Again, the LA worked closely with schools who were converting to academy status and had good relationships with local academy trusts, such that budgets were managed sensibly during the conversion process.

## **8. School Improvement Commissioning Fund and YSAB year end report**

Previously distributed

Maxine Squire referred to her previously distributed paper and noted that the LA had historically retained funds in the Central Services block for its statutory school improvement duties. The allocation of this funding was now managed by

the York Schools and Academies Board (YSAB). YSAB considered funding for system wide support such as the Wellbeing Worker service and Early Talk for York, as well as for schools causing concern. During 2022/23, £100k had been allocated to an initiative to improve school attendance, mainly to fund two fixed-term attendance officer posts. YSAB would review the effectiveness of the project and a report would be presented to the Forum. Maxine commented that the Early Talk for York project was continuing to demonstrate value and a linked project (More Talk for York) for secondary pupils would be piloted in two schools next year.

Maxine reported that YSAB had also allocated funding for SEND initiatives which included the SEND champion and adaptive teaching courses. Both had seen good engagement across the city.

In terms of the allocation of funding for schools causing concern, Maxine reported that Naburn Primary School had been removed from special measures and would join an academy trust, The Education Alliance, in the autumn term which would secure the school's future. Funding for York High School's internal Star Centre had helped the school to reduce exclusions and had mitigated pressure on places at Danesgate. The South Bank Academy Trust would assume full responsibility for this provision from the autumn term.

Maxine highlighted the reducing levels of funding from the DfE for historic commitments and the importance therefore of prudent management of YSAB's budget. She advised that a second NHS fully funded Mental Health support team would be in place from September; the team would be focussing on Emotionally Based School Avoidance. There would be a review of the work of similar services to ensure that there was no duplication.

Maxine advised that YSAB priorities for the next academic year would include:

- support for the Star Centre approach at York High School
- Early Talk for York

- Alternative Provision and SEND
- school attendance
- poverty proofing schools.

Next academic year, YSAB's work would be communicated to headteachers through half termly newsletters. Maxine advised that YSAB had also discussed a proposal that the chair of Schools Forum should join YSAB to facilitate communication between the two bodies, as YSAB reported to Schools Forum. Maxine proposed that a proportion of the centrally retained school improvement fund should be used to support school improvement activity in maintained schools only in 2023/24. Maintained school representatives supported this approach.

The Chair perceived that there was at present a disconnect between Schools Forum and YSAB, and therefore increased collaborative working would be positive. There was further discussion on the responsibilities and membership of the two bodies and on other networks in the city, such as one for secondary headteachers which was currently not meeting regularly.

It was agreed that, once YSAB had reviewed its terms of reference in September, they would be presented to Schools Forum for ratification in October. Maxine suggested that the Forum may also wish to formally ratify the appointment of the chair of YSAB. It was noted that the current model worked well but a review of the governance structure would be sensible.

## **9. Safety Valve Year 2, quarter 1 monitoring report**

Previously distributed

Maxine highlighted that safety valve agreements were coming under increasing scrutiny and had received hostile press from lobby groups who were concerned that provision for pupils with SEND was being rationed. She reported that the LA was on track to meet the deficit reduction targets, but this would become more

challenging from September. A monitoring report had been submitted to the DfE on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2023. The DfE had agreed to release the second tranche of funding.  
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Maxine identified a number of risks to the deficit reduction plan which included the cost of provision for young people with very significant levels of need. It was important to evaluate the impact of these expensive interventions to ensure they are effective. Maxine highlighted the increased expectation from parents regarding provision for SEND and the legal challenges being brought when expectations were not met. She noted that, when parents took their requests to a tribunal, the success rate nationally was 96%, and it was important therefore that the LA made every effort to resolve issues before this step was taken. A consistent offer for pupils with SEND across all schools in the city was key and further work to support the preparation for adulthood with parents and carers.

Maxine referred to the operational activity against each of the safety valve priorities which were detailed in her paper; these included:

- significantly reducing travel costs for SEND pupils and promoting independence
- work with Health on joint commissioning decisions
- additional Enhanced Resource Provisions being on track to open on time.
- work on sufficiency around special school places.

It was noted that there would be significant savings if less costly interventions were offered to pupils with complex SEND but it was key that parents and carers supported any change in approach. Chris Nichols (Pupil Referral Unit Representative) commented that it had taken two to three years to reduce dependency on bespoke transport arrangements to Danesgate but the change in approach had been beneficial for all.

. It was noted that funding for SEND had not kept pace with support staff pay increases which would add further cost pressures.

Maxine provided details of the number of EHCPs in the city which had been ended and she remarked that annual reviews should also be used to appropriately cease EHCPs if the plans were no longer needed.

## **10. Alternative Provision strategy**

Previously distributed

Forum members considered the commissioning priorities on page 6 of the document. There was some discussion on establishing specialist provision which could be accessed by maintained primary schools. Maxine advised that the future of the Social, Emotional and Mental Health outreach service provided by Danesgate was under discussion as the current de-delegation from maintained schools was not covering the cost of the service. Chris Nichols advised that he was reviewing the service with a view to remodelling it to be more streamlined and effective.

Maxine noted that the funding of Alternative Provision places needed to be reviewed to eliminate any potential double funding and a review of the characteristics of pupils attending Alternative Provision settings was needed, as some groups, for example children in care, were over-represented.

Lee Probert (16-19 representative) commented that there was a need to consider how best to manage transitions and plan interventions with these in mind.

## **11. Schools Forum forward plan**

- YSAB terms of reference
- maintained school Start budgets
- the Schools Budget and Dedicated Schools Grant for 2024/25

### **\*4. Minutes of the Schools Forum meeting of 10<sup>th</sup> May 2023**

Previously distributed.

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

**12. Any other agreed business**

There was no other business.

**13. Dates and time of meetings for the next academic year**

**Action:** the Clerk would circulate the meeting dates for 2023/24 once agreed. All meetings would begin at 8am in West Offices.

The meeting closed at 9.35am.

APPROVED