

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Schools Forum on 11 October 2023

Schools Forum meeting held remotely on Wednesday 13 September 2023

To view the archived recording of this meeting, please see here:
<https://bradford.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

Commenced 08:00
Concluded 10:30

RECORD OF MEETING ATTENDEES, APOLOGIES AND ABSENCES

Schools & Academies Members

IN ATTENDANCE

Member	Membership Group
Ian Morrel (Chair)	Maintained Secondary Schools – Headteacher
Ashley Reed (Vice Chair)	Academies Member
Wahid Zaman	Academies Member
Helen Williams	Academies Member
Michael Thorp	Academies Member
Amanda Slaney	Academies Member
Jonathan Nixon	Academies Member
Rowena Dixon	Academies Member
Isabel Peat	Academies Member
Matthew Hill	Academies Member
Lyndsey Brown	Academies Member - Special School Academies
Bev George	Maintained Nursery Schools – Governor
Sian Hudson	Maintained Nursery Schools - Headteacher
Helen Willett	Maintained Special Schools

APOLOGIES RECEIVED

Member	Membership Group
Brent Fitzpatrick OBE	Academies Member
Sarah Murray	Academies Member
Graham Swinbourne	Maintained Primary Schools - Headteacher

NOT IN ATTENDANCE (WITHOUT APOLOGIES RECEIVED)

Member	Membership Group
Victoria Birch	Academies Member
Melanie Saville	Academies Member
Jon Skurr	Academies Member
Richard Bottomley	Academies Member – Alternative Provision Academies
Kathryn Swales	Maintained Primary Schools - Headteacher
Kirsty Ratcliffe	Pupil Referral Unit (maintained)

Non-Schools Members

IN ATTENDANCE

Member	Membership Group
Tom Bright	Teaching Unions

APOLOGIES RECEIVED

Member	Membership Group

NOT IN ATTENDANCE (WITHOUT APOLOGIES RECEIVED)

Member	Membership Group
Junaid Karim	Council for Mosques (Bradford)
Ruth Terry	Officer Representing Vulnerable Children

Substitute Members present at the meeting as a Member (not as an Observer)

Substitute Member	Membership Group

Substitute Members present at the meeting as an Observer (not as a Member)

Substitute Member	Membership Group
Alison Kay	Academies Member

Local Authority Officers present at the meeting

Officer	Position
Asad Shah	Committee Secretariat
Niall Devlin	Assistant Director, SEND and Inclusion
Marium Haque	Strategic Director
Dawn Haigh	Principal Finance Officer (Schools)
Andrew Redding	Business Advisor (Schools)

40% of the School Forum's membership (filled membership positions) must be present for a meeting to be quorate. This meeting was quorate, with 58% of members present (15 out of 26 currently filled membership positions).

703. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

704. MINUTES OF 12 JULY 2023 & MATTERS ARISING

In introducing the meeting, the Chair welcomed 6 new members to the Forum: Helen Willett, Jon Skurr, Isabel Peat, Rowena Dixon, Matthew Hill and Ruth Terry. The Chair 'set the scene' for Members as follows:

- We expect to follow our usual timetable for the 2024/25 DSG and formula

funding cycle. Today's meeting, and then meetings in October and December, will prepare the way for the Forum to make its recommendations on 10 January. Today's meeting represents the starting point for discussions on the 2024/25 cycle. However, we will need to move quickly to formal consultation, beginning as usual mid-October.

- Important announcements have been made over the summer about 2024/25 financial year DSG funding and formula funding arrangements. These are presented to today's meeting. There have been significant announcements in particular, and a consultation, on early years entitlement funding, which are also presented to today's meeting.
- We warned in the July meeting that we are likely to find the 2024/25 budget round challenging. This is not so much because of technical changes that we will be required to manage (although there are some, especially in early years), but because we will find that the 2024/25 financial settlement is not at the level of recent years, the amount of budget headroom that we have will have reduced, and the financial position of our High Needs Block will worsen. It will be challenging also in respect of how the increases in funding for schools, academies and other providers (including early years' providers), that can be afforded by the 2024/25 settlement, compare with the current scale of growth in costs, especially as a result of pay awards and inflationary pressures. We begin to present to today's meeting further details on the 2024/25 settlement, and the view that this year's cycle will be 'challenging' is confirmed, especially for the Early Years Block and for the High Needs Block.
- As we have presented, we currently forecast a deficit High Needs Block financial position (based on the continuation of current growth rates and before mitigating activity is established) by the end of the 2025/26 financial year, with the rapid depletion of surplus balances in 2024/25. We have previously agreed with the Schools Forum that the Authority will convene a working group of interested Forum members in the autumn, at the point that the Authority has an outline plan for the mitigation and management of this deficit. We will provide an update on this under agenda item 10.
- One of the key messages for all schools and academies to take note of is the need to review and update their 2023/24 financial year budgets, as well as their 3-year budget forecasts, for the latest available information on pay awards, costs and formula funding projections. Most schools and academies will find that their budget positions have changed since original forecasts were produced earlier in the year.

The Business Advisor (Schools) then reported on progress made on "Action" items from the 12 July meeting. He reported that:

- **Item 696 (Schools Forum Membership):** A document is included in the meeting reports pack under matters arising, showing the Forum's membership for the 2023/24 academic year as it stands at September 2023. The Authority will continue to seek to fill vacant memberships.
- **Item 697 (DSG Outturn Balances):** The 2022/23 financial year final outturn balances have now been confirmed, include the final adjustment for the Early

Years Block. A document is included in the meeting reports pack under matters arising. The final balances figure is £36.856m, which is + £164k more than was estimated and presented in July. The only change is the balance held within the Early Years Block.

- **Item 698 (Early Years Block Funding and Entitlement Extension):** 2 reports are presented to this meeting, which provide details of the Early Years Supplementary Grant and the DfE's proposals for extending funding arrangements in 2024/25 for the new entitlements.
- **Item 699 (Formula Funding Development):** A report is presented to this meeting providing an update on Schools Block and High Needs Block formula funding development for the 2024/25 financial year.
- Within the agenda reports pack is a statement, which aims to summarise the main points regarding the latest pay award information for teachers. This is presented to ensure that Forum members are aware of this information, and also because it provides context for the information about the 2024/25 funding settlement, which will be presented through the agenda of this meeting. A Member asked for clarification on whether the new Teacher Pay Grant was only a one-off funding stream. The Business Advisor clarified that this Grant was not one off; that it would continue as a separate grant in 2024/25 before being merged into formula funding in 2025/26. However, the future year values of the grant are still to be confirmed.

Resolved –

- **That progress made on “Action” items and Matters Arising be noted.**
- **That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2023 be signed as a correct record.**

705. MATTERS RAISED BY SCHOOLS

No matters were raised, and no resolutions were passed on this item.

706. STANDING ITEM - DSG GROWTH FUND ALLOCATIONS

No allocations were presented, and no resolutions were passed on this item.

707. ALLOCATION OF THE EARLY YEARS SUPPLEMENTARY GRANT

The Business Advisor (Schools) presented a report, Document QE, which briefed the Schools Forum on the allocation of the Early Years Supplementary Grant (EYSG) in 2023/24. He explained how the EYSG has been allocated by the Authority and also then emphasised the implication for the DSG, as we forecast to

overspend the EYSG allocation by £0.30m, which will be met from the surplus balance held within the Early Years Block. This overspend is due to the Authority funding 4 more weeks of provision (26 weeks rather than 22 weeks) than we are receiving EYSG funding for from the DfE. He explained that this 'funding profile' issue is a significant factor when we assess the potential financial impact of the extension of the entitlements at September 2024 and September 2025. This is further discussed under the next agenda item.

A Member asked why the DfE would not fund us for 26 weeks of delivery. The Business Advisor offered the view that this is perhaps the result of the limitations of a national formula approach to the allocation of the EYSG (where different local circumstances are not specifically recognised) but also perhaps because the DfE has not been fully aware of this as an issue. We have emailed the DfE about this issue and the DfE has thanked us for highlighting it (saying that they will consider it further).

The Strategic Director, Children's Services, asked whether we understand why our rates of EYSG funding are below national median averages, explaining that this is something that is of concern (as we would expect Bradford's funding to be above national averages) and that the Forum may wish to further consider and to lobby Government on. The Business Advisor responded that he would need to look again at previous analysis, but he offered the view that this is most likely to do with the weighting of deprivation factors within the national early years formula. It was agreed that an analysis of this position should be presented to future Forum meeting for further consideration.

Resolved –

(1) That the information provided in Document QE be noted.

(2) That an analysis of why the uplifts in rates of EYSG funding received by Bradford are lower than national medians be presented to the Forum for further consideration.

708. DFE CONSULTATION ON EARLY YEARS BLOCK FUNDING 2024/25

The Business Advisor (Schools) presented a report, Document QF, which briefed the Schools Forum on the DfE's consultation on the Early Years Block for 2024/25 and on the implications of the DfE's proposals for the funding of providers delivering the early years entitlements, as well as for our Early Years Block management. The report provided the Local Authority's response to this consultation, which has been submitted.

The Business Advisor explained that the Early Years Working Group will meet to consider more closely the DfE's proposals, as well as to consider our early years entitlement funding arrangements for 2024/25 in response to these. He explained that our consultation with providers on our early years entitlement funding arrangements for 2024/25 will not begin immediately following the Forum's October meeting and depends on the timing of the DfE's announcement of the outcomes of the consultation and the publication of the 2024/25 Early Years Block

operational guidance.

Referring to the 'funding profile' issue, the Business Advisor explained that, if the DfE does not alter the funding profile to account for the introduction and extension of the new entitlements at September 2024 and September 2025, we model that we will have £3.2m of unfunded cost across 2024/25 and 2025/26. This, therefore, is a significant issue for us (and would represent a significant call on DSG reserves if not resolved). The Business Advisor explained that this issue has been included within our consultation response and that we have also directly emailed the DfE. The DfE has responded to say that the issue will be considered further.

The Chair asked whether members in attendance representing nursery schools have any initial feedback on the DfE's proposals for the funding of the extension of the entitlements. The member representing maintained nursery school headteachers responded to explain that the major concern for the early years sector as a whole is that the rates of funding that are allocated for the new entitlements must be sufficient to cover delivery costs; currently providers subsidise underfunded entitlement delivery via charging for non-entitlement childcare hours. Where non-entitlement hours now become entitlement hours, there will be significantly less flexibility for subsidy, which could have significant negative financial implications for the sector. The member asked for clarification on whether the protection of the funding of maintained nursery schools would be extended to the funding of new entitlements. The Business Advisor responded to explain that nursery school protection and supplementary funding only currently applies to the 3&4-year-old entitlement and would only continue to apply to this entitlement going forward.

Resolved – That the information presented in Document QF be noted.

709. 2024/25 DSG & FORMULA FUNDING SUMMER ANNOUNCEMENTS - BRIEFING

The Business Advisor (Schools) presented Document QG, which provided a briefing on the 2024/25 Dedicated Schools Grant settlement and formula funding arrangements, following the DfE's announcements made on 17 July 2023.

The Chair remarked that this report provides very important background for the development of our formula funding arrangements for 2024/25 and should be used as a reference document for Members going forward.

Within the presentation of the briefing note, the Assistant Director, SEND and Inclusion, informed the Forum that Bradford has been chosen as a local authority to pilot the DfE's SEND and Alternative Provision Review reforms. The Chair, and other Members, responded to this positively (that it is a positive step for us to engage with these reforms, and to feel their benefit, sooner).

Members did not have any other comments and did not ask any questions.

Resolved – That the information presented in Document QG be noted.

710. OUTLINE – FORMULA FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS & CONSULTATIONS 2024/25

The Business Advisor (Schools) presented a report, Document QH, which outlined the working principles that are being considered in the development of Bradford's formula funding arrangements for 2024/25 for the Schools and High Needs Blocks. He explained that the Authority anticipates presenting consultation reports, for Schools Block and High Needs Block formula funding arrangements, to the Schools Forum at the next meeting, with these consultations being published immediately after. In support of this, Forum Members are invited to (remotely) attend a 'Formula Funding Working Group' session, on Wednesday 27 September (8am) or Thursday 28 September (8am) or Tuesday 3 October (8am). As in previous years, these sessions will enable Forum Members to consider in more detail the impact of national formula funding decisions and to explore and guide the proposals for 2024/25. He explained that the Authority will contact the District Achievement Partnership to arrange to directly discuss the proposals for the continuation of the EHCP Banded Model (the special school funding formula).

Within his presentation, the Business Advisor highlighted the indicative initial modelling of the impact of potential formula funding proposals, and the growth in costs in the High Needs Block, on the 2024/25 DSG. He explained that this modelling, as a planning tool, helps to give sense of the level of "stress" that the 2024/25 DSG may come under. Our modelling, whilst still based on a series of early estimates (and prior to mitigation) currently indicates that we may overspend the 2024/25 DSG allocation by £15.25m, with £14.00m of this within the High Needs Block and £1.10m within the Early Years Block.

The Chair remarked again that this report provides very important background for the development of our formula funding arrangements for 2024/25 and for the beginning of our High Needs Block mitigation plan development.

An Academies Member asked for clarification on the impact of Census data-lag and whether the cost of this is negated by reducing pupil numbers. The Business Advisor explained that change in pupil numbers does not affect data-lag cost (as the Authority is funded in 2024/25 on October 2023 Census numbers, as are mainstream schools and academies). Data-lag cost is affected by changes in pupil circumstances and needs-led data between the annual October censuses, such as increases in Free School Meals.

Resolved –

(1) That the information presented in Document QH be noted.

(2) That Members be invited to attend a Formula Funding Working Group session

711. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK – FORECAST AND MITIGATION PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The Business Advisor (Schools) provided an update verbally on the current forecast for the High Needs Block and on the development of a strategic mitigation plan. He explained that, in the May 2023 meeting, the Schools Forum

resolved that a working subgroup of Forum members be convened at the point the Authority has developed a draft (or outline) of a strategic mitigation plan. The Authority indicated that work would begin over the summer, in the light of most recent growth data and following confirmation of the 2024/25 DSG High Needs Block settlement, and that we would expect to look to convene a subgroup from the beginning of the autumn term.

Forum members were asked to express their interest (or to confirm where they have previously expressed their interest) in sitting on the working sub-group. We anticipate convening this sub-group shortly.

The Business Advisor then also reported the following:

- The 2024/25 DSG settlement is now known, and this does not fundamentally alter our previous High Needs Block forecasts i.e. actual income for 2024/25 is consistent with our previous estimates.
- As we have included in the previous agenda item, we forecast that, prior to additional (noting that we are already taking action) mitigation, and assuming the continuation of existing spending growth rates, we may overspend our 2024/25 High Needs Block by £14m. It should be noted that this is a rough working estimate, that will develop and change. On the same basis, extending our estimates for a further year, it is forecasted that our High Needs Block may overspend by £22m in 2025/26. On this basis, our High Needs Block account, and then most likely our full DSG account, may be in deficit at the end of the 2025/26 financial year. This is similar to (a little worse than) the position that we outlined to the Forum when we presented our DSG Management Plan in January 2023. This position will be discussed in greater detail with the working sub-group.
- Members will recall that we have made a £0.920m investment in inclusion from the High Needs Block, with the continuation of this investment to be reviewed. The Authority, in outline, has determined that this investment is having impact, some of which will take further time to develop, and that this investment should continue, especially as it is in keeping the direction of travel of the national SEND Review and the DfE's guidance to authorities about investing in inclusion strategies. This will be discussed in greater detail with the working sub-group.
- From our review work, it is clear that the Authority is already taking mitigating action and already has in place many of the strategic actions that the DfE has identified and is progressing in working with the Safety Value / Delivering Better Value local authorities (the authorities currently in deficit, where the DfE has intervened, including to provide additional funds). The Authority has begun to outline actions that could (though not necessary would, assessing the knock-on implications) be taken in seeking to manage and to mitigate against deficit. These actions fall into 2 main categories a) formula funding and DSG funding management actions (such as banded funding, restraining uplifts, and moving income and expenditure between DSG Blocks, including Schools Block contribution), and b) high needs provision actions (where we would be further assessing that we have the right number and type of specialist placements available, and also where we would be seeking to

appropriately support and encourage inclusion in mainstream. From our review work, it is clear that the development of national standards for EHCPs is a critical element of budget control within the High Needs Block (as one of the implications / purposes of national standards is to 'cool' the current very high growth rate in the number of EHCPs).

- The Statutory Override (that means that DSG account deficits are 'set-aside' and are not counted against Council financial positions) is in place currently until the end of the 2025/26 financial year. CIPFA has recently issued some guidance / consultation that local authorities should be including DSG account forecasts within their wider Medium Term Financial Planning (MTFP) and that authorities should be 'planning' for the ending of the override. In reality, this may be very difficult. In Bradford, we will include our DSG forecasting in our MTFP from the next presentation of this, which will take place in November. This will help support wider understanding of the deficit risks in the DSG and the delivery of wider strategic action.

The Academies member, representing special schools and special school academies, whilst emphasising that the special schools sector faces significant challenges, expressed the view that all sectors are under pressure and that the development of a strategic mitigation plan represents a real opportunity to work together. The Chair echoed these comments

Resolved –

(1) That the information presented be noted.

(2) That Members be invited to express their interest in sitting on the working subgroup.

712. WORK PROGRAMME AND SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2023/24 ACADEMIC YEAR

The Business Advisor (Schools) presented a report, Document QI, which outlined the School Forum's 2023/24 Academic Year work programme.

Members had no comments and did not ask any questions.

Resolved – That the information presented in Document QI be noted.

713. SCHOOLS FORUM STANDING ITEMS

No matters were raised, and no resolutions were passed on this item.

714. AOB / FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

No matters were raised, and no resolutions were passed on this item.

715. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next scheduled is Wednesday 11 October. This meeting will be held remotely.

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Forum.

THESE MINUTES HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER