

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
DERBYSHIRE SCHOOLS' FORUM
Minutes of the Meeting Held on 12 June 2014
At 6.00 pm in Committee Room 1 at County Hall

Present

Brendan Hickey, David Baker, Peter Crowe, Joe Birkin, Peter Thorne, Martin Brader, Andrew Crichlow, Lindsey Partridge, Lesley Hartley, Paul Mason, Shirley Harvey, Philip Sunderland, Linda Du-Roe, Lee Floyd, Angela Colmar, Karen Hudson, Andrew Large, Trevor Clay, Cathy Tattersfield.

Substitutes

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Observers

Cllr Kevin Gillott, Christine Pennington (EFA)

Officers/Others

Chris Allcock, Mary Murkin, Kathryn Boulton, Vicky Pealing, Chris Woodhouse, Ruth Lane

Apologies

Athol Donaldson, Barry Thacker, Julie Cadman, Simon Beardall, Roger Tomlinson, Andrew Wild, John Partington, Penny Pennington, Cllr Damien Greenhalgh, Cllr Jocelyn Street.

Chris Allcock advised the Forum that three Forum members had resigned, Jonathon Fawcett, Athol Donaldson and Andrew Cartledge. In addition Councillor Barry Lewis had resigned his position as an observer on the Forum and been replaced by Councillor Jocelyn Street.

Martin Brader chaired the meeting.

14/09 Apologies

Chris Allcock read out the list of apologies, no apologies were received from the floor.

14/10 Minutes of the previous meeting – 12th February 2014

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed. Matters arising:

CAYA Catering would be asked to present an update to the next meeting regarding free infant meals. Belinda James, Acting Head of SSSEN, will also be invited to the next meeting.

At present, 237/350 primary schools and 23/45 secondary schools had agreed to return the Teaching & Learning Consultancy funding to the LA.

The Resources Task and Finish group has been set up and met twice. The group had helped to construct the recent funding consultation document and have also discussed school financial pressures. Discussions regarding the sector split of resources are planned for the September meeting.

Paul Mason said that the Derbyshire Schools Governors Association have rated the Forum very highly in its annual review and written to advise the LA accordingly.

14/11 SAP in Schools

Chris Woodhouse (Finance Manager, Systems and Procurement, Corporate resources) presented the paper outlining the background as to why SAP had been introduced, the progress with the roll-out, and confirmation of the on-going support arrangements.

Chris said they were continually looking to improve SAP and the existing User Group will continue to meet and provide valuable feedback. A questionnaire would be sent to schools about usability before the end of September and he is aware that some schools are experiencing technical difficulties and performance issues which his team are trying to resolve. He acknowledged that SAP is a huge change from DSAS and he thanked school staff and governors for their patience and support during the implementation process.

A Forum member asked why the cost of the Exchequer Services traded service has increased so much, in his school's case from £700 to £4,000. Chris Allcock added that the invoice payment process is longer now and more labour intensive for the LA, hence the cost increase. Chris Woodhouse confirmed they are looking to address this by passing back some of the workload to schools to save money and also because schools have expressed a desire to process their own invoices.

Appendix 2 of the report was discussed which referred to the number of support calls logged. The Forum felt the number of calls in April 2014 was still very high, especially as schools were on holiday for two weeks of this period. Chris Woodhouse explained that this was due to the financial year end and calls were starting to reduce and therefore the support team will be reducing from 8 to 4 members from 1st August 2014. This is to reflect the reduced need for training and the anticipated reduction in calls as system problems are ironed out.

Linda Du-Roe said that problems are being experienced in schools because they can't easily see if invoices have been paid and indeed not all invoices are being paid. This was reiterated by other Forum members and two schools indicated they had been threatened with legal action regarding non-payment of bills and the helpline didn't seem able to see whether invoices have been paid either.

Chris replied that there have been problems with staff turnover in the LA and this was another reason why the invoice payment procedure would be returned to schools.

On a positive note a Forum member did state that the SAP reporting system was much better than DSAS had been. The Chair summarised that a lot of these problems are for the User Group to address and this would continue to take place.

Forum agreed to note the report.

14/12 Support and Aspiration

Vicky Pealing (Support & Aspiration Project Manager) gave a presentation similar to one being made to Headteachers at the current round of area meetings.

Forum members expressed a lot of interest and opinions at the end of the presentation, mainly centered around the lack of understanding by many parties and communication

issues regarding the draft SEND Code of Practice and the Local Plan. Members were concerned that Health would not be as involved as they should be in the whole process which put pressure on Education as they always seemed to take the lead. Special schools in particular were concerned that parents seemed to think they could request money from them which would reduce their budgets and enable them to do less when they are already feeling financial pressures.

Linda Du Roe said she had been to Government meetings regarding this subject and it was clear that, although they were driving the implementation via LAs, they were not clear exactly how it would work and Pathfinder LAs were struggling to implement Local Plans. Pathfinders' experiences were that some parents were requesting personal funding and being given them.

Councillor Gillott summarised that this is a Government initiative, not a LA choice, but it had to be implemented. He has attended many meetings and the information being given out is changing all the time as the advice to the LA changes. It is impossible to devise a perfect Local Plan from September 2014. The reforms were probably a good idea, but he felt they were being implemented too quickly and the funding provided by Government was not enough. He encouraged interested parties to continue to feedback views to the LA which could be taken directly back to Government.

Kathryn Boulton also stated that the pace and scale of the project is providing great challenges to the LA. She confirmed that Health are engaged with the process at Board level. The budgets should not be seen as separate personal and educational, it is one budget. We all need to work with parents not against them and agreement will be reached. The LA will make full use of the three year transition period and the Local Plan will not be the full and final version in September. She emphasised that communication between all parties will be the key.

Lee Floyd stated that he accepted that he doesn't fully understand how the Local Plan will work. He is committed to helping children, but he doesn't want to lose any more staff. He is keen to ensure that the Forum understands that special schools do not have enough money to provide all they would wish for their pupils.

Vicky Pealing confirmed that in her experience in social care it is an extremely long process to develop an individual plan and negotiate with all the concerned parties and it takes up to a year to agree each personal budget. Parents haven't got the time or energy to force issues. Briefings were also being held in July for all SENCO's so they understood the new code.

Forum agreed to note the position.

14/13 2013 -14 Early Years Benchmarking

Chris Allcock presented the paper which provided a comparison of the financial elements of Early Years funding for 2013-14 to enable them to be considered in conjunction with the consultation document. The LA had only been made aware of the DfE's benchmarking relatively recently and a fuller report covering take up, performance and other issues would be provided to the Forum in the autumn.

The Derbyshire EY funding formula is fairly simple compared to other LAs. Comparison of the overall funding showed that our funding rate per hour for 3 & 4 year olds was 3rd out of

11 of our near neighbours and 4th out of 27 of the 'shire' LAs. With respect to funding for 2 year olds, Derbyshire was ranked as the 5th highest out of 11 of our near neighbours.

Forum agreed to note the report and receive a further report on this issue in the autumn.

14/14 National Funding update

Chris Allcock presented this paper. On 13th March 2014, the Schools Minister announced that a National Funding Formula would not now be introduced from April 2015 as originally planned. Instead an alternative approach was now being proposed to make funding fairer at a national level by addressing the distribution of funding between local authorities.

The current proposal is to calculate a Minimum Funding Level (MFL) for each LA based on a national formula, LAs whose current funding is below the MFL per pupil would receive an increase in grant. The DfE's provisional allocation model would increase Derbyshire's Schools Block DSG by £147 per pupil, which equates to approximately £14m. A DfE announcement is anticipated in July to confirm the proposed methodology; the extra money will arrive in schools for the 2015–16 financial year.

Forum agreed to note the report.

14/15 School funding consultation for April 2015

Chris Allcock presented the summary of responses to the consultation which was handed out at the meeting. The LA had received 102 responses from schools split across the sectors which equates to 24.6% plus 2 responses from the PVI sector. The Forum was asked for their views which could then be presented to Cabinet.

Lee Floyd commented that there are massive differences in the top up funding levels in special schools for example an Extremely Challenging Behaviour (ECB) Pupil receives funding of £56,000 and an Other Learning Difficulty (OLD) receives funding of less than £11,000. He felt that special schools were minded to review the top up amounts.

Chris Allcock replied that in the past they had tried to compare Derbyshire's special schools' funding with that of schools in other LAs but direct comparison had been difficult due to the different levels of delegation and responsibilities. The recent changes to the funding arrangements should make this comparison easier and this would be a key part of the School Forum's Funding Working Group's autumn workload.

A Forum member commented that the consultation replies gave a good agreement to the recommended proposals.

Forum agreed the report's recommendations.

14/16 DSG outturn 2013 -14

Chris Allcock presented the paper, the 2013-14 DSG outturn showed an underspend for the year of £6.7m. The two main elements were in respect of the High Needs Block and 2 year old provision. The High Needs Block underspend was being reviewed, a significant contributor had been reduced levels of top up payments to schools. This may be due to schools not applying for statements at historic levels, perhaps because of the requirement under the new regulations for schools to provide the first £6,000 of additional support for each pupil.

With regards to 2 year old provision, the LA is looking to extend the provision but clearly it is not being taken up in full. In 2015-16 the grant will be paid on the basis of actual take up levels, so it is less likely that an underspend will occur beyond 2014-15.

The accumulated centrally held DSG balances at March 2014 were £29.6m, of this £19.2m is already committed as listed in the paper. In addition there may be a significant financial liability in respect of Equal Pay claims relating to school based employees; the Forum will be asked in the autumn to commit some of these DSG cash resources to meet, or at least offset, the impact of any liability in respect of individual schools. A further report on this issue will be brought to the Schools Forum in the autumn.

The overall trend for schools' balances is still increasing, except for the special schools sector which had a net decrease of £572k.

Cathy Tattersfield commented that she knew of two schools that had made staff redundant as a result of having to contribute £6,000 towards each statement, however she was appalled at the level of school carry forwards in general. She stated she would be interested to know the amount of carry forward per pupil in each individual sector.

Trevor Clay commented for 2013-14 his College was only being funded for 43 places but he actually had 108 students. Lee Floyd reiterated that special school balances are under pressure especially with the need for capital investment. With the exception of his own school, special schools were situated in very old premises and this was a drain on their financial resources. He also felt that there has been an effective decrease in funding under the new arrangements. He has looked at every individual child in school and they all cost more to educate than the funding received. He has facilities he cannot use because he can't afford the staff to work in them.

A Forum member said that he understood Single Status in schools would eliminate Equal Pay issues. Chris Allcock responded that it has, but the claims are historic and pre-date the implementation of Single Status.

The Forum agreed the recommendations.

14/17 Work programme – 2014/2015

Chris Allcock shared a draft work programme for 2014/15 setting out the potential key areas for discussion; the programme would already have to be amended in the light of issues raised at this meeting and it may be necessary to hold an additional meeting to process all the work required. Members were reminded of the arrangements for submitting items for inclusion on future agendas.

Cllr Gillott asked that a future item be included in respect of the LA's funding cuts of £157m over the next 4 years and the impact these would have on schools. The cuts were already impacting on faith schools' subsidised transport, 6th form SEN transport, Children's Centres were also having to be closed. He felt schools' expenditure on LA provided services would have to increase.

Forum agreed to Councillor Gillott's request and noted the work programme.

The date of the next meeting will be 25th September 2014 at 6.00pm at County Hall.

The meeting closed at 7.50pm.