

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
DERBYSHIRE SCHOOLS' FORUM
Minutes of the Meeting Held on 9th February 2017
At 4.00 pm Rangewood Room, Post Mill Centre

Present

Barbara Arrandale, David Beaumont, Linda Du-Roe, Stephanie Marbrow, Julie Cadman, Liz Moorsom, Bridget Handley, Sue Kennedy, David Baker, Pauline Wensley, Julien Scholefield, Angela Stanton, Andrew Critchlow, Chris Wayment, Karen Hudson, Deborah Turner, Cllr Caitlin Bisknell, Cllr Jim Coyle

Substitutes

Alan Thomas, Cathy Tattersfield, Chris Anderson

Observers

None

Officers/Others

Chris Allcock, Mary Murkin, Ruth Lane, Karen Gurney, Kathryn Boulton

Apologies

Martin Brader, Kam Grewal-Joy, David Plummer, Lisa Key, Cllr Joselyn Street, Andrew Webster, Andrew Wild, Angela Lindley, Shirley Harvey

Linda Du-Roe chaired the meeting and Chris Allcock confirmed it was quorate.

17/08 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were given as noted above.

It was noted that Chris Wayment had attended the previous meeting on 9th January 2017. It was noted that Alan Thomas would be able to vote on any matters required as a Primary Governor substitute.

17/09 Minutes of the meeting held on 9th January 2017

Matters of accuracy

No points were raised.

Matters arising

No points were raised.

17/10 Joint Local Area SEND Inspection

Kathryn Boulton presented the paper and highlighted the following points:

- This was a local area inspection for the LA and Health.
- Children and parents were central to the inspection.

- There were three key questions;
 - How well the Local Area identifies SEND;
 - How well the Local Area meets SEND; and
 - How well the Local Area improves SEND outcomes.
- The report is a narrative response rather than a judgement and concludes that the Local Area knows itself well, identifying strengths but also some areas for development.
- The SEND Strategic Board has met and completed a workshop to review the report and has drawn up a refreshed strategic plan.

Linda Du-Roe asked what the reasons were thought to be as to why parents were not taking up personal budgets. Kathryn Boulton replied that she thought there were a variety of reasons, but there just didn't seem to be an appetite amongst parents to use the education element of personal budgets, which was also a feature of the national picture. However, communication with parents regarding this area could be improved.

David Beaumont commented that parents do make their own arrangements for school transport without accessing personal budgets. Chris Anderson added that in her experience parents didn't want the financial responsibility of personal budgets.

The Forum agreed to:

- (i) note the report and the findings from the joint local area SEND inspection; and
- (ii) endorse the work of multi-agency services, including schools, in addressing the areas for development noted in the outcome letter.

17/11 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) spending 2016 – 17

Karen Gurney presented the paper. David Beaumont asked what flexibility would there be in the DSG spending in future years. Karen replied that she thought there would be very little given the much reduced balance and the need to consider the potential for new schools in the south of the county which may require funding of £1m to £1.5m. David replied that in that case any buffer, as utilised in recent years for schools, has been spent.

The report was noted by the Forum.

17/12 Early Years Block Budgets 2017 - 18

Chris Allcock presented the paper. No questions were raised from the floor.

Schools Forum noted the report and:

- noted the increase in the funding rate for disadvantaged two year olds;
- approved the Authority's request to retain the central budgets set out in Appendix 2.
- noted the updated position with regard to likely funding and spending levels and provider rates as set out in Appendix 1 and Table 7.

17/13 High Needs Block Budgets 2017 - 18

Chris Allcock presented the paper and highlighted the following points:

- The transfer of funding for post 16 should be a straight in and out of the budget.

- High needs spending will now have to be contained within the High Needs Block grant allocation. From April 2018 there will be a ring fence around the Schools Block and the Early Years Block for Derbyshire will have reduced by ~10% compared with 2016-17 so there is little or no room to finance additional high needs costs from these sources.
- It is a concern that under the future national formula Derbyshire's current level of High Needs Block funding will only be retained due to the government's protection mechanisms. This protection is likely to be cash limited and hence the HNB grant is more likely to remain static and be eroded by inflation.

The following points were raised by Forum members:

Cathy Tattersfield said she was pleased to note from Appendix 1 that Academies are continuing to provide ERS units except for QEGS in Ashbourne and asked why their places were being cut so drastically. Mary Murkin replied that the places at QEGS have been too high for a while compared with the actual numbers of pupils attending. The LA has only recently been able to apply to the DfE for QEGS' numbers information and to ask that their places be reduced accordingly; previously the LA could not do anything about it.

Chris Allcock added that the school had to agree to the reduction, if they hadn't the LA would have needed to apply to the DfE for a reduction.

Cathy asked, if more schools become academies, would QEGS' position be repeated? Mary replied that pupils and places are now fairly accurately matched across the LA.

Cathy asked if there is now a shortfall in provision in the Ashbourne area. Kathryn Boulton replied that the gap is now in provision for Autism and extra places have been purchased at Holbrook but that the LA wants to do a sufficiency review. Chris added that a one-off grant of £0.308m was being provided by the DfE to help facilitate this.

On the matter of the funding of premature requirement costs in respect of special schools and PRUs, the sector representatives gave their approval for this funding to be top-sliced from institutions' budgets for 2017-18.

- (i) Schools Forum agreed to note the report and gave its views as above; and
- (ii) The special school and PRU representatives agreed to allow the funding for redundancy costs to be top-sliced from their schools' budgets for 2017-18.

17/14 Mainstream Schools National Funding Formula (NFF) response to consultation

Chris Allcock presented the paper and the following comments regarding the sparsity factor were made by Forum members:

- The methodology of calculation for the sparsity factor is a disaster, it doesn't take account of the children actually attending a school, is very complicated, with small movements in the average mileage count potentially having a disproportionate impact. It could have a massive impact on schools which are very similar but one qualifies for the sparsity factor and the other does not.
- In particular, the topography of Derbyshire doesn't lend itself to the 'crow flies' element of the calculation rather than using 'by road' as the distance qualifier. Although it has been suggested that individual schools could apply to the DfE to be measured 'by road'.
- Was the information regarding which Derbyshire schools were eligible available?

- Do the DfE include schools across county borders in calculations because some parents would not consider a school in a different county to where they reside?
- Can the LA choose to apply the sparsity factor to primary schools and not secondary schools?
- It has been discussed on the National Executive of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers that Derbyshire had previously tried to close some of its small schools but was prevented from doing so by the politicians of the time.
- Could publicity of the issue be arranged via the F40 group?
- If only 13 primary schools in Derbyshire qualify, then the sparsity factor clearly doesn't work.

The following replies were given by officers:

- It's unclear if the 'by road' qualifier will be available once the NFF is in place.
- The information regarding which schools are eligible is available on the DfE 'Collect' website.
- The LA could choose to apply the sparsity factor to one sector only in 2018–19, but once the 'hard NFF' is introduced in 2019 -20 it will apply across both mainstream sectors.
- The draft F40 response also expressed concerns about the indicator.

Discussion then moved to the 'funding floor'.

Chris Allcock said that, based on the DfE's 2016-17 modelling, 42 primary schools and 1 secondary school would have been protected by the 'funding floor' this year. However, the precise impact will depend upon future years' data. The floor is guaranteed until 2019-20 after which point it's unclear what will happen.

Deborah Turner asked if the LA was in touch with schools that potentially lose money under the NFF as a whole. Kathryn Boulton said that the LA has taken every opportunity to raise issues via the consultation, media and MPs. Other bodies may have more freedom to raise the issue than the LA. Councillor Bisknell added that issues had been raised at council level, including in the Council's recent budget debate.

Andrew Critchlow said it was no use just criticising and objecting, we need to come up with alternatives. When the 'funding' ceases small schools will close, which is what the government ultimately wants.

Chris Allcock replied that we need to be proactive and look at the costs side of the equation as well as funding. Can schools become more efficient by working collaboratively, this is the DfE's expectation. What the LA cannot afford to do is allow schools to overspend their budgets as the Council is likely to have to pick up the deficits.

Kathryn Boulton said that the LA has been doing lots of work with schools about working collaboratively and this needs to be pushed further. Chris noted that changes in the funding formula could actually change the thinking about school provision. If schools merge or close then the lump sum allocations, £110,000 under the NFF, would be reduced to reflect this. There is therefore an incentive to try and retain the current school estate to maximising the funding but for schools to remain viable efficiencies will have to be identified also.

Andrew Critchlow said that clusters of schools needed to get together. Liz Moorsom replied that this already happens but it doesn't really save you much money.

Sue Kennedy said that her school was part of a very active cluster of 13 schools and they were speaking to their local MP in the morning but the Authority needs to do more. A Forum member said that head-teachers in small schools were having to teach more and therefore had less time to engage in such activities.

Liz Moorsom said there was a danger that small schools would close and that there would be areas where there was no provision.

Cathy Tattersfield said in the past, when school closures were proposed, parents had fought successful campaigns and kept them open. Parents groups should be mobilised by helping them to understand in simple terms what has happened to school budgets.

Linda Du-Roe said that governors needed to meet in clusters to understand the position and that she would arrange a consultation response from the Derbyshire Schools Governors Association.

In terms of a response, Chris asked Forum members to e-mail the Schools Forum generic e-mail address schoolsforum@derbyshire.gov.uk with any comments by 16th March. If time allowed he would circulate a draft response to members before the DfE's closing date of 22nd March 2017.

The Schools Forum agreed to note the report.

17/15 High Needs National Funding Formula – response to consultation

Chris Allcock presented the paper and said he had not yet drafted a response and contributions were most welcome.

Cathy Tattersfield commented that 20% of funding was proposed to be based on deprivation. Pupils with the most significant difficulties, and therefore the most expensive, cut across all classes and, in her experience, are not linked to deprivation.

Chris replied that the government might argue that the historic allocation element of future funding calculations would mitigate the impact of this issue.

David Beaumont commented that lots of children in mainstream schools have low attainment and that you have to prove you are spending £6,000 on each pupil before you can access any funding from the High Needs Block. The LA's benchmark to attract EHCP or GRIP funding is too high compared with other LAs and inclusion in schools is contradicted by having to fund the first £6,000 of support. The schools exclusions data supports this view point.

Deborah Turner commented that the measure for children in bad health is subjective and therefore a strange data set to use, and also quite historic if data from 2011 is being used.

Chris Allcock confirmed that members who wished to could e-mail him at schoolsforum@derbyshire.gov.uk with any comments by 16th March 2017.

Schools Forum agreed to note the report.

17/16 Date of future meetings

The next meeting date will be held on 22nd June 2017 (6-8pm) Committee Room 1, County Hall. The meeting closed at 6.00pm.