

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
DERBYSHIRE SCHOOLS' FORUM
Minutes of the Meeting Held on 25 January 2012
At 6.00 pm at County Hall

Present:

Atholl Donaldson, Joe Birkin, Peter Thorne, Martin Brader, Denise Cunningham, Lindsey Partridge, Julie Cadman, Andrew Cartledge, Andrew Wild, Linda Du-Roe, Rosemary MacKenzie, Lee Floyd, Angela Colmar, Phil Moncur, Heather Rolfe, D Turner, John Crofts, Cathy Tattersfield, Chris Wayment, John Partington.

Apologies:

Patrick Cook, Peter Crowe, Julie Bloor, Peter Hamer, Barry Thacker, Paul Mason, Philip Sunderland, Penny Pennington, John Holmes, David Allen, Carole Nelson, James McNamara, Alison Bull, Cllr B Lewis, Cllr A Charles.

Observers:

Cllr M Longden, Ollie Pardo,

Officers and other attendees:

Mary Murkin, Karen Gurney, Andy Callow, C Jerman, Chris Tilley, Nicole Chavaudra

Martin Brader (Vice Chair) led the meeting.

12/01 Minutes of the meeting held on 6th December 2011

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

12/02 Schools' Broadband

Andy Callow presented the report to update the Forum on the re-procurement of Broadband and future funding arrangements. The procurement process has now concluded and the contracts with KCOM finalised. Roadshows giving opportunity for schools to meet the suppliers and compare services are now in place. The Derbyshire event will be held at Pride Park on 30th January 2012 and the number of schools showing an interest in attending is increasing. A Project Manager has now been appointed in Derbyshire to give advice and guidance regarding the new system and the decisions schools will have to make.

Andy informed the Forum that Cabinet had agreed to utilise up to £756k from the 2010-11 DSG underspend for initial investment in the core network. In return for this there will be reduced annual contract costs which should bring pricing stability to schools.

The DSG subsidy, which does not include secondary schools, is around £1.74m. The actual costs to schools are driven by various factors including distance from, and type of, telephone exchange and schools have no control over these. These costs have the potential to differ significantly from the share of the central DSG, if

delegated. Further modelling will be undertaken with a view to a further report being brought to the Forum's June meeting.

From November 2012, the intention would be to devolve funding to schools in line with their expenditure to avoid schools having an in-year shortfall to meet.

A member of the Forum asked how selective schools can be with their options and will limited selection make a difference? It was replied that schools can now choose on an individual basis and this will be reflected in the charge. Schools will need to weigh up the options and choose the most suitable for their needs. It was also asked if it would be better if all schools received the same contract with no options. Andy Callow replied that this was the previous broadband service and that schools were not satisfied with it. Schools can opt for the service they need and the charge will be fairer. Also individual schools can now get quotes from the open market and check that they are receiving best value.

It was also raised from the floor that, if the LA subsidy is only for next year, will schools be made aware of the long term costs? It was replied that schools will be supported in their choices and given advice. It was also queried if academies and free schools will be subsidised and the reply was that all schools in Derbyshire can opt to buy into the service but that academies and free schools will pay the full rate as they receive a share of the funding via the LACSEG (Local Authority Central Spend Equivalent Grant).

The Forum noted the report.

12/03 SEN Review – Terms of Reference

Chris Tilley presented a report informing the Forum of the terms of reference for a forthcoming review of Special Educational Needs (SEN) services.

Nicole Chavaudra talked through the paper and discussed the aims of bringing about an improvement in the quality, service and efficiency that users experience.

Chris Tilley explained that they were gaining information by 'listening, looking and learning' through meetings with various groups. A meeting was held at short notice and all but one of the 22 headteachers invited attended, with the one headteacher who could not come sending the SENCO. He felt that this showed the extent of schools' interest in the issue. There will be phased actions which will be addressed (short, medium and long term). Interest had been expressed regarding delegation of funding to families as they are most aware of their child's needs.

Concerns were raised over the Common Assessment Framework and appropriate sharing of information. This was noted.

It was raised from the floor that Out of County placements are a significant expense to the Authority and that it can be difficult to bring these children back into Derbyshire establishments once they had been placed. It was suggested that more could be invested In County to reverse this.

A member of the Forum pointed out that in Appendix A it mentions that 86.7% of all statements are issued within 6 weeks and this should be 6 months. It was agreed that this was an error and will be rectified.

It was also stated that the March deadline has been changed by the government and Chris Tilley said that the provisional indications were that it would be April. It was suggested from the floor that the end of February for responses does not give sufficient time to make decisions and it was replied that there has already been good feedback and it is time to move forward. It was also raised from the floor that this date is a concern to special schools' headteachers as their next joint meeting is not until March.

It was raised by a member of the Forum that objectivity is needed and that an 'overseer' can be of great help to schools. There needs to be a balance between personalisation and independent individuals. Chris Tilley informed the Forum that no SEN panels were under threat.

A member of the Forum stated that if SEN reviews are correct then everyone benefits. It was also raised that if more staff in schools are involved in SEN matters then everyone gains a greater understanding. Chris Tilley replied that he was reassured by the attendance from mainstream schools at the recent meeting and was optimistic and encouraged by the early response.

The Forum noted the report.

12/04 Schools' Budgets 2012-13

Chris Allcock presented the broad principals of the paper to the Forum. He explained that the DSG multiplier will be cash flat in 2012-13 and probably the following year. Previous modelling had been based on a Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) of minus 2%. However, this is now set at minus 1.5% and therefore the estimated losses of some schools will be tempered.

He informed the Forum that the loss of funding for 16-19 provision, estimated at £5m, is now to be phased over four years and not two as previously thought.

The Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) will be set at £600 per eligible pupil in 2012-13 and based on an 'Ever 6' count which triggers funding if a pupil on the January 2012 census has ever been eligible for FSM in any of the last 18 census dates. The DfE has announced that, from September 2012, schools will have to publish details of how their PPG is used.

Specialist Schools funding is now being levelled up and will be given on a block and per pupil basis (secondary schools) and block basis (special schools) to all schools in these sectors. Schools previously not in receipt of this funding will see the increase phased over a 3 year period.

The 2012-13 indicative multipliers were agreed at a Cabinet meeting on 10th January 2012 and will be published to schools imminently. The multipliers relating to the revised formula factors are slightly lower than anticipated due to MFG being funded at a higher rate. It is hoped that schools will be able to

estimate their budgets for 2012-13 based on the published information somewhat earlier than previous years, giving governing bodies and school leadership teams more time to plan their spending.

Chris then discussed the overall position with the DSG estimated to be down £3.7m on the previous year due to there being around 774 fewer pupils in Derbyshire schools. It is anticipated that this trend will continue for the following two years. There are 'minimum DSG funding' arrangements for 3 year olds, i.e. if the number of funded 3 year olds is less than 90% of the eligible cohort, additional DSG is payable. Derbyshire may qualify for around £800k of such funding but at present exact figures are not known.

Chris explained the DSG pressures and savings, highlighting major changes and the impact these will have. Income is reducing faster than costs and by 2014-15 the deficit is estimated at £5.5m. The intention over the next three years is to cover this shortfall by reducing central DSG budgets thus protecting the LMS multipliers and schools' delegated budgets. The reduction in central DSG underspend budgets would be phased; if too much is transferred in 2012-13 then potentially multipliers would have to be reduced again in 2013-14. The more measured transfer provides a greater chance that the indicative multipliers referred to above will be a more representative planning guide for both 2013-14 and 2014-15.

Table 3 shows the impact of central/delegated spending ratios and the reduction of amounts held centrally. As previously reported, this transfer of funds from the DSG would help with the Central Expenditure Limit (CEL).

Chris stated that the £2.7m SEN increase was not anticipated and, if this was to continue in future years, then multipliers will have to be pared back to meet the shortfall.

A member of the Forum asked why Derbyshire schools' SEN costs exceed neighbouring LAs and was this due to a larger number of SENTAs? Chris Tilley replied that this would be investigated as part of the SEN review.

It was also raised from the floor that small PVI providers would be badly affected by the proposal not to inflate the 2011-12 multipliers and the fact that, as a result of the single point entry changes, they are losing pupils to schools. This point was noted by the Forum.

It was asked by a Forum member how schools could plan and prepare for future years? Chris replied that if schools buy into the School Support Finance Traded Service then the new multipliers and pupil numbers are being entered onto the spreadsheets to give more realistic budget and carry forward estimates. These will shortly be released to schools.

It was also asked if more schools will receive the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) as a result of the paring back of multipliers. Chris agreed that paring back would trigger a limited increase in the number of schools supported by MFG but that this was unavoidable.

A question was also asked about the release of MFG in future years. Chris confirmed that as MFG is released it has to be recycled within the ISB. Whether this will be available to increase multipliers or meet new pressures e.g. extra SENTA hours will only become clear nearer the time.

The Forum noted the report.

12/05 Minimum Funding Guarantee Issues

Chris Allcock was seeking the approval of the Forum regarding changes to the MFG calculations of certain schools for 2012-13 and, where applicable, for 2013-14 and beyond. For 2012-13, schools cannot lose more than 1.5% per pupil. In 2011-12, the Authority had to ask the Secretary of State for approval for the majority of MFG disapplication issues. The regulations have changed for 2012-13 and Forums now have more powers to approve such matters.

Chris asked if the Forum would approve the removal of transitional and split site funding from Tibshelf's MFG baseline in 2012-13 and 2013-14. It was asked from the floor how much notice Tibshelf School had of the changes in funding. The reply was that the headteacher and governing body had known for a long time that this funding was time limited.

Forum was also asked to agree to a technical change in the methodology for counting early years (EY) pupils for MFG purposes. A Forum member asked for further clarification. It was replied that EY pupils are now funded on actual hours provided at 3 census points whereas, prior to April 2011, they had essentially been funded on a January census head count basis. Without the change, the MFG calculation could result in anomalous outcomes in cases where the January head count and full time equivalent pupils based on the number of hours provided varied considerably.

The Forum approved the recommendations and also agreed that any further MFG issues relating to individual schools can be approved by the Strategic Director, in conjunction with the Chair of the Schools Forum, and reported back to the next meeting.

12/06 Academy Recoupment

Chris Allcock presented the report regarding the arrangements for recouping monies from local authorities in respect of Academies. For 2011-12 and 2012-13 the Secretary of State had top sliced a percentage from every authority's Formula Grant. This top slice was a straight pro rata reduction and didn't reflect the number of academies in each authority. Derbyshire's grant was reduced by £3.7m through this process.

The DfE are now consulting on a more refined approach and have published national average indicative recoupment amounts per pupil. Based on these average national rates, and the number of children currently in academies, the amount recouped from Derbyshire could be around £1m lower at around £2.7m. The final recoupment for 2012-13 will be based on a local recoupment rate and the actual number of children in Derbyshire academies during 2012-13; as such the indicative figure above could well change.

The DfE is not proposing changes to the 2011-12 top slice, which the Authority has argued against in its response.

A copy of Derbyshire's response was attached to the report and there will be a further update when LACSEG arrangements have been finalised.

The Forum noted the report.

12/07 Schools' Finance Systems

Chris informed the Forum of potential changes to the core financial systems for schools. Schools currently use DSAS and the key functions were set out in section 2 of the report followed by a list of key issues which now need to be addressed.

SAP system showcases have been run for headteachers, bursars and admin officers. Appendix 1 summarised the feedback received from these showcases which was broadly very positive.

No decisions have yet been made about the new system; however, this will have to be decided by the Authority soon. The Forum was informed that the new system will involve training and supply costs for schools and a contribution from the DSG to help schools with these costs will probably be needed.

A further report on this will be brought as soon as possible.

The Forum agreed to note the report.

12/08 Date of Next Meetings

The date of the next meeting is still to be decided, the previous dates of 21st February 2012 and 14th March having both been cancelled. A new date will be timed so as to give Forum members a chance to discuss the government's expected further consultations on SEN and DSG funding. Forum members will be informed of a new date as soon as possible.

N.B. A further meeting is to be held at 6pm on 19th June 2012 at County Hall.