

Norfolk Schools Forum

Minutes of Meeting held on Friday 29 September 2023 Cranworth Room
County Hall
09:00 – 12:30 hours

Present

Amanda Conner (sub)	Terrington St Clement School
Steven Dewing	Sapientia Education Trust
Lacey Douglass	The Heather Nursery
Carolyn Ellis-Gedge	Parkside School
Bob Groome	Joint Consultative Committee
Glyn Hambling	Unity Education Trust
David Hicks	Synergy Multi Academy Trust
Carol Jacques	Earlham Nursery School
Clare Jones	Broadland Horizons Education Trust
Joanne Philpott	City of Norwich School
Sarah Porter	The Heart Education Trust
Daniel Thrower	The Wensum Trust
Joanna Tuttle	Aylsham High School
Vicky Warnes	Joint Consultative Committee
Jill Wilson (sub)	Toftwood Infant and Junior Federation
Martin White (Chair)	Nebula Federation

Representing

Maintained Primary Schools
Academies
Early Years Representative
Maintained Special Schools
Joint Consultative Committee
Alternative Provision
Academies
Maintained Nursery Schools
Academies
Academies
Academies
Academies
Maintained Secondary Schools
Joint Consultative Committee
Primary Maintained Governors
Maintained Primary Governors

LA Officers

John Baldwin	Head of Finance Exchequer services (for item 9)
Michael Bateman	Assistant Director, SEND Strategic Improvement & Early Effectiveness
Martin Brock	Accountant (Schools, SEND & EY)
John Crowley	Assistant Director, Education Intelligence and Effectiveness
Marilyn Edgeley	Admin Officer
Dawn Filtness	Finance Business Partner
Jon Nice	Senior Advisor
Simon Paylor	Strategic Commissioner, Health & Disability (for item 8)
Nicki Rider	Assistant Director High Needs SEND
James Wilson	Director of Sufficiency, Planning and Education Strategy
Jon Nice	Senior Adviser, Education Intelligence and Effectiveness

Apologies:

Adrian Ball	Diocese of Ely Multi Academy	Academies
Helen Bates	Roman Catholic Diocese	Roman Catholic Diocese
Martin Colbourne	City College	16 – 19 Representative
Mike Grimble	Avenue Junior School	Maintained Primary Governors
Rachel Quick	The Wherry School	Special School Academy
Hayley Porter-Aslet	Church of England Diocese	Church of England Diocese
Sarah Shirras	St Williams Primary	Maintained Primary Schools
Sam Fletcher	Assistant Director, Education Strategy & Infrastructure	
Sara Tough	Executive Director Childrens Services	

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. The Chair welcomed Carolyn Ellis-Gedge the new Maintained Special Schools Representative.

2. **Minutes of the Last Meeting and Matters Arising**

Matter of Accuracy – page 10 change wording in Chair's summary to "group contract". The minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

Matters arising:

- Specialist Resource Bases (SRBs).

Officers confirmed that teams have been in contact with all SRBs. If any member thinks that is not correct, they should contact Michael Bateman.

- Alternative Provision

Nicki Rider confirmed she has had discussions with Andy Tovell

- Clarity regarding redundancy costs for maintained schools

There is a fund managed by Kate Philpin – if schools are RAG rated as green the authority will not fund their redundancy costs, but if they are rated as amber or red, then they will be looked at on a case-by-case basis. There is a review of the current approach planned, and the outcome will come back to Schools Forum in due course.

A union rep thanked Members for their support for recent industrial action.

3. **Strategic Planning**

Local First Inclusion

This is the third report to Schools Forum on the Local First Inclusion programme and occurs two weeks on from our submission to the DfE of the second Tri-Annual Report (15th September 2023).

Michael Bateman gave a presentation providing an overview.

The chair thanked Michael for the encouraging update, in response MB highlighted the need to be cautious – the programme has many moving parts.

Comments from Forum Members and responses (in italics)

- Has a site for the Yarmouth school been identified?

Yes North Denes site.

- There is a demonstration planned at the Forum by parents group for next Friday – would it be worth putting something out in Eastern Daily Press?

Officers are aware of this – it is worth noting this is not specifically about Norfolk. It will be a good opportunity with the press to highlight all the good work we are doing.

- Buying into LFI is a critical factor – disappointed about comment to executive board by member of parent partnership where it was expressed by them that the huge increase in EHCPs was a measure of parents dissatisfaction with schools – how will you grasp this?

We have worked really hard with parent organisations over the years. At event earlier this week where 3 of the parent groups were represented we said we needed evidence of how many parents they represent and of how many they represent have this view. The answer was 300, 2,000 and 3,000 therefor a 5,000 reach out of 26,000 families. In response to a census we ran the majority said they were getting good guidance from their schools.

- Members highlighted the importance of all agency messaging being in line with Local First Inclusion strategy

We have a good working relationship at a strategic level with health colleagues. We will suggest saying what are needs rather than highlighting EHCPs. The intention is health teams become more and more integrated.

- It would be interesting to know how they intend to reduce waiting lists because that is where we are getting the most negative push back from parents, children not even being seen for 5 years.

It is likely that there will be changes to how pathways are administered.

- It is important that messaging from health partners is accurate and consistent – an example was shared where a parent concerned about a child went to a community paediatrician received a letter with a sweeping statement that every setting in Norfolk staff were welcome trained. They are not.
- Extra places – and turning some taps off. Are you able to share some details of what those taps are?

The basis for Safety Valve modelling the way we get back to a balanced budget is to turn the main tap off which is the Independent Sector. A big part of that is building the new special school places. The way we ensure the special schools are not full is the next level of pupil flow.

- You mention bringing schools in line - the other aspect is governors, you need to bring them on board as well.

Governors are part of our communication strategy. Governors and school leaders need to be our mouth piece.

- Members highlighted that some Trust boards do not use Governor Hub and ensuring a broad sign posting of documents through all channels.

There is a vacancy for a communications expert coming up.

- (Via email) - Schools and Community Teams are in place what are their key objectives now?

The KPI's are those agreed for the Safety Valve.

- Members highlighted the lack of communication about what community teams are doing.

The expectation is that teams are making direct contact. We recently hosted some events but with relatively low attendance.

Action: Michael Bateman will follow up on the work of the communications team, and reply to the email directly.

- Members said it would be helpful to use ecourier, they said need to contact people directly and this was not happening also suggested it would be helpful to see who people are by name, what regions they are looking at and what their responsibilities are – eventually a clear directorate saying these are the people looking after key elements.

In response officers said they did need Forum members to also take what information is out there and share it.

- Members asked how the geographically based teams will work with Special Schools children – who come from across Norfolk.

This is work in progress.

Action: NCC will circulate an MI Sheet sharing information about School and Community Teams.

- Members said making direct contact is key.
- The chair said he was concerned about primary alternative provision while he understands the reason for the focus on secondary.

We will keep looking at SRB model also this is a £100m six year program and we need to see where we are in 6 months.

- Members highlighted the issue that there is a gap in provision before these SRBs are going to come on-line. Concerns were raised at the dependence on unregulated provision at significant cost and the issue it could cause primary children once they reach secondary age. It was recognised that there is a limit to the pace that can be done.
- Members highlighted the need for a clear messaging that we all use when we report back to the people we represent.

Schools Forum noted the information provided.

Early Years Pathfinder – PowerPoint Presentation

The wrap-around childcare pathfinder scheme starts September 2024. Norfolk will start earlier as one of the authorities involved in testing wrap-around childcare. DfE are in listening mode about how they use this information in designing this program. Program is to provide access to childcare of all primary age children from 8pm to 6pm in term time. There will be significant funding available to support provision - £289m pot across the country – the idea is that at the end of the program settings are self-sustaining.

What should we do next, how should we to engage with schools, early years providers and multi academy trusts, around this issue? And what should we feed back to the DfE?

Comments from Forum Members and responses (in italics)

- Members highlighted that demand for out of school provision is limited and provision is often not viable unless it draws on a large population from several schools.
- We could attach provision to zones but don't want people to think they can't work across the zones, and it was highlighted that MATs and large federations often have their own geography.

We will need to flexibly adapt the model

- Members asked if there any requirements what the provision will look like and highlighted that quality play work is different to learning in lessons but is not just children left to their own devices.

We have discussed high quality play work rather than teaching and learning which is quite different. This funding gives us the opportunity to provide training and quality assurance.

Capital funding that is being given, almost all authorities are saying this is not enough and would not provide things like mini buses. This is the kind of feedback that we need to inform planning.

- Members raised that the biggest problem in some areas will be transport, and the significant issues around this for complex needs schools – the special school representative will take this back to NASSH.

The Early Years and Childcare team will be keen to talk to NASSH about this. There is funding for the LA to employ a project team. Members thought this was a good idea.

- Members highlighted the risk around number of places - need to have a minimum funding guarantee.

We can use the funding to ghost fund places to enable market testing.

- Children with Complex Needs need to be catered for, which is a challenge for nurseries, funding needs to be associated with that as well.

This has been the most common feed back from almost every LA to the DfE around the inclusion and SEND aspect.

Schools Forum noted the information provided.

4 Dedicated Schools Grant Consultation Proposals

Consultation and engagement plan

This purpose of this item is to share information on the consultation process and get feedback from Forum members on the consultation questions and engagement.

There will be 2 different types of events: (i) Early Years Consultation days which will be face to face and virtual sessions, and (ii) there will also be virtual sessions for the main consultation with schools.

Comments from Forum Members and responses (in italics)

- It would be a good idea to log the people that attend sessions and compare these to people who respond to the consultation. This would provide useful evidence.

Information on sessions will go out with the consultation.

- Members highlighted that with the first session being next Friday not much time. In future suggest discussing consultation events when we talk about the consultation topics in the summer. *Agree we could add later sessions. Would be good to have someone from Schools Forum at each of the sessions.*
- Very positive – suggest add a bit about Norfolk First Inclusion.

Consultations taking place:

- Mainstream Schools Funding/Special School Funding for GCSE provision
- Notional Send
- Early Years Funding
- Provisional DSG Allocations for 2024/25 and Fair Funding Consultation for Mainstream Schools' Formula

Officers said the main schools' consultation will include a narrative around falling rolls. The authority is not required to consult on this with schools only with Schools Forum. Forum will consider this in November. This is a change to the paper that was circulated.

Provisional DSG allocations for 2024/25 and Fair Funding Consultation for Mainstream Schools

The total core Schools Budget will total over £59.6 billion in 2024-25 – the highest ever level per pupil, in real terms, as measured by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS). This will include teachers' pay additional grant. The increase per pupil is 2.7% compared to the current year.

For Norfolk specifically, the DSG is £781m; this currently excludes the growth and falling rolls factors, and the Early Years Block.

Funding Consultation for Mainstream Schools' Formula

LAs are required to move to within 10% of the National Funding Formula. Norfolk already mirrors this.

Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) is proposed to be 0.5% - the LA will show the impact for schools as part of the technical papers to be issued.

Schools Block transfer – as per the paper, there are 3 options for ranking.

Other consultation proposals are as per the paper.

Comments from Forum Members and responses (in italics)

- The Nursery school representative asked for further information specific to her sector.

The Forum Representative for their schools will be sent more information to enable a Nursery School sector decision.

Capping of Gains

The options will be the same this year as they were last year.

Officers reminded that there had been a low response in the past from schools, particularly those affected, and so there was not a general understanding of the school system as a whole. The system will not receive well a change from the 'status quo' without a clear steer from Forum.

Since the last consultation, the Safety Valve has been agreed and includes the principle of Block transfers each year.

Unless there is a significant shift in overall funding for schools this will be a perpetual issue whilst the Block transfers take place impacting primarily upon those school who have become eligible for sparsity funding since the change in the NFF.

Officers clarified that it is important for the message to be shared with all schools by Members channels to ask them to respond and think about the whole system.

Comments from Forum Members

- The importance of schools responding to this was highlighted – 1 in 6 schools are impacted.

Falling Rolls

This is a fund that Schools Forum can provide a recommendation on; schools do not need to be consulted. Whilst there has, historically, been the option of a fund that Norfolk has chosen not to have, the rules have changed meaning that it no longer is only available to schools rated as Good or Outstanding. Therefore, it is appropriate to reconsider it for Norfolk.

Officers indicated that intention is to include high-level information about the potential for a Falling Rolls fund in consultation and discuss it further with Schools Forum in November.

Comments from Forum Members and responses (in italics)

- We will need information on exactly how this fund will be used to justify why we should put this money away?

agree, the decision of forum might be not to allocate.

School Forum noted the increase in overall DSG funding for 2024-25

- It will be important to highlight the important elements of the consultation to encourage engagement with a complex set of papers

Notional SEN

In the paper there are two main options: defer for a year or move to the national average incrementally over a 3-year period with an increase of 1.5%.

There is a danger this could get confused with the 1.5% transfer from Schools Block to HN Block and so messaging is critical.

The DfE expect Norfolk to take notice of national averages if we do not, then there could be a risk of derailing the LFI Program.

Comments from Forum Members and responses (in italics)

- Forum members recognised the significant impact an increase in notional SEND will have on schools and the importance of clarity of messaging.
- This is not an increase in funding and schools need to understand.
- It was highlighted that a 1.5% increase could be confused with the High Needs Block transfer.

The chair asked if members could be available for the consultation briefings and to have cameras turned on when they attend.

Schools Forum noted the information provided.

Early Years Funding Consultation

This paper explains the proposed process for consulting on changes to Early Years funding from April 2024. This includes an introduction of new entitlements for eligible working parents for up to 30 hours of childcare from when their child is 9 months old to when they start school.

The paper also considers the distribution of the Teachers Pay and Pensions Grant and the guidance of using a quality supplement.

Comments from Forum Members and responses (in italics)

- The Nursery school representative highlighted the higher costs associated with employing teachers, and questioned the impact on Nursery schools and schools with Nursery classes.

The challenge back from other types of provider from the consultative group is that other providers employing people with same qualification level ought to be able to reward those in the same way.

This will come back to Forum in November.

Action: Martin Brock to provide the information requested

Carole Jacques also requested the minutes from the Early Years Consultative Group.

- Special Schools Funding Review

Special Schools requested a second funding review around GCSE provision and residential provision.

A proposal has been formed for funding additional costs for students capable of taking more than 5 GCSEs, and the LA asks that all schools engage and respond.

More work is required in relation to the review of funding for residential provision in conjunction with effected schools. The LA are currently reviewing information received to date and so are not in a position to be able to consult. This will be consulted on after the November Schools Forum meeting, if appropriate.

Comments from Forum Members and responses (in italics)

Members asked why residential funding had fallen behind.

Residential provision is more complex. Any revision to residential will be met by savings elsewhere on DSG HN Block and Safety Valve Recovery planning.

Forum noted the progress of the Special School Funding Review and the intention to include a proposal for meeting GCSE costs provision in special schools alongside the autumn consultation.

It was agreed to debate funding for residential provision at the November meeting.

- **MFG Disapplication – Amalgamation funding**

Members are asked to agree the application of a second (and final) year of amalgamation protection for The Harleston Sancroft Academy, at 70% of two lump sums, for the 2024-25 financial year.

Officers confirmed they will receive split site funding.

Yes	14
No	0
Abstain	0

Unanimously agreed.

5. Catering

The circulated report updates Schools Forum on the activity of the Schools Catering Commissioning Group in relation to Schools Catering Contract arrangements for Norfolk Schools.

At the last Forum meeting it was determined that tendering for a new schools catering contract would be preferable and a commissioning group should be established.

An extension to contract with Norse till March 2025 with a measure of performance management now appears possible, with Norse having no objections to this approach whilst a tender process is carried out.

The group would like non-maintained schools to be included in the new contract.

There is support for a per meal pricing model with any new provider.

The current lot for repairs maintenance will not be continued in the new contract.

A project plan will be shared with Schools Forum in due course.

The extension to the contract is under review by Neil Carle.

Communications will be going out to schools in the current contract following this meeting.

Action: Simon Paylor will email the catering group when he has further information from Norse.

The chair thanked Simon Paylor for his work.

Comments from Forum Members and responses (in italics)

- Members questioned if schools had the option to do in house catering.
Buying into the contract is not compulsory.
- It is important to choose the consultant carefully - not giving money for old rope.
We will liaise with groups.

Schools Forum noted the update.

6. Risk Protection Arrangement update

This paper highlights the differences between the NCC Insurance for Schools and the DfE Risk Protection arrangement. It explains why the authority encourages maintained schools to remain with the current comprehensive NCC insurance arrangements for 2024/25 under the current 5-year NCC insurance arrangement.

If a school is thinking of leaving the insurance scheme, the Insurance team would like to know this sooner rather than later to minimise the potential financial impact upon other schools within the arrangement.

Comments from Forum Members and responses (in italics)

- As LA schools become fewer costs increase.
insurers think that schools are relatively high risk and liability claims can have a long tail consistency is important.
- A member highlighted that they have found RPA to be good, but is missing cyber cover.
- People need to look at experiences and look at testimonials the only other way is to ask for external reviews of the two schemes.
- Individual schools will make a decision. As a governor I would want to ask NCC in the future what their cyber insurance is like.
- What happens if a school falls down?
if it is about maintenance issues predominantly that is a cost that will be with the school.

Schools Forum noted the information provided.

7. Future Plan

Members should note that the Schools Forum meeting on 22 November in the Cranworth Room County Hall is scheduled to run from 09:00 – 13:00.

8. AOB – raised by Chair

People have contacted the Chair about an unfortunate email sent over the weekend about Teachers Pensions.

This email has caused great concern and the issue has been raised at the joint chairs meeting to identify what is being done about the issue and to seek assurance (which was received) that the contributions to the scheme had been made and the issue was Teachers pensions and MyOracle. The Chair has requested an update.

John Baldwin explained the position agreed is that the data in the old format will be accepted and teachers will see this in their records by mid-November. If schools have any individual approaching retirement age, then they should contact the LA as the sooner the LA is informed the better, and this has been communicated to schools. No contributions have been lost and manual 'fixes' have been in place for those retiring.

Comments from Forum Members and responses (in italics)

- Members questioned how this was communicated, and why it was not communicated at the working group. We all need to know when this communication went out and at what time. All about transparency. Trust levels with NCC are disappearing.

Email going out was a mistake and inaccurate. Nobody will be impacted. By the end of October expecting all records to be accurate.

- There are impacts of this on the in-service death benefit.

No person's pension will be impacted by this if anything happened to any individual we would be working with teachers' pension.

John Baldwin will share what communications have gone out.

Action: There will be an update of the current situation at the November meeting.

9. Date of next meeting

22 November 2023 09:00 – 13:00 Cranworth Room County Hall

The meeting ended at 12:30