

# Norfolk Schools Forum

**Minutes of Meeting held on Wednesday 17 May 2023 Cranworth Room County Hall  
09:00 – 12:30 hours**

## **Present**

Adrian Ball  
Helen Bates  
Steven Dewing  
Lacey Douglass  
Mike Grimble  
Glyn Hambling  
Georgie Howell (sub)  
Carol Jacques  
Karen McIntosh (sub)  
Joanne Philpott  
Sarah Porter  
Sarah Shirras  
Joanna Tuttle  
Martin White (Chair)  
Vicky Warnes

Diocese of Ely Multi Academy  
Roman Catholic Diocese  
Sapientia Education Trust  
The Heather Nursery  
Avenue Junior School  
Unity Education Trust  
West Norfolk AT  
Earlham Nursery School  
City College  
City of Norwich School  
The Heart Education Trust  
St Williams Primary  
Aylsham High School  
Nebula Federation

## **Representing**

Academies  
Roman Catholic Diocese  
Academies  
Early Years Representative  
Primary Maintained Governors  
Alternative Provision  
Academies  
Maintained Nursery School  
16 – 19 Representative  
Academies  
Academies  
Primary Maintained Schools  
Secondary Maintained Schools  
Primary Maintained Governors  
JCC

Martin Brock  
Michael Bateman  
John Crowley  
Marilyn Edgeley  
Dawn Filtness  
Sam Fletcher

Accountant (Schools, SEND & EY)  
Assistant Director, SEND Strategic Improvement & Early Effectiveness  
Assistant Director, Learning & Achievement  
Admin Officer  
Finance Business Partner  
Interim Assistant Director, Education Strategy & Infrastructure

Victoria Groom  
Simon Paylor  
Nicki Rider  
Sara Tough  
James Wilson

Senior Advisor Strategy and Partnership  
Strategic Commissioner, Health & Disability  
Assistant Director High Needs SEND  
Executive Director Childrens Services  
Director of Quality and Transformation

## **Apologies:**

Martin Colbourne  
Bob Groome  
David Hicks  
Clare Jones  
Rachel Quick  
Hayley Ross  
Rebecca Wicks  
Daniel Thrower

City College  
Synergy Multi Academy Trust  
Boudica Schools Trust  
The Wherry School  
Bure Park Academy  
The Clare School  
The Wensum Trust

16 – 19 Representative  
JCC  
Academies  
Academies  
Special School Academy  
Special School Academy  
Maintained Special School  
Academies

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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

It was noted that Helen Bates was present at the March meeting.

The minutes were accepted as a true record.

## **Communications**

Officers confirmed that if the format works they will produce this after each meeting.

Comments:

- The chair confirmed he had seen a draft of the communication and was happy with it but reiterated that this needs to appear as coming from the Schools Forum and not an NCC document.
- Needs to sign post events
- Could go out as an MI Sheet/published with minutes/emailed to individual members

## **Recent Ballot for 2 Academy Representatives**

Nominations were received from Jo Philpot and Daniel Thrower. There being no other nominations Daniel Thrower will commence as a new academy representative and Jo Philpot will commence a new 4 year term of office.

## **3. Strategic Planning: Local First Inclusion Plan**

Michael Bateman updated forum - today and in the future this will be an agenda item at all Forum meetings and will be in the format of a report rather than a presentation. School Forum members on the executive board gives Forum an input into processes. Is the shape of the report going to be useful in the future?

Today we will look at High level updates in terms of reporting in the public domain. There will be regular triannual reporting to the DfE. We are suggesting Forum focus on subset of KPI's and ask your views on the proposed subset and your thoughts on why the EHCP numbers continue to rise and what we can do to reduce those. We can then take any questions around the capital program.

The High Needs Block deficit will be discussed in the Outturn item on the agenda.

Report highlights there will be triannual reporting and how Forum members sit within that reporting.

Comments / questions from members:

- How will we get message out to parents

*In response confirmed ongoing liaison with parent groups but we are looking at different options.*

- Looking at the way these papers are presented any communication we are doing needs to link to regular items on the agenda as well so there is a direct link to these documents.

*In response, hopefully when we get the regular briefing as well as being a standalone document it will be a guide to further information.*

- There are cases where parents request an EHCP and the school says they can meet need without an EHCP, but it goes through anyway.

*In response, officers agreed with forum members that this needs to be looked into further.*

- We did miss an Educate Norfolk representative on the executive board.

*In response, there is a widely held view that there needs to be better representation from headteachers, we will address this.*

- Anytime an outcome from Schools Forum is required is this something that can be put at the front of the paper?

*In response – this would normally be in the executive summary at the front of the paper.*

- KPI's – interesting to see in addition to ones mentioned above.

*In response, we will include the full list of KPI's and highlight the ones where Forum has a more direct responsibility.*

- Looking at the independent sector it is concluded in the KPI's cost etc. That is fine as a snapshot now but what is key is 2024 – 2027 and if number of places are going down. Is the executive board giving any update projections?

*In response, the expectation is from September onwards reporting through the executive board those details will be there.*

- In future maybe independent sector working to same terms and conditions.

*In response, yes future may be independent sector working to National Band tariffs.*

It was noted that Church Park is in the main list but not in breakdown.

**Action: Paper will be amended.**

- People need to understand not just about building new schools but about expanding provision.

- Also about a change of heart and minds otherwise always will be problem with parents still going to tribunals.

*In response, no extra capacity will work without changes in culture across the system.*

- Important to constantly refer to the split between parent requests and school requests because then we know where to target the focus.

*In response, technical briefing is helpful but want to get feedback we can then learn from what happens on the ground.*

*Engagement with parents and tribunals process – we are having conversations with legal department about the tribunal judge network and how we can engage with that network to get a more strategic approach. Using other vehicles.*

*Already number of appeals lodged exceeded number in 2022 – more helpful to think about formal mediation. Is there something we can do together to build a strength of argument to change this.*

**Action: Officers will explore this further.**

- Links to EHCP to parents increasing applications for additional Disability Living Allowance.

- Create guidance – is there a need for comms suggesting wording schools may wish to use.

- Need to help Headteachers cope with enormous pressure from parents.- strategy for school to say what solution schools could provide to stop parents seeking an EHCP.

- SEN support not statutory parents seeking more formal piece of paper.  
*In response the statutory agreement is only for a point in time and is to promote independence away from the EHCP.*
- Want to give positive feedback as we are further along in the process, there is inclusion funding if you use the indices system.
- Time capacity an issue.
- Understand capacity issues but has a positive impact in the long run. Gives certainty of funding for future years.
- What do we need to be doing before children even arrive at schools?  
*In response, we are having discussions about how we co-ordinate different services. Challenge is capacity in schools and in the authority to have conversations with schools. Complexity of service, multiple agencies. Injection of time and support.*
- EHCP staff not talking to us but telling us who we have to take not understanding local context and pressure.
- With all different agencies need something to oversee that.  
*In response, important point made. Not different agencies just different teams. Always putting children at centre is critical.*

In summary:

- Forum were in agreement with the approach being planned and the way forward.
- Subset of KPI's – officers agreed to expand list and Forum will get a full set but will focus on that subset.
- How best to influence the education system to assist the aims of Local first Inclusion programme.

The debate we have had is ongoing.

- Concerns conversations in executive board get repeated at Forum as is the same people.

*In response, we are still getting into the cycle don't think this will occur in the future.*

**Action: It was agreed to say in report that we will be updating the plan in light of the outturn.**

### **Learning Strategy and Engagement**

A communication was sent out on a new Learning strategy for Norfolk to drive improvement across the county, the intention is to hear from the entire sector on how we can bring about learning improvements. The communication includes questions to allow colleagues to feedback on what it should be and how it should work.

The questionnaire contains 7 key questions:

- Are the ambitions and workstreams the right ones
- Do they reflect the views of the community
- Are there specific pieces of work we should be doing
- Is there existing work that is particularly effective
- What is the local authorities role
- How should we work at a zone level
- Where should we be prioritizing resources

**Action: Officers will send out an overview of the engagement plan and you can feedback with any questions.**

**Jo Philpott left the meeting at 10:50**

#### **4. Dedicated Schools Grant**

The paper is for information/comment

The overall DSG outturn position for all four blocks was £19.900m overspent for 2022-23.

Officers highlighted a substantial underspend on the Early Years block which requires investigation.

Comments:

- If you had noticed the over allocation what would have happened?

*In response, could have had a conversation as to could we have shaped the formula differently locally to take account of this. The plan is to bring a paper to the next Forum meeting.*

- Is it worth looking at before the 30 hours was introduced?

Is every LA having this issue?

*In response, a calculation takes the 30 hours into account. It would seem other LA's are having the same issue.*

- Good to know what the cumulative amount looks like. Instead of putting extra into High Needs should it be put into Early Years?

Sarah Porter offered to be part in any work looking into process of providers claiming SEN funding

*In response, thank you that's good to know, we are looking into how we can align early years funding with the rest of the system.*

#### **School Balances**

This paper sets out the changes in maintained schools' balances which have reduced from £17.684m as at March 2022 to £15.797m as at March 2023.

Comments:

- Previously an NCC statement to produce a deficit budget what is NCC view?

*In response, the position used to be that you could have a licenced deficit but this is no longer the case.*

**Action: we will come back with further information.**

- Members queried money for 'cluster

It was explained this was money for roles that operate over a number of schools.

**Action: Officers will come back with further information and check language used to describe this.**

**Forum members asked for a projection for year 2 and 3.**

#### **5. Catering Contract**

This paper is to update Schools Forum on plans for the commissioning of Norfolk's Schools Catering contract commencing 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

The current position is that we have a contract with Norse Easton in place extended to March 2024. We want an information gathering exercise. We are exploring options. We intend to come to Forum in July with an account of the options available.

Comments:

- What is a controlled entity?

*In response, a technical compliance - we could go with Norse without going out to tender.*

- If we go out to tender what are the timelines?

*In response, prepare documents in July, open tender September/November, mobilisation period December to April.*

- Schools have to make choices when setting their budget and the later you leave it makes this impossible.

- Why don't we just go out to tender?

*In response, we need more information to inform procurement as roundly as possible.*

- Schools would appreciate an open process – there was a lot of ill feeling among schools on how Norse dealt with covid and more recently strike days. Also price changes, a letter was sent to schools, but nothing was said beforehand at Educate Norfolk or at Schools Forum. Needs to be a mechanism on approving price rises.

- Observation, why would you not tender?

Gaging reception the current service has been given from the schools themselves there should be a scoping exercise and then go for the tendering process.

*In response, we are gearing up for procurement, we are going to need help from colleagues in gathering information.*

- If tight timeline is it sensible to mobilise 1 September?

*In response, the important part of the paper is the options we have and the information gathering we need to do now around the viability of a group contract.*

- Larger schools more likely to pull out so greater risk for smaller schools. Norse has picked up a problem where there has been no contractor. Who ever takes over, will have to be there to be a safety net for schools in trouble.

- Would be good to know if schools would buy back into the contract.

- Catering Board should consider increased costs.

- Transparency important.

*In response, already putting transparency at the forefront.*

- All catering companies at the moment are under pressure with the huge increase in cost.

*In response, this is not about Norse but about the group contract.*

## **6. Future Plan**

The next meeting on 7 July 2023 will be held in room JB031, Jubilee Building, Easton College

## **7. AOB**

It was agreed to change the November meeting to 22 November 2023 in order to have County Hall as the venue.

Audit paper – it was noted that this was not an agenda item as no one from audit was able to attend.

Comments:

- The audit person who attended our school had not had a DBS check. Also she informed us that audits would now be every ten years not five. Still issue with schools not choosing to have audits.

- Biggest issue staffing not touched and is a tick box exercise.
- Before this is top-sliced needs to be more robust.