

Norfolk Schools Forum

Minutes of Meeting held on Friday 26 January 2024 Cranworth Room County Hall

09:00 – 11:30 hours

Present

Adrian Ball	Diocese of Ely Multi Academy Trust
Helen Bates	Diocese of East Anglia Schools Service
Stephen Beeson	Diocese of Norwich Education Service
Lacey Douglass	Freelance Early Years Advisor
Mike Grimble	Avenue Junior School
Bob Groome	Joint Consultative Committee
Glyn Hambling	Unity Education Trust
Georgie Howell (sub)	West Norfolk Academy Trust
Carol Jacques	Earlham Nursery School
Clare Jones	Broad Horizons Education Trust
Karen McIntosh (sub)	City College
Joanne Philpott	City of Norwich School
Rachel Quick	The Wherry School
Sarah Shirras	St Williams Primary School
Joanna Tuttle	Aylsham High School
Matthew Smith (sub)	Sheringham Woodfields School
Vicky Warnes	Joint Consultative Committee

Representing

Academies
Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia
Church of England Diocese of Norwich
Early Years Representative
Maintained Primary Governors
Joint Consultative Committee
Alternative Provision
Academies
Maintained Nursery Schools
Academies
16 – 19 Representative
Academies
Special School Academy
Maintained Primary Schools
Maintained Secondary Schools
Maintained Special Schools
Joint Consultative Committee

Local Authority Officers

Martin Brock	Accountant (Schools, Special Educational Needs, and Early Years)
Michael Bateman	Assistant Director, SEND Strategic Improvement and Partnership
John Crowley	Assistant Director, Education Intelligence and Effectiveness
Marilyn Edgeley	Admin Officer
Dawn Filtress	Finance Business Partner (Children's Services)
Sam Fletcher	Assistant Director Education Infrastructure and Partnerships
Nicki Rider	Assistant Director High Needs SEND and CWD
Sara Tough	Executive Director of Children's Services
James Wilson	Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy

Apologies:

Steven Dewing	Sapientia Education Trust	Academies
Martin Colbourne	City College	16 – 19 Representative
David Hicks	Synergy Multi Academy Trust	Academies
Sarah Porter	The Heart Education Trust	Academies
Daniel Thrower	The Wensum Trust	Academies
Martin White (Chair)	Nebula Federation	Maintained Primary Governors

A summary of the papers and meeting is available as a concise briefing here:

<https://www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/school-finance/norfolk-schools-forum/forum-briefings>

1. **Election of Chair/Vice Chair**

Martin White and Glyn Hambling have indicated that they are happy to continue as Chair and Vice Chair.

It was resolved unanimously that:

there being no other nomination they are duly elected.

The vice chair chaired the remainder of the meeting in Martin's absence.

2. **Welcome and Apologies**

Apologies and substitutions were noted. Stephen Beeson was welcomed as the new Diocese of Norwich Representative.

3. **Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising**

The Early Years representative pointed out the following clarification for Item 6, Early Years Funding

Paragraph 2 & 3 need to reference 6.1 on November agenda (Wraparound Pathfinder). The wraparound pathfinder is for school age children, not those in early years.

Paragraph 1 and 4 onwards relate to 6.2 on November agenda (Early Years Block 2024/25 Funding Formula

It was resolved unanimously:

to approve the minutes of the meeting of 22 November 2023 as a true record.

Teachers pay and pensions

An email has been shared with an update on what information has been sent out.

Members highlighted that if there is different information to what was said at last meeting a communication should go out to update schools.

The JCC representative highlighted:

Pension details for the school 2022/23 have not been updated. There is a couple of TUPE transfers imminent, is it possible that this could delay the transfers when the new trusts are carrying out their due diligence? Staff will also want to know where they stand and what their course of action should be.

Action: Officers will check this before circulating a response.

De-delegation/Central School Services Block - Members asked if there is still a budget for PATHS

- This budget is no longer used to provide PATHS support. The budget of £121k is used towards providing a range of inclusion support, provided by the Inclusion and Opportunity Service.
- RHSE support – through fully and partially subsidised training, webinars and CPD etc

- Mental Health and Wellbeing – links to Mental Health Support Teams, ensuring these are linked to the wider transformation of the NSFT offer for CYP and schools
- Anti-bullying support
- Prejudice reporting and anti-racism support for schools
- PATHs support – for schools who still use this as part of their whole school approach.

4. **Review of Membership**

The Schools Forum received a [paper](#) that reviewed the current membership.

It was resolved that:

there was no need for any changes in the current membership at this time.

5. **Local First Inclusion (LFI)**

The Schools Forum received a [presentation](#) and [paper](#) that gave an update on Special Educational Needs in Norfolk (SEND)

James Wilson introduced the update on LFI to Schools Forum with particular emphasis on the two meetings that had taken place in November/December with the DfE as part of the 'EMS' programme. He summarised the successes in delivering the programme to date but also setting out the challenges that had occurred, specifically regarding ongoing high referral rates for EHCP and specialist provision.

Michael Bateman provided further detail on the implementation of, and impact to date, across the five workstreams of the LFI programme and high level update on the DSG remodelling.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to the presentation:

- Question: if completion of the INDIES (Identification of needs descriptors in educational settings) was increasing and what the impact of this particularly on requests for EHCPs? Officer response: numbers are growing (95% of mainstream schools now involved in this approach) and detailed numbers can be provided to members of SF, however, the flow of data from this is relatively recent. INDIES data will be key within the 'front door' design work and other strategic planning within LFI and business as usual.
- Question: is there any early information on impact of the new School & Community teams. Officer response: the presentation set out the contacts so far, since launch in September 2023, however, whilst verbal feedback has been positive it is too early to determine measurable impact.

- Comment: it is important that individual case study, improvements should be highlighted to celebrate successes and achievements.
- Comment. a reiteration that not all school leaders are aware of the services offer by the new teams and where contact had been made concerns about the offer being consistent. Officer response: the 'success' criteria for School & Community Teams, initially, within the triannual reporting to DfE was focussed on the establishment of the teams; clearly the next stage reporting will move onto impact and outcomes. Also, we all need to ensure our communications are more explicit about the offer in future and the way we assess impact.
- Comment: that the staff we have recruited for school and community teams have taken people out of schools into those jobs, and that schools are struggling to refill posts and have lost the benefit of those experienced colleagues. Officers acknowledged this issue.

Actions:

- **Steve Bush from Cambridgeshire Community Services to be invited to the next Schools Forum to set out ways of working collaboratively between health providers and schools.**
- **Provide Forum with information on numbers of INDES and the impact this approach is having.**
- **Provide Forum with information about School and Community Teams and their impact.**

The Chair summarised that reporting to DfE needed to balance their need for keeping on track with projects and the broader need for effective impact and addressing issues that arise during implementation. All Members need to feedback to our areas both the concerns that may exist and the celebrations relating to pieces of work and to continue that two-way process.

Individual members raised further points in relation to the presentation;

- Question: with the Independent sector, how soon can you tell us progress, for example have prices lowered and impact on viability/staffing. Officer response: work still progressing to determine the pattern of independent provision in the short, medium and long term. The likely timescale for determine this in a form that can be reported back to SF will be spring 2025.
- Question: the finance information extracted from the Cabinet report and within the LFI paper highlighted £30m+ overspend forecast within next financial year. And the concerns of this situation at the relatively early stage of the LFI programme of work. Officer response: The Cabinet paper confirmed the latest forecast at the time of preparation, in particular based on the flow/demand for special school places, whereas the 'stock-take' and remodelling work for LFI will take other factors into consideration and we will update SF on the revised figures based on

those that we provide to the DfE, by end of March, as part of the EMS process.

- Comment. As a Special School, we no longer have an admissions process focussed on Children's Services 'direction' but one that is determined via the tribunal service. We need to work collectively to promote how good mainstream schools are with their offer of inclusion to give families confidence and ensure that special school places are prioritised for the greatest need. Officers confirmed that this term there is a series of 'round the county' face to face (plus one online session) to engage families and professionals alike for our strategic SEND improvement work and with a focus on plans to extend support for mainstream alongside specialist provision development.

Action: Officers will bring back KPIs in March.

The Chair commented - as a group you should say what you are looking for to be able to reassure the system and go back to who you represent.

Individual members raised further points in relation to the presentation:

- said parents need confidence that wraparound support is there. Lot of people use EHCPs to get them in to a certain school. Challenge around what schools are inclusive and those that are not – what is the feedback, how do we hold those schools to account?
- asked about level of school and community teams and their action points, what is their strategy and consistency across the zones. That is our starting point.
- suggested looking at how people are deployed and responding to what we are working to and are teams over crossing. Officers response: we are doing everything at such a pace that we are almost doing and refining and writing all at the same time. In a perfect world we would be doing things slightly differently in terms of how we would be introducing these teams, designing the strategy and having data packs up front and then go.
- highlighted that working at this pace to meet the requirements of a DfE holding you to account but may leave key people behind. Officers response: An important part about these conversations is where we are missing the point and getting clarity and refining it. It is a big communication piece.
- highlighted the point that NCC colleagues are embroiled in it but schools are not so are looking for comms that give insight in the system.

6. Proposed DSG Budget

The Schools Forum received a [paper](#) that provided information on the proposed DSG Budget including central costs and covered the following points:

Forum members were asked to:

- Note information provided for the 2024-25 Dedicated Schools Block allocations and other DfE grants (Sections 1 and 2);
- Note the funding announcements in relation to High Needs Block (Section 3);
- Note the funding announcements in relation to the Schools Block (Section 4);
- Note the funding announcements in relation to the Early Years Block (Section 5);

Officers highlighted that they have just learned that the budget for under 2s has increased slightly to support funding for 26 weeks, not 22; this is not reflected in these figures but will not affect funding rates.

- Note the retention of 4% of 3- and 4-year-old, 2-year-old, and under 2's base rate allocations for EY central services (£2.776m), agreed at the November'23 meeting (Section 5);
- Note the information provided in respect of the final Early Years Block formula for 2024-25 (Section 6)
- Note the funding announcements in relation to the Central School Services Block (Section 7).

Individual members raised the following points:

- Regarding pensions grants the JCC representative confirmed that all four teaching unions have written to the DfE to demand what is happening to the money and will feedback to Forum.
- Question: about Final Early Years Formula - has the base rate reduced? Officers response: Yes. This is the first time we have the 3% SENIF and 4% top slice of the disadvantaged 2-year-old funding, so the base rate for the disadvantaged 2-year-olds is lower than the current rate. Most of those historically funded children will now get additional funding through early years pupil premium which they did not get previously which will mean the total funding is an increase. This has been communicated through finance alerts to the sector.

7. Planned Growth (Pupil Variations) 2024/25

It was confirmed that the 1.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs block has been accepted.

The Schools Forum received a [paper](#) that provided information on pupil variations requested in Authority Proforma Tool (APT) submission for 2024/25.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to the pupil variation paper:

- Question: asked if Officers check estimates and said it would be useful to have that information. In response Officers said they did not but agreed this could be done.

Action: Martin Brock to provide information

8. Sparsity Distance – Disapplication

Schools Forum member Adrian Ball (Diocese of Ely MAT) disclosed an interest, as Duchy of Lancaster CE School is within his Trust.

It was confirmed that Schools Forum members were asked via email whether they would support the disapplication for the 2024-25 financial year. The LA received 17 responses from Schools Forum members, all of which were supported the disapplication.

9. Forward Plan

It was resolved that if the March meeting had a light agenda, time should be set aside for LFI reporting.

10. AOB

Feedback on school Forum Communication document
Very helpful for feeding School Forum business back to colleagues.

The next Schools Forum Meeting will be held on 13 March 2024 in the Cranworth Room County Hall.