



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

West Northamptonshire Schools Forum

Minutes of a meeting of the West Northamptonshire Schools Forum held at Council Chamber, The Forum, Moat Lane, Towcester, NN12 6AD on Tuesday 19 October 2021 at 2.00 pm.

Present	Dan York, Maintained Primary (DY) Vanessa Bradley, Academy (VB) Peter French, Church of England (chair) (PF) Lee Hughes, Academy (LH) Cath Kitchen, Academy alternative provision (CaK) Jon Lake, Maintained Primary (JL) Iain Massey, Academy (IM) Eliza Hollis, Maintained Primary (EH) Paul Wheeler, Academy (PW)
Also Present:	Councillor Fiona Baker, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education Councillor Daniel Lister, Assistant Cabinet Member for Education William Healey, Education, Skills and Funding Agency Dan Perriman, NASUWT (DP) Elaine Coe, NEU (EC)
Officers	Alison Golding, Assistant Director, HR (AG) Rosemary Kavanagh, Assistant HR Business Partner (RK) Katie Morlidge, Senior Schools Improvement Officer (KM) Emily Taylor, Strategic Finance Business Partner (ET) Beth Baines, Senior Finance Business Partner (BB) Chris Kiernan, Assistant Director, Education (CK) Chris Wickens, Capital Programme Manager, Schools (CW) Paul Hanson, Secretary (PH) James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager (JE) Kathryn Holton, Committee Officer (KH) Rosemary Kavanagh, Assistant HR Business Partner (RK)

1. Apologies for absence and Forum Membership Changes

Apologies for absence were received from Lyndsey Barnett, Nikki Lamond, Hayley Walker, Sandra Appleby, Simon Bentley, Rachel Hutchinson, Karen Lewis and Jenny Thorpe. Apologies were also received from Councillor Louisa Fowler.

Two new members were welcomed to Schools Forum – Eliza Hollis and Dan York – both maintained primary representatives.

It was advised that Cath Kitchen was retiring at the end of 2021 and stepping down from Schools Forum. Plans were in place to recruit a new academy alternative provision member.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **Election of Vice Chair**

Paul Wheeler agreed to take the position of vice-chair.

RESOLVED:

That Paul Wheeler be elected as vice-chair of West Northamptonshire Schools Forum for the forthcoming year.

4. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

5. **Combined Services Reports**

5a Schools block 2022-23 central expenditure

ET introduced the report and advised that the Combined Services Reports were for information at present so that Schools Forum were aware of what would be in the schools funding consultation. The reports covered School Improvement Grant, Trade Union Duties and redundancy costs. The de-delegations were in line with previous years except for redundancy costs where there had been a slight increase requested for this year.

RESOLVED:

- That Schools Forum agreed the Central Expenditure on Education Functions proposals for 2022-23 funded from the CSSB as per Table 2 of the report be included in the Schools Funding Consultation.
- That the Maintained Schools Forum members agreed to the proposals for de-delegation as per Table 5 and the associated appendices to this report be included in the Schools Funding Consultation.

5b De-delegation: primary and secondary maintained schools de-delegation 2022-23 SIG, Trade Union and school redundancies

Trade Union (TU) Facility Time

AG introduced the report regarding the structure of TU facility time in maintained schools and those academies which take part in the shared arrangement. Schools Forum were responsible for deciding whether shared facility time arrangements operated across schools and for setting the funding level annually. It was proposed that funding was set at £2.10 - the same per pupil rate as previous years and at the lower end compared with other local authorities. There were two options for schools in dealing with TU facility time: central provision via de-delegation or provision to operate just within the school. The council considered that de-delegation worked effectively and ensured both schools and the council met their legal obligations.

BB advised that the paper provided draft budget information. An estimate had been made for this year based on the grant and looking at the carry forward expected for next year. From that the budget requirement for next year had been calculated. £2.10 per pupil was expected to provide an adequate budget. BB commented that a large number of academies also bought in to this service.

Dan Perriman (NASUWT) pointed out that having facility time was very important and enabled the unions and schools to build a closer relationship.

In response to a question from VB, CK confirmed that maintained schools were required to buy in to TU facility time if Schools Forum voted in favour, but academies could choose whether or not to opt in.

Schools Forum agreed to consult regarding TU facility time, with a vote to be taken at the December meeting.

Redundancies

BB introduced the report outlining the scheme and showing how primary schools accessed the fund to obtain support with redundancy costs. An HR business plan needed to be submitted. There had been more requests this year because schools had tended to hold off a restructure during Covid to support their staff during the pandemic. Schools were seeking restructuring due to both budgetary and school improvement issues but the funding was available purely for restructures due to financial issues.

DY asked whether the increase from £1.50 to £8.00 could be a problem for some schools. CK advised that there was no money for the local authority to support individual schools. Schools Forum could decide to approve de-delegation but change the amount. In response to a question BB advised that an average for other authorities could be provided, although not all authorities had a redundancies de-delegation.

ET advised that the redundancies de-delegation had previously been reduced due to a large carry forward. This was not expected to occur again and the per pupil rate therefore needed to be increased. JL asked if the amount could be smoothed out over the next few years. CK advised that this would be difficult.

School Improvement Grant (SIG)

CK introduced the report and noted that the SIG resource was small but effective. There were good relations with academy trusts and the SIG would be discussed with them as a legal obligation.

RESOLVED:

- That Schools Forum members supported these reports and the 'officer suggested' de-delegations and proposed rates and were aware that a vote would be required by Maintained School Members in December's forum meeting.
- That Schools Forum members agreed to the consultation proposals and questions.

6. 2021-22 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Monitoring

ET advised that this report was an update and no vote would be required. The forecast outturn position for 2021-22 was an overspend of £2.4m in relation to the high needs block. This was a structural deficit made up of out of county placements, pupils in schools, post-16 provision and alternative provision.

DY asked whether there was more strategic thought on how to address the overspend due to out of authority placements. CK advised that this had been a problem for all since the 2014 Children and Families Act when Statements of Special Educational Needs were replaced by Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The Government had predicted a decrease in demand, whereas in fact it increased, but money for specialist places did not increase.

CK confirmed that a large proportion of the overspend was spent on EHCPs. EH queried how much of the overspend was due to outsourcing. CK advised that creating more specialist places in West Northamptonshire was a priority.

RESOLVED:

That Schools Forum noted the forecast outturn position for the year ending 31 March 2022.

7. 2022-23 WNC Schools Funding Consultation

ET introduced the proposed funding consultation document which included the papers already discussed, together with others later on the agenda. The main paper set out the local authorities' responsibilities and listed the parts Schools Forum must be consulted on and which would be voted on in December. The consultation would commence on 1 November 2021.

RESOLVED:

- That Schools Forum noted the provisional funding settlement for 2022-23.
- That Schools Forum agreed the Schools Funding Consultation document for 2022-23.

7a Proposed school funding consultation, split site funding policy and permanent exclusion clawback policy

BB advised that the split site policy was a rolling forward of the previous Northamptonshire County Council policy and no increases were proposed to that.

BB explained that for bureaucratic and historical reasons the legislation had not been followed when clawing back from schools for the exclusion policy. A fixed fee had been charged with a reduced rate depending upon when in the school year the exclusion took place. The cost was quite small compared with putting a child in alternative provision. With the establishment of a new authority, the legislation needed to be followed and Schools Forum would need to agree to that.

CK confirmed that the money clawed back from schools formed part of the alternative provision budget and was used to support excluded children.

PF asked for assurance that excluded children did not slip through the net. CK advised that the children were known and plans were put in place for them. It was not easy to re-integrate these children into mainstream schools. One of the potential problems of reducing exclusions would be that those who were then excluded would be seen as more difficult to place.

RESOLVED:

- That Schools Forum considered and supported the proposed Split Site Policy for inclusion in the Schools Funding Consultation.
- That Schools Forum supported the officer suggested change in the way permanent exclusion claw backs were calculated.

7b Place planning and growth funding (weighted numbers)

CW introduced the report outlining the proposed growth fund for inclusion in the Schools Funding Consultation. The growth fund was applied in two ways – weighted numbers and the pupil growth fund. Without the growth fund it would not be possible to meet obligations to provide school places. There were 32 proposed new housing developments in Northamptonshire (17 in West Northamptonshire) which would need new primary schools.

RESOLVED:

That Schools Forum considered and supported the proposed growth fund for inclusion in the Schools Funding Consultation.

8. Funding of Specialist Support and Impairment Services

CK introduced the report and advised that the £2.1m cost of specialist services was currently funded by the council using the high needs block and the general fund. Although the council had the legal power to fund these services, the budget and the duty to fund them was the responsibility of schools. The block from which the services were funded was overspent and since the overspend was structural it would increase year on year.

It was noted that the final column of the table in section 2.4 (page 82) should read 1.41 and 1.14 (not 141 and 114).

CK outlined the three potential options for schools to provide specialist services: an insurance based scheme; top-slicing the resource required from schools' budgets; and trading the services. The second option was recommended and if agreed, the council would not ask for a top-slice of 0.5% (approx. £1.5m) of the delegated budget to contribute to the high needs block overspend (which was allowed by regulations).

JL asked what the experience of schools would be when looking for this provision if the top-slicing was agreed. CK advised that specialist services were well run in West Northamptonshire and would continue to be so.

CK stated that North Northamptonshire would not necessarily follow the same model as West Northamptonshire. There was no problem with differential funding as long as the service was paid for.

It was unanimously agreed that the Schools Funding Consultation document for 2022-23 be sent to schools for consultation.

RESOLVED:

That Schools Forum agreed the second option for inclusion in the Schools Funding Consultation, as set out in paragraph 3.4 of the report – to top-slice £2.1m, on the understanding that if it does so, the council will not ask for the 0.5% top-slice allowed by funding regulations.

9. Forum Forward Plan

The Secretary advised that the next meeting on 14 December 2021 would be held remotely via zoom.

RESOLVED:

That Schools Forum noted the forward plan.

10. Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 4.10 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____