



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

West Northamptonshire Schools Forum

Minutes of a meeting of the West Northamptonshire Schools Forum held remotely via Zoom and at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDyc2cNcl19OvcGOCuZDTBQ> on Tuesday 18 January 2022 at 2.00 pm.

Present: Peter French, Church of England (chair) (PF)
Paul Wheeler, academy (PW)
Dan York, maintained primary (DY)
Lyndsey Barnett, maintained nursery (LB)
Lee Hughes, academy (LH)
Rachel Martin, PVI (RM)
Jon Lake, maintained primary (JL)
Karen Lewis, academy special (KL)
Hayley Walker, PVI (HW)
Eliza Hollis, maintained primary (EH)

Also Present: Councillor Fiona Baker, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (FB)
Councillor Daniel Lister, Assistant Cabinet Member for Education (DL)
William Healey, Education, Skills and Funding Agency (WH)

Apologies for
Absence: James Shryane
Simon Bentley
Vanessa Bradley
Jenny Thorpe

Officers Beth Baines, Senior Finance Business Partner (BB)
James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager (JE)
Chris Kiernan, Interim Assistant Director, Education (CK)
Kelly Mills, Early Years Business Compliance & Funding Support (KM)
Paul Hanson, Democratic Services Manager (Secretary) (PH)
Kathryn Holton, Democratic Services Officer (KH)
Emily Taylor, Strategic Finance Business Partner (ET)

1. Apologies for absence and Forum Membership Changes

Apologies for absence were received from Simon Bentley, Vanessa Bradley, James Shryane and Jenny Thorpe.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. **2021-22 DSG Monitoring**

ET updated Schools Forum on the latest monitoring position across the DSG – Period 8 (end Nov 2021). An overspend of £2.9m was currently forecast on the DSG for this financial year. The High Needs overspend had increased by £100k. The biggest pressure was out of county independent placements driven by volume and price increases. This had been driven by the September intake and would have a knock-on effect on the budget for the next financial year. The other movement was an increase in the overspend forecast in the Early Years block of £0.4m. A nil variance was being forecast in the Schools and Central Schools Services blocks.

DY asked whether the increased September intake would have an impact in 2022 and if this would impact adversely on maintained schools' budgets next year. ET advised that projections had gone as far as possible given the current data but that CK's recovery plan would address some of the out of county pressures. CK believed that schools should pay for the services for which they received funding, and this would continue to be requested. However, there would be no further calls on schools to support the HN budget.

RESOLVED:

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

5. **2022-23 WNC Schools Budgets**

BB updated Schools Forum on the final settlement received just before Christmas. The appendix showed school by school details which were indicative until signed off by the ESFA (expected in February 2022). A decision from the minister regarding the 0.68% disapplication request rather than 0.5% High Needs block move was still awaited. The Early Years block was still indicative as the final settlement on that would not be received until July 2023.

In addition to the usual DSG update there was good news of a supplementary schools grant issued at the same time. This would be given as an allocation per school for the Schools block extra grant, with the additional £2m HN block for WNC to distribute. Both grants were to recognise NI increases and other inflationary pressures.

Table 2 within the document showed the final DSG funding allocations with an overall £10.6m supplementary funding increase for 2022-23. BB outlined the key headlines on the 2022-23 funding announcements on the funding received by the local authority by funding block.

PW noted that high needs had received an increase in funding and questioned when this could stop being funded from the main schools block. CK advised that if above inflation increases continued this would support a reduction to zero. However, schools would still need to pay for specialist services for which they were funded. This would be discussed further under Item 7 on the agenda but relied on reducing the number of high needs places in the independent sector which cost about 70% more than in the state sector.

LB asked whether the supplementary funding was available for nursery schools. BB advised that some would be allocated for National Insurance increases – as outlined in the document on the government website.

LB raised the issue of early years high needs pressures. CK advised that needs beyond those budgeted for would be funded by an overspend in the current year and then factored into the budget for the following year.

RESOLVED:

That Schools Forum members noted the final funding settlement and schools budgets for 2022-23.

6. Disapplication request (top slice) update

BB advised that Schools Forum needed to take a formal vote to approve the 0.5% top slice which would take effect if the disapplication request for 0.68% was not approved. This had been discussed and agreed at the December meeting, but a formal vote had not been taken.

A vote was taken with 10 in favour, none against and none abstaining.

RESOLVED:

That Schools Forum members agreed to the movement of 0.5% from the schools block to the high needs block, as allowed by funding regulations, in the event that the ESFA **do not agree** to the disapplication request of the £2.1m (approximately 0.68%) transfer.

7. 2022-23 WNC High Needs Budgets

BB outlined the report which informed Schools Forum of the High Needs block budgets for 2022-23 and presented the indicative Special Schools budgets for 2022-23.

RESOLVED:

That Schools Forum members noted the final funding settlement for high needs budgets for 2022-23 and the proposed indicative budgets for special schools for 2022-23.

8. High Needs Block Deficit Recovery Plan

CK outlined the report which set out the current deficit in the high needs block of the DSG and the proposed recovery plan. At the previous meeting Schools Forum

members had been asked if they wanted regular reports or a specialist sub-group on local authority progress in tackling the deficit. WNC was accountable to Schools Forum as they voted for the money to support the high needs block.

CK outlined the action plan which comprised 8 elements, each led by an officer. All would contribute to a reduction in the high needs block, but some were more important than others. Agreement had already been reached with a number of schools for 100 resource places. An additional 120 resource places had been agreed but capital was not yet available to fund these. However, replacing independent provision with places in the state sector would save the most money. WNC would need to borrow money (potentially up to £19m) to fund this and might require help from Schools Forum with repayments.

JL asked when a response was likely to be received from the ESFA regarding disapplication. WH advised that a query had been sent to the ESFA prior to sending to the minister for review.

DY asked whether CK was assured as to the amount of capital the authority had to fund resource provision in the short term. CK advised that many of the places could be funded by September 2022 and more by September 2023. At present £3m of the estimated £6.5-7m required was available. Positive discussions were currently taking place regarding schools with land – which could significantly reduce the cost of providing a special school.

PF believed that schools that were keen to provide alternative provision might well do a better job than some of the current providers.

KL noted the commitment to resource provision and asked about the admission procedure for securing a place in resource provision, and whether the provision would cover both primary and secondary. At present it was difficult to secure provision for pupils at the transfer from primary to secondary. CK advised that those with EHCPs would be prioritised. Places would be allocated based on parental preference and address. Resource provision was the first step for pupils with a high level of need, who had an EHCP and who could not be in a class of 30, even with support. There were some pupils currently in special schools who should be in mainstream schools and who might return once additional resource provision was in place. In WNC there were more parents who wanted their children to be in mainstream schools than there were places – so more of the resource provision places would be offered at secondary level.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the High Needs Block recovery plan would be on the agenda for each meeting – but only if there were changes to report.

RESOLVED:

That Schools Forum members would receive regular reports of progress against the recovery plan. An update would be emailed to members in March 2022 because the March meeting of Schools Forum had been cancelled.

9. 2022-23 Early Years Budgets

KM advised that the Early Years consultation had taken place between 24 December 2021 and 14 January 2022. There had been two reminders and two resends within that time. Of 506 providers 26 responses were received. KM summarised the questions and responses as outlined in the report.

RM expressed concern at central expenditure rising and services such as support and training being reduced. KM advised that Early Years had been split in April 2021 to form the Funding and Business Compliance Service and the Advisory and Training Service. The Advisory and Training Service now sat under School Effectiveness and it would be for that team to determine how to utilise the funding within their service. With additional monies coming into central from a funding and business compliance point of view, KM would look at increasing the provider portal to include the two year old checker so that it would benefit the sector. LB agreed with RM.

A vote was taken on the 5% central expenditure with 5 voting in favour, 3 against and 2 abstentions.

BB outlined the responses received to the consultation for maintained nursery schools. There were 5 maintained nursery schools in West Northamptonshire, of which two were in a federation, so 4 consultation responses had been received. Three of the responses were in favour of redistribution of the supplement which is within the DSG specifically for maintained nursery school settings. It had no effect on other nursery settings. WNC were looking to redistribute this based on an hourly rate per setting. This would negatively affect Camrose but would benefit the other 4 nursery schools.

LB spoke as the executive head of two nursery schools (including Camrose), rather than as a Schools Forum member, and expressed her concern at the proposed redistribution of funding for maintained nursery schools. The Chair read a statement from the other 3 nursery schools who were in favour of the redistribution.

CK advised that this was not a matter for Schools Forum to vote on, but for WNC to deal with. CK had agreed to meet with all 4 nursery heads, following which the local authority would make a decision. Schools Forum would be advised of the decision in due course.

RESOLVED:

- That Schools Forum members agreed to increase base rates at the suggested amounts provided in Tables 1 and 2 of the report.
- That Schools Forum members voted in favour of 5% central spend for the early years administration with 5 in favour, 3 against and 2 abstained from the vote.

10. WNC 2022-23 Draft Budget Consultation

ET updated Schools Forum members on the WNC Draft Budget 2022-23 and the Medium Term Financial Plan. Cabinet had considered the proposed draft budget for the next 4 years on 21 December 2021 and signalled approval for consultation, which would take place until 1 February 2022. The draft net budget was £733.8m (£336.4m excluding DSG). The Children's Services budget totalled £75m of which a large proportion was for Northamptonshire Children's Trust, with the remainder for

statutory education functions. There was £0.48m general fund investment to mitigate the reduction of the historical element of the CSSB to ensure education services are protected at the existing levels. The final budget would be presented to Cabinet and then to Council on 24 February 2022.

RESOLVED:

- That Schools Forum members noted the WNC Draft Budget 2022-23 and Medium Term Financial Plan.
- That Schools Forum members were encouraged to respond to the WNC Draft Budget Consultation.

11. Forward Plan

PH advised that there was no agenda business for the March meeting. It was therefore agreed that this would be cancelled but that CK would update members on the HN recovery plan and MNS funding in the interim. The next Schools Forum meeting would take place on 24 May 2022 and meeting dates for the next year would be circulated.

RESOLVED:

- That Schools Forum members noted the Forward Plan.
- That Schools Forum members agreed to cancel the meeting scheduled for 15th March 2022 due to insufficient business.
- That reports updating Schools Forum members on High Needs Recovery and MNS Funding could be circulated in the interim.

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____