

**MINUTES OF THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING  
TUESDAY 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021, 2.00PM**

**Present:**

**School Members:**

|                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Sandra Appleby*                       | David Ross Education Trust (Academy, North & West)                    |
| James Birkett, Chair (JB)*            | Wollaston School (Academy, North)                                     |
| Rob Hardcastle (RH)*                  | Hatton Academies Trust (Academy, North)                               |
| Lee Hughes (LH)*                      | Peterborough Diocesan Education Trust (Academy, North and West)       |
| Pat Kelly (PK)*                       | Millbrook Infant School (Maintained Primary, North)                   |
| Cath Kitchen (CK)*                    | Hospital and Outreach Education (Alternative Provision, North & West) |
| Jon Lake (JL)*                        | Althorp Partnership of Primary Schools (West)                         |
| Kevin Latham (KL)*                    | Creating Tomorrow Multi Academy Trust (Academy Special, North)        |
| Iain Massey (IM)*                     | Sponne School   |
| Angela Prodger (AP)                   | Pen Green Nursery   |
| Joanne Sanchez Thompson (JST, Chair)* | Learning for Life Education Trust (Academy, North)                    |
| Paul Wheeler (PW)*                    | East Midlands Academy Trust (Academy, North & West)                   |
| * also a shadow member                |   |

**Shadow Members:**

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| Laura Clarke | Rowan Gate School (Maintained Special, North)     |
| Nikki Lamond | Greenwood Academy Trust (Academy, North & West)   |
| Peter Leaver | Pathfinder Schools Academy Trust (Academy, North) |

**Non-school Members:**

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Hayley Walker (HW)*    | Blackthorn Good Neighbours Nursery (PVI, West) |
| Rachel Hutchinson (RH) | Holbourn House Day Nursery                     |

**NCC Officers:**

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Beth Baines (BB)    | Acting Group Accountant Schools Finance          |
| Cathi Hadley (CH)   | Director of Children's Services                  |
| Paul Hanson (PH)    | Democratic Services Manager (Secretary)          |
| Jessica Milne (JM)  | Strategic Manager, Early Years                   |
| Sharon Muldoon (SM) | Deputy Director, Children Families and Education |
| Raj Sohal (RS)      | Democracy Officer                                |
| Emily Taylor (ET)   | Strategic Finance Business Partner               |
| Carrie Trail (CT)   | Strategic Manager for Northamptonshire Schools   |

**1. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE FORUM MEMBERSHIP CHANGES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

1.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Fiona Baker, Siobhan Hearne and Karen Lewis.

## **2. MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING HELD 19 JANUARY 2020**

**RESOLVED that: The minutes of the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> January were agreed as an accurate record, subject to the correction of a number of descriptions of the groups various members represented.**

**Action: Paul Hanson**

## **3. 2020/21 DSG BUDGETS AND MONITORING**

3.1 BB introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

- The DSG forecast outturn position for the financial year ending 31st March 2021 was an overspend of £3.6m, against the budget of £233m after academy recoupment (1.5%) - this was a reduction of £0.3m from the prior report.
- This was mainly due to the High Needs block pressures of £4.01m relating to the increased number and cost of 'out of county' placements (£3.7m overspend), increased special school demand (£0.2m overspend) and increased demand for provision in mainstream settings (£1m overspend), which were partly offset by an underspend on SEN unit provision (£0.8m underspend).
- The 2020/21 forecast deficit was £4m but the underspend on the schools block of £0.3m related to de-delegated funds, which would need to be carried forward.
- The forecast deficit would need to be fully funded and this would be covered from a £3.75m planned contribution from the 2021/22 DSG budgets and 2020/21 growth fund underspend.
- The in-year deficit was temporarily financed through balances which had been earmarked for carry-forward.
- The DSG terms and conditions had changed and any overall deficit on the DSG would require a recovery plan in place.
- The overall DSG position for Northamptonshire was not forecast to be in an overspend position at the end of 2020/21, due to large PFI reserves. However, the local authority was planning to implement recovery plans for the North and West Unitary Northamptonshire Councils, to be reported to each respective Schools Forum.
- The Schools Block forecasted an underspend of £0.3m
- The High Needs Block forecasted an overspend of £4.01m
- The Early Years Block forecasted nil variance to budget

**RESOLVED that: The Forum noted the report.**

**Action: Beth Baines**

## **4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (UNITARY) AND CHILDREN'S TRUST UPDATE**

4.1 CH introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

- Background work was ongoing, moving swiftly towards unitary vesting day.

- NCC officers were positive that the new councils would bring exciting opportunities with the move forward.
- A letter had been sent from CH to provide the shadow Schools Forums with an update regarding the provisions of education services.
- Virtual sessions were also planned with head teachers and members of the leadership teams of the new authorities, to open dialogue between education services and the Forums.
- Service delivery would not be different with the move to unitary.
- The Northamptonshire Children's Trust launched on 1st November 2020. Final contractual issues had been finalised and would be in place by vesting day.
- The two new authorities would become responsible for service delivery of the Trust and contract arrangements and governance of operational/strategic structures would be split between them.

4.2 ET presented additional information to the Forum, regarding the financial aspects of the Children's Trust:

- For the financial year 1st April - 31st October, the authority achieved a favourable position underspend of £3M on the Children's Trust.
- The cost of the contract was on track.
- The 2021-22 budget for the Trust had been agreed at the February 2021 shadow council meetings.
- Similarly, any legacy issues and ongoing impact costs had also been determined at these meetings.
- Much of the work in disaggregating council finances had been completed.

**RESOLVED that: The Forum noted the report.**

**Action: Cathi Hadley, Emily Taylor**

## **5. EARLY YEARS 2021/22**

5.1 JM introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

- The local authority remained committed to meeting its statutory duties in delivering a high quality service to the early education and childcare sector.
- The proposed base rates for DSG funding to the sector for both the North and West Northamptonshire Councils were due to be implemented from 1st April 2021.
- The North and West Northamptonshire Councils had received increased funding from the DfE of:
- 8p in the base rate, per hour, for two year-olds.
- 6p for three and four year-olds.
- The proposed base rate for 2021/22 for North Northamptonshire was an increase of £785K .
- The increase for West Northamptonshire would be £935K.

- The Forum would need to vote to approve the central funding increase of 4.2% for North Northamptonshire and 4.16% for West Northamptonshire.

5.2 SA questioned why the deprivation rate had originally been reduced in the previous year, thus requiring another increase in 2021/22. JM explained that a decision was made based upon consultation undertaken in the previous year to decrease the deprivation rate, in order to increase the base rate as a whole.

**RESOLVED that: The Forum voted to approve the increase to the central funding percentage.**

**Action: Jessica Milne**

## **6. HIGH NEEDS EARLY YEARS FUNDING BLOCK TRANSFER**

6.1 BB introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

- The SEND budget sat within the Early Years block of the Dedicated Schools Grant, but received additional contribution from the High Needs block.
- In order for this to continue in 2021/22, the Forum would need to approve the transfer of funding between the blocks.
- In the previous two years, this transfer had been £805k from High Needs to Early Years.
- However, for 2021/22 this contribution from the High Needs block would be reduced to £569k (£271k for North, £298k for West)
- The Forum would need to vote to approve the transfer of these amounts

6.2 KL questioned how the High Needs amount required to be transferred to the Early Years block had been reduced. BB explained that for 2021/22, historical teachers' pensions within the High Needs and Early Years blocks had been transferred to the Central Schools Services block. As a consequence of removing these lines of expenditure from the blocks, the amount required for transfer had also reduced.

**RESOLVED that: The Forum voted to approve the proposal to transfer funding from the High Needs Block to the Early Years Block.**

**Action: Beth Baines**

## **7. MAINTAINED NURSERY SCHOOL FUNDING**

7.1 SM introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

- There were 4 maintained nursery schools (MNS) in the North, and 5 in the west.
- Most MNS were facing significant budget pressures and undergoing restructures, for the purpose of reducing costs.

- MNS were required to submit a balanced budget to the local authority. If a school had forecasted budget deficit, they would be expected to restructure.
- Many MNS had undertaken restructures but still struggled to set a balanced budget for 2020/21.
- All 9 MNS were asked to complete and return a financial diagnostic tool by November 2020, in an attempt to identify ways of reducing costs and increasing income.
- 8 of the diagnostic tools had been completed at the time of Forum, with 8 meetings also having taken place. The final diagnostic tool was in progress and a meeting was soon to be arranged.
- The MNS funding issues were not unique to Northamptonshire and were being seen across the country.
- Supplementary funding would be received by the 9 MNS in full, from the DSG. Any increases or decreases to this supplement would also be passed onto the 9 MNS.
- The total supplement received by MNS in 2020/21 amounted to £1.78M
- Assuming this supplement would continue to be provided by the government into 2022/23 and beyond, the local authority recommended a review and sector consultation on the distribution of the MNS supplement.

**RESOLVED that: That Forum noted the report.**

**Action: Sharon Muldoon**

## **8. DSG BUDGETS 2021/22 UPDATE**

8.1 BB introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

- Work was ongoing to determine the forecasted High Needs block deficit and how this would be funded from the 2021/22 disaggregated DSG budgets for North and West.
- The Early Years, Schools and Central Schools Services blocks budgets had all already been determined.
- The final forecasted budget positions would be presented as the DSG budget monitoring at the May 2021 Schools Forum meetings.

**RESOLVED that: The Forum noted the report.**

**Action: Beth Baines**

## **9. SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS**

9.1 BB introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

- Local authorities were required to publish schemes for financing schools, setting out the financial relationship between them and the schools they maintained.

- In making any changes to their schemes, local authorities were to consult all maintained schools in their area and receive the approval of the members of their Schools Forum, representing maintained schools.
- A full consultation would be brought to Forum in May 2021, detailing any proposed changes to the scheme.
- The North and West would require their own schemes.

**RESOLVED that: The Forum noted the report.**

**Action: Beth Baines**

## **10. SCHOOLS FORUM PLAN – 2020 AND 2021**

10.1 PH introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

- The next Schools Forum meetings for the unitary authorities would be held on:
- 25th May 2021 for West Northamptonshire
- 27th May 2021 for North Northamptonshire

**RESOLVED that: The Forum noted the report.**

**Action: Paul Hanson**

## **11. URGENT BUSINESS**

11.1 There was none.

There being no further business the meeting closed.