

Surrey Schools Forum Draft Minutes of Meeting

Thursday 8 July 2021 1.00pm Virtual Meeting on TEAMS (due to COVID 19)

For Chair/member approval

Present

Chair

Rhona Barnfield Howard of Effingham School (academy member)

Joint Vice Chair

Justin Price Freemantles School Special school head

Other school and academy members:

Susan Chrysanthou Furzeffield Primary Primary Head

Clare McConnell Bisley CE Primary Primary Head

Zoe Johnson-Walker The Winston Churchill School Secondary head

David Euridge Reigate Valley/Wey Valley Pupil referral unit member

Geoffrey Hackett Burpham Primary Primary governor

Steph Neale St Pauls Catholic Primary Primary governor

Fred Greaves Oakwood School Secondary governor

Matthew Armstrong-Harris (part) Rodborough Academy member

Sir Andrew Carter South Farnham Primary Academy member

Kate Carriett George Abbot School Academy member

Elaine Cooper SWAN academy trust Academy member

Jo Hastings Ottershaw Infant and Junior Academy member

Ruth Murton Thamesmead School Academy member

Neil Miller Bramley Oak Academy Special academy member

Non school members

Sue Lewis Private, voluntary & independent nursery providers

Jonathan Gambier Guildford Diocese (Church of England) (part)

Tamsin Honeybourne Teaching union member of Education Joint Committee (EJC)

Nick Trier Teaching union member of Education Joint Committee

Benedicte Symcox Family Voice Surrey

Local Authority Officers

Liz Mills (LM) Director–Education, Lifelong Learning & Culture

Eamonn Gilbert (EG) Assistant Director (Commissioning)

Sandra Morrison Assistant Director (Vulnerable Learners)

Louise Lawson (LL) Deputy Strategic Finance Business Partner

David Green (DG) Senior Finance Business Partner (Schools Funding)

Carol Savedra (CS) Head of Commissioning-Special Educational Needs /Early Education/Corporate Parenting

1 Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence

Apologies:

Donna Harwood-Duffy	Dorking Nursery	Maintained nursery head
Lisa Kent	Manor Mead and Walton Leigh Schools (special governor)	
Gavin Dutton	Pirbright School	Academy member
Paul Kinder	Warlingham School	Academy member
Christine Ricketts	Post 16 provider	

The Chair welcomed Steph Neale (new governor member).

2 Declarations of interest (where not self evident)

Sue Lewis-close relation worked for behaviour support team.

The Chair suggested that members should complete individual declaration of interest forms, which could be published in the same way as for governing bodies of schools. This would avoid the need for repeated declarations at meetings. A special interest would not prevent members from participating in debate on the relevant items.

Action: Clerk and Chair to pursue

3 Minutes of previous meeting (14 May 2021) and matters arising Accuracy

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as accurate.

Action points from previous meeting not otherwise covered on agenda

LL to circulate a list of high needs budgets with the minutes (with specific reference to the £24m planned overspend): attached to minutes of previous meeting.

Future reports on DSG recovery plan to include benchmarking data even if it had not changed (Daniel Peattie): no report for this meeting.

Organogram summarising SEND transformation structure to be circulated with the minutes: circulated with minutes of previous meeting.

Eamonn to discuss inflation with special schools phase council and letter to go to all special schools heads: this was distributed 9 June and inflated budgets have now been allocated.

LL to lead review of special schools IPSB process: this was not specifically an action to be completed for next Schools Forum meeting and was in progress.

Paper on proposals for laptops for looked after children/children with a social worker to be circulated: this was not pursued as funding is now to be found from outside DSG.

Other matters arising

None

4 Update on Department for Education school funding activity if any

DG advised that, earlier that day, the DfE had published the first stage of a two stage consultation on moving to the hard NFF. A summary of issues would be shared with Schools Forum members. DG thought the proposals would have

limited effect in 2022/23 and the earliest likely date for a full hard NFF seemed to be 2025/26.

Consultation closes 30 September 2021.

5 High needs block issues including update on high needs block working group

Discussions with DfE

LM reported that officers had met with DfE representatives and had taken them through Surrey's DSG deficit recovery plan. Officers had felt it was in the right place and that the main themes were in line with DfE expectations, eg reducing use of NMI provision and increasing inclusion. The DfE had been particularly interested in the relationship between the LA and the Schools Forum. The DfE has been asked to share good practice from other LAs, but that had not been seen by the DfE as their role. They might organise facilitated discussion sessions for local authorities, but officers noted that local authorities had existing networks through which there could be such discussions, for example through the County Councils Network, of which Surrey's Leader was now the leader.

Surrey had had the 23rd highest DSG deficit (in percentage terms) of all LAs when the five LAs were selected for the 2020/21 safety valve discussions. Surrey's deficit had moved higher up the rankings since but was still unlikely to be among the top five deficits for 2021/22 discussions.

Officers and members would continue lobbying on the need for more funding and reform of the SEN system.

DfE had given no indication that recent levels of annual high needs funding increases would continue or that the spending review would lead to increased spending on high needs.

Mainstream SEN funding review

A meeting between EG and phase council leads was planned for 12 July to agree the membership, terms of reference and timelines for a working group. He would also be looking for wider representation eg multi-academy trust (MAT) Chief Executives and the high needs block working group. The group would start to meet in September. It was important that schools with a wide range of characteristics were represented on the working group. **Action: EG to arrange and report**

Consistency and effective governance arrangements would both be important in localised funding arrangements.

The current system did not provide for some children in the most effective way and the aim was a system which did. Some schools had expressed concerns that the present funding processes drove schools to use 1:1 support arrangements where other arrangements would be more effective. Education Health Care Plans may need to be amended to reduce the emphasis on 1:1 support where it was not appropriate and to focus on the best way of meeting the individuals' needs and fund for those needs. This would not always mean teaching assistant support. However, this would take time. The working group would think about what a new system might look like. The LA did not want to prejudge the outcomes of the working group.

The work of the special schools working group had shown that “co-production” was important.

Health support was a concern and health representation on the group would be welcome.

Implementation was planned for September 2022.

The Family Voice representative asked for clear communication of proposed developments to parents and that there should be a “co-production meeting” before draft EHCPs were written. She suggested that it was difficult to make significant changes after the draft stage. Parents needed to be able to see that what was in the plan was clearly defined.

Key stage transfer: wholly maintained solution

25 capital schemes due in September 2021 had been completed and children would take up those places in September, allowing them to access the high quality provision in Surrey state maintained special schools and to be educated closer to home. These schemes had only been possible through a partnership between the LA and school leaders and through the willingness of school leaders and governing bodies to make changes. Only 22 children with a statutory right to a place still required places and most of these would be placed in mainstream provision. The other children still requiring specialist places were early years children moving into reception whose needs had only recently been identified.

The Family Voice representative asked that a set of frequently asked questions on key stage transfer should be made available to parents eg on the local offer website. She suggested that currently the process was not seen as transparent. EG thought it would be difficult for such a set of FAQs to cover questions affecting only a small number of parents.

LM to work with Family Voice on this. Action for LM

School led approach to inclusion: Inclusion round table

The aims of the round table included exploring how inclusion worked in Surrey, achieving cultural change, using robust evidence to achieve greater inclusion and to build on existing good practice in schools in inclusion and encourage schools to share examples of good practice. There were inconsistencies in the level of inclusion which were not explained by the context of schools. A roadshow was planned for early next term to include as many school leaders as possible. The work was school led and would be supported by changes in LA service operating models. Sandra Morrison would lead for the LA.

55 headteachers were now involved in the inclusion roundtable and workstreams and the output so far was really positive.

Team around the school

Good progress had been made in developing a pilot, involving 17 Spelthorne primary schools, two secondary schools and a pupil referral unit. Special schools would also be involved. The aim had been for a large pilot without it being unmanageable. The learning from the pilot would inform further developments at county level. Geoffrey Hackett undertook to secure support from governors.

Alternative provision

The Cabinet had agreed an alternative provision strategy and capital investment in the pupil referral unit estate in order to meet needs. Currently providers were making outstanding provision in accommodation which was not fit for purpose. There would be increased emphasis on outreach and on supported return to full time mainstream education.

Future programme for the high needs block working group

LM proposed that the group should continue to work over the next two years on:

- Expanding specialist places
- Completing the special school banding review and the mainstream SEN funding review
- Embedding the AP strategy
- Inclusion work, including thinking about bold pilots, trying different solutions and measuring outcomes
- Early years: there was a need to consider further how early years children could be supported. Further details would be provided in September.

The Chair noted that the high needs working group had arisen from a suggestion by Schools Forum and the need to keep Schools Forum updated of SEND transformation

Additional resources for school led solutions

The Chair had had discussions with Jack Mayhew (Chair of Athena MAT) who had proposed that resources should be allocated for school leaders to manage collectively within a locality or quadrant to make SEN provision which would break the current cycles and encourage inclusion. School leaders would be accountable for it and there would need to be checks and balances on governance to ensure that children's needs were met. The costs would fall within the scope of the high needs block and might include a transfer from Schools Block (as there was no other source of funding available). The Chair saw a parallel with the local management of SALP funds in secondary schools.

LM saw this as consistent with the school led approach of the inclusion round table, although the LA would have a large part to play. She was keen to work up a proposal for the September funding consultation paper, but she was also keen that any proposal should not restrict innovation.

The Family Voice rep expressed concerns that the experience of SEN children already varied widely across Surrey and asked that any proposals should look at that.

The Forum expressed no concerns about the proposal

6 Special schools banding review-update

The special school headteacher working group has met several times, most recently to consider proposals for implementation of the proposed funding arrangements, which include phasing in the new bands for children at key stage transfer, on IPSB or on initial placement, so that the funding for most children would not initially change. Another meeting has been scheduled to follow up on

these issues. The target is a consultation paper by the end of July to go to all special schools in early September. A summary of the proposals would be included in the main school funding consultation paper in September. It had not in fact been possible to consult all special schools before September as originally intended.

The Family Voice representative asked that the consultation paper could be shared with them and whether it would be published on Surrey Says. Officers thought it probably would not be published on Surrey Says, as they saw it as a detailed proposal of limited interest outside special schools, but they were open to suggestions as to other groups who might be interested. EG commented that the proposals did not involve any reduction in the overall budget just a redistribution.

The proposed model was seen as more coherent than the present arrangements. Currently IPSB (with its focus on 1:1 support) was often used simply because the banding system had no band of appropriate value. The new arrangements would offer more scope for appropriate funding without the use of IPSB. Band 7 would provide some flexibility for high cost pupils, particularly for those returned from NMI schools.

Modelling had been undertaken at school level and discussions were being held with two schools where special arrangements were required in order to avoid large losses under the proposed model.

Headteachers commented that the consultation needed to be complete, and decisions made, before November, as they would be considering proposals for September 2022 placements then.

7 Review of mainstream special educational needs funding

The Chair commented that many MAT CEOs had cross sector experience and offered her services. It was noted that the group needed to offer challenge and to test any proposals, but also to be of manageable size. This could be difficult given the number and diversity of mainstream schools. Geoffrey Hackett also offered his services, on behalf of governors.

8 Mainstream and early years items for funding consultation paper for 2022/23

DG reminded the Forum that, at the July meeting, the Forum is asked to consider proposals to go into the consultation, eg whether there was anything missing and whether the questions asked allow schools to express their views accurately on the issues to be decided, in order to support Schools Forum in making recommendations later. Results of the autumn consultation would be reported to Schools Forum on 7 October.

8a De-delegation, including alternative options for behaviour support and travellers support,

DG advised that proposals for de-delegation for 2022/23 covered the same services as in 2021/22 and largely at the same prices. There were detailed annexes on behaviour support and travellers services and on the intervention

fund. The Forum was not being asked for a decision now, but to advise whether the proposals were clear.

SM noted the need for service descriptions to describe both the benefits and risks of de-delegation and trading. Schools were asked to give feedback when using the services, so an evidence base existed.

Nick Trier suggested that schools didn't understand what the union facilities pool paid for and asked that a more detailed description should be given in future, including why these costs were not met from union subscriptions. He cautioned against any suggestion that costs could be further reduced in 2022/23.

Tamsin Honeybourne noted that a set of frequently asked questions was made available to individual schools which were asked to contribute, but that these might benefit from an update. Some schools didn't seem to understand the consequences of not contributing.

The Chair noted that there could be a fine balance between explanation and advertising.

Union reps to work with DG on reviewing the wording of the FAQs

Action for unions and DG

8b Other mainstream funding issues

DG advised that the LA had not yet decided whether to seek a transfer of funds from schools block to high needs block in 2022/23. Therefore the outline paper covered the possibility that the LA would ask for a transfer and also the possibility that it would not. The proposals were much the same as in 2021/22 ie to set the minimum funding guarantee at the highest possible level and match the NFF formula funding rates (but both subject to reductions if there was a block transfer).

Further proposals might be necessary arising from any changes the DfE might make. DG would circulate any such proposals to Schools Forum members to give them the opportunity (but no obligation) to comment.

DG proposed that notional SEN funding within school budget shares should be raised in line with the general increase in funding factor rates, so that schools would still spend a similar proportion of their funding on SEN.

DG proposed that the residual delegated combined services funding (confederations and additional school improvement) should be reduced in line with any reduction in combined services funding made by the DfE in 2022/23. This is outside the NFF.

The Forum had no comments on the proposals.

8c Early years funding proposals

DG noted that in 2021/22 the DfE had increased early years funding rates by only 1.3%. The likely increase for 2022/23 was not yet known. The LA could not commit to passing on the full increase in hourly rates as the budget for two year olds (in particular) had been overspent in 2020/21 and there were uncertainties over spending patterns in other areas.

The maintained nursery school representative had expressed concern that the proposals suggested a loss of specialist nursery places and that a small proportion of children needed specialist early years places and would then have nowhere to go. If specialist places were only funded when occupied, some providers would be unable to retain specialist staff.

CS advised that, in order to allow retention of specialist staff, it had been agreed that once a child was placed as a result of an Early Years Inclusion Pathway (EYIPP) then funding would be agreed and guaranteed for the full academic year or until that child moved on. It was generally expected that children with SEN would be placed locally in mainstream provision, alongside their neighbours, with a package of support within the school and/or professional support from outside. Specialist places would not be removed unless there was provision to replace them. Maintained nursery schools were seen as centres of excellence which the LA hoped to use to upskill the remainder of the early years sector. Special schools with nursery places might have a similar role.

Sue Lewis asked whether the early years DSG underspend was being used to support the high needs block and whether using the underspend in this way required Schools Forum approval. CS replied that the DSG was in overall deficit but that the council had not formally applied the current early years underspend to offset part of the high needs deficit. Sue Lewis saw it as important that the early years surplus was not further increased.

CS doubted whether there would be an underspend in 2021/22, given the pressures on the inclusion fund.

A recent consultation with providers had shown high satisfaction with the use of EIF. 100% of professionals had thought that EIF had improved collaborative working.

Justin Price reported that special schools headteachers were concerned about the suggestion that in future all early years children with SEN would go to local nurseries rather than to special schools. They didn't see this as feasible unless there was specialist provision locally and they felt they had not been consulted. They were concerned at the higher number of pupils currently requiring specialist provision at year R and thought the needs of some of these had increased as a result of unsuitable nursery provision,

CS was happy to take up the offer of input from special school heads. A huge amount of work would be done to ensure that early years pupils with SEN in mainstream placements received appropriate support, taking into account parental wishes and professional advice

Action: Justin Price and special school colleagues to work with CS in consultation paper wording

The Family Voice representative was concerned that specialist early years provision might be put at risk and that if a child clearly had SEN that should be acknowledged. Others noted that mainstream provision was not appropriate for all children with SEN even with additional support.

One member noted the mention of transitional funding for children moving from early years to reception and asked how support would be provided for children entering reception who had not accessed early years provision; there were more of these due to the pandemic. CS advised that early years funding could not be used in that way.

LM noted the general increase in use of specialist provision. The LA aimed to create an environment where children could be educated in their own community where possible, in particular by early intervention (such as Early Talk Boost to address language delay). However, for a minority a specialist provision would be the right answer. LM agreed that the language of the consultation proposal might need to be reviewed.

8d Other topics

The Chair would discuss proposals for a school led inclusion fund, funded by a block transfer, with Jack Mayhew (Athena) and Alex Russell (Bourne and Inclusion Round Table) (see item 5 above). **Action for Chair**

Officers would try to share a draft of the consultation paper with Schools Forum members over the summer, giving a week for comments. Members would not be obliged to comment. **Action for LM/DG/LL**

9 Schools Forum business

Future meetings

Members thought there should be at least one face to face meeting a year, to allow networking. It was agreed that the Oct meeting should be virtual, but that at the end of every meeting, members should consider whether the following meeting should be face to face.

Proposed dates for 2022 meetings would be circulated at or before the next meeting.

Membership

The Chair noted that a number of members were leaving the Schools Forum and expressed thanks to all on behalf of the Forum:

Kate Carriett, Jonathan Gambier, Tamsin Honeybourne, Nicky Mann, Ruth Murton, Nick Trier.

10 Other business

None

Meeting ended 3.20pm

Date of next meeting Thursday 7 October 2021 1pm, virtual meeting on TEAMS