



Surrey Schools Forum Minutes of Meeting

Tuesday 4 July 2023 1pm at Guildford Pavilion

Approved by members of the Forum at meeting on 3 Oct 2023

Present

Chair

Rhona Barnfield Howard of Effingham School Academy member

Joint Vice-Chairs

Kate Keane Ewell Grove Primary Primary Head

Justin Price Freemantles School Special school head

Other school and academy members:

Donna Harwood-Duffy Dorking Nursery school Maintained nursery sch rep

Clare McConnell Bisley Primary School Primary Head

Geoffrey Hackett Burpham Primary Primary governor

Steph Neale St Pauls Catholic Primary Primary governor

Elaine Cooper SWAN academy trust Academy member

Jo Hastings Ottershaw Infant and Junior Academy member

Karyn Hing Westfield School Academy member

Jack Mayhew Learning partners MAT Academy member

John Winter Weydon MAT Academy member

Non-school members

Sarah Porter Private, voluntary and independent nurseries

Tamsin Honeybourne Unions: Education Joint Committee

Matthew Rixson Guildford Diocese (Church of England)

Joe Dunne Arundel and Brighton Diocese (RC)

Local Authority Officers

Liz Mills (LM) Director–Education and Lifelong Learning

Carol Savedra (CS) Assistant Director-SEND, Education, Early Years

Daniel Peattie Strategic Finance Business Partner

Sarah Bryan Deputy Strategic Finance Business Partner

Anwen Foy Surrey Virtual School Headteacher

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

1 Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from:

Lisa Kent	Manor Mead and Walton Leigh Schools (special governor)
Ben Bartlett	Hinchley Wood Learning Partnership Academy member
Neil Miller	Bramley Oak Academy Special academy member
David Euridge	Reigate Valley/Wey Valley AP academy member
Folasadi Afolabi	Unions: Education Joint Committee
Claire Poole	Family Voice Surrey

Apologies for absence and resignation: Paul Jackson (PRUs)

2 Election of Chair

Jack Mayhew had been nominated unopposed as the next Chair, to take office by the end of July by arrangement with the outgoing Chair.

3 Declarations of interest for this meeting and register

There were no declarations of interest over and above those already reported. The Chair noted that seven current members had not submitted declaration forms, and she encouraged all members to do so. Forms would be circulated for members to complete and (where necessary) update.

.

4 Minutes of previous meeting (12 May 2023)

Accuracy

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as accurate.

Matters arising (not covered elsewhere on the agenda)

Two webinars had been arranged, on 12 and 18 September, to allow headteachers to ask questions on the forthcoming funding consultation, including the impact of proposed changes to notional SEN funding. Members noted the need to promote these events, as they were new. There would also be events to brief the early years sector on the early years funding proposals.

5 Mainstream SEND banding review update

Carol Savedra reported that the consultation on the proposed changes had now been completed and implementation was now in progress. Much modelling had been undertaken on transitional impact.

EHCPs for 1,140 secondary pupils had been transitioned from hours to the new bands. Schools had been capped at a maximum loss of 1% of the old values, and at a maximum gain of 2%. The estimated overall cost of transition for the secondary sector was £31,000. Over the next few weeks individual secondary schools would

receive statements with a summary of the overall impact of transition and a comparison of old and new funding at pupil level. Key stage transfer pupils would be excluded from the comparisons, as they would be assigned to the new bands but would not have an old value to use for comparison. Transition for existing (non key stage transfer) pupils would be in September 2024. Again the aim was that there would be no large gainers or losers at school level from transition. 573 key stage transfer pupils were assigned to bands in secondary schools. Schools would be given an update in the week's bulletin and an update would be provided for parents on Surrey Says. There had been positive feedback from families, after earlier concerns.

The Chair suggested that the process for reviewing bandings for special school pupils was long and not straightforward and hoped that the equivalent process for mainstream bandings would be simpler. Carol advised that changes should come from annual reviews or extraordinary reviews, via panel. LM suggested that a different process may be needed initially, in order to avoid delaying decisions and putting too much pressure on case officers. Perhaps there could be smaller panels initially. Members noted the need to ensure effective communications, particularly with SENCOs.

6 Surrey Virtual School Annual report on pupil premium plus for looked after children 2022/23

Anwen Foy presented this item. She reminded the Forum that the virtual school's remit included oversight of education for children who were in LA care, children previously in LA care and children with a social worker, but the focus of the item was on the pupil premium for children in care, which was managed by the virtual school. There were local arrangements for distribution, on which a range of parties were consulted, including an annual survey of designated teachers. Surrey was responsible for distributing LAC pupil premium to children looked after by Surrey even if they did not live in Surrey or attend schools in Surrey. Processes had to be simple but to ensure that funding was well spent, the link to PEPs was seen as a way of allowing funding to be distributed to schools quickly and giving Designated Teachers ownership. Post LAC pupil premium was allocated directly by DfE to individual schools.

Currently schools' designated teachers could request up to £600 per pupil per term in pupil premium for LAC via the PEP. Funding was linked to specific pupils and could be used to address academic and non-academic barriers to learning, including therapeutic interventions and support for building emotional resilience, linked to a child's identified needs. In 2022/23 a fourth payment had been made to schools. Some designated teachers did not request the funding. The virtual school was monitoring take up trends and seeking to find out why designated teachers did not apply.

Virtual heads were allowed to hold some of the funding centrally, for example to purchase services for children with higher levels of need, where there might be economies through using a single provider. Some funding for example had been

spent on delivering the Virtual School's attachment aware and trauma informed schools programme – currently 73 participants from 16 schools are involved.

Surrey's looked after children's attainment had exceeded national average (CLA) from early years to KS2. Secondary aged pupils' attainments were more mixed, but the proportion of post 16s who were NEET was now the lowest it had ever been.

From 2023/24, Anwen proposed that the £600 per term allocation should continue to be available on request, linked to children's PEP. An additional transition payment was proposed, as many looked after children were known to struggle at that point. Further payments could be available for additional needs. There would be reviews of a sample of schools to show how the additional funding had been used, and it was hoped this would generate examples of good practice to share. The aim was to retain the best features of current funding, while further targeting the most vulnerable children.

Anwen hoped to present another report to the Forum next year.

7 Future of ESS SIMS and way forward for maintained schools' management information systems

Daniel Peattie asked for the views of maintained school representatives on proposals for school management information systems (MIS) and Financial Management systems (FMS). The current contract terms for maintained schools would not be available in 2024/25, as ESS (current provider) have declared they will no longer contract with the LA but only directly with individual schools. Schools therefore have a decision to make as to what systems they operate from April 24. The current de-delegated budget arrangements would end meaning budget around £250,000 would pass back into the schools block for allocation through the formula.

Four options had been considered by a working group of school representatives:

- Individual schools could decide to stay with the current supplier (ESS). This would mean individual schools signing three-year contracts, the minimum length that ESS was prepared to offer. ESS was now offering to match existing Surrey prices plus (unspecified) inflation for Surrey maintained schools, although details remained to be confirmed, and there might be some variation at individual school level, so individual schools might still gain or lose.
- Schools could individually seek alternative suppliers. The council could not offer an alternative supplier without a full procurement process.
- Schools collectively undertake a procurement process for a new provider for April 2024-this was seen as attractive but not feasible.
- Schools could stay with ESS for the next three years, while undertaking a joint procurement process for an alternative supplier. This would give an option for a change in suppliers after three years. It has been assumed that the ESS pricing mechanism for those three years would be similar to that presently in place.

The working group had supported the fourth option. This did not preclude individual schools making different decisions from April 2024.

ESS have indicated they are prepared to match current prices (plus inflation) if the council signed a “facilitation agreement” whereby it agreed to give up its rights under the existing “perpetual licence”. This licence appeared to give the council some scope for negotiation. The council was seeking Schools Forum’s views as to whether it would support the council signing such an agreement. This would not preclude any maintained school from seeking an alternative supplier. IT and procurement colleagues are available to support schools to study and compare the associated contract terms.

Members expressed concern that ESS’ minimum three-year term meant that a school which planned to convert to an academy within that period would be forced to buy a three-year licence, much of which they would not use. They asked whether break clauses were available.

Members also noted that it was uncertain what schools would be buying if they committed to ESS, and what level of upgrade might be available. ESS had mentioned moving to a cloud solution but had not given a timescale. Members noted the additional costs of data transfer when moving to new systems. Members asked whether the option of SIMS Connect would be made available. They also sought clarity as to what ESS meant by inflation.

Members noted that ESS had already required academies to sign up for three years.

Members noted that while they might not like the ESS proposals, the only alternative was procurement of and implementation for a new supplier’s system by 1 April 2024. Some schools would find this challenging.

DP noted that this was a national issue and potentially involved ESS in administering new contracts with a huge number of schools.

Members asked whether the council had investigated other providers. DP advised that the council itself had not, but that it had access to some information on alternative products from discussions which other nearby LAs had held with other providers. Some alternative systems were anecdotally considered to be more expensive and there would be additional transition costs, which would need to be borne by schools. The proposals did not commit individual schools to continue to use ESS (or any other specified supplier).

The five maintained school reps present supported the proposals that:

- * a group procurement exercise commences with the object of selecting a new provider from April 2027 (available to all maintained schools but not compulsory for any school)
- * individual schools would contract with ESS or make their own arrangements, for the next three years
- * subject to further investigation and verification of the ESS offer, the council would agree to relinquish its rights under its perpetual licence, in return for ESS agreeing to honour current prices to Surrey maintained schools. This would provide better prices for schools for the next few years than otherwise available.

Members noted that schools needed to be aware that they had a choice of continuing with ESS or seeking an alternative supplier. They asked for an update to be provided for all schools in the bulletin before the end of term. **Action for Daniel Peattie.**

An update was requested for the next meeting **Action for Mary Burguieres**

8 Other issues for 2024/25 school and early years funding consultation paper

a) Mainstream schools funding formula

DG asked the Forum to consider whether sufficient detail had been provided on the proposals for their colleagues to form an informed view on them in the forthcoming consultation, and whether they expected any other proposals to be included. Proposals may need to be modified or extended, depending on what DfE included in their annual schools funding announcement, expected at the end of July. DG reminded the Forum that normally they have not been asked for advance support for the proposals, but just to agree that we have made a case for consultation.

DG proposed to circulate updated proposals to forum members before the start of next term. Members were not expected to look at them over the holiday period, but comments would be welcomed from any member wishing to review them. Officers aimed to avoid any surprises in the consultation paper. Officers would try to share any significant changes with the Chair and Vice-Chairs at least.

In 2023/24 the need to fund the transfer to high needs block had meant formula funding rates increasing by less than the national increase and they were now typically 98.5% of national rates. The proposed block transfer in 2024/25 was the same as in 2023/24, and so the LA should be able to afford a similar increase in funding rates to the national increase (as yet unknown), but both old and new rates would be below national rates.

General proposals

The general proposals in the paper were consistent with previous years:

- Leave Minimum per pupil level (MPPL) at the national level. DfE only allowed this to be varied where all other measures had already been taken to make the formula affordable. It was unlikely that Surrey would need to vary MPPL under those criteria.
- Set minimum funding guarantee as high as possible, consistent with previous practice and equality data.
- Offer two options for the level of ceiling (on per pupil gains) and the level of increase in formula funding rates (these were linked, the higher the increase in formula rates, the lower the ceiling). Actual values were dependent on modelling and on the DfE's funding rates for 2024/25.
- Continue to increase the primary lump sum in line with other factors, subject to any limitations imposed by DfE. In 2023/24 the DfE had required convergence of all factors towards NFF values, except where they were already within 2.5% of NFF. This had limited Surrey's secondary sector lump sum. Convergence criteria for 2024/25 were not yet known.

It was important to consider the impact of any changes on small schools. Typically 1 form entry infant and primary schools were considered small for this purpose.

DG expected Mainstream Schools Additional Grant to be added to the 2023/24 baseline, from which minimum funding guarantee would be calculated, as had been done with Schools Supplementary Grant in the previous year. This would mean that the MFG would be based on 2023/24 budget plus mainstream schools additional grant.

Former combined services funding

This was being phased out by DfE and was currently delegated in Surrey over and above NFF. In 2023/24 Surrey had proposed to reduce the sum delegated in that year and to cease delegating at all in 2024/25. Therefore the LA now proposed that no combined services funding would be allocated to schools in 2024/25.

Notional SEN funding

At the previous meeting it was noted that Surrey identified a much lower proportion of formula funding as notional SEN funding than did other LAs. Officers had proposed bringing Surrey's notional SEN funding into line with the national average over three years. The Forum had suggested a shorter timescale. Officers proposed to consult on two options: moving to national average in one year, or over two years.

The Forum made no further suggestions for inclusion in the consultation paper.

It was suggested that an item should be included in the Schools Bulletin, with a round up of key dates for the consultation and a reminder of the consultation meetings. Colleagues did not need to feel obliged to answer every question. The consultation would need to close in sufficient time to allow a report to the Schools Forum meeting on 3 October, so no later than Friday 29 September. It was noted that some phase council meetings were to be held in the week ending 29 September. LM agreed that the LA would aim to issue the consultation as near as possible to the start of the autumn term.

b) “De-delegation” proposals for 2023/24

DG advised that de-delegation was proposed for the same services as in 2023/24, apart from SIMS (see item 7). The proposals included an increase in deduction rates for behaviour support, travellers services and FSM checking, in line with the increase in the mainstream formula funding rates. Continued deductions were also proposed for the primary schools' intervention fund.

The Forum had no comments to make on the proposals.

c) Early years

Carol Savedra presented this item. The proposed scale of change to early years funding in the coming year would be extraordinary. Funding increases were proposed from Sept 2023, but so far DfE had simply advised that further information would be available before the end of the summer term. LAs were not allowed to change their early years formula funding rates during the year, so additional funding

would need to be distributed outside the formula. In the circumstances, she proposed a separate timescale for the early years consultation in autumn 2023, starting later than the schools consultation, The 15 hour funded entitlement for two year olds of working parents was being introduced from April 2024, so there was little time for preparation. This would mean funding being available for two distinct categories of two year olds. There was a risk that two year olds of working parents might displace disadvantaged two year olds, and there was a need to manage supply.

Funding proposals for three and four year olds

The main proposals were to

- Maintain the 5% centrally managed funds
- Continue to use £215,000 of those centrally managed funds for an early intervention fund for two year olds
- Continue to maintain the EIF for three and four year olds at 4% of total available funding
- Maintain the current “local” deprivation funding at £2.81/hour.
- Increase the basic hourly rate by the same percentage as the increase in the DfE rate, plus an increase to remove the continuing annual underspend
- Continue the same basis of distribution of maintained nursery school supplementary funding
- Continue the same basis of distribution of additional funding for teacher pension costs.

Two year olds

DfE has proposed an average funding rate for LAs of £8/hr, although there would need to be some level of top slice to support infrastructure. A deprivation supplement would also be needed, as not all funded two year olds would now be deprived. It was hoped to provide funding from early intervention fund for two year olds who would meet the criteria for disability access fund at age three.

Children aged 9 months -2 years

From September 2024 the funded entitlement will be extended to children of working parents aged 9 months- 2 years. The impact on demand was not yet known, and would depend on how parents varied their working patterns in response. Officers did not expect to ask schools to provide for children aged 9 months – 2 years.

DfE has proposed an average funding rate for LAs of £11/hr for this group.

LM had agreed that the LA would try to set hourly rates earlier for 2024/25 than in recent years.

Members asked whether there should be an increase in early years representation on Schools Forum, in view of the large increase in early years provision. DG to check regulations. **Action for DG**

9 Schools Forum issues

Next meeting to be on Tuesday 3 October 2023. The main item would be consideration of responses to the funding consultations, and recommendations to Cabinet.

10 Other business

The Chair was retiring after over 20 years on Schools Forum (she was the sole remaining original member) and 13 years as Chair. On behalf of the Forum, Kate Keane acknowledged her appreciation of the time, energy and commitment given by the Chair to the work of the Forum, and the professionalism, fairness and understanding she had demonstrated in the role, and wished her the best for the future.

Meeting ended 3.05pm

Date of next meeting

Tuesday 3 October 2023 1pm, on Teams