

Surrey Schools Forum Draft Minutes of Meeting

Monday 1 November 2021 1.00pm Virtual Meeting on TEAMS (due to COVID 19)

Approved by Chair

Present

Chair

Rhona Barnfield Howard of Effingham School (academy member)

Joint Vice Chairs

Kate Keane Ewell Grove Primary and Nursery Primary Head

Justin Price Freemantles School Special school head

Other school and academy members:

Donna Harwood-Duffy Dorking Nursery Maintained nursery head

Susan Chrysanthou Furze field Primary Primary Head

Zoe Johnson-Walker The Winston Churchill School Secondary Head

Geoffrey Hackett Burpham Primary Primary governor

Fred Greaves Oakwood School Secondary governor

Lisa Kent Manor Mead and Walton Leigh Schools (special governor)

Matthew Armstrong-Harris (part) Rodborough Academy member

Sir Andrew Carter South Farnham Primary Academy member

Karyn Hing Westfield School Academy member

Paul Kinder Warlingham School Academy member

Sarah Kober Darley Dene Academy representative

Jack Mayhew Athena/GEP Academy member

Kerry Oakley Carrington School Academy member

David Euridge Reigate Valley/Wey Valley AP academy member

Neil Miller Bramley Oak Academy Special academy member

Non school members

Sue Lewis Private, voluntary & independent nursery providers

Christine Ricketts Post 16 provider

Tracy Baker Unions: Education Joint Committee

Local Authority Officers

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

Jane Winterbone (JW) Assistant Director (Education)

Eamonn Gilbert (EG) Assistant Director (Commissioning)

Louise Lawson (LL) Deputy Strategic Finance Business Partner

Daniel Peattie (DP) Strategic Finance Business Partner

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

Jodi Emery (JE) Service manager SEND, Education, Preparation for Adulthood

1 Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence

Apologies:

Clare McConnell	Bisley CE Primary	Primary Head
Steph Neale	St Pauls Catholic Primary	Primary governor
Elaine Cooper	SWAN academy trust	Academy member
Paul Jackson	NW secondary PRU	PRU representative
Matthew Rixson	Guildford Diocese (Church of England)	
Joe Dunne	Arundel and Brighton Diocese (RC)	

2 Declarations of interest (where not self evident)

Chair: CEO of multi academy trust which now includes special schools
Geoffrey Hackett, Sarah Kober, Matthew Armstrong-Harris, Jack Mayhew:
schools with SEN centres

Kate Keane: SAFE director, Sue Lewis: SAFE director

Justin Price: SAFE director and school has interest in Worplesdon SEN centre.

3 Minutes of previous meeting (8 July 2021) and matters arising

Deferred to next meeting

4 High needs update

a) Summary update on financial position and progress relating to the SEND Strategy and deficit recovery plans

In 2020/21 the LA had spent £195m on the high needs block, £35m above available funding. For 2021/22 the LA had planned an overspend of £24m, after planned cost containments of £28m (of which £0.5m was one off measures). The current forecast overspend was £31m, due to a mixture of higher demand and some cost containments proving challenging. The LA is budgeting for an overspend recognising that SEND transformation will take time to achieve. The main sources of cost containment were increased numbers of maintained sector specialist places and the preparation for adulthood programme. The level of grant funding had not matched the increase in demand, but the projected annual overspend was now falling. A five year trajectory had been modelled and currently an in year balance was forecast for 2026/27, at which time the forecast cumulative deficit would be £177m. The deficit should start to reduce thereafter. However, further cost containment work was needed to achieve this.

Modelling was based on EHCP growth of 7% next year, and included the impact of population changes (including housing development) in future years and detailed forecasts as to the number and type of additional maintained specialist places required. Cabinet would be asked to consider a phase 4 SEND capital programme in January, for which schools had already been asked to submit expressions of interest. Schools had been advised of the needs and locations areas where additional places were needed.

Risks included:

- * smaller than expected annual increases in grant
- * EHCP increases exceeding those in the model
- * cost containments not being delivered.

LM emphasised that the budget strategy was not just an LA plan but had been agreed by the SEND Board. The expansion of maintained specialist places, the

special schools banding review, mainstream SEN funding review and AP strategy were all part of the plan. The next phase of the high needs working group's work would also focus on the inclusion strategy and on early years and early identification.

One member asked what was being done to support expanding special schools following the government's announcement that there would be public sector pay increases in 2022/23. LM advised that the planning model allowed for modelling of cost (and other) changes.

LM recognised the importance of measuring outcomes of the changes and she noted that often local provision was the best place to receive support. A wide range of indicators was used to measure SEND outcomes eg key stage outcomes, exclusions, absences, children missing education, home to school distance. These were compared with national, regional and local benchmarks. The rate of growth of EHCPs was now falling.

b) Special schools banding review

The banding review working group, made up of headteachers and LA officers, had met on many occasions since January 2020. Few special schools liked the current funding arrangements, which included historic factors and required much use of IPSB funding where no suitable needs band was available to meet children's needs. The proposed arrangements meant that a single banding system would apply across all schools, based on pupil need. This allowed more flexibility in banding to meet children's needs and allowed more scope for schools to admit pupils with higher needs, eg from independent special schools. The proposal was a joint proposal not just an LA proposal. All special schools had been offered individual meetings to discuss the proposals and several had taken up the offer.

Pupils on IPSB would be placed on needs bands and only around 50% of pupils on IPSB would still require individual funding levels under the proposals. The number of special school pupils on IPSB had increased hugely in recent years, creating a huge administrative burden. Under the proposals, IPSB would only be used for emergency funding, if at all.

The proposals had been intended to be managed within existing budgets but were not intended to make savings.

The group had considered a number of funding models before reaching the version in the proposal. The new needs descriptors had been based on work with a wider range of headteachers from the various special school sectors than the working group alone, in order to establish up to date profiles of all four categories of need, based around support needed by the child.

The proposal shared with schools included a set of band funding rates. Schools requesting meetings had been provided with individual examples of the possible impact.

Band S1 was unlikely to be used because band S1 pupils would not normally be in special schools. Most pupils would be in bands S2-6. Band S7 was a threshold, above which pupils would have individual funding levels, agreed with

schools for a year. This meant an administrative saving over the current system, where most of these pupils would be on IPSB, which was reviewed termly. The proposed bands were more evenly separated than the current bands, which meant that more pupils could be placed on a band rather than needing IPSB funding. Additional supplements had been needed for a few schools.

Originally all pupils were to be moved to the new banding at the same time, but this would have created too much instability for schools and too large an administrative burden for the LA. It was now proposed that only children at a key stage transfer point and children on IPSB would move to the new bands in September 2022. This meant that schools would need to manage two funding systems in the short term, but it meant reduced uncertainty and should mean that funding could be agreed as part of the key stage transfer process. Within 4-5 years all pupils would have moved to the new bands.

The special schools minimum funding guarantee required that average funding per pupil in a special school could not fall if the number and needs of pupils remained the same. The LA had agreed not to ask the Secretary of State for an exception (or “disapplication”), but aimed to implement the guarantee as best it could, given that pupil needs would change as pupils entered and left the school. The aim was that schools would not lose as a result of changes in descriptors (which might place pupils on a lower band) or changes in funding rates, although they could still lose if particularly high need pupils left (as would always have been the case).

By 1 November 11 schools had responded. A final decision on implementation would be taken on or around 8 November.

EG confirmed that the review had no impact on the funding of mainstream schools or of SEN units. A separate review would cover mainstream schools and SEN units.

Originally the changes were meant to be cost neutral, but an additional implementation cost of £500,000 had now been agreed, largely to fund minimum funding guarantee support for schools which would otherwise have lost funding, and some additional cost of mapping IPSB onto bands. LM suggested that this was a small implementation cost compared to that incurred by some other LAs. EG suggested that the bulk of the implementation cost would be incurred in the first year.

Some members asked why the proposed funding for nursery pupils was higher than that for primary pupils, arguing that the level of staffing support for both was the same. The difference was similar to that in the current bandings. Officers noted that there had been limited scope for variation from the present system and that generally key stage differentials had been left unchanged in the absence of any evidence for or against change. Officers noted that changing the key stage weightings would have a wider impact on the proposals and could necessitate rerunning the consultation. Removal of the nursery weighting would directly affect six schools which had nursery classes (but the consequent redistribution would affect more). No school had mentioned the issue in their response to the proposal.

The special school rep commented that it was easier to understand the key stage 3 / 4 differential (via the need for vocational and college courses) than the nursery/primary differential. He thought reception children needed higher funding, but noted that the group had thought it better to leave the age differentials alone rather than removing them.

LM agreed that officers would look at the issue of nursery/primary differentials.
(Action LM/EG)

Members queried the reference to Schools' Forum informing governing bodies of their discussions. EG advised that all schools directly affected had already been consulted at length. The Chair asked whether parents had been consulted on the proposal. EG replied that the new arrangements would only apply to pupils joining the school or on IPSB. Top up funding levels were not usually included in placement consultations with parents and were not included in EHCPs, although additional support hours were. How provision was made was a commissioning issue. Legal advice had been given that the consultation process was adequate if no changes were being applied retrospectively to existing pupils.

The Chair asked about the impact on existing pupils going through key stage transfer

LM agreed that officers would give further thought to the issue and would liaise with Family Voice. **Action:LM/EG**

Justin Price noted that schools would seek further discussions if they saw the proposed band funding as insufficient or if pupils' needs changed.

EG reiterated that the changes redistributed funding but did not reduce overall funding.

c) SEND funding in mainstream schools and centres

EG advised that a working group was being established and he wanted it to be as challenging as possible, because the extent of challenge in the special schools group had been helpful. Any proposals needed to be tested rigorously before implementation.

Implementation of any changes was now proposed for September 2023. He aimed that proposals could be presented by December 2022 because of the impact on key stage transfer. There had been a few early meetings with phase leads to scope out a process. Officers had looked at the Hampshire model. He saw this review as building on the phase 1 (special school) review, but the outcome could look entirely different. There was a desire to move away from the focus on hours and 1:1 support.

As the proposals would involve a large number of schools, there would be a need to be more proactive in sharing the work with the wider school population, and to ensure that all schools were aware of issues and developments, and to encourage feedback from all schools, but there would not be scope for individual meetings with all affected schools.

EG proposed monthly meetings of a group of six primary reps, six secondary reps and three Schools Forum reps, to include representatives of schools with SEN centres. A larger group might be unwieldy.

Several headteachers had already expressed a willingness to be involved. It was important to ensure that all parts of the system were represented.

It was noted that the early intervention fund had demonstrated success in moving away from 1:1 support.

Implementation arrangements would need to be discussed. Again there could be a choice between whole school implementation or a staged approach, eg based on key stage transfer.

EG asked for feedback on the proposed group size and on whether any other sector ought to be added. Members noted the importance of including small schools.

Sarah Kober offered to join the group as a representative of a one form entry primary school.

d) Alternative provision strategy

JW noted that the alternative provision strategy was linked into the inclusion work, and covered alternative education arranged both by schools and by the LA, including ensuring that schools were aware of their safeguarding responsibilities when using external providers. The aims were that:

- more pupils would be supported in schools, with fewer exclusions,
- the majority of excluded pupils would be reintegrated to their original schools,
- fewer children would be educated at home unless by parental choice,
- there would be improved education and well-being outcomes from alternative education
- more pupils would progress from AP to further education.

£22.7m of capital funding was being invested in fit for purpose buildings for PRUs, including some new sites. New site searches had been necessary for NW short stay school and Reigate Valley College, where the existing Pyrford and Sidlow sites had not proved suitable for redevelopment as PRUs as originally hoped. The aim was still to complete by September 2023.

The AP strategy was to be launched that week- in the schools bulletin. A young people's version had also been produced.

A service level agreement was now in place with PRUs, on behalf of mainstream schools. Currently the number of funded places exceeds the number of pupils they can safely accommodate on site, so they were expected to do additional work outside their buildings.

David Euridge noted that the Surrey SLA had been seen elsewhere as a model of good practice.

5 Update on governance arrangements for proposed SEND inclusion innovation fund

LM reported that 8 primary heads and 5 secondary heads had expressed an interest in the proposed working group to develop governance arrangements for

the inclusion innovation fund. She was still checking to ensure that representation was wide enough, but she thought it was. There would be an introductory meeting that week and then at least two further meetings before Schools Forum on 7 December.

Kate Keane noted the importance of involving small schools but that heads of such schools often had teaching commitments which prevented their participation. She suggested that we might try to share a small school representative across both this and the mainstream banding group. LM would try to put in place mechanisms to support small school heads to contribute.

6 Other business

DFE consultation on funding LA school improvement responsibilities (this was actually taken before item 4)

The LA currently receives a separate grant of around £0.8m pa to fund its statutory school improvement responsibilities in respect of maintained schools, ie basically to identify schools with standards issues and broker support. Additionally there is de-delegated funding which actually pays for provision of support to maintained primary schools.

DfE is consulting (between 29 October and 26 November) on removing the grant and including the statutory responsibilities in the central services levy (which at present levels would mean an increase of around £13 per pupil in Surrey's central services levy deduction from maintained school budgets.

The DfE proposal also means that the de-delegated funding managed by SAFE would cease to be de-delegated and would need to be included within the central services levy assuming it continued. This would mean that any deduction would apply at the same rate per pupil across primary, secondary and special sectors, not just primary as now.

The Chair asked for the draft LA consultation paper to be circulated to Schools Forum members, as that might help members to frame their own responses. LM agreed to circulate a draft and would have regard to feedback from members when compiling the LA response.

Members noted the importance of maintained primary schools understanding the possible impact on school improvement funding and that that might encourage them to respond. LM would circulate a briefing note. LM noted the need to make maintained secondary and special schools aware of the issue too. Action: LM to circulate briefing note and (later) draft LA response with deadline for Forum members to comment on draft response (**action for LM**)

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

DG reminded members of the nomination deadline of 19 November.

Meeting ended 3.00pm

Date of next meeting Tuesday 7 December 2021 1pm, virtual