

# Minutes of Schools Forum

**Monday, 19 June 2023 at 2.30 pm  
at Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** N Toplass (Chair)  
J Barry (Vice-Chair) M Arnull, S Baker, E Benbow, C Hadley,  
K Hazelwood, D Irish, W Lawrence, S Mistry, M Smith, D  
Steen and J Topham.

**Officers:** Julie Andrews (Assistant Director - Education Services)  
Abi Asimolowo (Head of Financial Business Partnering)  
Elaine Taylor (Finance Business Partner)  
Connor Robinson (Democratic Services Officer)

## **20/23 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from L Bray, D Broadbent and C Handy-Rivett.

## **21/23 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

## **22/23 To note Claire Hadley as the new 16 to 19 Provider representative**

The Forum welcomed Claire Hadley as the new 16 to 19 Provider representative.

## **23/23 Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2023 be approved as a correct record.



## 24/23 School Balances 2022/23 and Budget Plans 2023/24

Schools Forum was updated on the balances held by schools at the end of 2022/23 and the projected balances for 2023/24.

An updated report was circulated owing to a mistake in the published report in appendix 2.

Appendix 2 had been updated to reflect the current RAG rating of the projected balances for 2023-24 as indicated by the Budget Plans received from schools:

RAG	Primary	Secondary	Special
<b>Red</b>	Less than 1% or greater than 10% balance	Less than 1% or greater than 8% balance	Less than 1% or greater than 10% balance
<b>No. of Schools</b>	31	2	1
<b>Amber</b>	1%-2% OR 8%-10% balance	1%-2% OR 5%-8% balance	1%-2% OR 8%-10% balance
<b>No. of Schools</b>	13	1	1
<b>Green</b>	2%-8% balance	2%-5% balance	2%-8% balance
<b>No. of Schools</b>	20	0	1

Forum noted how it was important that schools balance budget priorities well whilst planning for any foreseeable changes in coming years. Schools were advised to take effective action to avoid deficit budgets or excessive balances above recommended limits.

The total school balances by phase as at the end of 2022/23 had been summarised and compared to the position at the end of 2021/22:

	2021-22 £m	In-Year Movement £m	2022-23 £m
<b>Budget Share</b>	30.404	(2.420)	27.984
<b>Capital</b>	0.484	0.607	1.091
<b>Other Funds</b>	0.437	(0.189)	0.248
<b>Total</b>	<b>31.325</b>	<b>(2.002)</b>	<b>29.323</b>

The Forum were informed that no schools were closing with a deficit budget share in 2022/23.

There were three schools that had converted into an academy during the financial year 2022/23 which were Rounds Green Primary school, Moat Farm Junior and Tipton Green Primary.

The conversion of these schools into academies and the transfer of balances to them was reflected in the reduction of balances held by the primary schools.

The projected balances for 2023-24 as indicated by the Budget Plans received from schools indicated that 24 primary schools were projecting to hold balances above 10% and seven primary schools were projecting to hold balances below 1% at the end of 2023-24. In total, there was a decrease of four primary schools in the Red category. The number of primary schools rated Green had increased by three to 20 whilst those rated Amber had decreased by 1 to 13.

There was no secondary schools projecting to hold balances above 8% and there were two secondary schools projecting holding balances below 1% at the end of 2023-24. This was an increase of one school projecting balances below 1% based on their 2023-24 budget plans. One Secondary school was rated Amber.

There was one special school projecting to hold a balance above 10% and no special school is projecting to hold a balance below 1%. There was no change in the number of schools projecting balances above 10% and there was no change in the number of schools projecting balances below 1% based on their 2023/24 budget plans.

There was one school projecting a deficit balance at the end 2023/24. The authority would be working with this school to review their budget plan and agree a licensed deficit plan where appropriate and it would put plans in place to regularly review the financial position of the school going forward.

There were two schools that have yet to submit their budget plans for 2023/24.

Forum was advised that there were a number of strategies in place to support schools experiencing difficulties in their budgets and a process of escalation was in place if required that would work to mitigate any potential implications.

It was recognised that budget planning was very difficult with so many variables, contributing to the potential for many different scenarios. It was suggested that a range of potential scenarios be presented to Forum for them to consider, allowing them to see clearly potential impacts on future budgets.

The Forum noted the balances held by schools at the end of 2022/23 and the RAG ratings of the projected balances for 2023/24.

## **25/23 Special Educational Needs High Needs Block Provisional Outturn Report 2022-2023**

Forum received the High Needs Block (HNB) provisional outturn report for the Financial year 2022/23.

The HNB budget for 2022/23 reported to Schools Forum on 26 September was £60.808million, net of the usual recoupment by the Department for Education (DfE).

The balance brought forward as at 1 April 2022 was £3.930million surplus. An additional grant amount of £0.082m had been received from the DfE in March 2023. The anticipated surplus reported to Schools Forum on 20 March 2023 was £0.197million. The current provisional outturn position was £1.723million surplus.

The overall balance in the HNB as at 31 March 2023 was £5.653million. The Variances were reported as:

### Variation 1 – Independent Schools

Out of borough placements, closed with an overspend of £0.761million. There had been slippage in the dates when pupils were expected to take up places and a reduction in the anticipated tri-partite funded places following a meeting in January 2023 with Sandwell Children's Trust.

### Variation 2 – Mainstream Schools

There had been an increase in both EHCP assessments and the funding of early years pupils which had resulted in an overspend of £0.730million in delegated funding to school for individual pupil support.

### Variation 3 – Focus Provision Schools

There had been an increase in EHCP assessments which has resulted in an overspend of £0.173million on the delegated funding provided to Focus Provisions.

### Variation 4 – SEN Special Unit

A new Special Unit was opened at Uplands Primary School. It was previously budgeted for within the SEN Developments cost centre

when the budgets for 2022/23, as discussions had been still underway with the school at that point. More Pupils have been placed in the provision than was expected and the outturn was £0.207million overspend.

#### Variation 5 – High Point Special School

There were more pupils on roll at High Point from 1 September 2022 than was anticipated when the budget was first prepared. This had resulted in an overspend of £0.156million.

#### Variation 6 – Early Years

An amount of £0.480million from the Early Years Grant was used to offset the early support for pupils in private provider settings and those in mainstream early years settings. The funding to private providers out turned at £0.874million resulting in an overspend of £0.324million. The £0.480million would be insufficient to cover the full costs of meeting the needs of the pupils in early year's settings.

#### Variation 7 – Recoupment

The Element 3 top up for pupils placed in Sandwell schools that were the responsibility of a neighbouring LA are funded by Sandwell for all pupils in the special schools and Looked After Children pupils placed in mainstream schools. This was recouped from the relevant authority. There had been an increase in pupils being placed which had resulted in an increase in recoupment income, with Shenstone being the highest importer of pupils due mainly to the location of the school. This had resulted in an additional £0.837million since the budgets had been produced. This budget for recoupment is always set with prudence as the income was not guaranteed and should pupils leave in particular at phase transfer and are replaced with Sandwell responsibility pupils, the income would cease.

#### Variation 8 – Albright Education Centre

A small number of pupils had been placed temporarily at Albright Education Centre pending a permanent placement being agreed. These had been funded through element 3 top-up for the period of occupancy. It was also found that the centre had been overfunded following an incorrect budget allocation which had now been recouped.

#### Variation 9 – SEN and Support for Inclusion Services

The total variances equate to a saving of £0.493m across 9 service areas. These were mainly due to staff turnover, maternity leave,

opting out of the LA superannuation scheme and full-time budgeted posts covered by staff on reduced hours and the inclusion of 2022/23 pay awards. Early Year's have also received income of £0.060million from the Early Year's Block for 2-year olds trajectory funding to provide specialist equipment that was not utilised in 2022/23. This would remain in the overall HNB balances and be available to set spend against in 2023/24.

#### Variation 10 SEN

SEN Developments was showing an underspend of £1.546million

– The underspend was as follows:

- HNB surplus balancing figure of £0.629million, which was the difference between the calculated budgets as at 1 April 2022 and the HNB Grant initial settlement 2022/23.
- Additional grant of £0.37million received in July 2022.
- Additional grant of £0.082million received in March 2023.
- The funding for the Special Unit had been held here and was now
- accounted for in variance 4 above equating to £0.27million.
- Slippage on planned expansions for specialist places, that had now been accounted for in 2023/24 of £0.195million.

Forum noted the continued variation in the HNB that had fluctuated over the academic year. The fluctuation was due to continued changes and predications and it was appreciated that these changes did not necessarily apply themselves to long term strategic planning.

Additional workstreams had been set up to consider the SEND funding and how the HNB was allocated. The ongoing Working Group into SEND funding had been halted to prevent the duplication of work and would wait for feedback from the workstreams.

Forum noted the contents of the report in relation to the 2022/23 HNB Grant Provisional Outturn Report for the 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

### **26/23 Dedicated Schools Grant Outturn 2022/23**

Forum was informed on actual expenditure incurred for the Dedicated Schools Grant blocks of funding, Early Year Block Central School Services Block, centrally retained and the de-delegated budgets over the financial year 2022/23.

The Summary provisional DSG outturn was presented to Forum:

Summary Provisional 2022/23 DSG (£'000)

	2021/22 B/F	Income	Expenditure	In Year Bal	TOTAL C/F
<b>Schools Block</b>	(358.91)	(308,463.03)	309,038.17	575.14	216.23
<b>HNB</b>	(3,930.30)	(60,890.09)	59,063.53	(1,826.56)	(5,756.86)
<b>EYB</b>	206.11	(24,113.58)	23,889.42	(224.16)	(18.05)
<b>CSSB</b>	12.90	(2,283.29)	2,272.27	(11.02)	1.88
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>(4,070.20)</b>	<b>(395,749.99)</b>	<b>394,263.39</b>	<b>(1,486.60)</b>	<b>(5,556.80)</b>

The Early Years Block initial allocation for 2022/23 was £23.386million. Due to adjustments for participation, the actual grant income received was £24.114million the net effect of which was a £0.727million increase.

The actual expenditure incurred during 2022/23 regarding the use of the Early Years Block:

Early Years Block (£'000)

Service Area	Budget 2022/23	Actual Expenditure	Variance
Early Learning 2-year olds	3,584	4,173	589
Early Years - PVI	10,697	10,730	33
Early Years - Schools	7,240	7,240	0
EY – Pupil Premium	307	326	19
SEN Inclusion Fund	480	480	0
Disability Access Fund	118	26	(92)
Central Services	961	915	(46)
Early Years Adjustment	727	0	(727)
<b>Total</b>	<b>24,114</b>	<b>23,889</b>	<b>(225)</b>

The actual expenditure incurred regarding the use of the Central School Services Block:

Central School Services Block (£'000)

Service Area	Budget 2022/23	Actual Expenditure	Variance
School Forum	3	0	-3
Pension Administration	146	146	0
Stat/Regulatory/Education Welfare/Asset Mgt	1,284	1,284	0
Admissions & Appeals	453	445	-8
Copyright Licenses <sup>1</sup>	397	397	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,283</b>	<b>2,272</b>	<b>-11</b>

The Pupil number growth allocation agreed by Schools forum was £1.3million. There was growth fund brought forward from 2021/22 of £0.336million making total funding available to be £1.636million. Total growth fund paid during the year amounted to £2.211million representing an overspend of £0.575million and would be the first call on 2023/24 PNG funding allocation.

De-delegated budgets, expenditure and variances were noted as:

Service Area	Adjusted Budget 2022/23 £'000	Actual Expenditure £'000	Variance £'000
Health & Safety Licenses	4	6	(2)
Evolve Annual License	0	5	(5)
Union Facilities Time	219	177	42
School Improvement	100	100	0
Schools in financial difficulty	0	88	(88)
<b>Total</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>(53)</b>

Education Functions budgets, expenditure, and variance:



Service Area	Budget 2022/23 £'000	Actual Expenditure £'000	Variance £'000
Education Benefits Team	175	175	0
Children's Clothing Allowance	33	33	0
Safeguarding & Attendance	264	264	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>472</b>	<b>472</b>	<b>0</b>

Forum noted the Dedicated Schools Grant Outturn 2022/23

## **27/23 Constitution Review**

Forum was advised that the Schools Forum Constitution and membership structure had not been updated since 2016. The changes proposed both for the constitution and membership structure were taken from the updated DfE guidance and reflected national and regional best practice.

The majority of the changes were administrative and had given more detail on the role and function of Schools Forum. The membership structure had also been updated to reflect the changes in pupil proportionality between maintained and academy settings, the proposed changes would increase the Schools Forum Membership from 20 to 24 members:

<b>Comparison Membership Breakdown</b>		
	<b>OLD</b>	<b>Proposed (NEW)</b>
<b>Schools Members</b>		
Maintained Primary	5	5
Maintained Secondary	1	1
Maintained Governor Primary	3	2 (-1)
Maintained Governor Secondary	2	1 (-1)
<b>Maintained Primary and Secondary Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9 (-2)</b>
Special Schools (Maintained)	1	1
PRU (Maintained)	1	1
<b>School Members Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11 (-2)</b>

<b>Academies Members</b>		
Academy Primary	1	3 (+2)
Academy Secondary	3	6 (+3)
<b>Academies Primary and Secondary Total</b>	4	9 (+5)
Special Academies	0	1 (+1)
<b>Academies Members Total</b>	4	10 (+6)
<b>Non-School Members</b>		
16 to 19 Provider	1	1
Early Years (PVI)	1	1
Trade Union Representative	1	1
<b>Non-School Members Total</b>	3	3
<b>Schools Forum Total Membership</b>	20	24

Forum had been presented with a number of variations with regards to the possible membership structure. It was determined that option one was the preferable option.

Option one:

<b>Draft Membership Breakdown</b>	
<b>Schools Members</b>	
Maintained Primary	5
Maintained Secondary	1
Maintained Governor Primary	2
Maintained Governor Secondary	1
<b>Maintained Primary and Secondary Total</b>	9
Special Schools (Maintained)	1
PRU (Maintained)	1
<b>School Members Total</b>	11
<b>Academies Members</b>	
Academy Primary	3
Academy Secondary	6
<b>Academies Primary and Secondary Total</b>	9
Special Academies	1
<b>Academies Members Total</b>	10
<b>Non-School Members</b>	
16 to 19 Provider	1
Early Years (PVI)	1
Trade Union Representative	1

<b>Non-School Members Total</b>	3
<b>Schools Forum Total Membership</b>	24

**Resolved that:-**

- (1) The changes to the Schools Forum Constitution be approved.
- (2) The changes to the membership structure as outlined in option one be approved.

### **28/23 Future Meeting Dates**

The Forum noted the future meeting dates:-

- 2 October 2023
- 6 November 2023
- 11 December 2023
- 15 January 2024
- 18 March 2024
- 1 July 2024

### **29/23 AOB**

Forum was asked to consider the position of Chair and Vice-Chair for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic year the potential for any nominations.

Forum members were asked to communicate the now vacant positions to the academy schools in preparation for the new year.

Meeting ended at 3.46pm

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