

Minutes of Schools Forum

Monday 14 June 2021 at 2.30pm
Virtual online meeting via MS Teams

Present:

D. Irish (Chair)
M Arnull, S Baker, J Barry, D Barton, W Lawrence, G Linford, K Morgan, E Pate, J Smallman, P Shone, N Toplass and J Topham

Officers: S Lilley, R Kerr, A Timmins, N Phagura, M Tallents, J Gill, S Suthi-Nagra and C Robinson.

18/21 Apologies:

Apologies were received from J. Bailey and L Howard

19/21 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest

20/21 Minutes

Agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2021 were a correct record



Future Insurance Options for Sandwell Maintained Schools

Schools Forum were advised on the two possible future insurance options available for maintained schools. Option one; the Department for Education's (DfE) 'Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA)', and option two; the offer from the local authority for comparative insurance cover and insurance services.

The tender process had come about following Cabinet approval on 17 March 2021 for the council to conduct a tender exercise and to secure appropriate insurances and enter into new long-term agreement for the period from 1 October 2021.

There were only two options put before Schools Forum: Option One which would see all schools joining the RPA scheme and: Option Two where all schools remain within the council's programme of insurance, with schools being charged a fixed premium per pupil (or per place in the case of special schools and pupil referral units).

The breakdown of the two options was presented to the Forum:

Insurance	Council		RPA	
	Cover	Excess	Cover	Excess
Property/ Material Damage (as per specified peril)/	✓	See Note 1	✓	See Note 2
Contents (as per specified perils)	✓	See Note 1	✓	See Note 2
Terrorism	✓	See Note 1	✓	See Note 2
Business interruption	✓	See Note 1	✓	See Note 2
Works in progress/ CAR	✓ - £5m	See Note 1	✓ - £250k	See Note 2
Elections	✓	£0	✗	
Money	✓	See Note 1	✓	See Note 2
Fidelity Guarantee/ employee dishonesty	✓	See Note 1	✓	See Note 2
Computers	✓	See Note 1	✓	See Note 2



Public Liability	✓	£0	✓	£0
Employer's Liability	✓	£0	✓	£0
Hirer's Liability	✓	£0	✓	£0
Motor / minibuses	(*)	See Note 3	✗	n/a
Engineering Inspection	✓	See Note 1	✗	n/a
Personal Accident	✓	£0	✓	£0
School Journey	✓	£0	✓	£0
PRICE PER PUPIL PER YEAR		£24		£19

1. Note 1 – Excess of £500 applies to primary schools and £1,000 to secondary schools during the period of the LTA
2. Note 2 - Excess of £250 applies to primary schools and £500 to secondary schools
3. Note 3 (*) Minibus cover is available at an additional charge of £850 per vehicle per year with a £250 excess in the event of a claim.

Forum was informed on the scope, terms and costs of covers provided by the RPA, it was noted that in most areas the offer from the RPA was at least equal to the Council's corporate insurance under option two in nearly all areas – however the key exceptions to this had been identified as:

- Motor / minibus insurance was not offered/ covered by RPA but was available under option 2 and is offered at the existing rate of £850 per vehicle per year;
- Contract Works cover was limited to £250,000 (compared to £5m cover provided under the council insurance provision). If work exceeding the RPA limit is planned, then additional cover would need to be arranged.
- Statutory inspection (known as engineering inspection) of lifts, boilers, etc was not provided by the RPA. However, this was included under the council cover.
- Employee dishonesty was limited to £500,000 under the RPA whereas under the council option it was £15m.
- Cover for money (and money in transit) was limited to £5,000 under the RPA, whereas the council cover has a limit of £10,000 during the business day but £2,500 in transit.
- The RPA has an unlimited indemnity for public and employer's liability whereas the council option under the current arrangement had a limit of £50m.



- The costs of schools' insurance under either option would provide certainty and enable improved budgeting.

If schools went with the RPA scheme, it was noted that any claims would need to be handled directly by the school and the RPA claims handling service. Should the council's insurance team be required to get involved in the claim to support the process, then it was envisaged that the school would be charged a minimum of £1,000 per claim, which would depend upon the complexity of the claim and resource required.

The details of the two schemes had been shared with the Joint Executive Group on 11 March 2021, where members of the Group all indicated a preference for Option two. The Joint Executive Group noted that the significant benefits that schools derived from the support provided by the council's Risk and Insurance service across the entire programme of insurance and processes involved.

The rate the council had considered its programme was £24 per pupil, this was compared to £19 per pupil for the RPA scheme. The Council offer for maintained schools provided the full range of insurance cover as offered by the RPA. The rate of RAP was slightly less than that of the local authority offer, the RPA offer also did not include engineering inspection cover within the price (which the Council does).

The local authority offer also provided schools with the benefit of a local named response / support for managing insurance activity and claims on behalf of the school.

Following questions from members it was noted that:

In response to questions from Forum members it was noted:

- The cost of both options reflected the combination of the maintained schools as a collective group, reflecting economies of scale. The options were being presented as one or the other, if the schools decided to split and choose different options it was highly likely that they would face higher costs.
- It was recognised that the costings across both options, being the same across all schools would be mean those schools who



happen to be smaller would be paying the same rate as those larger schools.

- The RPA scheme would mean schools would need to find engineering insurance in addition to the RPA cover.
- With the RPA Scheme there would likely be an increase in administration for both the school and the local authority.
- With the RPA cover schools would need to ensure their assets are valued correctly before joining the scheme.
- The commitment on the council scheme would be three years.
- The options had been taken to Joint Executive Group – where the Council Option had been selected as the preferred option unanimously.

It was recommended that maintained schools of the Schools Forum note the options available for insurance and vote on its preferred option.

Vote

Option One

For Against Abstain

Option Two

For Against Abstain
5

Agreed that maintained schools selected option two and would continue to receive comparative insurance cover and insurance services through the local authority.

22/21 **School Balances 2020/21 and Budget Plans 2021/22**

Schools Forum received a report in respect of the School Balances 2020/21 and Budget Plans 2021/22



The Forum was presented with the figures as were at the end of 2019/20 and how they look at the end of 2020/21.

The budget share had increased from £21.886m to £30.323m with an increase of £8.437m. The increase was reported as being a result of the Covid funding being received by schools over the year and not having the opportunity to spend before the close of the financial year in 2021.

Concerns had been raised by schools on the amount of money being taken forward into 2021/22, however schools had been reassured by the local authority that money would not be clawed back. The amounts accrued it was expected would be directed towards getting pupils back up to the levels expected following the effects of the pandemic.

Taking into account capital and other funds the total closing balance was reported as £31.709m.

	2019-20 £m	In Year Movement £m	2020-21 £m
Budget Share	21.886	8.437	30.323
Capital	0.844	(0.140)	0.704
Other Funds	0.593	0.089	0.682
Total	23.323	8.386	31.709

It was reported that no schools closed with a deficit balance. It was also noted that over the course of the financial year four schools had converted into an academy.

The projected Budget Plans for 2021/22 had been broken down and RAG rated.

Forum were advised on the number of schools in each RAG category. Thirty-four primary schools were projected to hold balances above 10% and five primary schools are projected to hold balances fewer than 1%.

There was one secondary school projected to hold balances above 8% and one seconder school projected to hold a balance less than 1%



There is one Special School projected to hold a balance above 10% and no Special school projected to hold a balance less than 1%.

There is one school projected to hold a deficit in 2021/22 financial year, work it was noted had already begun to ensure the financial position of the school going forward.

	Primary/Special	Secondary
Red	Less than 1% or greater than 10% balance	Less than 1% or greater than 8% balance
Amber	1%-2% OR 8%-10% balance	1%-2% OR 5%-8% balance
Green	2%-8% balance	2%-5% balance

In response to questions from Forum members it was noted:

- That the figures shown refer to the financial year and not the academic year, it was also recognised that schools may not yet have had the opportunity to spend money received from Covid relief, which would be spent during the summer term and in the new academic year.
- The uncommitted cumulative balances are not known in detail what they are reserved for and would only become apparent on greater engagement with the school.
- Within Appendix 1 the breakdown of the Community Funds refers to money being held for purposes such as nurseries, teaching schools or school hubs.
- The PRU Primrose was noted in the school balances budget plans 2021/22 as possessing 388.84% this was a mistake and the correct figure was 12.77%.
- That the colour designating those schools who have both exceeded and falling short with regards to their budget plans being red be changed so to differentiate them from one another.
- Entering into conversations with DfE in the future about funding – carrying and known to be carrying a substantial amount which



has only increased during the pandemic will need to be taken into account.

Schools Forum noted the report.

23/21 Early Years Block Outturn 2020/21 (RK)

The Forum was presented with the figures of the Early Years Block Outturn 2020/21.

The Early Years Block allocation for 2020/21 was reported as £24.540m. The actual grant allocation income received was £24.648m because of an early adjustment; the net effect of which was £0.108m.

The below table presented to Forum set out the actual expenditure incurred during 2020/21:

Table 1 – Early Years Block

Service Area	Budget 2020/21 £,000	Actual Expenditure £,000	Variance £,000
Early Learning 2-year olds	4,227	4,227	0
Early Years - PVI	10,583	11,379	796
Early Years - Schools	8,012	8,006	(7)
EY – Pupil Premium	281	208	(73)
SEN Inclusion Fund	480	480	0
Disability Access Fund	81	10	(71)
Central Services	995	995	0
Total	24,659	25,305	646



Forum noted that the 2020/2021 final DSG early years funding adjustments that would normally be announced in July, would now be delayed due to the new approach taken by the DfE. In this instance local authorities would access the top-up financial support that has been put in place during the 2021 spring term, up to a capped level of 85% of January 2020.

It was now understood that the final early years funding adjustment would now be published in November alongside the normal planned schedule to DSG update. The DfE had stated that they will endeavour to notify individual local authorities of their final allocation adjustments in September.

In response to questions from Forum members it was noted:

- That a trend had developed which had seen an underspend last year followed by an overspend this year. A reason for the movement was in part down to the in-year adjustment that had been received, the timing for the information was also being moved from July to September.
- The authority seeks to pay out on rates agreed for that financial year – at the end of the financial year the authority would look at the balances and after bringing the report to School Forum will look to pay those balances to the providers.

School Forum noted the report.

24/21 Central Schools Service Block, centrally retained & De – delegated Budgets Outturn 2020/21

Members of Forum were informed on the actual expenditure incurred for the Central School Services Block, which was centrally retained and the de-delegated budgets in financial year 2020/21.

The below table set out in detail the actual expenditure incurred during financial year 2020/21 regarding the use of the Central School Services Block and the de-delegated budgets.



Service Area	Budget 2020/21 £,000	Actual Expenditure £,000	Variance £,000
School Forum	3	0	(3)
Pension Administration	228	228	0
Stat/Regulatory/ Education Welfare/Asset Mgt	1,070	1,113	43
Admissions & Appeals	453	453	0
Copyright Licenses*	266	266	0
Total	2,020	2,060	40

*Copyright Licenses costs are paid for directly by the DfE and the DSG grant allocation paid to the authority is adjusted accordingly.

The Pupil number growth allocation previously agreed by Schools Forum was £2.269m. The DfE made an adjustment for pupil number growth funding paid to academies for the period April to August of the previous financial year. The academies adjustment for 2020/21 was £0.551m giving total funding available of £2.820m.

Table 2 – Pupil Number Growth Funding

Service Area/budget Description	Budget 2020/21 £,000	Actual Expenditure £,000	Variance _ £,000
Pupil number growth	2,820	2,137	(683)

De-delegated Budgets

Table 3 – De-delegated Budgets

The De-delegated budgets had been set out across service areas, and detailed below:



Service Area	Budget 2020/21 £,000	Actual Expenditure £,000	Variance _ £,000
Health & Safety Licenses	27	44	17
Evolve Annual License	6	6	0
Union Facilities Time	196	193	(3)
School Improvement	100	100	0
Schools in financial difficulty	243	206	(37)
Total	572	549	(23)

Forum noted the Central Schools Service Block, centrally retained & De – delegated Budgets Outturn 2020/21 and were advised that a further report would be taken to the School Forum meeting on 27th September 2021 which would set out the impact of the de-delegated budget expenditure with recommendations on the use of any carry forwards.

Schools Forum noted the report

25/21

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS HIGH NEEDS BLOCK 2020/21 OUTTURN and SPECIAL PROVISION OCCUPANCY

Forum was provided with the High Needs Block (HNB) 2020/21 outturn position.

The Final HNB Grant settlement for 2020/21 was £48.131m after deductions for academies recoupment and direct funding of high needs places by Education Skills and Funding Agency.



The carry forward balance on the HNB as at 31 March 2020 was reported at a £0.561m deficit.

A breakdown of the HNB budget of £48.131m; outturn as at 31 March 2021 of £46.973m and the in-year underspend of £1.158m was set out in detail:

Budget Heading	Budget 2020/21 £000	Actual Outturn 31/3/21 £000	Variance from Budget £000
1) Out of Borough Placements	4,929	5,916	987
2) Pupil Top Up and Place Funding	28,957	29,370	413
3) Post 16 Colleges	2,323	2,653	330
4) Hospital PRU	1,073	1,173	100
5) SEN Support Services	1,412	1,276	(136)
6) Support for Inclusion	4,574	3,803	(771)
7) Alternative Provision	1,911	1,111	(800)
8) SEN Developments	1,123	217	(906)
9) Other SEN Funding	1,677	1,378	(299)
10) Exclusions & Reintegration	152	76	(76)
TOTAL	48,131	46,973	(1,158)

Forum was advised on the nature of the variances: Out of Borough Placements – was reported as combination of an increase in the number of pupils placed out of the borough into independent



settings and a reduction in pupils placed in other local authority maintained and academy schools.

The Pupil Top up and place funding - The overspend related to maintained schools and academy mainstream provision, Focus Provisions and Special Schools combined, showing an overspend following new in year admissions, new assessments and an 33% increase in the number of pupils staying on into post 16 placements in mainstream and special schools.

With regards to Alternative Provision the underspend was as a result of the Alternative Provision Panel's controlling the number of pupils allocated alternative provision places and had been instrumental in reducing the expenditure throughout the financial year.

It was noted that the net carried forward balances for 2020/21 was £0.597m surplus after accounting for the £0.561m deficit from 2019/20.

SEN Advisor announced the creation of a Task and Finish Group which would examine the consultation proposals coming out of the SEND review and requested four members of the Forum to join the Group. There would be two meetings prior to the end of term and two meetings at the start of the new academic year. The Group would be a Sub Committee of Schools Forum.

The members were requested from a: Special School, an AP PRU and a Mainstream Primary and Secondary.

Forum members: Neil Toplass (Special School), Kevin Morgan (AP PRU), Wendy Lawrence and Jamie Barry (Mainstream Primary) put their names forward.

In response to questions from Forum members it was noted:

- That a detailed breakdown of needs would be brought to the next circulated and Forum.
- The AP responsibilities had changed and a lot of pupils who may have once come through the AP Panel are now receiving support via their school, staying on roll and the receiving support. The new approach was aiming to ensure everyone was



taking responsibility for the children and placing them appropriately.

- Schools can now fund AP independently of the High Needs Block, if a pupil requires additional support they would be able to go through the AP Panel.
- Number of pupils who are engaging with AP and going through the AP Panel will be communicated.

Schools Forum noted the Report

26/21 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS HIGH NEEDS BLOCK 2021/22 BUDGET

Schools Forum noted the Special Educational Needs High Needs Block 2021/22 Budget Report. The High Needs Block provisional Grant was reported as £53.666 million.

The allocation of the Grant was specified as:

Budget Heading	Budget 2021/22 £000	%
1) Independent Schools	5,102	9.5
2) Other LA maintained and Academy mainstream and Special Schools	1,518	2.8
3) Pupil Funding delegated to Schools and PRUS and Post 16	35,709	66.5
4) Hospital PRU	1,298	2.4
5) SEN Support Services	1,420	2.7
6) Support for Inclusion	4,642	8.7
7) Alternative Provision	843	1.6



8) SEN Developments	1,250	2.3
9) Other SEN Funding	1,731	3.2
10) Exclusions & Reintegration	152	0.3
Total HNB Grant 2021/22	53,666	

Forum was informed that within the SEN Developments there was an estimated surplus of £440K and within the Support for inclusion line there was a budget of £199K for Preventing Secondary Exclusions staffing that would not be utilised. This would be removed from the budgeted figures next financial year.

The High Needs Block had funded 1158 Whole Time Equivalent Specialist Places in Sandwell Provisions across Special Schools, Mainstream Focus Provisions and PRUs. The places commissioned for the financial year 2021/22 were reported to Forum and demonstrated in the tables below.

SPECIAL SCHOOLS	Places
The Orchard	147
The Meadows	185
The Westminster School	226
Shenstone Lodge and Brades	95
High Point from 1/9/21 WTE	22
Westminster SPI from 1/9/21 WTE	7
Additional places budgeted for in year across all Special Schools for potential over occupancy from 1/9/21 WTE	15
Additional Expansion at the Meadows school from 1/9/21WTE	11
TOTAL	708



FOCUS PROVISIONS

Primary Schools	ASD	61
	PD	12
	MLD	10
	HI	12
	SEMH	25
	SLCN	5
Primary Total		125

Secondary Schools	ASD	45
	PD	20
	HI	5
Secondary Total		70

TOTAL FOCUS PROVISION PLACES

	195
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PRUs

Primrose PRU (Primary)	25
Sandwell Community School (Secondary)	180
Albright	50
TOTAL PRU PLACES	255

In response to questions from Forum members it was noted:

- The High Point planned place element would be 38 programmed in, the 22 is the WTE.
- The figures reflect the severe and complex needs of some students who cannot be placed within Sandwell, due to a lack of



specialist provision within the Sandwell or they are being educated and looked after in another location nationally.

- The additional places budgeted for exist in case capacity is reached within the special schools, the number was reached through consideration as what might be required and based on commission prices.
- Comparing with other local authorities across the Black Country to examine any trends or specific issues relating to Sandwell would be examined and communicated.

Schools Forum noted the report

27/21 School Forum Membership - 2021/22 (RK)

Due to the pandemic those members of Schools Forum who had been first appointed in 2016 had had their membership of the Forum extended for a year, the extension period would expire on 30 June, and subsequently new members of Schools Forum would be required to be appointed for the next Forum in September.

Those members whose term had expired where noted as:

Representative Body	Name	Date of Appointment
Maintained Primary School member - Governor	Mr B Patel	01/06/2016
Maintained Primary School member - Governor	Mr J Smallman	01/06/2016
Maintained Secondary School Member - Headteacher	Mr P Shone	01/06/2016
Maintained Secondary School member - Governor	Ms C Gallant	01/06/2016
Special School Member	Mr N Toplass	01/06/2016



Trade Union Member	Mr D Barton	01/06/2016
Pupil Referral Unit	Mr K Morgan	03/03/2017

The new members would join the Forum in the new academic year, the processes for the selection of each member was emphasised and understood by the group.

It was agreed that those nominated would be forwarded to Debbie Campbell, who would then ensure they were communicated to the necessary officers.

28/21 **School Forum Forward Plan - 2021/22 (RK)**

Schools Forum noted the proposed future dates and agenda items of the 2021/22 meetings:

27 September 2021
8 November 2021
13 December 2021
17 January 2022
14 March 2022
20 June 2022

29/21 **AOB**

Permanent Provision for Schools Forum to be Held Remotely

Members of Forum were notified of the change in the regulations that would permit Schools Forum to continue as a virtual online meeting indefinitely.

While the advantages of the virtual online meeting was appreciated by Forum it was emphasised by a number of members that a face-to-face meeting would be preferable at least occasionally in order to facilitate those individuals who wished to observe, but also to introduce new members to the role and to increase the depth of discussion across the agenda.



It was agreed that once a new Chair was selected the preference for the virtual or in person meeting would be communicated to Forum.

The Next Meeting of Schools Forum: 27 September 2021 @ 2.30pm

Location: TBC

Meeting ended at 15.29

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

