

Minutes of Schools Forum

**Monday 12 December 2022 at 2.30pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Freeth Street,
Oldbury**

Present: N Toplass (Chair).
E Benbow, J Topham, W Lawrence, J Barry, D Irish, S
Baker, K Duff, J Baily and L Bray

Officers: A Asimolowo, M Tallents, A Timmins, E Taylor, V White and
C Robinson

58/22 Apologies:

Apologies were received from S Mistry and M Arnull

59/22 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

60/22 Minutes

Agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 7th
November 2022 be approved as a correct record.

61/22 Appoint to the Vacant position of Vice-Chair

No nominations had been received – J Barry indicated he
was to be re-appointed.

Resolved J Barry appointed as Vice-Chair of School
Forums

62/22 Approve Named Substitutions

Resolved that the named substitutes be approved:

- L Paino as named substitute for S Baker
- S Penny as named substitute for W Lawrence
- A Connop as named substitute for J Barry
- K Duff as named substitute for S Mistry

63/22 Schools Funding Consultation 2023-24 – Response Results

Schools Forum considered the recommendations of the responses to the proposals outlined in the Schools Funding Consultation 2023-24.

The 2023-24 Schools Funding Consultation was issued electronically to schools on 11 November 2022 and contained seven questions.

The decisions of the Forum defined the budget setting processes for all schools and academies within the borough for the next financial year. The process would assist schools in preparing strategic plans, ensuring schools are able to create viable budget, staffing and curriculum plans.

The responses to the consultation was similar to previous years however there was a decline in the number of secondary engagement.

Previous engagement was noted by the Forum:

	Primary	%	Secondary	%	TOTAL	%
2020-21	56/94	60%	9/18	50%	65/112	58%
2021-22	60/95	63%	10/20	50%	70/115	61%
2022-23	43/94	46%	10/20	50%	53/114	47%
2023-24	55/94	59%	6/20	30%	61/114	54%

Meetings had been held to explain the overriding principles contained within the consultation with the following stakeholders:

- Joint Executive Group – 10 November 2022
- Secondary Partnership – 17 November 2022
- Joint Union Panel – 22 November 2022
- Q&A Teams meeting – 23 November 2022
- Primary Partnership – 24 November 2022
- Association Sandwell Governing Bodies – 30 November 2022

Local Authorities had been directed to move closer to the National Funding Formula and it was advised that the amounts stipulated in the 2023-24 modelling options be treated cautiously.

There had been six large assumptions noted within the modelling options in question one which Forum noted would make it very difficult to give any certainties over funding for 2023-24. The assumptions were noted as:

- The modelling assumed a growth fund of £1.664m
- The modelling assumed £0.375m transfer of funding from the schools block to the Central Schools Services block
- The modelling included 2 brand new factors and removed a factor from 2022-23.
- The data supplied was on October 21 census data
- The SSG grant would be rolled in to DSG for 2023-24
- The £322m September funding used to model the figures is likely to be higher (based on past results and the announcement to increase school budgets by £2.3billion).

An enquiry was received concerning the figure used in model option 1 and 2 for the 10%/20% tightening of the EAL factor for the Primary Sector. The figure it was explained was not an error, but it was enforced by the DfE APT modelling tool and it was not possible to change this. Sandwell had been using EAL 2 for Primary Schools in previous years whereas the NFF (and DfE) had recommended that councils use EAL 3 (which roughly 2/3rd of EAL 2). If the move to NFF was not compulsory, the council could have continued to use EAL 2 but with the move to NFF, there was no option but to use EAL 3. A suggestion to re-model and manipulate the Free Schools Meals factor to “compensate” for had been dismissed. As a result of the enquiry it was agreed to extend the deadline for responses from 1 December at 12 noon to 5 December at 5pm

Schools Forum considered the recommendations.

Question 1

What option do you prefer to use for calculating schools funding in 2023-24?

The consultation noted three responses:

- minimum transition
- accelerated transition
- NFF factor values

Of the overall responses 82% had voted for Minimum Transition, 10% had voted for Accelerated Transition and 8% had voted for National Funding Formula Factor Values.

Concerns were raised regarding the way the consultation had been presented, advising some members felt left out without explanation and they were previously told further modelling would be presented that had not been. It was also questioned why the free schools meals factor had been dismissed.

In response Forum was advised that only the EAL factor met the description, there was the option to use substitute factors and the government was trying to move the formula forward.

It was expected that the Council would move towards NFF, but details would be questioned. There was no issue around EAL, but there remained some concerns around the formula. The Council had been advised that no school should lose funding they are entitled to due to errors with the formula. It was hoped that Forum members would be informed in January 2023 of the proposed budget.

Vote

Unanimous votes for Minimum Transition

Resolved that:-

The Minimum Transition be the preferred to use for calculating schools funding in 2023-24?

The Chair raised concerns regarding the figures with regards to EAL and was advised that these concerns would be raised at the next briefing with Cllr Hackett.

Question 2

Please indicate the option you prefer to use for calculating pupil number growth fund?

The consultation noted two possible responses:

- Maintaining the current criteria
- Utilise B/F funds

While 70% voted for Utilise Brought Forward Funds, 30% voted for Maintaining the current criteria.

Forum members questioned the impact of falling school rolls and the challenges it was presenting to schools. Members were advised that the Council was working with schools to actively reduce PAN due to falling numbers, and that there was ongoing engagement with schools to address areas where numbers are falling.

Forum members questioned why the issue of falling rolls had not been put forward for consideration sooner, members were disappointed that a further year would possibly need to pass before the issue could be addressed and instead wanted it to be considered as a matter of urgency.

Forum members requested that a Working Group be established to investigate the increasing challenges faced by schools due to the falling school rolls.

Vote

Unanimous votes for Utilise Brought Forward Funds

Resolved that:-

- (1) The Utilise Brought Forward Funds option be the preferred to use for calculating pupil number growth fund?
- (2) Schools Forum establish a Working Group to investigate school rolls and the increasing impact of reduced roll admissions.

Question 3

Do you agree to the top slice of the schools block to fund the attendance team from the CSSB block?

Schools were asked to respond Yes or No.

The Yes vote received 72% of the vote while 28% voted No.

Vote

Unanimous votes for agreeing to the top slice of the schools block to fund the attendance team from the CSSB block

Resolved that:-

the top slice of the schools block be used to fund the attendance team from the CSSB block

Question 4

Please indicate the option you prefer for the attendance service.

There were two possible options for consideration:

- Intermediate service
- Enhanced service

Of those who voted 66% voted for Intermediate Service, while 34% had voted for the Enhanced Service.

Vote

7 votes for Intermediate Service

2 votes against Intermediate Service

Resolved that:-

The Intermediate Service be the option for the attendance service.

Question 5

Please indicate if you agree with the CSSB funding Proposals?

Respondents had been asked either Yes or No to the proposals:

CSSB1 – Statutory & Regulatory /Welfare and Asset Man (56 Yes – 5 No)

CSSB2 - Admissions Service (58 Yes – 3 No)
CSSB3 - Historical Commitment Pensions Administration (52 Yes – 9 No)
CSSB4 - Schools Forum (57 Yes – 4 No)

Vote

Unanimous votes in favour to all the proposals

Resolved that:-

The CSSB funding Proposals be approved as above.

Question 6 (maintained sector only)

Please indicate if you agree with the De-delegated and Education Functions Proposals?

Respondents had been asked either Yes or No to the proposals:

DD1 - Health & Safety Licences (48 Yes – 1 No)
DD2 – EVOLVE (48 Yes – 1 No)
DD3 - Union Facilities Time (32 Yes – 17 No)
DD4 - School Improvement (41 Yes – 8 No)
DD5 - Schools in Financial Difficulty (34 Yes – 15 No)

Vote

Unanimous votes in favour to all the proposals

Resolved that:-

The De-delegated and Education Functions Proposals be approved as above.

Question 7 (maintained sector only)

Please indicate if you agree with the De-delegated and Education Functions Proposals?

Respondents had been asked either Yes or No to the proposals:

EF1 - Education Benefits Team (46 Yes – 3 No)
EF2 - Children's Clothing Support Allowance (46 Yes – 3 no)

5 votes in favour to all the proposals

Resolved that:-

The De-delegated and Education Functions Proposals be approved as above.

64/22

AOB

Forum members raised concerns regarding SEND top-up funding for pupils who required additional support. The Council stated that Schools Forum has agreed previously following a consultation that funding would not be increased for individual cases and instead it must be for all schools and all children.

Forum members raised concerns that EHCP provision was unable to be met due to funding constraints and highlighted the challenges that a funding gap creates. While Forum members accepted that a consultation had taken place in years previous, additional challenges now required a fresh look in new circumstances.

The Council confirmed that they are in contact with the DfE regarding the budget and funding and stated that Sandwell was one of only a few regions that are not in deficit.

Forum members requested that a Working Group be established to consider the Top-Up funding related available to schools to deal with increasing budget pressures.

Resolved that:-

Schools Forum establish a Working Group to consider the Top-Up funding available to schools to deal with increasing budget pressures.

Schools Forum thanked Andrew Timmins who was leaving Sandwell Council for all his support over the years and wished him well for the future.

Meeting ended 3:55pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk