

Minutes of Schools Forum

**Monday 2 October 2023 at 2.30pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council, Oldbury**

Present: N Toplass (Chair)
J Barry (Vice-Chair), M Arnull, D Barton, E Benbow, L Bray,
D Broadbent, O Flowers, K Hazelwood, D Irish, W Lawrence,
S Mistry, M Smith (substitute), D Steen and J Topham

Officers: Julie Andrews (Assistant Director - Education Services)
Sue Moore (Assistant Director - Education Support Services)
Elaine Taylor (Finance Business Partner)
Sara Baber (Early Years Lead)
Lavena Kuku (Inclusion Advisor)
Connor Robinson (Democratic Services Officer)

In Attendance: Councillor Hackett (Cabinet Member for Children, Young
People and Education)

30/23 **Election of Chair and Vice Chair**

Nominations had been sought for the position of Chair of Schools Forum for a period of two years. No nominations had been received. Neil Toplass indicated he was willing to Chair for the duration of the meeting.

Nominations had been sought for the position of Vice Chair of Schools Forum for a period of two years. Jamie Barry indicated that he would be happy to undertake the role.



Resolved that:-

(1) Neil Toplass is elected Chair for the duration of the meeting;

(2) Jamie Barry is elected Vice Chair of Schools Forum for the period of two years.

31/23 **Special Academies Representative and Special Schools (Maintained) Representative**

The Forum noted Neil Toplass as the new Special Academies Representative and welcomed Oliver Flowers as the new Special Schools (Maintained) Representative.

32/23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from S Baker, C Hadley, C Handy-Rivett.

33/23 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

34/23 **Minutes**

Forum members expressed strong disappointment that no High Needs Block Monitoring report had been submitted. The Assistant Director of Education Services explained that due to staff absence it had been difficult to compile the report and work would continue to rectify this.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2023 be approved as a correct record.



School Funding 2024-25

Forum was advised that it was now the second year of a five-year Government plan to implement a direct National Funding Formula (NFF). The NFF would be allocated directly to schools based on a single national formula with an expectation of full implementation by 2027-28.

To ensure a smooth transition towards the direct NFF Local Authorities were required to bring their own formulae closer to the schools NFF.

The headlines for the 2024-25 period set out that the total core school's budget would total over £59.6 billion in 2024-25 which was the highest ever level per pupil in real terms.

Funding through the mainstream schools NFF was increased by 2.7% per pupil in 2024-25 compared to 2023-24 which meant that funding through the NFF would be 8.5 % higher per pupil in 2024-25 compared to 2022-23.

The government had also announced additional funding for teachers pay. This would be allocated to mainstream schools through Teachers Pay Additional Grant (TPAG). Information and funding related to the TPAG would be allocated outside the NFF for 2024-25.

From 2024-25 Local Authorities would be required to move their local formula factor values a further 10% closer to the NFF. Sandwell had been named as one of only 21 authorities whose formulae are substantially different to the NFF compared with 72 who now mirror the NFF and a further 24 who mirror the NFF in most factors in 2023-24.

Other headlines included:

- the core factors in the schools NFF (such as the basic entitlement, and the lump sum that all schools attract) would increase by 2.4%;



- through the minimum per pupil funding levels, every primary school would receive at least £4,655 per pupil, and every secondary school at least £6,050;
- the funding floor would ensure that every school will attract at least 0.5% more pupil-led.

High Needs funding was increased by a further £440m (4.3%) in 2024-25 following the £970m increase in 2023-24 and £1 billion increase in 2022-23. This was a total increase of over 60% since 2019-20.

The high needs NFF would ensure that every Local Authority received at least 3% increase per head of their ages 2-18 population.

The APT formula model calculated school allocations based on an updated funding formula for 2024 to 2025. The main changes related to:

- the introduction of a national formulaic approach to allocating split sites funding. This ensured that split sites funding would be provided on a consistent basis across the country. This would affect one school in Sandwell;
- a new worksheet had been added to allow Local Authorities to provide details of eligibility criteria for growth and falling rolls funding;
- a validation check had been added to ensure sufficient funding was allocated to notional SEN;
- an adjustment had been added to the MFG baselines to ensure that funding previously allocated through the mainstream school's additional grant was protected.

The 2023-24 Mainstream Schools Additional Grant (MSAG) was planned to be rolled into the schools NFF from 2024-25 by:

- adding an amount representing what schools receive through the grant into their baselines;
- adding the value of the lump sum, basic per pupil rates and free school meals Ever 6 parts of the grant onto the respective factors in the NFF.



The Minimum Funding Guarantee would continue in 2024-25 between +0.0% and +0.5%.

Growth funding was provided within a Local Authorities schools block DSG allocation but unlike other factors in the NFF a provisional growth allocation was not published.

New for 2024-25 and to support Local Authorities to plan ahead for their growth fund allocation in the DSG settlement, was a forecasting tool which would be supplied to Local Authorities by the Department for Education (DfE). School organisation colleagues would be able to input the October 2023 census data into the tool to give an estimate of the growth fund that could expect to receive in 2024-25.

It would be based on the observed differences between the primary and secondary number on roll between October 2022 and October 2023. The growth allocation for each Local Authority would be £1,550 per new primary pupil and £2,320 per new secondary pupil plus a lump sum of £76,195 for each brand-new school.

Falling Rolls fund was also provided within the NFF Schools block and the new forecasting tool could also be used to calculate an estimate of the funding.

Forum was being asked to consider the three proposed modelling options that would be put out for wider consultation. The three models were:

- Minimum Transition (using the maximum transition period)
- Accelerated Transition (using a 2-year transition period)
- National Funding Formula

The Finance Business Partner addressed the concerns expressed around timescales in relation to the implementation of Teachers Pay Additional Grants. It was anticipated that the implementation would be around December time however, no date was currently known.



Forum members questioned the slow process of implementing the NFF and if greater funding was available why it was not being implemented sooner. The Finance Business Partner suggested that the question was one for the consultation.

Forum was reassured that the issues experienced the previous year would not be repeated and lessons had been learned.

Resolved that:-

- (1) Forum note the changes to the National Funding Formula;
- (2) Forum approve the consultation approach and modelling options to the 2024-25 Local Formula as laid out:
 - a. Minimum Transition (using the maximum transition period)
 - b. Accelerated Transition (using a 2-year transition period)
 - c. National Funding Formula

36/23

De-Delegated, Education Functions & Central Schools Services Block - Impact 2022-23 and Funding 2024-25

Forum considered the impact reports on the 2022-23 spending on the De-Delegated and Education Functions.

Summary of the De-Delegated and Education Functions was presented to Forum as follows:

REF	Full Title of Proposal	Lead Officer	Budget 23-24	Request 24-25
De-delegated - Maintained Schools only				
DD1	Health and Safety Licences and Subscriptions	Julie Andrews	£5,990	£5,800
DD2	EVOLVE Annual Licence Fee	Chris Davies	£6,300	£7,300
DD3	Union Facilities Time	Julie Andrews	£159,000	£159,000
DD4	School Improvement Services	Julie Andrews	£150,000	£150,000
DD5	Schools in financial difficulty	Julie Andrews	£100,000	£100,000
	TOTAL DD		£421,290	£422,100
Education Functions - Maintained Schools only				
EF1	Education Benefits Team	Sue Moore	£134,000	£134,000
EF2	Children's Clothing Support Allowance	Sue Moore	£33,000	£33,000
EF3	Safeguarding & Attendance	Sue Moore	moved to CSSB5	moved to CSSB5
	TOTAL EF		£167,000	£167,000



A Summary of the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) was presented as follows:

REF	Title	Budget 23-24	Provisional Budget 24-25
CSSB - As per ESFA			
CSSB1	Statutory/Regulatory/ Education Welfare/Asset Management	£1,724,680	£1,801,593
CSSB2	Schools Forum	£3,000	£3,000
CSSB3	Admissions Services	£452,600	£452,600
CSSB4	Historical Commitment - Pensions Administration	£116,720	£93,376
	TOTAL CSSB (Provisional - Updated December 2023)	£2,297,000	£2,350,569
CSSB5	Safeguarding & Attendance (ALL Schools)	£455,000	£512,000

The 2023-24 CSSB Budget was spent with no variances.

The only known 2024-25 figure was the 20% reduction in the historic commitment – Pensions Administration. The Council had retained the proposed allocation of the same as 2023-24 levels and any additional allocation had been earmarked against Statutory responsibilities.

Forum expressed some concern around the cost of the union facilities time and how resources were used. The Assistant Director for Education Services advised that a union representative would be invited to the next meeting to address concerns.

Forum members questioned if the resources allocated to the Schools Admissions Services was adequate. The Assistant Director for Education Support Services advised that school holidays increased the difficulty of processing admissions, a process of working with schools before the start of the new academic year may help improve service outcomes.

The move to the Oracle Fusion system had raised some concerns and Forum wished to receive more information on how the move would impact administrative changes in the future.



Resolved that:-

- (1) the Impact Reports on the 2022-23 spending on De-Delegation and Education Functions be received and noted;
- (2) the consultation on requests for funding on De-Delegation and Education Functions for 2024-25 be approved for the following:
 - a. Health and Safety Licenses and Subscriptions
 - b. EVOLVE Annual Licence Fee
 - c. Union Facilities Time
 - d. School Improvement Services
 - e. Schools in financial difficulty
 - f. Education Benefits Team
 - g. Children's Clothing Support Allowance
 - h. Safeguarding and Attendance
- (3) the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) 2024-25 Budget is approved;
- (4) the funding from the Schools Block for Safeguarding and Attendance is moved to the to the Central Schools Services Block.

37/23

Falling Rolls Fund 2024-25

Following the establishment of the Falling Rolls Fund Working Group at the 12 December meeting (Minute No. 63/22), the Working Group met in July 2023 to discuss the criteria to be used for eligibility for schools accessing a falling roll fund. Five options had been identified and were considered and it was acknowledged that there were two viable options that could potentially work for Sandwell.

In August 2023 the Department of Education had updated the Growth and Falling rolls funding guidance. The new guidance included only two eligibility options.



It was noted that previously only schools rated good or outstanding could qualify for falling rolls funding and this criterion had now been removed.

It was also noted that where Local Authorities operated a falling roll fund they would only be able to provide funding where school capacity data (SCAP)¹ shows that school places would be required in the subsequent three to five years.

Where the places were not expected to be required the expectation was that the PAN2 would be reduced.

Until October census figures had been released and finalised, it was difficult to estimate how much funding would be needed for the 2024-25 falling roll fund.

Two [options](#) had been circulated detailing the impact across schools and were considered by Forum.

Resolved that:-

- (1) approval is given for the introduction of a Falling Rolls Fund for all Sandwell schools experiencing falling rolls from 2024-25.
- (2) approval is given for option 2 as detailed in the [appendix](#).

38/23 Early Years 2023-24 Funding

Forum considered the 2023-24 funding rates and budgets available to the Local Authority which had been introduced by the Education and Skills Funding agency.

The main changes from the requirements for the 2022/23 financial year were noted as:

- clarification of local authorities' responsibilities in notifying providers of changes to local funding formulae;



- additional information on the allocation of supplementary funding to maintained nursery schools;
- in paying EYPP to early years providers, additional clarification on the payment of EYPP to childminders and further clarification on the payment of EYPP to providers for children in local authority care;
- increased value of the EYPP and DAF.

The DfE funds local authorities on the same basis for both the universal 15 hours entitlement and the additional 15 hours entitlement for working parents. This was because the statutory framework and the quality requirements for the 2 entitlements were the same.

Local authorities were to fund their providers in the same way for both sets of hours and not to distinguish between the two. This meant using the same hourly base rate and same supplements for both entitlements.

Local authorities were required to plan to pass-through 95% of their 3- and-4-year-old funding from the government to early years providers.

The breakdown of the funding for the early years block as per the July 2023 allocation was presented as follows:

Description	Funding (£m)
Universal entitlement – 3 & 4 Year olds	16.051
Additional 15 hours entitlement	4.788
2-year old entitlement	4.166
Early Years Pupil Premium	0.350
Disability Access Funds	0.135
Total Funding	25.490

At the Spring Budget, the Chancellor had announced an investment of additional funding for the existing early years entitlements worth £204m in 2023-24 (from September 2023) and £288m in 2024-25.



This was for local authorities to increase hourly rates paid to childcare providers for the government’s existing entitlement offers.

The grant provided supplementary funding for all existing early years funding streams: 3-4YOs; 2YOs; Disability Access Fund (DAF); Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP).

It covered the funding period September 2023 to March 2024

The funding rate was as follows:

	2023-24 EY DSG (Apr-Mar)	2023-24 EYSG (Sept-Mar)	2023-24 Effective rate (Sept-Mar)
2-Year-Olds (per hour)	£5.81	£1.90	£7.71
3-4-Year-olds (per hour) Flexibility & Deprivation is unchanged	£4.44	£0.35	£4.79
EYPP (per hour)	£0.62	£0.04	£0.66
DAF (per year)	£828	£30.00	£858

Forum noted the report.

39/23 **Future Meeting Dates**

The Forum noted the future meeting dates:-

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



Forum was reminded of the review and change in the Forum membership that had been agreed at the previous meeting. There existed a number of vacancies across the represented groups which needed to be filled. Forum members and officers agreed to work together to get these positions filled.

Forum members raised the possibility of re-establishing the SEND Working Group that had been paused owing to the ongoing Workstreams across the service. The Assistant Director for Education Services advised that a meeting was scheduled to be held the following week which would be considering the streamlining of ongoing Workstreams and that concerns expressed by Forum would be communicated.

A number of Forum members raised concerns relating to Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and Private Finance Initiatives (PFI). Forum requested support from the Local Authority in relation to the BSF/PFI costs in relation to their premises costs which had been increasing dramatically. Costs had been spiralling out of control and this had been impacted due to the inflationary pressure within the wider economy. Where there would be other fiscal mechanisms to implement for non-BSF estates this was not the case for the BSF schools. The Assistant Director for Education Services advised that the Director of Children and Education was in conversation with the DfE and had met with headteachers to address concerns.

Dave Irish informed Forum that he had taken a new position and would therefore be resigning from the Forum. Forum wished Dave all the best for the future.

Meeting ended at 4.06pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

