

Nottingham City Council Schools Forum

**Minutes of the meeting held remotely via Zoom on Tuesday 12 October 2021
from 1:48pm to 2:32pm**

Membership

Present

Judith Kemplay (Maintained Primary Head Teachers) (Chair)
Paul Burke (Secondary Academies) (Vice Chair)
Meeta Dave (Primary Academies)
Kerrie Fox (PRUs)
Patricia Lewis (Maintained Special Schools)
Stephen McLaren (The Nottingham Nursery School)
Janet Molyneux (Maintained Primary Governors)
Andy Smith (Secondary Academies)
Terry Smith (Maintained Primary Head Teachers)
Sheena Wheatley (Trade Unions)
Bob White (Secondary Academies)
Lisa Wilson (14-19 Education)

Absent

Kerrie Henton (AP Academies and Free Schools)
Tim Jeffs (Primary Academies)
Lee Morgan (Special Academies)
Debbie Simon (Early Years PVI)
James Strawbridge (Primary Academies)
Cath Rowell (Secondary Academies)
David Tungate (Secondary Academies)

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

John Dexter - Director of Education
Julia Holmes - Senior Commercial Business Partner
Nick Lee - Director of Education Services
Adrian Mann - Governance Officer
Kathryn Stevenson - Senior Commercial Business Partner

1 Nomination of Chair

Resolved to appoint Judith Kemplay as Chair of the Schools Forum for the 2021/22 academic year.

2 Nomination of Vice Chair

Resolved to appoint Paul Burke as Vice Chair of the Schools Forum for the 2021/22 academic year.

3 Apologies for Absence

Tim Jeffs - Primary Academies
James Strawbridge - Primary Academies

Christine Green - Strategic Finance Business Partner
Ceri Walters - Head of Commercial Finance

4 Declarations of Interests

None.

5 Minutes

The Forum confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2021 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

6 High Needs Places Consultation

Kathryn Stevenson, Senior Commercial Business Partner, gave a presentation on the proposed high needs place changes for the 2022/23 academic year. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the Schools Forum is a required consultee in the setting of the high needs budget. The development of high needs place change requirements is led by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities team and will be finalised over the next few weeks;
- (b) it is sometimes necessary to make changes to the number of high needs places outside of the normal Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) process, and the position will be formalised when the place number changes identified are submitted to the ESFA by 12 November 2021;
- (c) there is a potential opportunity to set up an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) class of 8 at Woodlands from next September, which will be discussed with the school. Currently, 12 extra places are required already and need to be formalised at Nethergate, as well as a further class of 8 for next September. The need for ASD places is increasing and top-ups are provided for those pupils at the same level as at Rosehill Special School, reflecting the level of need of this cohort. This has budget implications, and the Woodlands and Nethergate additional ASD places will be built into the budget from next September. It is proposed to reduce Oak Field's planned places by 2, with no changes proposed for Rosehill or Westbury;
- (d) two new Special Resource Units (SRU) are coming online in September, at Djanogly Strelley and Fernwood Primary. There will be a possible new SRU place at Bluecoat Primary, which would be offset by one less place at Bulwell Academy. Mellers Primary has taken on specialist deaf provision, and final high needs place numbers are being reviewed for Nottingham College, as a Further Education provider;
- (e) there is a cost impact of £195,000 on the 2021/22 budget, for unbudgeted extra special school places required from September 2021. An in-year high needs block increase of £113,000 will offset this pressure, along with a £30,000 specials contingency and a projected under-spend in the SRU budget. However, there will be an additional £770,000 budget requirement for special schools for 2022/23 arising from these place number changes, assuming a 2% funding uplift and a reduced budget requirement for SRUs of £17,000;

- (f) in respect of long-term planning, the Department for Education has given a High Needs Provision capital allocation of £2,550,000. Detailed analysis and scoping work is being carried out to produce business cases for future spending, which would require approval at the Capital Programme Board.

The Forum noted the report.

7 Funding Update for 2022/23 and the National Consultation on Completing the Forms to the National Funding Formula

Julia Holmes, Senior Commercial Business Partner, presented a report on the changes to the schools and high needs national funding formulas for the 2022/23 financial year, and on the Department of Education's (DfE) 'Fair schools funding for all' consultation. The following points were discussed:

- (a) in the main, the basic structure of the schools National Funding Formula (NFF) is not changing in the 2022/23 financial year. However, funding allocated through the free schools meals Ever6 factor will be moving from using the previous year's January school census to using the October school census. This removes the nine month lag in funding;
- (b) local authorities can set the minimum funding guarantee (MFG) between +0.5% to +2%. The Council intends to set the MFG per pupil as near to the maximum of 2% as possible. The indicative school budget allocations released in July 2021 were based on the pupils on the October 2020 school census, but the final funding allocations will be based upon the pupils on the October 2021 school census, and these will be notified to the Council in December 2021. In total, 81 schools in the city are still forecast to be in receipt of protection, so this means that the majority of schools will only see an increase of 2% in pupil-led funding per pupil;
- (c) the Council will receive the maximum allowable increase in high needs funding of 11% in the financial year 2022/23. Business rates are to be paid centrally by the DfE to the Council from 2022/23. Schools and academies will no longer be required to physically pay the invoices for business rates;
- (d) the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has reduced historic commitments funding by a further 20% compared to the 2021/22 baseline, representing a total loss of income to the Council of £2.693 million during the 2020/21 and 2022/23 financial years. These funding cuts will be reflected in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, but the required savings will not be made from schools funding;
- (e) the DfE is progressing with its proposals to move towards a 'hard' schools NFF in the 2023/24 financial year, with the aim that all funding distributed by the NFF should be allocated to schools on the basis of the hard formula without further local adjustment. The Council's approach mirrors the schools NFF already, so this should not represent a substantial change. However, the DfE will be running a transition and review process, as part of its implementation;

- (f) the main changes proposed by the DfE for the NFF are the introduction of new funding methodologies for allocating funding for premises, and for pupil growth. This will involve further consultation on allocating funding through the Private Finance Initiatives, exceptional circumstances and split sites factors. In terms of pupil growth, the DfE is proposing that local authorities will be asked to submit pupil number forecasts, and these will be funded on a standardised national funding criteria. Whether or not pupil growth is 'significant' at a given school will affect whether that school is eligible for additional funding, but the criteria for 'significant' has not yet been defined, so it is difficult to forecast the associated funding impact on the city's schools, currently;
- (g) the Forum considered that, due to inflation, the increase of 2% to the pupil-led funding actually represents a funding cut, in real terms. It is vital that all eligible parents are encouraged to register for free school meals, as the FSM6 factor in the funding formula and the pupil premium represents access to important sources of funding for schools. Sign-up increased during the Coronavirus pandemic, but there are still likely to be eligible people who have not yet registered, and further means of engagement are being explored;
- (h) the Forum noted that it is important to understand the impact of the DfE basing its calculations on the October census. It welcomed that NFF review, but wondered how the potential impact could be measured accurately, to inform a collective response. The impact of the estimation of pupil growth on a school-by-school basis is a potential concern, though the increase in the high needs funding at the 11% maximum is positive;
- (i) the Forum highlighted issues in the latest admissions process for pupils into schools, where it felt that there had been some potentially avoidable delays to admissions, meaning that schools might have missed out on the opportunity to secure further funding. The need to deliver the new School Admissions Code has affected the speed of the admissions process, but measures are in place to ensure that the admissions system is fit for purpose in meeting the required timetable. The improved system should now better reflect the admissions process going forward, and accelerate pupil applications;
- (j) the Forum also raised the processing of free school meals applications by the Pupil Benefits Team before the October school census. Staff capacity has been increased in the team and mitigations are in place to maximise access to the available funding, and work is underway to ensure that the process is as streamlined as possible;
- (k) the Forum was concerned that much less funding is coming to local authorities, making it far harder for them to support schools without making cuts elsewhere. It noted that there is a strong Education team at the Council, which should continue to engage with the DfE as actively as possible.

The Forum noted the report.

8 Schools Forum Sub-Group

Judith Kemplay, Chair of the Schools Forum, provided an update on a recent meeting of the Forum's Sub-Group. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the Sub-Group met to review the budgeted reserves, and a detailed report has been produced to review the funding risks to the Council over the next three years, as there is a level of uncertainty and potential high-impact risks arising after this year. £3.74 million has been left in the reserves to mitigate against future budget pressures, while £1.4 million has been ring-fenced for invest-to-save schemes, which will be considered by the sub-group at a future meeting. An update on this issue will be reported to members at the next Forum meeting, in December.

The Forum noted the update.

9 Future Meeting Dates

- **Tuesday 7 December 2021 at 1:45pm**
- **Tuesday 18 January 2022 at 1:45pm**
- **Tuesday 1 March 2022 at 1:45pm**
- **Tuesday 26 April 2022 at 1:45pm**
- **Tuesday 28 July 2022 at 1:45pm**