

Leicester City Council - Schools' Forum minutes

Draft minutes of the Microsoft Teams meeting held at 1pm on Wednesday 23 June 2021

Present

Schools members:

Mainstream Academies:

Special Academies:

Special School Governors:

Special School Heads:

Secondary School Governors:

Secondary School Head representatives:

Primary School Governors:

Primary School Head representatives:

Pupil Referral Units:

Name:

Mike Hobbs, Jane Ridgewell, Rose Angus,
Denham Kite, Amelia Smith

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Chandrika Patel

Anna White

Liam Mahoney, Glenys Mulvany

Matt Potts, Karl Stewart

Shaun Whittingham

Non-school members:

Teaching Unions:

Name:

Jessica Edmonds (Chair)

School support staff Unions:

Sam Randfield

16-19 Providers:

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Early Years PVI Providers:

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In attendance:

Cllr Elly Cutkelvin

Role:

Sue Welford

Assistant City Mayor (Education)

Martin Judson

Principal Education Officer

Simon Walton

Head of Finance

Ed Rowe

Principal Accountant, Finance

Martin Walsh

Pupil Place Planning Strategy Manager

Clerk to the Forum

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from: Steve Wilson, Julie Robinson, Matthew Leedham and Janine Gibson.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the previous meetings and matters arising

The minutes of the 21 January were agreed as an accurate record of proceedings.

The Chair also noted that this would be Chandrika Patel's last meeting due to retirement and thanked her for the contribution to the Forum.

Matters arising

i) Draft paper for Element three.

The Chair explained that a communication had been delivered to explain that views were sought on the consultation views on Element three funding. This would then be an agenda item later in the year.

ii) Letter to DfE

The Principal Education Officer explained that the letter template would be provided in the next coming days and would be circulated in this academic year if possible.

Action (Sue Welford)

iii) Future Virtual meetings

The Chair explained that the DfE had extended the arrangement to allow meetings to take place online. However, consideration would have to be given to the legality of these arrangements due to the financial jurisdiction of the Schools' Forum.

The Principal Education Officer acknowledged that some meetings had reverted to physical meetings due to changes in legislation and agreed to investigate if the Schools' Forum would need to revert to physical or hybrid meetings in the Autumn.

Action (Clerk – SW)

4. Pupil Place Planning

Ed Rowe the Pupil Place Planning Strategy Manager presented a briefing on the key factors regarding the capacity plans for schools going forward.

- Birth rates were highlighted as the most significant factor with this being the fourth consecutive year of falling births. Citywide births have fallen by 25% from a peak in 2010/11. This trend is also reflected nationally.
- The impact of the falling birth rates will be more immediate in primary schools and there would be a lag in secondary schools.
- Inward and outward migration also impacted on forecasting and there had been a weakening in migration since the Brexit referendum in 2016.
- The numbers of children that are city residents who chose a county school will be reduced as the County no longer have the capacity to take city residents.
- Strategic Housing developments in the north and west of the city will also require capacity for school places.
- The forecast shows that one in four city reception year places would be vacant by 2024 which would lead to PAN being reduced leading to a significant financial impact for schools.
- Secondary school numbers are expected to keep rising until at least 2025 /26 due to the lag. Additional capacity will need to be created and two new free schools will be built allowing the removal of temporary mobile buildings. Brook Mead will open on a temporary site in August 2021 before moving to a permanent site in August 2023. Beauchamp City will open in the north of the city, close to Ashton Green in August 2023.

The Mainstream Academies representative noted that the early years and primary sector was difficult to predict and asked if there was any data available to help predict birth rates.

The Pupil Place Strategy Manager explained that old data had been inherited and there was a move to use weekly data from the registrar team as the national data lags behind. It was also noted that data from the early years sector could be used to help with long term forecasting with reception numbers. There is a trend of falling birth rates both nationally and city wide. At this time a weighted average is used to try and calculate any trends.

The Secondary School Governor representative asked what would happen to numbers in secondary schools in 2025/26.

The Pupil Place Strategy Manager explained that it had been agreed with secondary heads that temporary buildings at secondary schools would be removed allowing them to revert to their original PAN and would be replaced by good quality permanent sites in the appropriate locations. There is a need to guard against building too much permanent capacity.

The Primary Schools Governors representative asked what time scales and processes were in place to help primary schools with the reduction in their PAN. It was also asked if there was a strategy in place to look at the capacity that might be created to help schools with a reduction in numbers.

The Pupil Place Strategy Manager explained that the relevant primary schools had been asked to consider a reduction in their PAN and there would have to be a two-year lead in time to allow for consultation. Schools have been encouraged to open new DSPs if they are reducing primary numbers as there needed to be an increase in the number of SEND places across the primary sector. One primary school have made the decision to replace a PAN of thirty pupils with a DSP unit.

The Principal Education Officer explained that schools needed to be supported in making the correct decisions and ensuring the best outcomes for children.

The Mainstream Academies representative noted that the correlation of losing a class has wider implications and is a complex issue. This is because you can't just remove one teacher and one TA and create an equal cost reduction.

The Chair noted that secondary schools had closed in the past leading to wide scale redundancies and asked that consideration was taken in planning for secondary schools.

The Pupil Place Strategy Manager explained that careful consideration would take place to avoid closing schools by using the data in advance.

5. Schools Budget

The Head of Finance presented the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and school balances.

High Needs Block

- Overall outturn position is the HNB is overspent by £5 million and the Early Years' block has an underspend of £1 million leaving a net overspend of £4 million. This means the DSG reserve that the LA had is now reduced to from £5.4 million to £1.4 million at the end of March 2021
- The HNB has a year on year increase in expenditure of 10% and the number of (EHC) plans had increased both locally and nationally.
- The Element 3 funding in mainstream for SEN had increased by 20% half of this increase can be attributed to an increase in the unit cost. The Element 3 funding has some shortcomings due to the element of the funding that supports schools rather than the funding that is attributed to a particular student.
- The DfE will provide an increase. However, this does not allow for the growth and the DfE do not provide funding based on the number of pupils who have an (EHC) plan.

Early Years Block

- There is a headline underspend of £1 million. However, the DfE will reduce the allocation due to a drop in numbers and the underspend will be approximately £350,000 on a £25 million block of expenditure.
- It is expected that the LA will be in deficit by March 2022 and the DfE will expect the LA to have a plan to reduce the HNB deficit.
- The LA are reviewing expenditure in all settings notwithstanding a significant level of growth year on year.

Maintained School Balances

- The cost categories show that there were significant cost savings of £5.7 million in 2021 compared to the previous years.
- A balance control mechanism policy takes the carry forward balance at the end of the year and any balance that exceeds 10% could be clawed back excluding exemptions.
- The exemptions are, ring fenced money not yet spent, capital projects, planning for uncertainty and exceptional costs.
- Clawback has never been used and is not being suggested this year. However, it is suggested that the principle of the school balance control mechanism needs to be reviewed and reduce the number of exemptions to ensure the budget is spent in year. The planning for uncertainty element would be deleted and reiterate the objectives of the scheme.

The NAHT representative asked if consideration could be taken for the pressures that head teachers are facing with pupil place planning, changes to pupil premium and pensions.

The Mainstream Academies representative asked if each block worked independently or as a whole and are there plans to review the deficit and will the DfE allow a deficit.

The Head of Finance explained that the DSG reserves must be managed as a whole and can't be moved between blocks. Work had taken place to try and find savings. However, the funding was not adequate for the in-year spend. It was noted that the DfE will allow LAs to carry forward a deficit but will expect the deficit to be paid back. He also explained that there were only a limited number of options to make savings and the crux of the problem was inadequate funding for the in-year spend.

Cllr Cutkelvin explained that the budget pressure was multi-faceted and any suggestions that had not already been put forward would be welcomed. It was also explained that mainstream and academy schools needed to be supported in enabling them to support students with the Designated Specialist Provision before considering an (EHP) plan.

The Chair asked Forum to vote on the budget proposals.

i No claw back of excessive balances

Vote: Yes *Unanimous*

6. Covid Issues (update)

The Chair explained that Schools' Forum would continue to take place remotely. However, future meetings would be reviewed based on any new guidance regarding face to face meetings.

7. A.O.B.

The Primary School Governors representative asked how decisions regarding de delegation were backed up by the relevant data as this was not readily available on previous occasions. Are the

relevant LA representatives happy that the relevant data is available for scrutiny, to allow robust and correct decision making?

The Chair explained that a new reporting tool was now available for teaching unions as requested by Forum and officers now log activity in every maintained school and academies that buy in. One terms worth of detailed reporting using the new format and details using the old format would be available.

The NAHT representative explained that in terms of Closing the Gap and School Improvement Leicester there is less money available and processes are being tightened. It was also noted that the city had a very strong partnership model and if delegated funds were not available with the quality of partnership the outcomes and quality of education would be put at risk.

The Principal Education Officer explained that the national outcomes and Ofsted inspections are not currently available due to Covid.

The Chair also explained that the Forum can request reports from the relevant partners that it delegates to. It was agreed that reports would be requested from the relevant bodies for discussion at the next Schools' Forum.

Action (Clerk)

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 2:45pm

The next Schools' Forum meeting date: 10am, 9 September 2021.