

**ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY 26 APRIL 2024**

In Attendance:

Kirstey Peart - Sitwell Infant (Maintained) (in the Chair)
Joshua Amahwe – Head of Finance, CYPS
Carol Brookes – Wales High School (Academy)
Aileen Chambers, Head of Early Years and Childcare, CYPS
Kelly Crompton, Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Alternative Provision
Mark Cummins, SEND Project Lead, CYPS
Dr. Sipra Deb (PVI Nursery)
Chris Eccles – Oakwood (Academy)
Wayne Greenhough – Nexus MAT (Special Academy)
Lindsey Hadfield – Executive Head, Arnold Nursery
David Horrigan – Maltby Learning Trust (Primary Academy)
Louise Keith – Principal Finance Officer, CYPS
Julien Kramer – Interim Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion
Lisa McCall – Wales High School (Academy)
Lee Morrill – Aspire
Lewis Moat – GMB Representative
Vera Njelic - Principal Finance Officer, CYPS
Colin Price – NEU Representative
Steve Scott – Happy Kids (PVI Nursery)
Pam Ward – Head of Service, Education, CYPS
Sarah Whitby - Head of Service - Access to Education
Nathan Williams – Roughwood Primary (Primary Academy)
Mark Windle – Badsley Primary (Primary Maintained)

Apologies were received from:-

Councillor Victoria Cusworth – Cabinet Member for CYPS
Steve Rhodes – Winterhill (Academy)
Mark Ryan – RNN Group
Karen Smith – Nexus MAT (Special Academy)
Sharon Stones – Head of Arnold Nursery and Children's Centre
Alan Richards – Academy Governor

52. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to today's meeting and introductions were made.

53. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

54. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes from the previous meeting held on 19th January 2024.

Agreed: That the minutes be approved.

55. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

56. MEMBERSHIP AND CONSTITUTION OF THE ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS FORUM (STANDING ITEM)

Consideration was given to the membership and constitution of the Schools' Forum and the suggested changes put forward for approval.

Agreed: (1) That the resignation be received from Andy Krabbendam of JMAT Trust (Primary Academy Representative).

(2) That the request from NAHT Union to become a member of the Schools' Forum be noted and that formal consideration of this request be made at the next Schools Forum Meeting, as part of the overall Forum review and membership/representation refresh.

57. ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS FORUM REVIEW

Consideration was given to an update on the Rotherham Schools Forum review, provided by Julian Kramer, Interim Assistant Director: Education and Inclusion.

Forum Members were advised that a formal brief regarding proposals for the review had now been completed and preparations to commission an independent party to support the review were moving forward. It was reiterated by the Interim Assistant Director that the review would be supported and funded by the Local Authority.

Agreed: That the update provided be received and noted.

58. EARLY EDUCATION FUNDING UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 46 of the previous meeting held on 19th January, 2024, consideration was given to a further report presented by Aileen Chambers, Head of Early Years that provided an update on the Early Years retention block proposals which centred around moving from retaining an initial 5% and reducing to 3% in future years. The update also included an analysis on nursery provision in the local area and a representation to the DfE to implement a simplified system for the distribution of the Inclusion Support Grant (ISG)

It was noted that the Local Authority had previously retained 5% of the Early Years block to contribute to the cost delivery of the Early Years and Childcare Service. The proposal to retain 5% from 3/4 year old funding and 3% from 2 year old and 9 month funding in 2024/25 was required to increase capacity within the team to meet the expected increase in workload detailed in paragraph 1.9 of the report.

The Forum was advised that it was intended to decrease the percentage retention as the Early Years budget increased in order to maintain the required budget. This would see the percentage retained reduce to 3% when all new entitlements were in place across each funding stream, which was expected to be achieved by 2026/27.

The Head of Early Years reported to the Forum that provision within the sector was relatively stable despite the challenging environment the early years sector faced. The numbers of childminders had decreased due to a reduction in demand in which also mirrored the national position.

Early Years settings had also seen a slight reduction although two new providers had recently opened. It was noted that one of the key challenges that affected the number of places available was recruitment of early years professionals. The potential capacity position once the expanded entitlements are available identified a number of areas of capacity pressure particularly for under 2's entitlement where additional places would be required to meet the projected demand.

Consultation on the Inclusion Support Grant was carried out with schools and providers in 2023 to inform implementation of the 3-tier model. The DfE included the SENIF within a consultation exercise undertaken between July and September 2023 on the extension of the early education entitlements and the results of the consultation were set out at Appendix 1 of the report. It was reported that most Local Authorities who responded to the consultation wanted a more prescriptive model and that the DfE had committed to reviewing arrangements going forward.

Discussion ensued and various comments shared on the information presented which included the feasibility of implementing 3% across the board sooner, concerns around the complexities of procuring the ISG funding and the need for the provision of information relating to the numbers of places available across the sector as opposed to the numbers of providers.

The Interim Assistant Director for Education and Inclusion acknowledged that whilst certain elements of the funding changes were not necessarily ideal the service was deemed a good service and had been recognised by the DfE as a potential national exemplar.

Agreed: That the report be received, and the contents noted.

59. SEND SUFFICIENCY UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report presented by Mark Cummins, SEND Transformation Project Lead which provided an update in respect of the Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND) Sufficiency Programme.

Phase 4 of the programme was approved for implementation by Cabinet in June 2023 to support mainstream schools to meet a wider level of need and improve local accessibility within both mainstream and special schools.

The report provided detail in relation to the key activities undertaken in implementing Phase 4 of the SEND Sufficiency programme which focused on resource provision development and the roll out of the Schools' Accessibility Funding Programme across both mainstream and special schools.

Phase 4 included the development of a minimum of 10 resource provisions across primary and secondary mainstream settings creating 100 new SEND places with the aim of addressing gaps in provision between mainstream and special schools.

Following an expression of interest and due diligence process, the first phase of resource provision implementation took place in Spring Term 2023. This included the approval of new resource provision at Thrybergh Academy and Dalton Foljambe and additional places at Wales High School resource provision. It was anticipated that building works will be completed so that the first places are available in September 2024.

Five schools were working through the necessary approvals to support the opening of their resource provision and a breakdown of accommodation and projected places for the academic year 2024/25 were set out in paragraph 2.4 of the report.

Subject to completion of building works and necessary DfE approvals eight provisions for Phase 4 were scheduled to be completed by September 2024 with the additional 100 places being delivered in a staged way over the remaining two academic years.

The Forum were advised that additional resource provisions and places would be developed during the 2024/25 academic year with a review of current capacity, provision mapping and analysis to be undertaken to inform the remaining provision roll-out.

A second key aim of the SEND Sufficiency Phase 4 was the implementation of the Schools' Accessibility Funding Framework. The intention of Schools' Accessibility Funding was to support schools to meet a wider level of SEND need through adaptations to existing buildings. In June 2023 Cabinet approved the School's Accessibility Strategy and

Accessibility Capital Funding Framework and since the launch, funding had been awarded to the following special schools: Nexus (Forest View) - £370k; Newman School - £15k; and Elements Academy - £67k.

Paragraph 2.10 of the report set out the details of the approved bids for the accessibility capital funding small grants' programme.

The report also identified key activities and outcomes that were currently in the process of development as part of a further Phase 5 SEND Sufficiency linked to the Safety Valve Agreement. The main focus of Phase 5 was to provide increased sufficiency of places and condition improvements within the specialist provision. Phase 5 would cover three core elements: Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) growth; Newman School; and Pupil Referral Unit Development. Additional details of these elements were set out in paragraph 2.9 of the report.

SEND Sufficiency Phase 5 projects were currently forming part of a feasibility study which would be completed during Spring Term 2024. The study would identify appropriate options for development including identifying appropriate school assets which could be developed, capital investment required and timescales for delivery. On completion of the feasibility study a further Cabinet report would seek appropriate approval to implement Phase 5.

The Forum welcomed the update provided and noted the positive progress being made.

Agreed: That the activity undertaken, and progress made to date together with the next steps identified for the SEND Sufficiency Programme be noted.

60. EXCLUSIONS, SUSPENSIONS AND PRU DATA

Consideration was given to a report presented by Kelly Crompton, Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Alternative Provision, which provided information on local permanent exclusions and suspensions for secondary and primary settings alongside pupil referral unit (PRU) numbers including children transitioning in and out.

The report highlighted that three-year data had identified a rise in permanent exclusions and suspensions across Rotherham's secondary settings and a rise in suspensions in primary settings. Although numbers had increased, Forum Members were advised that Rotherham's position was reasonably positive when comparing Rotherham's situation to the national position which was testament to the schools in Rotherham.

A newness and ever evolving range of behavioural needs had been identified from the exclusion and suspension process that had not been seen by professionals in schools previously.

There had been a year-on-year increase in the number of children placed in Aspire which had created additional capacity pressures in the PRU. Pupils transitioning out of Aspire for 2023-24 were more positive with thirty pupils leaving the unit at the end of the spring term. 23% of those pupils returned to mainstream education.

The Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Alternative Provision made referenced to a number of key actions and timelines detailed within section 3 of the report that the Forum noted.

Discussion ensued on a number of mitigating factors that had contributed to the rise in permanent exclusions which included the influences of social media. Whilst it was acknowledged that the rate of exclusions had reduced it remained a concern that numbers of exclusions had continued to increase.

It was recognised that exclusions were still predominately occurring within secondary settings and a pilot project working with secondary schools to mentor KS3 female students with identified online risk factors had been rolled out and was being measured through pupil voice. This project had been well received and initial feedback had been positive.

Forum Members went on to discuss the importance of successful transition arrangements from Year 6 to Year 7 and how primary schools can support Year 6 pupils to avoid problems occurring when pupils transition into Year 7.

It was also recognised by Forum Members that schools were now dealing with a variety of very challenging and complex needs coming into primary and early years settings that had not been previously seen before and settings would need to be equipped to adapt to the changing landscape of SEND needs.

Reference was also made to reduced timetables where it was acknowledged that support and monitoring in this area would need to be revisited.

Agreed: That the report be received, and the contents noted.

61. LATEST SCHOOLS DSG OUTTURN POSITION 2023-24

Consideration was given to a report presented by Louise Keith, Principal Finance Officer (Schools Finance), which provided Schools' Forum members with an update as to the draft 2023/24 outturn position of the delegated budget for maintained schools and centrally retained budgets, both of which were funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The report also set out to Schools' Forum maintained members a summary position on the surplus/deficit balances of the maintained schools within Rotherham.

It was highlighted that in 2023/24 the final allocation of DSG funding for Rotherham was £108m. The total Schools Block allocation was £230m. It was noted that a funding adjustment of £3.459 was made to the school block funding to reflect the DfE confirmed funding transfer of 1.5% to the High Needs Block.

In 2021/22 Rotherham was approved to enter the DfE's Safety Valve programme and received £2m of funding for 2023. Rotherham would continue to receive safety valve funding at £2m for the next 2 years.

As a result of the reprofiling of the safety valve funding, alongside an underspend on the High Needs Block and underspends on falling rolls and growth funding the DSG Central Reserve deficit had reduced to £5.9m at the end of 2022/23. The draft position on the DSG at the end of 2024 was £1.7m.

The latest DSG overall net deficit for the DSG reserve account was forecasted to be £535k in 2025/26 against a balanced position assumed in the Safety Valve Agreement. Forum Members were advised that the deficit had increased due to increasing EHCP numbers, inflationary pressures, continued ISP placements and a reduction in funding transfers from schools.

It was noted that a planned underspend of £2.068m in 2023/24 within the high needs block element had been achieved and transferred into the DSG central reserves 2023/24 draft accounts.

A brought forward balance of £500k in the Early Years block was utilised to fund the Inclusion Support Grant (ISG). The Local Authority had yet to be notified of the final early years' adjustment for 2023/24 however an increase of £38.4k was anticipated and had been included within the draft 2023/24 accounts.

The carry forward of balances on individual school budgets was an overall combined surplus of £2.2m which compared to £2.9m in the previous financial year. It was predicted that the reduction in the surplus balances when compared to the previous year had been driven by increased cost pressures in schools.

Three schools were reporting a deficit position for 2023-24 compared with one school in the previous financial year. Further details on what action would be taken to address those deficits were detailed in paragraph 5.7 of the report.

Of the total 2023/24 surplus balances, seven schools held balances above the thresholds set out in the Scheme for Financing Schools and these were being reviewed. School budgets were currently being compiled ready for submission in mid-May.

Agreed: (1) That Schools Form Members note the information contained within the report.

(2) That Schools Forum members note that the centrally retained early years balance was subject to change as this would be dependent on the early years adjustment for the Spring 2024 census count.

62. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK BUDGET FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS 2024-25

Consideration was given to a report presented by Joshua Amahwe, Head of Finance, CYPS which informed Schools' Forum members of the funding arrangements of the high needs funding block and the approach to determining the 2024/25 budget.

He explained that the report set the scene for the budget for 2024/25 and confirmed that the High Needs Block funding for 2024/25 was £57.863m, representing a 5% increase compared to the previous year's allocation. The report also outlined the level of funding transferred from schools to the high needs block as previously agreed by Schools' Forum earlier this year.

A disapplication request to transfer 0.5% of schools block funding to the high needs block was approved by the DfE amounting to £1.2m of funds being transferred to the high needs block to address pressures in this area.

Funding arrangements would continue to be structured in the same way as the previous year and high needs funding would be determined using the National Funding Formula (NFF) based on need and historic spend.

The Head of Finance explained that the context for budget planning for 2024/25 was one of increasing demand and complexity of needs, changing profiles and financial pressures which mirrored a national trajectory. There was a need to be mindful of the Safety Valve Agreement commitments when budget setting for 2024/25.

The Forum heard that the proposed 2024/25 high needs funding requirement was £60.34m set alongside a funding allocation of £59.082m, resulting in a planned projected deficit of £1.2m.

Further detail regarding the key commitments and underlying assumptions used to drive the funding requirements across a range of provisions was provided within the report (paragraphs 19 – 40).

A Financial Framework would be used to monitor the demand challenges and cost pressures within the high needs block, providing details on actions to be implemented in 2024/25 and beyond to achieve the planned deficit as agreed in the Safety Valve Agreement.

Several risks listed in paragraph 44 of the report continued to exert pressure on the delivery of the DSG management plan and agreed Safety Valve Agreement. Those risks would continue to be closely monitored through the year.

Agreed: (1) That the high needs funding settlement (including the outcome of the disapplication request) for 2024/25 be noted.

(2) That the proposed funding requirements for 2024/25, particularly in relation to the number of commissioned specialist places and the payment of top up funding to mainstream, special schools/academies and other providers and settings be noted.

63. **SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN**

The Chair invited Forum Members to review the Forward Plan of agenda items and share any other items for inclusion.

The following proposed agenda items were discussed and dates for future reporting were noted by the Clerk for inclusion on the Forward Plan.

- Reduced Timetables: Understanding and Impact – move to September meeting.
- Send Sufficiency – standing item for all meetings.
- Attendance Initiative – June meeting
- SEMH Provision and Trends – June meeting

Agreed: That the updates be received and noted.

Action:- Clerk

64. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Forum Members wished to place on record their thanks and appreciation to Julien Kramer who would be leaving Rotherham as Interim Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion in May.

Forum Members also wished to place on record their thanks and appreciation to former Schools' Forum Member, Deborah Ball who retired at Easter.

65. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Agreed: That the next meeting of the Schools' Forum take place on Friday 21st June, 2024 at 8.30am at Rockingham Professional Development Centre.