

**ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY 1 DECEMBER 2023**

In Attendance:

Kirsty Peart - Sitwell Infant (Maintained) (in the Chair)
 Deborah Ball - Treeton Primary (Primary Academy)
 Aileen Chambers – Head of Early Years and Childcare, CYPS
 Mark Cummins, SEND Project Lead, CYPS
 Councillor Victoria Cusworth – Cabinet Member for CYPS
 Dr. Spira Deb (PVI Nursery)
 Guiseppe DiLasio – Wales (Academy)
 Chris Eccles – Oakwood (Academy)
 Wayne Greenhough – Nexus MAT (Special Academy)
 Lynsey Hadfield – Executive Head, Arnold Nursery (Observer)
 Neil Hardwick – Head of Finance, CYPS
 David Horrigan – Maltby Learning Trust (Primary Academy)
 Louise Keith – Principal Finance Officer, CYPS
 Andy Krabbendam - JMAT (Primary Academy)
 Julien Kramer – Interim Assistant Director for Education, CYPS
 Angela McComb – Primary Maintained Governor
 Lee Morritt – Aspire
 Ian Muffett, Finance Manager, CYPS
 Vera Njelic - Principal Finance Officer, CYPS
 Colin Price – NEU Representative
 Mark Ryan – RNN Group
 Steve Scott – Happy Kids (PVI Nursery)
 Sharon Stones – Head of Arnold Nursery and Children’s Centre
 Nevine Towers - Head of Business and Operations (Primary Academy)
 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:

Kelly Crompton, CYPS, RMBC
 Steve Rhodes – Winterhill (Academy) (in the Chair)
 Alan Richards – Secondary Governor
 Karen Smith – Nexus MAT (Special Academy)

26. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

At very short notice the Clerk was asked to prepare the meeting as hybrid to allow for some Forum Members joining virtually and some attending in person.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interests were made.

28. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes from the previous meeting held on 22nd September, 2023.

Agreed: That the minutes be approved.

29. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

30. MEMBERSHIP AND CONSTITUTION OF THE ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS FORUM

No changes to the membership and constitution of the Rotherham Schools Forum were proposed.

31. DSG SUSTAINABILITY AND HIGH NEEDS FINANCE UPDATE

Consideration was given to the latest Dedicated Schools Grant position and the DSG projections as outlined in the DSG Management Plan presented by Neil Hardwick, Head of Schools Finance.

The Forum were advised how in 2017/18 the ESFA undertook an historic spend data DSG block realignment exercise, the High Needs block was then realigned after taking account of a £2.9 million transfer from the Schools Block in 2016/17 and an additional £3 million transfer in 2017/18. Prior to this exercise Rotherham consistently had a lower High Needs allocation than its statistical neighbours and the transfers helped dampen the impact of rising costs associated with the increasing demand for SEND provision in the borough.

From 2016/17 to 2019/20 the DSG deficit was rising at around £5 million per annum leading to an overall deficit of just under £20 million. Even with the SEND sufficiency strategies having an impact, further work was still required as the overall DSG deficit had risen to £21.258m at the end of the 2020/21 financial year.

As part of the DSG grant conditions in 2021/22 a plan was submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) for managing future DSG spend. Rotherham became one of the local authorities with a "Safety Valve" agreement.

The details of Safety Valve Revenue Plan and the funding arrangements which were on target were set out in detail as part of the report.

The 2021/22 outturn on high needs expenditure remained at £0.73 million, however after taking account of other balances in other DSG funding blocks resulted in an in-year deficit of £0.11 million increasing the net deficit in the DSG Central Reserve of £21.37 million, which was ahead of target in terms of the £22.013 million estimated in the DSG Management Plan.

Details on the DSG deficit position to the latest 2023/24 position was outlined, but demand on the High Needs budget remained high due to rising numbers of children supported in specialist provision and the rising costs of Education Healthcare (EHC) plans.

In the 2023/24 financial year the High Needs budget position as at October 2023 showed an overspend of £1.217m (excluding safety valve funding) against a planned contribution to reserves of £2.068 million. The £2.068 million planned contribution to reserves would be reduced to £851k should the £1.217 million overspend be realised. The £851k contribution to reserves was after the £3.459 million transfer of funding into the High Needs Block. The financial pressure would be £2.608 million without the Schools Block transfer in the 2023/24 financial year.

In terms of the 2024/25 budget estimate the High Needs Block pressures remained with the High Needs Block indicative allocation for 2024/25 being £57.377 million. The current 2024/25 pressure on the High Needs Block was estimated to be £1.716 million when including a transfer amount of £1.210 million (0.5%) from the Schools Block. Without this transfer the pressure was estimated at £2.927 million.

The Safety Valve agreement would still require a transfer from the School Block for the 2024/25 financial year of 0.5% to support the in-year financial pressures, to continue to meet the Safety Valve assumptions and avoid a significant increase in the overall DSG deficit over this period.

The other factors and risks to the management plan outside of the requirement for a school block transfer were the inflationary pressures, delivery of the capital programme to continue to support growth in resource centres and accessibility schemes to avoid high cost Independent Sector Placements and the continued growth in Education and Health Care Plans.

Forum Members were, therefore, reminded that the financial sustainability of the High Needs Block still remained a significant cause for concern for the Local Authority and would require the support of the Forum and High Needs Sub-Group to implement the strategies to assist in supporting the DSG High Needs Block to operate within its annual allocation.

The Cabinet Member and the Interim Assistant Director for Education also provided their support to the process and the success of the Safety Valve arrangement and welcomed the strategies in place to help Rotherham

deliver its target.

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

32. SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA CONSULTATION

Consideration was given to the report presented by Louise Keith, Principal Finance Officer, which set out the indicative proposals and sought approval decisions (where needed) for two areas of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2024/25:-

- Schools block.
- Central schools services block.

As a result of the Government's intention to implement a national funding formula for school and high needs funding allocations 2024/25 represented the seventh year of the Government's planned transition towards these proposals.

To comply with the ESFA operational guidance, Local Authorities were required to consult with schools, academies and Schools Forums in respect of planned changes to the local funding formula including the method, principals and rules that were to be adopted. The final decisions in respect of the local formula remained with the Local Authority.

A number of activities have taken place in respect of the consultation on the schools block and central schools services block including a consultation document being issued via e-mail on Friday 10th November, 2023 to all mainstream schools and academies.

The consultation closed on Friday, 24th November, 2023. Of the responses received seven maintained primary schools and twenty-nine academies responded (33% in total).

Further discussion ensued on the responses as set out as part of the report where consultation responses were received from individual schools/academies and those submitted as part of a multi-academy trust. The numbers listed were detailed as individual schools/academies.

There were changes proposed both in terms of the formula factors being used and the individual rates that would be applied to those factors. Nationally, the ESFA have looked to increase NFF factor values by 1.4% for basic entitlement, low prior attainment, free school meals, income deprivation affecting children index, English as an additional language, mobility, sparsity, the lump sum and the minimum pupil levels. In addition, the ESFA have increased the funding floor by 0.5%.

Last year the Local Authority suggested that the future years should be used as a transition to the national funding formula and where possible seek to change local factors/rates to bring them in line with the national

ones as this would provide for the best possible transition to the national formula. This was a view that was supported within the Schools Forum and that strategy in Rotherham was adopted.

To ensure schools and academies were in receipt of the indicative increase in the 2024/25 Local Authority's schools block allocation of £13.4m (2.03% per pupil year on year increase) the Local Authority was aiming to set the MFG to +0.5%. The MFG must be between 0.0% and 0.5% and is a way to protect the funding on a per pupil rate.

The Schools Forum would, therefore, need to vote on a number of proposals which were set out in detail as part of the report. The proposals were based on the consultation responses received from individual schools and academies.

In accordance with the regulations, only certain Forum Members were allowed to participate in a vote regarding the local funding formula. Other Forum Members that did not represent schools i.e. Union /Post-16 representatives could engage and participate in discussions, but were not eligible to vote.

A narrative and rationale for each of the questions was provided along with any clarification as necessary.

Agreed:- (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That the voting as indicated below be incorporated into the school and academy local funding formula for 2024/25:-

Question 1 – Do you agree with the principle that Rotherham is adopting in terms of prioritising an increase to the MFG?

Vote:- **11 For** **0 Against** **0 Abstain**

Question 2 – Considering the borough as a whole, and to ensure support for the most vulnerable children and young people in the district, do you support the Local Authority's request to transfer of the 0.5% from the schools block to the high needs block?

After the meeting Finance Officers contacted all Forum Members to clarify and identify a record of individual votes for them to retain for audit purposes.

Finance Officers validated:-

Vote:- **6 For** **6 Against**

Question 3 – Do you agree that the Local Authority should continue to provide for a growth fund? It is estimated for 2024/25 a budget from reserve of £120,000 is required.

Vote:- 12 For 0 Against 0 Abstain

Question 4 - Do you agree that the Local Authority should continue to provide for a falling rolls fund? It is proposed the fund will be funded from reserve as with the Growth Fund?

Vote:- 12 For 0 Against 0 Abstain

Question 5 – Do you agree that funding from the central school services block can continue to be held centrally for the services outlined above?

Vote:- 12 For 0 Against 0 Abstain

Question 6 – Do maintained school wish to de-delegate monies to create a Financial Difficulties Contingency Fund of £50K to support those schools with a financial deficit position?

Vote:- 4 For 0 Against 0 Abstain

Question 7 - Do maintained schools wish to de delegate funds again for trade unions facilities time, they would no longer need to buy back from the portfolio of services?

Vote:- 2 For 1 Against 0 Abstain

Question 8 - Do maintained schools wish to de delegate funds once again to support 'core school improvement activities' £24 per pupil and 'additional improvement services' £31 per pupil?

- Option 1 rate of £24 per pupil
- Option 2 rate of £31 per pupil

**Vote:- Option 1
 1 For 0 Against 0 Abstain**

**Option 2
 3 For 0 Against 0 Abstain**

Action:- Louise Keith/Vera Njegic

33. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK SUB GROUP

Julien Kramer, Interim Assistant Director: Education and Inclusion, sought support to revive the High Needs Sub-Group and how best to move this forward.

Forum Members were in support of the High Needs Sub-Group meeting as soon as possible given that the last meeting was cancelled. It was imperative that the Sub-Group become actively involved to pick up the

momentum from the last few months.

It was, therefore, suggested that a number of meetings be scheduled with plenty of notice to attendees. Dates/times to avoid were shared amongst Forum Members.

Agreed:- That a schedule of meetings for the High Needs Sub-Group be circulated as soon as possible.

Action:- Julien Kramer

34. SEND SUFFICIENCY PHASE 4 UPDATE

Consideration was given to a verbal update by Mark Cummins, SEND Transformation Project Lead, which provided an update on the proposal to create ten additional SEND resource bases in mainstream education and thus creating a minimum of one hundred additional SEND places across this phase of SEND sufficiency following approval by the Cabinet.

The key strategic aim set out for Phase Four was to enhance mainstream SEND capacity to meet a wider level of need across all schools and mitigate the need for children, young people, and young adults to be educated in settings outside the Borough and promote inclusive practice.

Expressions of interest were sought to identify schools that were able to host a resource provision. In total fifteen schools completed expression of interests which matched well and, in some cases, exceeded the intended schedule of provision.

An update was provided on the applications received and on which resource bases had been approved to date with work hoping to be completed ready for September, 2024.

Further information was provided on the shortlisted applications and their current status which would be funded by a mixture of capital funding and small grants.

Forum Members sought further information on the challenges being faced with capital and DfE applications, the timeline and the assessment of the impact provision.

It was pointed out that whilst the extra places were for children with Education and Health Care Plans, not all schools were aware of the extra provision being proposed in the borough.

It was, therefore, suggested that a briefing paper on the current situation and the progress made to date with SEND Sufficiency be provided. Rotherham had made some worthwhile investment and the support available needed to be shared.

Forum Members pointed out that as well as SEND there needed to be some consideration to the wider impact of SEMH both in Early Years and Primary for long term impact, but also now at Secondary level where there was a growing need for support for young people.

Forum Members welcomed the wider Phase 4 work profile and progress and looked forward to implementation and discussion as part of the High Needs Sub-Group.

Agreed:- (1) That the update be received and the contents noted.

(2) That a further update on SEND Sufficiency Phase 4 be included for the next meeting.

35. EDUCATION SAFEGUARDING ROLE UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report presented by Pam Ward, Head of Education and Inclusion, which provided an update on progress following the appointment of an Education Safeguarding Lead (in January 2023). The post was joint funded through a contribution from Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership (RSCP) and the remaining amount from schools.

Details of the wide and varied role of the Education Safeguarding Lead were highlighted and further detail provided on the direct partnership work taking place.

Schools and multi-agency partners valued the advice and input provided through the role, but this meant the demand for support was increasing and the workload was creating service pressure. An audit of need had also highlighted additional safeguarding priorities for 2023 -24 which were detailed as part of the report.

It was, therefore, proposed that a business case be presented to recruit an Education Safeguarding Officer who would support the work of the Education Safeguarding Lead having been raised at the last meeting of the Forum and as a result associated funding and next steps were now shared.

In terms of funding a funding formula had been developed to cover the single post for 2023-24 and to cover both posts from 2024-25 and this would lead to streamlining current responsibilities, build capacity and avoid a single point of failure.

Forum Members were advised that the posts were vital in providing support, training and challenge for the highlighted priorities.

Discussion ensued by Forum Members on the costs associated with the existing and new posts and how these were funded and whether a consultation exercise with schools would be implemented. There was

some concern where this role would sit when some Multi-Academy Trusts had different statutory responsibilities to those held within Trusts themselves which could mean they were paying twice. There was also a concern about a shortfall in funding if there was no service level agreement in place and if schools would be invoiced directly.

Forum Members whilst recognising the value of the support provided suggested that consideration be given to deferring this report to enable more information to be provided.

Agreed:- That the report be deferred and be included for consideration at the next meeting on the 12th January, 2024.

Action:- Pam Ward

36. **EARLY YEARS EXPANSION AND EARLY EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE STRATEGY**

Consideration was given to the report presented by Aileen Chambers, Head of Early Years and Childcare, which provided an overview of the range of developments currently taking place within early years including the DfE Early Years Expansion, the DfE Wraparound Childcare Programme, the development of a Rotherham Early Years Education and Childcare Strategy, the funding availability and the actions needed locally to meet requirements.

In the Spring Budget 2023 the Chancellor announced an expansion to the current early years entitlements with thirty hours childcare for every child over the age of nine months with working parents by September 2025.

The Government were focused on giving children the best start in life and supporting parents to access affordable, high quality childcare and this expansion of funded childcare was the largest ever and would remove barriers to work for nearly half a million parents with a child under three years in England. To enable childcare providers to prepare to deliver such a major expansion, it would be rolled out in phases to ensure there were enough places and staff ready to meet increased demand and the funding paid to childcare providers to deliver these offers would be increased. The expansion delivery would be over several phases are:

Childcare Sufficiency analysis in Rotherham indicated that most areas would have sufficient capacity to meet the projected demand in April 2024. There would be a shortfall in some areas if the take-up levels were higher.

Depending on the take-up levels for children under one year old, additional places could be required across 70% of the borough based on the current market. The DfE have announced a £100 million allocation for local areas to use to make sure childcare settings in their areas have enough physical space, anticipated to add thousands of new places across the country. Confirmation on allocation amounts to local

authorities and accompanying guidance were awaited.

Increased capacity would be required within the Early Years Team to manage the increased parental enquiries, distribution of funding to childcare providers and support for the sector to increase capacity and maintain high quality of delivery. On this basis Local Authorities were able to retain a percentage of the Early Years DSG to cover central delivery. It was anticipated that the central retention would increase by approx. £380k in 2024-25. This funding currently covered the majority of the Early Years and Childcare Service delivery.

A review of the structure of the Early Years and Childcare Service was underway with proposals being developed to ensure there was sufficient capacity and skills within the Team to support the increased entitlement implementation.

In terms of Wraparound Childcare the Government was investing £289 million over two years to support the expansion of wraparound childcare for primary school-aged pupils and the ambition was for all parents of primary school children to be able to access childcare in their local area.

The wraparound programme aimed to remove barriers to setting up new provision or expanding current provision, including removing the financial risk of setting up new provision when demand was not yet guaranteed. Parents should expect to see an expansion in the availability of wraparound care from September 2024. Funding details included Capacity Funding, Programme Fund and Capital Funding.

It was also noted that a Rotherham Early Years Education and Childcare Strategy was being developed and consultation with the sector had been undertaken to inform the strategy prior to approval by Cabinet in February 2024.

Forum Members welcomed the update and the detail contained for two, three and four year old children. Whilst it was difficult to predict take-up of the provision it was acknowledged that funding would be passported through to providers as soon as was possible. Current providers were also concerned about recruitment and retention of staff.

The DfE indicated that the Early Years Block allocations and early education rates for 2024/25 would be released by the end of November and that capital funding would be allocated for both the Early Years Entitlement expansion and the Wraparound Childcare Programme; details of which were still awaited.

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

37. **SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN**

Further to Minute No. 24(b) of the previous meeting held on 22nd

September, 2023, views were sought on the creation of a Forward Plan for non-finance agenda items for more detailed discussion.

Suggestions of future agenda items included:-

High Needs Sub-Group Updates
Attendance, Exclusions and Suspensions Data
PRU Numbers
SEND Sufficiency
Reduced Timetables – Understanding and Impact

A Forward Plan would be developed and agenda items scheduled accordingly.

Agreed:- That the information be received and noted.

Action:- Clerk

38. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Forum Members wished to place on record their thanks and appreciation to Neil Hardwick who was leaving Rotherham to take up a position in Bradford.

39. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Agreed: That the next meeting of the Schools' Forum take place on Friday, 12th January, 2024 at 8.30 a.m. at Rockingham Professional Development Centre.