

**ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY 21 JUNE 2024**

In Attendance:

Kirstey Peart - Sitwell Infant (Maintained) (in the Chair)
Carol Brookes – Wales High School (Academy)
Mark Cummins, SEND Project Lead, CYPS
Niall Devlin – Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion
David Horrigan – Maltby Learning Trust (Primary Academy)
Louise Keith – Principal Finance Officer, CYPS
Lee Morritt – Aspire
Lewis Moat – GMB Representative
Colin Price – NEU Representative
Karen Smith – Nexus MAT (Special Academy)
Sharon Stones – Head of Arnold Nursery and Children’s Centre
Cary-Anne Sykes – Head of Service, SEND
Nevine Towers - Diocese Sheffield Academies Trust
Pam Ward – Head of Service, Education, CYPS
Nathan Williams – Roughwood Primary (Primary Academy)
Mark Windle – Badsley Primary (Primary Maintained)
Kirsty Woodhead – Service Manager, Early Help

Apologies were received from:-

Councillor Victoria Cusworth – Cabinet Member for CYPS
Joshua Amahwe – Head of Finance, CYPS
Steve Rhodes – Winterhill (Academy)
Mark Ryan – RNN Group
Dr. Sipra Deb (PVI Nursery)
Chris Eccles – Oakwood (Academy)
Steve Scott – Happy Kids (PVI Nursery)
Alan Richards – Academy Governor
Sarah Whitby - Head of Service - Access to Education
Aileen Chambers, Head of Early Years and Childcare, CYPS
Kelly Robinson, Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Alternative Provision

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes from the previous meeting held on 26th April 2024.

Agreed: That the minutes be approved.

4. **MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

There were no matters arising.

5. **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.

Niall Devlin, Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion was invited by the Chair to share an update on the progress of the review of the Schools' Forum and its constitution.

It was suggested to Forum Members that a small sub-group be established to undertake the review of the constitutional and organisational elements of the Forum, including membership, decision making of core business and voting rights.

To shape this piece of work volunteers were sought from the Forum to participate in two focused meetings to be scheduled in September and October 2024. The sub-group would report back its findings and recommendations to the November Schools' Forum meeting.

Forum Members welcomed this approach and agreed to give consideration to their involvement in the sub-group.

Agreed: (1) That Alexandra Dudson, representing Academy Governors be removed from the membership and constitution as they are no longer in post.

(2) That volunteers be sought to participate in the sub-group meetings in September and October.

(3) That the findings and recommendations of the review be reported back to Schools' Forum in November 2024.

6. **SCHOOLS BUDGETS 2024-25 - LATEST POSITION**

Consideration was given to a report presented by Louise Keith, Principal Finance Officer (Schools Finance) which provided an update on the school's budget for 2024/25 since the position was last reported to Schools Forum in January 2024 and initial budgets for Rotherham maintained schools were submitted to the local authority in May 2024.

The latest confirmed DSG funding allocation for Rotherham for 2024/25 was £109.3m which included a total of £30.4m in schools block funding.

The total schools block allocation for 2024-25 after deductions for academy recoupment and NNDR was £30.45m. There was no impact on the schools' budgets as a result of the funding recoupment for academies.

The revised High Needs Block allocation for 2024-25 was £46.37m after deductions of £11.5m for recoupment. These were broken down as follows:-

- Mainstream Academies - £592k
- Special Academies - £8.1m
- Special Free Schools – £1.4m
- Further Education and Independent Learning Providers – £1.3m

The £0.5m increase in the Early Years block increase in entitlement for Under 2's was due to an increase in the estimated numbers from the DfE.

The Forum was asked to note that the funding transfer of £1.2m was made from the schools' block to the high needs block in 2024-25 and reflected the confirmed DfE decision on the disapplication request made by the Local Authority.

It was confirmed that approved detailed 3-year budget plans were submitted to the Local Authority by maintained schools by the agreed deadline. All but three schools submitted a balanced budget position. Recovery and action plans have been put in place and two schools were receiving some additional financial support to help them return to a sustainable position within an agreed timeframe.

It was noted that schools within the Borough had continued to raise sustainability concerns associated with increased cost pressures linked to the cost-of-living crisis this combined with a national fall in pupil numbers was putting primary schools under significant budget pressures.

Forum Members were advised that there were a number of ways the Local Authority was able to support schools in financial difficulty and were encouraged to engage with Finance colleagues in the Local Authority to access support.

A verbal update was then provided on the free school meals auto enrolment process. The main aims of the project were to ensure families received what they were entitled to, and schools received the Pupil Premium Grant associated with free school meals. Each child currently receiving free school meals equated to £1,455 for primary students and £1,035 for secondary students.

A working group was established comprising of representatives from

Revenue and Benefits, Customer Services, Finance, Public Health and Education. The core of the process involved cross matching revenue and benefits team data with school census data to collate a list of children eligible for free school meals but who are not currently claiming them. The estimated number of families to be contacted was 500-600 and letters to those families were expected to be issued towards the end of July. Customer Service staff would receive appropriate training for dealing with any associated calls or emails.

Forum Members went on to discuss the potential barriers (language etc) that may occur through the issuing of a letter and if this had been taken into consideration. The Principal Finance Officer agreed to refer this back to the project lead officer.

Forum Members commented that primary settings appeared to be the most affected from the data presented at 5.7 of the budget report. The Principal Finance Officer confirmed that this was predominantly due to a fall in pupil numbers and that the same challenges were likely to be seen in secondary settings over the next five years.

It was recognised that it was taking time to get support to address the significant rise in SEND needs. EHCP costs were difficult to predict and ISG funding was a huge cost to schools.

The Assistant Director confirmed that a Matrix of Need would be presented to Forum for discussion in September which would set out an agreed framework for funding children. The SEND sufficiency programme was also working with schools to develop and implement increased SEND provision across the Borough.

Forum Members confirmed they would also welcome further detail on what financial assumptions were being made, and if there were any emerging patterns from the previous year's financial position to help provide further context and understanding of associated risks. The Principal Officer confirmed she would discuss this further with the Head of Finance and consider how this could be captured and reported.

Agreed: (1) That the latest DSG funding for schools for 2024/25 financial year be noted.

(2) That the financial positions of Rotherham's maintained schools and the identified financial risks against the schools DSG budgets for the year be noted.

7. SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS (UPDATED)

Consideration was given to the report presented by Louise Keith, Principal Finance Officer (Schools Finance), which built upon previous reports setting out the main amendments to the Scheme for Financing Schools to bring in line with the DfE's latest version, updated as of 28th

March, 2024.

Agreed:- (1) That the report be received and the updates to the Scheme for Financing Schools sections highlighted in yellow be noted.

(2) That the DfE's latest version, updated 28th March 2024 be noted.

(3) That the Updated Scheme for Financing Schools be disseminated to schools.

8. SEND SUFFICIENCY UPDATE

Consideration was given to a verbal update presented by Mark Cummins, SEND Transformation Project Lead which provided a further update in respect of the SEND Sufficiency Programme.

It was noted that the first phase of resource provision implementation referenced under Minute Number 59 of the previous Forum meeting remained on track and places were due to be available from September 2024.

A further element of the SEND Sufficiency Phase 4 programme was the implementation of the School's Accessibility Funding to support schools to create additional places to meet a wider level of SEND need.

Seven projects had now been approved from the accessibility capital funding small grants programme and nine other school applications had been assessed and working through due diligence. Application themes were varied and covered the development of vocational curriculum, nurture spaces, sensory areas and several other innovative projects were coming forward.

The outcomes and impacts of Phase 4 would continue to be monitored and mapped against the Safety Valve agreement.

Discussion ensued on the significant number of pupils that did not currently have access to an appropriate setting. Provision and outreach services would continue to be developed which would hopefully reduce or stabilise the number of pupils not currently accessing provision. It was also noted that SEND Sufficiency Phase 5 projects would form part of a feasibility study to identify appropriate options for specialist provision. On completion of the feasibility study a further report would be presented to Cabinet seeking approval to implement Phase 5.

Forum Members were invited to put forward suggestions on what other areas of SEND sufficiency reporting they would welcome at future meetings. The Forum agreed the provision of benchmarking data that provided detail of local comparative statistics against the national SEND position would be useful for setting the context to what Rotherham schools were dealing with in relation to SEND.

Agreed: That the update be received and noted.

9. **ATTENDANCE AND WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE 2024**

Consideration was given to the report presented by Kirsty Woodhead, Service Manager, Early Help and Family Engagement which provided an update in respect of attendance data and the Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2024 guidance expectations.

In 2022 the DfE published a Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance to help schools, academy trusts, governing bodies and local authorities to maintain high levels of school attendance through the introduction of a core set of expectations.

A further update to the guidance was published in February 2024 which was due to become statutory from 19th August 2024. There was new guidance in several areas together with further clarification on issues raised via consultation. There was also new guidance on the National Framework for Penalty Notices to support consistency in practice and compliance with changes in law around registers and codes.

The School Attendance Matters Pathway and Strategic Plan were due to be updated along with the Code of Conduct to ensure compliance with the new statutory expectations. This work was expected to be completed by August 2024 and formally launched in September 2024.

An Attendance Delivery Group was due to be established in September 2024 to enable effective multi agency delivery of the strategic plan. Representatives to join this group were welcomed.

Due to a change of circumstances the Associate Head Teacher identified to work with the Local Authority to focus on attendance and share good practice was not now able to proceed and arrangements for this role would be revisited.

Forum Members heard that Rotherham was in a positive position to be able to embed the revised statutory guidance as it already aligned well to existing pathways and approaches used in Rotherham educational settings.

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

10. **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.

- Vice and Vice Chair Arrangements – September meeting
- SEND Sufficiency – Data comparison to national – September meeting
- Annual Exclusions Data – September meeting
- Feedback on Schools Forum Review – November meeting.

It was agreed the Clerk would check with the Head of Finance if any finance items were expected to be presented to the September meeting and update the plan accordingly.

Agreed: That the updates be received and noted.

Action: Clerk

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no other urgent business items to consider.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Agreed: That the next meeting of the Schools' Forum takes place on Friday 13th September, 2024 at 8.30am at Rockingham Professional Development Centre.