

**ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY 13 DECEMBER 2024**

Mark Windle – Badsley Primary (Primary Maintained) (in the Chair)
Carole Brookes – Wales High School
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)
Lee Morritt – Aspire
Colin Price – NEU Representative
Mark Ryan – RNN Group
Steve Scott – Happy Kids (PVI Nursery)
Sharon Stones – Head of Arnold Nursery and Children’s Centre
Nathan Williams – Roughwood Primary (Primary Academy)

Joshua Amahwe – Head of Finance, CYPS
Aileen Chambers – Head of Service – Early Years
Mark Cummins, SEND Project Lead, CYPS
Niall Devlin – Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion
Louise Keith – Principal Finance Officer, CYPS
Sarah Whitby - Head of Service - Access to Education
Angela Kemp – Secretary to the Rotherham Schools Forum

Apologies were received from:-

Councillor Victoria Cusworth – Cabinet Member for CYPS
Amy Leech – HR Business Partner
Lisa McCall – Wales High School
Nevine Towers - Head of Business and Operations (Primary Academy)
Alan Richards – Governor Representative
Pam Ward – Head of Service, Education, CYPS

30. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

32. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

Nominations were sought by the Clerk for the position of Chair of Rotherham Schools Forum for the next two years.

Mr. M. Windle was proposed by Mr. N. Williams and seconded by Mr. D. Horrigan and duly appointed to the position of Chair of Rotherham

Schools' Forum with immediate effect.

Resolved:

- That Mr. M. Windle be appointed Chair of the Rotherham Schools Forum for the next two years 2024/25 and 2025/26 academic years).

33. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved:

- That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2024 were agreed and approved as a correct record of the proceedings.

34. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

No matters arising arose during the consideration of the previous meeting minutes.

35. 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.

Resolved:

- That the resignation of Kirstey Peart representing Primary School Head Teachers be received.
- That the Schools Forum places on record their gratitude to Kirstey Peart for her services to the Forum.

36. SCHOOLS FORUM REVIEW FEEDBACK

Niall Devlin was invited by the Chair to provide feedback from the Schools Forum Governance Review meeting held on 22nd November 2024.

Discussions covered four key areas with particular focus noted on the following matters:-

- The completion of the of the ESFA's Schools Forum Self-Assessment Toolkit to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Schools Forum.
- Clarification on Voting Requirements in conjunction with a review of the ESFA's Schools Forum Powers and Responsibilities document.
- A review of the Forums Terms of Reference and proposed amendments
- Strengthening membership arrangements.

Members of the Review Group would meet again in the New Year and a further update would be provided following that meeting.

Resolved:

- **That the Schools Forum notes the update**

37. SEND SUFFICIENCY UPDATE

Mark Cummins provided a verbal update on the progress of the current phase 4 and 5 elements of the SEND Sufficiency Programme together with information on the longer-term strategy plans with particular reference made to the following:-

- Phase 4 resource provision was either open or in the process of opening. Provision at Winterhill had been delayed and was now scheduled to open at Easter.
- 100 places would be phased in over the current and next academic year and schools would be supported whilst they moved towards capacity of their provision.
- 28 projects had been funded to date from the School's Accessibility Funding to support schools to create additional places some of these projects were now complete.
- The outcomes and impacts of Phase 4 would continue to be assessed.
- As part of Phase 5 implementation a Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) provision was due to open in January 2025 providing 30 places.
- A report was due to be presented to Cabinet on 16th December to seek approval to release capital funding to enhance capacity and support provision at Newman School.
- A formal SEND Sufficiency Update would be presented to Cabinet in February and approval would be sought to develop a longer term SEND Sufficiency Strategy.

Discussion ensued about the future approach of this standing agenda item. It was suggested that reporting reverted to twice yearly to include a mid-year update along with a detailed annual progress report. Reporting by exception would be undertaken regarding any pertinent matters that the Forum would need to be made aware of. Forum Members supported this approach.

Resolved:

- **That the Schools Forum notes the SEND Sufficiency update provided.**

38. DEDICATED SCHOOL GRANT (DSG) AND SCHOOLS BUDGETS 2024-25 - LATEST POSITION

Louise Keith and Joshua Amahwe presented a report on the latest position of the schools budget for 2024/25 and commented on the following:

- The main funding changes announced by the DfE since the last Forum meeting.
- The latest confirmed DSG funding allocation position which included no changes to the schools block, a small increase in funding to the central block and reductions in the high needs and early years block.
- The 24 local authority maintained delegated schools budget position, including balances and factors attributable for this.
- The latest position of those schools operating with licensed deficits which continued to be closely monitored.
- Centrally retained schools DSG budgets which comprised of elements relating to schools' block, early years, central and high needs block including the latest forecasted positions and the factors that were attributable to the key variances.

Discussion ensued in relation to the early years reduction and linkages to accessing pupil premium. Concerns were raised that it appeared that there were less disadvantaged families accessing early years pupil premium and more were claiming entitlement as working families. It was confirmed that the position had been based on the Summer term census and would be recalculated based on the Autumn term figures. Further analysis could be undertaken and reported back at the next meeting and assurance was provided that take up for this month remained high for disadvantaged families.

Resolved:

- **That the Schools Forum notes the latest published DSG funding for schools for the 2024/25 financial year.**
- **That the Forum also notes the financial positions of Rotherham's maintained schools and the identified risks against the schools DSG budgets for the year.**

39. SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA CONSULTATION OUTCOME (PART A)

Louise Keith and Joshua Amahwe presented a report on the outcomes of Part A of the Schools Funding Formula consultation. The consultation, which was undertaken in November 2024, sought views on further changes to Rotherham's local funding formula as well as the proposals to transfer funding from the schools block to the high needs block which was

covered separately under Agenda Item 12.

The structure of the schools National Funding Formula (NFF) would remain largely unchanged in 2025-26, and a summary of the key changes as outlined in the report were provided.

A total of 62 academies and maintained schools responded to the consultation which equated to a 55% response rate which had improved in comparison to the previous year.

Details of the responses of the schools consultation was then summarised as follows:

Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG)

Question 1 : Do you support the proposal to set the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) within the local funding formula at 0% for 2025-26?

Consultation Response:

Of the total responses representing 62 schools 100% voted in favour of the proposal.

Pupil Growth

Question 2: Do you agree that in 2025/26 a growth fund of £150k is provided and will be funded from the DSG Allocation?

Consultation Response:

71% of the total 62 schools voted Yes and the remaining 29% voted No to the proposal.

Falling Rolls

Question 3: Do you agree that the Local Authority should continue to provide for a falling rolls fund of £50k? It is proposed that the fund will be provided from the DSG allocation.

Consultation Response:

93.5% of the total 62 responses voted Yes to the proposal and the remaining 6.5% voted No.

Next Steps

Rotherham MBC's responses to the outcomes of the consultation included the following proposed changes:-

- To set the MFG for its local school funding formula at 0% for 2025/26.
- To top slice the sum of £150k from the schools funding formula to be allocated to the relevant schools or academies that have agreed with the LA an increase in their numbers or PAN. Such allocation would be in accordance with the Growth Policy agreed by the Schools Forum. Actual payments would be reported to the Forum with any underspend maintained in the DSG reserve.
- To continue to maintain / operate a falling roll fund of £50k through top slicing of the 2025-26 Schools Block allocation.

The Forum heard that the future direction of travel nationally was to ensure all local schools funding formula had closer alignment with the National Funding Formula (NFF) for schools. The scope and flexibility to do things differently with the local funding formula had reduced drastically and was not expected to change.

Discussion arose on growth funding arrangements with Forum Members keen to understand last year's Growth Funding position and what consideration had been given to the level of spilt going forward.

Resolved:

- **That the School's Forum notes the contents of the report.**

40. SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA CONSULTATION OUTCOME (PART B) - (SCHOOL FUNDING TRANSFER TO HIGH NEEDS)

Joshua Amahwe presented a report which focused on Part B of the Schools Funding Formula consultation outcome and specifically the proposed percentage transfer of funding from the schools block to the high needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2025/26.

It was noted that the pressures indicated on Rotherham's High Needs budget were reflective of the situation being experienced nationally and were being address primarily through Rotherham's SEND Sufficiency Strategy. The funding transfer would be used to mitigate costs pressures arising in the high needs block, meet demand challenges and to enable the Safety Valve programme to continue to work towards achieving a balanced position at the end of 2025/26.

The response to the schools consultation regarding the proposed transfer was detailed as follows:

Question 4: Considering the borough as a whole and to ensure support for the most vulnerable children and young people in the borough, do you support the LA's proposal to transfer 0.5% from the schools' block to the high needs block?

Consultation Response:

56.5% of the schools that responded to the consultation voted No to the proposal, with 43.5% responses in support of the transfer proposed.

The rationale for why the transfer of funding was needed was discussed with specific reference made to the following areas:

- Increased cost pressures
- Demand challenges
- Meeting the signed Safety Valve agreement with the DfE, and
- Increased funding by the Government would not address existing cost pressures nor keep pace with future demand within the SEND system.

It was recognised that previous reports to the Forum had highlighted the significant issues facing the high needs budget. There were significant demands within the Rotherham borough due to the increasing numbers of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans within the system, Rotherham were already above average for EHC plans and were seeing an increase in pupil placements within specialist SEN provision.

It was highlighted that even with the increase in funding identified to support local authorities going forward Rotherham would still see a deficit position with its high needs projections as the additional funding would not cover the accumulated deficit and options to mitigate the deficit position were being considered.

It was noted that the modelling undertaken had indicated that the funding transfer proposals would not have a significant adverse impact on individual schools' core funding. The impact of managing inflationary pressures on school budgets were not expected to be considerably different next year and the government were looking to allocate additional funding to support NI increases. It was also noted that support to maintained schools in financial difficulty would continue to be implemented as planned.

Having considered the outcome of Part B of the consultation the Schools Forum were required to undertake a vote to establish whether the Forum supported the proposal to transfer 0.5% of schools block funding to the high needs budget.

Of the school members eligible to vote on this matter, nine voted in favour of the proposal, one voted against the proposal and there were no abstentions. Therefore, the proposal was agreed.

Resolved:

- **The Schools' Forum notes the outcome(s) of the recent consultation with schools on the proposal for a block funding transfer to the high needs budget and approves the council's proposal to transfer 0.5% of the schools block funding in 2025/26 to the high needs budget to address ongoing cost pressures.**

41. EARLY YEARS AND WRAPAROUND EXPANSION UPDATE

Aileen Chambers presented a report which provided an update on a range of developments currently taking place within the early years sector focusing on the following areas:-

- The DfE Early Years Expansion
- The DfE Wraparound Childcare Programme
- The Schools Based Nurseries Programme, and
- Breakfast Clubs Early Adopter Programme

Early Years Expansion

Details relating to the measures being taken to support the early years expansion was provided with particular reference made to the following:

- The delivery phases for the Early Years expansion and the significant expansion required within the sector to meet demand.
- Areas identified for potential expansion with Thurcroft and Swinton being highlighted as areas with the greatest pressures.
- The lack of opportunity within existing buildings or availability of new buildings which was restricting the progress of expansion plans together with the mitigating actions being taken to address this.
- The release of capital funding to support projects in Ravenfield, Swallownest and Kimberworth and other planned developments taking place at Waverley, Manvers and Dinnington.
- The early years recruitment campaign which was underway to support expansion.

School Based Nurseries Programme

Details relating to the measures being taken to support the School Based Nurseries Programme was provided with particular reference made to the following:

- The capital funding application process to support delivery of the

school based nursery expansion plans.

- The submission of an application from one school to create two-year-old provision and the ongoing activity involving a further 5 schools.
- The limited window of opportunity for applications to be made with the closing date for applications being 19th December 2024.

Wraparound Childcare Programme

Details relating to the measures being taken to support the Wraparound Childcare Programme was provided with particular reference made to the following:

- The aims of the expansion programme and the projected number of places required to meet demand.
- The engagement undertaken with schools and the number of successful applications made to date.

Information relating to the Breakfast Club Early Adopted Programme was also noted with expressions of interest due by 20th December.

It was also reported that the DfE had announced additional significant funding provision to support early years expansion and further information was expected to be provided in the new year.

Dr Deb extended her thanks to the Early Years Team for the ongoing support provided to the PVI sector. Concerns were shared about the sectors ability to meet the demands of the childcare expansion programme and the constraints within the sector due to recent budget announcements. It was also noted that the PVI sector had also been subjected to a re-evaluation of their business rates based on the numbers of children registered with providers and many providers were now seeing an increase in their business rates. Several other potential budgetary impacts were also flagged and noted for awareness.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum notes and approves the content of the report.

42. SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN

The Chair sought comments on the circulated Forward Plan and invited Forum Members to share any other items for inclusion.

The Clerk noted the following items for future discussion.

- Early Years Sufficiency

- Annual Update on Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

It was suggested further consideration be given to the forward programme of business items at the next Schools Forum Review Meeting.

Resolved:

- **That the updates be received, and the Forward Plan noted.**

43. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no other urgent business items raised. The Chair of the Forum concluded business and thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution.