

Schools Forum

Date: 12 December 2024

Time: 09.00 to 11.00.

Venue: MS Teams

Paper

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Public

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 7TH NOVEMBER 2024 – HELD VIA MS TEAMS**Present****School Forum Members**

Bill Dowell (Chair)
Mark Rogers – Primary Headteacher
Sian Lines – Diocese of Hereford
Andrew Smith – Independent Post 16
James Staniforth – Post 16
Sarah North – Primary Headteacher
Stephen Matthews - Primary Governor
Sarah Godden - TrustEd
Reuben Thorley – Secondary headteacher
Rachel Williams – Primary Headteacher

Officers

David Shaw
Andy Nicholls
Samantha Bradley
Lisa Taylor
John Rowe
Stephen Waters
Helen Owen

Members

Caroline Clode

Observers

Nick Bardsley

The chair welcomed all to the meeting.

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from John Hitchings, Shelly Hurdley, Sarah Finch Lisa Henshall and Marilyn Hunt

2. Election of Chair

Bill Dowell was re-elected unanimously as Chair.

John Hitchens was elected unanimously as Vice Chair.

3. Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes were accepted as a true record.

David Shaw updated Schools Forum on the matters arising from the last meeting.

- The link to the Shropshire Ordinarily available Provision (SOAP) framework has been circulated.

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- The link to the public consultation for the draft SEND and AP Strategy and Outcomes Framework has been shared.
- Meeting for Schools Forum in person has been delayed until 2025.

4. **Verbal Update on Shropshire Council Financial Sustainability** David Shaw updated Schools Forum

- **Quarter 1 Financial Monitoring report**
 - £62.5m savings set out for 24/25 in the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) approved in February 24
 - Quarter 1 overall position – £38.5m forecast overspend.
 - Mostly from savings where work is still underway around delivery, also pressure in social care.
 - Made highest savings ever last year, those needed in this year are more complex.
 - £46m of savings now identified for delivery by end of March 2025 – this is already more than the £41m savings delivered in the whole of 2023/24.
 - Service reviews and re-sizing of services/teams currently underway.
 - Quarter 2 monitoring position will be reviewed by Cabinet on the 20th November 2024.
- **Critical Spending Guidance**
Andy Begley, Chief Executive and James Walton, Executive Director of Finance implemented critical spending only during August 2024, so that all spending is reduced to only what is absolutely essential.
This means:
 - Expenditure essential to delivering services (with maximum efficiency)
 - Existing and necessary payroll and pension costs
 - Goods and services already received on receipt of this guidance
 - Expenditure required through existing legal agreements and contracts (that cannot be challenged or minimised)
 - Expenditure funded through ring-fenced grants (delivering outputs with maximum efficiency)



- Expenditure essential in achieving value for money and/or mitigating additional in-year costs.
- **Impact on Traded Services and Education Settings**
 - Traded activity continues – in line with the Critical spending guidance.
 - Benchmarking activity underway in relation to Traded Services to Schools - levels of fees and charges and services provided.
 - Interesting to note the experience of Birmingham City Council and the decision to remove almost all Traded Services to Schools, with the report noting challenges with their finance system combined with an under recovery of costs IRO £2m per year.
 - Review underway with Corporate Finance and an external partner regarding 'full cost recovery' of all Traded or Commercial Services.
 - This work will inform the 2025/26 de-delegation consultation that will be shared in the next couple of weeks in preparation for decisions to be made at the December Schools Forum meeting.

Mark Rogers and Rueben Thorley raised questions on whether there was a suggestion that Shropshire would be following Birmingham in how they do traded services.

David Shaw said that he would circulate the papers regarding the work that Birmingham is doing in the team's chat. He pointed out that there is clearly a difference in scale between schools in Birmingham and Shropshire, that there is a clear message from schools and Bureaus that they would like to retain links with the council and that all potential changes would be brought to Forum as always, and that it was a matter of raising awareness of conversations that are being held.

Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring 2024-25

5. Stephen Waters presented his paper.

- The 2024-25 forecast outturn position for the DSG is a £5.142m in-year deficit
- This deficit needs to be added to the £2.304m DSG deficit carried forward from 2023-24 resulting in a forecast cumulative DSG deficit of £7.446m



De-delegated Items

o Maternity Supply Cover

- Forecast overspend of £0.161m against the £0.267m de-delegated budget
- As expenditure in 2023-24 totalled £0.267m, there is a significant increase
- Forecast level of expenditure of £0.427m is higher than previous years so could be a one-off

Early Years Block

- Shropshire's Early Years Block DSG allocation for 2024-25 is £29.140m as of July 2024
- The indicative allocations for entitlements will be updated following new termly headcounts. The final Early Years Block DSG allocations will be based on (five-twelfths January 2024 PTE census numbers) + (seven-twelfths January 2025 PTE census numbers)
- The forecast outturn position is a £0.018m overspend against a provisional budget of £29.140m. This relates to the £0.396m centrally retained budget relating to staffing.
- There are no variances to budget forecast against the large allocations for 3-4 year olds, 2 year olds and under 2's

High Needs Block

- The forecast outturn position for the High Needs Block is an in-year deficit of £4.965m against a centrally controlled High Needs Budget of £32.337m. This budget excludes the place funding element of the High Needs Block totalling £9.936m.
- Shropshire's 2024-25 High Needs Block DSG of £42.272m has increased by £2.116m compared to the £40.156m allocation in 2023-24. This 5.3% increase is a smaller percentage increase than the previous year's increase.

Top Up funding

- There is an overspend of £0.122m relates to the top-up funding paid to mainstream schools. As anticipated, there has been a large increase in top-up funding to mainstream schools reflecting increasing requests for EHC Needs Assessment and issuing of EHC plans



- There is a £2.742m overspend on top-up funding to special schools.
- Explained by changes to top-up funding levels payable to 2 Shropshire Council special schools as reported to Schools Forum in the June meeting.
- With Severndale Specialist School, an annual review process was undertaken to review each pupil's needs and therefore the appropriate banding level. The banding levels were increased and pupils allocated to appropriate banding levels and the resulting changes backdated to the start of the 2023/24 academic year. As a result, a one-off payment of £2.274m was made to the school.
- This review of, and subsequent increase in, banding levels across the Council's special schools aligns with the strategy to build capacity in these settings where appropriate

Independent Special Schools

- Increase in demand shown by increase in numbers
- Increase in average termly cost per placement (both due to price inflation pressures and additional staffing support – increasing complexity). Typical placement cost at our most frequently used provider is £60,000 to £72,000 per annum which is over double the cost of a Shropshire Special School
- More frequent use of independent alternative providers, particularly in relation to children who are post 16

SEN Support Services

- There is a forecast overspend of £0.430m against the SEN Support Service budget of £2.121m. Similarly to 2022-23 and 2023-24, the overspend in 2024-25 relates to staffing overspends where additional staff have been employed to meet increased demand
- Overall position
- The Council's DSG financial position of a forecast cumulative deficit of £7.446m as at the end of the 2024-25 financial year reflects a continuing pressure on the total High Needs budget as expenditure continues to increase sharply year on year. This increase has been particularly pronounced over the last 2 financial years; 2023-24 and 2024-25



- The government's Budget for 2025-26. £1bn of additional funding has been earmarked for High Needs, recognising that the number of children with SEND is increasing and the associated costs of SEND provision has become one of the leading drivers of financial pressures for local authorities
- As it stands, there is a DSG Deficit statutory override in place until March 2026. This means that any deficit associated with the DSG is kept off the councils' balance sheet
- If the override is not extended, the High Needs deficit will have an impact on the council's overall financial position

Mark Rogers asked what share of national funding is allocated to Shropshire.

David Shaw shared the most recent update on the timeline of information being shared with local authorities but said that it is unfortunately not yet known what share Shropshire would be getting.

There was discussion amongst Schools Forum Members about how the extra funding will be allocated and what Share Shropshire will be getting.

School Revenue Funding Update 2025-26

6. Samantha Bradley communicated an update that the National Funding Formula will be out by the end of November and that hopefully she will be able to update Schools Forum further in December.

Early Years and Childcare Funding Update

7. Andy Nichols presented his paper.

New Personnel

- Andy Nicholls – Education and Childcare Sufficiency Manager
 - Dan Steele – Senior Project Officer – Early Years Sufficiency
- Latest Sufficiency Data
- 92.97% of issued codes validated by settings – Highest in West Midlands, First vs Statistical Neighbours, Third Nationally (7/11/24)
- Early Years Readiness
- All children 9m+ entitled to 30 hours childcare from September 2025
 - Predicted need of EXTRA 420 places September 2025



- Capital allocation of £541K
 - Spend to date approx. £400k (300 places)
 - DFE / Childcareworks happy with our approach – ahead of where most LAs currently are.
- Funding (to be approved)
- Additional £1.6m in relation to teacher's Pay Award September to March 24/25
 - All funding to be passed on to settings
 - £4.95ph to £5.03ph
 - Backdated to September 2024
 - Awaiting latest funding announcements – challenge for providers re NI and Minimum wage changes

Schools Forum Voted in Favour of the local authorities proposed plans for use of the additional EY budget grant.

Andy Nichols expressed his concern regarding sustainability and said that he would keep Forum informed of any developments.

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8. **Shropshire Ordinarily Available Provision (SOAP)**

John Rowe presented his paper.

Aims from September 2024

Priority 1: All schools and settings understand and are aware of Ordinarily Available Provision.

Autumn Term

- Education Quality Advisers introduced to primary and secondary schools.
- Support visits undertaken with respect to inclusive practice in settings and schools
- Three locality-based SEND and Inclusion network meetings shared with schools
- Production of SEND and Inclusion newsletter to include 'SOAP spotlight'.
- Implementation of 'test and learn' project with group of Schools Spring and Summer Terms
- Finalise EY and Post-16 OAP
- SOAP relaunch and sharing of best practice in SEND and Inclusion network meetings
- Completion of school and LA commissioned SEND reviews within schools and settings to provide support and challenge with respect to OAP.



- Test and learn project with focus group schools to review their use of SOAP and develop further their implementation. Use feedback provided on successes and challenges to feed into SOAP review.

- Draw out key themes to develop a CDP offer.

• **Priority 2: SEND Hubs begin to work towards becoming 'centres of excellence'**

Autumn Term

- Education Quality Advisers linked to hubs to provide challenge/support building on SeaView trust reviews

- Implementation of SEND hubs quality improvement cycle.

- SEND hub network established which provides supervision, support and coaching to hub leaders.

- Development of SEND Hub quality assurance criteria and risk assessment tracking systems that supports the QA of hubs.

- School performance monitoring to include SEND hub categorisation (to inform future challenge/support by EQAs)

Spring and Summer Terms

- School performance monitoring to include SEND hub categorisation (to inform future challenge/support by EQAs)

- Further monitoring of implementation SOAP within SEND Hubs through SEND review process.

• **Priority 3: All schools and settings have access to models of best practice to build their capacity to meet the needs of CYP with SEND**

Autumn Term

- Relaunch and rebranding SENCo network meetings as SEND and Inclusion forums.

- EQA facilitated solution circles to provide support to SENCOs

- Review of systems with respect to Early Intervention Grant (EIG) and Graduated Support Pathway funding to include aspects of support.

- EQAs secured funding for SEND Outreach service funded through change programme

- Development of Resource Bank to underpin SOAPs Spring and Summer Terms

- School performance monitoring to include SEND hub categorisation (to inform future challenge/support by EQAs)

- Further monitoring of implementation SOAP within SEND Hubs through SEND review process.

- Delivery of SEND outreach support (4 x FT Outreach teachers (North, Central, South and EY specialist) – funded through



change programme in first instance (before moving to traded service)

• **Priority 4: Work towards a balanced position of HNB finances**

2024/25

- Develop enhanced provision in SEND hub capacity (including SEMH and increased secondary capacity)
- Opportunity for £250,000 allocation for Shropshire for inclusive practice to support outreach in schools
- 4 x FT Outreach teachers (North, Central, South and EY specialist funded by SEND and AP change programme for 1 year in first instance before moving to a traded model)
- Begin work to support reduction in independent non maintained specialist school provision (INMSS) and move toward hub and to OAP)
- Identification (supported by parent carer engagement) of pupils whose needs could be better met within state-maintained provision.
- Begin reallocation of funding and adjustment of historic bandings to more appropriately support state-maintained provision.

By 2029/30

- Move towards model to enable more CYP to be supported within hubs/state-maintained provision.
- Further reduction of cost of INMSS to enable reallocation of funds for state funded provision.

Stephen Matthews said that the design was good and that he hoped that the timetable would be able to be stuck to as it was the help that schools desperately needed.

Stephen Matthews asked whether the quality advisors had been allocated to hubs.

John Rowe confirmed that advisors had been allocated, one per hub and another one for moderation purposes.

James Pearson asked whether priority 4 could be distributed as it wasn't in the original slides that were sent out.

John Rowe said that it would be sent out.

James Staniforth asked what finalising Post 16 entailed?

John Rowe said that it was about identifying what it looks like to provide a cohesive and easily understood plan as to what inclusivity looks like within post 16 provision and key to that would be working with post 16 providers.

James Staniforth asked if the risks of building up one provision to the detriment of another.

JR



John Rowe replied that this had been looked at and that is why the timetable is over a four- or five-year period.

William Dowell asked if communication would be broadened to the wider community.

John Rowe replied that a lot of work had been done to alert the wider SEN community.

Communications

9.

Bill Dowell said that he had had the opportunity to meet Julia Buckley, the new MP for Shrewsbury and she had expressed an interest in engaging directly with Schools Forum. He pointed out that as we now have four new Shropshire MPs, they need to be briefed on the work of Schools Forum, If Forum are agreeable then a document stating where we are nationally could be produced and sent to them from Bill Dowell as Chair and Leslie Picton as Leader of the council.

**Schools
Forum**

Future Meeting Dates

10.

12 December 2024

9 January 2025 (Provisional)

23 January 2025

20 March 2025

19 June 2025

11 September 2025 (tbc)

13 November 2025 (tbc)

Meeting was closed at 10.20am

