

Leicester City Council Schools Forum - Minutes

Draft Minutes of the Meeting held at 1pm on Thursday 13 June 2019 at Soar Valley Training Centre, Gleneagles Avenue.

Present

Schools members:

Mainstream Academies:

Special Academies:

Special School Governors:

Special School Heads:

Secondary School Governors:

Secondary School Head representatives:

Primary School Governors:

Primary School Head representatives:

Pupil Referral Units:

Name:

Jim Cook (Chair), Danny Bullock, David Wyatt,
Jane Ridgewell

Julie Aquilina

Ghezala Sultan

Sarah Osborne

Chandrika Patel

Julie Robinson, Anna White

Wendy Martin, Glenys Mulvany

Liz Warren, Karl Stewart, Nigel Bruen

Janet Washington

Non-school members:

Teaching Unions:

School support staff Unions:

16-19 Providers:

Early Years PVI Providers:

Name:

Jessica Edmonds

No attendee

No attendee

Michelle Orton

In attendance:

Paul Tinsley

Martin Judson

Simon Walton

Ed Rowe

Daniel Routledge

Role:

Director of Learning and Inclusion

Head of Finance, Education & Children's Services

Senior Accountant, Finance

Clerk to the Forum

(Item 5 only)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mike Hobbs, Steve Wilson, Sandra Hamilton-Fox and Shaun Whittingham.

2. Declarations of interest

Jane Ridgewell declared an interest regarding Item 5, Whatever it Takes, in view of her role on the partnership board.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 January 2019 were agreed as an accurate record of proceedings.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes

i) Schools Facing Exceptional Cost Pressures and Schools In Financial Difficulty

The final outturn figures for these areas had been included in the report presented under agenda Item 6.

ii) Behaviour Support Services

The final outturn figure had been included in the report presented under agenda Item 6.

iii) General Fund budget 2019-20

The link to the proposed budget report had been circulated to all members.

5. Whatever it Takes evaluation report

Daniel Routledge presented the evaluation report for Whatever it Takes. As in previous years, there were no specific performance measures that could definitively demonstrate the success of the project, but a number of proxy measures and indicators were available:

i. Reading attainment and attitude

There had been a small improvement in reading standards at Key Stage 1, with a 0.6% rise closing the gap to the national average to 4.7%. In Key Stage 2, a significant improvement of 5.6% had been achieved in those at or above expected standards.

Small gains had been made at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, but there had been a small drop in results in the Year 1 phonics screening check, which had resulted in a widening of the gap to the national average. However, those who met the standard at the end of Year 2 had increased to 90%, which was the first time that figure had been achieved in Leicester.

ii. Reading survey

There had been a significant decline in the number of pupils completing the survey when compared to previous years. Historically funding had been tied to completion of the survey, but that was no longer the case. However, 4699 responses still represented a statistically significant sample size.

In most categories, there had been a drop in the number of responses choosing the most positive outcomes. There had been a 3% reduction in pupils saying they definitely liked reading, and confidence in reading ability had fallen dramatically. Results in this category were at their lowest level since the survey began eight years ago. Confidence in reading aloud and enjoyment of reading out loud had also both declined by sizeable margins.

Members queried the reasons behind these reductions, and it was noted that results had started to fall at the same time as the SATS expectations had changed. However, it was difficult to prove a definite link between the two events.

iii. School based projects

84 projects in 57 primary schools and 18 projects in 13 secondary schools had received funding. There had been a reduction in the number of evaluations received following completion of these projects, meaning there was insufficient data to provide robust conclusions. However, feedback appeared to be broadly in line with previous outcomes.

iv. Central WiT events

A wide range of centrally organised events had been delivered. Highlights included Author Week, which involved 5000 pupils, Everybody's Reading Festival and Reading Rampage. These events were all well attended, and evaluation outcomes were very positive.

Members welcomed the report, and it was noted that although WiT began as a project for maintained schools using de-delegated funding, virtually all the academies now bought in and the scheme worked well for all schools.

It was agreed that reports on progress should continue to be provided to Schools Forum next year, and members noted that a similar approach should be adopted for other projects or services funded by de-delegation.

6. School outturn and balances 2018-19

The report of the Head of Finance, Education and Children's Services, was received. He apologised for the lateness of delivery, but members passed on their thanks for the fact this item had been brought forward and was being presented earlier in the year than had previously been the case.

Total DSG expenditure exceeded the in-year allocation by £4.5m, so reserves had been used as planned to cover the shortfall. As a result, the level of reserves had reduced from £12.7m to £8.2m during the financial year.

i. Schools Block

£3.8m had been set aside for the Growth Fund (excluding expenditure on the new Avanti Fields school) and all but £40,000 of that allocation had been spent. A total of 2,313 additional places had been funded at an average rate of £1,615 per pupil.

The Chair noted that reports would be required on in-year pupil numbers during 2019/20. The Head of Finance noted that commitments so far in 2019/20 were less than the funding that had been allocated, and that any surplus that might arise was ring-fenced for growth purposes only.

The report set out the final out-turn summary for 2018/19. It was noted that the LESP funding was also ring-fenced and £605,000 had been carried forward into the new financial year.

Members requested that reports on all LESP expenditure be brought to Schools Forum, and confirmed they wished to monitor in-year spending on all de-delegated items. The Head of Finance accepted the need for more transparency and noted that when DSG reserves were exhausted, any overspend would have to be picked up from local authority funds.

The Director of Learning and Inclusion confirmed that he would ensure any service benefitting from de-delegated funding would bring a report to Schools Forum in future.

ii. High Needs Block

The Head of Finance confirmed that an overspend of £5.8m had occurred in the High Needs Block. After non-recurring items such as Children's Centre Teachers and EIP Behaviour Partnership were removed, the recurring overspend was currently £5m. The Department for Education had provided some funding to partially mitigate the pressure in this area, but only £886,000 extra had been received.

One of the main reasons behind the overspend was the continued increase in the number and cost of mainstream top-ups. When the system was introduced in 2013/14, it had a budget of £3.75m. By 2018/19 this had increased to £8.3m and supported 1,215 pupils.

The trend was obvious, with more pupils meeting the SEN threshold and overall costs far exceeding allocated funding. In future, the DfE required an action plan to be developed if the deficit exceeded 1% of the total High Needs Block allocation.

In view of the pressures in this area, a review of the High Needs Block was underway. The level of top-up payments would inevitably be reconsidered as part of that process. It was expected that proposals would be brought forward in September, with a consultation period required.

Special school representatives raised concerns regarding the deficit positions a number of their schools were facing. It was queried what action would be taken to address this situation, together with historical inequities in funding. The Director of Learning and Inclusion confirmed that a report would be brought to Schools Forum, including the local authority's response to concerns that had been raised.

iii. School revenue balances

Total balances in Leicester were £15.28m, virtually unchanged overall compared to the previous year. Fewer schools had deficit balances, and 63 had a surplus balance. The Head of Finance noted that Schools Forum had indicated in September that it did not want any clawback applied for two years.

Members queried whether the local authority would be contacting schools with large surplus balances to discuss the position. The Head of Finance confirmed that a “light touch” approach was adopted, bearing in mind the pressure on resources available.

However, members recalled that Forum had previously reached a consensus that lessons could be learned from these examples, and far more commentary on financial management was now being included in the peer review work that was ongoing in schools.

Academy members confirmed that their accounts were published on 31 December each year, and members agreed that, as a city that embraced collegiate working, it would be beneficial for schools and academies to work together to learn lessons from all the data that was available.

7. Proposed meeting dates for 2019/20 academic year

The proposed meeting dates for 2019/20 were agreed.

It was also confirmed that the draft of the de-delegation consultation exercise would be brought to the September meeting for consideration.

8. Election of Chair of Schools Forum

As Jim Cook was stepping down from the role, a new Chair was required. Glenys Mulvany was prepared to continue her role as Vice Chair.

Jessica Edmonds was proposed as Chair by Glenys Mulvany and was seconded by Jane Ridgewell. She was then elected unopposed by members.

9. Any other business

i) Training for new Schools Forum members

The Chair noted that a number of new members had recently joined Forum, and a query had been raised as to what training could be provided.

It was agreed that the formal constitution document and the induction guide would be re-circulated to all members for information.

Action: Clerk

A training session was arranged to start at 12noon on Thursday 26 September at the Soar Valley Training Centre, ending immediately before the main Forum commenced at 1pm. Content would be supplied by the Chair and the Finance team. Lunch would be provided for members who wished to attend this session.

It was agreed the Clerk would contact all members to establish who wished to attend, to allow for appropriate catering arrangements to be made.

Action: Clerk

ii) Primary pupil numbers

Members were advised that a presentation had recently been prepared by Richard Sword, Director of Capital Programmes, detailing primary pupil place plans for the coming years. It was agreed that this would be circulated to all Schools Forum members for information.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 2.45pm.