

LINCOLNSHIRE SCHOOLS' FORUM
18 JANUARY 2024

PRESENT:

Josh Greaves (Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Wellspring Academy Trust) (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair)

Alan Howe (Governor, Sutton on Sea County Primary School), Anthony Stevens (Governor, The Holt Primary School, Skellingthorpe), Professor Ken Durrands CBE (Governor, The King's School, Grantham), Andrew Everard (Chair of Governors, University Academy Long Sutton), Jo Slessor (Governor, Carres Grammar School, Sleaford), Steve Baragwanath (Executive Principal, University Academy Holbeach), Philip Dickinson (Principal, Louth Academy), Simon Pickett (Head Master, The King's School, Grantham), Chris Fitzpatrick (Head Teacher, Tall Oaks Academy Trust), Tristan Revell (Head Teacher, Malcolm Sargent Primary School), Josh Greaves (Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Wellspring Academy Trust) (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Andrew Watts (NEU), Julia Merivale (Manager, Trinity Day Nursery) and Heather Marks (Vice-Principal, Boston College),

Officers in attendance:-

Elizabeth Bowes (Strategic Finance Manager, Schools Finance Team), Mark Popplewell (Head of Finance (Children's Services)), Martin Smith (Assistant Director for Children's Education), Emily Wilcox (Democratic Services Officer), Geraldine Willders (Head of Service - School Strategy), Kate Capel (Children's SEND Locality Manager), Sheridan Dodsworth (Head of SEND) and Geraldine O'Neill (Lead Consultant - Early Years Entitlement)

22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence had been received from Amy Stancer, Callum Clay, Michele Anderson, Gavin Booth, Lea Mason and Peter Tomlinson.

23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were declared at this point in the meeting.

24 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 5 OCTOBER 2023

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2023 be approved as a correct record.

25 SCHOOL FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS 2024/25

Consideration was given to a report by Strategic Finance Manager, Schools Finance Team which invited the Forum to consider the schools funding arrangements for 2024/25, as detailed in the report at pages 11-34 of the agenda pack. A supplementary report had also been circulated which included updates relating to the affordability gap of the mainstream schools National Funding Formula (NFF).

The Forum was advised of the background to the NFF and the Government's funding intentions for 2024/25. The fundamentals principles of the Government's NFF were not changing for 2024/25 and Members were directed to pages 19-20 of the report where the key NFF updates were detailed. It was noted that for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2024/25, the Council was to continue adopting the NFF in 2024/25, subject to affordability. The October 2023 schools census which was used for 2024/25 mainstream schools budgets had continued to see growth in both Free School Meals (FSM) and FSMs Ever 6 with the cost of living challenges being a contributing factor to this.

The Supplementary Paper explained that the overall affordability gap shortfall was £1.459m to adopt the NFF in full including a 0.5% minimum funding guarantee (MFG). The Council was unable to set an affordable formula, the LA would therefore continue to adopt the same principles for 2024/25 when addressing affordability issues of the Schools block. The following steps were applied: to reduce the growth element of Schools block budget by £1.236m, and the remaining £0.223m shortfall was to be addressed through a downward adjustment of 0.072% of the Key Stage Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) values from the Government's NFF rates in 2024/25. Appendix A also provided a funding comparison of the Government's Notional NFF factors for 2023/24 to 2024/25.

It was reported that the Council had conducted its annual review of the DSG central budgets, and areas of refinements were focused on the demand-led budgets within the High Needs block. The forecast in-year overspend on high needs would need to be met from available DSG reserves.

Consideration was given to the report and during the discussion the following points were recorded:

- The Forum were pleased that Lincolnshire was not yet in a deficit position on its DSG, however the Forum acknowledged the challenges raised about the rise in demand for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) places and the forecasted in-year deficit in 2024/25 on the High Needs block .
- High level benchmarking on funding arrangements had been undertaken, along with engagement with other local authorities on ways to mitigate financial challenges. Officers assured Members that the Council would seek to secure a sustainable budget in the medium-term whilst continuing to support children with SEND needs.
- Members acknowledged the significant amount of building work carried out to increase the number of SEND places available within the County and lessen the need

for external places. The significant impact these works had on the budget was noted, with a capital spend of 50% above the original budget for the programme due to school conditions and rising construction costs.

- Officers advised that although the work had been positive in meeting some of the need for places, it was acknowledged that there was a significant demand for SEND places which could not be met by The Building Communities of Specialist Provision programme. Significant work was ongoing to identify the needs of provision across different localities to ensure support is provided in a structured way. Officers noted that a Schools block transfer had not previously been sought to the High Needs block, officers were keen to seek the views of Members regarding this in future meetings, along with several other options to manage need.
- There was no impact from the proposed deduction to the School Growth Fund as officers had reviewed and determined new and existing re-organisation costs for 2024/25 along with including some flexibility to respond to any further re-organisations that may be necessary from September 2024
- Assurance was given that a low-risk, low-impact approach was adopted to the mainstream funding formula to meet the remainder of the affordability gap by the 0.072% reduction to the Key Stage AWPU values.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted;
2. That the Council's proposals of continuing to adopt the national funding formula and steps to address an affordability gap be supported;
3. That the disapplication request for the continuation of the primary schools rent factor relating to schools premises within Lincolnshire's current local formula under the exceptional circumstances criteria be agreed;
4. That the proposals relating to a number of centrally held budgets be agreed.

26 EARLY YEARS NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA

During this item, Tristan Revell declared a personal interest as the Director of a Childcare Centre.

Consideration was given to a report by the Sustainability and Development Manager, which invited the Forum to consider a report which provided a summary of the funding and distribution of the Early Years National Funding Formula and Childcare Reforms for 2024/25 and sought agreement on the Local Authority's proposals relating to the allocation and distribution of the centrally retained budgets. Further details could be found within the report. An updated report had been circulated.

The DfE had published the final budgets on 29 November 2023, which was later than planned. All associated technical notes and operational guidance had been reviewed and used to implement the funding changes for the next financial year.

Consideration was given to the report and during the discussion the following points were recorded:

- The Forum raised concerns over the challenges faced by early years settings as a result of a lack of funding provision, increased costs and recruitment challenges, which were significant and unsustainable.
- Officers recognised the difficulties faced by early years providers and emphasised that the Local Authority was doing as much as possible to support settings, including supporting different business models and cost implications to support and maintain sustainable provision.
- Officers also acknowledged the recruitment and retention pressures and assured Members that they continued to lobby the Government for further funding to support provision.
- Concerns over a lack of sufficiency and deficit of provision were highlighted. The Local Authority were supporting the development of new places and were using funds delivered as part of Childcare Reforms to build on the lack of places where needed.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted;
2. That the Local Authority's proposals for centrally retained funding be agreed.

27 ALTERNATIVE PROVISION ARRANGEMENTS

During this item, Josh Greaves declared a personal interest as the Deputy Chief Executive Officer for a trust which delivered Alternative Provision arrangements.

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Service for Inclusion, which provided a summary of the Alternative Provision (AP) arrangements in Lincolnshire for 2022/23, as detailed in the report at pages 35-44 of the agenda pack.

During the discussion, the following points were recorded:

- Members raised concerns over the frequency of pupil suspensions and the impact this could also have on other pupils' learning, budgets and to mid-year school admissions, particularly with an increase on mid-year admissions for KS4 pupils.
- It was suggested that consideration and reward be given to schools who were more inclusive and accepted pupils despite challenges.
- Members acknowledge the intention of the Fair Access Protocol but highlighted the significant disruption that could be caused as a result.
- Members were advised that mid-year admissions were higher than ever with no real rationale other than school dissatisfaction. Officers acknowledge that work schools were working hard to be as inclusive as possible and recognised the challenges faced within the high needs block.
- The impact that challenging behaviour on staff was also highlighted.
- It was clarified that the data provided within the report was only for Lincolnshire Schools.

- The challenges in getting some families to engage in the exclusions process were emphasised. It was suggested that additional financial and family support would have a positive impact on communities.
- Officers were pleased that Lincolnshire's involvement in the Pathfinder national pilot programme would bring additional funding to enhance and adapt the current system. It was acknowledged that with the right support outcomes were better, however the Local Authority was faced with a challenge to deliver statutory functions as a priority which led to a lack of funding to deliver early intervention works.
- Members requested to see a breakdown of data in terms of gender in future reports, as well as comparisons between high levels of special educational needs compared to the funding offered and achievement and attendance data.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and the comments made be recorded for consideration.

28 SUPPLEMENTARY TO THE ANNUAL REPORT ON SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (JUNE 2023)

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Service – SEND, which provided an overview of the up-to-date position in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and additional information that was unavailable when the last Annual Report on SEND was presented to the Forum. The full report could be found at pages 45-54 of the agenda pack.

During the discussion, the following points were recorded:

- A large proportion of the need for SEND provision had been attributed to individuals with autism, which was also impacted by the challenges faced due to delays in diagnosis. It was hoped that the new All Age Autism Strategy would support families and schools with some of the challenges currently experienced. The strategy was now live and progressing in a positive way to support families and adults.
- Members of the Forum acknowledged the serious challenges for SEND needs in early years settings. Officers were working on future proofing schools and workforce development to ensure needs could be met in mainstream settings where possible.
- It was hoped that family hubs could help families in accessing support.
- Assurance was provided that challenges in diagnosis and waiting times were being addressed by the Lincolnshire Integrated Care Board.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and the comments made be recorded for consideration.

29 ACADEMIES AND TRUST UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report by the Strategic Finance Lead – Children’s Services, which provided an update on the latest position regarding the number of Maintained Schools and Academies. The full report could be found at pages 55-58 of the agenda pack.

During the discussion the following points were recorded:

- As the number of multi-academy trusts was now significantly higher, it was suggested that data be split between multi and single academy trusts in future reports.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

30 LINCOLNSHIRE SCHOOLS' FORUM WORK PROGRAMME

The Forum were invited to consider the proposed work programme, as set out at pages 59-62 of the agenda pack.

RESOLVED

That the work programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 3.57 pm