

## Schools' forum minutes - Leicester City Council

Minutes of the virtual Microsoft Teams meeting held on the 31 January 2024.

### Present

#### Schools Members

	Name
Mainstream Academies	Jane Ridgewell, Mike Hobbs, Rose Angus, Amelia Smith
Special Academies	~
Special School Governors	Lynne Folwell
Special School Heads	Sarah Osborne
Secondary School Head Representatives	Anna White, Farhan Adam
Secondary School Governor Representatives	Sabera Seedat
Primary School Governors	Glenys Mulvany, Sue Welford, Liam Mahoney
Primary School Head representatives	Karl Stewart, Richard McKenzie
Pupil Referral Unit	Shaun Whittingham

#### Non-School members

	Name
Teaching Unions	Jennifer Day
School Support Staff Unions	Samuel Randfield (Chair)
16-19 Providers	~
Early Years (private, voluntary or independent) providers	Matthew Leedham

#### In Attendance

	Role
Simon Walton	Principal Accountant, Finance – Leicester City Council
Martin Judson	Head of Finance – Leicester City Council
Sophie Maltby	Director of SEND, Education and Early Help – Leicester City Council
Tracie Rees	Director for Programmes, Social Care and Education - – Leicester City Council
Cllr Vi Dempster	Lead Member for Education – Leicester City Council
Robyn Cooper	Clerk to Schools' Forum – Leicester City Council

Prior to the start of the meeting, introductions were made and new members were welcomed to Schools' Forum.

### **1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received and accepted from Matt Potts.

### **2. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest made in the business to be transacted.

### **3. Minutes of the previous meeting (22 November 2023)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2023 were accepted as an accurate record.

### **4. Matters arising from the minutes**

The update on the High Needs Block recovery plan was included on the agenda.

### **5. Dedicated Schools Grant budgets 2024/2025**

The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget report had been shared. Martin Judson explained that the report covered the DSG allocation update from the DfE across all blocks:

- Schools block
- Central Schools Services Block
- Early Years Block (including outcome of the consultation on the expanded early provision local formula and the revised rates)
- High Needs Block

Martin Judson highlighted the recommendations outlined in points 1- 13 in section 2 of the report and the summary table (Table 1) outlining the allocations.

Martin Judson explained that the overall allocation was £452.7 million in 2024/25.

#### **Schools Block**

Martin Judson explained that the allocation of schools' block DSG was generated from the census in October 2023. He stated that primary pupil numbers were up slightly for the first time in the last 4 years and secondary pupil numbers were up by 3%, which meant an overall increase of 1.2%.

Martin Judson highlighted that the DfE had adjusted the formula to include the mainstream schools additional grant (MSAG), which was a separate grant in 2022/23. This was £10.2 million, which was the increase of 3.1%, £333m compared to £323m in 2022/23.

Martin Judson highlighted that the DfE would be providing a 'teachers' pay additional grant' as in 2022/23 to cover the pay increase. He also highlighted that there would be another separate grant from the DfE to cover the increase in employer contributions rates to the teachers' pension scheme. He stated that there had been no details of this yet.

## **Central Schools Services Block**

Martin Judson explained that the central school services block (CSSB) was intended to fund services or expenditure which was previously classified as either historic commitments or those which were funded by the former Education Services Grant plus an allowance for historic teachers' pension and pay increases. He explained that for Leicester City Council is for legacy premature retirement costs. He explained that there had been a reduction in the grant in the last 2 years (40%), however the payment had continued at the same rate. He stated that they were always short on this funding stream.

## **Early Years Block**

Martin Judson explained that the Early Years block saw the biggest changes. He explained that for 3- and 4-year-old provision, the allocation included the increased hourly rate (£5.51, a 4.4% increase on the September 2023 rate of £5.28). Martin Judson explained that the 2-year-old provision had been expanded to cover working parents (from April 2024) and from September 2024 also cover provision for 9 months to 2 years (also working parents). He stated that there was a part year allocation for the 9 months - 2-year-old provision.

Martin Judson explained that the allocation for the 2-year-old and under 2s now included early years pupil premium and disability access fund, which had not previously made available. He stated that the 2-year-old disadvantaged funding, which was a separate grant paid last year, had been incorporated into the new rate from April 2024.

Martin Judson highlighted that because of the expanded provision the funding had increased from £24.5 million to £25.8 million.

## **High Needs Block**

Martin Judson explained that the funding allocation had increased by 3.3%. He explained that this increase was significantly lower than previous years but there had been pre-warning of this by the DfE.

## **Local Budgets**

### **Schools Block**

Martin Judson explained that the National Funding Formula (NFF) adopted in 2018/2019, however this was not enforced completely. He explained that the ESFA has not taken over directly distributing funding, although that was the intention, because some other local authorities need to move closer to the NFF.

Martin Judson highlighted Appendix B, which outlined the NFF rates.

Martin Judson explained that property rates were now paid directly to the LA from the EFSA, and this would continue this year. He explained that this was a notional amount (estimate made by the LA) and they would share the actual cost at the end of the year.

Martin Judson explained that PFI funding was up by 10.4%.

Martin Judson explained that a national funding formula had been introduced for split site funding (previously a local formula). He explained that the local formula was an initial payment of £100,000, which reduced annually to £50,000 (Mainstream only and 40% of the PAN was to be taught on each site). He explained that the new national formula was more generous with a guaranteed lump sum of £53,700 and an element paid on distance capped at £26,900. He stated that there were 5 schools that qualified.

Martin Judson explained that in terms of growth funding, 2 free schools continued to expand their year groups (Avanti and Brook Mead) increasing numbers in September 2024. He stated that these numbers were not included in the October 2023 census and therefore the allocation was short by £1.2 million. He explained that the DfE allocation for in year growth is £2.53m and £0.58m of this is committed to bulge classes in existing schools. He explained that this left £1.95 million, which would be used to fund the £1.2 million for Avanti and Brook Mead and then the surplus balance of £750,000 would be allocated to the overall funding available for schools that would otherwise have seen a lower gain in funding under the NFF.

Martin Judson explained that the DfE set the minimum per pupil funding (MPPL) amount or floor level funding, which was a protection applied before they looked at the minimum funding guarantee (MFG) protection. He explained that the same as last year there were 6 primaries that required additional funding to bring their NFF calculated funding back up to the floor level. Martin Judson explained the MFG and how it was calculated. He stated that this year it had been set at 0%, which allowed more schools to retain their gain under the NFF. He explained that a 0% MFG means that gains would be capped at 1.62%.

Martin Judson highlighted Table 2, which summarised the changes to school budgets in relation to gains/losses, Number on Roll, MPPL and MFG protection. He took the Forum through the figures including average total per pupil budget and year on year increase (%).

Martin Judson drew attention to the de-delegated budgets outlined in the report in Table 3.

### **Central Schools Services Block**

Martin Judson drew attention to the Central Schools Services Block allocations outlined in Table 4.

### **Early Years Block**

Martin Judson drew attention to Table 5, which outlined the early years local formula rates (base rates and supplements).

Martin Judson explained that they had consulted on the proposal that the funding formula for the expanded provision would use the same formula currently used for 3/4 year olds. He stated that there had been a 50% response rate from providers. He highlighted the results outlined in the report. Martin Judson explained that there was some uncertainty on the measure for the deprivation supplement, the LA felt that

using the income measure of deprivation (IMD) was appropriate as it was consistent with what was used for 3 / 4-year-olds.

Martin Judson highlighted the additional central costs which would be incurred to manage the expanded provision (£316,000 to £420,000) and this needed to be approved by Schools' Forum. He stated that this would be incorporated when calculating the final rates.

Martin Judson highlighted the rates outlined in Table 5 and took the Forum through the figures.

Martin Judson highlighted that the DfE had provided a capital grant (£558k) to LAs to support the expansion of provision and also the wraparound care offer for primary aged children. He stated that the Early Years Development Team will share some more information about how use the funding shortly.

Martin Judson explained that the ESFA had assumed that doubling in the current 2-year provision would be needed. He stated that the Early Years Development Team had done some work on capacity planning and provision for 9-months – 2 years would need some additional places. He stated that for September 2025, when the offer expanded to up to 30 hours (from 15) for all eligible, more significant increases in places was anticipated.

Martin Judson explained that grant funding of up to £1.9 million had been provided to the LA to support the development of the increased wraparound provision. He stated that the LA would start working on this with providers to work out the best approach.

### **High Needs Block**

Martin Judson explained that allocation was only up by 3.3%, compared to the 10% increases in the last 4 years. He stated that they knew that there would be a drop from this year and there would be no likelihood of it increasing significantly beyond that. He stated that the 10% increases had started too late for Leicester as demand had already outstripped allocation. He explained that prior to the increased allocations the in-year deficit was around £6 million. He explained that the additional allocations offset the future years growth in demand and inflation and kept the in-year deficit stable. He stated that reserves had been used and the cumulative deficit on the DSG generated by the High Needs Block stood at £6 million at the end of March 2023.

Martin Judson explained that the number of EHCPs prior to the pandemic had been relatively stable at 330/340 annually (0.64% of the mainstream population). He explained that from 2020 these increased and last year the number of agreed plans was 755 (1.6% of the mainstream population). He stated that they could not continue to fund plans at a rate of 1.34% of the mainstream population, it was financially unsustainable. He stated that they would have to see a different approach and reduce those funded directly from the High Needs Block.

Martin Judson explained that they were in discussions with the DfE about the position and they recognised that it was unsustainable. He explained that they had spoken to the DfE in September. He explained that they were strengthening the

project plan, which would go through the executive and scrutiny. He stated that an additional Schools' Forum meeting would have to be arranged to go through this document.

Martin Judson explained that the 2023/24 in-year deficit was now forecast to nearly £8 million due to higher numbers of funded pupils in mainstream. He took the Forum through the figures outlined in the report.

Questions were invited on the report:

*Farhan Adam - (re 4.22 in the report) Would the DfE allocation for in-year growth remain the same? Were more free schools/free school places anticipated?*

Martin Judson explained that the calculation did not look at Free Schools and the DfE does know that. He stated that they could take them into account and provide additional funding, but they did not and provided this through the growth fund. He explained that the calculation was based on increases in pupil numbers in certain areas between the census dates. It does not consider reductions. Martin Judson explained that they used that for the increase in free school numbers in year and bulge classes. He explained that it had been used previously for bulge classes.

*Mike Hobbs - (re High Needs Block) The 3.3% increase, was that the same increase that schools will get for banding and top up or was this unlikely because of the deficit?*

Martin Judson stated that the DfE had not specified any percentage increases unlike last year (i.e., providers to get 3.4%) but there was a higher allocation increase (10%). He stated that they had been quiet on that this year. He stated that they would come to a conclusion on price inflation based on different provision in the High Needs Block.

*Sarah Osborne - You said the number of EHCPs needed to be reduced, could you explain what you mean by that? If a child needed a plan, they need one.*

Martin Judson explained that what he meant was a decrease in the number funded by the High Needs Block. He explained that the recovery plan would be covered in the additional Schools' Forum meeting.

*Sarah Osborne - When we met in December (CLASS) you talked about meeting individually with special school headteachers about funding for schools. Would this happen before discussions on the recovery plan or after it had been shared with Schools' Forum?*

Martin Judson explained that this would be prior to that. He stated that this was a separate discussion to the recovery plan. He stated that this would be scheduled in before the end of the financial year.

Sophie Maltby reassured that the statutory assessment process would always be needs led and was a statutory duty of the LA and they would never not issue a plan if it was needed.

*Jane Ridgewell - How will the plans that could not be afford due to the deficit be provided?*

Martin Judson explained that this discussion would form part of the additional meeting.

### **Voting**

All members of Schools' Forum were eligible to vote on the recommendations.

*Approve the recommended growth fund funding rates as per the DfE.*

13 in favour

0 against

0 abstentions

Approved unanimously.

*Approve the expenditure to be funded from the central school services block (£2.2m).*

13 in favour

0 against

0 abstentions

Approved unanimously.

*Approve central expenditure of £0.42m to be funded from the early years block.*

14 in favour

0 against

0 abstentions

Approved unanimously.

## **6. Update on High Needs Block recovery plan**

Martin Judson explained that when the plan had been finalised an additional Schools' Forum meeting would be arranged. This would be circulated to all members.

**ACTION: Additional Schools' Forum meeting to be arranged.**

## **7. SEND Home to School and College Travel Policy**

Samuel Randfield explained that the changes to the SEND Home to School and College Travel Policy had been agreed some time ago and were now being implemented by the LA and communications had gone out to schools. The letter sent to parents had been shared with Schools' Forum members. Samuel Randfield invited questions.

*Sarah Osborne - What happens if children could not get the transport to their local secondary special schools? There was fear from headteachers that these pupils might not attend, or parents will want them to go to local colleges. Had local colleges voiced any concerns or had been any discussions about expansion in light of that?*

Tracie Rees explained that they had been in discussions with Leicester College about expanding provision and how they could provide 16+ support. She stated that in terms of young people that could not get transport to existing provision, there had

been a number of enquiries about this, and a number of colleges offered bursaries. She also highlighted that there was the opportunity to undertake travel training, which the LA promoted with all schools and offered. She stated that they wanted to encourage independence for our young people. Tracie Rees stated that it was a difficult one and she knew families were not happy about the changes because of the impact. She stated that they would do what they could to support families to ensure their young person went to school. She stated that they were in the early days of implementing policy. She stated that they would complete a FAQs sheet and share this with all schools.

Sarah Osborne stated that this would be helpful. She stated that there was a general concern about children not attending. She stated that they also worried about those more physically disabled students and the difficulty for them.

*Sarah Osborne - In the letter, it mentioned exceptions? I am not clear on who they were, would this be answered on the FAQs?*

Tracie Rees explained that for some young people (16-19 provision) travel was included in their plan. She stated that this would be where the LA deemed they needed support. She stated that so far 12 had been identified and the families had been contacted. Tracie Rees explained that for those who were continuing in September 2024 they would provide a personal transport budget but this was only a handful of students.

*Sarah Osborne - Was there an appeals process for parents?*

Tracie Rees explained that there was a generic email which parents could contact. She stated that they had received a number of enquiries already and they would respond to these. She stated that the exceptions were limited.

*Jane Ridgewell - (Referring back to appendix C in 2024/25 Dedicated Schools Grant report) What did the SEND transport cover?*

Martin Judson explained that the £360,000 was historic. He stated that they had been allowed previously to charge for SEN transport costs. He stated that when they switched to High Needs Blocks the amount was capped at what they were charging at that time. He stated that the overall SEND transport costs were £12 million.

## **8. Any other business**

There was no further business.