

Schools' forum minutes – Leicester City Council

Minutes of the virtual Microsoft Teams meeting held on the 20 November 2024

Present

Schools Members

	Name
Mainstream Academies	Jane Ridgewell, Mike Hobbs, Julie Robinson.
Special Academies	~
Special School Governors	Lynne Folwell
Special School Heads	Sarah Osborne
Secondary School Head Representatives	Farhan Adam, Anna White
Secondary School Governor Representatives	
Primary School Governors	Glenys Mulvany, Sue Welford, Liam Mahoney
Primary School Head representatives	Karl Stewart, Matt Potts
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	

In Attendance

	Role
Cllr Elaine Pantling	Assistant Mayor for Education and SEND– Leicester City Council
Simon Walton	Principal Accountant, Finance – Leicester City Council
Colin Sharpe	Head of Finance – Leicester City Council
Melanie Gaiderman	Lead for School Improvement – Leicester City Council
Shelley Piercy	SEND Inclusion Transformation Manager – Leicester City Council
Jessica Nicholls	Head of Service, SEND Support Services – Leicester City Council

Jo Poynton

HR Policy and Projects Manager –
Leicester City Council

Natalie Tegala-Patel

Governor Support Officer – Leicester
City Council

Robyn Cooper

Clerk to Schools' Forum – Leicester City
Council

Item 7 Any other Business

*City Catering service changes – financial and organisational implications for schools
(Liam Mahoney - on behalf of maintained primaries)*

Samuel Randfield explained the representatives invited to attend to respond on this item were not attending. He explained that Cllr Elaine Pantling would speak to the item at the start of the meeting. Any queries would be captured and carried over as a matter's arising for the next meeting.

Cllr Elaine Pantling gave her apologies that there was no one to speak to the item and she understood it was an important issue. She stated that all the impacted schools had been sent a letter yesterday explaining the position fully. She stated that she knew it was not what schools wanted to hear, however the decision had been thought through and examined properly. Cllr Pantling explained that the letter provided an option for schools, headteachers and/or business managers to meet with Andrew Shilliam, Sophie Maltby and herself. She stated that the letter apologised for how the decision was communicated and that it had not always been clear. Cllr Pantling stated that not all schools were part of City Catering. She stated that there was a question being asked at full council on City Catering which she would be speaking to.

Liam Mahoney stated that he understood that not all representatives at Schools' Forum bought into City Catering, however he was raising it because of the impact on maintained schools' budgets due to a decision of the council. He stated that on the Friday 25 October 2024 the Director of Corporate Services wrote to headteachers at 5:50pm informing them of the increase of paid meals and the free school meal (FSM) element. He stated that this was a cost over and above the funding schools received for free school meals, so the council were passing on the difference to delegated school budgets. Liam Mahoney highlighted that some schools were also paying additional transportation costs and the capital money previously available to invest in kitchens had disappeared. He stated that schools were now paying for the historic mismanagement of City Catering and DSG budgets were being used to top up the FSM element. He stated that when Schools Forum look at the list of schools in deficit, the council will have driven some of those. Liam Mahoney added that communication was an issue, and half term messages were not acceptable, and the council were the employer of staff in schools. He also highlighted that there were

contractual implications in decisions. Liam Mahoney stated that he thought it was a disgraceful decision and schools were being disproportionately punished for the service not being operated in the right way.

Samuel Randfield highlighted his disappointment that none of the officers were attending this meeting, with plenty of notice. He stated that it had not been explained to him why they were not in attendance. He stated that he was not happy with the communication.

Jennifer Day stated that she endorsed everything Liam Mahoney had said from the conversations she'd had with headteachers. She stated that the impact had not been thought through.

Cllr Pantling stated that she understood the difficult position and she had fought the corner for the schools, however the decision had been taken out of her hands. She stated that she thought the discussions needed to take place with the schools involved, not Schools Forum.

Sue Welford stated that the most important part was the FSM element and the impact of that on schools. She highlighted they were maintained school representatives on the Forum, and the schools impacted were mainly maintained, that was why it was an issue for Schools Forum. She highlighted that it would impact outturns and how those schools were judged. Cllr Pantling stated that she would take that back. She thanked everyone for listening.

Cllr Pantling left the meeting

ACTION – Item to be carried over to the next meeting.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Sabera Sedat, Amelia Smith, Matthew Leedham and Sophie Maltby.

2. Declarations of interest

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

3. Minutes of the previous meeting (2 October 2024)

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2024 were accepted as an accurate record.

4. Matters arising from the minutes.

Communication of Schools' Forum decisions – Samuel Randfield explained that he had discussed how to communicate discussion and decisions made in Schools Forum with Sophie Maltby. He stated that they had discussed a few different avenues of communication:

- A shortened version of the key discussions and decisions to be shared with various stakeholders via Forum members, Extranet bulletins.
- Short briefing at Keeping in Touch (KiT) meetings.

Karl Stewart highlighted that it was about being transparent and anyone interested could always investigate further if they had the key points. Julie Robinson suggested that written briefings would be better than the KiT meetings as she was not sure how well these were attended. Karl Stewart stated that he shared a brief document on decisions/discussions at the admissions forum and shared these via LPP.

ACTIONS

- **Karl Stewart to share an example of the briefing and check Schools' Forum members were happy with the level of content.**
- **Samuel Randfield would discuss options further with Sophie Maltby and the Clerk.**

5. De-delegation consultation conclusion

The de-delegation consultation analysis report had been shared with the paperwork for the meeting. Simon Walton took the Forum through the results of the consultation. He highlighted that 14 out of 42 schools had responded, which was low but an increase on the previous year.

Simon Walton explained that there had been some confusion around the trade union strand at secondary level and a misunderstanding around the pay as you go option for academies, which no longer existed. He stated that Anna White would be feeding back to the Forum separately.

Simon Walton highlighted the summary of the results and drew attention to the specific comments.

Voting Primary

Samuel Randfield reminded all parties that only those representing the primary maintained sector were eligible to vote.

Social, Emotional and Mental Health Team (SEMH Team) for Leicester City Primary Schools

5 in favour

0 against

Approved unanimously.

Primary School Improvement

5 in favour

0 against

Approved unanimously.

Assessment and moderation

5 in favour
0 against
Approved unanimously.

LA Strategic School Improvement

5 in favour
0 against
Approved unanimously.

Closing the Gap.

5 in favour
0 against
Approved unanimously.

Whatever It Takes

5 in favour
0 against
Approved unanimously.

Staff costs for trade union facility time

5 in favour
0 against
Approved unanimously.

Secondary

Anna White explained that there were two strands that secondary schools de-delegated - Staff Costs for Trade Union facility time and LA Strategic School Improvement. She stated that a separate meeting of the secondary headteachers had taken place to understand current who paid in and current use. She explained that a vote had taken place by the 6 secondary maintained headteachers:

- Staff Costs for Trade Union facility time - 6 voted to cease de-delegation.
- LA Strategic School - 6 voted to cease de-delegation.

Anna White explained that there had been 1 request for a consideration that the complaints handling service could continue to be bought into separately.

Samuel Randfield – Was any narrative provided around the decision?

Anna White explained that it was pressure on school budgets. She stated that the vast majority of secondary schools were academies, and they were not paying in and instead using internal union staff and then for matters more serious using regional union colleagues. She stated that in terms of strategic school improvement, some schools were already paying and valued the work of Melanie Gaiderman and made it clear that it was not personal, but rather a financial decision. She stated that the work liaising with Ofsted and the DfE over school complaints was valued by schools, which is why they requested that continued if possible.

Jennifer Day raised concerns that the decision from secondary headteachers came in after the consultation had finished. She stated that if trade unions put in a late response for a staffing restructure, for example, this would not be accepted.

Jennifer Day raised concerns on behalf of the teaching unions as to how secondary schools would fund their trade union representatives. She highlighted the example of an employment tribunal where 36 days leave for training was considered acceptable, which if this was needed for all school reps for each union would be a high cost. Jennifer Day highlighted that during Covid, the unions had a productive relationship with schools and the LA in relation to advice. She stated that they currently worked closely with the reps, and there were a number of trained reps in every school, but they were not trained to deal with major restructures, redundancies, dismissals etc. She explained that the lay officers provided consistency and undertook a lot of training on policies, which allowed them to support and challenge in processes such as redundancies. Jennifer Day asked whether all school reps would then need to attend meetings such as Schools and Settings and the TNC. She also highlighted that this could also lead to delays in processes if school reps could only be released on certain days. She highlighted that you could not expect full time teacher to keep up to date with employment law. Jennifer Day highlighted that it was a false economy and there was a major misunderstanding about what lay officers did during facilities time. She stated that she was deeply disappointed and would push hard to know how the schools would now use the public money that funded trade union facilities time.

Julie Robinson agreed with Jennifer Day about the misunderstanding. She stated that there would be a Trade Union Recognition Agreement (TURA) between the LA and unions, which would outline the guidance on the support provided. She asked whether it was possible to go against the agreement and whether schools would know how to draw up their own TURA. Jo Poynton stated that she was not aware of a recognition agreement for the teaching unions nor a facilities agreement. She stated that in terms of facilities, the status quo formed the agreement. Jo Poynton stated that this would need to be considered by schools in terms of time off for local reps.

Julie Robinson – Were secondary headteachers fully informed?

Anna White explained that they had met with Jo Poynton, Simon Walton, and Melanie Gaiderman. She clarified that the vote was returned during the consultation. She stated that the meeting was set up so headteachers could fully understand the implications of voting no. She stated that the vast majority of secondaries were not paying into the system.

Jennifer Day explained that other structures were in place for those who did not buy in, and they did not get the support. She stated that she had been in maintained schools regularly, supporting members that the trained in-school reps were not able to manage. She reiterated that it was a false economy, highlighting high HR costs

from external firms as well as then potential poor union advice. She highlighted concern that it could lead to potential tribunals.

Anna White explained that the main question had been if the majority of secondary schools were not paying in, what were the arrangements. She stated that there had been no mention of special arrangements, but rather schools were utilising their own internal union reps, releasing them with sufficient time to do their jobs properly. She stated that they would then utilise regional staff for more complex issues. Anna White stated that there was an acknowledgement that this did cause delay and was given as a downside.

Jo Poynton highlighted that 3 Trusts currently bought into the arrangement. Anna White noted that there was only 1 secondary school in those Trusts. Jennifer Day commented that it appeared that schools had decided, if academies don't buy in, they would not.

Farhan Adam stated that the issue was, the perception of inequality in terms of maintained schools paying the majority of union time that academies were benefiting from. He stated that a breakdown was needed and clarity around that perceived inequality. Jo Poynton explained that maintained schools and academies were charged on the same per pupil rate, which had reduced in the recent past. She stated that academies that did not buy in, did not get any service from the union reps that the budget funded. She stated that where schools did not buy in, the time was reduced accordingly.

Samuel Randfield asked secondary representatives if they were able to make the decision now on the 2 streams or whether an extraordinary meeting would need to be arranged following any clarifications/additional information. Farhan Adam stated that it would be appropriate to look at an alternate date. He stated that he would arrange a meeting with Anna White and then come back to Samuel Randfield.

ACTION:

A meeting for secondary representatives, relevant strand leads and trade union reps would be arranged in the next two weeks.

Melanie Gaiderman thanked Anna White for the feedback shared regarding strategic school improvement. She would take the request back in terms of the complaints work and highlighted that Sophie Maltby was also aware. She stated that it was highly unlikely that they would be able to provide that one element due to capacity to trade, however she would explore it with Sophie Maltby and the safeguarding in education team. Simon Walton explained that it would not be feasible to include it for the 2025/26 de-delegation due to timeframes so would be the following year if it was an option.

6. Update on High Needs Block recovery plan (verbal update)

Shelley Piercy provided a verbal update on the High Needs Management Recovery Plan. She explained that it had been written alongside finance and SEND support services. She explained that the plan had 6 aims. Shelley Piercy highlighted that they had a duty to address the deficit budget but were still committed to meeting the needs of children and young people. She highlighted that the funding from Government has not kept up with increased demand and there was a recognition that they were working in a broken system. She stated that the council had a cumulative deficit in the High Needs Block (HNB) and were ensuring a balance of meeting statutory duties and meeting need, whilst balancing that deficit and ensuring children and young people were able to thrive in education.

Shelley Piercy explained that the plan had been presented to the EFSA who were happy with the plan and aims to mitigate the spend in the HNB. She stated that they had sent the plan to City Mayor briefing and Childrens and Young People's Scrutiny on the 29 October 2024.

Shelley Piercy shared the 6 aims with Schools Forum and took them through the key points. She explained that it would take time as a change in culture had to happen. She stated that they were looking at it as one system and shifting resources to where they needed to be, whilst ensuring they were still providing that high level support.

Matt Potts – The plan looked good. You said you would be shifting resources, what will you be cutting back on?

Shelley Piercy stated that there was nothing in plan that looked at cutbacks, it was about looking at what they had, and it was being used. She explained that it was about being creative and innovative, for example an internal AP network had launched at primary level. She stated that they were utilising resources and celebrating successes, facilitating and sharing good practice.

Sarah Osborne – Has the High Needs Block Management Recovery Plan been shared with Schools Forum?

No.

Sarah Osborne – Was there a reason for that, last academic year, it was said that it would be shared over the summer?

Shelley Piercy explained that it had only just gone to scrutiny on the 29th October.

Sarah Osborne – Would it be shared now? Martin Judson started talking to Schools' Forum about it last December. It had not been shared with special school headteachers either. It had been said that there would be no significant expansion of special schools, but what about satellite hubs?

Shelley Piercy explained that it had been a recommendation from the SEND review, and it needed further unpicking. She stated that they would also need to include Michael Wilsher, Head of Education Sufficiency.

Sarah Osborne – So you're not aware of any plans for satellite hubs?

Shelley Piercy explained that this was not part of her remit but could take the query back to Michael Wilsher and Sophie Maltby.

Samuel Randfield – Were you in a position to share the plan in full for the next meeting?

Shelley Piercy stated that she could share it.

Jane Ridgewell – In terms of the timeline, did the plan and discussion with the ESFA require full cost recovery or had the deficit been sanctioned? It's that kind of information that Schools Forum will need as well as the detail of the plan.

Shelley Piercy explained that they had met with the ESFA in August and there was a statutory override until 2026. She stated that due to the change in Government they were not able to answer any other questions on this. She stated that they were happy to receive the recommendations in the transformation plan and the next meeting was in spring 2025. She stated that there had been recognition of the broken system. Jane Ridgewell stated that ultimately it would rely on partners to deliver the plan. Shelley Piercy explained that she had attended a CLASS meeting and would be attending LPP too. Jessica Nicholls stated that they were also looking to engage secondary headteachers too.

Jennifer Day highlighted that Martin Judson had stated that the High Needs Block funding formula was not fit for purpose and officers were working in those constraints. She appealed to Forum members to contact elected officials and get them to acknowledge that the system was not working and ask what they were going to do about it.

Shelley Piercy asked all Headteachers to reach out to the team on a survey on the High Needs Funding Block and pressures on schools to ensure schools had a voice into the DfE. She explained that they were meeting the DfE alongside Leicestershire and Rutland. She stated that there was still 9 months of funding for the Change Programme, and this was part of this work. She stated that they hoped to have a first draft of survey out before Christmas.

7. Any other business

- City Catering service changes – financial and organisational implications for schools (Liam Mahoney - on behalf of maintained primaries) – Covered at the start of the meeting.

- Samuel Randfield thanked Robyn Cooper for her support as Clerk to Schools Forum as this was her last meeting. Natalie Tegala-Patel would be taking over the role.
- Mike Hobbs highlighted concerns around the funding for 2025/2026 and that it was looking like it would not be as high as hoped. Colin Sharp highlighted that Simon Walton and other colleagues had sat in on a DfE briefing on funding and it looked like a complicated funding picture for next year. He stated that Simon Walton and colleagues would work through this once received. He stated that the DfE had been apologetic that the schools block settlement had come in later this year, and this had been due to the new Government.
- Liam Mahoney highlighted concerns around LCC staff attendance at the meetings and whether more could be done to encourage people to attend, e.g., move meetings if they clash with other council meetings. He highlighted that some attendees were volunteers. Samuel Randfield stated that he shared those concerns and would share them with Sophie Maltby.

2024/25 Dates

Wednesday 29 January 2025, 1pm to 3pm

Wednesday 18 June 2025 1pm to 3pm