

Schools Forum

Date: 7 November 2024

Time: 9.00 a.m.

Venue: Council Chamber,
Shirehall

Paper

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Public

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 20TH JUNE 2024 – HELD VIA MS TEAMS**Present****School Forum Members**

Bill Dowell (Chair)
John Hitchings – (Vice Chair)
Shelley Hurdley- Early Years
Mark Rogers – Primary Headteacher
Sian Lines – Diocese of Hereford
Andrew Smith – Independent Post 16
Sandra Holloway – Primary governor
Stephen Matthews - Primary Governor
Sarah North – Primary Headteacher
Sarah Godden - TrustEd
Alison Ashley- Special School Representative
James Pearson - TMBSS
Reuben Thorley – Secondary headteacher
Marilyn Hunt – Primary Headteacher
Sue Lovecy - Headteacher
John Boken – NEU
Rachel Williams – Primary Headteacher
Lisa Henshall – St Bart's Multi-Academy Trust

Members

Kirstie Hurst-Knight

Officers

David Shaw
Andy Nicholls
Stephen Waters
Karen Levell
Helen Owen

Observers

Roger Evans
Nick Bardsley

The chair welcomed all to the meeting.

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Carla Whelan.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes were accepted as a true record.

Stephen Matthews asked for clarification around the new childcare offer and wrap around capital grant funding, it was agreed that Steve Compton would recirculate the briefing.

- School Forum Slides including the link to the Delivering Better Value (DVB) resource pack circulated.
- Link to the Shropshire Ordinarily Available Provision (SOAP) framework to be circulated.
- Comparative finance Information and benchmarking postponed to the September Meeting.

DS

- Identify any Challenges/training needs related to SEND and supporting the increased range of SEND needs in mainstream.
– Alison Ashley had given the feedback to the National Teaching Schools Council. There is continued engagement with the DfE, However there are now changes happening with the schools council so there was no further feedback at this stage.
- Raise challenges regarding school and SEND funding with MPs and DfE to increase awareness of the challenges being faced. – MPs briefing drafted and completed in April 2024, the briefing has also been shared with Bill Dowell. The matter has also been raised formally with the DfE.

3. **Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring 2023-24**

Stephen Waters presented his paper.

- The 2023-24 outturn position for the DSG is a £4.486m in-year deficit.
- This deficit needs to be added to the £2.181m DSG surplus carried forward from 2023-24 resulting in a cumulative DSG deficit of £2.304m

Early Years Block

- The outturn position for the Early Years Block is a £0.087m overspend against a provisional budget of £17.868m.
- The overspend is explained by a £0.287m budget pressure on SEND support against a budget set of £0.600m. The demand experienced on this budget has grown in recent years with Shropshire seeing a growing number of children presenting with a range of developmental and emotional difficulties which require support.
- This position on the Early Years budget is provisional and could change once the final 2023-24 Early Years DSG allocation is published in July 2024

High Needs Block

- The outturn position for the High Needs Block is an in-year deficit of £4.128m against a centrally controlled High Needs Budget of £28.997m. This budget excludes the place funding element of the High Needs Block totalling £9.515m.

Independent Special schools

- Increase in demand shown by increase in numbers.
- Increase in average termly cost per placement. Typical placement cost at the most frequently used provider is £60,000 to 72,000 per annum. Over double the cost of a Shropshire special school.



- Increase in value of, and number of contributions to complex, Joint funded placements with social care and the Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- To counter this increase in demand for independent Special School placements we have increased top-up funding to mainstream schools, building capacity in SEND hubs attached to mainstream schools, increased top-up funding through an increase in banding levels in our 3 Special Schools and are providing a robust challenge around any placement decisions through the SEND team's commissioning and Procurement panel.

Top Up Funding to Special Schools

- An overspend £0.97m relates to top-up funding paid to Shropshire's special schools.
- Expenditure of £6.347m on top-up funding to Shropshire special schools is higher than previously forecast.

Top Up Funding to Mainstream Schools

- £0.258m relating to top-up funding paid to mainstream schools where expenditure totalled £5.943m in 2023-24. Representing an 18% increase compared to 2022-23.
- An increase in demand for top-up funding in mainstream settings mirrors the national picture. This figure includes the Graduation Support Pathway Payments as well as top-up funding.

SEN Support Services

- An overspend of £1.610m against this budget totalling £1.898m in 2023-24. The majority of the overspend relates to one-off staffing overspends, where additional staff have been employed, sometimes as agency workers to support the wider increase in demand.
- The Council's DSG financial position is moving from a cumulative surplus carried forward of £2.181m at the start of this financial year to a cumulative deficit of £2.304m at the end of this financial year.
- The 2024-25 provisional High Needs Block DSG allocation (before deductions) has been published. Shropshire's allocation is £42.188m representing a 5% increase compared to the 2023-24 allocation of £40.156m. Given that expenditure in 2023-24 on the High Needs Block increased by 26% or £9.048m compared to the 2022-23 figure of £34.854m, future expenditure growth is likely to outstrip future growth in High Needs Block DSG allocations.
- The High Needs Block DSG 3-year forecasting exercise undertaken in early 2023 forecasted that the council would



move to a DSG deficit position due to this shortfall in funding relative to increase in expenditure. There is an ongoing review of this 3 year forecast exercise to assess the extent by which future expenditure is likely to exceed future high needs block DSG income. This exercise will explore the plans that can be put in place to mitigate this, and timescale for delivery of these mitigations.

Marilyn Hunt asked whether and work has been done to compare the increase in DSG to similar local authorities.

David Shaw replied that yes, this work was being done and is part of the wider work that will be brought back at the September meeting.

David also pointed out that it is important to note that there is recoupment of costs from other authorities of around £373,000 and that the council have created around 200 additional special school places.

Sarah Godden raised the point of costs to pay agency staff and enquired whether there would be more permanent staff used in future. David Shaw said that this is something that the council is committed to improving.

Karan Levell added that they are linking with other local authorities to look at structures, strategies, and steps forward.

4. Special School Top-Up Bandings 23/24 and 24/25, including an overview of all current High Needs Banding Levels.

Karen Levell presented the paper.

Purpose and Background

- To inform Schools forum of the work that has been undertaken to align the top-up banding levels for children and young people with SEN attending Shropshire special schools.
- Special school places not only offer a lower cost alternative to independent places, but also allow pupils to be educated in their community. It is recognised that special schools are facing significant financial pressure due to increasing numbers of pupils with ever greater levels and complexities of need.
- Special Schools are funded from the High Needs Block - £10,000 per commissioned place, plus a top up for each child placed.
- 3 Special Schools in Shropshire – Severndale (415), Woodlands (82) & Keystone (90 rising to 120)
- Current funding arrangements for Severndale and Woodlands have been in place since 2014. Commissioned Place Funding and Top-Up rates remained unchanged.



- Different approaches across Special Schools – Severndale = banded. Woodlands & Keystone = single flat rate.

Banding Levels

Severndale – 4 levels

- Band A £1,000
- Band B £4,314
- Band C £11,696
- Band D £18,628

Woodlands & Keystone – flat rate £12,585

Severndale

- Concerns raised over insufficient funding to provide specialist provision, including level of staffing required to safely deliver the provision outlined in EHC plans. Challenges in managing School budgets within the current funding bands.
- Agreed action necessary between Local Authority and Trust to work together to ensure school was financially sustainable and able to provide good quality education to the Children and Young people.

Two Stage process:

- Firstly, working through annual review process with each individual pupil to confirm needs and appropriate banding for each CYP using Banding Criteria and back dating resulting banding changes to September 2023
- Secondly, review banding rates in line with local/ regional and national benchmarking to ensure school is safe and secure.

Severndale Review

- Full audit of the school
- Agreed minimum guarantee of staffing to keep school safe.
- Findings – too many children on wrong band and value of banding insufficient.

Proposed Funding for 2023-24					
Row Labels	2324 Numbers	% Split	Current		
			Banding Value	Sum of Banding Value	
Band A	0	0%	£1,000	0	
Band B	84	21%	£11,696	£982,464	
Band C	204.5	50%	£11,696	£2,391,832	
Band D	51.5	13%	£18,628	£959,342	
Band E	69.5	17%	£25,650	£1,782,675	
Grand Total	409.5			£6,116,313	
Commissioned	415		£10,000	£4,150,000	
TOTAL Top Up & Place				£10,266,313	

Woodlands

- Agreed minimum guarantee of staffing to keep school safe.



- Findings – too many children on wrong band and value of banding insufficient
- Agreed action necessary between Local Authority and Trust to work together to confirm number of commissioned places at 82 & move from flat rate top – up funding system to a 3 Band model reflective of pupil need.
- Firstly, developing banding descriptors for each level. Followed by alignment of pupils to the appropriate bands based on individual need resulting in pupils being placed on one of 3 bands.
- Secondly –providing additional top –ups within the banding – identification of pupils through SEN panel – working closely with Woodlands admissions team

Woodlands Review

Top up funding to be provided on a three-band pathway model (further detail of the three band descriptions has been provided)

Banding rates:

- Pathway 1: £12,585 34 students
- Pathway 2: £19,500 24 students
- Pathway 3: £26,000 24 students

Findings – disproportionate level of pupils at Pathway 3

Conclusion

- New banding rates reflective of continuum of provision and level of need
- Impact Forecast overspend on HNB from £4.5 m to £6m
- Reduced supply staff – more stability
- Seeing increasing confidence – more capacity to meet needs of complex pupils – reducing reliance on INMSS sector.
- Leading to prevention of external placements and increased scope for bringing pupils back

Alison Ashley pointed out the amount of work that Karen and her team have put into the work on Banding.

Marilyn hunt pointed out that the 3 different pathways may cause confusion.

Karen stated that work is being done to align the terminology used.

Alison Ashley added that Karen and David have been working in association with schools so any changes would be agreed by all involved.

Verbal Update, Outline of the EHCP Placement process, including challenges and opportunities of moving CYP.



Karen updated the Schools Forum on the process of looking at children who are in out independent and maintained Special Schools and the activity and process of bringing those children back.

- Through Annual Reviews of the EHCPs that statutory procedure which entails a significant timeline that involves the provider holding an annual review meeting and potentially additional assessments and updates from Educational Psychology teams.
- Statutory timeline that entails the Local Authority receiving the annual review reports, amending the reports, going out to consultation with parents and then finalising a plan.
- It is important to note that many of the children will have been on a considerable journey before attending the non-maintained and independent provisions.
- The Local Authority must give families rights of appeal, through mediations or the SEN tribunal.

Karen provided case examples to highlight the process.

Alison Ashley pointed out the lack of choice and lack of locality of Special School provision in Shropshire compared to larger Local Authorities.

Stephen Matthews asked if this situation was likely to improve.

Alison Ashley responded that opening Free Schools or Hubs would mean children with less complex needs could be kept in their locality area, which would bring down transport costs and free up spaces for more complex children.

David Shaw reiterated the length of time that this work would take, that it could take three to five years or longer.

Shelly Hurdley commented from an early years perspective on the importance of early intervention.

4. **Update on the development of new SEND Hubs**

Andy Nichols presented the paper.

To Summarise (as of June 2024):

- 4 new hubs created (Bowbrook, Ellesmere, Whitchurch, Morda)
- 1 Hub expanded (Bridgnorth)
- 50 additional places (up 47%)
- 3 new Education Quality Advisors (SEND and AP) appointed.
- Projected 5-year cost reduction to HN budget of £8.5m v's placing in independent.



Next Steps:

- Expand provision further - rebuilds not just refurb.
- Co-production / collaboration
- Keeping the focus upon local provision wherever possible

5. **SEND and AP Strategy and Outcomes Framework.**

David Shaw presented the Papers.

Purpose

- This strategy sets the direction and commitment from the Area Send Partnership to develop an inclusive system where everyone can thrive.

Our Priorities

The draft proposed system wide priorities will enable the implementation of our vision and address the themes emerging from our self-evaluation;

- Develop local, high quality, inclusive provision across the system. Including strengthening the graduated response and ordinarily available provision (SOAP) whilst ensuring consistency and effectiveness of the emotional health and mental wellbeing offer in mainstream education settings, across all phases.
- Enable early identification and the right help at the right time, including reducing waiting times for speech and language therapy and neurodiversity assessments.
- Enable children and young people to communicate confidently, contribute to decisions, and feel visible and valued members of their community.
- Develop a proactive, supportive, and clear alternative provision offer.
- Develop a system that makes sense and works together, improving co-production, communication and engagement with families and professionals from all services. Including Improving the quality and timeliness of EHC plans, annual reviews, and transition pathways.
- Develop a data informed and intelligence rich approach.
- Enable children and young people to feel visible and valued members of their community, ensuring they are supported to be as socially and economically independent as possible to achieve their next steps in life.

6.

Outcomes Framework

There are two important reasons to develop an agreed outcomes framework.



- We need to measure our performance by focusing clearly on how our work is impacting on outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- We need to ensure that we have a framework of consistent, regular measurements that we can apply year on year to see how our impact on children and young people with SEND is changing over time.

A summary

Feedback is welcomed from Schools Forum Members by the 1st of July 2024.

Feedback is also being gathered from a range of other people and groups, including CYP directly.

Public consultation on the SEND and AP Strategy and Outcomes Framework is now planned for w/c 8th July and will run for 6 weeks.

Sarah Finch pointed out the importance of attendance once a child is in place in a provision and that there needs to be a tighter definition on achievement with regards to wherever the starting points are.

David Shaw welcomed the feedback.

7. Schools Forum Work Programme and Membership

David Shaw presented the paper.

20 June 2024 –

- Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring

12 September 2024 –

- Final Dedicated Schools Grant update 2023-24
- Updated Dedicated Schools Grant 2024-25
- Schools Revenue Funding Update 2025-26
- Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring 2024-25
- Updated Dedicated Schools Grant 2024-25
- Growth Fund Allocations 2023-24 and 2024-25
- Early Years Block Allocations 2023-24 and 2024-25
- 7 November 2024
- Central Retention of Dedicated Schools Grant from April 2025
- Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring 2024-25
- 5 December 2024
- School Funding Arrangements 2025-26
- Consultation on the Central Retention of Dedicated Schools Grant from April 2025
- Central Schools Services Block 2024-25
- 9 January 2025 (Provisional)



- Extraordinary meeting if needed to make decisions on APT submission.
23 January 2025
- School Revenue Funding Settlement 2025-26
- Shropshire Schools Forum Constitution
20 March 2025
- Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring 2024-25
- High Needs Block 3 Year forecasting

David Shaw asked whether Forum Members would value having some Face-to-Face meetings as well as online.

8. Communications

Bill Dowell pointed out that a lot of things would have to wait until after the election and thanked everybody for attending.

9. Future Meeting Dates

12 September 2024
7 November 2024
5 December 2024
9 January 2025
23 January 2025

Meeting was closed at 9.48 am.

