

**Minutes of Dudley Schools Forum
Tuesday, 27th February, 2024 at 6.00 pm
Microsoft Teams**

Present:

Mrs J Belcher (Chair)

Mrs J Avery, Miss J Colbourne, Mrs A Hannaway, Mr T Harris, Mrs J Higgins, Mrs V Howard, Mr S Lanckham, Mr P Leyshon, Ms L Maskell, Mr B Roe, Ms E Stanton, Miss F Sumner, Mr K Tranter, Miss A Ward and Mrs S Watson.

Non-Voting Officers:

C Driscoll (Director of Children's Services), C Ludwig (Finance Manager), D Farnell (Lead for Childcare), M Palfreyman (Head of Education Outcomes and Inclusion), S Powell (Acting Head of SEND), S Thirlway (Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions), J Wilson (Senior Principal Accountant) and G Gray (Democratic Services Officer).

38 Introductions by the Chair

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

39 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Mrs M Harris, Mrs J Morgan, Mrs E O'Brien, Mrs S Parkes and Mrs A Webb

40 **Substitute Members**

It was noted that Mrs J Avery had been appointed as substitute member for Mrs E O'Brien for this meeting of the Forum only.

41 **Minutes**

In referring to Minute No. 31 - Head Teachers Consultative Forum – Budget Working Group Verbal Feedback, Mr B Roe, Primary School Governor representative raised a query concerning the alternative contracts for Dudley Schools catering services, in that it was considered by some Governors to be more time consuming and expensive together with adding more responsibility for school staff within some schools.

In response, the Head of Education Outcomes and Inclusion acknowledged that in some cases costs, further work, and responsibilities had increased within schools, however, it was considered that there were a significant number of schools who had seen a reduction in cost. It was noted that consideration had been given as to the best way forward regarding the provision of catering for schools, which had resulted in more efficient services.

Mrs J Belcher, Primary School Governor Representative, commented that various presentations and representations had been received at the Dudley Business Leaders Group throughout 2023, and that further to feedback received, it was considered that overall there had been an improved service for young people with a wider variety of meals now being offered

In regard to Minute No. 31 – Head Teachers Consultative Forum – Budget Working Group Feedback, Mrs A Hannaway, Primary School Headteacher Representative, clarified that Gigmill Primary School would be converting to Academy status on 1st March, 2024.

In regard to Minute number 31 – Dedicated Schools Grant Process 2024/25, Mrs J Belcher, Primary School Governor Representative, explained that the criteria regarding the new mandatory split site and sparsity factor had been circulated to all Representatives for information.

The Finance Manager further reported that the Dudley's Authority Proforma Tool (APT) had been submitted on 22nd February, 2024 and had subsequently been approved by the Department for Education (DfE). The Finance Manager advised that budgets would be circulated to schools by 29th February, 2024.

In regard to a query raised by Mrs L Maskell, Primary School Headteacher Representative, concerning Minute number 36 – Delivering Best Value (DBV) in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) update, the Head of SEND and Children's Disabilities Team clarified that Dawley Brook Primary School would be one of four schools, which would have SEND units established at their schools.

Resolved

That, subject to the amendments and comments made above, the minutes of the meeting held on 16th January, 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

42 Matters Arising from the Minutes

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

43 Head Teachers Consultative Forum – Budget Working Group Verbal Feedback

Mr T Harris, Secondary School Headteacher Representative, provided feedback on the discussions held at the Head Teachers Consultative Forum – Budget Working Group (HTCF-BWG) meeting. It was reported that discussions had been carried out at the Budget Working Group concerning budget restraints and it had been noted that although there would be no direct impact on schools, Local Authority services could be affected going forward.

It was reported that the rationalisation plan of the Local Authority Estates would be implemented imminently. The Local Authority buildings that were affected included: Saltwells Education Development Centre, Studley Court main offices situated at Mary Stevens Park, Priory Hall Training building, Ward House situated at Himley, Wollescote Hall in Stevens Park and 4 Ednam Road.

The Budget Working Group were advised that there were currently eight Headteacher vacancies across maintained schools within Dudley together with Headteacher vacancies that were available within various Academy Schools.

It was reported that four Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspections had been carried out since they had resumed on 22nd January, 2024. It was considered that the Ofsted inspectors were adopting a more compassionate approach and were being mindful of the wellbeing of the people involved with the inspections.

Reference was made to the Dudley Community Toothbrush Scheme, which continued to be rolled out within Primary Schools together with the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire, which had been circulated to all schools to complete.

It was noted that a pilot for the Poverty Proofing Project was being carried out to give consideration on how to reduce costs regarding trips and other ventures that could incur costs for students.

It was advised that Schools were continuing to follow the National Health Guidelines following the outbreak of Measles and any Covid 19 related cases.

The Budget Working Group were advised that Delivering Better Value (DBV) workshops had been carried out on 15th January, 2024 and that there had been 104 representatives from both Primary and Secondary sectors in attendance.

In regard to the SEND bases, it was advised that three schools had expressed an interest and a further eight were being sought.

It was noted that all Schools in Dudley had now entered into alternative catering provision.

It was advised that Alternative Provision and Inclusion Strategy Development options and appraisals were being carried out and had been shared for consultation. All exclusion and suspension data were being scrutinised on a monthly basis and would be shared with school leaders.

It was reported that a number of Schools were being converted to Academy status, which included: Thorns Primary School to Excelsior Multi Academy Trust; Withymoor Primary School and Gig Mill Primary School to Hales Valley Academy Trust; Newfield Park Primary School and Coseley Free School to Shirelands Collegiate Academy Trust; Hawbush Primary School to DRB Ignite Academy Trust. It was noted that Eton Star Dudley was continuing to be an ongoing project.

It was noted that a new regional Team Leader for the DfE had been appointed.

Resolved

That the feedback provided be noted.

44 Dedicated Schools Grant Stage 2 Budget Planning – Centrally Retained Service Approvals 2024/25

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted to approve the Local Authority's requests in respect of the centrally retained expenditure to be met from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2024/25.

The Finance Manager presented the report in detail, and in doing so, confirmed that the Department for Education (DfE) had increased the Central School Services Block allocation by a small amount with the budget being £1.849m for 2024/25, with an increase of 2% for ongoing services, however, there had been a 20% reduction for historic commitments.

The Finance Manager referred to Table 1 of the report submitted regarding the Early Years Block Central Expenditure, in particular it was proposed that £8,900 be allocated for the Early Years Budgets in respect of delegated service items, £437,400 allocated to Early Years Foundation advice and £105,600 allocated in respect of Early Years Funding Administration. It was noted that there had been an increase of just over £130,000 in regard to the Early Years Funding Administration in view of the substantial increases within Early Years Funding and the impact of pay award inflation.

It was further noted that in view of the expansion of services and the additional need for additional monitoring, managing and implementation of the scheme, there would be further funding of £10m for 2024/25. The extra funding included the appointment of two additional staff that were being funded from that extra resource, as well as the impact of pay award inflation.

The Places in Independent Schools for Non-SEN Pupils, Admissions Services and Servicing of the Schools Forum were also referred to in Table 1 of the report submitted. It was noted that in regard to the Places in Independent Schools for Non-SEN Pupils, there was a certain amount of financial pressure within this area, therefore, there could be an overspend should placements continue to increase.

Representatives voted on each item of expenditure, as indicated below:-

Table 1 – 2024/25 Central Expenditure Budgets for Schools Forum Approval – No Restrictions on Value

<u>Central Spend On</u>	<u>Value 2024/25</u>	<u>Decision</u>
Early Years Central Expenditure:		
• Early Years Contingency Nursery Education Funding	Nil	Nil
• Early Years Budgets in respect of delegated service items	£8,900	Approved
• Early Years Foundation Advice	£437,400	Approved
• Early Years Funding Administration	£105,600	Approved
• Places in independent schools for non-SEN pupils	£195,800	Approved
• Admissions	£269,100	Approved
• Servicing of Schools Forum	£5,000	Approved

Representatives were referred to Table 2 of the report submitted in regards to the 2024/25 Central Expenditure Budgets for Schools Forum Approval – Restricted to Cash Limit of 2023/24 Expenditure, and it was advised that there was a restriction placed on the value in 2023/24.

It was noted that although historically there had been a Contribution to combined budget, this had now been removed, therefore, there had been no spend against those items.

Representatives voted on each item of expenditure, as indicated below:-

Table 2 – 2024/25 Central Expenditure Budgets For Schools Forum Approval – Restricted to Cash Limit of 2023/24 Expenditure

<u>Central Spend On</u>	<u>Value 2024/25</u>	<u>Decision</u>
<u>Capital expenditure funded from revenue</u> Projects must have been planned and decided on prior to April 2013 so no new projects can be charged.	Nil	Nil
<u>Contribution to combined budgets</u> This is where the Schools Forum agreed prior to April 2013 a contribution from the schools budget to services which would otherwise be funded from other sources.	Nil	Nil
<u>Existing termination of employment costs</u> (costs for specific individuals must have been approved prior to April 2013 so no new redundancy costs can be charged)	£66,700	Approved
<u>Prudential borrowing costs</u> The commitment must have been approved prior to April 2013	Nil	Nil

The Finance Manager referred to the De-Delegations for 2024/25, that had been approved in principle at a previous meeting held on 14th November, 2023 which was summarised within Table 3 of the report submitted.

Representatives voted on each item of expenditure, as indicated below:-

Table 3 – 2024/25 De-delegations Approved by Schools Forum – Maintained Primary and Secondary Schools split

<u>De-Delegation Services for Mainstream Maintained Schools 2024/25</u>	<u>Budgets for De- delegation 2024/25</u>	<u>Decision</u>
Union Facilities Time	£77,000	Approved
Behavioural Pupil Referral Unit – Primary Outreach Service	£146,500	Approved

It was noted that the Schools Budgets had been accepted by the DfE and would be rolled out to schools in due course, and that it was anticipated that further information concerning the copyright licensing charge for 2024/25 following recent approval, which would be funded within the Central Block.

Resolved

- (1) That the 2024/25 Central Expenditure Budgets for Schools Forum – No Restrictions on Value, as detailed in Table 1 of the report submitted, be approved as listed above.
- (2) That the 2024/25 Central Expenditure Budgets for Schools Forum Approval – Restricted to Cash Limit of 2023/24 Expenditure, as detailed in Table 2 of the report submitted, be approved as listed above.
- (3) That the 2024/25 De-delegations – Maintained Primary and Secondary Schools split provisionally approved on 14th November, 2023, as detailed in Table 3 of the report submitted, be approved as listed above.

45 **Schools Forum Membership – Spring Elections Process**

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on an update in respect of Schools Forum membership.

In presenting the report submitted, the Democratic Services Officer confirmed that eight nominations would be sought during the spring election membership process together with the proposed timescales for the election process and that the results would be reported at the meeting of the forum held in June, 2024.

Resolved

That the updated position in respect of the membership of Dudley's Schools Forum, as referred to in Appendix 1 of the report submitted, be noted.

46 **Early Years Single Funding Formula and Early Years SEN Inclusion Funding and the Proposed Changes for 2024/25**

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the Early Years Funding Arrangements and Early Years SEN Inclusion Funding and the proposed changes to Dudley's local funding for Early Years providers for 2024/25.

In presenting the report submitted, the Lead for Childcare stated that there had been an introduction of a new expanded offer, which had resulted in a significant increase of £10m, being an additional 51% towards the Early Years budget. The new expanded offer would commence from April, 2024, and it was advised that the offer would provide i access to 15 funded hours of childcare for working parents of 2-year-old children, that 15 hours of funded childcare would be extended to children of working parents from the age of 9 months old from September, 2024, and working parents of children under the age of 5 years old would be entitled to 30 funded hours of child care per week from September, 2025.

The Lead for Childcare reported that the Dudley's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 3 and 4-year-old children within the Early Years Block would be increased by 27p providing £5.47 per hour and it was intended that providers would receive the full increase of 27p providing £5.07 per hour including the supplementary grant top up. It was noted that the grant top up allowed Dudley to continue to retain 30p centrally for other Early Years associated costs, together with the retention of 10p to fund the historic Teachers Pay and Pensions allocation (TPP).

It was advised that the allocated rate for 2-year-old children would increase to £7.78 per hour from April, 2024 and it was proposed that 20p would be retained to support additional associated administrative costs, which were considered significant, and to create a contingency fund with the intention to allocate £7.58 per hour to providers.

It was reported that the new rate established for 9-month-old children from September, 2024 would be £10.61 and it was proposed to retain 20p to create a contingency fund with the intention to allocate £10.41 to providers. It was noted that the contingency funding would provide an allocation to contribute towards additional costs for new children that providers may take in between April and July.

It was noted that the 9-month-old child funding rate was a newly established demographic calculated within the new funding formula, however, it was noted that there was no current baseline to provide a comparison.

Local Authorities were required to allocate 95% of the Early Years Block funding received, however, it was noted that Dudley had allocated 98.76% for 2024/25.

Representatives were advised that Netherton Park Nursery School would receive the same base rate as other maintained and Academy nursery classes through the Early Years Funding Formula and the provision would receive an additional payment of £390,000 from the Maintained Nursery Supplement to protect against reductions of the base rate funding, and would also include the Teachers Pay and Pension Grant.

The Lead for Childcare advised that £120m funding would be allocated to Earliest Inclusion and the Early Years Block, however, £641,000 would also be taken from the High Needs Block to support children in early years.

In regard to the Early Years Special Educational Needs (SEN) Inclusion Funding, the Lead for Childcare explained that Local Authorities were required to have the SEN Inclusion Funding, however, Dudley also offered the funding to providers for 2-year-old children for early intervention and that the funding was designed to meet the needs of all children with or without an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The Lead for Childcare further outlined in detail, the Early Education Funding support packages as set out within the report submitted.

It was reported that there were four Inclusion Hubs that were situated in Wrens Nest Primary School, Caslon Primary School, Netherton Park Nursery and Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School and options were being explored to establish a fifth Inclusion Hub within the Borough.

The Lead for Childcare explained that the Annual stakeholder consultation had started on 5th February, 2024 in view of the DfE requiring all Local Authorities to advise all Early Years and Childcare providers with the new rates by 20th February, 2024. It was advised that thirteen responses had been received, and it was noted that , three providers were not in agreement in view of concerns raised regarding the rates for 3- to 4-year-old children.

It was reported that the Early Years Pupil Premium had been increased by 68p per hour, which provided £388 for eligible children per financial year and that the Disability Access Fund had been increased by £29 to £910 for eligible children. It was noted that Government had specified that every funded child would now be eligible to access the Early Years Pupil Premium and Disability Access Fund.

Resolved

That the publication of information regarding the proposed Early years Funding Allocations: Funding Arrangements and Changes for 2024/25, be noted.

47 Delivering Best Value (DBV) in SEND Update

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted updating Schools Forum on the Delivering Best Value in SEND programme in Dudley.

The Acting Head of SEND presented the report and, in doing so, provided an update on the progress of the DBV in SEND programme. It was reported that Primary and Secondary Schools were invited to join the DBV work streams, sub-working groups, and the task and finish groups that were available. A link had been circulated inviting colleagues to join the work streams and it was noted that some same educational settings had requested to attend various work streams with different staff members and the breakdown and frequency of meetings were outlined in the report submitted.

In response to the request from Representatives at the last meeting of the Schools Forum, the school survey was extended and that feedback together with the schools workshop day that had been held at Himley Hall in January, 2024 would be shared at a future meeting of the Forum.

The Acting Head of SEND referred Representatives to Work Stream 1, redesigning specialist services and the Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) offer, and reported that 10 sessions had been carried out with Genuine Partnerships to carry out the four cornerstones and co-production. It was explained that the invitation had been extended to all schools in Dudley to join the initiative and that upcoming sessions were scheduled to take place for March and April 2024.

Work was being undertaken towards co-producing the Working Together Charter for Dudley SEND, which would support the four cornerstones framework and the Charter would outline the shared vision and help build trust, communicate effectively, and value the diverse perspectives and contributions from everyone across the SEND partnership with a view for the Charter to benefit all stakeholders.

The Acting Head of SEND reported that a stakeholder working group had been established which would undertake meetings on a fortnightly basis. It was advised that many gaps had been identified concerning shaping the reorganisation of the future service model, that feedback had now been shared with the most recent group, and it was noted that there had been representations from Headteachers, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCO's), Early Years settings, Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Post 16, at the workshops.

In regards to the OAP work workshop, it was reported that a broader representation had been sought for participation within the sub-groups to inform each of the four broad areas of SEND and it was advised that there was a discussion taking place concerning the proposal of using the Revolution portal as a digital platform to house the OAP framework., Concerns had been raised, however regarding access to the Revolution portal and it was noted that this would need to be co-ordinated with the task and finish group to consider all options that were available.

The Acting Head of SEND further reported that work was continuing to be carried out regarding the evaluation for the training requirements for mainstream schools, details of which was outlined within the report submitted.

Representatives were referred to Workstream 2 of the report submitted concerning developing and delivering the sufficiency strategy, and the Acting Head of SEND advised that work was continuing regarding the commissioning of the third-party supplier for the SEND Sufficiency Strategy Development. It was advised that stakeholder working groups would be established once the work had been completed and that 9 schools had expressed an interest in joining the work group.

The Acting Head of SEND clarified that the tender process for the Resource Bases had concluded and that feedback from the Panel was being consolidated to reach a decision. It was noted that potential schools would be contacted regarding the outcome by the end of February, 2024.

Representatives were referred to Workstream 3 of the report submitted concerning preparation for adulthood, and the Acting Head of SEND advised that the workstream was in regard to the commitment, which encompassed a range of factors crucial for preparing young people for adulthood. It was noted that there was a significant amount of overlap with Dudley Adult Social Care in particular concerning Post-19 preparation for Adulthood and consideration was being given to remove potential duplication.

It was noted that two stakeholder working groups were being established with a view to focus on Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and Employability, to formulate a comprehensive Post 16 curriculum and pathway and the second stakeholder working group would focus on Careers, Progression and Transition into Adulthood.

In regard to Workstream 4 concerning redesigning the spend profile, it was reported that the workstream had not been included within the formal agreement with the DfE, however, it was considered to be a vital action that formed the foundation for other DBV work being carried out and Representatives were referred to Table 2 regarding the Programme Plan of Workstream Activities for January, 2024 to March, 2024.

In response to a query from Mrs A Hannaway, Primary School Headteacher Representative, concerning the frequency of meetings outlined in Table 1 concerning the Workstreams and Stakeholder Groups, the Acting Head of SEND clarified that the information regarding Building Schools Capacity Task and Finish Group had since been updated and undertook to provide Members of the Forum with information regarding the frequency of meetings.

In reference to Workstream 2, Ms J Higgins, Academy Member, commented that the RAG rating status for the Developing and Delivering our Sufficiency Strategy should be monitoring rather than on track in view of complexities of the areas.

In response, the Acting Head of SEND advised that the ongoing work within the Workstreams outlined the work that could be carried out within the earliest possible time rather than the need for a diagnosis.

Resolved

- (1) That the content of the Delivering Best Value in SEND Update be noted.
- (2) That the Acting Head of SEND provide information to Members of the Forum concerning the frequency of the Building Schools Capacity Task and Finish Group meetings.

48 Directorate of Children's Services – Verbal Update

The Director of Children's Services referred to the Council's challenging financial position and advised that a legal balanced budget had been set, which would be submitted and recommended at the meeting of the Full Council on 4th March, 2024. The budget included growth for Children's Services of £7.8m a year to respond to demand, however, it was noted that this was a general fund for Children's Services and would not be included for Schools budgets.

Resolved

That the verbal update on the Directorate of Children's Services, be noted.

The meeting ended at 7.00pm

CHAIR