

**Minutes of the Forum Meeting held on Wednesday, 12 December 2018
Held in Room 1, Civic Suite**

<p>Present: Antoinette Fisher (Chair) Darren Gelder (Vice Chair) Andrew Wilkins Jane Davenport Marie Murphy Ben Taylor Eleanor Clarke John McDermott Bernie Farkas Rob Fletcher Jenny Godsall Donna Payley Paul Jackson David Lewis Wendy Jarema Stephen Steinhaus Hon. Alderman Norman Davies Gina Godwin Councillor Annette McKenzie Councillor Julie Hlland Councillor Ken Meeson Sally Hodges Phil Leivers Steve Fenton Stuart McHale Carl Fagan Observers: Michelle Hill Nicole Fowles Sarah Hobden Jane Taylor Dr Toby Close Ann Lowe Donna Wright</p>	<p>Dorridge Primary Grace Academy Hazel Oak Reynalds Cross St Peters RC School Our Lady of the Wayside Triple Crown Centre St Alphege Blossomfield Infants Fordbridge Knowle Primary Academy Yew Tree Primary Castle Bromwich Juniors TU Representative Park Hall Solihull AP Academy Langley Academy Wise Owls Nursery</p> <p>Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Skills Director of Children’s Services Assistant Director, Learning & Achievement Head of Business & Performance Childrens Services Finance Manager Department for Education Auckland Education Centre Coleshill Heath Castle Bromwich Juniors Windy Arbor Park Hall Head of 0-25 SEND Service Senior Education Improvement Advisor</p>
Minutes taken by Alison McWilliam, Senior Forum Administrator	

Item		Action
1	<p>Apologies for Absence Apologies were received from Lynda Mackay, Geoff Harley-Mason, Karen Scott, Louise Minter, Eva Evans, Charlotte Shadbolt, Lisa Whitehouse and Peter French. AF welcomed everyone to the meeting, including new members and observers. In Peter French’s absence, AF thanked him for his support of Forum over the past few years, Peter will be leaving the CofE Diocese at Christmas.</p>	
2	<p>Minutes of Last Meeting (27.9.18) The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting.</p>	
3	<p>Matters’ Arising Page 1 Strategic School Improvement Fund – Following confirmation that Solihull’s joint bid through Hazel Oak Teaching School (HOSTA) had not been successful, PL had established that this was due to Central Government withdrawing the Fund in its entirety. As so much work has already been undertaken, HOSTA is keen to produce a model that can be rolled out across the Borough using teaching school funds. Further detail will be provided in due course.</p>	PL
4	<p>Cabinet Member Items – Councillor Ken Meeson CKM provided an update on a number of areas, including: Sufficiency of School Places – Housing developments, both known sites (included in the</p>	

<p>5</p>	<p>Local Development Plan) and unknown (where developers may come forward with additional proposals) will continue to put pressure on school places. Schools are already responding by putting in additional places and building extensions.</p> <p><u>Pressures on SEND</u> – This is a national issue and in Solihull is affected by the increase in EHCP referrals, parental preference and the fact our special schools are full. Solihull has submitted a bid to fund an ASD Free School, but competition will be strong from other authorities.</p> <p><u>Children’s Services Budget</u> – The number of children coming into care has risen dramatically in the past two years severely impacting the budget.</p> <p>School Resource Management Self-Assessment Tool – Carl Fagan, DfE <i>Reference ‘School Resource’ slides and resource documents, attached to minutes</i> CF introduced himself and presented information on two DfE resources. Firstly, the DfE’s new Self-assessment, data driven tool, which can help schools/academies to discover where, when, if and how they could make changes to enable them to achieve more from their available resources. Schools Resource Management Advisers are employed to go into schools that are struggling to manage their finances to undertake interventions and will use the tool to discuss how a school’s resources are allocated and where the problems may have arisen. Members raised the following questions: Q – Is there expected to be a direct link between a school’s funding and outcomes? A – The tool provides an indicator of efficiency to promote a conversation, rather than acting as an accountability measure. Q – Can you explain the teacher/contact ratio? A - ASCL has calculated that 0.78 is the optimum amount of teacher time that should be spent in front of children. Q – Is the tool a replacement for ICFP? A – No, but it does something very similar and is a complementary tool. Q - Who has access to the information completed by a school? A - For academies this is a non-mandatory tool, although it may become mandatory in time. For maintained schools, information will be returned to the LA for them to use as part of the school’s audit process. The DfE will ask for statistics on completion. Q - Does the tool work for PFI schools? A – No, but the DfE is considering that there should be different thresholds for PFI schools. Q - When is the first return expected? A – It will be based on 2019-20 financial year, so the return date will be at the end of that financial year.</p> <p>Secondly, the Schools Financial Benchmarking tool, which many schools will already be familiar with. It has been developed over a number of years and takes a range of data for 60 different spending areas and allows schools to make a comparison with schools with similar characteristics (which may not necessarily be part of the same authority). It then provides schools with an opportunity to talk to and learn from that similar school. It was noted that the tool does not work as well for special schools. The following question was raised: Q – With regard to Adviser involvement, will the DfE wait for academies to submit their financial results? A - SRMAs are now working with schools that have been brought to the DfE’s attention, either from the data or from nominations where LAs have asked for help to support a school. The resource will be prioritised according to level of need. It was agreed that PL will share the Self-assessment tool with the authority’s internal audit team. CF would appreciate comments and feedback from members. AF thanked CF for his presentation.</p>	<p>Attached</p> <p>PL</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Director of Children’s Services & Skills – Sally Hodges SH explained some of the challenges the Directorate has been facing over the last 12 months.</p>	

The LA and schools are in the same position financially, with budgets restricting what can be done. In particular, the LA has an exceptionally large number of LAC (416 children) and a very high proportion (61 children) of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) (the national average is 0.07%, Solihull has 170%); the cost of their placements has become extremely high (up to £5k a week) and it can be a struggle to place some of them.

There are challenges around SEND in terms of rising demand for EHCPs (which have risen dramatically since the conversion from Statements to Plans) and the need for LA support services. Solihull has struggled to meet the 20 week timescale to achieve a Plan, with around 60% currently meeting the timescale (national average 70%) and the intention is to reach the national figure as soon as possible.

Discussions are taking place regarding the high cost of transport for SEND children.

Contracts have been squeezed as far as possible, however the high number of children and the requirement to transport many of them out-of-borough has led Councillors to consider how much of the cost could be recharged to parents

An Alternative Provision Consultation is taking place to consider a different model where the children are brought back into schools, supported by the LA, with the LA buying places from schools. There has already been some very positive feedback from schools and SH would like to receive more.

In her lobbying on behalf of schools and the service, SH is in discussions with the National Children's Commissioner's office about Solihull's particular challenges and how they may be able to support us and a request has been put to the Home Office's Deputy Director for Asylum Seekers for additional funding for UASC children. Sir Andrew McFarlane, a top judge for children would like to visit Solihull as we have a good reputation in this area, to see how we manage our cases through court.

Earlier in the year Ofsted inspected Solihull's Care Leaver and UASC services and received a good report. We are expecting another Joint Targeted Area (JTA) inspection of services involved in abuse in the home/family environment. It is unlikely that schools will be involved, but it is possible and they will be informed in due course.

In Solihull, the relationship between schools and the LA is really good, with a collaborative responsibility for all children across the Borough's education system. We are developing good relationships with Health and CCG colleagues linked to our 0-25 Commissioning Strategy for services for children with SEND, mental health needs and those who are vulnerable and exploited.

Louise Rees has been appointed as SH's successor. She is currently Children's Services Director at Stoke on Trent and is expected to start in mid-February, but hopes to spend some time in Solihull in January.

Questions

Q – RF - High Needs Block spending has gone from £1.5m in September to almost £3m now, predominantly linked to a dramatic rise in independent school fees, is SH surprised, did we not see that coming?

A – SH - We did see it coming and expected demand to increase along with the increase in EHCPs; there are some very complex children in the Borough. However, the size and speed of the increase has been surprising. These are mostly expensive independent placements and if we can spend the money better locally and with more support, then this is what we want to achieve.

Q - RF – Are we monitoring children placed in out-of-borough provision in terms of attendance, progress, etc. as robustly as if they were in-borough?

A – SH - We have a duty to monitor outcomes and safeguarding for all children, including LAC, SEND, Elective Home Education, etc. although our systems are different for out-of-borough and we could possibly do it better with additional resources.

PL – The LA's Budget Strategy Group is considering a proposal to increase funding for the next financial year in order to add capacity to the SEND team.

Q - RF – This is a dramatic rise in independent fees for a relatively small number of children, what is the contractual arrangement for fees?

A – SF - Some of the placements are a 'distress purchase' because we cannot find an appropriate alternative setting, so the priority has been to do the right thing for the children and then manage the contract later. However we have a process review in place to try to resolve that. There is a standard national contract that everyone, including independent

schools, work to as a default setting.

SH - We cannot do a deal for a block of places because each child has a very specific Plan. We have submitted a bid for funding to open an ASD school, as part of a broader Centre of Excellence, to include the school at its core, plus parental, medical and teaching facilities; the outcome of the bid is expected in Spring 2019.

PL - We also have to respond to parental preference. Now that we are building up the Education Psychology Service, we have more robust evidence for use at tribunals and that, together with input from the Parent Carer Forum, is already proving beneficial.

AF thanked SH for her presentation and wished her all the very best for the future. Forum looks forward to working with Louise Rees.

Assistant Director's Items – Phil Leivers

A consultation with stakeholders has just closed around increasing the number of SEND places in the Borough. The team is now analysing responses and the headlines include:

- Over 70 responses were received, from parents, heads and principals, SENCOs, governors and supporting agencies.
- The vast majority of responders found the strategy being consulting on to be helpful and agreed with the list of priorities and commissioning principles.
- Eight primary schools have shown interest in hosting an ARP or enhanced provision on their site. A couple of secondaries said they were doing something already, but might wish to expand on that in due course. PL asked secondary colleagues to let him know if they were interested.
- Mainstream schools were asked if they would like to have some special school provision on their site, run by an existing special school and 2 or 3 responded that they might consider that.
- A range of plans have already been put in place to add additional specialist places in the Borough. As well as additional places at existing special schools, a number of ASD ARPs are now open, Forest Oak has successfully moved its sixth form into the Solihull College campus, freeing up space at the school – it is hoped that Hazel Oak will replicate this with their own sixth form students later this year - and discussions are on-going with Northern House about increasing places.
- For Alternative Provision, the secondary AP Academy opened at Easter and currently has around 53 students, with the number increasing in September. This is already making a significant difference, with the number of fixed term and permanent exclusions down by half, in comparison to this time last year.
- Solihull's primary AP, Auckland Education Centre, received a very disappointing Ofsted inspection in October and was judged to be Inadequate in all respects. There are currently 19 young people at the Centre and plans are in place to ensure they are safe and receiving the best education possible whilst they are still placed there. Since November, Michelle Hill has been appointed as Head and is already making a big difference. Longer term, a paper is going to the Cabinet Member's Decision Making Session w/c 17 December requesting approval to consult with stakeholders, including schools, on the future of the Centre. One option is to close the Centre and develop separate pathways for AP (rather than a PRU) and SEMH (Social, Emotional, Mental Health).

Members agreed that the additional specialist places must not be filled with children who should be in mainstream school with support.

Questions

Q - RF – What has happened at Auckland and what will happen in the future if it closes in September is a huge worry for north Solihull heads.

A – No further children will be referred to Auckland, but Bev Petch, Head of the AP Service, will be communicating with schools about support for any children who would have been referred for assessment or placement. In addition, the LA will put school improvement support in place for the Centre, as it would for any school in similar circumstances.

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School Funding 2019-20 – Steve Fenton, Stuart McHale

Central Services, Retained Duties for All Schools – Steve Fenton

Reference 'School Funding 2019-20 – Central Services' report

Forum is asked to agree 2019-20 funding for a number of areas, including:

Central Services – These services are funded as a separate grant under the Central Services Block (no top-slice). Finance WG receives annual reports on each of the services and at its meeting on 3 December made a recommendation to Forum that funding for these services be accepted as set out. In brief:

Growth Fund – Although we probably need around £250k to fund in-year bulge classes (normally around 6 per year) and set-up costs to manage demographic growth, because we are funded 2 years in arrears, £350k will help to recover the overspend from last year. The criteria are as contained in Appendix C, as distinct from where a school is growing 'from the ground up', where a Pupil Number Variation is made and funding comes through the main core funding formula.

Central Services Block – This covers areas such as School Admissions, servicing of Schools Forum, Licencing Fees and services within Retained Duties (Appendix B) and comes through as a specific DSG grant. The LA asks all schools, regardless of category, for agreement to passport the £1.089m grant through to the LA as a contribution towards the full cost of providing the services, with no impact on school budgets.

It was noted that the cost of the Admissions service had increased by £18k to cover the cost of undertaking Appeals for both maintained schools and academies at no charge. Despite this additional work coinciding with schools taking over the Nursery Admissions process, it will not generate any staff savings as the Nursery Admissions process is not particularly labour intensive and the Admissions team is now managing a significant and growing number of in-year admissions, the work for which has been subsumed with no additional resources.

Early Years and Family Information Service – Central spend must be no more than 5% of the per pupil hourly rate. The proposals for both teams are within limits at 4.5%.

EY Inclusion Fund – £250k to support settings for children with emerging SEND.

EY Contingency Fund – £100k to minimise the risk of volatility in the hourly rate from one year to the next.

Primary School Contingency - £100k de-delegated at £6.40pp for managing 'unusual' costs such as those associated with backdated staff pension payments and staff exit costs due to management of change.

TU Facilities Time – The impact of planned adjustments (through savings relating to the amalgamation of two unions into one) will reduce the cost from £7.50pp to £6.50pp for 2019-20. Finance WG is working on strategies to reduce this figure further for future years and will consult with schools before implementing any changes.

Members agreed the recommendations as set out, including the passporting of the £1.089,230 grant through to the LA.

General Duties – Stuart McHale

Reference 'School Funding 2019-20 – General Duties' report

The Council Leader and the Deputy Chief Executive have recently presented proposals to Members for the Authority's Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2021-22, which included two specific proposals for growth around supporting the START Service with around £400kpa from 1 April 2019 and additional support for SEND Transport (plus additional support for the Looked After Children Service). This will now go through the formal budget process.

In order to provide the General Duties contained in Appendix C for maintained schools, maintained schools' Forum members were asked to approve a budgetary top-slice for 2019-20. The detail and narrative is similar to the past two years, but figures have been updated to reflect current costs. In recognition of the pressures that schools are under, the LA has agreed to retain the same rates as last year with no inflationary increase, and to subsidise the total cost by around £600k. The top-slice of maintained schools' budgets will therefore remain at £66pp for mainstream schools, £165pp for special schools and £247.50 for PRUs.

Maintained schools' members agreed the top-slice.

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Group Reports

Reference Work Group Reports

Reports for **Capital WG, Finance WG, EdSEND and SSSAB** were accepted and no

	<p>questions were raised.</p> <p>9 Solihull AP Academy – Stephen Steinhaus The Academy currently has 54 pupils, expected to rise to 80 by the end of the academic year and is already making a big difference in terms of reducing exclusions. A recent DfE monitoring visit was extremely positive, with the academy having already hit or on-track to reach its targets. In January recruitment will commence for staff for Years 8-9 and 9-10</p> <p>10 Date of Next Meeting Wednesday, 15 May, 2019 at 5.00pm in Room 1, Civic Suite NOTE: THERE IS NO FORUM MEETING SCHEDULED FOR SPRING TERM 2019</p>	
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