

CITY OF YORK SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on Thursday 9th May 2024 at 8.00am at West Offices

Present:

Dave Hewitt (Maintained Secondary Headteacher Representative) Chair, Jemma Dunne (Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative), Lamara Taylor (Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative), Glen Duxbury *deputising for* Andrew Daly (Academy Representative), James McGann *deputising for* Mark Hassack (Academy Representative), Andrew Robinson *deputising for* Gail Brown (Academy Representative), Dee Statham (Academy Representative), Chris Nichols (Pupil Referral Unit Representative), Ken Merry (16-19 representative)

In attendance:

Cllr Robert Webb (Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education), Martin Kelly (Corporate Director, Children and Education, CYC), Maxine Squire (Assistant Director, Education and Skills, CYC), Richard Hartle (Principal Accountant, CYC), Dan Bodey (School Inclusion Advisor) and Helen Marshall Groot (Head of Governor Services, CYC, Coordinator and Clerk)

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and round the table introductions were made. It was noted that Jemma Dunne would be the new Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Steve Lewis (Academy Representative), Tracey Roberts (PVI Early Years Representative), Jo Olsen (Maintained Secondary Governor Representative), Adam Booker (Special School Representative)

3. Minutes of the Schools Forum meeting of 1st February 2024 and 11th March 2024

Previously distributed.

The minutes of the last two meetings were agreed to be a true and accurate record and were duly noted as approved.

4. Matters arising

There were no outstanding action points to report or matters arising from the minutes.

5. Bank Accounts for Schools Scheme

Previously distributed.

The Chair invited Richard Hartle to present the item regarding early interest payments following a query raised in the February meeting. Richard explained that the current Bank Accounts for Schools (BAfS) scheme was complex and while the whole paper had been shared the relevant interest calculation was highlighted on page 6 which explained the movement in payments.

Payments to maintained schools were due at end of each month however following the implementation of the BAfS scheme payments to schools were

moved to middle of month resulting in the Council forgoing interest by sending the payment early. The scheme was last updated 2016 and it was highlighted that historically interest had not been charged however this had been challenged by external auditors. Without charging the interest the Council General Fund was subsidising the ringfenced Schools Budget.

In response to a question Richard explained that there was no clear reason for the move of the payment from end to middle of the month however it was assumed that this had been done in consultation with schools and the most probable reason was to reduce amount of requests from schools for cash advances for those struggling to maintain a positive bank balance.

The Chair asked for further clarification on the use of public funds and where the money was allocated from. Richard explained that the Council was obliged to pay the maintained schools funding from the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) at the end of each month. When the payment was sent in the middle of the month the Council at that point was paying out of the Council's General Fund and was therefore losing interest that it otherwise would have gained.

Richard added that they were not able to charge the lost interest to the DSG on receipt and the only way to recoup this was through individual school payments. It was noted that if the interest could be paid directly out of the DSG, the financial consequence would be the same however it would not be shown directly on the school balance sheets.

A forum member asked if it was possible for schools to make individual decisions about when to receive the funding. Richard responded that on a practical basis bespoke arrangements to individual schools would be difficult.

A forum member asked whether there was scope to consult with maintained schools again on the timing of the payment. Richard responded that an action to review the BAfS was in the Children & Education Finance Team's forward plan as the current scheme has not been reviewed since 2016. However, there was limited capacity to run a robust review at the present time and it was important that the consequences of any changes were clearly mapped and consulted on. The finance team were currently in the process of a complete review of the school finance systems which would be concluded in 2025 after which the BAfS scheme could be reviewed.

The Chair requested a time scale for the review of the BAfS scheme. Richard responded that it would take place in the 2026/2027 financial year or earlier if capacity allowed. In the interim period Richard would pass on the forum's concerns about the interest charge to the council's Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer) and ask her to consider approaching the council's external auditors to confirm whether their original position on the interest charge still stood.

The Chair highlighted that school budgets were tight and an issue for all schools and the impact was in excess of £100k in interest in 2024/25 which was considerable.

In response to a question relating to inflation rates, Richard explained that it was linked to interest rates as opposed to inflation, noting the long period of low interest rates until recently.

Maxine Squire suggested that regional benchmarking be run as part of the review process.

Richard highlighted that those schools that have a licenced deficit were not charged interest and this was only applicable to schools with balanced or surplus budgets or unlicensed deficits.

In response to a question Richard explained that regular meetings and conversations happened with the School Business Managers.

6. De-delegation for the Danesgate Behaviour Support Outreach Service

Previously distributed.

The Chair explained that as an action from the previous meeting, Chris Nichols had been asked to present alternative models for funding the Outreach service provided by Danesgate.

Chris apologised for the late distribution of the paper and recapped the current position through de-delegated funding of the maintained primary schools.

Through feedback it was clear that schools were in support of a strong tier 1 service in the city and there was growing demand, particularly on primary schools, and growing complexity of need. The proposal outlined an enhanced staffing structure which would be reflective of the current needs and growing needs for future. This would include a specialist SEMH teacher, a Teaching Assistant Level 3 and a Teaching Assistant Level 4, providing service across both primary and secondary.

Chris explained that it had not been clear historically where outreach connected to the short stay PRU provisions (Kestrel and Eagle) however while there were cross overs, it was important to draw a distinctive line between them. These were different services accessed through different referral routes and funding must be clear and transparent.

Maxine highlighted that the new model would be to provide support up to Y9 in response to the requests being submitted. Issues in Y10 and Y11 generally had different presentation and required different intervention routes. Chris added that the proposal would offer a quality service with a longer term investment where early intervention would support secondary colleagues in many aspects including Y6/7 transition. Through the patterns and trends of the Learning Support Hub and PFANS referrals, at the current time the majority of support for Key Stage 3 pupils (Y7,8 and 9) required tier 2 and tier 3 support. Outreach intervention at younger age should mitigate and reduce that need to access the higher tier support.

Richard Hartle tabled the financial proposals highlighting the current de delegation model and the cost to schools for three options of funding through school contributions to meet the cost of the model presented in the paper of £211k.

Questions were invited.

A forum member highlighted that there was a range of Trusts represented across schools in York and asked what the impact would be if one or more Trusts did not agree to the model. Maxine responded that there were various options ahead however it would be beneficial for all schools and Trusts to have an equitable understanding and access to the service in terms of preventative work at tier 1. Academies were not benefitting to the full extent through paying by the hour.

A forum member asked if the model would work without the contribution from all the schools listed. Richard explained that it would be difficult to have a hybrid model and the purpose of the discussion was due to the current hybrid approach not working. Chris added that maintaining pay as you go was not sustainable as

the service would have to significantly over inflate the day rate to staff and structure the service.

A forum academy member asked how a team of three people would cover all of the schools in order to get best value from the contribution, highlighting that the cost to Ebor schools would be £23k which would equate to 62 days of service based on the current costs. Chris explained that the cost would not necessarily be direct access of the service and the intention was that all schools city wide would benefit through putting in early intervention.

A forum academy member commented that their Trust did not currently use the service as pay as you go so the proposed model would not be value for money noting that over the past year all academies had only accessed 42 hours.

Maxine responded that some of that low level of access was due to restrictions of paying an hourly rate also highlighting that some academy schools who were not accessing at tier 1 had a high number of referrals into tier 2 and 3.

Dan Bodey explained that Trusts also benefited from a lot of time and support from himself and the team that was currently not directly charged. If Trusts did not buy in to the model there needed to be consideration of how that first tier of intervention in a graduated response would occur. If there was no provision operating in that tier 1 space then there would be consequences at other levels. As educators in the city they should all be collective stewards and recognise that referrals into tier 2 would increase if service was not operating properly at tier 1. It was incumbent on all to make sure provision at tier 1 was effective.

A forum member asked if there was any data to show how successful tier 1 intervention had been in primary school children tracked through to Y7, 8 and 9.

Dan Bodey responded that there had been a reduction at both phases, including reduced size of Danesgate intake and there were some students having successful transitions back to secondary schools.

Glen Duxbury left the meeting at 8.32am

A forum member asked whether there was capacity in three members of staff for all schools. Chris highlighted that the current staff were part time and the model would be for three full time staff. Dan Bodey added that the model was looking at the best solution, the service would benefit from ten more specialist staff but it was about getting the best out of the system and best way to deploy resources within the budget.

A forum member asked if there was a sense of what schools would get for the financial contribution. There was a general understanding about collective working and supporting the system but for some individual schools there was a large contribution being requested. Chris explained that referrals would go through the Learning Support Hub to provide a fair referral system. Rather than restricted to hours, time would be invested for the individual cases. The enhanced model proposed would be able to do more than the current model through expertise in SEMH and trauma informed practice. Dan added that the capacity in the team in the enhanced model would allow the team to be more reactive, providing the autism team as an example.

A forum member highlighted that schools needed to be self-sufficient through approaches such as Thrive plus there would be continued cost to access alternative provision and highlighted the outreach as a further significant cost to add to the budget. Chris explained that there was an understanding of the individual investment from the schools however it was essential to get tier 1 of

the graduated response right. The existing service was one that schools had acknowledged as valuable and supportive.

A forum member highlighted that the current need that was being addressed would not drop and asked how the enhanced model would provide to the additional schools. Maxine explained that need varied across schools, but the model was focused on collective ownership and could not be viewed as what individual schools would be getting. Schools would be working as inclusion partnerships identifying what needs were distinctive in particular areas to have a successful joined up approach to prevalent need. It was an equitable scheme rather than equal scheme but a sustainable approach needed to be established through collective ownership.

Dan added that every referral was looked at on a case by case by the Learning Support Hub but a joined-up approach would allow to put some stronger filters in place through training for staff, building resilience of support staff for challenging behaviour and sharing skills.

Cllr Webb (Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education) extended thanks to Chris for putting together the proposed model and options for funding. There were two issues for schools that were regularly reported back, budget and supporting young people with SEMH. The model presented represented three years of clarity on an approach and an opportunity for schools to support each other and work together as a city. The model represented a city wide response to a need that was growing which would be a positive step forward.

A forum member asked whether the cost for Kestrel and Eagle would be on top of the costs for outreach. Chris responded that this was correct. As highlighted earlier in the meeting the short stay PRU was a separate referral process through

PFANS and while that cost had always been stipulated it had not always been implemented to the detriment of Danesgate.

A forum member asked if there was a risk that more schools would permanently exclude their pupils. Dan responded that through the graduated response the right cases to be escalated could be identified. Permanently excluding pupils just moved the pressure onto other mainstream schools. There was no more in the pot in terms of specialist provision places and the model suggested would strengthen the filter of which pupils came through the system. Through training and confidence building the team could also build resilience in the schools to manage SEMH needs.

Maxine highlighted that other cities did not have the equivalent of Danesgate who had operated at a high level to its detriment for years. Funding had gone back into schools but this had not improved the system.

Martin Kelly commented that every individual in the city was responsible for the children in the city. While there was an understanding that the costs outlined were significant, at the moment there were schools affected disproportionality by geography. The model presented would bring together an approach in terms of taking responsibility as a city.

The Chair clarified that the proposal was asking for a three year commitment and asked when the approach would be reviewed. Chris responded that it would be towards the end of the second year.

In response to a questions Chris explained that to implement the service for 2025-26 academic year a decision would be required in autumn term 2024.

The Chair highlighted the potential that not all colleagues may opt to buy into the enhanced service and asked what the alternative approach would be. Chris responded that it would need to be discussed further at Schools Forum in order to be open and transparent. If schools or academies did not want to opt in then the model would not work.

The Chair summarised that the forum would be asking for an indication if schools and academies wanted to buy into the enhanced outreach service under the costs indicated. After brief discussion it was agreed that option three was the fairest and most viable option. Option three apportions the cost of the service to schools based on reception to year 9 pupils numbers, IDACI (for deprivation) and the number of SEMH pupils, one third for each factor.

The proposal and costings to be shared and members to return to the next meeting with an indication of whether schools and academies were agreeable to the model.

Martin Kelly requested that the proposal be shared with the outline of discussion around system leadership and moral responsibility across the city.

Dan Bodey left the meeting at 8:58am

7. Education Funding lobbying letter

The discussion was taken in conjunction with item 8.

Richard highlighted that York received slightly higher SEND funding but were at the bottom for the schools block and there were significant financial challenges across all schools in the city. It was noted that despite low funding into York, outcomes were strong. There were general challenges around further education

funding and Post 16 progression routes into college. In addition there were challenges with SEMH and SEND.

A forum member noted that York had the lowest funded schools with funding only increasing by 0.5% for those schools on the minimum per pupil funding floor.

Some schools had already made cuts to balance the books.

The impact of support staff pay award had been much higher than projected and this had a disproportionate impact on projections.

Martin Kelly noted that SEND was in crisis and was, potentially, the single issue that may take the council into bankruptcy within two years which would have significant impact on the system.

It was agreed that a letter from different parts of the system collectively saying that the situation was not good enough would be impactful.

8. f40 briefing paper

Previously distributed for information.

9. Schools Forum forward plan

The following items were noted:

- Danesgate Outreach Service model
- Education Funding - draft letters
- YSAB annual report
- Dedicated Schools Grant Outturn 2023/24
- Safety valve
- Maintained schools outturns 2023/24

- Discussion paper SEND banding

10. Any other agreed business

There was no other business.

11. Dates and time of meetings for the next academic year

4 July 2024

All meetings would take place on Thursdays from 8.00 to 9.30am at West Offices.

The meeting closed at 9.27am.