



**SURREY**  
COUNTY COUNCIL

# **Surrey Schools Forum Minutes of Meeting**

**Tuesday 28 June 2022 1.00pm Virtual Meeting on TEAMS**

Approved by



#### **4 Update on DfE funding consultations: second stage of direct national funding formula for mainstream schools**

DG advised that the DfE had now published its second stage consultation on moving to the direct (formerly hard) schools national funding formula, largely drawing on areas identified in the first consultation as needing additional work. The deadline was 9 September. An initial officer draft response to the consultation was attached. The final LA response could draw on discussions with Schools Forum, but it would be an LA response. The proposals would have no impact on budgets in 2023/24. For the avoidance of doubt the proposals only affected mainstream schools.

The DfE proposed to implement a direct NFF no later than 2027/28.

The DfE proposed that the facility for transfers from schools block should continue, though the Schools Forum would no longer have an approval role, which would be for the Secretary of State alone. Some constraints were proposed on how the funding for a block transfer is taken out of the schools formula. Variation in minimum per pupil funding level was explicitly stated as something which the Secretary of State would consider, whereas previously it had been strongly discouraged). Multi-year approvals would also be possible, subject to annual review.

The Chair noted that it was important that schools should be consulted on the method of removing funding from the formula to fund a block transfer, as the LA would be seeking such a transfer under the safety valve agreement (see item 6).

DG understood that the safety valve agreement did not in principle constrain the LA from seeking a transfer to high needs block in excess of 1%. The Chair emphasised that consultation with the Forum, and wider consultation with schools, would still be expected.

The DfE proposed to standardise notional SEN funding but had not yet proposed a specific formula to be used. It would remain notional (not ringfenced). The £6000 additional support threshold would remain, at least until any wider changes in the SEND system were made following the SEND Green Paper.

Some restrictions on the method of funding for growing schools were proposed. In particular, it was not clear whether vacancy funding for bulge classes admitted in previous years would still be permitted. LAs could be funded separately for areas of growth and for areas of significant falls in rolls (significance threshold not yet specified).

Currently academies could be funded for “popular growth” i.e. filling existing vacancies where an academy trust had improved standards leading to increased demand for places. The Chair noted that this acted as an incentive to multi academy trusts to take over weak schools. Currently, similar funding was not available to maintained schools where improved standards led to increased demand, but the consultation proposed that maintained schools in that position could be allowed to apply for popular growth funding.

DfE proposed to introduce a national split site formula factor, to replace existing local factors.

Currently LAs could fund exceptional premises costs where they exceeded 1% of school budgets. The proposals included raising the threshold to 2.5%. Two out of five Surrey schools currently funded for rent would fall below the 2.5% threshold. (NB on review, probably three).

Various data issues were also considered. In particular, the DfE had asked whether provision of a calculation tool, to allow schools to estimate next year's funding, would be more useful than publishing notional school level formulae, based on previous year data.

## **5 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management plan update**

One member asked whether a contingency could be set aside to assist those schools particularly challenged by a reduction in lump sums. DG advised that it was not possible to distribute schools block funding to mainstream schools outside the NFF (NB apart from specific exceptions e.g. growth fund) and thus such a contingency would not be possible.

**c) Other formula funding issues**

DG reminded the Forum that former historic commitments funding within DSG was expected to fall by another 20% in 2023/24. This was all now delegated to schools and he proposed that the relevant delegated funding factors should be similarly reduced.

The formula factor for looked after children would cease from 2023/24 because it would no longer be permissible.

**d) School improvement deductions**

***Statutory school improvement***

The school improvement monitoring and brokering grant had been reduced by half in 2022/23 and would cease entirely in 2023/24. This had funded statutory school improvement work in maintained schools. An overall reduction in contract value had been made for the year to August 2023 to reflect the expected reduction in the number of maintained schools. A school contribution of £12.65 per pupil was proposed (i.e. not quite twice the 2022/23 rate). Full academisation would take some time and thus there would be a significant number of maintained schools requiring monitoring for some time yet. One member noted that the proposed deduction was nearly twice the 2022/23 rate and suggested that there was a need to consider whether it could be reduced. LM noted that the work was done by a school led partnership which was not focused on making money. She suggested that a small number of Schools Forum members should look at the scope of the proposed commissioned arrangements and make recommendations if appropriate. Arrangements needed to be reviewed in the context of the Schools Bill, but there was a need to be proactive rather than just acting when problems arose. Carol Savedra to lead. **Action for CS**

The Chair asked to be kept informed and noted the need for an independent focus. CS noted that LAs still retained statutory school improvement duties in respect of maintained schools, even though funding had changed.

One member argued that there had been cases where the LA had not identified failing schools sufficiently in advance. LM commented that Surrey's maintained schools had a good record, but she felt that the system was in transition and we needed to recognise the changes needed as a result of government policy.

Another member suggested that some schools received nothing in return for the deduction and that the proposal was for a significant increase in the deduction at a time when schools were struggling. LM advised that SAFE engaged with all schools and used data from all schools in order to undertake risk assessments. This was done in order to meet the requirements on the LA in respect of maintained schools causing concern.

### ***Non statutory school improvement***

This covered the maintained primary schools intervention fund. Secondary and special schools' contributions had been refunded in 2022/23 as it was no longer possible to "de-delegate" from primary schools alone.

#### **e) Other de-delegation items**

The proposals for other de-delegated services were little changed, except that no de-delegation was proposed for school specific contingency, on DfE advice. Further information had been provided on behaviour support and traveller services.

One member asked whether more information should be provided on de-delegation for trade union representation and suggested that Education Joint Committee might help with that.

#### **f) Early years funding proposals**

The maintained nursery school transitional grant had been in place for several years. It was proposed to distribute it in the same way as previously i.e. deduct split site and rates cost and then split equally between the four maintained nursery schools.

No changes were proposed to deprivation funding, which would continue to be linked to early years pupil premium eligibility. Funding for free school meals provision in the maintained sector would continue.

**g) Any other proposals which members wish to suggest**

At the last meeting, members had been asked if they wished to suggest other items to be included. No further items had been proposed, and none were proposed at this meeting.

DG noted that other proposals may be necessary, once DfE had published the arrangements for 2023/24 (due in July 2022). Members would be given an opportunity to comment on any late proposals.

## **7 Update on special schools funding and mainstream banding review**

### **Funding of special schools**

EG recalled that at the previous meeting an increase of 2.5% in the funding of special schools had been proposed. Since then, the council had formally approved an increase worth up to 7% for support staff on the lowest grades, which had had an impact estimated at £1m on special schools. There was no scope for funding this from the high needs block because of safety valve constraints.







## **8 Schools Forum business**

Date of next meeting Thursday 6 October 2022

To include responses to consultation paper and recommendations to Cabinet, and expected DfE updates, and PRUs/alternative provision

It was agreed to plan for the next meeting to be “in person”, subject to circumstances at the time, venue to be investigated. Ideally the room should be larger than previously used.

## **9 Any other business**

### **Funding for special schools outreach**

This had been raised as an item of concern but had now been resolved outside the meeting.

### **Nursery/year R special school placements**

A member expressed concern that nursery providers were being asked to hold pupils moving into year R who needed special school places where these had not yet been found. LM suggested that this should be discussed outside the meeting, The Chair suggested that letters should be sent to parents advising that places were still being sought,

### **Funding for refugees**

One member asked for clarification of Surrey’s arrangements.

### **Meeting ended 3.35pm**

Date of next meeting Thursday 6 October 2022 1p