

# Surrey Schools Forum Draft Minutes of Meeting

**Friday 10 January 2025 1pm on Teams**

Approved by Chair. Subject to approval by members at meeting on 13 May 2025

## **Present**

### **Chair**

Jack Mayhew                      Learning Partners MAT                      Academy member

### **Joint Vice-Chairs**

Justin Price                      Freemantles School                      Special school head

### **Other school and academy members:**

Donna Harwood-Duffy      Dorking Nursery school                      Maintained nursery sch rep

Zoe Johnson-Walker      The Winston Churchill School      Maintained secondary head

Nick Elliott                      NE Secondary short stay sch      PRU representative

Liam McKeevor                      Oatlands School                      Maintained primary governor

Chris Hamilton                      Portesbery School                      Maintained special sch governor

Ben Bartlett                      Hinchley Wood Learning

Partnership                      Academy member

Sir Andrew Carter                      South Farnham Educ Trust      Academy member

Jeanette Cochrane                      The Howard Partnership Trust      Academy member

Karyn Hing                      Westfield School                      Academy member

Sarah Kober                      Lumen Learning Trust                      Academy member

Gareth Lewis                      Elmwey Learning Trust                      Academy member

Amanda Merritt                      Maybury Primary School                      Academy member

Kerry Oakley                      Carrington School                      Academy member(part)

### **Non-school members**

Tamsin Honeybourne      Unions: Education Joint Committee

### **Local Authority Officers**

Julia Katherine (JK)      Director–Education and Lifelong Learning

Eamonn Gilbert (EG)      Assistant Director -Commissioning (item 9)

Carol Savedra (CS)      Assistant Director-Commissioning

Kay Goodacre (KG)      Strategic Finance Business Partner (CFLL)

Nikki Parsons (NP)      Deputy Strategic Finance Business Partner (ELLC)

David Green (DG)      Senior Finance Business Partner (Schools Funding)

Paul Smith of HR attended to present item 10,  
Anwen Foy, Surrey Virtual School Headteacher, attended to present item 12.

Maria Dawes, SAFE, attended as an observer.

## **1 Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence**

The Chair welcomed members.

Apologies for absence had been received from:

Clare McConnell	Bisley Primary School	Maintained primary Head
Jo Vigar	Charlwood Primary	Maintained primary governor
Elaine Cooper	SWAN trust	Academy member
Jo Hastings	Ottershaw Infant and Junior	Academy member
Matthew Alexander	Greensand MAT	Academy member
John Winter	Weydon MAT	Academy member
Neil Miller	Bramley Oak Academy	Special academy member
David Euridge	Inclusive Education Trust	AP academy member
Folasadi Afolabi	Unions: Education Joint Committee	

## **2 Declarations of interest for this meeting and register**

There were no declarations of interest over and above those in the register.

## **3 Minutes of previous meeting (8 October 2024)**

### **Accuracy**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as accurate.

### **Matters arising (not covered elsewhere on the agenda)**

No matters arising were discussed as such, although a few issues from the previous meeting were covered under specific items.

## **4 Final Dedicated Schools Grant settlement 2025/26**

DG noted that the provisional DSG settlement had been late because of the impact of the change of government. The final settlement had been announced on 18 December 2024.

### **Schools block**

£60m of assimilated grants had been added to the baseline, including the full year impact of core schools budget grant, which had been paid for only seven months in 2024/25 (estimated at £11m for the remaining five months, or 1.3% of schools' budgets). This meant that the National funding formula (NFF) increases did not need to cover the remaining part year impact of that part of the teacher pay award which had been funded from grant in 2024/25.

Most NFF formula factor values had increased nationally by 0.5% above grant

In 2024/25 the LA had set aside a contingency for four additional secondary school bulge classes, over and above those needed for pre-agreed PAN increases. Although there was a risk that one or two such classes may be needed in September 2025, the LA had not set aside such a contingency in 2025/26 but had opted to bear the risk. Should the classes be required, they would still be funded based on the agreed criteria and the budget would be overspent. Officers were also aware that extra classes might be needed in the secondary sector due to fewer pupils attending independent schools now that VAT was applied to their fees, but as the impact was unknown they had opted not to provide a contingency for it. Any overspend would form part of the DSG carry forward to 2026/27 and would be considered in the context of 2026/27 budget decisions. The growth fund was still likely to be underspent taking one year with another, given the large forecast underspend in 2024/25.

Where a school is extending its age range (eg infant school converting to primary) the additional pupils must be funded by using estimated pupil numbers in the main funding formula, but the funding for the additional pupils comes from the growth fund allocation. The proposed basis of funding for the additional classes was unchanged from previous years, and the schools concerned were 6.393.02 Td(2)-3 (0)-3 (2)6 (4)-3 (/2)-5 (5)6 (.

- \* agreed the proposals for advance funding of pre-opening costs of wholly new primary schools, should it be required
- \* agreed that all expenditure meeting the above criteria can be incurred during the year for any school meeting those criteria.

## **6 Falling rolls fund 2025/26**

### **General proposal**

DG reminded the Forum that there was now a DSG allocation for assistance to schools with falling rolls. The LA was allowed to allocate additional funding to schools where pupil numbers had fallen (other than by reduction in PAN/removal of bulge classes) and where the vacant places thus created would be required by September 2027 (inclusive) as a result of pupil growth in the area. In the September 2024 funding consultation, the LA had proposed, and a majority of schools had supported, proposals to provide additional funding in 2025/26 for primary schools where pupil numbers had fallen by more than 5% since October 2022 or October 2023 (whichever was higher), and which were in planning areas where sufficient overall growth was expected before September 2027 for the places to be required.

rising. While there were a few exceptions, it was unclear whether their vacancies would be needed within the required timescale. But similar funding for secondary schools could be reconsidered in future years if circumstances changed.

In principle the LA could spend more on falling rolls than the DFE allocation, but that would mean reducing main formula allocations.

The Chair noted the serious impact of falling rolls on primary schools and the need to do what could be done to assist them.

### **Special case: Lakeside Primary School**

DG reminded Forum members that a year ago they had agreed as a special case to provide additional funding to Lakeside Primary School, which had lost pupils to other local schools with vacancies, when the school moved to a site on a new housing estate 2.8 miles away. The proposed additional funding was intended to compensate for the loss of pupils attributable to the move, and was provisionally agreed for three years.

The Forum was asked to agree funding for 2025/26, on the same principles as 2024/25, at an estimated cost of £231,000.

The Forum agreed:

the proposed criteria for falling rolls funding for 2025/26, including the special case, and the proposed falling rolls budgets

Based on the latest data this means an increase of roughly 0.36% in formula factor rates, lower than the national 0.5%, reflecting data changes locally, and a minimum funding guarantee of 0%. A ceiling on gains was considered as a possible alternative, but in 2025/26 the main losers from a ceiling would be small rural schools in receipt of sparsity funding and with large falls in pupil numbers, thus conflicting with the aim of supporting small schools and thus this could not be recommended. Examples were given in the annexes.

#### **Alternative formula factors if DfE rejected block transfer request**

The DfE had not (at least yet) agreed to the LA request to transfer 1% of schools funding to the high needs block. Should this not be agreed, the LA proposed to set funding rates higher than above (approx. 99.73% of NFF). The Forum was asked to support this proposal for use if required, as there would not be sufficient time to reconsult the Forum later if DfE turned down the request.

#### **Exceptional premises factor request for rents of essential accommodation**

The LA had asked DfE to approve continued funding of rents of essential accommodation. The proposal was exactly the same as current arrangements, but the DfE now required annual applications. The DfE expected to know Schools Forum's view of the proposal and thus the Forum was asked to support it. (Update: approved by DfE 22 January)

#### **De-delegation**

The LA proposed to increase all de-delegation rates by 3.6% in 2025/26. This differed from the proposal approved in October (in which some rates would increase by more than that and some by less). Representatives of maintained primary and secondary schools were asked to approve the revised proposed rates for services previously approved for de-delegation.

The Chair noted that a number of primary headteachers had expressed concern over the arrangements for de-delegation of funding for non-statutory school improvement. They sought clarification that de-delegation could be, and had been, approved on the basis that SAFE managed the funding.







One member asked why SAFE subscriptions for traded school improvement work were the same for maintained schools and academies if the LA retained funding from the proposed deductions from maintained schools. The SLA with both sectors covered the same traded services, The retained duties funded by the deduction were separate and set out in the contract with the LA.

CS advised that SAFE now provided governor support and that what was provided under the SLA exceeded basic statutory responsibilities e.g. it included a training offer.

The Chair suggested a briefing to Primary Council on statutory services provided from the levy deduction, for all services included. This could also clarify what is provided by SAFE and what is provided directly by the council. **Action for JK/KG?**

One member asked for clarification as to whether any of the teacher pension costs was for charges by Capita, expressing concern over the standard of service they provided. **Action; DG to check with Corporate**

Maintained school reps present approved the proposals, The Chair asked for more transparency in future over the details of the statutory duties.

## **9 Special Schools and Pupil Referral Unit inflation funding process for 2025/26**

Eamonn Gilbert reminded the Forum that, unlike mainstream funding, there was no national funding formula for special schools and PRUs. Inflation allowances were negotiated by individual local authorities from the high needs block. In 2025/26 there had been a near-7% increase in Surrey's high needs block but this needed to cover significant current and new year EHCP growth not just inflation. In Surrey,

Members noted the impact of higher than expected Surrey pay settlements, particularly for low paid staff.

EG would provide an update to Schools Forum on the agreement reached. **Action for EG**

The government had promised additional funding towards the increases in employer NI but the amount and basis of distribution were not yet known. Such funding would be in addition to any inflation uplift amount agreed for 2025/26.

The allowable limit on centrally retained funds had been reduced from 5%

### **13 Arrangements for distribution of government grants**

DG explained that the LA was expected to consult Schools Forum annually on the arrangements for distribution of government grants to schools. For most such grants the DfE specified how much was to be paid to each school and all the LA could do was to pass on the allocations to maintained schools as soon as possible via the

Schools Forum, however it had been decided these meetings were no longer needed as the discussions duplicate those held in other forums. A lot of work has been done with SCC and phase council leads to map out all of the partnership working groups with school representation in order to avoid duplication and make best use of school leaders' time.

### **Child Wellbeing Bill**

A member noted that the Child Wellbeing Bill appeared to place additional statutory duties on local authorities. He asked whether the LA had a view yet as to what changes in teams would be required and whether that would have an impact on schools funding. It was agreed that the issue should be added to a future agenda.

### **Action for JK/KG?**

### **Funding deductions for permanent exclusions**

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