



Surrey Schools Forum Minutes of Meeting

Tuesday 9 January 2024 1pm on Teams

Approved by the Forum at their meeting on 14 May 2024

Present

Chair

Jack Mayhew Learning Partners MAT Academy member

Joint Vice-Chairs

Kate Keane Ewell Grove Primary Primary Head

Justin Price Freemantles School Special school head

Other school and academy members:

Donna Harwood-Duffy Dorking Nursery school Maintained nursery sch rep

Katie Aldred Bagshot Infant School Primary Head

Clare McConnell Bisley Primary School Primary Head

Nick Elliott NE secondary SSS PRU head

Steph Neale St Pauls Catholic Primary Primary governor

Ben Bartlett Hinchley Wood Learning
Partnership Academy member

Sir Andrew Carter South Farnham Educ Trust Academy member

Elaine Cooper SWAN academy trust Academy member

Jo Hastings Ottershaw Infant and Junior Academy member

Karyn Hing Westfield School Academy member

Sarah Kober Lumen Learning Trust Academy member

Kerry Oakley Carrington School Academy member

Sue Wardlow Greensand MAT Academy member

John Winter Weydon MAT Academy member

Neil Miller Bramley Oak Academy Special academy member

David Euridge Reigate Valley/Wey Valley AP academy member

Non-school members

Sarah Porter Private, voluntary and independent nurseries

Folasadi Afolabi Unions: Education Joint Committee
Matthew Rixson Guildford Diocese (Church of England)

Local Authority Officers

Julia Katherine (JK) Director–Education and Lifelong Learning
Mary Burguieres Assistant Director (Systems and Transformation)
Carol Savedra (CS) Assistant Director-SEND, Education, Early Years
Jim Nunns Assistant Director IAN (NW area)
Neil Slack Surrey Education Services Manager
Carrie Traill Head of Education
Matt Marsden Interim Strategic Finance Business Partner
Sarah Bryan Deputy Strategic Finance Business Partner
David Green (DG) Senior Finance Business Partner (Schools Funding)
Eamonn Gilbert Assistant Director -Commissioning (item 6 only)

1 Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from:

Christine Ricketts Post 16 providers

New member: Nick Elliott (pupil referral unit headteacher).

The Chair welcomed Julia Katherine as new Director of Education and Lifelong Learning.

2 Declarations of interest for this meeting and register

The Chair thanked those members who had updated their declarations of interest, but noted that a few were still outstanding. As the register was not public, he asked that relevant interests should still be disclosed at meetings. None were disclosed in respect of this meeting.

3 Election of Vice-Chairs

The Chair advised that both Vice-Chairs had been nominated unopposed to continue in office and both had accepted.

Kate Keane advised that she would be leaving her present school at the end of the present academic year, and thus would be unable to complete her new term of office.

It was agreed that the terms of office of Vice-Chairs should be realigned to match the academic year.

4 Minutes of previous meeting (3 October 2023)

Accuracy

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as accurate.

Matters arising (not covered elsewhere on the agenda)

De-delegation of funds for union facilities for secondary sector

The maintained secondary rep had opposed the proposal at the October meeting, but the consultation response from the sector had not been clear. A vote on this proposal had been deferred from the last meeting in order to allow further consultation with the sector. There was no sector representative present at this (January) meeting. It was agreed that in all the circumstances there could be no de-delegation in 2024/25, but schools would be able to buy in if they chose.

5 Final DSG settlement for 2024/25: update

Final DSG allocations for 2024/25 had been published in December. Total Schools Block allocation was £0.2m higher than the provisional figures published in October, as corrected by DfE and circulated to Forum members since the last meeting. Of the increase in schools block funding of £43.8m since 2023/24, £27m was due to assimilation of mainstream schools additional grant and only £16.8m was actually new money. There was a 1.4% increase in most mainstream funding rates, 1.4% in minimum per pupil level and 0.5% in minimum funding guarantee. All of these were the same as announced by DfE in October. The final high needs block allocation was £1.5m higher than the provisional (£1.3m for pupil numbers and £0.2m cross border adjustments). Pupil number funding in the high needs block is always updated in December.

There was a large increase in early years funding, in order to support the new entitlements and to support increased funding rates for current entitlements. Early years funding would be updated during the year using future census data, in the normal way. Paper 9 covers early years funding in more detail.

The Forum had no questions on this paper.

6 Update on special schools, including proposed disapplications

Inflation increase for 2024/25

Eamonn reminded the Forum that whereas mainstream school funding was determined by a (largely) nationally driven formula, decisions on inflation funding for special schools were still locally driven. Over the past two years, proposals for changes to special schools funding had been discussed by a special school headteacher working group, which made recommendations to phase council. Officers were still working through details for 2024/25, but they anticipated making a proposal to the working group later in the week, with a joint proposal to phase council on 2 February. Officers were committed to do all they could to agree a proposal by 31 January.

Proposed variation in funding for Grafham Grange and St Dominic's schools

As part of Surrey's commitments under the safety valve agreement, officers had been negotiating with Orchard Hill MAT and had reached an agreement with the MAT and the two schools on their aligning funding with Surrey band funding for pupils joining the school over the next five years. This would mean their moving towards the same formula as that applied to other Surrey state special schools. Although this was an action in the safety valve agreement, it required a "disapplication" request to DfE, because it breached the minimum funding guarantee. DfE expected to know the views of Schools Forum on any disapplication requests.

A statement agreed with the MAT had been circulated to Forum members.

One member asked why a five year transition period was necessary. EG advised that it was important to avoid destabilising the schools and to avoid impact on provision for current pupils. The actual difference in funding would depend on which Surrey bands new pupils were on-and this would vary for every intake. Therefore it was difficult to estimate the overall financial impact.

The Forum supported the proposed agreement without a vote.

7 Growing schools fund and falling rolls issues 2024/25 and update on 2023/24

DG reminded the Forum that they had the right of approval of the growing schools budget and criteria, and asked the Forum to note the latest estimates for 2023/24 and to approve criteria and budget for 2024/25. Some additional criteria had been added in response to changes in DFE requirements. The paper also proposed transitional falling rolls funding for one school, seen as a special case. Surrey's 2024/25 DSG growing schools allocation was £4.018m, plus an allocation of £0.592m for falling rolls, for four small areas in Surrey where primary pupil numbers had fallen by 10% or more. LAs were allowed to move funds between NFF formula and growing schools/falling rolls funds.

The updated 2023/24 estimates included £423,000 for three special cases for which the LA was recommending approval. Total estimated cost for 2023/24 was now £2.190m.

The paper proposed a transfer of £400,000 from growth fund to support the formula. DfE had now clarified that certain categories of growth within PAN need not be funded, and accordingly DG proposed that a further £400,000 be transferred from growth to NFF (by reducing the contingencies for growth with PAN), leaving growth fund of £2.386m (not £2.786m). There was always uncertainty in growing schools costs until September place allocation was complete and therefore it was necessary to allow contingencies.

The full criteria were described in Annex A. The proposals in part 2 were new for 2024/25.

The LA had sought a disapplication from DfE to reduce the funding of four schools where bulge classes were leaving in July 2024. The outcome was still awaited (NOTE: rejected on 12 January, as officers had anticipated).

One member asked what was done with any underspend on the growing schools budget and whether it was available for schools in the following year. DG advised that any underspend was reported to Schools Forum as part of the outturn, but that in recent years no decision had been taken on its use. He thought DfE just looked at the net DSG outturn and therefore doubted whether growth fund underspend could be carried forward separately while the LA had an overall DSG deficit, so there could be no guarantee that underspends benefited schools in future years.

The member suggested that the budget may have been set too prudently and that mainstream schools were thus disadvantaged.

DG argued that the budget needed to be set prudently to avoid risk to next year's NFF rates. The Forum recognised that there was a balance of risk between running a surplus and risking an overspend. DG reminded the Forum that it wasn't possible to distribute a growth fund surplus through the formula during the year as LAs were not allowed to change the mainstream formula during the year.

It was agreed that officers would contact DfE to clarify whether unspent growth fund could be carried forward separately and recycled to schools, despite the overall DSG deficit, and that the response would be considered when setting the growing schools budget for 2025/26.

New criteria for 2024/25 (annex 2 pt 2)

DG explained that two new criteria were proposed for approval:

- * to fund as growth an extra class where any school had previously increased PAN but the growth had not materialised in the year of the PAN increase (in effect deferred growth)
- * where a school had recently reduced PAN (such that the PAN of the leaving group exceeded the most recent PAN) and the LA had seen the decision to reduce PAN as reasonable at the time it was taken, to measure growth from the reduced PAN rather than the leaving group PAN

The third proposal in Annex 2-to fund specified other growth within PAN-was withdrawn, as recent advice from DfE suggested that it was no longer required.

DG also asked for the Forum's approval to allocate growth fund to any school on the basis of the agreed criteria in 2024/25 without further approval.

Pre opening funding for wholly new free schools

The paper included a proposal for pre opening funding for wholly new schools. DG advised that it was not required in 2024/25, but was included in order to keep it within the criteria in case it was required in future (NB no budget was requested for this in 2024/25).

Schools extending age range and funded on average pupil numbers.

Annex B showed the schools which were to be funded on average pupil numbers in 2024/25. LAs were expected to advise the Forum of the schools to be funded in this way.

2023/24 growth fund allocations for schools where PAN had been held down or reduced

The Forum was asked to approve exceptional growth allocations in 2023/24 to three schools which did not meet the normal criteria, at a total cost of £423,000:

- Merstham Park, to fund growth above 120 (temporary PAN applied to leaving group when first admitted, compared to full PAN of 180), on the basis that the temporary PAN had been needed due to accommodation limitations
- Bishop David Brown school, where the July 2023 leaving group had been admitted under a PAN of 180, but the PAN had since been reduced to 150. The proposal was to fund growth above 150, not 180.
- Collingwood College, where the July 2023 leaving group had been admitted under a PAN of 355, later reduced to 300. The proposal was to fund growth above 323 (number in leaving group) rather than above 355.

Both PAN reductions had been seen as justifiable at the time they were made, based on pupil number data at the time.

The Chair noted that these proposals for 2023/24 were consistent with proposed criteria for 2024/25.

Exceptional falling rolls proposal for Lakeside Nursery and Primary academy

DG asked the Forum to approve an exceptional falling rolls fund proposal for Lakeside Nursery and Primary Academy. Pupil numbers at this school had fallen when it moved to a new site on a new housing development, but projections showed that pupil numbers were expected to recover within the next three to five years. The school was seen as a special

case for falling rolls funding because it had moved site to support the LA. The pupil losses were not just ordinary variations but reflected the change of location. DFE had confirmed that it was happy for the LA to use local projections of pupil numbers, rather than 2022/23 SCAP return data, which must normally be used, because the move has meant that the school is now in a different planning area.

DG reminded the Forum that falling rolls funding may only be used where the places are expected to be required within the next three to five years. Uncertainty over where pupil losses were temporary would occur has been a major reason for Surrey's reluctance to use a falling rolls fund.

The Forum:

- * **noted current estimates for growing schools funding for 2023/24**
- * **agreed the proposed criteria for growing schools funding for 2024/25 (described in Annex A of the paper, apart from the third proposal in part 2 of annex A**
- * **agreed the provisional growing schools' budget for 2024/25 and the proposed transfer of £800,000 to support the main formula**
- * **supported the proposed methods for the use of average pupil numbers for schools changing age range**
- * **agreed the proposals for advance funding of pre opening costs of wholly new primary schools**
- * **agreed the proposals for 2023/24 growth funding for the three schools named above where effective PAN was reduced or otherwise suppressed in previous years**
- * **agreed the proposed basis of falling rolls funding for Lakeside Nursery and Primary Academy**
- * **agreed that all expenditure meeting the above criteria can be incurred during the year for any school meeting those criteria.**

8 Final proposals for schools funding formula 2024/25, including update on disapplication requests for 2023/24 and 2024/25 and related arrangements, post 16 mainstream SEN place funding and residual de-delegation

Setting formula funding rates for 2024/25

DG reminded the Forum that the LA now needed to adjust formula factors and use of ceiling, in order to make the formula affordable with the updated data. The level of additional need for formula purposes had increased between October 2022 and October 2023, at an estimated cost of £2.4m, and thus Surrey would have been unable to deliver NFF in full even without a transfer of funds to high needs block. Surrey was still awaiting a response to the block transfer proposal, but the proposals in the paper largely assumed that it would be approved.

In the autumn consultation, the LA had proposed two options for affordability adjustments, ie a small reduction in funding rates and a reduced ceiling, or using a ceiling alone to reduce costs. The former had received majority support, but there had also been significant minority support for a larger reduction in funding rates and a higher ceiling.

Officers had reviewed the impact of the proposals using Oct 2023 data and were asking the Forum to consider two options:

- * the previous recommendation of funding at 98.5% NFF with a ceiling and
- * funding at 98.44% NFF with a higher ceiling (amended from 98.4% in the paper following the additional transfer from growth fund).

Both options would leave minimum funding guarantee at 0.5%, thus providing some inflation increase to all schools, would deliver MPPL in full and would preserve the lump sum above

NFF. The paper showed that 45% fewer primary schools were subject to ceiling deductions under the reduced funding rate method, which meant that funding losses were spread more widely across schools. Many schools would see funding 0.06% lower, but a few schools would see much smaller ceiling losses.

For schools on minimum funding guarantee or MPPL under all options the choice makes no difference. Data showed that in 2024/25:

- * the proportion of small primary schools subject to a ceiling would be greater than the corresponding proportion for all primary schools, and thus action to mitigate the ceiling would support small schools-eg for the option illustrated 29% of primary schools with under 100 pupils were subject to a ceiling compared to 11% of all primary schools
- * many schools which would be subject to a ceiling in 2024/25 were also subject to a ceiling in 2023/24 (the ceiling was based on the previous year budget, after any ceiling deduction)
- * for some schools the ceiling represents a significant percentage reduction.

However, the actual number of schools on ceiling would differ from those shown in the paper due to the impact of the additional £400,000 transfer from growth fund.

One member noted that more schools would be on MFG under the reduced formula factor proposal and commented that an 0.5% increase was inadequate. DG replied that a school on MFG as a result of the proposed change would have been only 0.06% (or less) above MFG otherwise, i.e. still suffered only a small loss under the proposed change in funding rates.

Another member supported assistance to small schools but was uneasy at supporting a proposal which had not been explicitly set out in the autumn consultation. He suggested that that might discourage schools from engaging with the consultation in future. DG argued that while a further reduction in formula rates (below 98.5%) hadn't been explicitly proposed in the consultation paper, it had been an option which respondents could choose if they did not support the LA's two preferred options, so it was not wholly new. The final decision on the formula is for the LA after consultation (a point the DfE always emphasise). The method now proposed had been the second most popular among schools, of the four described in the consultation.

Other members supported the use of a method which supported small schools.

The forum noted that a decision to implement the reduced NFF rates would require careful communication to colleagues to avoid undermining the consultation process.

The Forum supported the proposal for setting formula rates at 98.44% of NFF (with variations for lump sum and basic entitlement as before), allowing a higher ceiling than if they were set at 98.5% as originally proposed.

Reserve proposal (in case DfE rejected the proposal to transfer funds to the high needs block)

The Forum supported the reserve proposal, for use if the DFE rejected the proposed block transfer. This was to set funding rates at approximately 99.75% of NFF (adjusted for lump sum and basic entitlement) with no ceiling.

Proposed disapplications for Cranleigh Primary School in 2023/24

The LA proposed to apply to DfE to make two changes to 2023/24 funding for Cranleigh Primary School:

- * withdraw split site funding from January 2024, as the school had given up its second site at the end of December 2023 (£5000)

* withdraw SEN centre place funding backdated to September 2023. There had been no pupils in the centre since that date, and the school had agreed to the reduction. As these were changes to the current year's budget shares, they required a "disapplication" request to DfE, on which the DfE would expect to know the Forum's views.

The Forum supported the proposed disapplications.

Post 16 mainstream SEN place funding

DG reminded the Forum that, a few years ago, the LA had agreed that post 16 mainstream SEN place funding should be distributed based on the current number of post 16 top up pupil, rather than on a historic number of places. As this was a local arrangement, the Forum was being asked to support its continuing use.

The Forum supported continuing use of the local arrangements for distributing post 16 mainstream SEN place funding.

9 Outcome of early years funding consultation, including approval of central spend

Carl Savedra reported that there had been 132 responses to the early years funding consultation, compared to 84 the previous year. The consultation had been separate from that on schools because the DfE announcements had been later and because of the significance of the changes. All proposals had been broadly supported by the sector, including those for the new entitlements for children aged 9 months to two years of working parents. From April 2024, children aged two of eligible working parents would be entitled to 15 hrs/week, from Sept 2024 this would be extended to children aged 9 months to two years and from Sept 2025 both groups would be entitled to 30 funded hrs/week. Key comments from responses had been included in the paper. The overall funding was increasing from £84m in 2023/24 to £132m in 2024/25 to £184m in 2025/26, plus implementation funding both for new entitlements and wraparound, plus capital funding.

The Chair noted that there had been broad support for all of the proposed options.

An increase of 3p/hr in the hourly rate for 3-4 year olds had been proposed, in order to remove the "historic (annual) underspend".

Changes had been made to the proposals on deprivation since the consultation, based on decisions by DfE. All early years age groups would now be eligible for early years pupil premium and thus it was proposed to use the same criteria for deprivation formula funding for all age groups. Under present criteria a very high proportion of two year olds would attract deprivation funding and it would have meant too low a basic rate had the Surrey deprivation rate been set at the same level as for three and four year olds. Thus initially it was proposed to set the two year old deprivation supplement at £1, and to review and monitor the proportion of two year olds eligible for deprivation funding. Currently this was estimated to be around 25% of the combined current and working parent entitlement. The aim was to keep the basic hourly rate for two year olds above £6. Few under twos were expected to be eligible for deprivation funding, but takeup would be kept under review.

As funding for 3-4 year olds had increased appreciably, it was now proposed that only 5% of 3-4 year old funding would be used for EIF, rather than 5.7% as at present, thus allowing a larger increase in the basic hourly rate. It was proposed that EIF funding for under twos, two year olds and 3-4 year olds should be held separately.

Maintained nursery school supplementary grant would continue as previously, ie split site allocation, business rates at actual cost and the balance split equally among the four maintained nursery schools.

Hourly rates for Surrey were higher than anywhere else apart from London boroughs, reflecting Surrey's high costs.

DfE's estimated funding allocations for under two year olds had been based on 22 weeks (for two terms) rather than 25. DfE had still to provide a satisfactory response (update: confirmed 11 Jan that DfE would fund 25 weeks).

DfE would cap central retention for all age groups at 3% in future and hence permanent establishment spending would be contained within 3%, the balance up to 5% would be used for implementation costs. Centrally retained funding had increased by £2.7m to £5.6m, for infrastructure and grant funding for expansion £930k of the increase was long term and the rest temporary.

Population decreases were a significant risk for two year olds (13%) and under twos (8%).

Indicative hourly rates for 2024/25 would be available by the end of January, but they might be set cautiously.

Expansion of wraparound

This was expected to be parent funded, but the LA had a sufficiency duty. The LA was discussing with providers how to use the implementation funding. The LA proposed to consult schools on this outside the bulletin.

The Chair noted the significant demands of the expansion on resources and supported consulting schools outside the bulletin.

The maintained nursery rep commented that early notification of indicative funding rates was one of the key issues for the sector. It was also important to communicate why the basic rate for two year olds was falling. This was largely because there had previously been no central retentions (or allocations to EIF).

Only around 50% of disadvantaged two year olds qualified as deprived under the new criteria (as opposed to SEND etc).

Significant sums had been set aside for communications. There were very detailed plans to increase central capacity. The governance model for the expansion needed to go to Cabinet. Further details could be provided at the next meeting of Schools Forum.

One member asked what difference it would make if the wraparound care was state funded rather than parent funded, given that state funding levels were often lower than charges for parent funded provision.

CS thought the proposed level of funding for funded entitlements was financially sustainable. Initial surveys of parent, carers and providers suggested 82% of current provision would convert to funded entitlement, but that parents would only take up extra hours when the funded entitlement increased to 30hr. She was already aware of significant increases in takeup of the 2 year old entitlement.

Work had been done to identify areas of over and under supply, but to be useful to providers this really needed to be done at ward level, which was difficult.

Schools forum had an important part in the communication process.

The forum supported the early years funding proposals (including central expenditure) without a vote.

10 Three financially resourced models to support Early Intervention and Inclusion and 'waiting well' for delayed Education Health Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs)

JK explained that the proposed initiatives were responses to feedback from schools.

Education Inclusion and intervention funding

This built on what was available for preschool children. It was not always evident at year R whether long term support via an EHCP was needed or whether by providing appropriate early support an EHCP and long term support could be avoided. A pilot project involved identifying pupils who had received additional support in early years. Pupils would be identified based on those already receiving support and who may need some continued support in Year R but not necessarily ongoing support, to avoid bureaucracy or a bidding process. Correction to paper (p34): funding would NOT be provided for children receiving wider support.

The Chair commented that managing the increase in EHCPs was a challenge and suggested that funding for all children on EIF should continue into reception.

JK explained that the proposal that EIF should apply only where there were at least three eligible children was aimed at keeping the proposal proportionate and affordable.

One member commented that pilots created inequality across Surrey. JK advised that the pilot would concentrate on those schools most in need and not on geographical areas. A member also asked that outreach services should be considered.

Members wanted to know how the impact of the proposal would be measured. Criteria may need to evolve over time.

CS advised that within EIF there was a robust process for measuring tangible progress from interventions. Success depended on identifying the right children and the right interventions.

“Waiting well”

“Waiting well” involved additional funding for schools which had had to support multiple pupils over a period due to delays in EHC needs assessments. The backlog at its worst had been around 1000 unallocated EHC needs assessments, but this had now been reduced as a result of the recovery plan in place. By May it was expected that over 60% of EHC needs assessments would be completed within 20 weeks (above performance nationally). The proposal was to provide additional funding for schools which had had a number of children for whom they had had to continue to provide additional support whilst awaiting assessment. The LA already had the data to identify which schools were most impacted and was particularly concerned over the impact on small schools, so schools would not need to apply for funds.

Members commented that 60% of EHCPs being completed within 20 weeks didn't mean the backlog had been cleared. JK replied that that was above the national average and that the Surrey completion rate was expected to return to above the national average, as it had been previously.

Members asked about the cost of this proposal. It would be affordable.
Members noted the need for transparency over evaluating impact.

Criteria for funding could be shared.

Additional STIPS support

Schools are already receiving additional STIPS support for pupils awaiting assessment, and this has been very positively received. Currently this was being funded from existing resources, but that was not sustainable. Schools had valued the additional support, and increasing STIPS support could be achieved relatively swiftly compared to increasing the availability of educational psychologists.

The Chair asked why additional STIPS support would be required if the EHCP backlog would be cleared by May and whether STIPS support for children with delayed EHCPs had been at the expense of other support for schools. JK commented that STIPS offered wider support and did not just concentrate on the backlog. In future it would focus on supporting children receiving SEN Support and looking at the impact of recent changes.

The Chair suggested that the Forum supported the proposals but sought more detail. He recognised the challenges and that there was still a long way to go.

The Forum supported the proposals.

11a CSSB (central schools services block) 2024/25

DG reminded the Forum that the central schools services block was intended to fund a range of services, which were statutory responsibilities of the LA both for maintained schools and academies, and that there is no expectation that this funding is delegated to schools. The Forum has the right of approval of expenditure from the central schools services block (except payments to the DfE for licences and subscriptions). The services proposed were set out in the paper, largely the same as in 2023/24, with two additions of small value (total £34k) and a few minor changes.

The Forum approved the proposed CSSB budgets for 2024/25

11b Central services levy 2024/25

DG advised that the same rates of central services deductions from maintained school budgets were proposed for 2024/25 as for 2023/24 (ie £35.98 per pupil plus £6.50 per pupil for statutory school improvement. The services proposed to be funded were the same as in 2023/24, although the overall funding available would be reduced due to academy conversions, and there had been some increases and decreases in individual service costs.

The services covered maintained primary, secondary and special schools and PRUs, and voting was restricted to those groups.

Representatives of maintained primary and special schools agreed the proposed deductions (NB single decision for all maintained schools other than maintained nursery schools-unaffected by there being no maintained secondary or PRU reps present)

12 Locality Nurture Hub provision (Primary and Secondary Phase)

Jim Nunns presented this item.

The proposal arose from a recent review of nurture groups and learning support units (LSUs). They were seen as helpful but needed to be more consistent in provision and there needed to be more of them. The proposal was for at least one nurture group and LSU in each borough and that they would do outreach. There was a need to move more funding to support emotional wellbeing needs and distressed behaviour. Current distribution of provision was uneven, and suspensions and exclusions were increasing as were emotional wellbeing concerns. The aims were that the right provision at the right time would avoid the need for assessment and specialist provision later, to support children with EHM needs and their parents, and supporting inclusion, a high priority of the inclusion innovation working group. The proposal was ambitious and at scale, perhaps 190 children a year. It would take five years for the project to be established.

Members asked how the development would be monitored, suggesting that some nurture groups had been more successful than others. STIPS would monitor, schools would have to submit expressions of interest. Relevant staff in nurture groups would have Nurture UK training, funded from the mental health investment fund, as would 4-8 STIPS in each area to do the monitoring. It was hoped that training could be funded for secondary schools too.

Members questioned whether the nurture groups would in fact be available to pupils from other schools, and whether additional staff would be provided for outreach. Jim advised that STIPS would do a lot of the work to ensure that nurture group schools connect with other schools and that there should be a % of places set aside in each for children from other schools. He saw this as a step in the right direction and hoped it would be more than the sum of its parts.

Members noted that costs of nurture groups/LSUs had not been reviewed since 2012.

One member suggested that the existing SALP processes were quite complex, and that SALP was struggling. He urged that services should be more joined up. He would not like to see something different coming up separately. JN replied that the proposed programme had to work within the system. He suggested that SALP was mainly for pupils in need of alternative provision, and that the current proposals would come at an earlier stage.

Members asked where the total cost of £1.5m for this proposal and item 10 would come from. JN replied that financial mapping had been undertaken and that if 10% of the children involved avoided NMI placements the overall savings would be significant. The project was ambitious but could yield year on year savings in NMI placements. He had no anxieties over the costs. It was important to support children by early preventative work, rather than later by assessment and specialist placements. The Chair agreed this was crucial.

There was no capital budget for the proposal, so schools would need to have space available.

The Chair summarised that the Forum was supportive of the general direction, and that it was vital that the work was done.

13 Distribution of government grants

DG explained that the Forum was supposed to consider the arrangements for the distribution of government grants to schools annually. The item allowed the Forum to consider the issue. Generally the LA had little choice over grant distribution, but simply had to pass on school level allocations calculated by DfE.

The Forum had no questions on the issue.

14 ESS SIMS update

Neil Slack and Mary Burguieres presented this item, Guidance and file schemas had been provided for schools seeking to change suppliers. The file formats ought to make sense to those providers. A survey of schools' intentions had been undertaken. Only 36 maintained schools (20% of the sector) had responded, of which most were remaining with ESS. Some were proposing to remain with ESS for finance only, which might carry a risk of double licensing. Some schools still seemed unsure, which was a cause for concern. Schools needed to be aware of appropriate processes for transferring data.

Group procurement work on an alternative supplier was planned to start in 2024.

15 Schools Forum issues

May meeting to be on Teams and July meeting to be "in person".

No additional agenda items were proposed.

16 Other business

There was no other business.

Meeting ended 3.58pm

Date of next meeting

Tuesday 14 May 2024 1pm, on Teams