



Surrey Schools Forum Minutes of Meeting

Tuesday 8 October 1pm on Teams

Approved by members at their meeting on 10 Jan 2025

Present

Chair

Jack Mayhew Learning Partners MAT Academy member

Joint Vice-Chairs

Jo Hastings Ottershaw Infant and Junior Academy member

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 Maintained primary head

Clare McConnell Bisley Primary School Maintained primary Head

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

Jo Vigar Charlwood Primary 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

Elaine Cooper SWAN academy trust Academy member

Karyn Hing Westfield School Academy member

Sarah Kober Lumen Learning Trust Academy member

Gareth Lewis Elmwey Academy member

Amanda Merritt Maybury Primary School 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 Inclusive Education Trust AP academy member

Non-school members

Tamsin Honeybourne	Unions: Education Joint Committee
Matthew Rixson	Guildford Diocese (Church of England)
James Kibble	Arundel and Brighton Diocese (RC)
Charlotte Swann	Family Voice Surrey (SEN)

Local Authority Officers

Julia Katherine (JK)	Director–Education and Lifelong Learning
Eamonn Gilbert (EG)	Assistant Director -Commissioning
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 and Vicky McHugh of HR attended to present item 5.

1 Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence

The Chair welcomed new members: Jeanette Cochrane, Gareth Lewis, Amanda Merritt, and Liam McKeever.

Apologies for absence had been received from:

Folasadi Afolabi	Unions: Education Joint Committee
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2 Declarations of interest for this meeting and register

Ben Bartlett declared an interest as CEO of a multi academy trust with SEN centres. Jeannette Cochrane declared an interest as representative of a multi academy trust with special schools and SEN centres.

3 Minutes of previous meeting (2 July 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, however some supplementary material will be circulated.

4 Update on DFE funding announcements

DG reported that a new core schools budget grant had been announced. School level allocations for mainstream schools had been published by DFE in the previous week. The grant was for additional costs including the September 2024 teacher pay increase and increases in support staff costs. DfE had confirmed that the grant would be assimilated into NFF in 2025/26 but not how it would be assimilated. Typically, the grant was around 2% of budget share for mainstream schools. The grant also covered special schools and pupil referral units. the LA had some discretion over the basis of allocation to these sectors and discussions on a method

of distribution were in progress with headteacher working groups for these sectors. (NB no requirement to consult Schools Forum on the basis of distribution).

There was also an early years budget grant, intended to assist with the cost of the teacher pay increase to early years providers. There was an expectation that sector representatives would be consulted on the basis of distribution, but there was no requirement to consult Schools Forum.

Announcements of funding levels for 2025/26 were not expected until after the Budget on 30 October. An additional schools forum meeting in November/December might be needed in order to consider Budget outcomes.

5 Support staff pay

Paul Smith recalled a previous request from Schools Forum members that they could be engaged early in support staff pay discussions and involved in the decision making process. Unions had submitted a pay claim for 2025/26 equivalent to an 8% increase on the paybill, which was seen as unaffordable. They sought proportionately larger increases for lower grades. The council's medium term financial strategy had allowed for a 3% average increase. Currently the lowest pay point (PS1/2) was £12.04 /hr., which was above current projections of £11.89/hr for the minimum wage from 1 April 2025, although the government had yet to announce a value. PS3 hourly rate was currently £12.56. The (non-statutory) real living wage was currently £12.00/hr, only a little below PS1/2.

The King's Speech had included the introduction of a national negotiating body for school support staff, which would apply to all state schools not just maintained, but no commencement date had been announced. Paul suggested that it was unlikely to have any impact on the 2025/26 pay settlement. The previous (2010) Labour government had done some work on a similar body with a remit including a national pay spine and national job evaluation scheme. It would need statutory backing because of potential equal pay issues. It was unclear whether this would mean additional government funding for support staff pay increases, in a similar way to those recently provided for teachers' pay increases.

Options for a local pay offer would be needed in case the national body was not in place in 2025/26. A paper would be considered by PPDC on 4 November with a range of options. Schools Forum members were invited to suggest issues of concern for inclusion in that paper

Action: members to contact Chair or Paul Smith or DG with any issues, if possible by 15 October

One member noted the absence of a paper for this item and asked whether Paul would attend all Forum meetings in future and asked for him to provide papers in advance. PS agreed to do this.

Action for PS-attend future Forum meetings and provide advance papers.

The member also noted the disproportionate impact of recent support staff pay settlements on special schools, due to the high proportion of staff on low pay grades. Paul noted that minimum wage increases in recent years, targeted to meet a previous government target of reaching 67% of median earnings by 2024, had necessitated larger percentage increases in pay for the lowest grades, but the position of the current government on the minimum wage was not clear.

Members emphasised the essential role of support staff in schools. They asked for as much notice as possible of proposed pay increases. Paul advised that information was usually available on the Education services hub, and that business managers should check that regularly, but that timetables for decisions depended on the progress of negotiations. In 2024 a dispute over the pay offer had led PPDC to make a revised offer.

Members noted that there were recruitment and retention pressures at all levels. Higher graded staff (for example business managers) had received minimal increases in recent years. ASCL was looking at this. But there were also difficulties in recruitment and retention of teaching assistants in special schools. They suggested that an SEN allowance might help.

It was noted that a union request within their pay claim, for an additional day's holiday, would be a budget pressure for schools because it meant an increase in pay for term time only staff.

6 Outcome of Surrey Schools funding consultation

DG summarised the outcomes of the recent schools funding consultation.

Question 7: Do you support the transfer of 1% of the schools block allocation to the high needs block in 2025/26, in order to support the continued implementation of the safety valve agreement, which secures additional funding towards the historic high needs deficit?

This had been supported by 46% of responding mainstream schools and 50% of responding schools.

DG explained that the 1% transfer required Secretary of State's approval, irrespective of Schools Forum's view, because it exceeded 0.5% of schools DSG. The Chair acknowledged that the LA had no option but to ask for the transfer, because of the importance of securing the safety valve funding from DFE. He suggested that schools' opposition had slightly softened since last year, but that schools in general were not in support. Schools had found the 1% deduction challenging.

One member suggested that a new government and new Secretary of State might give Surrey a chance to argue that the block transfer was not in children's interests and that education needed funding properly. Special schools needed proper funding but so did all schools and the transfer was "punishing everyone".

Members suggested that the low response to the consultation might reflect a sense of inevitability about the proposal

JK agreed that the block transfer was part of a much wider issue, that the government was aware that the current funding arrangements were not working and that many LAs were experiencing funding difficulties due to SEND. The government's response was not yet known. The Association of Directors of Children's Services was pressing for the SEND funding issue to be prioritised. Rachael Wardell (Surrey DCS) would chair ADCS next year. KG noted that Surrey was working with other south east LAs to bring the issue to the attention of government.

KG reminded the Forum that the council was making a very significant contribution (£144m) to the repayment of the high needs deficit.

The Chair asked officers to feed back that mainstream schools were not supportive of the proposed transfer, and that it was part of a wider school funding problem.

The Chair recognised that the LA would ask the government to approve the transfer, but suggested that the transfer was a short term solution which was causing major problems for schools and that the Forum would prefer it not to go ahead,

The Forum did not support the proposed transfer of funding to high needs block. The Forum did not formally vote.

Question 8: Do you agree that the recommended proposal (funding rates mainly at 98.2% of NFF, and 0.5% minimum funding guarantee) best meets the needs of Surrey schools, assuming a transfer to high needs block is approved?

This was seen as a technical proposal and was based on assumptions pending announcement of NFF rates post budget, including that DfE would set the minimum funding guarantee at 2024/25 levels. It had been supported by 71.62% of mainstream schools in consultation.

The Forum agreed to support the proposal without a vote.

Question 9: Do you support increasing the current lump sums in line with the increase in other formula factor rates (as in previous years) in order to assist small schools?

DG explained that this meant increasing lump sum factors even though they already exceeded NFF. It gave some additional support to small schools (above the sparsity funding threshold) and was the only means by which the LA could provide support. The Chair noted the majority support in the consultation (89%).

The Forum supported the proposal without a vote.

Question 10: Do you support the proposed "reserve" proposals for MFG and formula factors, (described in the consultation paper), in the event that no block transfer is approved? (Basically follow NFF, except for preserving higher lump sum and lower basic entitlement)

DG explained that the proposal was necessary in case the Secretary of State did not approve the transfer of funds to high needs block.
The Chair noted clear majority support for the proposal.

The Forum supported the proposal without a vote.

It was noted that the previous government policy had been to converge on NFF for all schools by 2027/28, and that this meant that Schools Forum influence over local funding would be reduced. However, the current government's policy on the NFF was unclear.

Question 11: Which of (several proposed options) do you think best meets the needs of Surrey schools, if formula factors have to be adjusted because of increased levels of additional need in October 2024?

DG explained that, in 2025/26, Surrey would be funded on the basis of October 2024 pupil numbers but October 2023 additional needs characteristics. However, Surrey would need to fund schools on October 2024 pupil numbers and October 2024 additional needs characteristics. This would be a cost pressure if October 2024 additional needs exceeded those in October 2023. The LA proposed to manage that, if necessary, by a smaller increase in formula factor rates than in question 8, rather than by a ceiling on large per pupil gains. A ceiling had been used in recent years, but a ceiling concentrated any reduction in funding on fewer schools. If a ceiling was used several years running, some schools would see ceiling deductions in consecutive years, as the per pupil gain for one year was calculated from the previous year's (reduced) value. The proposal to use lower formula rates (but not to use a ceiling) had been supported by 57% of schools in consultation.

The Forum supported the proposal without a vote

(Other options described in the paper had included a ceiling on per pupil gains, and a combination of reduced formula rates and a ceiling)

Question 12: Maintained primary and secondary schools were asked to approve the de-delegation of funding for a range of services

All de-delegation proposals for maintained primary schools had been supported by a majority of responding schools.

Maintained primary school representatives agreed, without a vote, to approve de-delegation of funding, on the proposed basis, for

- * **behaviour support**
- * **teacher association and trade union facilities time**
- * **other special staff costs**
- * **free school meals eligibility checking**
- * **support to travellers**
- * **non-statutory school improvement**

Only two maintained secondary schools had responded: they had supported de-delegation of funding for other special staff costs and free school meals eligibility

checking. However, one had supported and one had opposed the de-delegation of funding for teacher association and trade union facilities.

The maintained secondary school representative agreed to approve de-delegation of funding for

- * **other special staff costs**
- * **free school meals eligibility checking**

De-delegation of funding from the secondary sector for union facilities time was not approved.

Question 13: Do you agree that it is appropriate that the proportion of core funding in Surrey deemed notional SEN is brought into line with national averages in 2025/26?

DG noted that 2025/26 would be the second stage of a proposed two-year transition to move the proportion of Surrey formula factors deemed notional SEN to the national average. It had been supported by 62.2% of mainstream schools responding and by 62.5% of schools responding which is lower than the equivalent percentages last year (note: in the autumn 2023 consultation, 79% of mainstream schools supported)

Members sought clarity as to why the change was being proposed and why the LA saw the national average as the appropriate level of notional SEN funding for Surrey. KG noted that DfE was looking at national funding measures and that the level of notional SEN funding was linked to discussions on exceptional high needs funding.

One member asked that the LA should monitor how much schools spent on SEN from core budgets, suggesting that it was unlikely that schools spent less than their notional SEN budgets. Another commented that her school spent far more than its notional SEN budget on SEN and still could not meet needs. She saw it as important to establish the actual cost to schools of meeting SEN needs and to link that into the issue of properly funding education. KG suggested that DfE was looking at a national measure.

Action:officers to consider how to collect data on how much schools spend on SEN from core budgets

The Forum supported the proposed increase in notional SEN funding without a vote.

Question 14: Do you support additional funding from the high needs block to assist schools where the notional SEND budget does not cover the first £6,000 per EHCP?

95% of schools had supported the proposal in consultation.

The Forum supported the proposal without a vote.

Question 15: Schools were asked whether the termly EHCP average used to calculate the additional funding should be a financial year average or an academic year average.

A majority of schools (82.67%) had supported the use of an academic year average. DG noted that use of an academic year average (Oct 2024/Jan 2025/May 2025 for 2025/26 funding) meant that budget allocations would not be finalised at the start of 2025/26. Schools had preferred this option as the data would be more up to date.

The Forum supported the proposal without a vote.

Question 16: Do you support the proposed variation in calculation of additional SEN funding for infant schools, in order to provide additional support to infant schools?

The Chair noted clear support from schools for the proposal.

The Forum supported the proposal without a vote.

Question 17: Do you support allowing a minimum of 20% of the notional SEN budget for children on SEN support, when calculating whether additional funding is due to schools under (the proposal in Q14)?

The Chair noted clear support from schools for the proposal.

The Forum supported the proposal without a vote.

Question 18: Do you support the introduction of falling rolls funding for primary schools facing a short term fall in pupil numbers, where the vacancies are expected to be required due to pupil growth in the area within the next three years?

DG reminded the Forum that the LA was only allowed to provide falling rolls funding for schools where the vacant places were required within three years due to demand growth in the area (five years from latest SCAP data). The LA was not allowed to provide wider funding support for schools with falling rolls. DG noted that the estimates of eligible schools and costs were based on the latest data available in the summer. Officers would aim to update the data for 2025/26 based on Oct 2024 pupil data when available. DG advised that officers would also consider the impact of demand in adjacent planning areas, where relevant.

The 14 planning areas where growth was expected were Addlestone and Ottershaw, Ash and Tongham, Caterham, Chertsey, Chobham/West End/Bisley, East Guildford, Farnham, Godstone, Horley, Milford and Witley, North East Tandridge, Sunbury, Tillingbourne Valley, Virginia Water/Lyne and Longcross.

One member suggested that it was hard to think of areas where primary pupil numbers were likely to increase.

The Forum supported the proposal without a vote.

Question 19: Do you support the proposed 5% threshold for funding vacancies (ie do not fund the first 5% fall in numbers) and the proposed basis of calculation of funding for individual schools?

DG noted that the 5% had been an estimate but that the cost using a 5% threshold had matched the available funding. Some schools had asked for a lower threshold, but that would mean reducing funding elsewhere. There had been majority support for the proposal.

The Forum supported the proposal without a vote.

Question 20: Do you agree that the LA should aim to contain the cost of falling rolls allocation within the estimated DFE allocation?

Again there had been majority support for this proposal.

The Forum supported the proposal without a vote.

7 Early years (funding) consultation update

CS advised that the early years funding consultation had only closed on Sunday 6 October, due to the need for a minimum four-week consultation in term time. There had been only 128 responses, of which 22 had been from state schools. Autumn 2024 was the first term in which the funded entitlement had been extended to children aged from 9 months.

The consultation had asked separately for views on the level of central retention, the level of deprivation funding and the proportion of funds allocated for early intervention funding, from each age group: 3-4 year olds, disadvantaged two year olds, two year olds of working parents and children aged 9 months-2 years of working parents.

Proposal to retain 5% of funding centrally (for all age groups)

This had been supported by:

- 66% for 3 and 4 year olds
- 66% for disadvantaged two year olds
- 63% for 2 years olds of working parents
- 52% for children aged 9 months-2 years

It was not clear why there was less support for central retention of funds for children aged 9 months to two years.

The previous government had intended to reduce the limit on centrally retained funding from 5% to 3%. The LA had planned central spending so that long term commitments against central funding did not exceed 3%. The other 2% would be used to support implementation of the expanded provision and to provide grant funding for the sector. The total budget for the sector was increasing from £84m to £150m so there would still be an increase in centrally retained funding.

DG noted that the level of central funding was an issue for Schools Forum decision.

The Forum agreed the proposed level of central retention without a vote.

Deprivation funding

In Surrey, formula funding for deprivation had been linked to economic deprivation Early Years pupil premium (EYPP) criteria. The rate had been £2.81/hr for three and four year olds and £1/hr for younger children. The logic of the lower rates for younger children was that staffing ratios for younger children were already higher than for 3-4 year olds and that disadvantaged 3-4 year olds needed more support in order to prepare for school.

From 2025/26 it was proposed that Surrey formula funding would be extended to all children eligible for EYPP, including looked after and post looked after children. The cost of this extension was estimated at £49,500 (106 children).

Members asked whether the number of looked after/post looked after children attracting this funding was stable. Carol advised that it was, but that the funding could be reviewed annually.

CS confirmed that early years pupil premium did not cover service children, but that they might be eligible for early intervention funding.

The Forum supported the proposals for deprivation funding without a vote.

Early intervention funding (EIF)

The proposed proportion of funding set aside as early intervention funding was lower for younger children, as far fewer under twos were likely already to be identified as needing additional support. Total EIF in 2024/25 was £7m.

There had been majority support for the proposed levels of EIF for all age ranges, but support for under twos had been only 54% (compared to 70-71 % for other age ranges)

CS was happy to share consultation comments in respect of EIF with Forum members.

Action: CS to share consultation comments on EIF with Schools Forum members

The Forum supported the proposals for early intervention funding without a vote

Additional funding for maintained nursery schools

Additional funding was allocated to maintained nursery schools and the LA proposed to continue to allocate it first to meet the cost of business rates, then to maintain the existing split site allowance, then to split the balance equally (note: after continuing the teacher pay and pension supplement). There had been only a limited response to this question but a majority of the few responses had been in favour.

The Forum supported the proposal without a vote.

8 High needs place change proposals 2025/26

EG reminded the Forum that there was an annual process whereby LAs proposed to ESFA the number of high needs places to be funded in academies (and colleges) for the following academic year. Letters were being sent to academies that week with the LA's proposals. Schools and colleges were being offered meetings to discuss the proposals if they were not in agreement,

Current demand for high needs places meant that few reductions in place numbers were proposed. In general, current numbers were proposed with some increases, for example where additional places were being provided through the capital programme. Where the number of pupils in special schools exceeded the number of agreed prefunded places, extra places would now be funded at £10,000, rather than at a lower level as had applied before 2024/25.

The Chair noted that the proposals were a starting point for discussion and that for most providers the number of places would be similar to now.

The Forum had no questions on this item,

9 Other special school funding issues if any

Item not required

10 Schools Forum issues

Proposed items for the January 2025 meeting were on the agenda.

It was agreed that one or two additional meetings may be needed in late November/early December, in case any changes arising from the 30 October budget were significant enough to require further consideration by the Forum prior to January.

Action: JK and Chair to liaise and propose possible dates. (Provisionally arranged for Monday 18 November 10.15-12.30 and/or Tuesday 10 Dec, 1-4, if required)

The Forum agreed that one meeting a year should continue to be in person, with a preference for the May meeting rather than July. JK proposed, and the Forum agreed, to try to book a room at Woodhatch Place for that meeting, to avoid the

expense of an external venue (Update: Woodhatch Place is not available for the proposed May date, so we will need to move the in person meeting back to July).

11 Other business

John Winter expressed concern at the low level of school engagement in the recent consultation (21%) and asked whether it had been effectively promoted to those who were not headteachers or business managers, in particular academy trust CEOs. JK agreed that the paper would be sent to MAT CEOs in future years. It was noted that some MAT CEOs had responded. DG clarified that where MAT CEOs responded to the consultation, their responses were counted once for each school they named in the response which had not also responded individually, and that was set out in the consultation paper. Thus no academy's views could be counted twice if the CEO responded.

The Chair noted that the consultation was of decreasing relevance to schools as funding moved towards the NFF.

Another academy rep noted that that MAT had arranged for their chief finance officer to brief all headteachers in order to improve their knowledge of the consultation proposals.

One member noted that the first question had concerned the transfer to the high needs block, on which the LA was not offering a choice. This might have suggested to colleagues that the proposals were not really for consultation and thus discouraged them from responding. Another noted that apart from the block transfer the proposals had little impact on funding for most schools.

It was noted that there was a general need to increase school leaders' understanding of schools funding issues and to consider how the consultation process could be used to support that.

Action for NP: to look at organising drop-in sessions for school leaders on various issues, which could include aspects of the NFF.

Meeting ended 3.00pm

Date of next meeting

Friday 10 January 2025 1pm start, on Teams

Possible additional meetings before that date, depending on DFE announcements, please hold Monday 18 November 10.15am-12.30pm and Tuesday 10 December 1-4pm, for that purpose