

**Sefton Schools Forum Minutes**

**Minutes of Sefton Schools' Forum Meeting**

**MONDAY 15.03.21**

**TEAMS - Virtual Meeting held**

**Forum Members present:**

**In attendance:**

Chair: Dorothy Lee-Ogden

Anna James, Erin Wheeler, Sue Kerwin, Isobel MacDonald-Davies, Kevin McBlain, Tony Faye, Mark Chambers, Niki Craddock, Christopher Lee, Cathy Earley, Ian Parry, Ginny Taylor, Colin Upton, John Horrocks, Peter Moore, Nick Carbonaro, Alice Apel, Tricia Davies, Daniel MacAreavy, Julian Ward, Amanda Ryan, Vicky Buchanan, Matt Jenkinson, David Eden, Jennifer Taylor, Gil Bourgade, Malcolm Parry, Alistair Devey, Alicia Cavanagh, Debra Vis,

**Others present:** Nicola Robson

		<b>Actions</b>
1	<p><b>Apologies</b></p> <p>Toni Oxton-Grant (Sub – Tony Faye)</p>	Chair
2	<p><b>Minutes from the last meeting</b></p> <p>Chris Lee - One amend to last minutes – Consultation ready by Easter 2021</p>	Chair
3	<p><b>Matter Arising / Issues for further consideration</b></p> <p>David Eden – Letter sent to all schools, no feedback therefore cover renewed from April</p> <p>Nick Carbonaro – Information passed to special schools and amount charged is what schools were already charged, added to the 18-19 baseline</p> <p>Yearend budget – Deficit met by Council? What does this mean for schools? There is still a shortfall in the budget however there is no plan to claim this back from schools, the deficit will be managed within the Council Service or from other areas, therefor schools will not be asked to contribute.</p> <p>DFE Guidance sent out in January</p> <p>Concerns raised due to accuracy of the HNF item in previous minutes, further investigation showed minutes were succinct and accurate showing the following statement.</p> <p><i>"When issuing data reports members request that a paragraph "what does this mean for each individual school" be included in the report to help members interpret</i></p>	Chair

	<p><i>the data, explain to peers and allow them to vote confidently knowing the impact and numbers affected. Bringing more clarity to the process”.</i></p>	
4	<p><b>Questions raised on behalf of SAPH with regards to Sefton Catering Services and Sefton Arc by Anna James (AOB Item)</b></p> <p>Colin Upton &amp; Peter Moore were invited by the forum to answer a number of questions raised by Head Teachers with regards to Catering Services and Sefton Arc.</p> <p>Questions raised for Colin Upton</p> <p><b>Questions raised on behalf of SAPH with regards to Sefton Catering Services and charges during the national lockdowns.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>When was it realised that there would be a significant deficit?</b>  As soon as it was announced that schools would be closing for most pupils, it was clear that this would cause a significant financial problem for the catering service.  There was obviously a lot of uncertainty initially. We did not know what, if anything, we would be advised to charge schools during this period, what we may be able to claim from the Government or what meals we would be asked to provide to FSM pupils at home.</li> <li>2. <b>Has this arisen purely from staffing costs?</b>  It is predominantly due to staffing costs as we did not furlough our staff.   Staffing is by far our largest cost. To put it into context, wage costs for our kitchen staff total about £5.2m for 20/21 whilst we would spend about £2.1m on food.   We also had to pay other costs such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport costs for our despatch service to primary schools with no on-site kitchen</li> <li>• Management Costs</li> <li>• Central Charges – payroll, HR etc</li> <li>• Depot Charges – the management team is based at Hawthorne Road Depot</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. <b>Has there been a saving on food?</b>  Yes, there has been a significant saving on food, about £800,000, during 2020/21.</li> <li>4. <b>What steps were taken to mitigate the shortfall?</b>  We took advice from Sefton’s HR section to determine if we could furlough those school meals staff that were not in work during the lockdown period.   The advice given was that in the main the scheme was not to be used in the public sector as central Government has said that there are underpinning staffing budgets in place.   There was also concern expressed about what the view of Elected Members would be if we pursued this approach.</li> </ol>	Colin Upton / Peter Moore

**5. How will the deficit be addressed?**

The Council has submitted claims to central Government to report income losses due to Covid-19 which will significantly reduce the deficit. However, we cannot claim for those periods after lockdown when schools returned but meal numbers were significantly below normal levels.

For example, meal numbers in September 2020 were down by 29% compared to September 2019. Even by December, meal numbers were 12% down compared to December 2019.

This fall was due predominately to fewer pupils being in school and the reduced service we were asked to provide in most schools.

The remaining deficit will have to be met by the Council.

Colin was thanked for his response.

Questions for Peter Moore

**Re request for transparency on the SLA procurement system**

- 1. A number of schools have had lengthy meetings with Sefton Arc (Dave Ellison) over the past few years. Schools are paying wildly different amounts for the same service and Sefton Arc has not provided, despite numerous requests and direct instruction from Mike McSorely some years ago, the formula for these charges or an explanation as to how they are calculated. Schools Arc is also not part of the procurement service meaning there is a lack of transparency for the charges.**
- 2. Please provide a list of SLA charges to schools for the past three years for the Sefton Arc SLA for Forum to examine.**
- 3. Please provide the formula or explanation for how these charges are calculated and reasons for such disparity between schools.**

Peter Moore Introduced himself to the forum and his roll covering work areas including Sefton Arc.

Sefton Arc is costing more than would be expected to run the service, over spending and under achieving – A full review of the service is underway, an aim of the review is to establish greater transparency for schools and a full review report will be shared once complete. Peter has received all the documentations and letters from correspondence with previous managers and will be investigating fully all aspects of the business. Sefton Arc is a Council service but there is commercial sensitivity around the services delivered, so while making the service transparent is essential, full costings wouldn't be publicly available to stop others gaining a financial edge and competing for tenders.

At the time of the meeting the calculation of the SLA is not fully understood but once the review has investigated this it will be shared.

Schools can negotiate for services elsewhere and give 90 days' notice to terminate their contract, however the Council does need to cover the cost of the service.

	<p>It was acknowledged that some schools have been requesting FOI's and transparency on this matter for 4-5 years and that a full review report will be shared once complete, along with a project plan and service costs.</p> <p>Peter was thanked for his response and commitment to return with more information.</p>	
5	<p><b>Early Years Forecast 2020/21 update as at February 2021</b></p> <p>A snapshot of the financial year was provided, understandably 20/21 has been a difficult year for providers in the sector, 12 months ago only key worker children were attending nursery, some provision closed, and some children moved provider. Some Early Years reserves were used to plug the funding gaps. From June providers were asked to reopen and by the Autumn term attendance stood at 92%, the DFE helped by setting 2020 funding at the 2019 census level, this helped Sefton as numbers were high at this point. We were informed that 21/22 funding would be based on the January 21 census figure, however the country moved to further lockdown at this point and while nurseries remained open, attendance was lower. Therefore, if the funding figure is based on this information Sefton will receive a lower funding allocation than previous years. Additionally, there is a possibility that as in other years the DFE may claw back some of the funding allocation from the current year due to the lower 89% attendance rate identified in the census. If figures increase as predicted by January 22, the authority may receive extra funding in June 22.</p> <p>The budget is currently underspent, as stated above some of this was used to fund sustainability programmes during the pandemic in spring 2020. Some of the remaining underspend will be used this year to honour the increase in hourly rate and much of the underspend will be depleted. It is not estimated that the sector will bounce back until 22/23, due to the number of people currently out of work and not requiring childcare or not feeling comfortable sending their children back yet given the ongoing Covid situation.</p> <p>Qu. Why on pg.12 of the report is there a £50K overspend? This figure has now reduced due to the changes associated with Sandunes.</p> <p>Qu. Is our current attendance and uptake trend the same across the whole of the NW and are the DFE taking this into account?</p> <p>Its not 100% know if others are experiencing the same trend as there hasn't been a lot of discussion across the region, however it is known that Wirral have asked a question about funding for providers, and whether all of the funding will be passed on or some withheld, so it is known that they have the same concerns.</p> <p>It was noted that the national Day Nurseries Association have raised concerns that attendance at private nurseries is as low as 40% and that this is hugely worrying what the impact of low demand will be on the sector. It is estimated by them that it will take a lot longer to return to pre-pandemic levels and sufficiency levels may need addressing during this period, to ensure provision is available once bounce back occurs.</p> <p>The DFE have asked for a summary of how much extra has been paid due to low numbers and it is unknown if this may be to help address the deficit somehow?</p> <p>Forum is asked to:</p>	Kevin McBlain

	<p>Note the 2020/21 Early Years revised forecast position as at February 2021 and the potential forecast deficit on DSG Early Years Reserves in 2021/22 due to a dip in Headcount numbers at January 2021.</p>	
6	<p><b>High Needs Forecast 2020/21 as at January 2021 and 2021/22 position</b></p> <p>January overspend stood at £3.1 million, as of February this was £3.3 million, so it is hopeful that the budget deficit will not increase too much by the end of March, the deficit brought forward was £5.4 million. A review of the Higher Needs Fund is underway; however, it is the same areas of the service that overspend each month, SEND support, out of borough placements and capacity to deal with numbers.</p> <p>The High Needs funding for 2021/22 is now known, and with support from schools of £430k through the Schools Block funding, total funding will be £35.842m. However as previously explained in the budget report from January, £0.649m of this is passported for the Teachers Pay and Pensions previously provided through separate grant payments. Taking this element out of the funding leaves basic funding for High Needs spending of £35.193m compared against this year's equivalent funding of £32.314m, an increase year on year of £2.879m. Compared to the forecast spending in 2020/21 (£35.587m) this would still leave the Authority with a deficit of £0.394m even before any new systems of High Needs funding allocations is introduced!</p> <p>It will take a number of months to see the impact of the review and new banding structure to see if this helps alleviate some of the deficit for 21/22</p> <p>This may be made worse in 2022/23 if the DfE amend the formula element on High Needs historic values as they are considering doing under a current HNs consultation. Sefton could lose as much as £451k funding in 2022/23.</p> <p>Qu. The aim pre Covid was for Sefton to increase its number of HNF places? Is this still the case or has Covid changed this?</p> <p>Officers are still working on the Sufficiency Plan and places, there was a slight pause, but the working group are meeting again now, and the work is coming together, a proposal will be completed in the next few weeks</p> <p>Qu. It was noted that Post 16 is running at a deficit.</p> <p>Part of the process is to look at the full age range of services including Early Years and Post 16.</p> <p>Schools Forum is asked to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Note the updated forecast overspending on High Needs in 2020/21 as at January 2021; and note the position for 2021/22.</li> </ol>	Kevin McBlain

7	<p><b>Notional SEN updates</b></p> <p>Schools were asked to complete a proforma outlining their indicative spending for SEN children to be compared to the figure outlined in the budget as an estimated spend for SEN. This included cost of staff (medical &amp; professional). There has been a 72% return rate (67 / 93 schools) and the data has been compiled and analysed. It is hoped schools will continue to monitor this data periodically to refresh the data. The data will be used to analyse the level of spending, efficiency, best practice, allow for discussions around pooled budgets etc and for maximising the value of the funding.</p> <p>It was noted that schools are all very different, have different cohorts and different levels of need. That every child with an additional need is different and it's very hard to make comparisons.</p> <p>There was some concern around the use of the term "efficiencies" and it was clarified that it is not easy to draw comparisons and that the data should be a tool to prompt discussion rather than one to chastise. It was agreed that more data such as number of EHCP's could be added and the team are open to adapting the tool over time.</p> <p>It was also noted that some schools had included more items in their breakdown so further quality assurance is needed.</p> <p>It was agreed that the tool should be shared with the SEN Forum to help with the ongoing project work taking place there.</p> <p>Forum is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Note the Summary of the data and any issues arising from it.</li> <li>2. Review at a future meeting the notional SEN budget allocation and formula method of distribution so that SEN budget levels per school are transparent and fair.</li> </ol>	Kevin McBlain / Mark Chambers
8	<p><b>First Phase High Needs Consultation on the National Formula Funding Allocation mechanism</b></p> <p>A consultation presentation was shared and sent out.</p> <p>On 10 February 2021, the DfE launched the first consultation paper around proposed changes to the High Needs National Formula Funding (NFF) allocations to Local Authorities. This has been supported by a DfE guidance document and 6 questions, which the DfE are asking Local Authorities; Schools and any other interested parties to respond to, on-line, if they wish by 24 March 2021. A second phase of the consultation will take place in the future.</p> <p>The associated report outlines the current practice for calculating and allocating funding to authorities, along with a new proposed calculation for allocating funding based on the 2017 data. This would result in a considerable projected decrease in funding for Sefton. Working through the calculation identifies, that Sefton's funding would have reduced by a total of <b>£451k</b> if applying the proposed changes. This reduction is not shown in the DfE's table in terms of a real funding loss. The DfE does however state at the foot of its Table, that 47% of LA s funding would have changed under the proposal, with 35 LA s gaining and 36 (Sefton included) receiving less funding. The remaining 79 LA s would have no funding change at all, either due to being brought up to the floor level of 8% minimum gains or brought down to the ceiling</p>	Nick Carbonaro / Kevin McBlain

	<p>level of 12% maximum gains, despite the proposed changes to their historic funding element up or down.</p> <p>A response has been drafted by the authority on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and it is recommended that Forum Members respond along with schools, parents and other interested parties. It is possible that the funding makeup has already been decided based on 2017 data, however this data would leave Sefton with a significant decrease in funding and it is suggested that more relevant data such as the number of EHCPs or more recent data is used and that this is highlighted in any consultation responses.</p> <p>Forum is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Note the contents and issues arising from the DfE consultation proposed changes to High Needs funding from 2022/23 and the intention of the LA to make a response.</li> <li>2. School Forum also respond formally to the consultation.</li> <li>3. Schools Forum recommends that all schools and interested parties make a direct response to the on-line consultation survey, which closes on 24 March 2021.</li> </ol> <p>Link to consultation questionnaire:  <a href="https://consult.education.gov.uk/funding-policy-unit/high-needs-nff-proposed-changes">https://consult.education.gov.uk/funding-policy-unit/high-needs-nff-proposed-changes</a></p>	
9	<p><b>Verbal update on the latest Early Years Development Group meeting</b></p> <p>Work is ongoing to sustain the pandemic as previously outlined, funding has been given for training and support and all training now being done centrally.</p> <p>A recovery plan is in place and more support may be needed for PVI’s, although some funding has been received from the authority it is not enough to cover full amount lost. Some nurseries did receive grants, but unfortunately others were part of a bigger chain or charity so not eligible.</p> <p>Minimum wage increases plus pension contributions have also impacted on the sector.</p> <p>Demand for childcare is down as less people are employed and there is also an added cost of PPE, some providers are benefiting from 2/3 business rates, but others aren’t, all of which have contributed to a difficult year.</p> <p>The 2-year-old offer uptake is very low, with no new children currently registered yet.</p> <p>When children do return their development has fallen behind and they need extra support as well as ongoing wellbeing nurturing.</p> <p>When recovery happens, the sector needs to be ready.</p> <p>Early Years lateral flow testing may impact on staffing levels or staff may choose not to isolate if positive and just come in. Recruitment is very difficult.</p> <p>Childhood immunisation levels are down, MMR vaccine levels are down, measles cases are increasing, and this is having an impact on children.</p>	Representative

	<p>It was noted that all schools and nursery Covid data is collected and analysed everyday and that there is not a big upturn in numbers.</p> <p>Further discussions will be had with the development group around issues and concerns for the sector.</p>	
10	<p><b>Verbal update on the latest SEND Workshop Group meeting on 9 March 2021</b></p> <p>As per previous items a presentation was delivered re funding consultation and work ongoing as per matters arising.</p> <p>Working subgroups are meeting regularly and work progressing well.</p>	Representative
	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See Item 4 Above re-Tabled Item</li> <li>• Next meeting will be via Teams, while it was acknowledged that some would like to meet face to face, the policy is still to meet virtually, if this changes a new appointment will be sent</li> <li>• As per matters arising a discussion took place regarding the accuracy of the previous minutes, it has subsequently been identified that the minutes were correct</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Date of next meeting: Monday 28 June 2021 at 1.30pm by Virtual TEAMS</b></p> <p><a href="#">Click here to join the meeting</a></p>	