

**DRAFT MINUTES  
MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS' FUNDING FORUM (SFF)**

**10:00 – 12:00, 12 February 2021**

**Virtual Teams Meeting**

**Present:** John Dennis (Chairperson), Mark Tomkins (Vice Chairperson), Kate Le Page, David Meades, Jenny Ashley-Jones, Richard Rule, Sue Birchall, David Anderson, Sue Beauchamp, Phil Sayer, Sarah Beaney, Céranne Litton, Mark Seymour, David Whitehead, David Gleed, Neil Willis, Annabel Lilley, Emma Bradshaw, Ben Cooper, David Stanley.

Richard Long (Cabinet Member), Matt Dunkley (Corporate Director), David Adams (Interim Director), Karen Stone, Chris Scott, Robin Goldsmith (Clerk), Ian Allwright.

**Apologies:** Tracey McCartney, Michael Powis.

1.	<p><b>Welcomes and Introductions</b></p> <p>Chair welcomed the following two new members to the school funding forum:</p> <p>Sarah Beaney – Business manager for Ashford St Mary's Primary School Representing LA Primary Schools Emma Bradshaw – Executive Principal Alternative Learning Trust – The Limes College Representing Academy Pupil Referral Units</p>	
2.	<p><b>Minutes and matters arising from the SFF meetings held on the 4th of December:</b></p> <p>The minutes were accepted as an accurate record.</p> <p>Actions from previous meeting:</p> <p><b>Term Time – Back Pay / Kent Scheme Pay update.</b></p> <p>Ian Allwright gave a verbal update on this item.</p> <p><b>Kent Scheme Pay update</b> A proposed pay rise has been taken to Personnel Committee which was agreed and was included in the KCC budget that was also passed. A pay policy paper will be taken to Personnel Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> March and the outcome of this will be communicated to Schools. The link between pay and performance has been suspended this year due to COVID, so the proposal presented is a blanket 2% increase for all staff plus bottom and top of grades. The bottom pay point will be uplifted to £9.55.</p> <p><b>Term Time – Back Pay</b> Kent is entering the implementation stage, and this will be phased starting with KCC staff. This involves a smaller number of staff and will provide a good test of</p>	

the process. Then KCC will move onto voluntary controlled and community schools and then the remaining schools after that. Currently Kent is doing a pilot with some schools to iron out the process to be ready for March. Sue Birchall raised that it is important that this is not rolled out to community schools during closedown and budget setting. Ian Allwright said the whole process needs to be completed before November, so we need to avoid any delays as much as possible. Sue represents a school involved in the pilot and has fed back to Kent alternative ways of completing the data collection exercise. David Adams mentioned that Kent will consider the timetable and whether it is possible for the Academies to go before community schools. A communication will go to schools detailing the offer and what the next steps will be.

Neil Willis agreed with both Sue and David's comments and suggested the Academies HR departments are contacted directly to make the process smoother.

Sue Beauchamp mentioned that members of staff do not need to be part of a union and do not need to make their own application for this. There was also a query as to what would happen with Schools who use SPS as their payroll provider. Ian confirmed that they are linking with SPS.

Ben Cooper asked when Foundation Schools would fit into the timeline. Ian confirmed this is likely to be between voluntary controlled/community schools and Academies.

#### **Growth Policy working Group.**

Christ Scott gave a verbal update on this item. A discussion was held at the previous forum to create a group made up of SFF members and AEO's to review the Growth policy for 2022/23. A few members have agreed to be part of the group and a future meeting will be arranged.

#### **Schools Funding Forum: Elections.**

Christ Scott gave a verbal update on this item. SFF elections were held, and the following two members were appointed:

Sarah Beaney – Business manager for Ashford St Mary's Primary School  
Emma Bradshaw – Executive Principal Alternative Learning Trust – The Limes College

#### **Central budgets.**

Karen Stone gave a verbal update on this item. Kent County Council agreed the budget for 2021/22 and within the budget was a reduction of £1.1m in the central services grant, which the Local Authority receives for services for schools. These were shown as efficiency savings however this has been offset by additional funding until a review of the services provided by Kent is concluded. There seems to be a direction of travel from the DFE to continue to reduce this budget. The result of this review will be brought to future meetings.

	<p>David Whitehead asked if KCC are aware of what services could be cut. Matt Dunkley responded there may be some cuts but none of these will appear this year. The work is ongoing and Kent value the relationship it has with schools. This relationship was echoed by Richard Long and John Dennis.</p>	
<p>3.</p>	<p><b>High Needs / Deficit Recovery Plan.</b></p> <p>Karen Stone presented this item to the SFF and the papers and presentation can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>The Slides showed the following positions:  Total Cost of High Need Placements &amp; Top Up Funding  Total Number of High Need Placements &amp; Top Up Funding  Average Cost of High Need Placements &amp; Top Up Funding  DSG Reserve Position</p> <p>The DSG position, which includes the Term Time Only pay settlement, is predicted to be £67.3m deficit by the end of the year. KCC are not the only council to have a significant deficit DSG balance. A recent survey results said that 76 Local Authorities have a deficit and KCC are 1 of 24 in the range of 20% to 39% deficit (as a percentage of total DSG) and there were 13 Authorities who were above this.</p> <p>The DFE have not yet announced how they are expecting to address the deficits. The in-year position for KCC for 2021/22 is likely to be at similar levels.</p> <p>Mark Tomkins asked what pressure or support KCC is facing from the DFE for the growing deficit. Karen stated the DFE had not yet made contact but this could be due to Covid as previous guidance stated that Local Authorities would be contacted regarding their deficit positions and only a handful have been contacted. The DFE also cancelled the Section 251 for 20/21 which is the local authorities budget document which is submitted to the DFE. Matt mentioned there is a DFE SEN review taking place which is now due to be published in April which was delayed due to Covid. The system does need to be reformed. The only support that has been given is that they have agreed for us to transfer 1% of the School Block to High Needs.</p> <p>David Adams gave an update on the Inclusion Fund.</p> <p>Inclusion Priority areas identified by schools:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A comprehensive, graduate training offer</li> <li>2. Leadership Development and peer to peer review</li> <li>3. Effective transition processes and pathways</li> <li>4. Case support through localities</li> </ol> <p>Karen mentioned the following other SEN related Finance updates:</p> <p>Review of STLS is underway.  Exploring alternative joint funding arrangements.  Market engagement activities to inform future commissioning arrangements with Independent &amp; Non-Maintained Special Schools.</p>	

	<p>Initial options paper for revising the commissioning arrangement for Home Tuition.  Work is beginning on understanding demand and medium/long term solutions. Short commission of additional therapy workers to support increasing demand SEN therapies.  Developing a pipeline tool to support future planning &amp; forecasting.  DSG Deficit Recovery Plan – next steps and finalisation.</p> <p>David Whitehead raised that he is on a group that has reviewed the KPI's for STLS and they had some concerns. Karen/David responded that these are not completed and are still under review and it is good to get feedback to get the SLAs correct. Annabel Lilley on behalf of the special schools said that there is an enormous piece of working being carried out, that this is not a done deal and that there is a lot still to be signed off. It is very helpful to get feedback from mainstream schools that this service is really valued.</p> <p>Kate Le-Page asked what goes into the pipeline tool and which partner agencies have fed into this? Karen's response was that we are in discussion with other Local Authorities who have moved forward with this and Buckinghamshire is one which we believe has a good tool.</p> <p>High Needs Formula Funding Consultation was circulated this week with the closing date being the 24<sup>th</sup> of March. Traditionally we seek the School Funding Forums thoughts and support of any response we make. The consultation focuses on the distribution of funding between Local Authorities not the total pot. The questions for 2022/23 relate to the Historic Spend element and the Low Prior Attainment factor. For Kent this does not actually change the total level of funding we receive as we are a floor funded authority even though we will receive more funding through these factors. There are further questions for beyond 2022/23 relating to whether there should be more factors to reflect local circumstances.</p> <p>John Dennis suggested that, as usual, we look at Kent's response and hopefully the school funding forum will lend its support to KCC's response.</p>	
4.	<p><b>Early Years centrally retained Spend / New year rates.</b></p> <p>Karen Stone presented this item to the SFF and the papers can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>The ESFA announced on the 17th December that the local authority funding rates will be increased from 2021-22 by 8 pence per hour for two-year olds and 6p per hour for three- and four-year olds Free Entitlement Funding. The proposal to the Forum is to increase the base rate given to providers by the same amounts. The Local Authority is not intending to update the calculation of the deprivation supplement for 2021-22, therefore Early Years Providers will receive the same deprivation supplement in 2021-22 as in 2020-21. The Deprivation supplement is normally recalculated on an annual basis using the October headcount information. However due to concerns over the impact of Covid on the children attending during the Autumn Term, it was felt using the October 2020 census data could lead to distorted results. Kent is proposing to run a consultation during the summer to change the deprivation calculation.</p>	

	Tracey McCartney and Michael Powis both emailed their support for these recommendations. The Forum agreed to these proposals.	
5.	<p><b>Balance Control Mechanism (BCM)</b></p> <p>Karen Stone presented this item to the SFF and the papers can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>The Schools Funding Forum were asked to consider whether the BCM process should continue as normal for balances held as at 31st March 2021, or a “lighter touch” BCM approach is taken in recognition that the COVID pandemic is a sufficient reason for schools to have accumulated an “excess” uncommitted balance during 2020-21.</p> <p>John Dennis asked when schools would have to produce a plan of how they intend to reduce these balances. Karen confirmed that this will form part of the budget information they submit in May.</p> <p>Ben Cooper supports this and has had several schools contact him regarding this and, in his eyes, had reasonable explanations due to what has happened this year. Ben thinks the proposed light touch is the right balance and that it is not ignoring the issue, but is flexible due to Covid and that this should only be for one year.</p> <p>Sue Birchall is supportive of this as well and hopefully this will stop the knee jerk spending. Sue suggested that the plans should be coming in at the same time as closedown.</p> <p>The Forum agreed to this proposal.</p>	
	<p>Next provisional meeting dates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 May 2021 meetings to be confirmed.</li> <li>• 2 July 2021 - Venue to be confirmed 8am to 12pm</li> <li>• 1 October 2021 - Venue to be confirmed 8am to 12pm</li> <li>• 3 December 2021 - Venue to be confirmed 8am to 12pm</li> </ul>	