

**Minutes of a meeting of the Leicestershire Schools Forum
via Teams on Monday 4 July 2022 at 10.00am**

Present

Liam Powell	Secondary Academy Headteacher
Chris Parkinson	Secondary Academy Headteacher
Kath Kelly	Secondary Academy Headteacher
Jane McKay	Primary Academy Headteacher
Karen Allen (Chair)	Primary Maintained Headteacher
Alison Ruff	Primary Maintained Headteacher
Kelly Dryden	Special Academy Headteacher
Graham Bett	DNCC Representative
Jane Dawda	Primary Maintained Headteacher
Ed Petrie	Primary Academy Headteacher
Miss J McBrearty	Secondary Academy Headteacher
Beverley Coltman	PVI Early Years Representative
Kirk Hayles	Primary Academy Headteacher

In attendance

Jane Moore, Director of Children and Family Services
Mrs D Taylor, Lead Member Children and Family Services
Alison Bradley, Interim Assistant Director Education and SEND
Jenny Lawrence, Finance Business Partner, Corporate Resources,
David Atterbury, Head of service, School Sufficiency

Item		Action
1.	<p>Apologies and Substitutions</p> <p>Apologies were received from Carolyn Lewis, Clive Wright, Jane Lennie and Martin Towers.</p>	
2.	<p>Minutes and Matters Arising</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on the 6 June 2022 were agreed.</p>	
3.	<p>Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire</p> <p>Jane Moore thanked the Forum for meeting at short notice. The purpose of the meeting is to share the overview of the current SEND and LA position and to share the DfE program the LA is being pulled into because of the scale of the difficulties. A presentation was shared with the meeting.</p> <p>Jenny Lawrence spoke of the financial challenges corporately, saying that that it is widely reported in the media that the levels of</p>	

inflation at 9% and expected to rise further, was having a significant effect on the LCC budget and the financial gap in the MTFs is expected to rise from £40m to £70m. Therefore, immediate actions are taking place to look at where more savings can be found. LCC as a relatively low funded authority will feel the hit more quickly than other areas. In addition, the High Needs deficit is continuing to grow and the LCC have invested £25 million pounds to increase local specialist provision and try and stem the flow into Independent Specialist Schools. Looking at the medium term with delays in savings and a need to work with an external partner the deficit could rise to £99 million. National and Technical accounting changes will require the deficit will have to be covered by revenue which will mean service reductions.

Jenny said that funding alone is not a solution to the problem although part of the solution may have to come back to future school block transfers. The level of EHCP requests in Leicestershire is much higher than other LA's both nationally and in the East Midlands.

Jane Moore then spoke about the DfE position and the launch of the SEN Green Paper. The DfE have launched a 3 tiered intervention program. The first tier being the Safety Valve where the DfE enter into rigid agreements with local authorities requiring specific actions take autonomy away from the LA and the schools. LCC are in the second tier, Delivering Better Value. The DfE are offering delivery support diagnostics and support with implementation with a small grant of £40,000, full details of the support are currently under discussion and yet to be fully identified. LCC has done the diagnostic work the DfE are delivering in phase 1 already and are looking to jump straight into the implementation stage as the timing is now critical in order to avoid moving to a safety valve position. The third tier is support from the Education Skills and Funding Agency.

Jane Moore went on to talk about the work already being done to support the changes. There has been a 54% increase in requests for EHCPs from schools and parents. Over half of this growth cannot be explained by population growth nor is it reflective of children requiring SEND support. The LA is not funded per head so the block of money does not grow as EHCP numbers rise. The SENA service has buckled under the weight of the workload and user satisfaction levels are at the lowest they have ever been.

There has been investment in local sufficiency with new SEMH and C&I places being made available and also investment in a new case management system with a self-serve element for parents and schools as increasing queries are adding to the workloads.

The Transforming SEND and Inclusion Program is already working on the findings of the diagnostic work and is looking at the whole system and why the disproportionate demand.

Alison Bradley then spoke about the Transforming SEND and

Inclusion Program, talking of the notional SEND budget given to schools which is equivalent and that 38% of the LA placement budget is spent in schools.

Alison spoke of the need to work collectively with all stakeholders and to have clear roles and responsibilities. It was reiterated that SENA is the administrative part of the process.

Alison spoke of the ambition should be having the right support at the right time in the right place, meeting the needs of SEND across the system.

The role of schools and Schools Forum are very important in this and the DFE are looking at views and the collective voice.

The proposed changes were then highlighted around decision making and ways of working, developing capacity and autonomy which would promote inclusive and early intervention and redesigning and integrating effective interventions to support schools. Skills and expertise is within schools and should be used. Digital and performance and communication and engagement which promotes engagement with all stakeholders and involving school leaders and parents will be key.

Alison finished by saying that the LA is keen to hear from school's forum any and all ideas in terms of change.

Jane Moore concluded the presentation by saying that the present system doesn't work in the best way for children. There need to be changes to the system and a different way of using the current funding. At the moment schools are limited with what they can do for their children. The LA is looking to redesign the system so that schools can do what they need to do to keep the children in mainstream. Jane said that the LA and partners need to step into the space and do things differently. She said it wasn't just about cutting funding and not spending but finding the place to operate within the budget. This has brought to the forum to engage school leaders from the beginning and work for the best outcome.

The Chair thanked Jane for the presentation and opened the floor for questions and comment.

Liam Powell asked that as there was an increased emphasis on schools, forum and stakeholders to be a part of this, without having had time to absorb everything, is the LA saying the money will come from schools to manage the deficit?

Jane Moore responded by saying that there was no defined answer. The Green Paper is about keeping children in mainstream and this may mean movement of funding come from the High Needs block to the Schools Block. The money needs to go to schools. It is a case of using the High Needs Block differently.

Jane Dawda asked about the SEN notional budget saying that

some schools have a higher proportion of plans than others, is there a suggestion of removing the notional budget from schools and giving it to where it is needed.

In response Jane Moore said that the DFE money to schools and the SEN Notional funding is about the whole child and is for the school to manage the educating of the child. The notional funding will need to be looked at and be clear what it is for. The data is difficult because does a school with a higher number of EHCP's mean it is more inclusive or does it mean that those schools with a fewer number are utilizing SEND support. The general consensus is if the funding is according to number of EHCP's the finding would go up. Jenny Lawrence also said that the DFE have made a conscious policy decision not to use the number of EHCP's as a driver for funding. The SEN notional budget will stay but standardised nationally and the £6000 threshold is believed to be under review.

Graham Bett then observed that schools need to be aware of the context. The LCC has realised that spending is not sustainable and the DfE is also coming in saying this is going to be dealt with. With rising costs and rising inflation in schools, this is not the moment for the LCC to say we have a problem and we will take money from the schools block. If the DFE is interested in the schools and the Forum's views how will this be communicated?

School leadership will want to work in partnership and this should not be around money coming from schools. There should be professional input to get a better system. Graham Bett felt that going to other authorities and school leaders was the best way to find out.

Jane Moore answered Graham Bett by saying that the purpose is to make the right money is in the right place. Putting the LCC deficit in context, it is not the imperative but is an imperative. The department have been working on this since 2017 and none of this work has impacted the budget. Schools need to be fundamentally involved and the LA will ask the DfE how they want to capture the information. Whilst talking to school leaders is a good idea, it should be remembered that Nottingham City schools are better funded.

Karen Allen said that the notional budget in her school is eaten up with high needs children. The EHCP can be more costly than the SENIF funding. Parents are not interested in the provision only in the hours. It is the hours that trigger parents. As the provision is there and can be provided without the hours, concentrate on the provision. Majority of children can be helped in a different way without putting hours in the plan. Karen also said that there are more children with complex needs coming to mainstream and if this is where they are to be then there needs to be more support and less jumping through hoops to get that support otherwise it becomes a babysitting exercise and the child is not benefiting.

Jane Moore thanked Karen for her comments and agreed that moving from an hour's based to an outcome's based resource allocation within an EHCP could be an answer but this has been discussed many times in the past but it hasn't been possible to move to implementation. The LA will need help from schools to move this forward. Schools are able to end plans which are not suitable at the annual review and the parent's expectations can be collectively managed at that point. There are children who shouldn't be in mainstream but the special schools have children who maybe could be in mainstream.

Kelly Dryden commented that all specialist school plans are provision led plans are in place already so it would be culture shift and then judgements made on the support level to achieve the outcomes. A blended approach maybe to start with to help parents.

Alison Ruff said that parents think they are entitled to the hours and the funding. She asked what other authorities do around this. Maybe work with a scoring criteria list i.e. are able to toilet alone, feed themselves or move around the school alone. Children who maybe come to school with low ability would not meet the scoring for an EHCP.

Karen Allen agreed and said a lot of children come into school with plans in place and then they thrive in school. The plans are not necessary but parents are loathe to give them up. Perhaps say that it is SENIF funding until the end of Key stage 1 unless the child has very complex needs.

Deborah Taylor added a link to Government research which she said was very interesting
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1084458/DFE_HN_Budget_case_study_report.pdf

Kirk Hayles asked whether there was any monitoring or policing in places as has been mentioned some schools are more open than others to taking children with a high level of need.

Graham Bett then asked about timelines and when any notification would come into schools particularly in respect of a Schools Block transfer.

Jane Moore answered him by saying that there were multiple timelines, already working on reducing costs in independent placements but they have the monopoly and the power. She said that the conversation at this Forum had been extremely useful on the best way to stem demand and any other solutions would be welcomed.

Both Jane Moore and Deborah Taylor reiterated that whilst the school block transfer action would not be taken off the table it is not being looked at, at the moment, as it is not a solution to the deficit but could be part of a solution. If it is needed then the LA will come

	<p>to the Forum in the usual way, there is a defined process set out by the DFE to pursue a transfer. Mrs Taylor finished by saying we need a system shift and not just throw money at it.</p> <p>Karen Allen said that talking to other authorities about how they do things differently would be a way forward.</p> <p>The meeting was then closed.</p>	
4.	Date of Next Meeting Thursday 29 September, 2.00 pm via Teams.	