

# Schools' Forum



City of  
**Stoke-on-Trent**

**Date:** Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2019  
**Time:** 8:30am to 11:00am  
**Venue:** Watermill Special School  
**Chair:** Jonathon May  
**Minutes:** Emily Evans

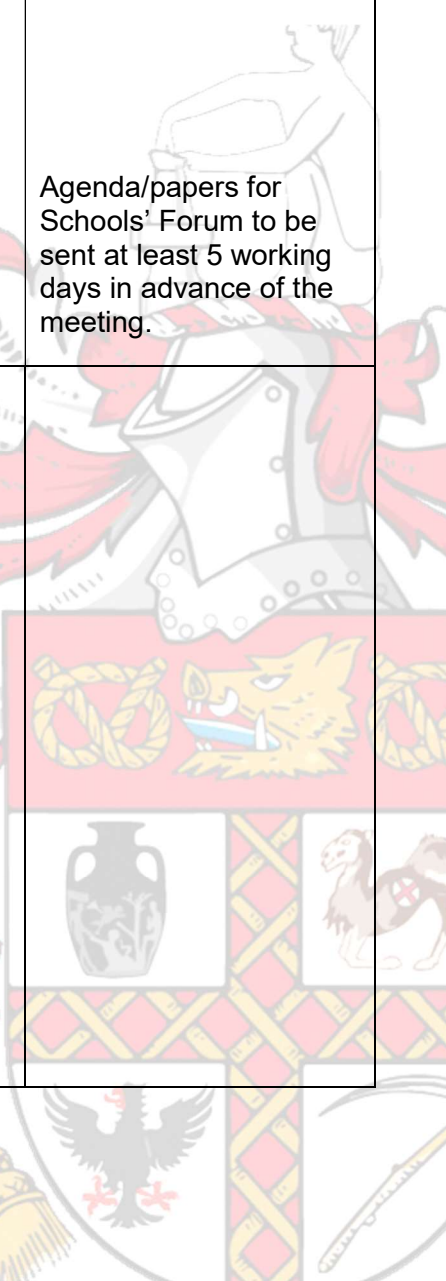
**Attendees:**

Jonathon May (**Chair for Schools' Forum**)  
 Emma Gater (**Vice Chair for School's Forum**)  
 Lisa Hughes (**Special Schools Representatives**)  
 Juliet Levingstone (**Nursery School Representative**)  
 Sarah Thursfield (**Primary Maintained Representatives**)  
 Jonathan Baddeley, Ian Beardmore, Lisa Sarikaya, Stephanie Moran (**Primary Academy Representatives**)  
 Nick Lowry, Gareth Jones, Michael Astley, Andy Fitzgibbon (**Secondary Academy Representatives**)  
 David Sidaway, Mark Barratt, Jen Lomas, Nick Edmonds, Andrew Brindley, Sue Day (**Local Authority Representatives**)  
 Harold Gurden (**Union Representative**)  
 Derek Gray (**Primary Governor**)  
 Katie Dixon (**Secondary Academy Representatives**)  
 Mark Kent (**16-19 Partnership Representative**)  
 Councillor Abi Brown (**Cabinet Member for Corporate Resource, Strategy and Partnerships and Leader of the Council**)  
 Councillor Dave Evans (**Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Lead Member for Children's Services**)  
 Emily Evans (**LA officer – minutes**)

**Apologies:**

Carl Ward (**Secondary Academy Representatives**)  
 Jon Lovatt (**Primary Governor**)  
 Mark Rayner (**Secondary Academy Representatives**)  
 Councillor Janine Bridges (**Cabinet Member for Education and Economy**)  
 Bianca Johnson (**PVI Representative**)

	Item	Action
1	<p><b>Welcome and Apologies</b></p> <p>Apologies were received from Carl Ward, Jon Lovatt, Mark Rayner, Cllr Janine Bridges and Bianca Johnson.</p> <p>Andy Fitzgibbon attended as a new representative for the Secondary Academies.</p> <p>Michael Astley attended as the on behalf of Mark Rayner as the Secondary Academy representative.</p>	

<p><b>2</b></p>	<p><b>Minutes from the last meeting</b></p> <p>The minutes were agreed as an accurate reflection of the meeting.</p> <p>Forum asked why P Gerrard was not in attendance at the meeting to discuss admissions. J Lomas responded that the agenda was focused on High Needs and that admissions would be discussed at the next Schools' Forum meeting.</p> <p>N Lowry requested an update on the working group that was supposed to be established for secondary student numbers. J Lomas responded that the LA had already looked where school places were needed for next year, and advised that there was no funding left to explore this further.</p> <p>N Lowry questioned why the High Needs presentation was not tabled in advance of the meeting. J Lomas responded that it was a joint decision from the Council to bring the presentation on the day and to not release for discussion beforehand, as it was important to contextualise the presentation and form the start of the discussion. N Lowry added that it was a regular occurrence where papers/presentations were not released or shared prior to Schools' Forum. N Lowry went on to say that representatives need sufficient time to go away and consult with members before making decisions at Schools' Forum.</p> <p>M Barratt requested that all Schools' Forum papers were tabled and sent out in advance of meetings going forward.</p>	<p>P Gerrard to be invited to the next Schools' Forum meeting on 15 September 2019.</p> <p>Agenda/papers for Schools' Forum to be sent at least 5 working days in advance of the meeting.</p>
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p><b>High Needs Deficit Recovery Plan (Presentation to be tabled)</b></p> <p>The High Needs Deficit Recovery Plan was discussed with Schools' Forum. It was noted that the plan had to be signed off by the Local Authority's Chief Financial Officer and submitted to the ESFA by the 30 June 2019.</p> <p>There is a current forecast in year overspend for 2019/20 of £14.24 million. We are currently spending currently £5.57 per annum more than we are receiving. There local authority is currently providing the cash flow for the deficit. This position is not sustainable financially.</p> <p>The total DSG reserve balance at 1 April 2015 was £15.8 million surplus, of which, £9.1 million related to the High Needs Block. The total DSG reserve balance as at 31 March 2019 is £14.24 million deficit. The DSG gap is currently forecast between £11.6 million to £14 million.</p>	

There has been substantial additional funding allocated to schools over recent years for the following;

- £4.03 million transfer from the High Needs to Schools Block (DfE baselines) in 2013-2014 onwards.
- £2.08 million to the Schools Block – PFI premises in 2018-19 onwards.
- £1 million to the Schools Block for Pupil Growth Formula based in 2019-20.
- £1.62 million to the School Block – Pupil Value Increase in 2019-20.
- £15.90 million for Pupil Premium in 2011-12 onwards.
- £5.70 million for Opportunity Area Funding 2017-20.

Since 2015/16, Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) have increased by 54%. High Needs Funding has increased by 12%. Mainstream population has increased by 6% and Maintained Special School population has increased by 23%. It was also noted that 356 pupils have moved from Mainstream Schools to Special Schools in the last 4 years, which compares to 141 in the previous 4 years.

J Lomas shared that the number of EHC plans has continued to increase and is above the national, he went on to add that Stoke-on-Trent were outliers compared to statistical neighbours, and that the SEND benchmarking is also above unitary authorities. The number of pupils educated outside of the city has not yet reduced and the numbers of pupils moving from mainstream to specialist provision is still high.

Forum advised that they felt Stoke-on-Trent was 'different' to other statistical neighbours. J Baddeley felt that the high number of EHC plans should not be seen as a negative, and more as a positive, as it showed that Stoke-on-Trent were meeting the needs of the child and that our assessment processes were accurate, and that this may have not been the same for other statistical neighbours.

N Edmonds challenged forum why they thought Stoke-on-Trent was different to other deprived areas.

Actions for the recovery position over a 5 year period are as follows;

- Review EHCP numbers and placements.
- Expansion of Special Schools.
- Two new Special Schools.
- Reduction of top up rates (already actioned).
- Reduce SEN team budgets.
- Reduction of external alternative provision numbers.

The request is for £3.5 million to be transferred from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. This would equate to 2.1% of the Schools Block.

Through the High Needs Working Group and the local authority, there have been a number of actions put in place to try and reduce the deficit. Forum was asked what other options they believed could help reduce the deficit.

N Lowry commented that following the proposal from the Council on funding, he felt the trust between the Council and Schools' Forum would be in danger. He felt that it was 'underestimating' the will of Headteachers. N Lowry then went on to say that the plan that was presented two years ago was supposed to sort the budget issue out, but that the plan had clearly failed.

Forum advised that there had been an increase in violence from pupils and that staff were suffering from this. It was also a concern that this was not being dealt with appropriately with other agencies. J Baddeley added that he was struggling to retain staff in his school and felt that if money was taken away from the DSG block there would be an increase in permanent exclusions.

Forum shared that there were a number of schools who were having difficulties with children who were on EHC plans. It was noted that additional hours were recognised as a need, but that schools were not receiving payments for these hours. It was felt by Headteachers that there had been a number of things put in to place to delay funding for EHC pupils.

G Jones also advised that there had been a negative impact on his school with admissions, whereby his school had to take on an additional 40 students above the PAN. G Jones then added that he has got to await the money for the additional pupils.

Forum added that mobility was an issue and that schools were getting a lot of out of city pupils, which often came with significant social mental health needs.

M Kent commented that as Stoke-on-Trent was one of the 12 'Opportunity Areas', a case to the DfE for funding should be made.

H Gurden questioned why Reach was empty. J Lomas responded that pupils would be moving in to the use the site at Reach from w/c 17<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

H Gurden requested a breakdown on the cost that is spent on alternative providers. Forum also requested a break down on the Central Block.

Forum advised that the proposal would mean major redundancies in school. It was felt that this would be a crisis point for colleagues.

Discussion to be had amongst Forum.

Break down on the Central Block expenditure and alternative providers to be provided.

	<p>It was also felt by Forum that if the issues were to be solved collectively, then the Council needed to ensure they progressed with buildings to get children from out of city back in to Stoke. It was also felt that there needed to be a commitment from Health and Social Services in supporting SEMH pupils.</p> <p>S Moran added that it was a moving problem and that she would not have any capacity to support children if money was removed from her schools budget.</p> <p>S Moran requested a risk assessment to be completed, should the funding be taken, as this would cause schools to be forced to permanent exclude pupils.</p> <p>N Edmonds advised that there was a national discussion currently taking place from an audit perspective regarding the accounting treatment of DSG deficits which presented a further risk. Forum was asked what other options they believed could be put in place to reduce the deficit, and were asked if they felt that Stoke was different to statistical neighbours, then where the money could be taken elsewhere.</p> <p>Cllr A Brown commented that she had listened carefully to the discussion. Cllr A Brown commented that as Leader of the Council she has responsibility for every child in the City. However, she was concerned that the issue with the High Needs DSG was being presented as a 'council' problem, rather than a collective problem. She felt it was important that we worked together to resolve the issues.</p> <p>Cllr A Brown said Forum needed to identify why they felt the City was different to its statistical neighbours, so that if so, the argument could be articulated.</p> <p>Cllr A Brown expressed her concerns with regard to issues raised concerning gangs and youth violence and that she would be able to follow up this with the Police and Crime Commissioner if required</p> <p>Cllr A Brown said that she would be in attendance at the next Schools' Forum.</p>	<p>Risk assessment to be completed, should the request be granted.</p>
	<p><b>Any other Business</b></p> <p>J Lomas advised that a copy of the High Needs Deficit Recovery Plan will be emailed out to all Schools' Forum representatives.</p> <p>Primary School Headteachers to meet collectively at the next Headteachers' Breakfast Briefing to further discuss the request from the Council.</p>	<p>A Brindley to email a copy of High Needs presentation to all attendees.</p>

	<p><b>Date of the next meeting</b></p> <p><b>Date:</b> Tuesday 17 September 2019 <b>Time:</b> 08.30 – 11.00am <b>Venue:</b> Watermill Special School</p>	
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