

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

MONDAY, 11 JULY 2016

Forum members Present: Patricia Brims, Chris Davis, Keith Harvey, Reverend Mary Harwood, Angela Hay, Stacey Hunter, Sheilagh Peacock, Chris Prosser, Clive Rothwell, Graham Spellman (Vice-Chairman), Bruce Steiner (Chairman), Suzanne Taylor and Keith Watts

Also Present: Avril Allenby (Early Years Service Manager), Ian Pearson (Head of Education Service), Claire White (Finance Manager (Schools)) and Annette Yellen (Accountant for Schools Funding and the DSG), Councillor Dominic Boeck (Executive Portfolio: Education), Councillor Anthony Chadley (Council Member), Jacquie Davies (Pupil Referral Units), Councillor Mollie Lock (Shadow Executive Portfolio: Education and Young People, Adult Social Care) and Jo Reeves (Policy Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Reverend Mark Bennet, Catie Colston, Paul Dick, Anthony Gallagher, Jon Hewitt, Peter Hudson, Brian Jenkins, Derek Peaple, David Ramsden and Charlotte Wilson

Forum members Absent: Ben Broyd

PART I

26 Minutes of previous meeting dated 6 June 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes from the meeting held on 6 June 2016 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

27 Actions arising from previous meetings

The progress against actions arising from previous meetings was noted.

28 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

29 Schools Forum Membership and Constitution from September 2016

The Schools Forum considered a report (Agenda Item 5) which presented a review of the membership and Constitution of the Schools Forum. Jo Reeves reported that the School Census May 2016 had revealed some minor changes in the spread of pupil numbers across the different sectors, including John O'Gaunt Secondary School about to join Excalibur Academies Trust. However these changes were not of a level to recommend that any alteration be made to the composition of the Schools Forum membership.

A number of Schools Forum members would be coming to the end of their term in September 2016; the report detailed what action was required of those members.

There had been no changes to the Schools Forum Regulations which required changes to the constitution.

Jo Reeves invited Schools Forum members to approve the membership and Constitution of the Schools Forum from September 2016.

Stacey Hunter sought clarity on a point in the Schools Forum Constitution (top bullet point, page 22 of the agenda). Jo Reeves explained that 'education of children otherwise than at school' included those who were Home Educated. Ian Pearson added that it would refer to children under Engaging Potential and at the Lighthouse. The Schools Forum had a broad remit and was consulted on arrangements for all children with funding from the High Needs Block.

SCHOOLS FORUM - 11 JULY 2016 - MINUTES

Claire White, referring to paragraph 5.4, noted that the Early Years Steering Group would be meeting on 21 September 2016 to decide on their representative.

RESOLVED that the membership and Constitution of the Schools Forum from September 2016 be approved, subject to the bullet on page 2 of the Constitution being clarified (page 22 on the agenda).

30 Primary Schools in Financial Difficulty - Bids for Funding 2016/17

The Schools Forum considered a report (Agenda Item 6) which summarised two bids that had been received from schools with a deficit budget to access funding from the schools in financial difficulty de-delegated fund. The budget for the fund in 2016/17 was £332,600, which included the carry forward of the unspent budget from 2015/16 of £215,280. No payments had so far been made in the current financial year.

John Rankin Infant and Junior schools were in a federation, and from April 2016 were operating a single budget. The bid from John Rankin Schools was for £68,060 (out of a total deficit of £182,300) which was to cover one-off compensation/redundancy payments and the accountancy and IT additional support paid for to improve their financial systems and to put in place a deficit recovery plan.

The schools ended 2014/15 with a deficit, mainly due to poor financial controls. The schools set balanced budgets for 2015/16, but then didn't implement the changes required and failed to control the expenditure. Since then, the Chair of Governors, Chair of Resources, School Business Manager, and Executive Head had all left, and WBC Finance had been providing significant support to the new team. A new Executive Head teacher would start in September 2016.

The current five year budget plan had been largely prepared by WBC finance staff, working with the new Chair of Governors, interim executive head teacher, and new school business manager. Approval of this funding would bring the school out of a deficit position a year earlier, although the new executive head would need time to consider the staffing structure moving forward.

The Schools' Finance Manager verified that their current budget plan had been subject to scrutiny and that this bid met the criterion set by the Schools' Forum. The financial controls in the school were also now more robust.

The bid from Westwood Farm Schools was for £76,000 (out of a total deficit of £127,370) which was to cover one-off termination packages. The schools ended 2015/16 with deficits mainly due to the cost of unforeseen exit packages of senior staff. A permanent Executive Head had been appointed from September 2016, and she had been involved in the preparation of the deficit recovery plan alongside the interim Executive Head. The plan had been scrutinised by and discussed with WBC finance staff. Approval of the funding would bring the school out of deficit a year earlier, and reduce the risk of needing to make further savings at the detriment of the pupils.

The Schools' Finance Manager verified that their current budget plan had been subject to scrutiny and that this bid met the criterion set by the Schools' Forum.

The Heads Funding Group (HFG) was unanimous in recommending to Schools' Forum approval of both bids for the full amount requested. HFG were also asked to consider a proposal that where primary schools in deficit engage Schools' Finance to work with them on deficit recovery, that this cost be deducted from the Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund without schools needing to make a separate bid for this funding to the Group. HFG agreed, and recommended this proposal to Schools' Forum. The cost would be in the region of £2k to £3k if all primary schools currently in deficit were to pay for this additional support.

SCHOOLS FORUM - 11 JULY 2016 - MINUTES

Keith Watts asked what guarantee could be offered that the schools would have proper management in the future. Ian Pearson advised that the Heads Funding Group had questioned the schools' representatives and had sufficient confidence in the management teams going forward to recommend to the Schools Forum that the bids be granted. Keith Harvey confirmed that both cases had been viable and heads had confidence that both schools could reach surplus balances in five years.

Bruce Steiner stated that both schools had changed management teams. Patricia Brims asked what mechanisms were in place to prevent the new management teams from falling into the same position. Claire White advised that schools had delegated budgets and it was difficult for the council to intervene unless they were invited to. Ian Pearson added that monitoring and support was available. The schools' governing bodies would scrutinise the schools budgets and the council offered training to governors to support them in their role. Bruce Steiner commented that as a finance governor he had received training.

Chris Davis asked what provision there was to support the schools to achieve financial efficiency. Claire White advised that when a school set a deficit budget there were rigorous controls and monthly budget monitoring. The budget planner provided to schools now included more information to help schools. The Schools Forum would receive a report in December 2016 to review the progress of all the schools with deficit budgets.

RESOLVED that the two bids for funding from the Schools in Financial Difficulty fund be approved and that the cost of additional support for schools in deficit from the Schools Finance team also be met from this fund.

31 **School Funding Arrangements 2017/18**

Claire White advised that no new information had been published by the government regarding the second-stage consultation on a National Funding Formula. She anticipated that this might mean further changes would be deferred until 2018/19.

32 **De-delegation Proposals 2017/18**

The Schools Forum considered a report (Agenda Item 8) which set out the details, cost, and indicative charges (de-delegations) to schools of the four services on which primary and secondary maintained school representatives are required to vote (on an annual basis) on whether to de-delegate or not.

Maintained primary and secondary members of the Forum were asked to consult with the groups they represented, to gauge whether these services should be de-delegated in financial year 2017/18. A decision would be taken at the October 2016 meeting of the Schools' Forum.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

33 **School Budgets 2016/17**

The Schools Forum considered a report (Agenda Item 9) which set out the three year budgets of all maintained schools and highlighted some key observations. The overall position of the 74 maintained schools (69 budgets submitted as 5 sets of federated schools now operated with one single budget for 2 schools) was shown in Table 1. The number of surplus budgets was going down, with the number of deficit budgets increasing. However looking at overall balances compared to original forecasts, it was evident from these figures that many schools would set a "worst case scenario" budget, but would manage spending decisions carefully during the year with sight of the longer term position.

SCHOOLS FORUM - 11 JULY 2016 - MINUTES

Considering the overall position on the year two and three forecasts in table 4, if schools took no action there would be a significant overall deficit. 26 schools had forecasted a year 2 (2017/18) deficit of greater than £25k, compared to 20 schools in 2015/16. This position was unlikely to materialise, although the increase in numbers showed it was becoming more difficult for schools balance their budgets without making any changes to their operation. Unless in a deficit position and the school has been required to produce a detailed deficit recovery plan, for many schools years two and three were usually the position if nothing changed – i.e. pupil numbers were static so funding remained the same, staffing numbers and grades remain the same, yet costs (inflation and pay rises) go up.

Graham Spellman commented that in the commercial sector, budget forecasting was always completed on a worst case scenario basis because one could not be sure of future costs. It was good practice of schools to forecast in this way.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

34 DSG Monitoring Month 3 2016/17

The Forum considered a report (Agenda Item 10) regarding the DSG Monitoring for Month 3 of 2016/17. This was a regular report to the Forum.

Claire White explained that a chart had been inserted at paragraph 3.6 to reveal what proportion of the DSG spending could be considered high risk. For 2016/17 this was nearly £16m.

Table 4.1 was showing no variances at the end of month 3; changes were more likely to arise by month 7. The table would also help track the £697k planned overspend.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

35 Vulnerable Children's Grant Annual Report 2015/16

The Forum considered a report (Agenda Item 11) which laid out the position of the Vulnerable Children's Fund (VCF) as at the 2015/16 year end. The fund was used to support a school for a time limited period when pupils displayed challenging behaviour which might put them at risk of exclusion.

The table revealed that in 2015/16 there had been a reduction in requests to extend funding for a further time period. The VCF had been considered for a reduction in funding by the Forum earlier in the year but Heads were on the view it was a useful fund and a significant source of assistance.

Graham Spellman enquired how the fund was monitored in-year. Ian Pearson advised that Darren Suffolk would be the budget manager going forwards who would need to be stringent in considering applications for funding early in the financial year to ensure that there was still a balance available later in the year.

Stacey Hunter enquired how the impact of the Fund was measured. Angela Hay advised that primary schools particularly found it was important to access the VCF when children needed support. Chris Davis suggested that schools could provide case studies to testify to the VCF's benefit.

Claire White reminded the Forum that for 2016/17 an additional £40k had been added to the VCF from the unused exclusion budget.

Patricia Brims concurred that case studies would be useful and asked that they be anonymised to safeguard pupil confidentiality.

SCHOOLS FORUM - 11 JULY 2016 - MINUTES

RESOLVED that the report be noted. A selection of schools would be asked to provide case studies regarding the impact of the Vulnerable Children's Fund. (Action: Cathy Burnham)

36 Two Year-Old funding and Early Years Pupil Premium

The Forum considered a report (Agenda Item 12) regarding two year old funding and early years pupil premium funding.

Avril Allenby reported that the council now had 101 providers offering free entitlement spaces for two year olds. She took on board the comments made at the previous Schools Forum meeting regarding Pupil Premium and explained that there was an action plan to publicise the funding and make it easier to apply for. In Early Years, Pupil Premium equated to a relatively small amount of money and was used to enrich the environment rather than provide targeted support.

Regarding two year old places, there were now a high number of applications on the list provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) but many children who were on this list and eligible for funding did not then find an appropriate setting. Further work was being undertaken to address this.

Councillor Mollie Lock asked if there were enough places available. Avril Allenby advised that more schools were now ready to offer places to two year olds and more child minders were able to offer places. Provision of places had previously been an issue and now the challenge would be to get the child to the right place for them.

Ian Pearson suggested that the action plan be circulated with the minutes for the meeting.

Keith Watts asked whether there was data to compare the take up between rural and urban areas in the District. Avril Allenby advised this data was available for two year old places but not pupil premium.

Suzanne Taylor commented that there was a two-term lag in receiving the data from the DWP. Avril Allenby advised that the list was being reviewed regularly to ensure there was as high a take up as possible.

Keith Harvey posited that the time spent on these initiatives might outweigh the funding received. Suzanne Taylor advised that one child would receive £189 in Pupil Premium. Avril Allenby advised that for the Pupil Premium providers received 53p from the government and in West Berkshire this was increased to £1 through the early years funding formula.

RESOLVED that the report be noted. The action plan would be circulated to all members with the minutes from the meeting.

37 Forward Plan

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan for the next two meetings be agreed.

38 Date of the next meeting

The next meeting would be held on Monday 10th October 2016, 5pm at Shaw House.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 5.50 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature