

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 23 JANUARY 2017

Forum Members Present: Reverend Mark Bennet, Fadia Clarke (Substitute) (In place of Ben Broyd), Chris Davis, Paul Dick, Lynne Doherty, Antony Gallagher, Keith Harvey, Reverend Mary Harwood, Jon Hewitt, Peter Hudson, Stacey Hunter, Brian Jenkins, Mollie Lock, Sheilagh Peacock, Derek Peale, Chris Prosser, David Ramsden, Graham Spellman (Vice-Chairman), Bruce Steiner (Chairman), Suzanne Taylor and Keith Watts

Also Present: Avril Allenby (Early Years Service Manager), Mike Lindburn (Health and Safety Manager), Ian Pearson (Head of Education Service), Jane Seymour (Service Manager, SEN & Disabled Children's Team), Claire White (Finance Manager (Schools)) and Annette Yellen (Accountant for Schools Funding and the DSG), Jessica Bailiss (Policy Officer (Executive Support)) and Jo Reeves (Policy Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Ben Broyd, Councillor Anthony Chadley, Jonathon Chishick, Catie Colston, Jacquie Davies, Angela Hay and Charlotte Wilson

PART I

68 Minutes of previous meeting dated 5th December 2017

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 5th December 2016 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Reverend Mark Bennet raised a query about the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) Strategic review in relation to pupil numbers. Ian Pearson confirmed that of the current six sites the proposal was for both Moorside and Riverside to be vacated. Regarding pupil numbers, primary provision would not be reduced. The number of secondary places would decrease to around 46, however this was an increase from the proposal in the consultation. This would be reviewed again by the Joint Strategic Review Panel (JSRP).

Reverend Mark Bennet referred to a Primary PRU waiting list. Ian Pearson commented that the overall pattern had formed part of discussions and it related to full time provision at Key Stages three, four and five. Paul Dick commented that the crisis was at Primary School level and this needed to be reviewed by the JSRP. David Ramsden stated that he sat on the JSRP and if numbers were changing then demand needed to be re-assessed.

RESOLVED that David Ramsden would raise the issue of numbers and demand at the next JSRP.

69 Actions arising from previous meetings

Action 1 would be updated on under agenda item five (Membership).

70 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

71 Membership

David Ramsden gave an update against Action 1 regarding Chris Prosser and David Ramsden informing their respective Governing Bodies of the Secondary Governor

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vacancy on the Schools Forum. A colleague of his was very interested in the position however, was unable to commit at that point in time. It was confirmed that there was no timescale attached to filling the position however, it was in the interest of the Schools Forum to have the position filled as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that David Ramsden and Chris Prosser would continue to raise awareness of the Secondary Governor vacancy on the Schools Forum.

72 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Funding Settlement and Budget Overview 2017/18 (Claire White)

Claire White introduced the report, which set out the Government's funding settlement for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and the overall budget position for 2017/18. This report set the context for other reports that would be discussed later on the agenda, which covered each of the three blocks in more detail.

The reform of the School and High Needs funding blocks had been delayed by a year and it was proposed that this would take place from 2018/19. The second stage of the consultation was underway and responses were required by the 22nd March 2017. This would be discussed in more detail at the meeting of the Schools Forum in March.

Funding allocations for each block had been received on the 20th December 2016. Table one of the report summarised the overall position and more details were included within Appendix A of the report.

Regarding the School Block, the pupil rate for 2017/18 was £4,348.43. October 2015 pupil numbers were 22,235, resulting in a Schools Block allocation of £96.687m. Claire White explained that after taking into account centrally retained budgets and running the school formula on the current funding rates, there would be headroom of £226k.

Regarding the Early Years Block, no change had been made to West Berkshire's proposed funding rate following the consultation on the new formula. Additional funding had been allocated to support the increase in provision from 15 to 30 hours for eligible children from September 2017. This would be adjusted based on actual numbers in the January 2018 census. In the first year, rates to providers were likely to be lower than they should be, in order to recover the deficit from 2016/17. The Early Years Funding Group would be aim to balance the budget going forward.

Claire White moved on to talk about the High Needs Block. The 2017/18 settlement for West Berkshire had received an additional £350k to the allocation, which was based on actual population and assumed population increases. Although the High Needs Block grant had received a welcomed increase, based on estimated expenditure for 2017/18 there would still be a shortfall in funding and further savings would need to be made. More detail on this would be provided within the report under item eight of the agenda, where a number of saving options would be presented to the Schools Forum for further discussion.

RESOLVED that the Schools Forum noted the report.

73 Schools Block Budget Proposals 2017/18 (Claire White and Ian Pearson)

The Chairman drew the Forum's attention to the recommendations within the report under paragraph's 2.2 and 2.3. All Forum Members would be required to vote on recommendation 2.2 (To agree the centrally retained budgets as set out in Tables 2 and 3) and all primary and secondary maintained school Forum Members would be required to vote on recommendation 2.3 (To agree the additional de-delegations as set out in Tables 4 and 5).

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Ian Pearson introduced the report, which set out proposals for the Schools Block Budget for 2017/18.

The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) schools block allocation for 2017/18 was confirmed on the 20th December 2016 and totalled £96.7 million. In addition it was estimated that there would be a £300k under spend in the Growth and Falling Rolls fund, which could be carried forward and included within the amount for allocation.

In the past the Government had given the local authority an Education Services Grant (ESG), which amounted to just under £2 million. However, in 2017/18 this grant was being cut. Statutory services provided by the local authority for maintained schools would become a de-delegation from individual school budgets. All schools would have to pay for these services. Academies would also receive a cut to the grant they received to pay for these services (though will receive transitional relief), and they would however have to continue to purchase them.

Paragraph four of the report gave an overall picture of the School's Block. Table Two illustrated services currently provided by the DSG and would continue to be met by the schools block DSG. Table Three showed services that were previously funded by the ESG and would have to be met from the schools block DSG going forward. Table Four highlighted central statutory services previously funded by the ESG that would not be transferred to the DSG but would need to be de-delegated from maintained school's budgets as they would remain as statutory. Table 5 set out the proposed cost of the school improvement de-delegated services for 2017/18 and this was covered in more detail under Appendix F to the report. There was also a separate report under Appendix E regarding Health and Safety, which had been discussed in great detail at the Heads Funding Group.

Paul Dick noted that the servicing costs of the Schools Forum had increased by 50%. Claire White explained that in the past school finance regulations set by the Government had not allowed the Local Authority to put up the budget of this service in line with what it had actually cost and it had been capped at what the cost had been three years ago. Funding had been moved around to ensure this service could continue despite increasing costs. The 50% increase shown reflected the Governments recognition that the cost of this service had increased and therefore resulted in removal of the cap.

Paul Dick felt that with schools facing ever reducing budgets it seemed unfair for any budget to increase by this amount. Claire White stated that the budget in question provided posts that supported the Schools Forum, including administration of all the meetings provided by Strategic Support. Keith Watts asked what would the result be if the budget in question was reduced to £42k and Claire White confirmed that the Forum could not be serviced. There was a statutory requirement to have five Schools Forum meetings per year. The Chairman acknowledged the point that was being made however stated that in the grand scheme of things the amount of money in question was relatively small.

The Forum then moved on to consider the reports under Appendix E and F. Appendix E included proposals for Health and Safety provision for maintained schools.

Mike Lindburn (Health and Safety Manager), presented Appendix E of the report, which considered Health and Safety Services in line with the changes to the Education Services Grant (being that the statutory element of this service would now need to be met by schools) and how this fitted in with the current traded service with maintained schools and academies.

Mike Lindburn stated that his report set out the legal requirements expected of schools and that they had to be provided with access to competent advice. Within the report there

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were a number of proposals to be considered on how the Health and Safety Service would be funded into the future.

Option 1: Combine the costs of the provision of schools health and safety service currently split and funded through the ESG and through buy back income, thus removing the differing level of service and maintaining current staff levels.

Option 2: Combine the costs of the provision of schools health and safety service currently split and funded through the ESG and through buy back income, thus removing the differing level of service but reduce current staff levels by one full time post.

Option 3: Maintain the current choice based service options, with all schools equally and equitably sharing the cost of the provision of the Level One schools health and safety service.

Mike Lindburn explained that Options 1 and 2 offered a different way of delivering the Health and Safety service. Option 3 would require no changes.

Peter Hudson noted that Option 3 was what was currently provided in terms of health and safety and queried whether schools needed to be Level Two in order of being considered adequate. Mike Lindburn commented that legislation stated that advice had to be provided however legislation did not provide scope on how advice should be provided. There was a debate as to whether Level One schools fully met the legal requirements.

Chris Davis asked if there was any evidence to support that schools opting for Level One were missing something. He also asked if Level One schools could look elsewhere for the provision of Level Two services. Mike Lindburn stated that he was not aware of any other arrangements for health and safety advice or any other forms of external support. In regards to Chris Davis' first question, Mike Lindburn reported that there was a usual spread of scores across need assessments. One advantage to schools choosing to be Level Two was that they had access to up to date training.

Keith Harvey reported that his school had been Level One for many years however, felt that if schools were forced to become Level two there would be more advantages for them and therefore this was preferable.

Chris Davis was concerned that some schools might have made financial investment into a set up that ensured they were a Level Two school. Options 1 or 2 would mean that such schools would be forced to pay for something they were already doing in a different way.

David Ramsden thanked Mike Lindburn for including a third option within his report, which had not been included when the report was discussed at the Heads Funding Group. David Ramsden expressed that he did not support Options 1 or 2 as he felt schools should not lose their freedom to choose. Sheilagh Peacock stated that many of her colleagues would not want to be forced into buying Level Two services.

Anthony Gallagher asked for clarification on the cost of Option 3 and Mike Lindburn confirmed that they would try to retain any existing charges.

Peter Hudson noted that Option 3 would result in a lower level model, where schools could then buy into Level Two services. Mike Lindburn stated that in reality with just one post, Level Two was not something that was achievable.

Ian Pearson noted that conversations seemed to be supporting Option 3 and he reminded Members of the Forum that this could be reviewed next year. David Ramsden supported this and felt that an early review of the system would be helpful.

John Hewitt stated that he was speaking on behalf of special schools and noted that costs for them would increase however he noted they were unable to vote. Claire White confirmed that special school, nurseries and PRUs would have to pay for the services

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decided by their primary and secondary colleagues. There had been no clear response from the Department for Education on when she had raised this query.

Ian Pearson drew the Forum's attention to Appendix F regarding a proposal to de-delegate formula funding for 2017/18 for school improvement services for maintained schools. The changing national landscape of school improvement was one of transition from local authority led to a system-led model of school improvement with subsequent reduction to local authority funding. The proposal concerned the support for transitional school improvement funding in two stages; April to August 2017 and then September to March 2018. Although national school improvement funding was being reduced, statutory functions were not being reduced and the Local Authority would retain responsibility for these. It was reported that the Department for Education (DfE) had recently announced that there would be a contribution to transitional funding to support statutory functions from September 2017 to the equivalent of £1800 per school per year. This sum did not fully meet the cost of transitional arrangements or the delivery of statutory functions.

Ian Pearson reported that page 55 of the report detailed the non statutory core offer. Page 52 included a table, which set out the cost at a total net cost of £256k for financial year 2017/18. The second period of time from September to March brought the cost down to £0k.

Ian Pearson stated that the original cost per pupil had been £45. At the Heads Funding Group this had been reduced to £19 per pupil and had since reduced again to £16.50. Graham Spellman asked for clarification on the noticable cliff edge between August and September and Ian Pearson confirmed that the offer would move from a statutory plus offer to just a statutory offer. Graham Spellman further queried what would happen to Officers involved at that point and Ian Pearson reported that the team would have to be reduced and the Local Authority would be actively looking into this.

Chris Davis referred to the paragraph at the bottom of page 52 and was concerned that schools would be paying for something they would not receive. Ian Pearson reported that schools categorised as A or B would receive a degree of support. They would receive what they were receiving at present between April and August and this would then reduce between August and March. Ian Pearson confirmed that schools could change to a different category and these were reviewed two or three times per year.

The Chairman queried what would happen if a vote was not passed on the items in question. Ian Pearson stated that it was hoped that a position would be agreed however, if it was not then the item would have to be referred to the Secretary of State.

In line with paragraph 2.2 of the report, the Chairman invited Members of the Forum to vote on if they were in agreement with the centrally retained budgets as set out in Tables 2 and 3.

RESOLVED that all were in favour of agreeing the centrally retained budgets set out in Tables 2 and 3.

In line with paragraph 2.3 of the report, the Chairman invited Members of the Forum to vote on if they were in agreement with the additional de-delegations as set out in Tables 4 and 5.

RESOLVED that no Forum Members were in favour of Option 1 under Table 4.

RESOLVED that no Forum Members were in favour of Option 2 under Table 4.

RESOLVED that all Forum Members were in favour of Option 3 under Table 4.

RESOLVED that all Forum Members were in favour of agreeing the additional de-delegations as set out in Table 5.

74 High Needs Block Budget Proposals 2017/18 (Ian Pearson, Jane Seymour and Cathy Burnham)

Ian Pearson introduced the report which sought to update Members of the Forum on the current financial position of the High Needs Block budget for 2016/17 and 2017/18. The report set out option available in order to balance the budget over 2017/18 and 2018/19.

There would be deficit of just under £600k in 2017/18 and then for 2018/19 the deficit would reduce to just under £300k. The Schools Forum needed to look at the potential saving options included within the report and decide which savings should be made to bring the budget back into balance. The Heads Funding Group had discussed the various options in detail at its last meeting and recommendations made by the Group were included on page 66 of the report. It was confirmed that the Schools Forum did not need to make a decision on these saving options at that point in time however, needed to have a clear idea of which options it favoured.

Claire White reported that that the Schools Forum would have to make a decision in March regarding which savings should be made. By this time savings from the PRU review would be clearer along with the forecast for 2016/17 and 2017/18.

Jane Seymour referred to page 67 of the report, where reducing speech and language therapy sessions was a possible savings option. Jane Seymour reported that the need for therapy had reduced however, Specials Schools would still have the option to buy these services if they wanted to.

Peter Hudson asked if other areas listed as possible saving options could be bought back by schools. Jane Seymour reported that the Specialist Inclusion Support Service could be bought back by schools.

Paul Dick felt that the principle should be added that if services were not statutory they should not funded. Ian Pearson reported that Jane Seymour was working closely with a group of Head Teachers to reduce the cost of different services being offered. Paul Dick stated that he would be happy to be a part of this group.

Reverend Mark Bennett referred to balancing in year budgets and raised a query regarding what happened to deficits. Claire White confirmed that these deficits would be paid using future savings.

Keith Harvey asked if all the Option A savings were added together, it would be close to £50k deficit in 2018/19. Claire White confirmed that they would as savings in 2017/18 would be doubled up over two years.

David Ramsden commented that the High Needs Block needed to operate year on year. He commended the table on page 66 and 67 of the report, which gave a sliding scale of possible savings.

Peter Hudson referred to column B of the table on page 66, which stated 'possible saving subject to further discussion' and queried what the timeframe would be for these discussions. Jane Seymour reported that conversations were taking place currently and there would be clarity on areas of savings categorised under column B by the next meeting of the Schools Forum in March.

The Chairman invited Members of the Forum to vote on if they agreed with the savings strategy for 2017/18 and 2018/19 as per the Heads Funding Group recommendations as set out in Section 7 of the report.

Paul Dick reiterated his point that only statutory services should be continued and wanted to ensure this was noted.

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RESOLVED that all were in favour of that recommended by the Heads Funding Group as set out in Section 7 of the report.

75 Early Years Budget & Formula Proposals 2017/18 (Avril Allenby and Claire White)

Avril Allenby introduced the report to Members of the Forum, which set out the changes to the early years funding in 2017/18 and proposed formula. On the 1st December 2016 the Government had announced that the proposed new early year's national funding formula would commence for April 2017.

Avril Allenby reported that the pass through rate had been confirmed as 93 percent for 2017/18 and 95 percent thereafter. As proposed in the consultation there would be a universal base rate required for all types of providers.

The consultation had proposed removing the ability to use quality supplements, which for West Berkshire Council providers was the main differentiation in rates used and would have the largest impact. The use of a quality supplement would now be allowed to recognise workforce qualifications.

There was already a model for consultation and section four of the report detailed the background on what could be included. Avril Allenby highlighted that it was not a public consultation and was only open to providers of the free entitlement.

Keith Harvey noted that supplements would be capped at 10 percent and therefore was concerned that providers would be out of pocket. Avril Allenby commented that this was difficult to predict and vulnerability of providers was an area that needed to be monitored closely. Avril Allenby stated that they were lucky in West Berkshire in that they had a good relationship with providers, who were happy to approach the Local Authority if they needed to.

The Chairman concurred with Avril Allenby's point that the level of vulnerability to difficult to predict. He then invited Forum Members to vote on whether they were happy to agree that the proposal could go out for consultation with providers.

RESOLVED that the proposal could go out for consultation with providers.

76 DSG Monitoring 2016/17 Month 9 (Ian Pearson)

The Forum considered the report, which set out the current financial position of the services funded by the local Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and highlighted any under spends.

RESOLVED that the Forum noted the report.

77 Growth Fund and Falling Rolls Fund 2016/17 (Claire White)

Claire White introduced the report, which informed Forum Members about payments made to schools from the Growth Fund and Falling Rolls Fund budget 2016/17.

The table under section four of the report showed the under spent element and £300k would be added back to schools block resources next year.

Claire White explained that they had been building up the Growth Fund for the new school. This would now no longer be required for 2018/19 if the proposals in the Government's national funding formula go ahead. This was discussed at the last meeting of the Schools Forum and as a result the money would be released back to schools.

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78 Forward Plan

Joanne Reeves drew the Forum's attention to the forward plan and highlighted that the next two meetings were normally included however, Jessica Bailiss would soon be forming the work programme for the coming year, which would be brought in full to the next meeting of the Schools Forum in March.

79 Any Other Business

Claire White raised the schools and high needs national funding formulae consultation and reported that she would put a briefing note together that put this information into a West Berkshire prospective. She hoped to email this information to Members of the Forum prior to the next meeting in March.

The Government were removing money from the base funding and focusing it on poor attainment and deprivation and as a result some schools would benefit and others would not.

80 Date of the next meeting

The next meeting would be held on Monday 6th March 2017, 5pm at Shaw House.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 6.30 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature