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Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 16 JULY 2018

Present: Reverend Mark Bennet, Jonathon Chishick, Catie Colston, Jacquie Davies, Chris Davis, Councillor Lynne Doherty, Keith Harvey, Reverend Mary Harwood, Angela Hay, Jon Hewitt, Patrick Mitchell, David Ramsden, Graham Spellman (Vice-Chairman), Bruce Steiner (Chairman), Suzanne Taylor and Keith Watts

Also Present: Wendy Howells (Finance Manager: Schools), Ian Pearson (Head of Education Service), Annette Yellen (Accountant for Schools Funding and the DSG), Jessica Bailiss (Policy Officer (Executive Support)) and Michelle Sancho (Principal EP & Service Manager)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Ben Broyd, Councillor Anthony Chadley, Antony Gallagher, Lucy Hillyard, Brian Jenkins, Councillor Mollie Lock, Chris Prosser, Jane Seymour and Charlotte Wilson

PART I

1 Minutes of previous meeting dated 18th June 2018

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18th June 2018 were approved.

2 Actions arising from previous meetings

June18 – Ac1 - Consulting with the relevant governing bodies regarding the secondary governor vacancy: David Ramsden reported that this action was underway.

It was noted that actions Jun18-Ac2 and Ac4 were on the agenda and would be discussed later in the meeting.

June18 – Ac3 - Effectively manging schools in financial difficulty: Ian Pearson reported this would be managed by the standing item that would commence in October 2018 concerning deficit recovery.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

4 Membership

The Chairman reported that it was Chris Davis's last meeting of the Schools' Forum as he was due to retire. He thanked Chris Davis for his many years of contribution to the work of the Schools' Forum and wished him a long and happy retirement.

It was also noted that the Chairman's term of office had ended in July and that he would continue as a Member of the Schools' Forum for a further three year term.

5 Schools' Forum Membership and Constitution from September 2018 (Jessica Bailiss)

Jessica Bailiss introduced the report (Agenda Item 6) which aimed to review and where necessary update the Membership and Constitution of the Schools' Forum. It was

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highlighted that there was a typographical error on page 11, section 2.1, and that the date for approval would be from September 2018.

Jessica Bailiss explained that the membership for the Schools' Forum must reflect the proportion of pupils within each sector. No schools had converted to an academy since September 2017 however, Lambourn Primary School was due to convert in September 2018 and therefore the pupil numbers for this school had been included with information for academies. Jessica Bailiss added that even with this in mind, there had not been a significant enough change to require a change to the composition of the Forum.

In terms of changes to the Constitution there was one amendment proposed under section 5.1 of the report, regarding attendance and a six month rule.

In conclusion it was recommended that the Schools' Forum approve the Membership and Constitution as set out in section 2.1 of the report. Keith Harvey proposed that the Forum approve the Membership and Constitution and this was seconded by John Chishick. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum approved the Membership and Constitution from September 2018.

6 **Primary Schools in Financial Difficulty - Bid for Funding: The Willows (Wendy Howells)**

Wendy Howells introduced the report (Agenda Item 7) that summarised the bid that had been received from the Willows Primary School to the Primary Schools in Financial Difficulty De-delegated Fund. It was noted that there was a typographical error under section 4.1 as the report did not include an Appendix A.

Wendy Howells reported that the bid was for an amount of £36,118 to cover the cost of staff restructuring and executive support following a formal warning to the school.

At its meeting on the 3rd July 2018, the Heads Funding Group had agreed to recommend that the Schools' Forum approve the bid in full, since the costs had already been incurred and had contributed to the deficit position. Approval of the bid would not clear the school's deficit and it would still be required to implement savings. Receipt of the funding would help repay the deficit in year as planned.

Jonathon Chishick proposed that the Schools' Forum approve the bid in full and this was seconded by Chris Davis. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum approved the bid from the Willows Primary School as set out in section 2.1 of the report.

7 **Primary Schools in Financial Difficulty - Bid for Funding: Parsons Down (Wendy Howells)**

Wendy Howells introduced the report (Agenda Item 8) that summarised the bid that had been received from the Parson Down Partnership to the Primary Schools in Financial Difficulty De-delegated Fund. The amount being bid for was £32,106 to help cover the costs of redundancy.

At its meeting on the 3rd July 2018 the Heads Funding Group had agreed to recommend that the bid be approved in full. The school had a robust deficit recovery plan, including moving the school to a two form entry and a restructure of staffing. Approval of the bid would not clear the school's deficit and it would still be required to implement the savings in their deficit recovery plan.

Jonathon Chishick proposed that the Schools' Forum approve the bid in full and this was seconded by Chris Davis. At the vote the motion was carried.

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RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum approved the bid from The Parson Down Partnership as set out in section 2.1 of the report.

8 Scheme for Financing Schools 2018/19 (Wendy Howells)

Wendy Howells introduced the Scheme for Financing Schools (Agenda Item 9). Some statutory changes had been made to the document along with one Local Authority change, which included an amendment to the policy for schools in deficit.

Schools had now been consulted on the document including changes and no questions had been received. Therefore Wendy Howells recommended that the Schools' Forum approve the Scheme for Financing Schools for 2018/19.

Keith Harvey reported that the document had been discussed at the Primary Headteacher Forum and all had felt that the document was logical and accurate.

David Ramsden proposed that the Schools' Forum approve the document and this was seconded by Jonathon Chishick. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum approved the Scheme for Financing Schools 2018/19.

9 DSG Outturn 2017/18 (Ian Pearson/Wendy Howells)

Wendy Howells introduced the report (Agenda Item 10) which set out the actual deployment of the Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG) in 2017/18, explaining the main variances and to propose the amounts to be carried forward to 2018/19.

Section 5.2 of the report detailed the options for utilising the unspent budgets and 5.3 included recommendations from the Heads Funding Group (HFG) on how this money could be used.

- 1) Primary Schools' in Financial Difficulty – it was recommended that the unspent budget of £259,099 be added to the funding available in 2018/19 to help meet restructuring costs for schools in deficit, which would provide a total budget of £379,120.
- 2) Support to Ethnic and Minority and Bilingual Learners – it was recommended that the amount of £35,170 be used to offset the cost to schools for this service in 2019/20. This would be an approximate reduction per pupil of £50.
- 3) Behaviour Support – it was recommended that the £4,500 be added to the current year budget and for it to be utilised in 2018/19.
- 4) Growth Fund – it was recommended that this be rolled into the budget already set for 2018/19, increasing the budget to £277,710.
- 5) School Improvement – It was recommended by the HFG that £5,960 of the unspent budget of £73,410 be used to offset the over spend in the Statutory and Regulatory Duties budget. The HFG had not reached a recommendation for the remainder of the money however, this would be discussed again at the HFG meeting in October 2018.

Catie Colston asked for clarification that section 5.3 listed recommendations from the HFG and Ian Pearson confirmed that this was correct. David Ramsden noted that schools had been under represented at the last meeting of the HFG and Ian Pearson confirmed that there had not been a Secondary School representative present.

David Ramsden raised a question about the unspent budget for the Primary Schools' in Financial Difficulty Fund (£259,099), regarding whether this money could be handed back to schools. Wendy Howells reported that this was not possible however, it could be used in 2019/20 to reduce the amount the pooled schools would be required to pay into the budget.

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Ian Pearson stated that there had been concern raised at the HFG that this budget could continue to rise. The approval of bids from The Willows and The Parsons Down Partnership would mean the overall budget would reduce to around £300k. The HFG had discussed a cap being applied to the budget and any money paid into the budget above the capped amount would be returned to schools through reducing costs the following year. David Ramsden was concerned that the sum of money would be left unused and Ian Pearson highlighted that schools were continuing to forecast deficits and therefore it was highly likely that there would be further calls on the fund.

Reverend Mark Bennet felt that the money needed to be viewed strategically. Schools were having to make hard decisions and this pot of funding provided schools with the confidence to make these decisions early on. Ian Pearson added that extra criteria had been added to the fund, as agreed by the Schools' Forum, that allowed it to be used for obtaining additional advice and support to schools that required it.

In reference to the options set out under 5.3, Graham Spellman asked if one unspent budget could be used to offset another. Wendy Howells confirmed that this could be done, for example £5,960 of the School Improvement unspent budget was being used to offset the over spend in the Statutory and Regulatory Duties budget.

Keith Watts speculated that schools that went into deficit used the Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund as a last resort. He felt that it could be worth reversing this situation to help schools before they reached crisis point. This would however require a change in expectations amongst school leaders.

Wendy Howells stated that the Schools' Forum had agreed the criteria for accessing the fund for example, a decrease in pupil numbers. There were several criterion that a bid could be submitted against. It was not recommended however, as part of the criteria, that a school should already be in deficit. Keith Watts was concerned that schools were unaware of the process and Wendy Howells stated that the Strategy for Primary Schools in Financial Difficulty was circulated to schools on an annual basis.

(Patrick Mitchell joined the meeting at 5:21pm)

Reverend Mark Bennet felt that the process needed reiterating to Chairs of Governors. Ian Pearson felt that the issues needed to be approached collectively. It was important that the mismanagement of funds was not rewarded and therefore the area needed addressing carefully. Keith Watts highlighted that currently when a school failed to balance its budget, money was awarded and ideally schools needed supporting before they reached this point.

David Ramsden reiterated his concern about the amount of unspent funding in the Schools' in Financial Difficulty pot, which was nearly reaching £400k. Jonathon Chishick stated that a deficit of almost £900k was being projected for primary schools and therefore the Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund should be viewed as a contingency fund. He did however, agree with the notion that the fund needed to be capped. All schools were taking steps to address their deficits however, additional support might be required.

David Ramsden stated that he disagreed with the point made by Keith Watts regarding how the Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund should be used. He was aware that a large degree of deficits were a result of management issues. There was a huge amount of unspent money, which in his view could be used elsewhere.

Keith Harvey was in support of discussing the Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund at the next HFG. Chris Davis added that in his view the pot of money was not increasing unacceptably and it could be argued that in the grand scheme of things, the amount of money available was relatively small. Issues could be addressed when setting the next budget and a cap could be applied. It was agreed that the area should come back to the

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HFG for discussion in October 2018 and in particular focus should be given to applying a cap to the fund.

David Ramsden stated that it was important to ensure that the criteria for accessing the fund was correct as there was a danger that schools would be wanting to call on it more often. Ian Pearson confirmed that there was a rigorous system in place that involved the HFG challenging schools applying for funding.

Wendy Howells moved on to talk about the High Needs Block, where £100k would be allocated for invest to save projects. This area would be discussed in more detail under Agenda Item 12.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The unspent funding in Primary Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund would be discussed in more detail at the next HFG in October 2018, with particular attention given to applying a cap.
- 2) *(Post meeting comment: Although the Forum raised no objection to the recommendations set out in section 5.3 concerning unspent budgets (for the following areas: Support to Ethnic and Minority and Bilingual Learners (£35,170); Behaviour Support (£4,500); Growth Fund (£75,710); and School Improvement (£5,960)), by omission no motion for approval was carried and therefore, these items would need to return to the Schools' Forum in October 2018 for decision).*

10 High Needs Block - Invest to Save Proposals (Jane Seymour)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 11), which aimed to present proposals for invest to save projects using £100k of one off funding in 2018/19 for consideration by the Schools' Forum. The High Needs Block overspend in 2017/18 was £256k less than anticipated. The Schools' Forum had agreed to use £156k of this money to reduce the deficit in 2018/19 and for £100k to be allocated to projects that would help generate savings in the High Needs Block.

Ian Pearson reported that pages 80 and 81 of the report pack detailed proposals for consideration. All the proposals added up to the total amount of £100k and it was highlighted that this would be a one off sum of money. The aim would be to reduce the pressure on the High Needs Block going forward.

It was agreed that the Schools' Forum should consider each item individually.

5.1 Equipment for children attending resourced schools and nursery schools – Proposal: £10,000 be set aside to meet the costs of equipment in nursery schools and schools with resourced units.

Keith Harvey queried if the amount of £10k was the exact amount the Schools' Forum had cut the service in 2017. David Ramsden struggled to see how a one off sum of money could be used for invest to save projects.

Ian Pearson reported that since the budget had been cut in 2017, equipment costs had sent some schools with resourced units into deficit. As there was now some money available this was an area that required revisiting and the one off amount of £10k would sustain the service until a decision was taken to review the budget long term. Based on this David Ramsden stated that he was happy to support the proposal.

Suzanne Taylor asked if the £10k would be used to offset the cost of equipment in year and Ian Pearson confirmed that it would be, as some schools were unable to afford equipment. Suzanne Taylor confirmed that she was not aware of any nursery schools that would need to call on the fund. Ian Pearson confirmed that the main issue was with resourced schools as they had a disproportionately high number of children requiring resources.

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Keith Harvey suggested that the Schools' Forum consider opening up the £10k to all schools. Keith Watts stated that if the fund was made available to all schools, then the criteria would be met by resourced schools and also other schools that might suddenly require resources. Jonathon Chishick stated that when the fund had been cut in 2017 he had not realised that nurseries did not have a delegated SEN budget to pay for equipment.

Ian Pearson stated that it was within the remit of the Schools' Forum to either approve the recommendation or alternatively open the fund up to all schools.

Reverend Mark Bennet stated that he represented a school with a resourced unit that had a classroom especially for children with a hearing impairment and he stated that further funding would be particularly useful. He queried if there also needed to be money allocated specifically to new resourced units. David Ramsden was of the opinion that children with hearing impairments attended mainstream schools as well and therefore the funding should be made available to all schools, as long as certain criteria was enforced. Chris Davis added that if there was a robust system in place then the funding should be opened up to all schools and each case should be judged on its merits. Ian Pearson suggested that there should be threshold applied. Chris Davis recalled that there was once a bidding system in place.

RESOLVED that this should be brought back to the next round of meetings in October 2018.

5.2 Training programme for behaviour leads in schools with high exclusions – Proposal: If the bid is not successful, it would be possible to tailor the programme to be delivered for a lower amount of £78,400.

Ian Pearson reported that a bid had been submitted for funding from the Strategic School Improvement Fund for a programme of support and training for schools with high exclusions. The bid was for an amount of £167,000. If the bid was not successful, it would be possible to tailor the programme to be delivered at a lower amount.

Jacquie Davies commented that anything that could be done to help keep children in mainstream school was worth investing in. Chris Davis stated early intervention could mean that a child would less likely end up being permanently excluded.

Reverend Mark Bennet felt that the project could help address particular issues but not all. He asked how the effectiveness of the project would be monitored as it was significant project. Michelle Sancho reported that the aim would be to identify and track pupils to see what impact the project was having. Suzanne Taylor asked if there would be a focus on developing language. Michelle Sancho stated this would be included as part of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course programme as it was recognised that the school system had a significant impact on speech and language development. Catie Colston stated that she was supportive of offering training to schools. It would not solve all issues however, was a move in the right direction.

Patrick Mitchell queried if the project was approved, if it would be accessible to schools other than the top five schools with the highest exclusion numbers. Michelle Sancho reported that this would be possible.

David Ramsden felt that the quality of the training would be a huge factor in the success of the project. He was not fully informed on the nature of the project however, did have concerns. Michelle Sancho stated that the quality of training would be high. A pack of information would also be produced and left with schools to refer to. It was an invest to save project because individuals would be trained, data would be collected so that schools could be monitored and a network of behaviour leagues would be created. Michelle Sancho added that there would be a process of engagement with schools and

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details on how this could be implemented was detailed as part of the bid (Appendix A). Collaborative working with schools would be required.

Graham Spellman asked when it would be known if the bid had been successful. Michelle Sancho stated that they had been informed they would know by July 2018, so it was hoped that this would be known shortly.

Jonathon Chishick asked if it was a West Berkshire based initiative and if the bid was not successful in West Berkshire could the authority join with other authorities to deliver the project. Michelle Sancho confirmed that it was a West Berkshire based project and although it could be possible for West Berkshire to join with another local authority, this could cause the project to become too broad and complicated as it would be likely that another authority would have different systems in place. Michelle Sancho reminded the Forum that if the bid was refused then a slimmed down option would be required from that included in Appendix A.

Catie Colston proposed that the proposal should be approved and this was seconded by Chris Davis and at the vote the motion was carried (David Ramsden abstained from voting).

RESOLVED that the Schools Forum approved the allocation of £78,400 to this project if the bid was not successful

5.3 Delivery of PPEP Care Training module on ASD for schools – Proposal: This could be achieved at a cost of £10,000.

PPEP Care stood for Psychological Perspectives in Education and Primary Care. It was a nationally recognised programme which offered training. There had been a rise in complex needs including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) consultation had revealed that this was an area schools would like to be upskilled on. The training would be delivered by experts in the field and then staff who had been trained would be able to help roll the training out to schools.

David Ramsden stated that he had been asking for something similar for some time and fully supported the project. He however queried if £10k was enough to cover costs if all schools took up the offer. Michelle Sancho stated that the figure was based on the delivery of a number of sessions.

Angela Hay echoed David Ramsden that training was something that was needed however, was concerned if enough money was being allocated. Michelle Sancho reported that if more money was made available then more sessions could be offered. David Ramsden felt that this was something that would be worth considering if the bid for funding under item 5.2 was successful. All schools needed to be made fully aware of what was being offered as it was prestigious.

Reverend Mary Harwood was aware that there were many parents awaiting support from CAMHS professionals and asked if this situation would get worse, if these professionals were delivering the training. Michelle Sancho confirmed that CAMHS professionals would not be delivering the training but rather members of the Education and Psychology Team.

Keith Watts queried if there was an overlap between the proposals for 5.2 and 5.3 and Michelle Sancho felt that this was unlikely because 5.2 was solely focused on ASD.

Jon Hewitt proposed that the Schools' Forum approve the proposal and this was seconded by Keith Harvey. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Schools Forum approved the allocation of £10k for this project.

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5.4 Setting up on line forum for SENCOs – Proposal: More work would need to be done to identify costings but this could be a relatively low cost initiative. The remaining £1,600 could be set aside for this purpose.

Ian Pearson reported that this was a relatively straightforward project and would involve increasing interaction between SENCOs and the sharing of good practise. Keith Watts felt that it was a good initiative however, stressed that SENCOs needed to be allocated time within the working day to be involved.

Keith Harvey was concerned that £1,600 was not enough funding to sustain the project as it could involve a phased set up and management. David Ramsden felt that success would depend on the quality of the software. Ian Pearson stated that Officers could proceed based on the initial amount and then return to the Schools' Forum if it was thought that further funding would be required.

Patrick Mitchell stated that it was important that somebody took ownership of the management of the system. Catie Colston was concerned that the danger would be that only SENCOs who were already engaged would use the system. Ian Pearson stated that there was further support available to SENCOs and the system would be put in place to enhance the support already available.

Chris Davis proposed that the Schools' Forum approve the proposal and this was seconded by David Ramsden. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that:

- An update on costings should be provided to the Schools' Forum in due course.
- That the amount of £1,600 be allocated.

5.5 Funding for resourced schools experiencing financial pressures

Ian Pearson stated that the HFG agreed to recommend that this could not be resolved with one off funding and that a review on funding for resourced schools was required. Focus needed to be given as to whether the funding formula was fit for purpose and if it required adjusting.

RESOLVED that a report would be brought back to the Schools' Forum on this in due course.

11 School Budgets 2018/19 and Schools in Financial Difficulty (Wendy Howells)

Wendy Howells introduced the report (Agenda Item 12), which set out the overall position in relation to school balances. The report also highlighted some key observations and detailed the strategy that the Council intended to follow for schools in financial difficulty.

Table 1 on page 103 highlighted how many schools had a surplus or deficit budget. The number of schools forecasting a surplus had risen slightly for 2018/19 and the number of schools forecasting a deficit budget had reduced by one school.

Table 2 showed the overall balances for each sector compared to the original budget/forecast. In 2017/18 the actual revenue balances were over £2m higher than the original budget (with the main school budget outturn nearly £1.8m higher than the original budget). The main school budgets set for 2018/19 were forecasting a net surplus of £642k, which was £3.5m higher than the forecast set in 2017/18. These swings were no different to previous years and it was possible that schools were setting a "worst case scenario" budget for years two and three of their forecasts. Careful decisions and assistance from the Schools' Accountancy Team would hopefully help to manage the budget deficits down.

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Catie Colston asked in essence what the figures were showing and Wendy Howells confirmed that overall schools were being pessimistic with their forecasting for years two and three. Catie Colston queried if schools were taking this approach because they were struggling to predict that far ahead and Wendy Howells confirmed that this could be the case. David Ramsden noted that there were big gaps between forecasted figures and actual balances. Schools were trying to give realistic figures however, only had their year one budgets agreed. There was huge financial pressure on schools and therefore they needed to act cautiously. Wendy Howells highlighted that if schools were struggling then they needed to contact the Schools' Finance Team for support. Patrick Mitchell stated that pulling budgets back under control through employing lower cost members of staff was a method of the past.

Table 3 showed that seven schools were continuing a deficit from the position in 2017/18 and a further two schools closed in deficit and set a deficit budget for 2018/19. The 2018/19 balance as forecast in 2017/18 was £608,890 however, it was now known that the deficit would amount to £923k. Even though the overall position of schools had improved the situation for schools in deficit had not improved. Table 4 gave the overall three year forecast for the main school budget for each sector. It was expected that most schools would manage to improve their deficit.

Wendy Howells moved onto page 106 of the agenda, which gave details on the West Berkshire Strategy for Schools in Financial Difficulty. The Strategy had not changed since 2017/18 and was very dependent on staffing levels. The schools that required intervention immediately included John Rankin, The Willows, The Willink and Westwood Farm as all had significant deficits.

David Ramsden asked how the Strategy was applied within individual schools. Ian Pearson stated that meetings were set up involving a 'task force', which would review a school's budget and staffing structure, and determine options to repay the deficit and make recommendations. A plan would be put in place and if the school deviated from this plan then further conversations would be required. David Ramsden commented that it was extremely difficult to move out of deficit once a school had found itself in this position.

Keith Harvey asked at what point a 'notice of concern' was raised. Wendy Howells confirmed that this was applied if a school was in deficit and was not working with the Schools Finance Team.

David Ramsden noted that there were a number of federated schools in deficit. Ian Pearson stated that a project was underway looking into how federated schools operated. These schools had access to two lump sums. Leadership costs at the beginning of the process were a consistent issue. Keith Watts was curious about this point because it had been assumed initially that the restructure of leadership would reduce costs. Ian Pearson explained that expanded structures had often resulted in increased leadership costs.

Chris Davis noted that all but one school had now submitted their budgets and asked if the Schools' Forum should be concerned about this particular school. Wendy Howells confirmed that all schools had now submitted their budgets.

Catie Colston asked if Governors were included in meetings with schools facing financial difficulty and Wendy Howells confirmed that they were always invited to be involved.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

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12 DSG Monitoring Month 3 (Ian Pearson)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 13), which set out the current financial position of the services funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

Ian Pearson added that the report was for monitoring purposes and at this stage was just for information. There would be a better indication of the position later in the year at months six and nine.

RESOLVED that the Schools Forum noted the report.

13 Forward Plan

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the Forward Plan.

14 Any Other Business

The Chairman stated that he would need to give his apologies for the next meeting of the Schools' Forum in October and therefore Vice-Chairman Graham Spellman would chair the meeting.

15 Date of the next meeting

The next meeting would take place on Monday 15th October 2018, 5pm at Shaw House.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 6.21 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature