

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 15 JULY 2019

Present: Reverend Mark Bennet, Dominic Boeck, Jonathon Chishick, Hilary Latimer, Ian Nichol, Erik Pattenden, Felix Rayner (as substitute for Keith Harvey) and Bruce Steiner (Chairman)

Also Present: Melanie Ellis (Chief Accountant) and Ian Pearson (Head of Education Service), Jessica Bailiss (Policy Officer (Executive Support)) and Michelle Sancho (Principal EP & Service Manager)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Catie Colston, Jacquie Davies, Antony Gallagher, Keith Harvey, Alan Henderson, Jon Hewitt, Lucy Hillyard, Brian Jenkins, Sheila Loy, Janet Patterson, Chris Prosser, David Ramsden, Graham Spellman, Jayne Steele, Suzanne Taylor and Charlotte Wilson

PART I

13 Election of Chairman

Due to the meeting not being quorate, the Schools' Forum were unable to elect a Chairman for the 2019/20 municipal year.

Bruce Steiner proposed that he would be Chairman for the meeting on 15th July 2019 and this was seconded by Reverend Mark Bennet. At the vote the motion was carried.

Ian Pearson used the opportunity to also welcome Felix Rayner to the meeting, who was the nominated substitute for Keith Harvey.

RESOLVED that Bruce Steiner would be the Chairman for the meeting on 15th July 2019 and the election of Chairman for the 2019/20 municipal year would be considered at the next meeting of the Schools' Forum in October.

14 Minutes of previous meeting dated 17 June 2019

Due to the meeting not being quorate the minutes of the meeting held on the 17th June 2019 could not be approved.

RESOLVED that the minutes from the meeting on 17th June 2019 would be deferred to the next meeting of the Schools' Forum in October 2019.

15 Actions arising from previous meetings

The Schools' Forum noted the actions from the last meeting which were either in hand or had been completed.

Jessica Bailiss referred to action Jan19-Ac1 and reported that an election had run for the position of secondary Governor representative however, there had not been any nominations. An election would be run again in the new academic year.

RESOLVED that an election for the position of secondary Governor representative on the Schools' Forum would be run again in the new 2019/20 academic year.

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16 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

17 **Membership**

There were no updates regarding membership.

18 **Schools' Forum Membership and Constitution from September 2019 (Jessica Bailiss)**

RESOLVED that this item was deferred to the next Schools' Forum meeting in October 2019, due to the meeting not being quorate.

19 **Schools in Financial Difficulty - Bids for Funding (Melanie Ellis)**

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 8), which summarised bids that had been received from schools in deficit to access funding from the Primary Schools in Financial Difficulty de-delegated fund.

Bids had been received from three Primary Schools which were St Finian's, St Joseph's and Kintbury. The bids had been considered by the Heads' Funding Group (HFG) which had recommended that all three bids should be approved by the Schools' Forum.

Ian Pearson added that each of the bids had met the relevant criteria for the Primary Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund and had been interrogated regarding their bid by the HFG. The recommendation from the primary element of the HFG to approve the bids had been unanimous.

The Chairman invited Primary School members of the Schools' Forum to vote on whether to approve each of the bids.

Hilary Latimer proposed that the Schools' Forum approve the bid submitted by St Finian's for £35,500. This was seconded by Ian Nichol and at the vote the motion was carried.

Hilary Latimer proposed that the Schools' Forum approve the bid submitted by St Joseph's for £10,299. This was seconded by Ian Nichol and at the vote the motion was carried.

Hilary Latimer proposed that the Schools' Forum approve the bid submitted by Kintbury for £31,300. This was seconded by Ian Nichol and at the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum approved each of the bids as set out in section 2.1 of the report.

20 **Schools: Deficit Recovery (Melanie Ellis)**

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 9) that was previously presented on 17th June 2019. It reported on the outturn position of the nine schools that set a deficit budget in 2018/19, provided an update on the work that had been carried out to support these schools and now at request of the members of the Schools Forum included a breakdown of the total income variance.

Melanie Ellis referred to the table on page 28 of the report and highlighted that a large amount of income was generated through reimbursements.

Councillor Erik Pattenden asked how parental contributions were raised. Ian Pearson confirmed that this was raised through a variety of forms. In some cases parents agreed to make a contribution to the schools and another way of raising this money was through school events. Hilary Latimer stated that at her school a pledge giving scheme had been set up for parents. A lot of money was also raised by the Schools' Parent Teacher

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Association (PTA). Felix Rayner added that funding raised by the PFTA was normally used to fund luxuries that could not otherwise be afforded.

Jonathon Chishick referred to primary schools in deficit and asked officers what the situation looked like for the following year. When submitting budgets many schools were projecting deficits and steps were then required to mitigate the issue. Jonathon Chishick asked if there was any knowledge regarding employee pension contributions and to what extent these would be funded. Ian Pearson stated that the model Jonathon Chishick had referred to was one most schools used and that many schools were projecting year on year deficits. Schools then need to think about how this deficit could be reduced.

Jonathon Chishick was concerned that when submitting three year budgets, deficits seemed to worsen year on year. Ian Pearson acknowledged that costs were imposed on schools overtime due to changes enforced by Central Government. The Government normally tried to subsidise such changes for a time limited period. Sometimes the funding provided by Government did not cover all of the cost to schools due to the funding formula used. Melanie Ellis stated that when schools submitted budgets they allowed for increases in cost but not increases in funding.

Jonathon Chishick queried the situation going forward. Melanie Ellis reported that positively the number of schools in deficit had been reduced down to three. Melanie Ellis stated that she could provide some information on the number of schools predicting a deficit in year two and add this in to the next schools deficit report that was brought to the Schools' Forum.

Reverend Mark Bennet queried the extent of parental contributions and was concerned that some parents might not be able to afford to commit to this. It was important to recognise how this might privilege some schools.

Ian Pearson reported that there was a deprivation element to the funding formula. It was however appreciated that it was more complicated than this and some schools were feeling squeezed financially.

The Chairman commented that it was not helpful that Central Government had postponed decisions concerning funding six times, which had led to further frustration. There was no confirmation yet as to whether pension contributions would continue to be subsidised. It was important that Schools and Local Authorities continued to put pressure on Central Government.

RESOLVED that Melanie Ellis would add a section to the Schools Deficit report on the number of schools predicting a deficit in year two, in time for the next Schools' Forum meeting in October 2019.

21 **Vulnerable Children's Fund - Annual Report for 2018/19 (Michelle Sancho)**

Michelle Sancho introduced the report (Agenda Item 10), which sought a review of the Vulnerable Children's Fund (VCF) for 2018/19.

The report compared how funding was used two years previously. The VCF had been reduced from £60k to £50k from the previous year in order to contribute savings in the High Needs Block. The money was mainly used by primary schools for Teaching Assistant support in unexpected circumstances, for example if a new child joined a school and the necessary support required for the child was not in place.

Michelle Sancho reported that the number of schools accessing the fund had remained fairly constant. Reverend Mark Bennet noted that although the number of schools accessing the fund had remained constant the number of requests for funding had reduced. Michelle Sancho explained that this was because the level of funding had

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reduced therefore depleted sooner. Schools were also aware that the funding was only short term.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

22 Trade Union Facilities Time - Annual Report for 2018/19 (Gary Upton)

Gary Upton introduced his report (Agenda Item 11) that informed the Schools' Forum of the activities undertaken by teacher trade unions.

Gary Upton explained that a pot of money was put aside by schools that used the facility. The money enabled Gary Upton and other Union members to be released to conduct trade union duties with schools.

Sometimes Headteachers used the services more than others and useful relationships had been formed with Headteachers, which had resulted in reduced need for face to face meetings. Efficient phone call and email conversations resulted in a reduction in one to one case work.

A lot of good work had taken place with the Local Authority regarding policy and guidance. Gary Upton used the opportunity to thank Headteachers who had been receptive to policy changes.

Ian Pearson added that Facilities Time was a de-delegated service that was available to all maintained primary and secondary schools. Academies were also able to buy in to the service. Gary Upton stated that efforts were made to encourage academy schools to buy into the service. He commented that it was particularly useful for the large scale academy trusts to use the service as they gained access to local trade union representatives.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

23 School Meals Contract

Ian Pearson introduced the item that aimed to update members of the Schools' Forum on the situation with the Schools' Meal Contract.

An oversight had been made and certain contracts had not been brought to the Schools' Forum. The necessary conversations had taken place to ensure this issue would be resolved going forward.

Ian Pearson referred to the paperwork that had been circulated with the agenda, which included a letter from Andy Sharp, Executive Director - People and a presentation that had been provided to Headteachers over two meetings proposing a way forward with the schools meal contract situation.

The process was being led on by the Commissioning Team at West Berkshire Council. The contract had been due to end and a retendering process was conducted. Unfortunately, part of the way through, this process had gone wrong and subsequently abandoned due to the exploitation of legal challenge by other contractors.

Communications had been sent to schools to extend the current contract with an option to depart from the contract. Some schools had chosen to depart from the contract however, most had remained or were unsure. The issue was that Free School Meals had increased in cost by 40 pence per meal per day and schools had felt the increase was too steep to bear.

Following the push back from schools a new price increase of 5 pence per child was negotiated however, schools' were still not satisfied with the increase as it would cost individual schools thousands of pounds. At this stage the Council offered to subsidise the cost from September 2019 for a year. 41 schools had remained in the contract and seven had taken the decision to leave.

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Many schools had expressed an interest in being involved in the re-tendering process. Ian Pearson stated that an acceptable way forward had been reached however, it was important to ensure the situation did not re-occur. The necessary contracts would be brought to the Schools' Forum for discussion in future.

Reverend Mark Bennet thanked Ian Pearson for his explanation. He commented that for a fortnight many schools had felt angry and challenged about the situation. The timescale for Governors to make a decision had been particularly tight. Reverend Mark Bennet however, expressed that the position reached was acceptable.

Reverend Mark Bennet felt that confidence in the contract might have diminished and effort to rebuild this confidence was required. There was the potential for costs to rise if this was not overcome. Ian Pearson agreed with this point. A survey had gone out to schools to collect information on the matter and the Executive Director – People, had offered face to face meetings with schools to obtain views.

Ian Nichol echoed the comments made by Reverend Mark Bennet and was conscious of the point that costs for schools could rise if confidence was not regained. He welcomed Governor and Headteacher involvement going forward.

Ian Nichol referred to the cleaning contract and noted that it would come to an end in July 2019. There had been a lack of clarity over re-provision and he asked for an update on the situation. Ian Pearson reported that the key point was there had been the ability to extend the school meals contract however, this was not the case with the cleaning contract. The previous provider had left and therefore an interim provider had been put in place. The Commissioning Team had advised that the interim provider would remain in place until the contract process went through the necessary cycle to find a successful bidder. Ian Pearson added that there was a smaller number of schools involved in the cleaning contract and there would also be the option to opt out.

Ian Nichol expressed that he was still unsure about the contractual process and so were schools. He welcomed further information from Commissioning colleagues. Ian Pearson confirmed that Commissioning colleagues were currently working with the current provider on the cost. Contact would be made with schools once more details were available.

Councillor Erik Patterson noted that other contracts besides the schools meals contract were not on the forward plan for the Schools' Forum. Ian Pearson confirmed that this would be updated in time for the next meeting.

Councillor Pattenden asked if changes to the way commissioning was conducted at the Local Authority in that there was a central team, had complicated matters. Ian Pearson stated that a restructure had placed commissioning expertise in one team to help add robustness. A further restructure was not required however, the approach to commissioning required further focus, particularly the interface between the people doing the work and schools. These issues would be picked up as part of the review being conducted by the Executive Director – People.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be updated with the relevant contracts that needed to be considered by the Schools' Forum in October 2019.

24 **Forward Plan**

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the Forward Plan.

25 **Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting would take place on 14th October 2019, 3- 5pm at Shaw House.

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(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 5.51 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature