

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2020

Present: Reverend Mark Bennet (Church of England Diocese), Councillor Dominic Boeck (Executive Portfolio: Children, Young People and Education), Jonathon Chishick (Maintained Primary School Governor), Catie Colston (Maintained Primary School Governor), Jacquie Davies (Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher), Antony Gallagher (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Keith Harvey (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Jon Hewitt (Maintained Special School Headteacher), Lee Hunt (Post 16 Representative Substitute), Brian Jenkins (Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent Provider Representative), Hilary Latimer (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Sheila Loy (Academy School Governor), Councillor Ross Mackinnon (Executive Portfolio Holder: Finance and Economic Development), Maria Morgan (Maintained Nursery School Headteacher), Julia Mortimore (Academy School Headteacher), Ian Nichol (Maintained Primary School Governor), Gemma Piper (Academy School Headteacher), Chris Prosser (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), David Ramsden (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), Graham Spellman (Roman Catholic Diocese) and Charlotte Wilson (Academy School Headteacher)

Also Present: Alice Pye (Senior Health and Safety Advisor), Avril Allenby (Early Years' Service Manager), Jessica Bailiss (Policy Officer), Melanie Ellis (Chief Accountant), Ian Pearson (Head of Education Services), Lisa Potts (Finance Manager), Jane Seymour (Service Manager, SEN & Disabled Children's Team), Moira Fraser (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager) and Michelle Sancho (Principal EP & Service Manager)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Janet Patterson and Jayne Steele

PART I

25 Election of Chairman

Ian Pearson opened the meeting. Members of the Schools' Forum had been notified that Bruce Steiner, Chairman of the Schools' Forum, had stood down from his role as a Governor and as Chairman of the Forum. Ian Pearson reported that a letter had been sent to Bruce Steiner thanking him for his service on behalf of the Forum.

Ian Pearson invited the Schools' Forum to nominate and vote on the position of Chairman for the coming year.

RESOLVED that Graham Spellman would be Chairman of the Schools' Forum for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.

Graham Spellman invited the Schools' Forum to nominate and vote on the position of Vice-Chairman for the coming year.

RESOLVED that Catie Colston would be Vice-Chairman of the Schools' Forum for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.

26 Minutes of previous meeting dated 13th July 2020

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13th July were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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27 **Actions arising from previous meetings**

The Chairman drew the Schools' Forum's attention to the actions for the last meeting on 13th July 2020. All actions were completed or were in hand.

28 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

29 **Membership**

Jessica Bailiss provided the following Membership updates:

- Chris Prosser's current term of office was due to end and the end of October 2020. Chris had consulted with maintained secondary heads and had confirmed that he would continue for a further four year term.
- An election was undertaken for the maintained secondary governor vacancy from September into October 2020 however, no nominations were received.
- An election would be arranged to fill the Academy Governor vacancy.
- No other forum members were approaching the end of their term of office at that time.

30 **Schools Funding Formula Proposal 2021/22 (Melanie Ellis)**

Melanie Ellis stated that the main report was brief and the full detail could be found in the consultation document under Appendix A, which would go out to all schools for consultation. The Government was still planning to move to a hard funding formula and when this happened the Government would set the school funding rates rather than the Local Authority.

There were two technical changes for 2021/22. The formula funding would now include the Teachers Pay Grant and Pension Employer Contribution Grant, so these would not be received separately.

Melanie Ellis reported that there had been a 4% increase in funding overall and the main change involved sparsity funding. Sparsity funding had increased from £26k to £45k for primary schools. Local Authorities would continue to be able to transfer up to 0.5% of their schools block to other blocks of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), with approval from the Schools' Forum.

The option to lower the amount of sparsity funding received by eligible schools and allocate the remaining funding across all primary schools had been included as a question within the consultation document. In December 2020, decisions would be required from the Schools' Forum regarding how any shortfalls or surpluses should be dealt with.

The consultation also included a question regarding the de-delegation of particular services. All the consultation proposals could be viewed on page 23 of Appendix A.

Jonathan Chishick stated that he had raised a question earlier in December 2019 regarding certain schools having to deal with a disproportionate number of children with Special Education Needs that did not have an Education, Health and Care Plan. He had asked whether this issue could be factored into the funding formula going forward. Ian Pearson reported that this matter had been discussed at the last Heads Funding Group (HFG) and a report had been provided by Jane Seymour. It had been given serious consideration however, decided by the group that it would place further pressure on the High Needs Block (HNB). Jonathan Chishick was satisfied that the issue had been discussed and asked for a copy of the report that had gone to the HFG.

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Gemma Piper referred to the transfer of funds to the HNB and queried if there was any additional information yet regarding how this money would be used. Ian Pearson reported that if a transfer was agreed it could be used to either cover some of the deficit or alternately it could be used for invest to save projects. If a transfer was agreed, the amount that could be transferred would also need to be decided. Gemma Piper queried if the consultation was asking if schools were happy to consider a transfer or if they were happy to commit to a transfer amount of 0.5%. Ian Pearson confirmed that at this stage schools were being asked more broadly if they supported the notion of a transfer. Further detail and options would then be brought to the next HFG in November 2020.

David Ramsden explained that in 2019 it had been felt that a transfer of 0.5% had been too much. He would support a continuation of a 0.25% transfer as had been agreed in 2019. It was felt that different options should be included as part of the consultation. Melanie Ellis confirmed that this could be included.

The Chairman invited the relevant members of the Forum to consider the proposal under section 2.1 of the report. This was proposed by David Ramsden, seconded by Jonathan Chishick and at the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that:

- Different A copy of the report that went to the Heads' Funding Group regarding schools under pressure due to high numbers of children with SEN, be sent to Jonathan Chishick.
- Funding transfer options from the schools block, to be included within the consultation with schools.
- All school members of the Schools' Forum including the PVI representative agreed the recommendation under section 2.1 of the report, that the consultation be undertaken with all schools before setting the school funding formula for 2021/22.

31 Additional Funding Criteria 2021/22 (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 8), which set out the proposed budgets for additional funds for 2021/22 and to agree the criteria for accessing these funds to go out to consultation with all schools.

Melanie Ellis referred to the recommendations within the report and suggested that the Schools' Forum consider the funds under section 3 a, b and d of the report and that the Schools' in Financial Difficulty Funding (section 3d) be considered as part of Item 10 (Delegations report).

Melanie Ellis reported that the information included within the report linked to the previous report on the Schools' Funding Formula and that agreement was being sought for the information to be included as part of the consultation with schools. The proposals were included in detail under section four of the report. Melanie Ellis reported that it was not being proposed that the Falling Rolls Fund should be reinstated.

Jonathan Chishick noted that funding for schools with disproportionate numbers of high needs pupils had been underspent in 2018/19 and 2019/20 and queried why this money had not been spent. He was surprised that there was not a need to increase this fund in line with inflation. Melanie Ellis reported that she would look into this and carry out an analysis and report back.

Reverend Mark Bennet queried why the Growth Fund was be allowed to increase year on year. Melanie Ellis reported that Growth Funding was allocated to local authorities by the Department for Education (DfE). Reverend Bennet queried if there was any intention to use the funding. Melanie Ellis reported that any under or overspends of the Growth Fund formed part of Dedicated School Grant (DSG) balances. Bids had not yet been

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requested to Growth Fund for 2020/21 however, more information would be available on this by the end of the year.

Catie Colston referred to section 4.1(a) and noted that the Growth Fund was based on the growth in pupil numbers, which was taken from school census information. Catie Colston queried whether Covid had the potential to impact on this. Ian Pearson reported that the Department for Education (DfE) had produced guidance on this and there had been an allowance based on Covid absences to ensure schools were not negatively impacted on. The same principle was applied to free school meals.

Ian Pearson commented on the high costs associated with opening new schools and added that the Growth Fund had been allowed to strategically grow in anticipation of these costs. This was explained in more detail under section 4.1(a) of the report.

The Chairman invited the relevant Members of the Forum to consider the recommendation under section two of the report.

Catie Colton proposed that the Schools' Forum agree recommendation 2.1 and this was seconded by Antony Gallagher. At the vote the motion was carried.

Jonathan Chishick proposed that the Schools' Forum agree recommendation 2.2 and this was seconded by Jon Hewitt. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that:

- Melanie Ellis would look into underspends in funding for schools with disproportionate numbers of high needs pupils and report back at the next meeting.
- The Schools Forum agreed recommendation 2.1 that the proposed budgets for additional funds (the Growth Fund (a) and Funding for schools with disproportionate numbers of high needs pupils (c)) for 2021/22 as set out in section 2.1 of the report (The Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund (b) would be considered under agent item 10).
- The Schools' Forum agreed recommendation 2.2 that the criteria for additional funds go out to consultation with all schools.

32 Scheme for Financing Schools 2020/21 (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report which sought to approve the proposed consultation on the updated Scheme for Financing Schools.

Melanie Ellis reported that it was an annual report that required approval from the Schools' Forum on the proposed consultation. Appendix A to the report set out the changes that had been made to the Scheme for Financing Schools. It was proposed that the updated document should go out to consultation for three weeks from 21st October until 11th November 2020 and that the updated Scheme was in place from 1st April 2021.

Catie Colston referred to page 48 of the agenda pack, which highlighted some of the changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools. Catie Colston drew attention to the directed revision under paragraph 2.3.1; Submission of financial forecasts, which stated that 'From the 2021 to 2022 funding year each school must submit a 3-year budget forecast' Catie Colston queried if schools would have enough information to do this. Melanie Ellis reported that the section referred to was a directed revision and therefore had to be adopted. Schools would however, be supported with this.

Catie Colston noted the section on redundancies was being removed however, queried why there was nothing to replace it. Melanie Ellis believed that the missing information was an error and not a material change.

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The Chairman invited the relevant members of the Schools' Forum to consider the recommendation under section 2.1 of the report. Chris Prosser proposed that the recommendation be agreed and this was seconded by David Ramsden. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that all maintained school members of the Schools' Forum agreed that the updated Scheme for Financing Schools go out to consultation in line with the recommendation under section 2.1.

33 De-delegations 2021/22 (Lisa Potts)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 10) which set out the details, cost and charges to schools of the services on which maintained school representatives were required to vote (on an annual basis) whether or not they should be de-delegated. Ian Pearson reported that the proposals for de-delegations aligned to that of previous years and included the same areas.

Ian Pearson reported that at this stage a decision was required on whether the information should be included within the consultation with schools. Decisions would then be required from maintained primary and secondary schools at the next Schools' Forum meeting in December 2020, on whether the services should be de-delegated. Other provision such as iCollege, nursery schools and special schools would have the opportunity to buy in to services. Most services were also available to academy schools. The report set out detail on each of the services including any changes in cost.

(Richard Hawthorne left the meeting at 6pm)

Information on the Health and Safety Services was set out in more detail on page 121 and Alice Pye, Senior Health and Safety Advisor at West Berkshire Council, was in attendance to answer any questions.

Jonathan Chishick asked for clarification on whether there would be a basic and enhanced level of health and safety service available in 2021/22 and queried what the cost of the basic level would be. Ian Pearson explained that the consultation would be asking schools for views on whether they wished to delegate the health and safety service and secondly what level they wished to delegate it at. Once the responses from schools had been analysed this information would be brought back to the Schools' Forum for decision.

In response to Jonathan Chishick's question Alice Pye confirmed that there would be two levels of health and safety service available. The system currently in place was a Level 1 and Level 2 service and this would be included in the proposal going out for consultation with schools. The second proposal was to bring the service to an equal level, like what had been provided throughout the Covid pandemic. Alice Pye confirmed that the cost for the Level 1 service in 2021/22 was £4.47 and if a joint service was opted for then the cost would be the same as the Level 1 service with a top up fee depending on the size of a school.

David Ramsden commented that there had been much discussion about the health and safety service over the years and in the past schools had been provided with the choice to buy in to the level of service they wanted. David Ramsden queried what had changed to stop the same approach being taken. Alice Pye reported that the service had run at a loss over several years and was sustained by the level of Level 2 buy back. When the level of buy back dropped, the level of service dropped considerably. During Covid the decision had been taken to provide all schools with the Level 2 service as schools needed this additional support in the changing situation. If in April 2021, if the level of buy back dropped, the level of service provided would also have to reduce. Providing an

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equal level to all schools would help to sustain the service so that it continue to provide the level of service that schools had required during the Covid pandemic.

David Ramsden queried if it was therefore a question of how many schools currently buying into Level 1 would be willing to buy into Level 2. Alice Pye stated that this was not necessarily the case as the level of schools buying into Level 2 changed each year due to individual budget pressures. Alice Pye was conscious of the budgetary pressures on all schools going forward and therefore the increased likeliness that many would cut spending going forward. There was still a corporate responsibility to provide the service to schools but a balance needed to be sought regarding what level schools required. Covid had highlighted that all schools required additional support through exceptional circumstances.

David Ramsden queried how the heightened level of service to all schools had been funded. Alice Pye confirmed that this had been supported through schools that had bought back the Level 2 service.

Ian Pearson reminded members of the Forum that the proposals would be included in the consultation with schools. Any issues that occurred would be discussed at the Heads Funding Group in November before the report returned to the Schools' Forum in December 2020.

The Chairman invited the relevant members of the Forum to consider the recommendations set out in the report and also invited primary school members to consider whether they agreed that the Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund should be topped up to £200k.

Jon Hewitt proposed that the recommendation under section 2.1 of the report be agreed and this was seconded by Antony Gallagher. At the vote the motion was carried.

Keith Harvey proposed that the recommendation to agree that the Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund should be topped up to £200k, be approved. This was seconded by Antony Gallagher. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that:

- Maintained school members of the Schools' Forum agreed that the proposals set out in Table 7 of the report be included in the consultation with schools.
- Maintained primary school members of the Schools' Forum agreed that the Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund should be topped up to £200k.

34 A long term view of HNB Budget and impact of the SEN Strategy (Jane Seymour)

Jane Seymour introduced the report (Agenda Item 11) which provided an indication of the savings opportunities arising from the SEND Strategy 2018/23 and sought approval in principle for continued resourcing of the SEND Strategy Officer post, the Therapeutic Thinking Officer post, the ASD Team posts and the increased Vulnerable Children's Grant, as there were deemed essential to achieve long term savings in the High Needs Block (HNB).

Jane Seymour reported that she had been requested to provide a report that attempted to project savings going forward as a result of implementation of the SEND Strategy. The report set out each of the objectives within the SEND Strategy and assessed potential cost savings associated with each one. The report included background to the SEND Strategy, which had been in place for two years. The aim of the Strategy was to provide the best possible services with children with SEND as locally as possible and to improve life outcomes. Services also needed to be provided in a cost effective way and this was a theme throughout the Strategy.

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The report looked at each of the objectives within the Strategy in detail and attempted to make assumptions about savings for each one. The detail on this was set out from page 137 of the report.

Page 147 of the report included a table, which detailed the total potential savings for the High Needs Block (HNB) if all the measures set out section four of the report were taken over the seven year period of the SEND Strategy. The total estimated reduction in spend, as a result of implementing the Strategy over the seven years was £1.7 million. Jane Seymour explained that this would only be a net reduction if demand across other areas of the HNB was retained and everything remained the same. It however, had to be considered that there could be continued growth in pressure against other areas of the budget.

Jane Seymour reported it would be recommended as part of the budget setting process for the HNB that invest to save initiatives, which had been originally been agreed for one year, should be allowed to continue. These were critical to reducing spend. A more detailed report on the HBN budget including proposals, would be brought to the next meeting of the Schools' Forum in December 2020.

Jane Seymour drew attention to the recommendation under section 2.2 of the report, which was seeking agreement to make the SEND Strategy Officer a permanent post. The position was currently recruited to on a three year basis. The current post holder was leaving for a permanent role and Jane Seymour stressed that it was particularly difficult to recruit and retain staff for short term posts. The role was critical to driving the Strategy forward and achieving savings.

Hilary Latimer referred to Jane Seymour's recommendation to make the SEND Strategy Officer a permanent position and queried if there would be any employment law implications involved in the matter. Jane Seymour confirmed that the current member of staff had been seconded from a permanent role within the authority and although was leaving because the post was short term, they did have a permanent substantive role to return to.

Gemma Piper noted that the item was titled 'a long term view of the High Needs Block (HNB) and impact of the SEN Strategy' and noted that the SEND Strategy was just an element of the HNB. She queried how the savings achieved by the SEND Strategy would sit within the wider plan for the HNB. Ian Pearson commented that the budget monitoring report later on the agenda highlighted that the deficit was in excess of £1.7m potential saving referred to by Jane Seymour, which could possibly be achieved through implementation of the strategy. Ian Pearson reported that West Berkshire was in a similar situation to many other local authority areas regarding the HNB. This had been recognised by the Department for Education (DfE) and the struggles faced to bring budgets back into balance. As a result the DfE wanted to hold discussions with local authorities during 2020 about possible ways forward. Ian Pearson commented that one of the biggest issues faced was that the amount of money coming through the system was not enough and as a result of this being recognised by the DfE there had been an increase in SEN funding.

Ian Pearson explained that alongside invest to save proposals, historically a menu of saving options had been also formed. Cuts had been made significantly in the past. Recently focus had moved away from cutting services because it has been argued that some of the cuts implemented had been counterproductive. This signified the complexity of the area of work. In recent years the deficit had been driven by increased numbers of children requiring specialist provision, including an increase in children requiring Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Ian Pearson stated that some savings options would need to be brought to the next round of meetings in November/December. Ian Pearson added that there was the other issue of charging schools for particular

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services such as for Learning and Literacy support. This had been done in the past however, had resulted in decreased take-up of placements. All issues would need to be looked at collectively and possible ways to solve them.

Charlotte Wilson raised a question regarding HLTAs for ASD and the spend to save initiative for this area. She asked if recruitment was taking place for the teacher post as well or had the two ASD TAs replaced this post. Jane Seymour confirmed that the teacher role would be recruited too as well as the two ASD TA positions.

Charlotte Wilson raised a further query regarding resource unit funding. It was noted that this area had not been mentioned and she hoped that this would be included when the HNB was considered more generally. Ian Pearson confirmed that this would be included in discussions at the next round of meetings.

Finally Charlotte Wilson queried Therapeutic Thinking. She noted that this was detailed heavily in the SEND Strategy however, it had been highlighted at the secondary heads meeting that not all schools had bought into it and therefore this was a concern. In response to Charlotte Wilson's point, Michelle Sancho reported that even if schools had not bought into the Therapeutic Thinking approach or undertaken training they would be able to access funding available and therefore all schools were still able to benefit. In representing secondary heads, Charlotte Wilson stated that they would not be in support of a criteria that had to be met in order to access funding.

David Ramsden concurred with the points raised by Charlotte Wilson. The issue was that it was difficult to know how much to cut and by when and therefore it was difficult to put a deficit recovery plan in place. David Ramsden asked if there was any clarification from the DfE regarding how long discussions with local authority areas would take, otherwise a difficult situation was being faced as it was unknown how deep cuts needed to be made. Ian Pearson stated that it was currently unclear in terms of what would be expected however, it was hoped that there would be some answers by December however, it was possible that there would not be clarity in time for the next Heads Funding Group and Schools' Forum.

Ian Pearson further commented that in the past the approach taken had included giving consideration to areas that could deliver savings through investment and also looking at areas where potential savings could be made. A judgment would then need to be made on which of these approaches should be taken.

Gemma Piper queried if the proposals outlined in the report around savings would balance the budget in year for the SEND element of the HNB. Ian Pearson drew attention to the budget monitoring report where it could be seen the budget had been set for the current year and figures suggested that there was a £200k overspend against the deficit budget. Ian Pearson did not see that it would be possible to bring the budget back into balance for 2021/22. It would however, be possible to plan to reduce the deficit.

The Chairman invited member of the Forum to consider the recommendation under 2.2 of the report to make the SEND Strategy Officer a permanent position. Jon Hewitt proposed that this be agreed and this was seconded by Chris Prosser. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the recommendation under 2.2 of the report to make the SEND Strategy Officer a permanent position was agreed by the Schools' Forum.

35 Early Years Block Budget - Deficit Recovery Plan (Avril Allenby)

Avril Allenby introduced the report (Agenda Item 12) which sought to update the Schools' Forum on the deficit recovery options considered by the Early Years Funding Group.

Avril Allenby provided some background, which was detailed under section two of the report. Avril Allenby stressed that any plans for recovery would impact upon a very wide

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range of providers. The report provided background information on action taken so far including by the Early Years Funding Group (EYFG), which had explored a range of options, which were included under Appendix A to the report.

Section three of the report provided some information on the Early Years Budget for 2020/21. The current year forecast was showing a reduced deficit of £999,952 and the main reason for this was because of a higher than expected grant adjustment for the hours relating to 2019/20. Avril Allenby reported on the significant impact on the sector from Covid-19 including on vulnerable children, which was detailed under section four of the report.

Avril Allenby drew attention to recommendations from the EYFG included under section five of the report. This group included a large range of providers from across the early year's sector. Section five highlighted that the impact of Covid-19 had resulted in early evidence of financial difficulty for many early years providers with many being close to closure. The ongoing uncertainty was likely to further compound issues being faced. Therefore the recommendation from the EYFG was to apply a tapered reduction in rates with a lower impact on rates in the first two years increasing to meet the deficit over a five year period. The EYFG had proposed that Option 4 Version B be adopted because this option was fairly equal in terms of its impact and safeguarded funding for the most vulnerable children. The EYFG also recommended that the deficit recovery plan was delayed until April 2022 to ensure current providers could deal with the ongoing impact of Covid-19.

Avril Allenby drew attention to section six of the report, which reflected discussions that had taken place at the Heads' Funding Group (HFG). Avril Allenby highlighted that although the HFG was represented on the Schools' Forum there were limited representatives with early years classes attached to their schools.

The HFG had challenged the proposals put forward to delay the deficit recovery until April 2022 and had recommended that this be removed. The HFG had also suggested that further modelling work take place to ensure the full amount of the deficit was recovered by the end of the five year period. Comments from the HFG had been taken on board however Avril Allenby wanted this information to be presented to the next EYFG before returning to the Schools' Forum for agreement.

Avril Allenby concluded that further work was required to develop a suitable model that covered the deficit in full but also ensured that the impact on all types of provider was carefully considered to ensure no part of the sector was disadvantaged.

Maria Morgan reminded members of the Forum that in early years funding was attached to children's age rather than a cohort. Many early years settings were only full in the summer term and this funding often acted as a buffer for other times of the year when settings were not full, to help meet fixed staff costs. Many settings had lost private income normally generated in the summer, due to Covid-19. Also regarding the early years pupil premium funding, Maria Morgan raised the point that it worked differently in early years. Schools only had to apply for this once, whereas early years setting had to apply for this funding on a termly basis.

Ian Pearson commented that there had been a very in depth discussion on the item at the HFG. He referred to section six of the report, which detailed the recommendations of the HFG and these needed to be considered by the Forum in terms of agreeing a way forward.

Brian Jenkins felt that points raised were very valid however, stressed that the ongoing threat of Covid-19 to early years settings further exacerbated the issues already faced by the sector. Covid-19 was having a devastating impact on the early years sector.

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Brian Jenkins felt that the recommendations under section 6.1 of the report were inappropriate and he urged that a different approach should be taken to give the PVI sector a chance of survival. He felt that the EYFG were better positioned to make recommendations regarding the sector than the HFG.

Ian Nichol commended the work that gone into the financial modelling and he supported a tapered approach, given the current economic situation. Ian Nichol noted the needs of vulnerable children that had been reported on and felt that an equalities impact assessment should accompany the final report that would be considered March 2020. He was concerned about the proposal for the HFG and concurred with Bryan Jenkins. Given the huge uncertainties and nature of the sector he felt to decide on a set of savings in March 2020 that needed to be implemented from April 2020 was inappropriate and there should be an opportunity for the sector to adjust to any decisions taken. Ian Nichol stated that he would also like to see a report on how the HFG had engaged with the sector in forming its recommendations.

Reverend Mark Bennet stated that it was hoped that Covid-19 was a short term issue however, it was acknowledged that the impact would be high. Reverend Bennet stated that he had been unaware that the level of support from The Government for the early sector had been so low. Catch-up funding had been mentioned however for vulnerable children it was known that crucial time was in the early years. He felt that there was a political point that need to be raised and suggested that elected Members who advised the Forum could lobby on the issue. It was also an issue that would impact on schools later on as children in early years moved into schools.

David Ramsden, as a member of the HFG explained that the group had undertaken a very detailed and robust discussion on the matter. The group was recommending that there was no delay in a budget deficit recovery for a year and a half. The HFG had suggested that the recovery begin and regular reviews be undertaken and did not feel it would be wise to delay deficit recovery until 2022. The HFG had been of the view that a sensible approach to deficit recovery overtime should be taken, which supported the sector but could also be adjusted accordingly.

Gemma Piper concurred with David Ramsden and had also formed part of the discussion at the HFG. Gemma Piper referred to comments made earlier in the meeting that there was uncertainty around how much needed to be saved by when.

Maria Morgan referred to the comments made by Reverend Bennet regarding Covid-19 and vulnerable children being affected. Early years was the gateway service into special needs The current waiting time for some services was 12 months and therefore some children might not be able to access support services until starting school. This highlighted the vastness of the impact in terms of how schools would be impacted on going forward.

In response comments made by David Ramsden, Brian Jenkins reported that the deficit for early years had reduced as highlighted in the report. This showed that the issue was ongoing and had been tackled. He was not requesting that efforts should stop in terms of achieving the deficit recovery position however, it would be wrong not to delay plans and allow the sector a fighting chance.

Ian Pearson reported that a decision was not required on the report currently. The root of the issue was how the sector was funded. The Government needed to look at funding for the early years sector and the impact on children moving through education. Ian Pearson highlighted that a decision on the deficit recovery plan was not necessarily required at the next meeting of the Forum in December. The Early Years Budget was normally set in March. Given the volatile situation around Covid-19 and funding, Ian Pearson did not feel that they would be in a position to set the budget in December 2020.

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The EYFG needed to consider the recommendation from the HFG and put together a model that started the deficit recovery in April 2021. A counter model could however, be put together by the EYFG that begin in April 2022. Both models could then be presented to the Schools' Forum and a decision taken.

David Ramsden added that it had been made clear at the HFG and within the report that there did not need to be the same level of deficit recovery achieved in each year and it could be tapered. The HFG were however, keen that recovery efforts were not left until 2022.

Councillor Dominic Boeck noted that a political view had been sought. He sympathised with the challenges being faced by the sector and that funding for early years needed to improve. Local MP Laura Farris was keenly interested in education and particularly early years and Councillor Boeck confirmed that he would raise the issue with her. Councillor Boeck concurred with David Ramsden that there was a problem to face and work needed to commence on this as soon as possible.

The Chairman invited the Schools' Forum to consider whether it endorsed the proposals from the HFG.

RESOLVED that:

- Councillor Dominic Boeck to raise the issues discussed regarding the early years sector with Local MP Laura Farris.
- The Schools' Forum endorsed the proposals from the HFG that would be considered by the EYFG.

36 Contracts - Review of Energy Arrangements (Chris Harris/Karen Felgate)

Ian Pearson referred to the report for information (Agenda Item 13), which aimed to inform the Schools' Forum of the intention by the Council to review the current energy arrangements which would affect a number of schools and their energy provision. A report would be brought back to the Schools' Forum at a later stage.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

37 DSG Monitoring 2020/21 Month 6 (Ian Pearson)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 14) that provided the forecast financial position of the services funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), highlighting any under or over spends, and to highlight the cumulative deficit on the DSG.

Ian Pearson reported that the key points were highlighted on page 161 of the report. The Early Years Block (EYB) was forecasting a £795k overspend in Quarter Two. This had reduced from £1.477m, so although there was still a deficit, this was positive.

Regarding the High Needs Block (HNB) there was a deficit deficiency target of £1.2m, which had been added to by an in-year overspend of £180k. The main variances in spending were included under section 9.1.

Melanie Ellis added that the deficits referred to were in-year positions and the accumulative deficit could be seen under 10.2 and the total forecast deficit on the DSG amounted to £3.9m.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

38 Deficit Schools (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 15) which provided details of four schools which had submitted deficit budgets for 2020/21, one school that expected to

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recover its deficit position in 2020/21 and two schools which ended the 2019/20 financial years with unlicensed deficit balances.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

39 Forward Plan

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the Forward Plan.

40 Date of the next meeting

Monday 7th December 2020 at 5pm.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 7.20 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature