

Minutes of a Meeting of the Schools' Forum

Monday 13th July 2015

Shaw House

Present:	Reverend Mark Bennet	Academies	Governor	Kennet School
	Patricia Brims	Primary Schools	Governor	Brimpton Primary School
	Paul Dick	Academies	Headmaster	Kennet School
	Reverend Mary Harwood		Church of England Representative	Oxford Diocese
	Jackie Hegg (substitute)		Further Education Representative	Newbury College
	Peter Hudson	Primary Schools	Governor	Mortimer St John's Infant School
	Stacey Hunter	Pupil Referral Units	Headteacher	The Reintegration Service
	Brian Jenkins		Early Years PVI	Jubilee Day Nursery
	Sheilagh Peacock	Primary Schools	School Business Manager	The Winchcombe School
	Chris Prosser	Secondary Schools	Headteacher	The Downs School
	David Ramsden	Secondary Schools	Headteacher	Little Heath School
	Clive Rothwell	Secondary Schools	Governor	John O'Gaunt School
	Graham Spellman		Roman Catholic Representative	Portsmouth Diocese
	Suzanne Taylor	Nursery Schools	Headteacher	Hungerford Nursery School
	John Tyzack	Primary Schools	Governor	Falkland Primary School
	Keith Watts		Union Representative	

Councillors:

Councillor Dominic Boeck

Executive Portfolio for C&YP

Officers:

Cathy Burnham

Principal Educational Psychologist

Ian Pearson

Head of Education

Claire White

Schools' Finance Manager

Observers:

Jacquie Davies

Pupil Referral Units

Headteacher

Alternative Curriculum Service

Jo Reeves

Policy Officer, West Berkshire

1. APOLOGIES RECEIVED

Richard Blofeld	Primary Schools	Headteacher	Robert Sandilands School
Councillor Mollie Lock		Shadow Portfolio Holder for C&YP	
Fadia Clarke		FE Representative	Newbury College
Jon Hewitt	Special Schools	Headteacher	The Castle School
Kate House	Primary Schools	Headteacher	The Ilsleys Primary School
Catherine Morley	Primary Schools	Headteacher	Theale Primary School
Derek Peale	Academies	Headteacher	Park House School
Chris Prickett	Primary Schools	Headteacher	Streatley Primary School
Bruce Steiner	Academies	Governor	St Bartholomew's School
Charlotte Wilson	Academies	Headteacher	Trinity School

Action

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING DATED 15TH JUNE 2015

The minutes of the meeting on 15th June were approved.

3. ACTIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The 2015/16 budgets will be amended for the carry forwards in time for the first budget monitoring report to Schools' Forum in September.

Ian Pearson had been in contact with Michele Blain, Governance Improvement Advisor, regarding drawing to the attention of all Governors the role of the Schools' Forum.

All other actions are either on today's agenda or are due to be completed at a later date.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

5. MEMBERSHIP

The Chair welcomed Councillor Dominic Boeck to his first meeting of the Forum.

6. SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP & CONSTITUTION

Claire White informed Members that there was a requirement to review its membership and constitution annually. There have been no legislative changes since the last update to the constitution in 2012 which is still compliant, but Claire suggested that the wording in Part A could be updated to reflect that provided in the latest 2015/16 version of the EFAs 'Schools forum powers and responsibilities' document. Jackie Hegg pointed out that the representation of the further education sector should be included. No changes to the membership were proposed because the number of members for the primary, secondary and academies sectors is still broadly proportionate to the current number of pupils.

It was noted that five members are coming to the end of their term and will need to either be re-elected or replaced by their group.

John Tyzack added that as Chair of the Forum he had recently completed a survey from the DfE about the effectiveness of our Schools' Forum, and stressed again the importance for Members to engage with the sector that they are representing.

DECISION: The minor amendment to Part A of the constitution was agreed plus reference to further education representation to be added. It was agreed that there would be no changes to the membership for 2015/16.

ACTIONS:

The West Berkshire School Forum constitution be updated accordingly and published on the website

The five members coming to the end of their term make arrangements for their re-election or replacement, and let Claire White know the outcome.

C White

**P Dick for
Academies
I Pearson
for Primary
S Hunter
for PRU
M Harwood
for C of E
Diocese**

7. HEADS FUNDING GROUP – TERMS OF REFERENCE

Ian Pearson explained that the Heads Funding Group (HFG) is a working group of the Schools' Forum. Its terms of reference have not been reviewed or updated for several years and there was a need to do so now to reflect the work that the group currently do on behalf of the Schools' Forum. The proposed terms of reference in respect of the work that the group is tasked with and how the group operates were agreed, though there was much discussion on the membership of the group. Ian explained that the core membership is taken from the Schools' Forum Head members, but that there would also be an opportunity for Heads not members of the Schools' Forum to attend when they had a particular interest in a topic. Keith Watts queried why there was not a balance in the core membership between primary and secondary, and Claire White explained that the primary School Forum membership included a School Business Manager (SBM). To make the core membership of the HFG proportional the group could either invite the SBM to join or select an additional Head. Several members also queried who the additional Heads would be – would they change every meeting to bring in experts on particular topics, and would they have voting rights. It was agreed that the optional members could join the group debate but would be non voting members

DECISION: The Terms of Reference were agreed subject to the following amendments:

- **The School Forum Primary SBM be added to the core membership**
- **The optional members are to be non voting**

ACTION: The Terms of Reference to be amended accordingly

C White

8. SCHOOL FORMULA 2016/17

Claire White presented the report on the arrangements for setting the primary and secondary school formula for 2016/17. As there has not yet been any announcements made by the DfE and there will be little time to devote to a review, it was proposed that there will be no changes made to the local formula for 2016/17 unless an announcement is made that would be of benefit to West Berkshire schools. There will be a short consultation to be sent to all schools and also School Forum members for two weeks in early September with a final view taken by Schools' Forum at the end of September.

Claire also provided some benchmarking information setting out the West Berkshire formula compared to national averages, showing that we are not an outlier and our rates are close to the average for the main factors. Paul Dick expressed his concerns that our rates for deprivation and prior attainment are

low. Claire explained that because we receive below average funding in our DSG rate and pay out base pupil funding rates and a lump sum close to average, it is inevitable that the rates paid out for other factors will be lower. If we were to receive additional funding it would certainly be a consideration.

The expectation is that the Government will start consulting on a national formula in the Autumn, for implementation from 2017. With our DSG funding rate now falling well below the average following the distribution of the additional £390m in 2015/16, there is a possibility this may mean more funding for West Berkshire schools, though we are unlikely to see any inflationary increases to the funding rate.

DECISION: Once the arrangements for 2015/16 have been received from the DfE, a two week consultation will take place with schools proposing no change, unless there is a change in the arrangements considered by officers to be advantageous to West Berkshire schools.

ACTION: A short consultation document to be produced and go out to schools early September

C White

Paul Dick left the meeting after this item at 5:40pm.

9. BALANCE CONTROL SCHEME

Claire White presented a proposal for changing the schools excess surplus balance claw back scheme. The report listed several reasons why the current scheme is no longer appropriate, and stated that schools should have autonomy to make their own decision on what is a reasonable balance in their own particular circumstances whilst taking their strategic longer term financial plans into account. Although the level of balances overall had not reduced over the last four years, the number of schools with an excess and the level of those excesses had significantly reduced. Four options were given – no change to current scheme, bringing nursery, special and PRU schools into the current scheme, totally remove the scheme, or introduce an alternative lighter touch review. The consensus from Heads Funding Group was that the current scheme should be replaced by a light touch review by Schools' Forum. Claire provided an example of what data could be included in a light touch review, including each individual schools recent history of balances, their current balance as a percentage of actual income received, the difference between their planned end of year balance and actual end of year balance for the last three years, and their planned balances for the next three years.

Graham Spellman welcomed the fact that the Forum would be receiving more information than they receive now, though Peter Hudson was concerned that the Forum would have no power to do anything if they had concerns. Claire explained that after reviewing the data the Forum would be able to challenge schools on their financial management and identify schools where support may be required, which should provide a more helpful approach. The challenge could be in any format the Forum requested and felt was appropriate – from a written explanation to questions posed or the school being asked to attend a panel. It

would be on an exceptional basis only rather than a blanket approach. David Ramsden felt that the reason the DfE had removed the ruling was political to allow Academies to have more autonomy. We would need to be careful on how the change was communicated, particularly in explaining this to schools who had suffered a claw back in the past. He was also concerned that the review would involve a lot of work. Claire confirmed that the data collection did not involve much work – all the data already exists for other purposes. Mary Harwood stated that as a governor of a school who had suffered claw back in the past she personally would not have a problem with the change. Sheilagh Peacock felt that schools should be trusted to make their own judgements, particularly very small schools. David agreed that if the review did not involve too much work then he would support this, though the annual review would need to ensure that balances are not creeping back up again. Peter agreed, and that it should be made clear that the claw back scheme could be reintroduced if need be. He also suggested looking to see what other local authorities use in their light touch reviews.

DECISION: Agreed to consult with schools on changing the scheme for financing schools to remove the claw back scheme and replace with a light touch review.

ACTION: Consultation to go out to all maintained schools with a report back to Schools' Forum in September.

C White

10. INKPEN EXCESS SURPLUS BALANCE

Ian Pearson reminded members that at the last meeting they had requested that Heads Funding Group (HFG) investigate Inkpen's excess surplus balance further, by inviting the Head and School Business Manager to give an explanation and answer questions posed by the group. This had taken place at the last HFG, and the members present were satisfied with the clear explanation and evidence given by the school and recommended no further action.

DECISION: It was agreed that no further action would be taken, and the school could keep its excess surplus balance

11. PRU BUDGET

Cathy Burnham reported that there is a significant amount of work going on with PRUs currently, so not all reports have come to this meeting and Heads Funding Group had not previously had sight of this report. This report provided an early update on the impact of changing the PRU bandings from four bands to a single band. To date there is only one half terms of costs from the reintegration service and this shows a reduction in cost compared to the same period last year, so is looking promising. There is a need to ensure that the support to pupils isn't being compromised by this reduction. Further information will be provided at the next meeting in September.

Cathy gave a verbal update on the PRU strategic review. An options paper has been sent out as a pre consultation to secondary Heads. The three options are

a smaller PRU with greater delegation to schools, moderate restructuring with some delegation, and little change. There have so far been seven responses out of ten and the deadline is this Friday. Out of the responses received to date, the preferred option is moderate restructuring. Once the preferred option has been determined this will be costed and sent out to formal consultation to all interested parties.

Mark Bennet questioned why the review was concentrated on secondary (KS4). Cathy commented that permanent exclusions and thus the Alternative Curriculum service will be the main focus of future provision. Concerns were raised about KS5 and the statutory school age is going up. Chris Prosser stated that KS5 had not been fully debated, and David Ramsden agreed that this needs further consideration. Cathy agreed to take this on board.

12. INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL BUDGETS 2015/16

Claire White presented a report for information on the budgets for 2015/16 submitted by maintained schools. Four schools have submitted a deficit budget, compared to three last year, and the position at each of these schools was briefly explained – mainly due to decreases in pupil numbers and the lead in time needed to restructure to reflect the lower pupil numbers. Long Lane, Kintbury and Purley all have a deficit recovery plan in place, though John O' Gaunt's deficit continues to grow. An increasing number of schools are forecasting deficits in 2016/17 *if they take no action*, reflecting the fact that costs (particularly employment costs) are rising whilst funding remains static. This highlights the level of savings that schools are required to find in order to stand still. David Ramsden asked Ian Pearson if he had received a reply from the letter sent to the DfE last term regarding the school funding crisis, but he responded that he had not, stating how difficult it is to get responses. The impact of free schools opening up at late notice in Reading is affecting some of our schools (impacting on pupil numbers and thus funding), and the need for cross LA discussions was stressed. Graham Spellman stated that the position at John O'Gaunt appears to be getting worse despite the number of reports received over the years on positive action being taken. Ian stated that the school had taken a number of actions to reduce its costs, including closure of the sixth form, but pupil numbers were not improving. He stressed that the risk was being borne by the Council and not other schools, but agreed that something more radical needs to happen. Mark Bennet commented on the current school transport consultation and queried whether the Council is being joined up in its thinking i.e. is paying the transport costs for pupils to travel to a school outside John O' Gaunt's catchment area having an impact on the schools viability. Ian replied that for many pupils, schools located outside their catchment area are actually closer, so parents have a right to make a claim.

13. TRADE UNION FACILITIES TIME – ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15

Keith Watts introduced the annual report on trade union work supported by facilities time. The report set out the number of cases all five unions had dealt with in the period September 2014 to May 2015. They do not hold information on actual amount of time spent on each activity. David Ramsden was interested

in knowing whether there was a historical comparison available and whether the number of cases had gone up, but this information is not available. Ian Pearson stated that it is good practice to have a report on how de-delegated schools money has been spent and it was useful to receive this report. He requested that the report next year also included the financial information, showing how much had been spent.

14.HOME TUITION REVIEW

Stacey Hunter introduced the review of the Home Tuition Service. This information had been asked for prior to the funding cuts in the current year budget. She had since added the financial section. The report had been reviewed at Heads Funding Group, and although full of information and tables they had asked for it to be more strategic. Cathy Burnham added that the expenditure per pupil averaged out at £9,833. Ian Person stated that different pupils engage for differing numbers of hours, and requested information on cost per hour of tuition which might prove more meaningful. Stacey highlighted that the greatest cost is for tutors of which there is a high turnover. Cathy emphasised that there was a growing number of pupils with mental health and anxiety, and that this needs to be tackled. Home tuition will form part of the PRU strategic review.

ACTION: Data to be provided on cost per hour of provision

C Burnham

15.FORWARD PLAN

Members were asked to note the items for the next two rounds of meetings and to forward any additional items to Claire White.

16.SCHOOLS FINANCIAL VALUE STANDARD – ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15

This item which slipped from the last meeting is no longer being brought to Schools' Forum.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Brian Jenkins brought to the attention of members that there is currently a Government consultation entitled "a call for evidence for the cost of childcare" which closes on 10th August. The Government is committed to increasing the hourly rate and increasing the number of funded hours from 15 to 30 which is potentially good news for this sector.

Meeting closed 6.50 p.m.

Date of next meeting: Monday 28th September 2015
Time: 5pm
Venue: Shaw House