

DRAFT

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

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 11 MARCH 2019

Present: Reverend Mark Bennet, Catie Colston, Jacquie Davies, Lynne Doherty, Keith Harvey, Alan Henderson, Jon Hewitt, Brian Jenkins, Hilary Latimer, Mollie Lock, Sheila Loy, Patrick Mitchell, Ian Nichol, Chris Prosser, David Ramsden, Graham Spellman (Vice-Chairman), Bruce Steiner (Chairman) and Suzanne Taylor

Also Present: Avril Allenby (Early Years Service Manager), Melanie Ellis (Chief Accountant), Amin Hussain (Schools Finance Manager), Ian Pearson (Head of Education Service), Jane Seymour (Service Manager, SEN & Disabled Children's Team), 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: Councillor Anthony Chadley, Jonathon Chishick, Antony Gallagher, Lucy Hillyard, Jayne Steele, Gary Upton and Charlotte Wilson

PART I

62 Minutes of previous meeting date 21st January 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on the 21st January 2019 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

63 Actions arising from previous meetings

The Schools' Forum received an update regarding actions recorded during the previous meeting. Action Jan19 – Ac1 was ongoing as another election would need to be held for the position of Secondary Governor Representative on the Schools' Forum as no nominations had been received.

Regarding Dec-Ac2 Jane Seymour confirmed that an item on the funding for children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) who attended Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) would be added to the Work Programme for Autumn 2019.

RESOLVED that an item on the funding for children with EHCPs who attended PRUs would be added to the Schools' Forum work programme for Autumn 2019

64 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

65 Membership

Jessica Bailiss provided the following updates regarding Membership:

- Keith Harvey's and Antony Gallagher's term of office had come to an end at the end of January 2019. The Primary Head Teacher Association was consulted and it was agreed that both would continue on the Forum for a further term.
- The Headteachers' Association also agreed that Janet Patterson Headteacher at Brightwalton School, would become the new Primary Headteacher representative to replace Angela Hay.

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- Catie Colston's term of office would cease at the end of March 2019 and conversations regarding consultation on the position were taking place.
- The election process would run again in March 2019 for the position of Secondary Governor representative on the Schools Forum.

66 **Primary Schools in Financial difficulty - Bids for Funding from Brightwalton, John Rankin and The Willows (Melanie Ellis)**

Ian Pearson introduced the report which summarised the bids that had been received from schools in deficit to access funding from the Primary Schools in Financial Difficulty de-delegated fund.

Keith Harvey reported that the applications for John Rankin Federation, The Willows and Brightwalton Primary Schools had been discussed at length at the Heads Funding Group (HFG) on 27th February 2019 and it had recommended that the Schools' Forum support the bids.

The Chairman invited Members of the Schools' Forum to consider if they agreed that each of the bids should be approved.

John Rankin Federation

Keith Harvey proposed that the Schools' Forum agree the bid for funding from John Rankin Federation for the amount of £2,833. The proposal was seconded by Patrick Mitchell. At the vote the motion was carried.

The Willows Primary School

Catie Colston proposed that the Schools' Forum agree the bid for funding from The Willows Primary School for the amount of £29,460.12. The proposal was seconded by Ian Nichol. At the vote the motion was carried.

Brightwalton CE Aided Primary School

Patrick Mitchell proposed that the Schools' Forum agree the bid for funding from Brightwalton Primary School for the amount of £7,494.37. The proposal was seconded by Ian Nichol. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the bids for funding from John Rankin Federation, The Willows and Brightwalton Primary Schools were approved.

67 **Invest to Save Proposals (Michelle Sancho)**

Michelle Sancho introduced the report which summarised the actions undertaken with regards the Invest to Save proposals.

Due to the invest to save funds being issued in the 2018/19 financial year but the delivery of the behaviour and PPEP care training and support taking place over the academic year, it was necessary to request that unused funds were carried over to the 2019/20 financial year.

Ian Pearson stated that the proposal had been supported by the HFG.

Rev. Mark Bennet stated that schools had been asked to submit training proposals and he noted that these would be evaluated in the summer term. Rev. Mark Bennet asked if the proposal to carry funding into 2019/20 was approved, if the evaluation process would be delayed. Michelle Sancho confirmed that the timescale for when evaluation would take place would not be affected.

Jon Hewitt proposed that the recommendation to carry over unused funds into 2019/20 be approved. The proposal was seconded by Patrick Mitchell. At the vote the motion was carried.

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RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum agreed that unused funds could be carried over into 2019/20 to enable the completion of planned activities.

68 Final DSG Budget 2019-20 (Amin Hussain)

Amin Hussain introduced the report which set out the overall budget for the Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG) for 2019/20 and the final budget position for each of the funding blocks.

Amin Hussain reported that a number of queries had been raised by schools concerning their individual funding allocations and he confirmed that information would be sent out to schools in the next ten days to explain why some of the allocations had changed. Queries from individual schools would be dealt with on a school by school basis.

David Ramsden asked how the situation had occurred. Amin Hussain reported that DSG funding was received and then the figures adjusted accordingly. David Ramsden asked why the allocations had changed from what was originally reported to schools. Amin Hussain confirmed that he would email schools individually to explain why their allocations had changed. Ian Pearson reported that when initial school budgets were forecasted, they were indicative and some adjustments had been made. This would need explaining to schools and a report would be brought to the next HFG to provide some background on the issue.

Patrick Mitchell stressed that some schools were not happy about their revised allocations. Figures had been provided in February 2019 and it was not highlighted that amounts allocated to schools could change. Patrick Mitchell recalled that the Schools' Forum had agreed to cap funding gains at 2% and believed that this had been overridden by the Council's Executive. He asked for an explanation on this point

Rev. Mark Bennett added that he had spoken with some school business managers who had been used to having access to the finance model used for their school, which showed how their funding was calculated. This had not been shared and therefore had caused frustration

Councillor Lynne Doherty reported that contrary to what had been mentioned in February 2019 the Council's Executive had agreed the 2% on funding gains as agreed by the Schools' Forum. In light of this David Ramsden again asked why the allocations had changed, as it was important that schools understood the reasons. Catie Coltson also expressed her confusion on the issue. If the 2% cap had been agreed by both the Schools' Forum and the Executive, she could not see why the allocation amount had changed. Amin Hussain reported that a cap of 2% had been consulted on with schools however, if final allocations could not be aligned to the cap then adjustments had to be made.

Ian Pearson agreed that schools needed to understand what view had been taken that had led to a change in the figures from the onset. An explanation was required on the overarching issue and what had led to variances to schools. This information needed to be sent to all schools and members of the Schools' Forum.

It was proposed that a decision should be taken on whether to agree the overall DSG deficit budget after agenda items nine (High Needs Budget) and ten (Early Years Budget) had been considered (*for the decision taken regarding this item, please see item ten (Early Years Budget)*).

RESOLVED that

- A report would be brought to the next HFG to provide some background on changes to individual school funding allocations.

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- An explanation to be provided on the overarching issue that had caused allocations to change, including what had led to variances for individual schools. This information needed to be shared with all schools and members of the Schools' Forum.

69 Final High Needs Budget (Jane Seymour)

Jane Seymour introduced the report which set out the current financial position of the High Needs Budget (HNB) for 2018/19 and the position known so far for 2019/20, including the likely shortfall. It also sought a decision on the proposal to fund a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy Officer from the HNB in order to take forward projects in the SEND Strategy to achieve long term savings.

There was a forecast shortfall of £2.17m in the 2019/20 HNB, which was an increase from the figure of £1.86m reported to the last Schools' Forum meeting. Reasons for this increase were detailed under section 3.8 of the report as follows:

- There had been an increase in resourced unit place funding of £24k.
- An increase of £198,028 in top up costs, mainly due to schools' fee increases and new placements. This included a net increase of four placements. The figure provided at the Schools' Forum meeting in January 2019 had been a prediction.
- An increase of £33,295 in other statutory services. This was mainly due to an increase in bespoke packages for children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
- An additional £56k for a proposed SEND Strategy Officer. Further detail on this could be viewed on page 65 of the report under section six.

Jane Seymour reported that the final column of the tables within Appendix A highlighted the pressure being faced for each area, as this showed how the predicted budget for 2019/20 differed from the current year. Top Up Funding was the main area of pressure.

The Schools' Forum had agreed not to proceed with further saving options other than bringing the Home Tuition Service in house.

Jane Seymour explained a Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy had been in place since the Autumn of 2018, which was an ambitious five year strategy. Work had commenced on implementing the SEND Strategy however, increased capacity was required to move forward. The proposal included within the report was for a SEND Strategy Officer who would focus on moving SEND work at a pace required to achieve the desired savings. It was suggested that the post should be offered on a temporary contract for three years initially. A number of the projects within the SEND Strategy were resource intensive including a proposal for a new 50 place secondary provision for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and/or with Social and Emotional Mental Health needs and this was detailed under section 6.8 of the report. It would take up to seven years for the provision to be filled and it was possible that it could deliver a potential annual saving of £1.25m.

It was highlighted that the HFG on 27th February 2019 had recommended that the proposal to fund a SEND Strategy Officer from the HNB, should be agreed by the Schools' Forum.

Rev. Mark Bennett noted that some of the services within the HNB were non statutory. He recalled that the Schools' Forum had been informed that these services offered value for money and were often cost effective options compared to other alternatives. Rev. Mark Bennett felt that it would be helpful to have a review of these services to verify their value. Jane Seymour stated that detailed work to assess the value of non-statutory services had been undertaken but she agreed this needed to continue.

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Keith Harvey referred to an announcement from the Secretary of State concerning specialist schools. Ian Pearson reported that this was the result of a call for applications to create special free schools, largely through using capital funding. Reference within the report to a secondary SEMH provision, was separate to this process. Ian Pearson reported that West Berkshire Council had considered applying however had been approached by Reading Borough Council for support as they were putting together an application for the same provision. West Berkshire would be able to access the facility, if Reading's bid was approved. Wokingham were also supporting Reading's application.

Jane Seymour added that if Reading's bid was approved, it would help West Berkshire in the short term. West Berkshire Council could have submitted its own application however, it was particularly difficult to retain control over the costs from free schools.

Regarding the SEMH secondary provision detailed in the report, Ian Pearson reported that the resource would be attached to an existing secondary school. Chris Prosser asked if a secondary school had put itself forward and Ian Pearson confirmed that a school has expressed an interest in supporting the project.

The Chairman drew the attention back to the recommendation under section two of the report. Keith Harvey proposed that the Schools' Forum approve the proposal to fund a SEND Strategy Officer from the HNB and this was seconded by Graham Spellman. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum approved the proposal to fund an SEND Strategy Officer from the HNB.

70 Final Early Years Budget (Avril Allenby)

Avril Allenby introduced the report which set out the proposal for the Early Years budget, which was based upon the recommendation of the Early Years Funding Group. The period of time for the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) had come to an end and steps were being taken to reach the same common base for all providers.

Avril Allenby reported that various scenarios had been explored to provide the proposals included within the report. A realistic rate had been reached that was flexible and workable for providers. It was important to note that places were driven by the offers provided to parents and it was an area that was particularly difficult to predict.

Avril Allenby reported that there had to be a 95% pass through of funding to providers. It had been agreed that a quality supplement would be required.

All elements of funding had been reviewed including base rates, the rates for two year olds and the pupil premium, which for early years was particularly low and required top up funding to help increase take up.

The Early Years sector was impacted upon by what was offered to parents and it was becoming increasingly difficult for some providers to remain viable. Therefore focus on supporting the sector was required. Analysis had been undertaken on the sector which ranged from large day care provision to smaller voluntary organisations. Some providers had needed to close due to increasing funding pressures.

Ian Pearson noted that under the conclusion on page 45 of the report, there was a proposal that the Schools' Forum agree the two year budget model for the Early Years Block. Ian Pearson stated that it was difficult to agree something that went beyond the financial year and therefore suggested an indicative model should be agreed.

Further work was required on the Pupil Premium to assess the impact and to ensure investment in the area was adding value.

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The Chairman drew attention to the recommendations detailed under section two of the report.

David Ramsden proposed that the Schools' Forum agree the two year indicative model for Early Years and this was seconded by Catie Colston. At the vote the motion was carried.

Suzanne Taylor proposed that the Schools' Forum agree that the single base rate for all providers was increased from £4.30 to £4.40 and this was seconded by Patrick Mitchell. At the vote the motion was carried.

Brian Jenkins proposed that the Schools' Forum agree that the funding rate for two year olds was increased to £5.65 and this was seconded by Suzanne Taylor. At the vote the motion was carried.

Brian Jenkins proposed that the Schools Forum agree the increase in the deprivation funding supplement allocated to the pupil premium pupils to make the total funding per hour £2, and this was seconded by Chris Prosser. At the vote the motion was carried.

As agreed, the Schools Forum considered the recommendation for agenda item eight regarding the final DSG budget 2019/20. Keith Harvey proposed that the Schools' Forum agree the overall deficit budget in 2019/20 of £1,824,646 and this was seconded by John Hewitt. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that

- The Schools' Forum agreed all the recommendations set out in section two of the report.
- The Schools' Forum agreed (as per the recommendation set out under section two of item eight - DSG Funding Settlement and Budget Overview 2019/20) an overall deficit budget for 2019/20 of £1,824,646.

71 Growth Fund 2018-19 (Amin Hussain)

Amin Hussain introduced the report which aimed to inform the Schools' Forum of payments made to schools from the Growth Fund budget in 2018/19.

Three schools had made successful applications for Growth Funding: Theale Primary, Bradfield Primary and John Rankin Infant School. All three schools had met the Growth Fund criteria. Amin Hussain added that Theale Primary School had raised a query regarding whether it was eligible to receive further funding and this was being looked into. In the meantime the £13k as highlighted in the report would be awarded.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report

72 Schools: Deficit Recovery (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report which provided an update on the work being carried out with the nine schools that had set a deficit budget in 2018/19. This report had been requested at the last meeting of the Schools' Forum in January 2019.

Melanie Ellis reported that the report also contained comments from each of the schools on progress against their deficit.

Catie Colston commended the report and stated that she found the information very useful. Rev. Mark Bennet agreed however, suggested that going forward it would be helpful to highlight within tables the amount paid to schools from the Schools' in Financial Difficulty Fund.

Ian Pearson drew attention to section 5.1 of the report, which positively showed that the collective deficit for schools in deficit had been reduced from £870k to £604k at period

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nine. This demonstrated the hard work carried out by schools and the Council to reduce the deficit.

Patrick Mitchell queried how confident officers were in forecasted figures. Ian Pearson stated that there was intense work taking place with the nine schools. The figures provided realistic forecasts that were being managed by the individual schools.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

73 **DSG Monitoring 2018/19 Month 10 (Ian Pearson)**

Amin Hussain drew attention to the report, which set out the current financial position of the services funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), highlighting any under or overspends.

Amin Hussain drew attention to the table under section 4.1 of the report. The budget was set with an overspend of £464k against the DSG, as per the decision made by the Schools' Forum. The forecast overspend position at Month Ten against expenditure was £121k.

Amin Hussain drew attention to the table under section 6.1 of the report, which set out the current forecast for the Early Years Block and highlighted an underspend for the area. As at Month Ten there was a £356k forecast underspend for the Early Years Block.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

74 **Work Programme 2019/20**

The Chairman drew attention to the Work Programme for 2019/20. Graham Spellman proposed that the Schools' Forum approved the work programme and this was seconded by David Ramsden.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum approved the Work Programme for 2019/20.

75 **Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

76 **Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting would take place on 17th June 2019, 5pm at Shaw House.

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

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature