

# 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, 25 JANUARY 2021

**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), Emily Dawkins (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Jon Hewitt (Maintained Special School Headteacher), Brian Jenkins (Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent Provider Representative), Hilary Latimer (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Sheila Loy (Academy School Governor), 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), Felix Rayner (Maintained Primary Representative (Substitute for Keith Harvey)) Graham Spellman (Roman Catholic Diocese), Jayne Steele (Non School Post 16 Provider) and Charlotte Wilson (Academy School Headteacher)

**Also Present:** Avril Allenby (Early Years Service Manager), Melanie Ellis (Chief Accountant), Ian Pearson (Head of Education Services), Jane Seymour (Service Manager, SEN & Disabled Children's Team), Jessica Bailiss (Policy Officer (Executive Support)), Lisa Potts (Finance Manager) and Michelle Sancho (Principal EP & Service Manager)

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Keith Harvey, Councillor Ross Mackinnon and David Ramsden

#### PART I

#### 58 Minutes of previous meeting dated 7th December 2021

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2021 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### 59 Actions arising from previous meetings

The Chairman drew attention to the action from the previous meeting on page 11 of the agenda.

Dec20-Ac1 - Councillor Dominic Boeck reported that he had not been able to meet with MP Laura Farris due to a conflict with a parliamentary matter. He had however, been able to meet with two staff members from her team, who had informed him that Laura Farris had met with Vicky Ford, the Minister for Children, to express her concern regarding early years funding and to seek support for changes. The next step for Laura Farris was to go and meet with the Policy Team at Number 10 regarding the issues. Ian Pearson and Avril Allenby had also attended the meeting and had briefed them on the issues facing early years funding.

#### 60 Declarations of Interest

The Chairman drew attention to members' standing interests on page 13 of the agenda. This list would be accessible on the School Forums' webpage.

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Gemma Piper declared an interest in Agenda Item eight, and reported that, as her interest was a disclosable pecuniary interest or an other registrable interest, she would be leaving the meeting during the course of consideration of the matter.

Reverend Mark Bennet declared an interest of transparency in Agenda Item eight, and reported that as his interest was not a disclosable pecuniary interest or an other registrable interest, he would remain in the meeting during the course of consideration of the matter. Reverend Bennet would not take part in the vote on the item due to it being restricted to School Members.

### 61 Membership

Jessica Bailiss provided an update regarding membership of the Schools' Forum. An election was currently taking place to try and fill the vacancy for a primary school business manager position on the Forum. The deadline for nominations had been extended until the 2<sup>nd</sup> February.

Jessica Bailiss confirmed that no other School Forum Members were near reaching the end of their Term of Office.

### 62 Schools Funding Formula 2021/22 (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 6), which sought agreement to the final school funding formula allocations for 2021/22.

Melanie Ellis highlighted that the report set out the criteria that had been agreed for allocating the formula funding, which had been agreed by the Schools' Forum in December 2020. Since this meeting the final allocations had been received from the DSG and these were shown under table in section 4.1 of the report. The Local Authority had been awarded £600k in growth funding and section five of the report detailed how the Growth Fund was calculated. As it was within the Schools Block, movement of funding between the formula and the Growth Fund was permitted.

Some analysis had been undertaken on the cumulative balance of the Growth Fund and with the funding from the previous year it was estimated that the balance of the fund by the end of March 2021 would be about £1.2m. As the projected balance was considered to be sufficient to meet growth it was not felt that the further £600k was required and therefore two options were proposed for consideration:

- a) Put the full 2021/22 allocation into the schools funding formula to allocate to schools, or;
- b) Use £274k of the 2021/22 growth fund to increase the High Needs Block (HNB) transfer from 0.25% as previously agreed to 0.5%, and put the remaining balance of £330k into the school formula and allocation to schools.

Melanie Ellis added that if option (b) was chosen then money transferred to the HNB could be used for 'invest to save' purposes.

Ian Pearson explained that a discussion had taken place at the Heads' Funding Group (HFG) and it had been suggested that some of the Growth Fund allocation for 2021/22 could further support efforts to drive down the deficit in the HNB. Ian Pearson had discussed this with Jane Seymour and asked her to comment on if there were any particular areas that could be targeted with the funding if agreed. Jane Seymour reported that there was a report under agenda item nine on the HNB that included a number of current invest to save proposals. It was being requested that funding for these projects was ongoing and therefore any growth funding transferred to the HNB could be used for these areas. Regarding other potential uses of the money, one difficulty was that much of the funding required within the SEND Strategy required ongoing funding rather than one off amounts. Jane Seymour stated however, that the Forum might wish to use some of

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the funding to support resourced schools because the pressure faced by this area was high. Further consideration could be given to what other areas could be funded on a one off basis. Ian Pearson stated that if recommendation (b) was approved then a further report would be brought to the Forum for consideration that included detail on how the funding could be used.

Gemma Piper raised a question on the reporting factor of a further transfer. It was clear from guidance that a transfer needed to be in line with deficit recovery plans. Gemma Piper queried if anything further would be brought to the Forum on the strategic oversight of savings and sought clarity on this point.

In response to Gemma Piper's question Ian Pearson reported that there were two options. Firstly the funding could be used to pay down some of the deficit in the HNB. The other preferred approach that could be taken would be to add the funding to a deficit recovery plan/framework that would support activities that would reduce costs in the HNB overtime. There was an issue about the funding being one off however, this applied to any funding transferred to the HNB, including the 0.25% that had already been agreed in December 2020.

Reverend Mark Bennet referred to discussions that had taken place regarding deficit recovery in the past and he noted at some point the expectation was that this would be externally monitored. He sought clarity on what the current position was in terms of the need to provide a deficit recovery plan and when there would need to be accountability for how funding was being used. Ian Pearson explained that the Department for Education (DfE) was measuring deficits against a local authorities overall DSG balance. In West Berkshire the pressure predominately rested in the HNB. A deficit was looked at in proportion to an areas total spend and some areas had deficits that exceeded their HNB budgets. West Berkshire was not currently in this position as the overall deficit was about £3.94m against the overall DSG balance of £25m. Ian Pearson reported that the aim was to bring a report to the next meeting which showed detail on the deficits being faced by other local authorities.

West Berkshire had not yet been approached by the DfE regarding its deficit but was aware that conversations were being sought and had been made aware of the thresholds being used. The DfE had recognised that it was a broad problem being faced. Any contact from the DfE would be reported in due course.

Councillor Dominic Boeck noted under section 2.2 of the report that the final funding formula rates and allocation were subject to political ratification, but it would not be referred to the Council's Executive. Melanie Ellis confirmed that the matter was due to be dealt with by Councillor Ross Mackinnon as an Individual Member Decision.

Ian Nichol referred to items 14 (a) and (b) on the agenda, which considered increasing numbers of schools facing deficit and the pressure on schools' budgets caused by Covid-19. He queried if consideration had been given to using the £604k of growth funding as part of the Schools' in Financial Difficulty Fund (SFDF) due to the size of the issue facing schools as the lockdown progressed. Ian Pearson noted the valid point as more schools were facing a potential deficit but not for the reasons the SFDF was originally created for. Ian Pearson suggested that the Forum might wish to postpone the decision until Agenda Item 14.

Catie Colston queried if the HFG had expressed a preference over options (a) or (b). Ian Pearson confirmed that option (b), which included awarding some of the funding to the HNB, was generated by the HFG but it had been felt that the options should be taken forward to the Forum for consideration.

Gemma Piper stated that she had been of the understanding from the HFG meeting that more work was going to be carried out in time for the Forum to show the impact of the

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funding overtime and asked for clarification on this. Ian Pearson clarified that Keith Harvey had raised option (b) at the HFG and it had been suggested that this be considered at the Forum. How the funding could be used if agreed was a separate issue for consideration and would be included within the next HNB report being brought to the Forum in March 2021. It was confirmed that a decision regarding schools funding formula needed to be taken at the current meeting.

The Chairman suggested that a vote needed to be taken based on the recommendations set out in the report. Further work would be required regarding how the funding would be targeted if money was transferred to the HNB. Moira Fraser noted that a suggestion had been raised to defer the vote on the recommendations set out in 2.1 of the report until Agenda Item 14 was considered.

Melanie Ellis clarified that the vote that was required was for all schools however, if the SFDF was to be considered as a possible use of the funding then this would be for consideration by primary schools only. Therefore Melanie Ellis was of the view that a vote needed to be taken on the recommendation in 2.1 first. Primary schools would then need to take a decision on whether they wished to place growth funding in the SFDF.

Jonathan Chishick noted that consideration was required on whether transfer a further £274k to the HNB. This would leave £330k to be allocated out to schools and could be devoted to issues faced as a result of Covid-19.

The Chairman invited members of the Forum to consider whether they were in favour option (a) or (b). At the vote recommendation (b), which included increasing the HNB transfer to 0.5% and allocating the remaining funding to schools was agreed.

### **RESOLVED that**

- Option (b) as set out in section 2.1 of the report was agreed.
- The Schools' Forum noted the final formula rates and allocations to schools, which were subject to political ratification on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

### **63 Central Schools' Services Block Budget 2021/22 (Melanie Ellis/Ian Pearson/Lisa Potts)**

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 7), which set out the budget proposal for services funded from the Central Schools' Services (CSSB) block of the DSG and proposed measures to enable the budget for the block to be balanced.

Ian Pearson reported that adjustments had been made to the block and it had been brought into balance. This was explained in more detail within the report.

The Chairman invited the Forum to consider the recommendation to agree to the 2021/22 budget for the CSSB. This recommendation was proposed by Sheila Loy and seconded by Ian Nichol and at the vote the motion was carried.

**RESOLVED that** the Schools' Forum agreed the 2021/22 budget for the CSSB as set out in the report.

### **64 Growth Fund 2020/21 Payments (Melanie Ellis)**

*(Gemma Piper declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 8 by virtue of the fact that she was the Executive Head of Kennet School Academies Trust including Whitelands Park Primary. As her interest was personal and prejudicial and a disclosable pecuniary interest, she would be leaving the meeting during the course of consideration of the matter and would take no part in the debate or voting on the matter.)*

*(Reverend Mark Bennet declared an interest of transparency in Agenda Item 8 by virtue of the fact that he was a director on the Kennet School Academies Trust. As his interest*

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*was not a personal or disclosable pecuniary interest he would remain in the meeting during the course of consideration of the matter. He was unable to take part in the vote on the item due to it being restricted to School Members only.)*

*(Gemma Piper was placed in the virtual waiting room at 17.37pm)*

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 8), which aimed to review the Growth Fund applications and sought a decision on whether to award payments to schools from the growth fund in 2020/21.

Melanie Ellis reported that following the receipt of the final October 2020 census data, all schools were invited to make a funding request if they felt that their circumstances met the Growth Fund criteria. Whitelands Park Primary School, which was part of the Kennet School Academies Trust had been the only school to submit an application. This was due to an extra class being required from September 2020 to meet basic need, which involved an increase of 17 pupils. They had not needed to agree the provision of the extra class with the Local Authority for basic need and therefore the application did not meet the criteria of the Growth Fund. The loss of funding to the school however, would be significant.

The application had been considered by the Head's Funding Group (HFG) however, there had been differing views across the group on whether the case should be approved. It had therefore been forwarded to the Forum for consideration.

Richard Hawthorne reported that he would find it difficult to support the application. His school, John O'Gaunt, had been in a similar position to Whitelands Primary School however, the case had been refused due to not meeting the criteria of the Growth Fund. If the application from Whitelands Park was approved, Richard Hawthorne felt that there would be number of other schools applying to the fund. It was important to keep the process fair to all schools and approving an application outside of the criteria could set a precedent.

Ian Nichol concurred with the caution raised by Richard Hawthorne regarding applications not meeting the criteria and was concerned about awarding funding on an ad-hoc basis. It was possible that the criteria needed revisiting. Many schools in Thatcham had moved around within their PAN however, had made adjustments without needing to apply to the Growth Fund.

Chris Prosser echo the concerns that had been raised and felt that consistency needed to be applied. He agreed that maybe the criteria needed to change going forward however, it was important that a consistent approach was taken with all schools. Melanie Ellis agreed that she would look into this at a later date.

The Chairman invited the Forum to make a recommendation. Chris Prosser proposed that the Schools' Forum support refusal of the application and this was seconded by Jonathan Chishick. At the vote the motion was carried.

### **RESOLVED that**

- The criteria for the Growth Fund would be reviewed.
- The application by Whitelands Park Primary School to the Growth Fund was refused.

## **65 High Needs Block Budget 2021/22 (Jane Seymour)**

*(Gemma Piper re-joined the meeting)*

Jane Seymour introduced the report (Agenda Item 9), which set out the current financial position of the high needs budget for 2020/21, the position known so far for 2021/22, including the likely shortfall, together with savings options for 2021-22 and

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recommendations on the continuation of Invest to Save projects agreed by the Schools Forum for 2020-21.

Jane Seymour reported that there had already been a large amount of discussion on the High Needs Block at both the Heads' Funding Group and Schools' Forum.

Jane Seymour drew attention to section 3.5 of the report and stressed the Local Authority's statutory duties for children with SEND were effectively open ended. If a children required an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) then this must be provided regardless of budgetary constraints. The number of children with EHCPs was increasing, in spite of the threshold for an EHCP remaining the same and being applied robustly.

Jane Seymour reported that there had been a rise in EHCPs in West Berkshire of 31% between 2015 and 2020 and the HNB budget had not risen at the same rate. Appendix D to the report showed that most of this increase was in EHCPs in specialist placements rather than mainstream schools, which was what was primarily driving the HNB budget pressure. There were plans through the SEND Strategy to create more local provision for children with SEMH and autism, which would alleviate the pressure to some extent as local maintained provision was most cost effective. It was however, also critical that mainstream schools were supported to maintain more children with SEND in mainstream settings, if the HNB overspend was to be effectively addressed.

Jane Seymour drew attention to section 3.10 of the report, which detailed that the net shortfall in the 2021-22 HNB budget, was £3,960,618. Without the carried forward overspends, the shortfall in 2021-22 would be £1,123,298.

Key pressures on the HNB were detailed within Appendix A to the report. The greatest area of pressure was Top Up Funding with Independent Special Schools causing the greatest pressure on the budget, mainly due to large numbers of SEMH and ASD specialist placements. This was followed by maintained special schools. Non WBC special schools and free special schools were other areas of significant pressure. There were many strategies in place to address these pressures and help children remain in mainstream schools including Therapeutic Thinking and the other invest to save projects. Regarding the projected overspend, Jane Seymour reported that the aim was to bring a report to the next meeting in March 2021, which provided some predictions regarding how spend could be reduced overtime including investment in mainstream schools to reduce the level of children moving out of this area.

Jane Seymour drew attention to invest to save projects for 2020/21, which were detailed under section six of the report. The projects included the recruitment of a Therapeutic Thinking Officer; increasing the Vulnerable Children Fund (VCF) and expanding the ASD Advisory Team. Evaluation data was included on each of the projects apart from for expansion ASD Team as this had needed to be delayed due to Covid-19. Success criteria was also set out for the coming year.

Jane Seymour highlighted that Appendix B to the report looked as possible saving option, which involved non statutory services. The HFG had been of the view that these were preventative services and if cut would only increase pressure further on HNB. The HFG had been in favour of taking an invest to save approach to reduce the deficit overtime.

The Chairman invited the Schools' Forum to look in detail at each of the saving proposals under Appendix B. A vote was carried out on each area of potential saving and none of the saving options were supported by the Forum.

The Chairman invited the Schools' Forum to consider the invest to save proposals contained within the report. Jon Hewitt recommended the invest to save projects be approved and this was seconded by Sheila Loy. At the vote the motion was carried.

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### RESOLVED that:

- The Schools' Forum did not support any of the saving options detailed in Appendix B to the report.
- The Schools' Forum supported recommendation on invest to save projects detailed under section six of Appendix A of the report.
- The Schools' Forum noted the predicted shortfall in the HNB.

### 66 High Needs Block - Resourced Schools (Jane Seymour)

Jane Seymour introduced the report (Agenda Item 10), which sought approval from the Schools' Forum to adopt an additional funding band for resourced units for children with physical disabilities.

Jane Seymour reported the budget for schools with resourced units was not meeting budget requirements. It was important that resourced units were funded in a fair way, which allowed schools to meet the needs of pupils and did not impact negatively on the school's mainstream school budget. A survey was carried out with schools with resourced units to ascertain in more detail what the specific funding pressures were. Returns were received from seven out of the ten resourced provisions.

Jane Seymour explained that there were no specific patterns that could be identified from the information received. Funding pressures were not consistent across specific types of resourced provision in terms of the type of SEN catered for and therefore there did not appear to be a case for a general funding uplift across all resourced provisions. Jane Seymour reported that there did however, appear to be one exemption to this which related to children with physical disabilities, where there were currently three bands for children (PD1, PD2 and PD3). Jane Seymour explained that PD3 did not generate sufficient funding for the high level of personal care required by some children. It was therefore proposed that a new funding band (PD4) be introduced.

If agreed then a further report would be brought to a future meeting which detailed the new values of the bands. There would be no funding implications as a result of the decision because top up funding was already having to be provided to meet need and therefore it was a formality.

*(Mark Bennet and Gemma Piper declared an interest in the item because Kennet School had a resourced unit and abstained from voting on the matter.)*

The Chairman invited the Forum to consider whether to approve the recommendation under 2.1 of the report. Jon Hewitt proposed that the recommendation be approved this was seconded by Ian Nichol. At the vote the motion was carried.

**RESOLVED that** the recommendation for an additional funding band for children in Physical Disability resourced provisions with very high level needs, was approved.

### 67 Vulnerable Children's Grant 19-20 (Michelle Sancho)

Michelle Sancho introduced the report (Agenda Item 11), which provided a review of Vulnerable Children's Grant (VCF) 2019/20. Michelle Sancho stated that fund was typically reported on the year after the financial year it had been awarded in. Table one on page 90 of the agenda showed an overview of the allocation of the VCF between 2016 and 2020.

Feedback had been sought from schools per individual pupil that had received grant funding and this was detailed from the bottom of page 90 of the report. It was important to note that the evaluation was carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore the level of feedback was lower than usual. 67% of schools had reported a decrease in their level of worry for a pupil and there had been no reports of increased worry levels. Michelle Sancho reported that the VCF was a well valued fund.

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**RESOLVED** that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

### 68 **Dedicated Schools Grant 2021/22 (Melanie Ellis)**

*(Gemma Piper left the meeting at 6.15pm)*

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 12), which set out the final Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation for 2021/22.

The table under section 4.1 of the report set out the final 2020/21 DSG allocation based on the October 2020 census pupil numbers. Pay and Pensions would be funded as part of the DSG for 2021/22 and not by a separate grant.

**RESOLVED** that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

### 69 **Early Years Budget 2021/22 (Lisa Potts/Avril Allenby)**

*(Janet Patterson left the meeting at 6.30pm)*

Lisa Potts introduced the report (Agenda Item 13), which updated the Schools Forum on the funding rates for the Early Years Block for 2021/22.

The normal process for determining funding allocations for local authorities for the early years' entitlements was to take an annual census count of the number of hours taken up by children in each local authority in January. However the Department of Education had advised that a new process was to be used for 2021. This was because the DfE had recognised that the number of children attending childcare might not have returned to normal when the January 2021 census was taken. Therefore if attendance was below 85% of the January 2020 census levels, a top up would be applied.

Lisa Potts added that this would have a big impact on maintained nursery schools which normally received a lump sum each year. The period from April to August was indicative and September to March was subject to change.

Avril Allenby referred to the point in the report regarding allocations and the January census. If the attendance rate for January 2021 was below 85% of the attendance recorded for January 2020 then a top up would be applied. It was important to note however, that the top up would only be up to 85%. It had been census week the week prior to the meeting and it was clear many parents were still withholding their children due to the lockdown. Previously allocations to providers had been guaranteed however, it was now based on places being available. Avril Allenby commented that it would be interesting to see what final figures were, as the funding allocations presented in the previous and current report were indicative.

Lisa Potts reported that the proposed budget for Early Years was due to be brought to the next meeting of the Forum in March 2021 however, she added that this was going to be particularly difficult to in light of the current situation. Catie Colston sympathised with the position being faced and stated that she would be interested to know how other areas were managing to create a budget given the lack of information. Lisa Potts reported that she had not yet spoken to other areas but she intended to do so. Estimates would have to be made.

Brian Jenkins stressed that the early year's sector was heading into an impossible situation and pleaded with the Forum to bear with the sector. He referred to the comment made earlier in the meeting regarding the meeting at Number 10 Downing Street and the fact that there was due to be a policy discussion. Brian Jenkins stated that he would be interested to hear what this meeting could entail. The Chairman sympathised with the impossible situation faced by the early year's sector.

Reverend Mark Bennet referred to the strategic significance of the issue. Early years settings were very important in preparing children for school, particularly amongst

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disadvantaged pupils. In light of the Covid-19 situation, a reduction in pre-school education would have a knock on impact on schools. As well as budgeting, the importance of reaching out to children and families who were in need was also a significant issue that needed to be kept in mind.

**RESOLVED** that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

### **Deficit Schools and the Impact of Covid-19 on School Budgets (Melanie Ellis)**

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 14a), which provided details on the schools in deficit as set out in 1.1 of the report. Melanie Ellis reported that there were increased numbers of schools forecasting large deficits.

Melanie Ellis reported that the table under section 6.1 of the report provided a summary of the schools that had predicted deficit forecasts for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Melanie Ellis moved on to the report on page 103 of the report (Agenda Item 14b), which looked at the impact of Covid-19 on schools budgets, which was significant. In order to gauge the impact on schools the Schools' Accountancy Team had written to 59 schools asking them to submit their P6 budget monitoring forecasting for their main school budget and for their out of hours provision, if applicable. 51 schools had responded in total.

Melanie Ellis explained that 31 maintained schools operated out of hours provision and 29 of these schools had submitted a P6 year end forecast. 23 of the schools had reported a reduction in their forecasted year end position, 13 of whom forecast to end the year in a deficit position based on the impact on out of hours provision.

In July 2020 schools had been able to claim for exceptional costs arising as a result of Covid-19 however, conditions and criteria set for this funding were stringent and restrictive. Melanie Ellis reported that an option for consideration was whether the unforeseen costs incurred to manage Covid-19, together with loss of income, could be considered as a reasonable use of the Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund (SFDF) for schools facing an unplanned deficit in 2020/21. The data on end of year positions would not be available until May 2021 and Melanie Ellis proposed that a further report was taken to the HFG at this time for consideration.

Ian Pearson added that the DfE had recently indicated that they intended on moving the census point for when they would be calculating Free School Meals (FSM). Normally this would be calculated based on the January census however, it was being moved back to October. By moving back to October it meant that there was a five to six month period between the funding being calculated and being received by schools. In light of Covid-19, it was likely there would be an increase in children requiring FSM between October and April and therefore this could result in schools not receiving Pupil Premium Funding that they otherwise would have received. This change to the census could have a negative impact on school budgets going forward.

Avril Allenby added to the comments from Ian Pearson and reported that she had checked numbers and early years had seen a month on month increase of about 50 pupils applying for FSM. Therefore there had been a significant increase in children since the October census.

Hilary Latimer reported that Andy Higgs the Chairman of the Primary Headteachers Association had been asked which schools would be missing out on funding as a result of the change. A number of schools had voiced concern regarding the number of additional pupils that would have been eligible for the Pupil Premium Grant funding if the January census had been used.

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Catie Colston reported that she had not previously appreciated the impact of the information and would be interested to hear any feedback as a result of discussions. The issue being faced would also apply to other local authorities and therefore was not a localised issue. Ian Pearson reported that a discussion would be taking place with the DfE that week on the matter regarding the consequences of the decision.

### **RESOLVED that**

- Ian Pearson would feedback to the Forum regarding discussion with the DfE on matter of schools missing out of funding for Free School Meals.
- Melanie Ellis would bring a report to the HFG after May 2021 to give consideration as to whether the unforeseeable costs incurred to manage Covid-19, together with the loss of income, could be considered as reasonable use of the SFDF.

### **71 DSG Monitoring 2020/21 Month 9 (Ian Pearson)**

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 15), which reported the forecast financial position of the services funded by the DSG, highlighting any under or over spends, and to highlight the cumulative deficit on the DSG.

There were no significant variances within the Schools' Block. There was a potential issue regarding the impact of business rates. The report referenced the overspend of £400k in the Early Years Block, which was predicted in the current year. The Central Schools' Block was forecasting a £21k underspend and was one of the reasons why it was predicted the block could be balanced in 2021/22.

Section 9.1 of the report provided further detail on the HNB and what the main pressures were. The deficit within the DSG sat largely within the High Needs and Early Years blocks, and Ian Pearson stated that reports would be presented to Schools Forum on plans to address the deficits.

**RESOLVED that** the Schools' Forum noted the report.

### **72 Forward Plan**

**RESOLVED that** the Schools' Forum noted the forward plan.

### **73 Date of the next meeting**

Monday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021 at 5pm.

*(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 6.40 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....