

# 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, 8 MARCH 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), Keith Harvey (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), 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), Janet Patterson (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Gemma Piper (Academy School Headteacher), Chris Prosser (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), Campbell Smith (Academy School Governor), Graham Spellman (Roman Catholic Diocese) 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) and Jessica Bailiss (Policy Officer (Executive Support))

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Richard Hawthorne and Michelle Sancho

#### PART I

##### 1 Minutes of previous meeting dated 25th January 2021

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

##### 2 Actions arising from previous meetings

Actions Jan21 – Ac1, Ac2 and Ac4 were either completed or in hand.

Regarding Jan21 – Ac3 concerning schools missing out on funding for free school meals, Ian Pearson reported that he had discussed this matter with the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE had changed the census date from January 2021 to October 2020. A number of children had become eligible for free school meals between October and January and would continue to do so between January and 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021. As a result of changing the date of the census schools would lose out on funding for these additional children.

The DfE had responded to the issue and had reported they were looking to bring the census dates in line with each other. Secondly they acknowledged that communication had been poor regarding the change. The DfE had however confirmed that the change would not be reversed going forward.

##### 3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

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### 4 Membership

Jessica Bailiss reported that there was still a maintained secondary representative vacancy and an election would take place in the spring to try and fill the position in time for the next round of meetings. No School Forum Members were near reaching the end of their Term of Office.

### 5 Work Programme 2021/22 (Jessica Bailiss)

Jessica Bailiss introduced the report (Agenda Item 6), that sought approval of the work programme for 2021/22. Jessica Bailiss reported that the work programme largely followed the same pattern as in previous years and was subject to change throughout the year.

Sheila Loy proposed that the Schools' Forum approve the work programme for 2021/22 and this was seconded by Jonathon Chishick. At the vote the motion was carried.

**RESOLVED** that the Schools' Forum approved the work programme for 2021/22.

### 6 Final High Needs Block Budget 2021/22 (Jane Seymour)

Jane Seymour introduced the report that set out the current financial position of the high needs budget for 2020/21, the position as far as it can be predicted for 2021/22, including likely shortfall, together with recommendation on Invest to Save Projects and a prediction of potential future High Needs Block (HNB) spend and savings.

At the last meeting of the Forum it had been agreed that the invest to save proposals agreed in 2020/21 should continue in to 2021/22. A request had also been made for further invest to save proposals for consideration, to be funded through a further 0.25% of the Schools' Block. The proposals set out under section seven of the report had been discussed at the last meeting of the Heads' Funding Group (HFG) and it was proposed that authority be delegated to the Head of Education Services to determine which invest to save projects would be funded and the level of funding for each project following consultation with the HFG at the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021 meeting.

Jane Seymour drew attention to section 3.8 of the report, which detailed that the net shortfall in the 2021-22 HNB was £4,086,306. This included a predicted 2020/21 overspend of £980,686 and carried forward overspends of £1,279,122 in 2019/20 and of £521,000 in 2018/19. Total carried overspend of £2,780,808). Without the carried forward overspends the shortfall in 2021/22 would be £1,305,498.

Regarding the additional invest to save proposals under section seven of the report, Jane Seymour reported these would be discussed further at the HFG if agreed by the Forum. The main focus of the proposals was children with Autism or Social and Emotional, Mental Health (SEMH) difficulties as these were the areas where expenditure was highest for external placements. It had also been identified that specialist placements had needed to be provided for children with Autism or SEMH who had become Emotionally Based School Avoiders (EBSA). A range of possible projects were proposed to provide earlier intervention for these cases and achieve better outcomes, whilst reducing spend in the long term. More detail was required regarding the numbers of children and potential savings so this information would be submitted to the HFG on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.

Jonathon Chishick queried what 'EP' stood for and Jane Seymour confirmed that this stood for 'Educational Psychologist'.

Gemma Piper queried the timescales for when savings could be expected and asked what early tracking to assess impact would take place. Secondly regarding success criteria of the current invest to save proposals, Gemma Piper noted that there was no detail in relation to money contained within the report and queried if financial goals could be added, particularly in relation to areas such as 6.1.3 which involved the recruitment of

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a Therapeutic Thinking Officer. In response to this query, Jane Seymour report that evaluation had already started for the current invest to save projects listed under section six of Appendix A of the report. Some of this evaluation work had been delayed due to Covid-19. It was envisaged that a report would be brought to the Forum in the summer to update on each of the projects and impact. A report would also be brought to the Forum at the end of the financial year. Jane Seymour agreed that financial details needed to be added to the success criteria for each project. Many of the invest to save projects under section seven of the report involved appointments to posts. Impact in these areas could not be monitored until the roles had been recruited to. Draft success criteria including financial success criteria would be added to each proposal under section seven in time for the HFG on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021.

The Chairman drew attention to section two of the report and asked for clarification on each recommendation, particularly recommendation 2.3. Ian Pearson explained that the decision to transfer a further 0.25% to the High Needs Block had been taken at a late stage in the financial year. This had not provided the HFG with much time to consider the proposals and had resulted in the group not reaching a conclusion. It had been felt that further detail was required on each of the areas set out under section seven of the report. It was therefore suggested by the HFG that the Forum could agree in principle to apply the funding to the range of areas listed in section seven of the report, with the detail of the proposals discussed further at a special meeting of the HFG. As the HFG was not a decision making body it was proposed that the decision be delegated to the Head of Education Services following consultation with the HFG at a meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021. This was in line with the Local Authorities constitutional arrangements.

Keith Harvey felt that the deficit in the block of £4m needed to be highlighted before any of the recommendations within the report were considered. He acknowledged that this had been discussed previously and that the necessary plans were in plan such as the SEND Strategy to bring the block back in to balance overtime. Ian Pearson suggested that the Forum might wish to consider agenda items eight, nine and twelve prior to taking a vote on the recommendations set out in the report.

Gemma Piper drew attention to page 36 of the report regarding projected expenditure and income. According to current consultation being conducted by the DfE, there could be a funding shock for the local area and she queried what would happen if this was the case and raised her concern regarding a further funding shock for the HNB. Secondly Gemma Piper referred to point seven on the table featured on page 38 and noted that this related to FE however, this was not shown on the graph. Gemma Piper was concerned that an important piece of data was missing as this accounted for the largest rise.

In response to Gemma Piper's query Lisa Potts confirmed that the data had been pulled together to help show what might happen in the future. It was not yet known what the likely increase in income would be overtime. Lisa Potts reported that the predictions for 2022/23 had been based on the increases that had been awarded in earlier years. Beyond 2022/23 it was anticipated that income could reduce further. Gemma Piper queried if there was a need for the Forum to respond to the DfE's consultation that was currently live. Lisa Potts reported that a response for the wider group could be included. The deadline for responses to the consultation was 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

In response to Gemma Piper's query regarding increases in EHCPs at FE provision, Jane Seymour reported that a footnote should have been added to this section of the report as the figures were slightly misleading. The figures rose from 55 in 2015 to over 100 in 2020, which looked like a significant increase in the number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) however, this was due to a transfer of responsibility for children with high needs from the Learning and Skills Council to the Local Authority and

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represented a transitional stage. These numbers did not place as large a pressure on expenditure as it seemed as there had been funding transferred for these young people. Other areas were causing a much larger pressure including young people placed in specialist placements and special schools.

Regarding the consultation referred to be Gemma Piper, Ian Pearson reported that a collective response would be very helpful. Ian Pearson explained that they were still within the time period where the Government had committed £14bn of additional expenditure, which had equated to about £2m of additional funding in West Berkshire. Despite this injection of funding, it had still not been possible to balance the HNB Block budget. The DfE was undertaking conversations with authorities with the highest deficits. Ian Pearson added that this was calculated by looking at a local authority's deficit as a percentage of the overall budget. In West Berkshire the deficit within the HNB was at about £4m against an overall budget of about £25m.

Reverend Mark Bennet asked where the £4m deficit sat and whether this was sustainable in the medium term. Reverend Bennet also noted that it had been suggested that the vote on the item be deferred until other items concerning the HNB had been considered and he stated that he supported this approach. Ian Pearson confirmed that the deficit was currently sitting on the balances. It was agreed that the vote on the item should be deferred until later on the agenda.

*(The vote on this item was taken after the Forum had considered agenda items 8, 9 and 12, which also related to the HNB)*

The Chairman invited the Forum to consider the recommendations under section two of the report:

- To agree the overall HNB budget for 2021-22. This included a 0.25% schools block transfer to fund the invest to save projects set out in Section 6 of Appendix A of the report.
- 2.2 To agree to invest a further 0.25% schools block transfer in the Invest to Save projects detailed in Section 7 of Appendix A of the report.
- 2.3 To delegate authority to the Head of Education Services to determine which invest to save projects would be funded and the level of funding for each project following consultation with the Heads Funding Group at the 23 March 2021 meeting.

Jonathon Chishick proposed that recommendations 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 above be approved by the Forum and this was seconded by Jon Hewitt. At the vote the motion was carried.

### **RESOLVED that:**

- Reporting on invest to save projects to be added to the work programme for the cycle of meetings during the summer 2021 and at the end of the financial year. This would need to include financial success criteria for each area.
- Jane Seymour and Lisa Potts to include a view from the Forum in the response to the DfE's consultation that was currently live.
- The Forum agreed the recommendations set out in section two of the report (as detailed above). An update would be provided regarding the outcome of 2.3 at the next Forum meeting in June 2021.

## **7 Special Schools Additional Funding (Jane Seymour)**

Jane Seymour introduced the report, which sought agreement from the Schools' Forum to increase the value of special school funding bands by five percent.

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The funding scheme for special schools was devised in 2013 and since the funding scheme was introduced, the value of the special school funding bands had never been increased. There had been a 0.5% reduction in 2016/17 as part of a range of savings to address the overspend in the HNB.

Jane Seymour reported that there had been no increase in the value of the funding bands for children with EHCPs in mainstream schools and resourced schools. Special Schools were impacted on to a greater extent by this as all other their children had EHCPs and therefore all of their funding was derived from the high needs funding arrangements.

Since 2013, mainstream schools budgets had increased by 13.1% while special school budgets had decreased by 0.5%. The result of this was that special schools had been reliant on carried forward funding which was now reducing and they also had needed to make reductions to their provisions, which were listed under section 4.5 of the report.

Both special schools had reported that they would have to set a deficit budget for 2021-22 to avoid provision for children becoming unsafe if there was no increase in funding. Jane Seymour reported that Reading Borough had taken the decision to increase the value of its special school funding bands in 2021/22 by five percent.

Jane Seymour reported that to maintain the quality of provision and avoid special schools going into deficit it was proposed that the special school funding bands were increased by five percent. The approximate cost of this increase would be about £214k.

Gemma Piper believed that Reading Borough Council were applying a two percent increase to all EHCPs. Jane Seymour reported that she was only aware of an increase of five percent for special schools but she would seek clarity from her contacts at Reading Borough.

The Chairman invited the Forum to consider the recommendation to increase the value of funding bands for West Berkshire mainstreamed special schools by five percent. Keith Harvey proposed that the Forum approve the recommendation and this was seconded by Hilary Latimer. At the vote the motion was carried.

**RESOLVED** that recommendation 2.1 to increase the value of funding bands for mainstream special schools by five percent was approved by the Schools' Forum.

### **8 Resourced Schools - funding bands for children with physical disabilities (Jane Seymour)**

Jane Seymour introduced the report, which sought agreement from the Schools' Forum to amend the funding bands for resourced units for children with physical disabilities.

Jane Seymour reported that there were currently three funding bands for children with physical disabilities (PD) and PD resourced schools and these bands were no longer fit for purpose. It was becoming increasingly necessary to provide 'exceptional' funding to PD resourced provision as PD3 was not sufficient to meet the staffing needs of the most complex children. It was therefore proposed that the current Band PD1 was abolished and the value of the current Band PD2 was adopted as base funding for PD Resources. It was also proposed that a new band PD4 was introduced in order to reduce the number of cases where exceptional funding had to be applied.

Jane Seymour reported that the cost implications of the proposal were neutral as children were already being funded at higher levels than the existing funding bands through exceptional funding arrangements.

Reverend Mark Bennet asked if any work had taken place to track the number of children that had been kept out of a higher cost provision and whether this was a useful area of work for the Forum to consider. Reverend Bennet also noted that children with greater

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needs were being accepted into resourced provision and queried if there was scope to expand this further to prevent children having to enter higher level more expensive provision. Reverend Bennet stated that he would abstain from voting on the recommendation as he believed he had a conflicted interest. Jane Seymour reported that they could look at which children might have needed to move to a higher more specialist level of provision if resourced schools had not agreed to accept them. Regarding whether this could be expanded Jane Seymour reported that a whole range of issues would need to be looked at such as physical accommodation. Jane Seymour did not feel that there would be any scope to expand this area in the short term but was something that could be investigated further in consultation with the relevant headteachers. Jane Seymour confirmed that PD was not a group that produced high numbers of pupils like Autism and SEMH and therefore did not have the potential to deliver the same level of savings.

Jonathon Chishick queried if there was any data available to show how funding levels compared with other local authorities and if there were any national standards. Jane Seymour confirmed that there were no national standards for PD. Other local authorities with similar provision had been approached in the past for benchmarking data however, it had been difficult to obtain this as local authorities did not have to provide this data as part of a national return requirement by the DfE. The only way to obtain the data was through cooperation from other local authorities and this had not been successful in the past however, could be revisited.

The Chairman invited the Forum to consider the recommendation to approve that the funding bands for PD resourced units should be amended as set out in the report for 2021-22. Jonathon Chishick proposed that the recommendation should be approved and this was seconded by Catie Colston. At the vote the motion was carried.

### **RESOLVED that:**

- Jane Seymour to look at data on which children might have needed to move to a higher more specialist level of provision if resourced schools had not agreed to accept them.
- Jane Seymour to look into the possibility of expanding the use of resourced provision for children with high level PD with the relevant headteachers, to avoid the use of higher level more expensive provision.
- Jane Seymour to look into approaching other local authorities to obtain benchmarking data regarding funding levels for PD.
- The recommendation set out in 2.1 of the report proposing that funding bands for PD resourced units should be amended as set out in the report, was approved by the Forum.

### **9 Early Years Block Budget 2021/22 and Deficit Recovery Plan (Avril Allenby/Lisa Potts)**

Avril Allenby and Lisa Potts introduced the report that set out the proposal for the Early Years Budget, which was based on the recommendation of the Early Years Funding Group (EYFG).

Lisa Potts drew attention to section four of the report, which provided a forecast outturn for 2020/21 for the Early Years' Service. There had been a decline in the number of hours in the January 2021 census due to Covid-19 and this had been recognised by the DfE. If uptake was below 85% of the January 2020 census then a top up would be applied. The final census figures were not yet available for West Berkshire although provisional data indicated that uptake was at 89% and therefore top up funding might not be received.

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Regarding 2021/22, Lisa Potts reported that hours fluctuated year on year. Because the uptake for January 2021 was low Lisa Potts stated that she had created a number of options and used an average for the last three years for a basis for the budget for 2021/22. There was also a deficit for the block, which had been carried forward. Lisa Potts drew attention to section 5.1 of the report, which detailed that the EYFG had been consulted on reductions to the funding rates to recover the current deficit on the Early Years Block. A range of options were presented to the EYFG and the option chosen was detailed under the table in section 5.1. Lisa Potts stated that the table showed that a tapered approach to reducing rates would be used over a five year period. The Forum had agreed previously that efforts to recover the deficit should begin from April 2021. The table under section 5.2 estimated how the deficit could be repaid across the different areas and Lisa Potts stressed that this would need to be monitored as it was based on 2019/20 hours and the hours for the current year were slightly lower.

Lisa Potts drew attention to section 5.9 of the report, which provided detail on the reduction of hours in the 2020/21 financial year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This had made it particularly difficult to set the 2021/22 budget. Section 5.10 gave an overview of the budget totals for hours based on the reduced rates for 2021/22. One of the key factors in trying to recover the deficit in the Early Years Block was the pass through rate. Currently in West Berkshire more funds were being passed through than what was being received so the suggestion was to bring this down to 100% for year one and then it would be assessed going forward once further data was available.

Avril Allenby stated that the Early Years Budget had been discussed in great detail. The diversity of the sector made it a particularly challenging area. The Appendix to the report showed the impact on the different types of providers during the first year of recovery. Since drafting the report some funding had been secured, which was Covid grant money and could be given out to providers to support with costs.

Avril Allenby stressed that the context of the Early Years Budget and the uncertainties faced continued to be very challenging for providers, particularly around the uptake of hours. The proposal presented was the best fit approach to getting the budget back in line.

Revered Bennet noted that a Covid grant for providers had been mentioned to help provide support with costs. He highlighted that one of the issues likely to come out of the pandemic was developmental issues for children and he asked if there was likely to be any funding available to support providers with this. Avril Allenby reported that she did not believe that funding for this purpose was available from Government currently.

Ian Nichol noted that a decision had been made regarding the level of reduction in funding for three to four year olds; two year olds and deprivation and choices were clearly made. He noted that the funding for three to four year olds had reduced by 1.82%; funding for two year olds had reduced by 2.73% and deprivation funding rate had reduced by 42%. Ian Nichol was extremely concerned about the reduction in the deprivation rate, particularly at a time when there was concerns about vulnerable children. Ian Nichol was concerned that an equalities impact assessment had not been carried out as part of the report and this would have happened if it had been a Council report. Ian Nichol asked how the equalities impact of the recommendation had been assessed and evaluated by Officers.

In response to Ian Nichol's question, Avril Allenby reported that a number of scenarios had been looked at and the impact these had across the different rate changes. Regarding deprivation, the Local Authority had taken a decision in the past to approach it differently to a lot of other authorities by topping up a fairly low base allocation from Government. Avril Allenby stated that in forming the proposal the aim had been to maintain levels of provision across the Authority that were appropriate and this was how

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the choice had been reached. Avril Allenby explained that it would be difficult to say that there would not be some impact on areas of deprivation but this was essentially because the funding to date had been very generous compared to other areas.

Ian Pearson stated that the proposal reduced the deficit budget overtime and the percentages quoted by Ian Nichol represented the reductions at the higher end across the five year period of the recovery plan. Funding for early years was particularly complicated and was very difficult to predict. The proposal which had been thoroughly discussed at the EYFG needed to be a dynamic recovery plan so that if the funding for early years was to change in a positive way then the level of reductions set out in the table could reduce. A starting point for the plan was required and the plan would need to be reviewed on a yearly basis.

Maria Morgan reminded the group how the Pupil Premium worked in Early Years and how it differed to how it worked for schools. In Early Years it had to be applied for on a termly basis. In West Berkshire the rate had been topped up significantly. Regarding Reverend Bennet's point regarding children with additional needs, Maria Morgan reported that most of the money in Early Years went on staffing and ensuring ratios were met. The only area where savings could be made was support for children with additional needs and therefore this could have an impact in the long term and would need to be monitored. Maria Morgan highlighted that a large difficulty facing the sector was the pressure the Speech and Language Service was under due to the shortage of therapists and this was causing a 12 month wait for services. Maria Morgan stated that she had little doubt that children starting school in September 2021 and 2022 would be impacted by this.

Ian Nichol referred to the five year projection and stressed that deprivation funding was due to be cut by double what it was to be cut in year one. Ian Nichol asked for clarification that it was only the 2021 cuts that were for consideration and that there would be opportunity in future years to review the level of cuts and how they were distributed across the funding streams. It was felt that it would also be helpful to have a formal equalities impact assessment carried out as part of reporting. The Chairman confirmed that the proposal was to consider 2021/22 budget only. Ian Pearson noted the comments made by Ian Nichol and reiterated that the plan for recovery was dynamic and could be assessed annually against allocations and pressures within the block.

Gemma Piper requested that the number of providers impacted upon negatively, particularly those that had managed to remain open throughout the pandemic be included in future reporting. This would help to show the medium to long term impact. Avril Allenby reported that a Covid related report had been brought to the Forum previously and she felt it would be appropriate to update this.

The Chairman invited Members of the Forum to consider the recommendation to agree the 2020/22 budget as detailed in 5.10 of the report. This was proposed by Brian Jenkins and seconded by Reverend Bennett. At the vote the motion was carried.

### **RESOLVED that**

- Equality Impact Assessments to be carried out in the future when cuts were proposed.
- Avril Allenby would bring a report to a future meeting of the Forum that included detail on the number of providers impacted upon negatively, particularly those that had managed to remain open during the pandemic.
- The Schools Forum agreed the recommendation to approve the 2021/22 Early Years Budget as set out in the report.

**10 Energy Topics (Christopher Harris)**

Chris Harris introduced the report which sought to update the Schools' Forum on a number of energy related matters including; the transfer of electricity meters to EDF as part of the Council's central energy portfolio; the Council's current Purchasing Strategy; the current Environment Strategy and also the best ways to engage with schools regarding energy issues.

The purpose of the paper was to provide an update on some changes to the central energy contract. A number of schools were part of this contract and benefitted from economies of scale and the ability to obtain cheaper energy prices. The current framework was provided through Crown Commercial Service (CCS) and there was currently two electricity suppliers including EDF and British Gas. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 the arrangement with British Gas would cease and meters would be transferred to EDF. There would be no costs associated with the transfer but there would be a process change in the way the billing was carried out. Invoices from EDF would be received centrally at the Council and a process would be put in place whereby the Council sent the information to school sites on a monthly basis.

Chris Harris reported that as part of the EDF contract the Energy Team were looking to do an exercise whereby they benchmarked the CCS framework against alternative providers to ensure value for money was still being offered. A brief benchmarking exercise had been carried out to date and had indicated that the CCS contract was still offering good value for money.

Catie Colston raised a query regarding timescales of the transfer as she noted that some admin work was involved and the 1<sup>st</sup> April was immediately prior to the Easter holidays which could pose a problem if schools were expected to use a new system. Chris Harris referred to the admin work mentioned and confirmed that he would be completing most of this and it was already underway. All that would be required from schools involved in the contract was clarification of the billing process and who the invoices needed to be sent to. Chris Harris confirmed that he would liaise with schools and EDF.

Ian Nichol raised a query regarding renewable energy and felt that it would be helpful to have more information on this in terms of the progress on the roll out to schools. Chris Harris reported that this was something the Energy Team would be able to provide and he would feed the information back to Phil Newton in this Team.

**RESOLVED that:**

- Phil Newton would be approached regarding providing an update on the roll out of renewable energy to schools.
- The Schools' Forum noted the report.

**11 Impact of Covid 19 on the High Needs Block (Jane Seymour)**

Jane Seymour introduced the report, which reported on the impact of Covid-19 on the High Needs Block (HNB).

Jane Seymour reported that it was very difficult to quantify the impact of Covid-19 on the HNB. There had been a significant increase in requests for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) however there had been a rising trend in this area anyway. It was likely that Covid could have caused children to fall further behind. Jane Seymour reported that the upward trajectory in this area needed to be carefully monitored and more detailed analysis undertaken to see how the increase related to Covid.

There was anecdotal evidence that the level of demand relating to EBSA was increasing and although this was a significant issue prior to Covid it was likely to have increased

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difficulties for children already dealing with anxiety issues around attendance due the large period of time out of school.

Jane Seymour concluded that it was not possible to be more specific about or quantify the impact of Covid on the HNB at that time.

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

### 12 **Deficit Schools (Melanie Ellis)**

Melanie Ellis introduced the report, which provided details of the five schools which had submitted deficit budgets for 2020/21; the two schools which ended the 2019/20 financial year with unlicensed deficit balances; deficit recovery progress statement from the school outlined above and summaries of schools that had informed West Berkshire Council they now expected to end the 2020/21 financial year with an unlicensed deficit balance.

Melanie Ellis reported that there were five schools with licensed deficits for 2020/21 and two of the five schools were predicting that they would be out of deficit by the end of the financial year. Schools remaining in deficit would need revised plans and would need to be monitored throughout the following financial year.

Section four of the report detailed that two schools had ended the financial year 2019/20 with unlicensed deficits. Both schools had submitted their Period Nine Budget Monitoring and Forecast report, which had been reviewed by the Schools' Accountancy Team and feedback provided. Both schools were predicting to be in a better financial position by the end of the financial year.

Melanie Ellis reported that the main concern was that at the end of Period Nine, six primary schools had informed the Local Authority that they now expected to end the financial year 2020/21 with an unplanned deficit on their Main School Budget, with the total forecast value of £94,002.

Seventeen primary schools also expected to end the year with unplanned year end deficits on their Out of Hours Clubs, with a total forecast value of £170,589. This had been hugely impacted by Covid. The Out of Hours budgets would be transferred to main school budgets at year end so once everything once added together it was possible that there could be 11 schools with deficits totally a value of about £224k. The picture on this would not be fully clear until year end. Melanie Ellis proposed to bring a report to the next meeting of the Forum in June 2021, which set out the final position of schools in deficit.

**RESOLVED** that:

- Melanie Ellis to bring a report to the next Forum meeting in June 2021, which set out the final position for schools in deficit.
- The Schools Forum noted the report.

### 13 **DSG Monitoring 2020/21 Month 10 (Ian Pearson)**

Ian Pearson introduced the report which set out 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 being the month 10 report it was getting close to the end of the financial year and therefore would be fairly accurate. Much of the information contained within the report had been discussed as part of other reports earlier on the agenda, in particular the High Needs and Early Years Blocks. The report set out the in-year position however, the issue was the cumulative deficits in both the High Needs and Early Years Blocks. The aim for deficit recovery was to balance budgets in-year as the first priority and then to recover the deficit with a sensible approach.

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

**14 Date of the next meeting**

Monday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021 at 5pm.

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

**CHAIRMAN** .....

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