

# SCHOOLS FORUM

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 21 JUNE 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), Emily Dawkins (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Keith Harvey (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Jon Hewitt (Maintained Special School Headteacher), Hilary Latimer (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Councillor Ross Mackinnon (Executive Portfolio Holder: Finance and Economic Development), Janet Patterson (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Gemma Piper (Academy School Headteacher), Chris Prosser (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), David Ramsden (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), Campbell Smith (Academy School Governor), Graham Spellman (Roman Catholic Diocese) and Jayne Steele (Non School Post 16 Provider)

**Also Present:** Melanie Ellis (Chief Accountant), Ian Pearson (Head of Education Services), Lisa Potts (Finance Manager), Jessica Bailiss (Policy Officer (Executive Support)) and Michelle Sancho (Principal EP & Service Manager)

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Jacquie Davies, Michelle Harrison, Sheila Loy, Julia Mortimore and Ian Nichol

### PART I

#### 15 Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

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

**RESOLVED that** Graham Spellman would continue as Chair of the Schools' Forum for the 2021/22 municipal year.

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

**RESOLVED that** Catie Colston would continue as Vice-Chair of the Schools' Forum for the 2021/22 municipal year.

#### 16 Minutes of previous meeting dated 8th March 2021

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### 17 Actions arising from previous meetings

All actions were completed or in hand apart from Mar21-Ac3, which would be updated on verbally:

Mar21-Ac3: Final High Needs Block, Update on invest to save decision: Ian Pearson reported that at the last Schools' Forum meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> March it had been agreed that a further 0.25% should be transferred from the Schools' Block to the High Needs Block to support 'invest to save' initiatives. It had however, not been agreed how exactly

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the money should be deployed and this had needed to be discussed further at the Heads' Funding Group (HFG).

Ian Pearson reported that following discussions the HFG had not reached a decision and therefore he had undertaken further discussions with the primary and secondary headteacher groups. Regarding the final allocation of the funding, both primary and secondary groups had been in support of a pot of funding (£52,685) to be provided for schools to support children with ASD that were at risk of requiring specialist placements. This funding could now be accessed by schools.

Ian Pearson reported that there had been a lot of discussion at the HFG regarding the relative difference in the level of needs across the primary and secondary phases and which were causing financial pressures. It had been felt by headteachers that these were not the same for each phase and therefore the money should be allocated differently across primary and secondary. Therefore the remaining sum of funding (£221,315) would be split between the two phases equally. The secondary phase funding would be divided between the 10 secondary schools equally to support retaining SEND children. The primary phase funding would be used on a twelve month basis to support coordinated Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) work in primary schools.

Ian Pearson reported that evaluation would be required against all elements of the funding, including from individual schools. Secondary schools could choose to use their funding to buy into the primary strategic EBSA support service arrangements and any secondary school wishing to do this needed to declare their intention by end of June 2021.

Ian Pearson concluded that he had been delegated authority to agree how the funding should be deployed and therefore he had written to the HFG to confirm what had been agreed after consultation with both school phases.

Mar21-Ac6, Resourced Schools – Funding bands for children with physical disabilities:  
Ian Pearson reported that benchmarking data would be sought from the south east regional group of local authorities regarding funding levels of physical disabilities (PD) and presented to a meeting of the HFG in the autumn 2021.

**RESOLVED that** an item on benchmarking data on funding levels PD to be added to the forward plan for the HFG in October 2021.

### 18 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

### 19 **Membership**

Jessica Bailiss reported that there was still a maintained secondary governor vacancy on the Forum. An election had been held however no nominations had come forward. A further election would take place later in the summer. No Forum Members were near reaching the end of their Term of Office.

### 20 **School Balances 2020/21 (Melanie Ellis)**

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 7), which set out for information purposes the year end balances for all maintained schools, highlighting those schools with a deficit or significant surplus.

Melanie Ellis reported that the schools' account for 2021/21 had now been closed and the closing balance for each school determined. The school balances at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 totalled £7.85m, an increase of £2.54m from 2019/20.

Table three on page 16 of the report summarised the main school balances. Primary school balances had increased by £839k to £2,917k. This represented five percent of the

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main school funding. Melanie Ellis added that 39 primary schools had seen an increase in balances and 14 had seen a decrease. A breakdown per school was detailed in Appendix A to the report.

Melanie Ellis highlighted that there was a further more detailed report on the financial impact of Covid later on the agenda however, section 4.5 of the report detailed that Covid-19 had obviously had a significant impact on schools, both operationally and financially. Schools had received over £1.2m in grant funding related to Covid-19 from the DfE, £775k of which was the Covid-19 Catch Up Premium. For many schools the majority of the planned expenditure for this grant was in 2021/22, thereby increasing their carry forward balances.

Table four on page 17 of the report provided detailed on the schools with significant surpluses and balances in excess of 10% of their funding in 2020/21.

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

### 21 Financial Impact of Covid on Schools (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 8) that outlined the financial impact of Covid on schools during 2020/21. The report also aimed to explore if any bids to the Primary Schools in Financial Difficulty would be supported.

Melanie Ellis reported that all schools had been written to and asked for statements detailing the impacts faced as a result of Covid both positive and negative.

Melanie Ellis drew attention to 5.1 of the report, which provided detail on primary schools. Overall the unbudgeted costs and lost income were more than offset by cost savings and additional funding received. These were set out in detail under section 5.1 of the report.

The biggest impact from Covid could be seen under section 5.2 of the report for out of hours clubs with a loss of about £492k across maintained primary schools.

The three maintained secondary schools and iCollege had reported a saving as a result of Covid and detail on this could be found under section six of the report. Nursery schools had lost income overall as a result of Covid as detailed in section seven of the report.

Melanie Ellis stated that the report had been to the HFG and would return to the next cycle of meetings once further statements were received from schools.

**RESOLVED that**

- A further item on the financial impact of Covid on schools be added to the forward plan for July 2021.
- The Schools' Forum noted the report.

### 22 DSG Outturn (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the item (Agenda Item 9), which aimed to report on the outturn of the services funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), highlighting any under or over spends, and to highlight the cumulative deficit at 31 March 2021.

Melanie Ellis drew attention to section 4.3 of the report, which detailed that there was a cumulative deficit of £1.6m. Positively the 2020/21 outturn position had reduced the cumulative deficit position to £1.46m, due to an in-year underspend of £147k. It was positive that the overall deficit had not increased. Melanie Ellis however, explained that the situation was different across each of the blocks.

- Schools Block – had an increased surplus due to the large amount held in the Growth Fund. A decision had been taken not to increase this fund further and instead to allocate funding back out to schools. There were commitments against

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the Growth Fund for the opening of the new school Highwood Copse and therefore the balance for this fund would begin to decrease over time.

- Early Years Block – there was a cumulative deficit in this block however, there was a deficit recovery plan in place over a five year period.
- Central Schools Services Block – there was a small deficit however, this would be addressed when budget setting for 2022/23.
- High Needs Block – this was the block with the largest deficit. The cumulative deficit at the 31st March 2021 stood at £2.3m, which was significantly lower than anticipated. There was a planned deficit that would need to be added to this amount for 2021/22 and by March 2022 it was expected that the deficit position would be £3.6m.

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

### 23 Schools: Deficit Recovery (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the item (Agenda Item 10), which reported on the outturn position of the four schools that set a deficit budget in 2020/21, and also on schools closing 2020/21 with an unlicensed deficit.

Melanie Ellis reported that four schools had a Main School Budget (MSB) licensed deficit in 2020/21, totally £98.4k. Two schools had ended the financial year 2020/21 with an unlicensed deficit and further detail was included under section six of the report.

Melanie Ellis reported that the four schools with MSB licensed deficit had worked very successfully to reduce the deficit. The deficit had been licensed at £98.4k and the final outturn was only £11.9k, which was very positive and an improvement of £86k.

The two schools with unlicensed deficits had originally planned to have a surplus of £21k between them however, had ended with the closing deficit of £44k. Both schools had fallen into deficit due to the impact of Covid, particularly as a result of the impact on out of hours provision.

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

### 24 Vulnerable Children's Fund - Annual Report for 2020/21 (Michelle Sancho)

Michelle Sancho introduced the report (Agenda Item 11), which aimed to provide a review of the Vulnerable Children's Fund (VCF) 2020/21.

Michelle Sancho stated that the report provided details on the original £50k assigned to the VCF and not on the additional £75k of funding included as part of the invest to save approach, which would be reported on as part of a broader report being brought to the Forum in October 2021 on the invest to save projects and their impact.

Michelle Sancho reported that the VCF had been operating for a number of years and was a relatively small fund. It was traditionally used to assist schools that were facing additional financial pressures as a result of in-year admissions or where children's needs had dramatically increased (e.g. due to a new medical condition or a crises at home).

The period reported on covered three national lockdowns as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In total 56 children had benefitted from the VCF during 2020-21 and most applications were received from primary schools. As with most previous years, most applications (84%) requested funds to support through use of a Teaching Assistant (TA) and 16% required funds to buy equipment for pupils.

Michelle Sancho reported that 81% of those schools that had accessed the VCF had said reported that those children they had received the funding for had made progress as a

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result. 54% of responses had indicated that staff were still worried about the pupil's needs and amount of progress, largely as a result of the pandemic and lockdowns.

Michelle Sancho concluded that the relatively small fund seemed to be well received by schools and feedback from schools that had accessed it was very positive.

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

### **25 Forward Plan**

The Schools' Forum noted the forward plan.

### **26 Date of the next meeting**

*(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 5.32 pm)*

**CHAIR** .....

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