

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 11 DECEMBER 2017

Present: Reverend Mark Bennet, Jonathon Chishick, Catie Colston, Jacquie Davies, Chris Davis, Councillor Lynne Doherty, Antony Gallagher, Louise Griffiths (In place on Suzanne Taylor), Keith Harvey, Reverend Mary Harwood, Angela Hay, Jon Hewitt, Brian Jenkins, Patrick Mitchell, Julia Mortimore (In place of Lucy Hillyard), Helen Newman, David Ramsden, Graham Spellman (Vice-Chairman), Bruce Steiner (Chairman) and Keith Watts

Also Present: Gabrielle Esplin (Finance Manager (Capital and Treasury Management)), Ian Pearson (Head of Education Service), Jane Seymour (Service Manager, SEN & Disabled Children's Team), Andy Walker (Head of Finance), Claire White (Finance Manager (Schools)) and 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, Lucy Hillyard, Councillor Mollie Lock, Suzanne Taylor and Charlotte Wilson

PART I

42 Minutes of previous meeting dated 30th October 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on the 30th October were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

43 Actions arising from previous meetings

There were no outstanding actions from previous meetings.

44 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

45 Membership

The Chairman announced that he had received a letter of notification from Paul Dick, stating that he would be resigning from the Schools' Forum from January 2018 when he was due to retire from his role of Headteacher at the Kennet Secondary School. The Chairman stated that Paul Dick had been a Member of the West Berkshire Schools' Forum since its inception and he thanked Paul Dick for his involvement and commitment. A replacement for Paul Dick would be found for the Schools' Forum in due course.

46 Draft DSG Funding & Budget 2018/19 (Claire White)

Claire White introduced the report (Item 6), which set out the overall calculation of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in 2018/19, and the current position for each of the funding blocks. The Central Schools Services Block was a new block for 2018/18. This and the way funding for the Schools Block and high needs Block was calculated, had significantly changed in 2018/19 following two consultations carried out by Government over the last two years.

The actual allocations for 2018/19 would be announced by the Government mid December 2017. The Early Years and High Need funding allocations would be provisional, and the budgets for these blocks would need to be set using estimates.

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Claire White drew attention to Table 1 under section four, which summarised for 2017/18 and 2018/19 the estimated DSG funding to be received for each funding block and the estimated expenditure.

The Schools' Block was based on 2016 pupil numbers. If the number of pupils remained relatively similar then there would be a small amount of headroom. It was currently unknown how changes in pupil characteristics would impact upon the headroom. Claire White stated that the census figures should be available imminently and this would have an impact on what funding each school would receive.

Claire White moved on to talk about the Central Schools Services Block in more detail and stated that it was possible that funding could be moved from the Early Years and High Needs Blocks into the Central Schools Services Block to meet the shortfall in this block.

Reverend Mark Bennett noted that West Berkshire was a small Local Authority and questioned if partnership working with other similar authorities was an option that had been explored. Ian Pearson stated that the Local Authority was always looking to drive efficiencies. Conversations had taken place with other authorities regarding shared services and this was happening across other services within the Local Authority. Sometimes these arrangements worked well, but it was worth noting that partner agencies often suffered from each other's funding pressures.

Claire White reported that the funding rates for the early years block had now been published and would remain the same. The Local Authority had argued that the area cost adjustment was unfair and as a result had secured a meeting with the Department for Education on the 15th January 2018. It was unlikely that anything would change for 2018/19 however, a review could take place for 2019/20.

Claire White moved on to the talk about the Early Years Block and reported that the deficit for the block had been carried forward to 2017/18 and was due to be repaid over a three year period. It was hoped that the indicative funding rates given to providers earlier in 2017 for 2018/19 could be honoured, but this would need to be reviewed in light of the current year expenditure compared to forecast funding, in order to keep the deficit under control.

Louise Griffiths referred to paragraph 6.7 of the report and stated that early years settings were often unable to access some of the statutory services. Claire White confirmed that only services early years settings could benefit from, would be taken into account in any transfer of funding to the central block. Claire White confirmed that more would be known in January 2018.

Claire White moved onto the High Needs Block. A new formula for allocating high needs funding to local authorities was being used in 2018/19. Under this formula West Berkshire would receive less than the current High Needs Block Allocation however, the Department for Education had ensured that all authorities would gain a minimum of 0.5% over their baseline.

Paragraph 8.5 showed how the funding was calculated for the block. The deficit was still higher than had been hoped, as demand in the high needs area continued to grow.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

47 Final School Formula Proposal 2018/19 (Claire White)

Claire White introduced her report (Item 7), which set out the results from the consultation with schools on the proposed primary and secondary school funding formula for 2018/19 and also set out the final recommendation.

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Claire White moved to section 4.4 of the report, which detailed the consultation responses. Although there were a number of emails and telephone calls to clarify or discuss how certain elements of the formula worked, or to stress the impact on individual schools, there were only four formal responses to the consultation. These were from Winchcombe, Brimpton, Kennet and John O'Gaunt. Section 4.4 of the report included the main points raised as part of the consultation, either formally or informally.

The first point was raised by Brightwalton, which had an issue on the application of the sparsity factor for their school. Claire White explained that if the nearest school was more than two miles away then the sparsity factor was payable. Brightwalton's nearest school on which the distance criteria was based, was Chaddleworth (1.8 miles) however, Brightwalton had declared that no pupils were taught on the site and all the pupils attended the school at Shefford. Claire White reported that she had made an application to the Secretary of State (SoS) for Education to see if the regulations could be dis-applied in this instance and the SoS had agreed that in this instance the regulations could be lifted as there were exceptional circumstances, but subject to Schools' Forum agreement.

Reverend Mary Harwood reported to the Schools' Forum that there were occasions when children attended the school at Chaddleworth. Children were dropped off at the school at Chaddleworth and then taken to the school at Shefford by minibus. If the school at Brightwalton was closed for any reason then children would be sent to Chaddleworth. Claire White clarified therefore that if Brightwalton was not accessible for any reason, then children could be accounted for at Chaddleworth. Mary Harwood confirmed that this was correct and although children were not always taught at Chaddleworth, it was open and children were registered there.

Ian Pearson summarised that Brightwalton had made a case to receive the extra sparsity funding, on the basis that it was more than two miles from its closest school. However this only applied if this closest school was Shefford School. Mary Harwood had declared that Chaddleworth was still open and operating and if this was the case then Brightwalton should not receive the sparsity funding. David Ramsden concurred that if Brightwalton did not meet the criteria then it should not receive the funding.

The Chairman asked the Schools' Forum to vote on whether the sparsity funding should be given to Brightwalton School based on the case they had submitted as part of the consultation, taking into account what had been stated by Reverend Mary Harwood. At the vote the notion not to award Brightwalton School the sparsity funding was carried. The reason for this was that Brightwalton's closest school was Chaddleworth School, which was less than two miles away.

Claire White referred back to section 4.4 of the report which outlined the additional points raised as part of the consultation. The second points concerned, how long the minimum funding guarantee would last into the future, and how reliant schools could be on this element of the funding in their future planning. The third point raised was concern regarding the impact of the lowering of the lump sum on small schools, and Claire White stated that she would come back to this point as there was a proposal that required consideration.

Moving on, Claire White reported that the fourth comment raised as part of the consultation concerned the statement given by Nick Gibb that 'every school would see an increase in funding through the formula from 2018' and this was clearly not the case for some West Berkshire Schools. This was down to the lack of understanding that the national funding formula was a method of allocating funds to local authorities and in reality could not be replicated.

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The final point raised was that West Berkshire should continue to lobby the Government for increased funding in order to enhance, or as a minimum maintain education standards.

Claire White stated that since the consultation, there had been two further pieces of information from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Firstly there was now no requirement to apply to the SoS for Education to set a minimum funding guarantee of between 0% and 0.5%. This could be agreed locally and so was now a firm recommendation for the West Berkshire formula rather than it being subject to approval.

Secondly Claire White reported that the sparsity factor calculation used in the National Funding Formula (NFF) was not the same as the calculation allowed in the school finance regulations (SFR). It had been assumed that the SFR would be updated. If there was support for the use of the NFF, then an application would have to be made to the SoS. The SFR calculations applied a taper to the funding according to the number of pupils in a school, whereas the NFF calculation used a weighting according to the year group size. Small schools qualifying for sparsity received more funding by applying the NFF methodology (a difference of about £68k overall). The Heads Funding Group had been of the view that as schools had not previously received sparsity funding (as this was new funding), it could be at a reduced level in the first year by applying the SFR rather than the NFF calculations.

Ian Pearson clarified that in this particular case, if the NFF calculation was used then a larger sum of money would be given to schools which qualified for sparsity funding. Keith Watts noted that this seemed like a plan by the Government to close small schools, but with the understanding that it was not viable to close all small schools. Claire White confirmed that six schools in total qualified for the sparsity funding.

The Chairman asked the Schools' Forum to vote on whether to agree the first three recommendations under section 2.1 of the report collectively:

- Use of the National Funding Formula (NFF) rates for every formula factor, applying a funding cap on gains of 3% per pupil.
- Apply a minimum funding guarantee of 0% but up to the maximum allowable of 0.5% according to the amount affordable based on the final funding allocation.
- If required after the above had been applied, scale every formula factor upwards or downwards in order to match the final funding allocation available for distribution to schools.

Chris Davis proposed that the Schools' Forum agree the first three recommendations (set out above) and this was seconded by Catie Colston. At the vote the motion was carried.

The Chairman asked the Schools Forum to vote on whether to agree the fifth recommendation set out under section 2.1 of the report:

- Use the School Finance Regulations calculation of the sparsity factor, rather than the NFF calculation.

It was proposed by Chris Davis that the Schools' Forum agree the fifth recommendation (set out above) and this was seconded by Jonathan Chischick. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Schools Forum agreed the recommendations set out under 2.1 of the report (detailed above) apart from the recommendation detailed under bullet point five (detailed below).

RESOLVED that the Schools Forum did not approve the recommendation:

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- An application to be made to the Secretary of State for Education to dis-apply the financial regulations in order to change the distance of the next nearest school for Brightwalton in the application of the sparsity factor.

48 **Criteria and Budgets for Additional Funds 2018/19 (Claire White)**

Claire White introduced the report (Item 8), which set out proposals for approval of the proposed criteria and budgets for additional funds for 2018/19. Claire White reported that the report had not changed since it was last viewed by the Schools' Forum in October 2017. The only comments received as part of the consultation were in agreement with recommendation two concerning widening the criteria for primary schools in financial difficulty. Recommendations were set out on page 41 of the report.

The Chairman invited Members of the Schools' Forum to vote on whether to agree the recommendations set out under section 2.1 of the report:

- Removal of the Falling Rolls Fund from 2018/19.
- Widening of the criteria for primary schools in financial difficulty to enable schools currently not in deficit to apply for funding towards meeting restructuring costs that were required to avoid a deficit.
- A small amendment to the wording of the growth fund criteria to clarify that funding for an increase to the pupil admission number can only be if this increase was in response to basic need.

Patrick Mitchell proposed that the Schools' Forum agree the recommendations outlined above and this was seconded by Keith Harvey. At the vote this motion was carried.

It was agreed that recommendations under section 2.2 should be separated out so that only primary schools considered approval of the Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund.

The Chairman invited Members of the Forum to vote on whether to approve the following budgets:

- The Growth Fund (£205,000), and;
- Schools with disproportionate Number of High Needs Pupils (£100,000)

David Ramsden proposed that the Schools' Forum approve the budgets outlined above and this was seconded by Chris Davis. At the vote the motion was carried.

The Chairman invited Primary School Members of the Forum to vote on whether to approve the following budget:

- Schools in Financial Difficulty (£9.64 per pupil (approximately £120,000))

Keith Harvey proposed that the Schools' Forum approve the budget outlined above and this was seconded by Anthony Gallagher. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the budgets detailed under sections 2.1 and 2.2 of the report were approved by the Schools' Forum.

49 **De-delegation Proposals 2018/19 (Gabrielle Esplin)**

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Item 9) regarding de-delegation proposals for 2018/19. This report had been discussed by the Schools' Forum in October 2017, where various de-delegations had been considered.

Recommendations were contained under sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 of the report. No counter proposals had been received as part of the consultation with schools.

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Ian Pearson clarified that the last bullet under section 2.1 and 2.2 (Statutory and Regulatory Duties Option 2) referred to schools de-delegating Health and Safety Level One services, or the core provision. It had been expressed at previous meetings that schools should be given the option to sign up to Level Two services at an extra cost.

Gabrielle Esplin stated that the recommendation under section 2.3 would only need to be considered by representatives of maintained special schools, nursery schools and PRUs.

The Chairman invited representatives of maintained primary schools to vote on whether to agree the de-delegation of fund for the following services:

- Behaviour Support Services
- Ethnic Minority Support
- Trade Union Representation
- Schools in Financial Difficulty
- CLEAPSS
- and Statutory and Regulatory Duties Option 2

Chris Davis proposed that maintained primary school representatives agree the de-delegation of funds for the services outlined above. This was seconded by Keith Harvey. At the vote this notion was carried.

The Chairman invited representatives of maintained secondary schools to vote on whether to agree the de-delegation of funds for the following services:

- Behaviour Support Services
- Ethnic Minority Support
- Trade Union Representation
- Schools in Financial Difficulty
- CLEAPSS
- and Statutory and Regulatory Duties Option 2

David Ramsden proposed that maintained secondary school representatives agree the de-delegation of funds for the services outlined above. This was seconded by Helen Newman. At the vote this notion was carried.

The Chairman invited representatives of maintained special, nursery schools and PRUs to vote on whether to agree the de-delegation of funds in the 2018/19 financial year for Statutory and Regulatory Duties Option 2. Jon Hewitt proposed that maintained special, nursery schools and PRU representatives agree the de-delegation of funds as outlined above. This was seconded Jacquie Davis. At the vote this notion was carried.

RESOLVED that the recommendations set out in sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 were agreed by the relevant Schools' Forum Members.

50 Draft High Needs Budget 2018/19 (Jane Seymour)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Item 10), which set out the current financial position of the High Needs Block Budget (HNBB) for 2017/18 and the position known so far for 2018/19. The report also explored options in order to make savings and balance the budget in 2018/19.

Ian Pearson referred to the table on page 85 of the report, which illustrated the pressure that the HNBB was under. The overspend for 2017/18 had been anticipated to be

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£490,640, however, the current forecast was approximately £10k (£500,750) in excess of this. Any over overspend at year end would need to be met from the 2018/19 grant.

To tackle the deficit in the HNBB, the Schools' Forum had chosen to take a longer time view. Sudden large cuts could have had a detrimental impact upon the needs of pupils and therefore the decision to manage the budget over time had been preferred.

Ian Pearson reported that the estimated deficit for the HNBB was anticipated to rise to £670,980 in 2018/19, which was a growth of about £170k on the 2017/18 figure. The Heads' Funding Group (HFG) had concluded that it was not realistic or desirable to attempt to save the full shortfall in 2018/19, and to do so might be making unnecessary severe cuts, given that a large proportion of the shortfalls was made up of carried forward overspend.

Ian Pearson added that an option discussed at the HFG had been to cover of the growth in deficit of £170k, which was explained in more detail under paragraph 5.2. As the result of discussion the HFG recommended that the savings of £220k should be identified, which represented the portion of the shortfall, which related to the ongoing costs plus 10% of the remainder. Ian Pearson explained that this was currently only a figure and there were not yet any preferences with regard to which areas should be considered for savings. This would be taken as an item for consideration at the next HFG and Schools' Forum meetings.

Reverend Mark Bennett pleaded with Officers to be careful with language used when writing reports (particularly in reference to paragraph 3.2). He understood that the reports were financial in context however, more neutral language was required when referring to the needs of young people and their families, particularly when comparing to the national picture and the level of Statements /EHC Plans.

Keith Harvey noted from the report that other local authorities were in a similar position concerning pressures on HNBB. He had viewed the paperwork of other Schools' Forums and had struggled to find an example where there was not a HNBB deficit. Keith Harvey asked Officers if there had been any comment from Government on the problem being faced nationally. Ian Pearson stated that there was no doubt that the issue was at the top of local authorities' agendas. The issue had largely occurred as the result of two factors. Firstly the introduction of the SEND reform, which had with little warning, given local authorities responsibility for children aged up to 25. The funding provided for this change did not align to the spending required to meet need. The second factor that had contributed to the deficit was planned places, in that the number of children requiring places exceeded the number of places available. Funding for places did not increase year on year, which placed pressure on the system. Ian Pearson stated that these issues collectively eroded the ability to spend. There was also a growing number of children with needs for example, those who were on the Autistic Spectrum. Mental health needs were also increasing. The Government was aware of these issues but had not yet put anything in place to help address them.

Claire White reported that the annual Section 251 statistical return collected information overall for the DSG and not broken down by funding blocks. Generally information gathering took place by each local authority and Claire White stated that all local authorities in the south east seemed to have a deficit in their HNBB.

Keith Watts queried what would happen if deficit were allowed to keep on increasing. Claire White reported that other local authorities had made transfers from other blocks, in particular the schools block and this was why they could not go straight on to using the National Funding Formula (NFF). All areas were working hard to resolve the issue.

David Ramsden stressed the Heads' Funding Group and Schools' Forum had put in a lot of hard work to ensure cuts were made as far as possible without shutting the high needs

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area down. The next discussion that needed to take place was regarding what could be cut further in the HNBB.

The Chairman invited Members to consider whether they agreed that the amount of £220k should be the amount covered off from the HNBB. David Ramsden proposed that the Schools' Forum agree with the recommendation from the HFG that £220k should be identified as a saving in the HNBB. This was seconded by Anthony Gallagher.

RESOLVED that:

- The Schools' Forum agreed that the saving of £220k should be identified within the HNBB.
- A report be brought back the next meetings of the HFG and Schools' Forum, which sets out options for where savings could be made.

51 iCollege - Review of Places and Accommodation (Jacquie Davies)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Item 11), which aimed to update Members of the group on the establishment of the iCollege and the current situation and proposals for the future. Ian Pearson clarified that the report considered pupil places and accommodation.

The re-organisation of the service had reduced the number of sites from six down to four, which had reduced costs and the number of places available. There were now 66 places in total.

An issue had arisen which was detailed under sections 4.2 and 4.3 of the report. Ian Pearson explained that when the number of places was reduced to 66 it was anticipated that these places would be filled by children out of mainstream provision and not children with SEND or/and EHC. However, it had become apparent that iCollege was suitable for SEND/EHC children, partially due to a gap in specialist support for these children locally, as a number of settings had closed or failed Ofsted inspections. As a result places at iCollege had filled very quickly. The proposal to remediate the problem was to create six additional places, which would increase the overall number of places at iCollege to 72 and increase access to mainstream pupils.

Ian Pearson reported that the other sections of the report detailed issues with the iCollege sites. One of the iCollege sites was located in temporary buildings (Badgers Hill, Calcot), which were old and no longer fit for purpose and therefore needed to be removed and rebuilt. An options appraisal had been conducted and the conclusion was that the provision should be rebuilt on the existing site. Funding for this was already in the capital budget.

Updates on that proposal had been considered by the Heads' Funding Group and was for the Schools' Forum's for information only as it formed an important part of the High Needs Block. Further information would be brought back to future meetings of the Schools' Forum in due course.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

52 iCollege - Alternative Education Charging Options (Michelle Sancho)

Michelle Sancho introduced her report (Item 12), which set out iCollege charging options for 2018/19.

Paragraph 3.3 of the report summarised the current position, which was that the High Needs Block Budget (HNBB) heavily subsidised the top up payable for placements made by schools. A further element of the HNBB savings strategy was that schools would become responsible for the full cost of the places they commissioned. The HNBB would therefore pay just for permanent exclusions and sixth form places. The original plan had

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been that this would be implemented from September 2017 however, when the HNBB was set this was pushed back until April 2018.

An alternative proposal was for a new charging mechanism to be put in place from April 2018 for the full financial year. The Heads' Funding Group (HFG) proposed that the following options (contained under paragraph 4.1 of the report) be considered by the Schools' Forum:

- 1) Continue with the current method, whereby schools paid a fixed sum for each placement up to a maximum ceiling.
- 2) Continue with the original proposal, whereby schools paid in full for their placements.
- 3) The High Needs Block subsidises school places by an agreed percentage (illustrated with 50%).

Michelle Sancho reported that Option 1 was not an affordable option. The Local Authority favoured option 3, as this incentivised schools to keep costs and length of placements as low as possible. The amount that the HNBB would subsidise this option was yet to be decided. A sliding scale had been discussed at the HFG. Appendix A modelled a subsidy of 50% and this would cost the HNBB £820k, which means another £200k of savings would need to be found.

The Chairman asked for clarification from Officers. There were three options to consider however, the percentage for Option 3 was undecided. The Chairman felt that it would be difficult to ask the Schools' Forum to consider voting for an option, where there were no confirmed figures.

David Ramsden referred back to original discussions regarding iCollege charging, which was originally supposed to fall to schools. However some schools had been surprised by this approach and therefore the Heads Working Group formed to review iCollege had met to see if this could be adjusted. David Ramsden was of the view that the High Needs Block could not take on the full subsidy and therefore Option 1 was out of the question. Some smaller schools would also be unable to cover the cost if they had a larger number of pupils requiring the service. If the cost to schools was too great then this could lead to an increase in permanent exclusions.

The Chairman stated that option three must be considered as an in-between option that was yet to be defined. He asked what the process would be if Option 3 was approved. Claire White clarified that if 25% was applied then this would bring spending down by £200k. Option 3 could be modelled over time as follows: 50% in year one; 25% in year two and 0% in year three, when the full cost would have to be met by schools. The Chairman stated that if Option 3 was approved then it would have to be done so on the basis that it would require further modelling work by Officers, with a definitive figure brought back to the Schools' Forum for agreement.

Keith Harvey stated as Headteacher of a primary school that 25% would consume 2% of his budget and this could be 5% for smaller schools. Chris Davis stated that the figure did not link to the size of the school but how many pupils it had using the iCollege service.

Ian Pearson reiterated the options for consideration and confirmed that if Option 3 was approved then this would require an Officer to provide a menu of different options for the Schools' Forum to consider and agree. David Ramsden stated that a consensus needed to be sought from all Headteachers regarding how much they were willing to pay for iCollege services. Ian Pearson stated that a majority might have to be considered rather than all Headteachers and it was important to note that members of the Schools' Forum represented their relative groups.

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Graham Spellman asked for clarification on if the Schools' Forum agreed the 50% rate if a further £200k would need to be found within the High Needs Block. Ian Pearson stated this was correct unless agreement was reached to carry forward a high deficit. David Ramsden was of the view from discussions that had taken place at the HFG, that 50% was not affordable.

The Chairman invited members of the Schools' Forum to vote. If Option 3 was agreed then it would be carried on the basis that more work was required. At the vote Option 3 was carried.

John Chishick suggested that the iCollege charging options should be dealt with in the context of the High Need Block Budget deficit.

RESOLVED that it was agreed by the Schools Forum that the High Needs Block subsidises school places by an agreed percentage (Option 3), subject to further modelling work being carried out by Officers.

53 Update on Schools in Financial Difficulty (Claire White)

Claire White introduced the report (Item 13), which provided an update from the schools that had set a deficit budget in 2018/19.

All of the schools in deficit had received a support meeting which had taken place between September and early November. The meetings had been attended by the Headteacher, school business manager, the Chair of Governors and/or the Chair of Finance and then from the Local Authority, the School Finance Manager, the senior or school accountant and a peer Headteacher. Claire White commented that it had been particularly useful to have a peer Headteacher present.

Claire White stated that although the process was time consuming it was extremely useful. Workshops would have been an alternative way to carry out the process however, it would have been much harder for schools to apply the information to their own circumstances. Claire White reported that schools in deficit would be re-visited in the spring term of 2018 to consider their budgets for 2018/19. All other schools had been encouraged to review their positions. Claire White reported that so far only 10 schools had requested a support meeting. Details on the questions these schools were asked in assessing their position were included under section five of the report.

Claire White highlighted that the report contained the reports provided by each school. Each school had been given a RAG rating, which had been determined by the West Berkshire team in its assessment on how likely the school was to recover the deficit as per the school's plan, set at the beginning of this financial year.

Chris Davis noted that Beenham was rated as 'amber' however, in 2020/22 it was anticipated that the school would be back in deficit. Claire White reported that at the next meeting with the school in the spring term, the aim would be to check that the school had put firm plans in place to help avoid this happening.

Keith Watts was concerned that some schools seemed to have gone into deficit when they had opted to have one Headteacher between two schools. He was concerned that some schools might see this as an option to cut costs when in reality it made the situation worse. Keith Watt raised a second concern in reference to Kintbury School recruiting teachers based on a salary scale and he did not feel that this was credible. Finally Keith Watts asked what challenge there was for schools were using support staff to cover for teachers.

Claire White responded that the federated schools she had visited were in deficit for a number of different reasons and not because they had chosen to become federated. Financial problems were mainly as a result of poor financial management or because

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pupils numbers had reduced quicker than a school was able to plan for. With regards to recruiting teachers on lower salary scales to make savings, Claire White reported that schools needed a plan in place to remodel staffing structures, and recruiting on a lower salary scale was an additional “fortuitous” saving. Finally in relations to Keith Watts question about support staff covering for teachers, Claire White reported that this was mainly in relation to HLTAs rather than TAs.

RESOLVED that the Schools’ Forum noted the report.

54 Schools Funding Benchmarking Information (Claire White)

Claire White introduced the report (Item 14), which set out the key school benchmarking information for 2017/18 in a chart/graph format and highlighted any significant points to note regarding West Berkshire’s position compared to its statistical neighbour authorities and all other unitary authorities.

Claire White reported that the report was submitted to the Schools’ Forum on an annual basis. The information showed that West Berkshire’s position was similar to the previous year however, this was expected to change with the introduction of the National Funding Formula.

According to the chart under Appendix G, some local authorities still had a much lower spend on children with high needs in 2017/18. The final two graphs under appendices I and J showed funding versus attainment. West Berkshire received lower than average funding however achieved higher than average attainment.

RESOLVED that the Schools’ Forum noted the report.

55 DSG Monitoring 2017/18 Month 7 (Ian Pearson)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Item 15), which came to each Schools’ Forum meeting and set out the current financial position of the services funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and highlighted any under or over spends.

Section five of the report detailed information on the Schools’ Block, where the current spend forecast for the Schools Block DSG was in excess of £64 million. The net position was £27,210, which was considered reasonable.

The net position for the Early Years Block was just under £300k. This was an area that was very difficult to predict.

Section seven of the report set out the current position of the High Needs Block and showed the small forecasted overspend of £10k.

It was possible that further variances might arise by the spring term on the budgets for high needs top ups, early years payments and early years funding.

RESOLVED that the Schools’ Forum noted the report.

56 Forward Plan

RESOLVED that the Schools’ Forum noted the forward plan.

57 Any Other Business

Claire White reported that a team had been formed by ESFA with the aim of scrutinising each local authority’s Schools’ Forum. In particular they would be checking that all information was up to date on websites and Forums were adhering to regulations and voting rules. A total of 75 local authorities had been scrutinised so far as part of the process, so it was anticipated that West Berkshire would be contacted soon, unless it

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had passed all scrutiny checks. A questionnaire would be sent out to School Forum Clerks in the near future as part of the piece of work.

58 Date of the next meeting

The next meeting would take place on Monday 22nd January 2017, 5pm at Shaw House.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 6.45 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature