

# **SCHOOLS FORUM**

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2018**

**Present:** Reverend Mark Bennet, Jonathon Chishick, Catie Colston, Jacquie Davies, Lynne Doherty, Antony Gallagher, Keith Harvey, Angela Hay, Jon Hewitt, Brian Jenkins, Hilary Latimer, Mollie Lock, Patrick Mitchell, Chris Prosser, David Ramsden, Bruce Steiner (Chairman), Suzanne Taylor, Charlotte Wilson and Iain Wolloff (Substitute) (In place of Ben Broyd)

**Also Present:** Melanie Ellis (Chief Accountant), Amin Hussain (Schools Finance Manager), Ian Pearson (Head of Education Service), Jane Seymour (Service Manager, SEN & Disabled Children's Team) and Annette Yellen (Accountant for Schools Funding and the DSG) and Jessica Bailiss (Policy Officer (Executive Support))

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Ben Broyd, Councillor Anthony Chadley, Alan Henderson, Lucy Hillyard, Michelle Sancho and Graham Spellman

### **PART I**

#### **31 Minutes of previous meeting dated 15th October 2018**

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2018 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **32 Actions arising from previous meetings**

The Schools' Forum received an update regarding actions recorded during the previous meeting. Actions had been completed and could therefore be removed from the list of actions arising for the previous meeting. Action 2 regarding the Secondary Governor vacancy on the Schools' Forum was ongoing.

#### **33 Declarations of Interest**

Iain Wolloff declared an interest in Agenda Item 6, and reported that, as his interest was a disclosable pecuniary interest or an other registrable interest, he would be leaving the meeting during the course of consideration of the matter.

#### **34 Membership**

Jessica Bailiss gave the following updates regarding Membership for the Schools' Forum:

- Angela Hayes' Term of Office would cease at the end of December 2018 and consultation was taking place through the Primary Headteacher Executive Group to find a replacement representative.
- Keith Harvey and Antony Gallagher's term of office would come to an end in January 2019 and they were consulting with the relevant forum.
- There was still a Secondary Governor Representative vacancy. Expressions of interest had been sought however, no interest was shown and therefore consultation with Governors would continue.
- Regarding the Primary Governor Representative vacancy, an election had been coordinated (and the deadline extended) however, no nominations had been received. The election process would run again early in the New Year.

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- Regarding the Academy Governor Representative vacancy, an election was underway and nominations had been received. This is not normally something the Local Authority would undertake on behalf of the academies however, there was more than one Governor interested in the position and therefore an election process was required. The result of the election would be announced on the 13<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

### 35 Final Additional Funding Criteria 2019/20 (Amin Hussain)

*Iain Wolloff declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6 by virtue of the fact that he was the Principal at Newbury College, which was the Sponsor for the new school being built as part of the Sandleford development. As his interest was a disclosable pecuniary interest, he 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.)*

*(Iain Wolloff left the meeting at 5.15pm)*

Ian Pearson introduced the report which set out for approval the proposed criteria and budgets for additional funds for 2019/20.

The Schools' Forum needed to consider the proposals under sections 2.1 and 2.2 of the report.

Ian Pearson drew attention to the first bullet point and Appendix A to the report, concerning Growth Fund Criteria for 2019/20. There would be a new school opening in 2019 and two sums of money had already been agreed. Funding would include the actual cost of staff appointed and in post prior to the opening of the new school up to a maximum of £75k, plus a fixed one-off lump sum of £25k for all the purchases necessary before the school opened.

Regarding the diseconomies of scale, this provided financial top up for the new school. The new school would be sponsored by Newbury College however a decision needed to be taken concerning the number of years support funding would be provided through diseconomies of scale. The Department for Education (DfE) expected diseconomies of scale funding to be provided for a minimum of two years and therefore three years was being proposed. Ian Pearson drew attention to the XX under paragraph two of section 2.1 and stated that '3 years' should have been inserted into the report.

Ian Pearson moved on and drew attention to the second bullet point under section 2.1 concerning the Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund and explained that though various discussions at both the Heads' Funding Group and Schools' Forum an agreed position had been reached to cap the fund at £200k. Schools that had paid into the fund in 2018/19 would have access to the fund, however, because there was already a significant balance within the fund, no schools would be expected to contribute in 2019/20. This would allow the balance to decrease.

Ian Pearson drew attention to bullet point three under section 2.2 concerning approving the budget of £100k for schools with disproportionate numbers of high needs pupils. Local authorities could provide additional targeted support to individual schools from its High Needs Block (HNB) where it would be unreasonable to expect the first £6k of support for that schools high needs pupils to be met from the local authorities formula funding, due to an exceptional number of such pupils on its roll.

Jonathon Chishick noted that the agreed £100k had been spent within the current year and therefore asked if enough money was being allocated for this purpose and whether schools with higher than average numbers of children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) were being underfunded. It was questioned if data on children receiving Special Education Needs (SEN) Support had been studied, to see if some schools had more pupils.

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Ian Pearson reported that SEN support was a self-declared high level of support. If subsidies were to be provided for pupils in certain categories then this could cause a perverse incentive to place more pupils in categories. Ian Pearson confirmed that discussions around a central fund had not taken place. Regarding whether £100k was sufficient to support schools, Ian Pearson commented that it was too early to know. The Schools' Forum could decide to increase the amount allocated however, this would impact on funding elsewhere.

David Ramsden commented that if the criteria was widened then there would be a risk that many more children could be funded, which would be unaffordable.

Ian Pearson reported that on occasion a school might present a case that it had higher numbers of pupils with Special Education Needs or Disabilities (SEND) that fell below requirements for an EHCP. It was confirmed that there was data available on pupil numbers

Rev. Mark Bennet referred to the issue regarding falling rolls and asked if local demographic data was suggesting that there might be a falling rolls issue in the future. Rev. Mark Bennet suggested that it would be worth looking retrospectively at the data. Ian Pearson reported that the Schools' Forum had taken the view to remove funding support for this factor however, it was permissible to reinstate this funding. This required consideration going forward.

Catie Colton referred back to the diseconomies of scale issue and asked what the Schools' Forum's responsibilities were for a new school receiving this funding. Ian Pearson confirmed that the new school would operate as a 'free school', which followed the same rules and regulations as academies. Funding would flow from the Education, Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) directly to the school however, the Local Authority had to agree with the Schools' Forum how the local funding formula would address the needs of the new school. Funding for the school would not be sufficient to cover the cost of running the school and therefore agreement needed to be sought with Newbury College on threshold requirements and on how long additional support was required for.

The Chairman invited members of the Forum to vote on whether they agreed with the recommendations set out in sections 2.1 and 2.2 of the report. Jonathon Chishick proposed that the Schools' Forum support the recommendations and this was seconded by Keith Harvey. At the vote the motion was carried.

**RESOLVED that** the Schools' Forum agreed the recommendations set out in sections 2.1 and 2.2 of the report.

### 36 Final School Funding Formula Proposal 2019/20 (Amin Hussain)

*(Iain Wolloff re-joined the meeting at 5.30pm)*

Ian Pearson introduced the report which set out the result from the consultation with schools on the proposed primary and secondary school funding formula for 2019/20 and to make a final recommendation.

The report gave a summary of the consultation responses from schools. Only six of the 81 schools in West Berkshire had responded to the consultation. The Schools' Forum would need to take the final decision.

Ian Pearson drew attention to the three recommendations on the first page of the report. The first recommendation related to replicating the National Funding Formula (NFF) in West Berkshire. The second recommendation concerned the use of the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) to flex any reduced or additional funding as appropriate and scaling the factors according to affordability. The third recommendation recommended transferring 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block.

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The table on page 37 of the agenda pack showed Option 1, which included a -0.5% MFG and 3% cap on gains. The table on page 39 of the agenda pack showed Option 2, which included a 0% MFG and 2% cap on gains. The tables for each of the options showed the impact on each school. Option 2 ensured gains were kept to a minimum to ensure most schools did not lose funding as a result of the NFF.

Ian Pearson drew attention to the table on page 30 of the agenda pack which compared the impacts of Options 1 and 2 (Typographical error: Column two should be titled Option 2). The Heads' Funding Group had considered the information along with the six consultation responses and had reached the view that Option 2 was the preferred option.

Regarding the transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, this had been considered at length by the HFG and three had voted for transferring the funds and seven against. Of the six schools that had responded to the consultation 2 had given a view in favour of transferring the funding and four had been opposed.

Ian Pearson suggested that the Schools' Forum had the opportunity to discuss other items on the agenda which were linked to the transfer of funding prior to taking a decision. It was agreed that the decision would be taken after Item 16.

Rev. Mark Bennet was of the understanding that Option 1 would be aligned to the eventual formula figures for each school and he queried if this had been considered by the HFG. Ian Pearson reported that the HFG were fully aware of this point however, were also aware that Option 2 would offer protection to losing schools for a prolonged period of time. Keith Harvey concurred with this view.

Catie Colston asked what the latest information was saying regarding when there would be a move to the NFF. Ian Pearson explained that there were a range of reasons preventing a move to the NFF at the current time, including the other important Government business that was taking priority. A move to the NFF would be deferred for at least another year, potentially until 2020/21. Catie Colston noted that essentially there was some leeway until the NFF came into force.

The Chairman invited members of the Schools' Forum to vote on the recommendations. Patrick Mitchell proposed that the Schools' Forum use the NFF rates for every formula factor, applying a funding cap of gains and MFG as agreed at the meeting. This was seconded by Mark Bennet. At the vote the motion was carried.

David Ramsden proposed that that Option 2 be adopted which would include a 2% cap on gains and MFG of 0%. This was seconded by Chris Prosser. At the vote the motion was carried.

**RESOLVED** that the first two recommendations, were agreed as set out above. The third recommendation regarding a transfer of funds from the Schools' Block to the High Needs Block would be discussed and voted on after Item 16.

### ***(Discussion after Items 8 to 16 had been considered)***

The Chairman drew the Schools' Forum's attention back to the third bullet point regarding a decision required concerning the transfer of 0.5% of funding from the Schools' Block to the High Needs Block (HNB).

Rev. Mark Bennet referred to the Benchmarking report (Item 14) and felt that West Berkshire might compare well to other Local Authorities regarding spending within the HNB, because a lump sum of funding had already been transferred in recent years. Rev. Mark Bennet did not feel that a transfer of £490k would resolve the issue within the HNB.

Ian Pearson highlighted that issues within the HNB were not unique to West Berkshire and were being faced nationally. The Officer recommendation was to transfer the

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funding and if agreed the Schools' Forum would need to agree how the money was allocated.

Ian Pearson added that some local authorities had already transferred the funds and he was aware that both Kent and Reading Local Authorities had recently received agreement to transfer the funds from their Forums. Some other local authorities had carried out the transfer in 2018/19 however this had not been the case for West Berkshire.

Although the Officer recommendation was to approve the transfer. The Heads Funding Group had voted against (7 to 3) the transfer.

Patrick Mitchell stated that the Department for Education (DfE) had clear guidelines on what information should be provided to schools through the consultation and he was concerned that some of these guidelines had not been followed in West Berkshire. Therefore he did not feel that the correct procedure had been followed to consider a transfer. Ian Pearson commented that the guidelines set out that two separate consultation documents should be sent out to schools and in West Berkshire this had been merged into one document and not as much information had been provided as had been by Reading Local Authority.

Keith Harvey stated that he felt conflicted regarding the transfer. He acknowledged the points made by David Ramsden and Patrick Mitchell however, understood that it was a difficult position to be in.

David Ramsden stated that he fully supported the position to further lobby the Government. There were more complex social issues that needed consideration.

The Chairman invited members of the Schools' Forum to vote on whether they agree with Officer recommendation to approve the funding transfer. Jon Hewitt proposed that the Officer recommendation be approved and this was seconded by Angela Hayes. At the vote this motion was not carried.

**RESOLVED that** a transfer of 0.5% from the Schools' Block to the HNB was not approved.

### 37 Final De-delegations 2019/20 (Amin Hussain)

Amin Hussain introduced the report, which set out the details, cost and charges to schools of the services on which maintained schools' representatives were required to vote (on an annual basis) whether or not they should be de-delegated.

There were three categories that required a vote and these were set out under section 2 of the report.

Ian Pearson reported that there had been ongoing discussions about the Health and Safety Options and clarified that Option 1 related to an enhanced more expensive service and Option 2 included the core service and was what had been agreed by schools for the previous year.

It was suggested that a vote on Accountancy Options 1 and 2 take place after Item 15 (Schools: deficit recovery), which would be moved to next on the agenda.

The Chairman invited maintained schools to vote on the de-delegations proposals for 2019/20. It was clarified that the vote would exclude accountancy options and regarding Health and Safety Options, the proposal included Option 2 (cores service).

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### Maintained Primary Schools

Antony Gallagher proposed that maintained primary schools support the de-delegation of the following services and this was seconded by Hilary Latimer. At the vote the motion was carried.

- Behaviour Support Services
- Ethnic Minority Support
- Trade Union Representation
- Schools in Financial Difficulty
- CLEAPSS
- Statutory and Regulatory Duties comprising:
  - Internal Audit of schools
  - Administration of pensions for school staff
  - Health and Safety (Option 2)

### Maintained Secondary Schools

David Ramsden proposed that maintained secondary schools support the de-delegation of the following services and this was seconded by Chris Prosser. At the vote the motion was carried.

- Behaviour Support Services
- Ethnic Minority Support
- Trade Union Representation
- CLEAPSS
- Statutory and Regulatory Duties comprising:
  - Internal Audit of schools
  - Administration of pensions for school staff
  - Health and Safety (Option 2)

### Maintained Special, Nursery and PRU Schools

Jacque Davies proposed that maintained Special, Nursery and PRU Schools support the de-delegation of the following services and this was seconded by Suzanne Taylor. At the vote the motion was carried.

- Statutory and Regulatory Duties comprising:
  - Internal Audit of schools
  - Administration of pensions for school staff
  - Health and Safety (Option 2)

**RESOLVED that** the proposals as set out above were agreed by the relevant maintained school representatives.

### *(After Item 15 had been considered regarding schools: deficit recovery)*

Ian Pearson explained that there were two Options available concerning statutory accounting functions in respect of schools. The details setting the two options out was included under Appendix F on page 84 of the agenda.

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David Ramsden felt that it was too early to make a decision on this point as it was not yet known how many schools would be in deficit. Patrick Mitchel felt that adopting Option 1 would be penalising those schools not in deficit.

Jonathan Chishick highlighted that the difference in cost between the options was 71 pence per pupil however, Option 1 would provide increased accountancy support across schools. Some smaller schools were struggling to balance budgets and therefore he did not feel that 71 pence per head was a great amount to help address the situation.

It was confirmed to members of the Schools' Forum that the decision could not be taken on a per school basis.

David Ramsden was concerned that schools not in deficit would be covering the cost of schools in deficit. He queried if assumptions had been made with regards to adopting Option 1. Ian Pearson confirmed that the work was currently only provided on a yearly basis and therefore if schools voted in favour of Option 1, they would be voting for continuation of the increased support to schools.

Rev. Mark Bennet queried how the effectiveness of inter school support was assessed and queried if this was provided from a central service or if certain schools were called upon to help schools which were struggling with deficits. Melanie Ellis reported that there were two headteachers currently involved in the visits to schools that were struggling. Ian Pearson reported that there was no such support in review meetings however signposting and matching was carried out. For example the new Business Manager from the Willows School was being supported by the experienced a Business Manager at Mortimer St Mary's C.E. School.

Jonathon Chishick reiterated that it was only 0.5 FTE that was being debated, which required a relatively small amount of money.

Catie Colston commented that historically there had been many areas of support provided for example Governor Services however, many of these areas had been scaled back or eliminated completely. Catie Colston expressed her support for funding professional help.

David Ramsden proposed that accountancy function Option 2 (without additional dedicated support) be supported and this was seconded by Patrick Mitchell. At the vote this motion was not carried.

Antony Gallagher proposed that accountancy function option 1 (with additional dedicated support) be supported and this was seconded by Jon Hewitt. At the vote the motion was carried.

**RESOLVED** that the Option 1 accountancy services was agreed by the Schools' Forum.

### 38 **Schools: deficit recovery (Melanie Ellis)**

Melanie Ellis introduced the report to the Schools' Forum, which provided an update on the work being carried out with the nine schools that had set deficit budgets in 2018/19.

There was now dedicated support for schools in deficit. A one year fixed term 0.8FTE term time only Senior Accountant post has been created in the Schools' Finance Team. For the period 1<sup>st</sup> September 2018 until 31<sup>st</sup> August 2019 the post holder would work with schools that had set a deficit budget in 2018/19.

All schools had submitted their Period 7 Budget Monitoring and Forecast reports. Two schools were forecasting a deficit in excess of their license. If this was still the case at the next 'Task Force' meeting following Period 9 forecast then intervention might be required.

Catie Colston queried the sustainability of improvements being made. Melanie Ellis confirmed that this was difficult to answer early in the process however, feedback from

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schools was very positive. Catie Colston felt that it was important to share any 'warning signals' experienced by schools before falling into deficit.

David Ramsden felt that a longer term view was required. Some schools had been in and out of deficit over the past eight years and some had been in deficit long term and this was concerning. It was felt that some trend information would be helpful. Melanie Ellis confirmed that there was some trend information included for each of the nine schools in deficit under the appendices to the report. David Ramsden felt that data ranging further back in time was required as it often took time to get out of deficit. A longer term view was required to highlight any patterns

Melanie Ellis commented that all schools had recently been emailed a health check assessment to carry out. RAG rating had also been carried out with school business managers to assess financial management ability. This information could be brought a future meeting of the Schools' Forum.

Jonathon Chishick suggested that if trend data was to be explored then in year deficits be included.

### **RESOLVED that**

- Information on RAG ratings on financial management ability to be presented a future meeting of the Schools' Forum.

### **39 High Needs Block - Resourced Units (Jane Seymour)**

Jane Seymour introduced the report, which aimed to inform the Schools' Forum of proposed action in response to concerns expressed by some mainstream schools with resourced units that they had a shortfall in funding, and to seek agreement from the Schools' Forum.

So that the extent of the issue could be explored it was proposed within the report that a survey be conducted as all current information was anecdotal. A final report would be submitted to the Schools' Forum in March 2019.

It was also proposed that if any changes were required to the resourced unit banding system, consideration would be required by the Schools' Forum in March 2019, when consideration would also be given to the shortfall in the High Needs Block for 2019/20.

David Ramsden proposed that proposals set out in Section 4 of the report were supported by the Schools' Forum. This was seconded by Angela Hayes. At the vote the motion was carried.

**RESOLVED that** the Schools' Forum agreed the proposal set out in Section 4 of the report.

### **40 Funding children with EHCPs who attend PRUs (Jane Seymour)**

Jane Seymour introduced the report, which sought agreement for the proposed banding system for children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) who were placed in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

Jane Seymour reported that historically there had always been some children with EHCPs who attended PRUs, usually on a short term placement pending an alternative placement. The number of children with EHCPs attending PRUs was increasing and some children were staying with PRU placements on a longer term basis and Jane Seymour explained that this was something that was intentional.

The first band was SEMH1 and this band had no additional funding attached. Two bands were being proposed and these were bands SEMH 1 and 2 and they would have higher levels of funding attached and would be for children with more complex needs.



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David Ramsden recalled suggesting at the Heads Funding Group that the bands be kept under review overtime, to ensure they system did not become top heavy. This would need revisiting at a later stage.

Rev. Mark Bennet was concerned that placing children in categories would move away from a system that considered individual needs. Jane Seymour reassured members of the Forum that every child would receive an in depth assessment for an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP). The aim of the banding system was to provide accuracy and transparency when additional funding was awarded.

Keith Harvey proposed that the Schools' Forum approve the proposed banding system set out in section 5 of the report and this was seconded by Charlotte Wilson. At the vote the motion was carried.

### **RESOLVED that:**

- The Schools' Forum agreed the proposed banding system set out in section 5 of the report.
- The banding system be reviewed overtime and to be brought back to the Schools' Forum at later stage.

### **41 High Needs Places and Arrangements 2019/20 (Jane Seymour)**

Jane Seymour introduced the report, which advised the Schools' Forum members of planned places allocated currently to special schools, resourced schools, FE providers and mainstream sixth forms and likely numbers of pupils in those institutions requiring planned place funding 2019-20.

The report was brought to the Forum on an annual basis. Jane Seymour reported that a number of Planned Places were set by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and there was no option to increase the number of places allocated apart from for academies and FE providers. If extra places were agreed by the ESFA for these settings then funding for these places was top sliced from the High Needs Block and allocated to by the ESFA. Jane Seymour explained that some of the funding was recouped through import /export adjustments.

New regulations required local authorities to fund all places for high needs students at FE colleges regardless of where the students were resident and which local authority had financial responsibility for them. In West Berkshire this equated to a request for an additional 43 places for Newbury College, which if agreed would need to be top sliced from the High Needs Block. An import /export adjustment would be made to the 2019-20 High Needs Budget to reflect the placed places which West Berkshire had funded for students from other local authorities however, it was possible that there would still be a shortfall. Jane Seymour added that there was little flexibility to move places around.

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

### **42 Draft DSG Funding & Budget 2019/20 (Amin Hussain)**

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

Amin Hussain drew attention to each of the funding block in turn. Regarding the Schools Block under section five of the report, the final funding for 2019/20 would be determined by the October 2018 pupil numbers multiplied by West Berkshire primary and secondary units of funding. Amin Hussain drew attention to section 5.3 which gave a breakdown of the block based on the October 2017 census numbers. More detail would be available at the next meeting of the Forum in January as the result of the October 2018 census had just been received.

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Regarding the Central Schools Services Block under section six of the report, the Council's Executive had agreed to meeting the statutory and regulatory duties costs in 2018/19, which was a one year only decision and there would be a requirement to find balance this block in 2019/20. Further details and proposals on the Central Schools Services Block would be brought to the meeting of the Schools' Forum in January 2019.

Amin Hussain moved on to the Early Years Block and stated that it was too early to make an accurate forecast for the current year because funding would be based on the January 2019 census.

Amin Hussain drew attention to section eight of the report regarding the High Needs Block (HNB). Forecasting would be based on the October 2018 census. A deficit had been set in 2016/17 with a plan to repay the amount over three years. It was unlikely that this would be achievable due to increasing demands on the block.

Amin Hussain drew attention to Appendix A to the report, which gave a breakdown of funding within each of the blocks. Appendix B showed the current deficit to be £2.2 million, which was considerably higher than the deficit, for the previous year. Amin Hussain commented that if the 0.5% transfer of funding from the Schools Block to the HNB was approved this would not eliminate the deficit however, it would go some way to helping the situation.

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

### 43 **Draft High Needs Budget 2019/20 (Jane Seymour)**

Ian Pearson introduced the report which set out the current financial position of the high needs budget for 2018/19 and the position known so far for 2019/20, including likely shortfall.

The deficit amount agreed in 2018/19 had been driven upward due to an increase in students requiring specialist provision. Ian Pearson explained that the detail was set out within the report however, in essence increased spending was because there were more pupils requiring specialist provision; increased numbers of students were needing to be moved out of mainstream school and there as increased numbers of students presenting with complex needs.

Jane Seymour referred to details for Place Funding, on page 136 and reported that the budget had overspent by £240k. Some of this would be offset by import / export adjustments.

*(Jonathon Chishick and Hilary Latimer left the meeting at 6.31pm)*

Jane Seymour drew attention to Table 2 under appendix A on page 136 regarding Top up funding. Top up funding was paid to institutions where pupils from West Berkshire were placed. Most top up budgets were under pressure, and the type of placement creating the greatest pressure was shown in order under section 2.2 of the report. The cost of Education and Health Care Plans in mainstream schools had increased compared to previous years for the first time and this was because a higher band was having to be used due to increased complex needs. Jane Seymour reported that the overall pressure on the block was in excess of £500k due to cost of needing to move more students out of mainstream school into specialist provision.

Jane Seymour moved on to talk about Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). The number of children with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) being placed at PRUs was increasing as this was often an appropriate and cost effective provision for some young people. Under new funding arrangements for PRUs, these placements had to be funded through the SEN budget. The estimated cost was £331,400 for 2019/20. Jane Seymour stressed that these placements were more cost effective than independent and non-

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maintained special school placements. iCollege had been expanded specifically to allow for the admission of SEND/EHCP students.

Regarding other statutory services under Section 4 of the report. The budget for Sensory Impairment services was under particular pressure because of an increase in the number of children with severe hearing and visual impairments, who required a high level of visits from teachers of the deaf / visually impaired.

Jane Seymour explained that overall the £2.4million pressure was an accumulation of the areas detailed in Appendix A. The main reason for the pressure was the cost of moving children out of mainstream schools into other settings. There was a strategy in place however, the benefit would not be seen in the short term. Savings would need to be made however, this was getting more difficult. Jane Seymour reported that robust demand strategies were in place and the most cost effective options were always chosen. The underlying issue was the demand for high need provision was rising but the funding had remained static.

Keith Harvey referred to the large amount of savings that had been made to the HNB in recent years and felt that it was time that increased pressure was placed on the Government through Local Members of Parliament (MPs). Councillor Lynne Doherty confirmed that action was already being taken. Letters had been sent to the Local Government Association through the South East Group however, there had been little engagement in response. The issue was a national problem so it was hoped that the Government would react soon.

Jon Hewitt reported that the Special Schools in West Berkshire had written a joint letter to local MPs. 'Voice' the group that represented special schools was also taking a similar approach. Jon Hewitt added that parents were also critical in making the Government take action. It was a Central Government issue and change was required. Jon Hewitt stressed that there was not an issue with the HNB as a result of poor management, it was a collective deficit as it was all blocks that were funded by the DSG.

The Chairman commended the points that had been raised by members of the Forum and stated that unfortunately the Government seemed to be focusing little else apart from Brexit at the point in time.

David Ramsden referred to the decision due to be taken regarding transferring money from the Schools Block to the HNB and stated that he was against transferring the money. He acknowledged the points made by Jon Hewitt and accepted that it was a national issue. He also used the opportunity to commend the work undertaken by Jane Seymour and her team. Parents were being forced to take their cases to tribunals and schools and the SEN Team were feeling the pressure. David Ramsden explained that his objection to the transfer was based on three issues. Firstly he did not feel that cuts had been made hard enough the previous year. Secondly if the funding was transferred, £490k was not going to make the difference required to the HNB. Thirdly, schools were already under immense pressure and he did not feel that funding should be taken from the Schools Block that was already under pressure.

The Chairman noted the points made and reminded members of the Forum that this area would be discussed in greater detail later on the agenda.

*(Charlotte Wilson left the meeting at 6.42pm)*

Jane Seymour reported that a strategic approach was being undertaken and there was a five year SEN Strategy in place however, this would take time to roll out. Regarding the transfer of funds from the Schools' Block to the HNB, Jane Seymour reported that out of £9 million, only £800k was spent on non-statutory services and to cut these services further would place further pressure on the rest of the HNB.

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Jacque Davies added that of 64 learners at iCollege, 40% had no funding attached, which placed great pressure on the HNB.

Keith Harvey referred to the cuts that had been made the previous year and queried how much these savings had saved in the long term. It was important that value for money was kept in mind.

Rev. Mark Bennet it was easy to look inwards when under pressure and stated that some services needed to be provided at scale to be provided effectively. He asked if cross boundary working was considered. Ian Pearson stated that opportunities for joined up working were always taken. Examples of this work currently taking place included the Sensory Consortium service run by all the Berkshire Local Authorities and the proposed SEMH provision provided in partnership with Reading.

Ian Pearson highlighted that West Berkshire's position in terms of its HNB was also driven by the National SEN Funding Formula. West Berkshire suffered because levels of deprivation was one of the factors that the formula was based on.

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

### 44 **SEN Benchmarking (Jane Seymour)**

Jane Seymour introduced the report which provided comparative information on High Needs Block spending across local authorities in the South East. Jane Seymour explained that the report included information from the High Needs Block (HNB) Department for Education (DfE) benchmarking tool. The information looked at budgets rather than spending and showed costs per head against other local authorities in the South East.

Jane Seymour drew attention to paragraph 3.3 which showed the five groups that the HNB was grouped into. The data showed that West Berkshire was not significantly out of line with other local authorities in the South East.

Paragraph 3.7 showed that the West Berkshire top up funding in maintained schools, academies, free schools and FE colleges was £206 per head, which was slightly above the South East average of £196 per head, but below the England average of £216 per head.

West Berkshire's per head budget for non-maintained and independent special schools (paragraph 3.8) was £122, which was higher than the South East average of £111.

Data showed that West Berkshire spent less on SEN support services. Brighton and Hove had very high spend on these services, which it was thought might be to help more children stay in mainstream schools. This required further investigation.

The West Berkshire Therapies Budget showed in the benchmarking tool as £8 per head compared to the South East average of £3 per head and a range of £0 to £14 per head. This was the biggest discrepancy between West Berkshire and the South East average and required further investigation as it was thought that the data might not be accurate.

Jane Seymour reported that Appendix 2 showed overspend on HNBs across 2017/18 and all but three local authorities had overspent. West Berkshire was the second lowest in terms of how much it had overspent at 2.8%.

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

### 45 **DSG Monitoring 2018/19 Month 7 (Ian Pearson)**

Amin Hussain introduced the report which provided an update on the work being carried out with the nine schools that has been set a deficit budget in 2018/19.

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At Month 7 there was a net forecast overspend of £431k. The budget had been set with an overspend of £464k against the DSG, as per the decision made by the Schools' Forum. The forecast overspend position at Month 7 against expenditure budgets was £315k with a further £116k under achievement on the High Needs funding primarily due to a reduction in the import/export adjustment.

Amin Hussain explained that details for each of the blocks was included within the report. Paragraph 8.3 set out the main variances against expenditure for the High Needs Block.

Overspending in the High Needs Block were significant and the total overspend forecast against the Block was £895k (including budgeted over spend) and consideration needed to be given to where spending could be scaled back and savings identified in order to contain overspend to the initial budget or alternatively transfer an amount from the Schools' Block to the High Needs Block.

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

*(The Chairman drew the Forum's attention back to Item Seven to make a decision on transferring money from the Schools' Block to the High Needs Block)*

### 46 **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan was noted.

### 47 **Any Other Business**

There was no other business raised.

### 48 **Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting would take place on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019, 5pm at Shaw House.

*(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 7.00 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

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