

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 15 JUNE 2020

Present: Reverend Mark Bennet (Church of England Diocese), Councillor Dominic Boeck (Executive Portfolio: Children, Education and Young People), Jonathon Chishick (Maintained Primary School Governor), Catie Colston (Maintained Primary School Governor), Jacquie Davies (Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher), Keith Harvey (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Jon Hewitt (Maintained Special School Headteacher), Brian Jenkins (EARly Years Private, Voluntary and Independant Provider Representative), Hilary Latimer (Maintaned Primary School Headteacher), Sheila Loy (Academy School Governor), Maria Morgan (Maintained Nursery School Headteacher), Julia Mortimore (Academy School Headteacher), Ian Nichol (Maintained Primary School Governor), Janet Patterson (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Derek People (Academy School Headteacher), Chris Prosser (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), David Ramsden (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher) and Graham Spellman (Roman Catholic Diocese)

Also Present: Avril Allenby (Early Years Service Manager), Melanie Ellis (Chief Accountant) and Ian Pearson (Head of Education Services), Jessica Bailiss (Policy Officer (Executive Support))

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Antony Gallagher, Councillor Ross Mackinnon, Jayne Steele, Bruce Steiner, Gary Upton and Charlotte Wilson

PART I

1 Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman

Jessica Bailiss invited the Schools' Forum to nominate and vote on the position of Chairman for the coming year.

Jessica Bailiss invited the Schools' Forum to nominate and vote on the position of Vice-Chairman for the coming year.

RESOLVED that Bruce Steiner would continue as Chairman of the Schools' Forum for the 2020/21 municipal year.

RESOLVED that Graham Spellman would continue as Vice-Chairman of the Schools' Forum for the 2020/21 municipal year.

2 Minutes of previous meeting dated 9th March 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th March 2020 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendments:

Page 6, Item 86, Growth Fund 2019/20 Payments, first section in brackets, to read as follows: Kennet Academy Trust.

3 Actions arising from previous meetings

The Chairman drew the Schools' Forum's attention to the actions for the last meeting on 9th March 2020. All actions apart from Mar20-Ac1 were completed or were in hand.

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Action: Mar20-Ac1: Melanie Ellis to review guidance regarding the charging of interest and report back to a future Schools' Forum meeting: Melanie Ellis reported that she had not been able to find any specific information on this point however, she had spoken to the Executive Director for Resources at West Berkshire Council and could confirm that no interest would be charged.

4 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

5 **Membership**

The Chairman welcomed Maria Morgan from Victoria Park Nursery school, who had taken over from Suzanne Taylor in April 2020 as the nursery representative on the Forum.

Graham Spellman reported that his term of office would end in July 2020. He had consulted with his group and had confirmed that he would continue for a further four year term.

The Chairman confirmed that Gemma Piper, Headteacher at Kennet School, would become the sixth Academy representative on the Forum from July 2020.

6 **DSG Outturn 2019/20 (Melanie Ellis)**

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 7) that aimed to inform the Schools' Forum on the outturn of the services funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), highlighting any under or over spends, and sought to highlight the reserves deficit at 31 March 2020. Melanie Ellis highlighted figures were provisional until signed off by the Council as external auditors.

The yearend position was a deficit of £1.8m however, with balances in the reserve there was a cumulative deficit of £1.56m. This would be top-sliced against the relevant DSG blocks in the 2020/21 budget.

Melanie Ellis moved on to talk about the individual blocks. There was a £1m surplus budget in the Schools' Block and this mainly consisted of remaining balances in the Growth Fund and other de-delegated balances.

The Early Years Block (EYB) had a deficit of £875k and there was a separate report on this block later on the agenda. There was a small surplus in the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) and there was a deficit in the High Needs Block (HNB) of £1.8m. The deficit in the HNB was £300k better than originally forecasted due to some savings that had been made in year that were detailed within the report.

Melanie Ellis explained that because of the cumulative deficit of £1.56m within the DSG, there was a requirement from the Department for Education (DfE) to provide a deficit recovery plan. The Local Authority was currently awaiting guidance from the DfE on when this recovery plan would need to be submitted. The recovery plan would be brought to a future meeting of the Schools' Forum.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

7 **School Balances 2019/20 (Melanie Ellis)**

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 8), 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 confirmed that there had been a small increase in the balances. Table one on page 17 of the report, showed that there were increases in nursery schools, special schools and PRU balances and decreases in primary and secondary schools' balances.

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able two on page 18 of the report however, showed that the reductions in balances were largely in the capital funding. This was due to a timing issue because schools were allocated capital funding at the end of the 2019 financial year, which had not provided them with time to spend the money. Melanie Ellis reported that the overall movement in figures was relatively small for 2019/20.

Jonathan Chishick noted that the cumulative surplus exceed the deficit from the previous year and therefore queried if surpluses could be used collectively to cover the deficit meaning that a deficit recovery plan would not need to be submitted to the Department for Education (DfE). Melanie Ellis highlighted that school balances belonged to individual schools and therefore this approach could not be taken.

Catie Colston drew attention to section 4.5 of the report and the additional capital funding that had been provided to schools in February 2020. Catie Colston queried what this money should have been used for. Melanie Ellis stated that she did not have the detail on this to hand however, would report back on this point at the next meeting of the Forum in July 2020.

RESOLVED that:

- Melanie Ellis to provide detail on what capital funding provided to schools in February 2020 should have been used for.
- The Schools' Forum noted the report.

8 Early Years Block Budget - Deficit recovery plan (Avril Allenby)

Avril Allenby introduced the report (Agenda Item 9) that aimed to update the Schools' Forum on the Early Years Budget (EYB) and recovery plan in the light of COVID19.

Avril Allenby reported that originally the plan had been to bring a recovery plan for the EYB to the meeting of the Forum however, due to the recent Covid19 situation this had not been possible. The report provided the Forum with some background information to the situation and how this had impacted on early year's providers. Early years was a particularly complex area of funding and the report aimed to clarify step by step how funding was being passed through to providers.

Avril Allenby reported that there was an Early Years Funding Group and then a wider Early Years Group that represented the whole range of settings in the sector including child minders, private providers and day nurseries. Due to the pandemic this group had been unable to meet however, it would be meeting within the next week. It was this group that would be consulted on the development of the EYB deficit recovery plan and budget plans for the year.

The timeline and impact for early year's settings in light of the pandemic was similar to that experienced by schools. They had been requested to close their doors in March to the wider group of children and only accept the children of key works and children who were vulnerable.

The report went through the steps that were being followed by the Local Authority to provide funding to early years settings. There were key dates throughout the year that were detailed within the table under section 3.4 of the report. There was a system in place that captured the number of children accessing a setting. An estimate was used and then this was finalised using a 'Headcount Day' task and funding was adjusted accordingly. Avril Allenby explained that this process was underway when the lockdown was first enforced and therefore the Local Authority had been able to provide funding on the information obtained. Soon after the lockdown was imposed the Government announced that local authorities would have to continue to pass funding through to early years settings.

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Avril Allenby explained that going forward there were significant issues being faced. Children were beginning to return to early years settings however, the sector was having to follow similar requirements to schools regarding social distancing and therefore there were limits on how many children could be catered for. The Local Authority however, would need to continue funding early year's providers and roll funding forward.

Avril Allenby stressed the complexity of the situation, which was compounded by the issue that some providers were funded entirely by the entitlement funding provided by the Government. Others settings used a combination of this funding and income generation. It was important that the childcare market was sustained for when parents were able to return to work.

Avril Allenby stated that the childcare market was extremely fragile and was being impacted upon by various aspects of the Covid19 situation, including staffing issues and reduced numbers of children. A whole range of financial packages had been offered however, for many childcare settings these were often difficult to access. For example regarding furlough, childcare settings were only able to furlough staff paid for out of their generated income and for some settings, this only made up a small proportion of their income. There was also small business grants, however many providers found these difficult to access and rate relief, which could only be accessed by some providers as not all providers owned their own properties.

The Chairman thanked Avril Allenby for her report and acknowledged the difficult situation being faced. Maria Morgan thanked Avril Allenby for her thorough report and reported that the other issue impacting on early year's settings was the changes in children numbers each term. The summer term was normally when settings were at their fullest and then in the autumn term with children moving on to primary school these numbers normally dropped, adding to the increasingly complex picture for early years settings.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report and that a further report would be brought to the next meeting in July 2020.

9 Trade Union Facilities Time - Annual Report for 2019/20 (Gary Upton)

RESOLVED that this item was deferred until the next meeting of the Forum on 13th July 2020.

10 Schools: Deficit Recovery

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 11), which aimed to inform the Schools' Forum on the outturn position of the four schools that set a deficit budget in 2019/20, and reports on schools closing with an unlicensed deficit.

Melanie Ellis referred to section five of the report and reported that four schools had a Main School Budget (MSB) licensed deficit in 2019/20, totalling £117.4k. The final outturn position was a closing balance of £27.6k surplus. The overall improvement for budget to year end was £144.9k which was an excellent outturn, with two of the four schools ending the year in surplus.

Section six of the report provided detail on five schools that ended the financial year 2019/20 with an unlicensed deficit. At the time of writing the report, three of the schools were expected to submit a Deficit Budget License Application for 2020/21. Melanie Ellis was unable to comment on further schools that might be requesting a deficit application however, this information would be brought to the next meeting of the Forum in July 2020.

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David Ramsden stated that the number of schools in deficit was better than what had been expected earlier in the year and he commended schools for the recovery work that had taken place and the support that had been provided by the Local Authority.

RESOLVED that the Schools Forum noted the report.

11 Forward Plan

Revered Mark Bennet stated that he wanted to raise two points in relation to the Forward Plan for the Schools' Forum. Firstly he referred to the deficit faced by the High Needs Block (HNB) and queried what the intended timescale was for work being undertaken to produce a deficit recovery plan.

Secondly Reverend Bennet felt that it would be useful for a report to be brought to a future meeting of the Forum on the impact of Covid19 on funding of West Berkshire Schools, particularly regarding mental health issues and whether vulnerable groups were being reached. Reaching such groups was an area that had been politically criticised in West Berkshire in the past.

Reverend Bennet also queried if the implications of the announcement from Government regarding provision over the summer, would be brought to the July Forum meeting for discussion.

Ian Pearson referred to the points raised by Reverend Mark Bennet. Firstly regarding the HNB and a deficit recovery plan, a further report would be brought to the Forum meeting in July 2020 if capacity allowed. The Covid19 situation had placed increased pressure on the Special Educational Needs, Inclusion and Disabled Children Team and this was the reason why the report had been deferred from the June Forum meeting.

Ian Pearson further explained that there were two parts to the recovery plan. The first part related to projects funded in the current year as part of an Invest to Save initiative. Some of these projects if successful had the potential to be ramped up in order to deliver increased savings. The second part related to the implementation of the SEN Strategy, which had previously been discussed at the Forum and provided an overall approach to addressing and supporting special educational needs.

Ian Pearson highlighted that the recovery plan required by the Department for Education DfE would not just cover the HNB but the whole of the DSG and therefore in West Berkshire's case would include recovery of the deficit in the Early Years Block.

Reverend Mark Bennet noted that a report was due to come to the next Forum however, it was possible that this could slip due to the pressures caused by Covid19. Ian Pearson confirmed that staff were doing their best within the resources that were available.

Ian Pearson referred to the second point raised by Reverend Mark Bennet regarding the impact of Covid19 on West Berkshire schools, and felt that it would be helpful to have a discussion on this at the next Forum, particularly regarding cost pressures. Some of these pressures were falling directly on schools and Ian Pearson was aware that some cost pressures would be reimbursable through Government arrangements however, there was no certainty regarding which pressures this would include. The pandemic would also impact on end of year balances for individual schools and across the DSG funding blocks. He explained that the Council was facing other pressures that were not part of the DSG as a result of the pandemic including on areas such as home to school transport. The Council had received some funding for the impact of Covid19 and it would be interesting to see how this was being applied to young people. The Council had used its own funding to provide laptops for young people who had not benefited from the Government's Laptop Project.

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Regarding support for vulnerable groups, Ian Pearson reported that he was aware anecdotally that schools in the district were doing a great job at keeping in touch with vulnerable families and many vulnerable children had been invited back to school.

Regarding Reverend Mark Bennet’s final point concerning learning over the summer, there were two issues. Firstly support for vulnerable families and secondly loss of learning. The Secretary of State was due to make an announcement regarding a comprehensive programme of catch-up in the coming week.

It was agreed that a report on the impact of the Covid19 situation on schools should be brought to the next meeting of the Forum in July however, this would only be based on key areas of expenditure at this stage.

RESOLVED that a report would be brought to the next meeting of the Forum in July 2020 regarding the impact of Covid19 on West Berkshire schools and where the pressures were falling.

12 Date of the next meeting

Monday 13th July 2020 at 5pm.

13 Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED that members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the under-mentioned item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as contained in Paragraphs 5 and 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the [Local Government \(Access to Information\)\(Variation\) Order 2006](#). [Rule 8.10.4 of the Constitution also refers](#).

14 Part II - Update report on the Schools' Catering Contract (Robert Bradfield)

(Paragraph 5 – information relating to legal privilege)

(Paragraph 6 – information – information relating to proposed action to be taken by the Local Authority)

The Schools Forum considered an exempt report (Agenda Item 15) which aimed to update the Schools’ Forum on progress made with school meal tender for eight school sites.

RESOLVED that the Schools’ Forum noted the report.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 5.52 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature