

# **SCHOOLS FORUM**

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 19 JULY 2021**

**Present:** Councillor Dominic Boeck (Executive Portfolio: Children, Young People and Education), Jonathon Chishick (Maintained Primary School Governor), Catie Colston (Maintained Primary School Governor), Jacquie Davies (Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher), Michelle Harrison (Maintained Primary Schools), Jon Hewitt (Maintained Special School Headteacher), Brian Jenkins (Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent Provider Representative), Councillor Ross Mackinnon (Executive Portfolio Holder: Finance and Economic Development), Maria Morgan (Maintained Nursery School Headteacher), Ian Nichol (Maintained Primary School Governor), Chris Prosser (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), David Ramsden (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), Campbell Smith (Academy School Governor) and Graham Spellman (Roman Catholic Diocese)

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

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Reverend Mark Bennet, Emily Dawkins, Keith Harvey, Hilary Latimer, Sheila Loy, Janet Patterson, Gemma Piper, Michelle Sancho and Charlotte Wilson

### **PART I**

#### **27 Minutes of previous meeting date 21st June 2021**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the following change: Ross Mackinnon had not been present at the meeting.

#### **28 Actions arising from previous meetings**

All actions were completed or in hand.

#### **29 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

#### **30 Schools' Forum Membership and Constitution from September 2021 (Jess Bailiss)**

Jessica Bailiss introduced the report (Agenda Item 5), which aimed to review and where necessary update the membership and constitution for the Schools' Forum, which was carried out on an annual basis.

The membership composition of the Forum and number of members representing each sector needed to be broadly proportionate to pupil numbers. Table one showed a breakdown of pupil numbers compared to 2020 by sector and it could be seen the number of number of pupils in each sector had remained broadly the same and therefore no changes were proposed to the structure of the membership.

The Constitution for the Forum needed to comply with the Schools' Forum Regulations 2012. There had only been one change to the Regulations in 2020, which enabled

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Schools' Forums to continue to meet remotely if they wished. There was one proposed change to the constitution which was detailed under section 6.1 of the report following the declaration of interest exercise that was carried out earlier in the year and it was proposed that going forward there should be no more than two representatives from one school/academy across the groups that make up the Forum. This was only proposed for new members joining the Forum and would not be actioned retrospectively.

It was recommended that the Forum approve the membership and constitution including the proposed changes detailed under section 6.1 of the report.

Jonathan Chishick raised a query regarding how the school groups were divided between Headteacher and Governors. He felt that this needed clarifying within the constitution under section 2.2. It was also noted that under 2.3 it was stated that primary and secondary representatives would be elected by their respective heads' forum. The process for governors differed to this and this needed to be clarified in the constitution. Jess Bailiss stated that she would look in to this following the meeting.

The Chair invited the Schools Forum to vote on recommendation set out in section 2.1 of the report. John Hewitt proposed that the recommendation be approved and this was seconded by Chris Prosser. At the vote the motion was carried.

### **RESOLVED that:**

- **Jessica Bailiss would review the points raised by Jonathan Chishick and ensure that these were clarified within the constitution.**
- **The membership and constitution was agreed by the Schools' Forum, including the proposed amendment set out in section 6.1 of the report and clarification of the points raised by Jonathan Chishick.**

### **31 Growth Fund: Exceptional Payment (Melanie Ellis)**

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 6), which aimed to review the exceptional Growth Fund application from The Calcots and decide whether to award a payment to the school from the growth funding 2021/22.

In December each year following the confirmation of the autumn census numbers, schools were invited to make an application to the Growth Fund if they met the criteria. The Calcots had submitted an application earlier than normal because during the five months following the October 2020 census, the pupil numbers at the school had increased by seven with five additional pupils in Reception. The school had stated that two classes of 32 Reception pupils was unsafe and larger groups of mixed ability pupils was not feasible due to physical constraints of classroom sizes. Classrooms at the school could physically only accommodate 26 children due to dimensions.

The application had been considered by the Heads' Funding Group (HFG) in June 2021 however, further information had been requested due to the applications similarity to another recent application, which had been refused. As a result the report included additional detail under section five, which provided a comparison to previous bids and set out how the calculations had been carried out. Section 5.5 showed that Calcot School had needed to provide an additional class, whereas the other school could have moved to a mixed year group for one year. The HFG had therefore been in support of the application from The Calcots.

Melanie Ellis stated that the Growth Fund currently had a balance of £1.5m. If the application from The Calcots was agreed then there would be an initial payment of £27.5k for the period of April to August 2021 with a potential further payment of £38.5k to be agreed in December, following the invite to all schools to make an application to the Growth Fund following the autumn school census.

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The Chair invited the Schools' Forum to vote on the recommendation to approve the application from The Calcots as set out in section 2.1 of the report. Jonathan Chishick proposed that the application was approved and this was seconded by Ian Nichol. At the vote the motion was carried.

**RESOLVED** that the application from The Calcots to the Growth Fund was approved by the Schools' Forum.

### 32 **Early Years Block Budget - update on deficit recovery plan (Lisa Potts/Avril Allenby)**

Lisa Potts introduced the report (Agenda Item 7), which aimed to update the Forum on the deficit recovery for the Early Years Block.

Lisa Potts reported that the deficit recovery plan incorporated reducing rates for providers and this had come into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021.

Lisa Potts highlighted the table under section 3.2 of the report, which showed that there was a planned budget to overspend by £461k in 2019-20 but the final figures showed an overspend of £875k. In 2020-21 there had been a planned budget to overspend by £1.5m however, by the end of the year the actual overspend had reduced to £970k.

Lisa Potts reported that positively for 2021-22 the current forecast deficit position was £787,947 and this was prior to taking in to account the reduction in the rates for providers. It was noted that it was early in the process however, it was hoped that the figure would continue to reduce over the next few years.

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

### 33 **The impact of Covid on the Early Years Sector / Early Years Sustainability Grant (Avril Allenby)**

Avril Allenby introduced the item (Agenda Item 8), which aimed to inform the group on the take-up and impact of the Early Years Sustainability Grant 2021 and share the comments of the Early Years providers' survey.

Avril Allenby reported that some grant funding had been made available to early years provided due to the pressures faced as a result of Covid. The majority of providers had taken up the offer of the funding. Any providers that had not applied had been approached to ensure all were fully aware of the opportunity available.

A short survey had been sent to providers as part of the process to help gain an understanding of the impact being faced and responses to the survey were detailed under section 4.2 of the report.

Avril Allenby explained that many businesses had been able to access rate rebates during the pandemic however, for early years the number of businesses able to access this had been particularly low due to many not owning their own premises. Business loans, the furlough scheme and other grant funding had been particularly difficult for early years providers to access as many did not receive income and were reliant on grant funding provided by the Local Authority.

Avril Allenby drew attention to the ongoing areas of concern raised as part of the survey on page 41 of the report, which included concerns regarding furlough, parents continuing to work for home and changes to working hours.

Avril Allenby reported that provider rates had been reduced as part of the deficit recovery plan and the sustainability grant funding had helped slightly to reduce the impact of this.

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Ian Pearson highlighted that grant funding made available to early years providers was money agreed by the Local Authority to support settings and was not money from the Dedicated School Grant. A total of £226,200 had been agreed and to date a total of £198k had been paid to 130 providers.

Brian Jenkins highlighted the second paragraph on page 43 of the report and felt that this summed up the discomfort that existed within the early years sector across the country. He thanked West Berkshire Council for the grant funding that had been made available however, stressed that this was a small figure in comparison to the losses sustained by businesses in the sector. He appreciated the work undertaken by West Berkshire Council to provide the grant funding however it was not a solution to the problem and action was required from The Government on this.

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

### 34 Early Years Budget - changes to funding (Lisa Potts)

Lisa Potts introduced the report (Agenda Item 9), which set out the new process for the Early Years grant funding for the financial year 2021/22.

Lisa Potts reported that traditionally the Local Authority received funding based on the number of hours taken up by children in the January census. The DfE had recognised however, that the number of children attending in January 2021 would be much lower than normal due to Covid. The process had therefore been changed for the current year so that if the numbers of children in the spring term 2021 were below 85% from the previous year then a top up would be received up to the 85%.

Lisa Potts added that this would be split across the different types of early years funding, which were detailed under section 3.2 of the report. It was expected that West Berkshire would only be entitled to top up funding for two year olds.

The final allocation for 2020/21 had not been received yet and would be received later in the year. Lisa Potts reported that for 2021/22 the DfE had asked the Local Authority to provide funding based on the termly data. This would not change the payment paid out to providers and would only change the amount received by the Local Authority from the Department for Education, which would be based on the hours that children were attending rather than the January census alone.

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

### 35 Trade Union Facilities Time - Annual Report for 2020/21 (Gary Upton)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 10), which informed members of the Forum of the activities of the teacher trade unions.

Ian Pearson explained the report was an annual report provided on behalf of the education unions that benefitted from the facilities funding available through delegations. The report detailed what the funding had been used for. Positively it was highlighted in the report that there was a good working relationship with employers.

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

### 36 DSG Monitoring 2021/22 Month 3 (Ian Pearson)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 10) which set out the forecast financial position of the services funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), highlighting any under or over spends, and to highlight the cumulative deficit on the DSG.

Ian Pearson drew attention to the table under section 5.1 of the report, which provided the forecast position at the end of June. Ian Pearson added that it was important not to

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be misled by figures provided and highlighted the cumulative deficit figure on the bottom line of Table 1. The Early Years and High Needs Blocks were facing the largest pressures and a lot of time had been spent focusing on these areas to help bring them into a more balanced position. Ian Pearson stated that whilst Table 1 indicated a forecast cumulative deficit position at the end of the financial year (£2,723k), this needed to be seen in the context of balancing across the different blocks. Ian Pearson drew attention to Table 2 under 5.4, which provided the overall position of the different blocks, which led to the figure of £2,723K. There were surpluses in some blocks and significant deficits in others. It was important to note that there were two elements being measured, including the expected position at the end of the current financial year and the cumulative position.

Ian Pearson added that there was further detail set out in the appendices to the report. It was noted that as quarter one was early in the financial year the figures could move substantially.

David Ramsden asked if there was an indication from the Department for Education (DfE) on when there would be a strategy for tackling the deficit in high needs across the country and he noted the next item on the agenda (Item 12), which provided information on English county councils warning of a £1.3bn special educational needs deficit.

Ian Pearson reported that Item 12 helped put the high needs deficit in West Berkshire in context with the rest of the country. It was highlighted that the combined deficit for 40 authorities had gone up from £134m in 2018/19 to a projected £1.3bn in 2022/23. The Government looked to be engaging in conversations with those local authorities with the largest deficits in proportion to their overall DSG budget.

Ian Pearson reported that The Government were due to carry out a national SEND review, which would look at the practicalities of how young people with SEND were supported. It would also look at what SEND children were currently being provided with and what the cost of this was. The review had been delayed and a date had not been confirmed for when it would take place. The outcome of this review was required before there was any certainty about the next steps moving forward. Locally in the meantime, a number of invest to save strategies had been put in place.

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

### **37 Special Educational Needs Deficit Information Item (Ian Pearson)**

It was noted that this item had been referred to as part of Item 12.

### **38 Forward Plan**

The Schools' Forum noted the Forward Plan.

### **39 Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the Schools' Forum would take place on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2021 (location to be confirmed)

### **40 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 3 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](#).

### **41 Part II - SENDIASS – Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Information Advice & Support Services Contract (Thomas Ng)**

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*(Paragraph 3 – information relating to financial /business affairs of particular person)*

The Schools Forum considered an exempt report (Agenda Item 16) which aimed to inform the Schools' Forum the outcome of an open tendering exercise for a contractor to provide the SENDIASS (Special Education Needs and Disabilities, Information, Advice and Support Service).

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

*(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 6.00 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

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