

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 18 OCTOBER 2021

Present: Reverend Mark Bennet (Church of England Diocese), Jonathon Chishick (Maintained Primary School Governor), Jacquie Davies (Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher), Emily Dawkins (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Michelle Harrison (Maintained Primary Schools), Keith Harvey (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Jon Hewitt (Maintained Special School Headteacher), Hilary Latimer (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Catherine McLeod (Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent Provider Representative), Maria Morgan (Maintained Nursery School Headteacher), Ian Nichol (Maintained Primary School Governor), Janet Patterson (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Gemma Piper (Academy School Headteacher), David Ramsden (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher) and Graham Spellman (Roman Catholic Diocese)

Also Present: Melanie Ellis (Chief Accountant), Ian Pearson (Head of Education Services) and Jane Seymour (Service Manager, SEN & Disabled Children's Team), Jessica Bailiss (Policy Officer (Executive Support)) and Michelle Sancho (Principal EP & Service Manager)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Avril Allenby, Lisa Potts, Councillor Dominic Boeck, Catie Colston, Richard Hawthorne, Councillor Ross Mackinnon, Julia Mortimore, Chris Prosser, Campbell Smith and Charlotte Wilson

PART I

42 Minutes of previous meeting dated 19th July 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th July 2021 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

43 Actions arising from previous meetings

There was one action from the previous meeting, which had been completed.

44 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

45 Membership

Jessica Bailiss reported that there were still two vacancies on the Forum including for an academy governor representative and a maintained secondary school governor representative. Work would continue to try and fill both vacancies.

46 Schools Funding Formula Consultation 2022/23 (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 6), which set out the requirements and changes for setting the primary and secondary school funding formula for 2022/23 and to approve West Berkshire Council's funding proposals to go out to consultation with all schools.

Melanie Ellis drew attention to section 2.1 of the report, which recommended that the consultation be undertaken with all schools on:

- (1) West Berkshire Council's proposed school funding formula for 2022/23
- (2) An up to 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to other funding blocks

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- (3) The criteria to be used to allocate additional funds
- (4) The proposed services to be de-delegated.

The largest change in the 2022/23 National Funding Formula (NFF) was changes to the sparsity factor. The sparsity factor distances were now based on road distances, instead of straight-line distances and the sparsity distance taper had been introduced, in addition to the existing year group size taper. In 2021/22 seven West Berkshire schools had been eligible for sparsity and under the new NFF 22 schools would be eligible. The impact of this was detailed under the table in section 5.5 of Appendix A to the report.

Regarding recommendation two, Melanie Ellis reported that 0.5% could be transferred from the Schools' Block if approval was given by the Schools' Forum. If approved, 0.5% would equate to £590k. Melanie Ellis highlighted that there was a £60k shortfall in the Central School Services Block (CSSB) and a deficit recovery plan in place for the Early Years Block (EYB). The forecast deficit for the High Needs Block (HNB) for April 2022 was £3.6m. Proposals for how the money would be used, if a transfer was agreed to the HNB, was set out under sections 7.10 and 7.11 of the to follow pack including a revised version of Appendix A. Melanie Ellis reported that like in previous years a question would be included within the consultation with schools asking for a view on what percentage should be transferred if approved.

Melanie Ellis drew attention to section 6.1 on page 11 of the agenda. West Berkshire Council replicated the NFF as far as possible, however after pupil characteristic changes and any transfers of funding, the formula would need to be altered to remain within the total funding available. A decision would need to be taken locally on how to allocate any surplus or shortfall in the final funding allocation. In previous two years it had been agreed that this should be achieved by amending the AWPU rates and it was proposed that this option be included as part of the consultation as this provided the most even distribution across schools.

Finally Melanie referred to the final two questions within the proposed consultation regarding the criteria for accessing the additional funds set out in section eight of Appendix A and de-delegated services, which was set out under section nine of the Appendix A.

Jon Hewitt proposed that the recommendation under section 2.1 of the report, which proposed that the consultation be undertaken with all schools on the four areas listed above, be approved. This was seconded by David Ramsden. The Chair invited the Forum to vote on the proposal and the motion was approved.

RESOLVED that the Schools Forum approved the recommendation set out in section 2.1 of the report. The consultation with schools would take place for three weeks from 20th October until 10th November 2021.

47 **Draft De-delegations 2022/23 (Lisa Potts)**

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 7), which set out the details, costs and charges to schools of the services on which maintained schools representatives were required to vote (on an annual basis).

Ian Pearson highlighted the range of services for de-delegation were detailed under section 3.2 of the report. The Report would be brought back to the next meeting of the Forum in December 2021 for final decision following the consultation with schools.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

48 Scheme for Financing Schools 2021/22 (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 9), which included the updated Scheme for Financing Schools and proposed that it went out to consultation for three weeks from 20th October to 10th November 2021. There were only minor updates proposed, which were detail within Appendix B to the report.

Keith Harvey proposed that the updated Scheme for Financing Schools went out for consultation and that the updated Scheme was adopted after Schools' Forum approval in December 2021. Ian Nichol seconded the proposal. The Chair invited the Forum to vote on the proposal and at the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Schools Forum approved the recommendation under section 2.1 of the report.

49 Benchmarking Data - funding levels for Physical Disabilities (Jane Seymour)

Jane Seymour introduced the report (Agenda Item 10), which provided benchmarking data on funding of resourced provision for children with physical disabilities (PD).

Jane Seymour reported that a decision had been taken by the Forum to increase the value of the PD resourced funding bands in West Berkshire for the current financial year. This was due to increased numbers of complex cases using the provision requiring a higher level of funding. When the decision was taken, the Forum had asked for a further report to be provided on how funding bands in West Berkshire compared with other local authorities and if more use could be made of PD resources to avoid out of area placements. Jane Seymour reported that she had managed to obtain data from three other local authorities in the south east. This information showed that in all cases the bands in West Berkshire were higher than the other authorities however, West Berkshire had very low spend on specialist placements in comparison.

In conclusion Jane Seymour stated that it was felt that West Berkshire was already making very effective use of resourced provision and it was avoiding high costs on specialist external expensive placements. Further to the information in the report Jane Seymour commented that she had recently seen benchmarking data from the south east and when comparing spend per head on external placement West Berkshire was one of the lowest. Jane reported that West Berkshire was already catering for most children in house and the provision did not need to be changed. This would however, be kept under review.

Reverend Mark Bennet asked if West Berkshire could offer any surplus places to other local authorities. Jane Seymour confirmed that there was not currently any surplus places however, children from outside were sometimes accepted if possible. Gemma Piper commented that this could be an income stream overtime for the Local Authority. There were currently no surplus spaces at the Kennet secondary provision but this was something that could be considered going forward.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

50 Update on HNB Invest to Save Projects (Jane Seymour)

Jane Seymour introduced the report (Agenda Item 11), which aimed to update the HFG and Schools Forum on the invest to save projects agreed in 2020/21 and 2021/22. The first section of the report set out what the invest to save projects were and how much had been spent on each. Some projects had started in 2021 and the Schools' Forum had agreed that these should continue into 2021/22. There was then a second set of projects

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agreed in 2021/22 however, as these were not agreed until July 2021 they were only in the early stages.

Michelle Sancho drew attention to section four of the report on the Therapeutic Thinking (TT) post and increase in Vulnerable Children Grant (2020-21 and 2021-22). The table under section 4.4 of report presented the estimated savings from core schools (13 schools) that changed their school policies to fully adopt a TT approach. The total estimated savings from these schools was £244k.

Appendix A included information on all other schools and how they had benefitted from funding. Michelle Sancho drew attention to the table on 149 of Appendix A, which detailed the total estimated saving from all other schools was £634k. The total saving when combined with the figure from the core schools was £878k for the current year. This was from the investment of £58k for the TT post and £129k increase in the Vulnerable Children Grant.

Jane Seymour drew attention to section five of the report, which provided detail on the investment to appoint two teaching assistants in the Autism Team (2020-21 and 2021-22) at the cost of £58k. Two TAs had been appointed using the funding and two separate projects set up. One project working with four primary schools and one other project working with two secondary schools and groups of identified children in each. Jane Seymour provided further detail on each of the two projects and reported that all of the pupils worked with at primary level were still in school and none of the children had moved to alternative placements or become emotionally based school avoiders (EBSA).

Jane Seymour continued by providing detail on the secondary project under section 5.9 of the report, which was focused on pupils who were EBSA. Jane Seymour referred to case studies detailed within the report where it could be seen that good outcomes were being achieved.

Jane Seymour reported that she would express the savings for the Autism project in the same way as the TT and VCF projects when the invest to save projects were next reported on in March 2022. Jane Seymour reported that it was felt that three children at least would have needed out of area specialist support had it not been for the projects, providing a saving of around £186k. Savings had also been achieved from at least four children who were at high risk of EBSA and had avoided specialist placement.

Michelle Sancho moved on to comment on the new EBSA Fund and Posts (2021-22) detailed under section six of the report. A panel met once per month to consider requests from schools that had opted in to the project. Each schools was provided with actions in the way of interventions. Michelle Sancho referred to the posts detailed under section 6.1 of the report and reported that schools were very engaged. There was a number of complex cases and therefore the extra resource was being well utilised and appreciated by schools. Michelle Sancho reported that a project was also being trialled including the use of robots to increase engagement. The project had been trialled by other authorities and the feedback had been very positive. The attendance for one child in West Berkshire through the project had increased from 0 to 85 percent.

Finally Jane Seymour referred to section seven of the report, which provided detail on the ASD Funding (2021-22). The annual allocation for this initiative was £52,685. The process for schools to be able to access this funding was now in place and the first panel was held in July 2021 to consider 12 applications. A total of £11,330 was allocated by the panel. Schools were expected to provide detail on what outcomes were achieved as a result of receiving the funding and this would help provide detail on the impact of the project at a later stage.

Keith Harvey raised a question regarding ongoing funding. If through the consultation schools agreed to transfer some funding from the Schools' Block for invest to save

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purposes he queried what this would be spent on. Jane Seymour stated that in the survey with schools a number of proposals would be highlighted. One proposed area of investment was in the Early Development and Inclusion Team, which was a very small team. Increased referrals were being experienced in this area and there was a long waiting list meaning that children were starting primary school without receiving the right intervention. Investment was also proposed for iCollege places to help avoid permanent exclusions. Finally it was known that the cost of medical home tuition was going to increase significantly in line with EBSA because until children were able to return to school the Local Authority had a duty to ensure provision was in place for these children. All proposals were in keeping with aims around early identification and early intervention to help avoid high cost out of area placements by helping to keep children in mainstream schools.

Michelle Sancho reported that the iCollege review was ongoing and was looking at different ways of funding. Alternatives to permanent exclusions were being looked at through offering short term placements to support schools. Michelle Sancho stated that an increase in challenging behaviours was being experienced as a result of Covid and the proposals as part of the iCollege review would complement the TT approach.

Keith Harvey commented that what had been referred to sounded like new invest to save proposals and he queried if the plan was to continue the current invest to save projects. Ian Pearson referred to earlier explanations regarding the impact of invest to save projects and stated that the conclusion was that there had been a net positive impact on the HNB. These could not be continued as one of invest to save projects however, if agreed it was proposed that funding for these areas was mainstreamed as part of the HNB and would form a significant part of the deficit recovery plan.

Reverend Mark Bennet referred to the projects and noted the short term impacts however, asked if there was a plan to follow up on the projects to assess the long term impact and the progress of individual cases. Michelle Sancho reported that children accessing TT support would be tracked. If pupils remained in school and avoided permanent exclusion then this could be assessed overtime and projected savings could be calculated.

Gemma Piper was aware that the permanent exclusion rate in the area was very high and she queried if individual pupils were being tracked by name. It was acknowledged that it was very early on in the process but it was possible that some cases that were originally assessed as a saving were no longer the case and this needed to be taken into consideration if future investment was being based on current figures. Michelle Sancho suggested that pupils could be tracked by the financial year and this would avoid part year reporting. The issue was that the reporting cycle for the Forum did not match the academic year. Michelle Sancho confirmed that there was access to all data including pupil names, from schools that had agreed to feedback.

Gemma Piper stated that at the Heads Funding Group it had been agreed that a simplistic overview would be provided as part of the report going forward. This overview needed to include all invest to save and likely savings.

RESOLVED that:

- An overview would be added to the next report due to be presented to the Forum in March 2022, which provided a summary of investments and likely savings as a table.
- The Schools' Forum noted the report.

51 Deficit Schools (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 12), which provided details of two schools that had submitted deficit budgets for 2021/22 and three which expected to recover their deficit position in 2021/22. There were an additional two schools that ended 2020/21 with unplanned deficits entirely due to the financial impact of Covid-19.

Melanie Ellis reported that the two licensed deficits totally £77k. One of the schools was Inkpen Primary school and Melanie Ellis added that the school had not included an assumption about receiving sparsity funding. If the National Funding Formula sparsity factor was agreed as part of the consultation then this would have a large impact on the school's deficit. Melanie Ellis reported that the same applied to Beenham Primary School.

Melanie Ellis reported that two schools ended 2020/21 with an unlicensed deficit however, neither were forecasting a deficit going forward.

Ian Pearson commended schools for managing budgets in a very effective way.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

52 DSG Monitoring 2021/22 Month 6 (Ian Pearson)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 13), which presented 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 reported that the report provided Quarter Two figures and therefore the figures were forecasts and gave an indication of the position at the end of the year. Table One provided the original budget and forecasted figures for Quarter One and Two and therefore gave an indication of how the position was changing overtime.

Ian Pearson referred to Table One, where the position for the High Needs Block (HNB) appeared to be £109k. This needed to be considered in context of the significant deficit that had been set against the block.

Ian Pearson drew attention to Appendix A, which provided the DSG 2020/21 budget monitoring at Month Six. He drew attention to the 'Variance' column and highlighted that the vast majority of variances were related to top ups and managing additional funding for particular children with additional needs. This was a very difficult area to predict.

Reverend Mark Bennet referred to the Early Years Block (EYB) and asked if there was an indication if Covid had impacted on the pattern of take up of places and the additional needs of young children. Ian Pearson reported that Early Years providers had suffered a great deal throughout the pandemic from both the funding mechanism and also from parents deciding to keep children at home. Settings had also had to put a whole range of methods and strategies in place that had not been funded in the same way as schools. Funding for the sector in the current year had not been typical. The sector was also supporting a deficit reduction plan, which meant providers were operating on a reduced hourly rate and this would continue for the period of the deficit recovery plan.

Gemma Piper asked for actual figures for the last two years to be included in the report going forward.

Maria Morgan concurred with the points raised by Ian Pearson. Regarding maintained nursery provision very few settings were currently full and there had been a reduced uptake in the 30 hour places. Regarding children with additional needs, Maria Morgan stated that there were increased levels of children with lower levels of language and higher levels of anxiety. Children were also struggling to get access to the NHS services that they needed. For early years the wait for speech and language support was 72 weeks and the wait for an ASC diagnosis was 18 months longer than it was before the

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pandemic. This would mean that there would be a lot of children moving on to primary school without the support that they needed or a diagnosis. Maria Morgan was supportive of further funding going in to the Early Development and Inclusion Team (EDIT) if approved by schools.

Keith Harvey noted that Early Years providers could not comment in the consultation on the possible transfer as it was a transfer of funding from the schools block. This included potential investment in EYs through EDIT and support for transition. He commented that investment in Early Years would be of benefit to all schools. Ian Pearson referred to the list of proposals under section 7.10 of Appendix A of agenda item six, which provided details on the funding transfer to the HNB if agreed.

Catherine McLeod commented on the Early Years Sector and how it contributed to the school system. Catherine McLeod reported that the sector was currently looking at the transition phase and if there was to be some invest to save funding for early years then it would be suggested that it be focused on this area to ensure children moving out of the early years phase with SEND have the necessary support in place and to make the transition to school as smooth as possible. This would also be a benefit to schools.

Ian Pearson reported that there was an overlap between what had been referred to by Catherine McLeod and the proposal for EDIT team. It was agreed that any investment could have a significant benefit. It was important to note that it was about preparing children for the next phase of their life and education and therefore needed to be thought through carefully.

RESOLVED that:

- Actual figures for the last two years to be included in the report going forward.

53 Forward Plan

RESOLVED that the forward plan was noted.

54 Date of the next meeting

Due to Covid restrictions and venue limitations it was currently not possible to hold meetings of the Forum in person.

The next meeting of the Schools' Forum would take place on 6th December 2021 on Zoom.

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

CHAIR

Date of Signature