

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 24 JANUARY 2022

Present: Tom Barlow (Post 16 Provision), Reverend Mark Bennet (Church of England Diocese), Councillor Dominic Boeck (Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education), Jonathon Chishick (Maintained Primary School Governor), Melissa Cliffe (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Catie Colston (Vice Chair and Maintained Primary School Governor), Jackie Davies (Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher), Richard Hand (Trade Union), Keith Harvey (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Jon Hewitt (Maintained Special School Headteacher), Caroline Johnson (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Maria Morgan (Maintained Nursery School Headteacher), Julia Mortimore (Academy School Headteacher), Gemma Piper (Academy School Headteacher), Chris Prosser (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher) and Campbell Smith (Academy School Governor)

Also Present: Avril Allenby (Early Years Service Manager), Melanie Ellis (Chief Accountant), Ian Pearson (Head of Education Services), Jessica Bailiss (Policy Officer) and Michelle Sancho (Principal EP & Service Manager)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Emily Dawkins, Michelle Harrison, Councillor Ross Mackinnon, Catherine McLeod, David Ramsden, Graham Spellman and Charlotte Wilson

PART I

67 Minutes of previous meeting dated 6th December 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on the 6th December 2021 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

68 Actions arising from previous meetings

There was only one action arising from the last meeting (Dec21-Ac1). Jane Seymour reported that there had been a question raised regarding whether there would still be a deficit in the High Needs Block (HNB) if the agenda range for Education Health and Care Plans had not been increased to 25. This had been one of the main areas of pressure on the HNB over the past five years. It had not been possible to get a very specific answer to this question. The way the HNB was allocated did not break down in to age ranges and therefore it could not be identified the proportionate of the block that was for young people who were post 19.

Spend in the HNB was just over one million pounds. Historically it was likely that the amount that was allocated for young people in FE colleges was lower than the actual spend however, a specific proportion could not be identified. Jane Seymour commented that it could be safely said that the area would have created a shortfall it was unlikely that this would account for the total overspend in the HNB.

69 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

70 Membership

The following membership updates were noted:

- Ian Nichol (Maintained Primary School Representative) had stood down from the Forum and he was thanked for his commitment over the last three years.
- Caroline Johnson the headteacher at Bradfield CofE Primary School and Melissa Cliffe the headteacher at Basildon CofE Primary School had recently joined the Forum.
- Tom Barlow from Newbury College (interim Finance Director) would replace Jayne Steele on the Forum as the post 16 representative until March 2022.
- Keith Harvey and Reverend Mark Bennet had recently reached the end of their terms of office and having consulted their relevant groups had confirmed that they would continue for a further term.
- Elections for the Maintained and Academy Primary Governor positions will take place in February.

71 Schools in Financial Difficulty - Bid for Funding from Spurcroft Primary School (Melanie Ellis)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 6), which summarised the bid for £50,981 that had been received from Spurcroft Primary School to access funding from the 'Primary schools in financial difficulty' de-delegated fund. Other bids were received and reviewed by Heads Funding Group, but it was agreed that they did not meet the criteria for approval. The bids were subsequently withdrawn.

After detailed consideration of the bid from Spurcroft for £50,981, the HFG were recommending approval of the bid but to the value of £30k. The report also proposed a second recommendation to the Forum that the HFG would be used a filter to carry out the detailed work in analysing bids and that the bids that came forward to the Forum were those that were considered to meet the criteria and recommended for approval by the HFG.

Jonathan Chishick requested that more detail on bids be included in the appendices for the Forum going forward. He noted that the deficit at Spurcroft had arisen due to the out of hours club and therefore it would have been helpful to know how much the out of hours deficit was and what the position had been at 31st March 2020. It was noted that the school was setting a surplus budget for 2022/23 and it would be helpful to know how much this surplus was in the context of the £30k. Ian Pearson stated that this point would be taken away from the meeting so that further information could be included with recommended bids in the future. Melanie Ellis concurred and stated she would ensure more information was included.

Keith Harvey proposed that the recommendations set out under section two of the report be approved and this was seconded by Melissa Cliffe. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that:

- The bid from Spurcroft Primary School was approved, with payment being capped at £30,000.
- Only bids recommended by Heads Funding Group should be submitted to the Schools Forum for approval going forward.
- Melanie Ellis would ensure that more information was included in appendices for bids being recommended for approval by the Forum going forward.

72 De-delegations Proposals 2022/23 (Lisa Potts/Ian Pearson)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 7) that set out the details, cost, and charges to schools of the services on which maintained school representatives are required to vote (on an annual basis). Appendix A to the report showed how much each service cost on a school by school basis for 2022/23.

Jonathan Chishick raised a query regarding the figures for the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service. At primary level it applied to over 700 pupils however, at secondary school there were only 11 pupils. He queried why the numbers reduced so dramatically going in to secondary school. Part of the service ensured that GCSE papers were provided in a language that could be understood by these children and Jonathan Chishick was therefore surprised regarding the split in the cost to primary schools compared to the cost to secondary schools. Ian Pearson stated that this area was the most complex in terms of the way the census produced information that fed into the allocation. A large difference in numbers would be expected between primary and secondary school due to seven of the ten secondary schools being academies and therefore would not feature in the total pupil numbers being catered for. Some of these secondary schools were very large. Academies that want access to the service had to buy the service and were not able to delegate. For maintained schools, if the fund was de-delegated then the service was available free of charge to these schools. Numbers however, did not relate to pupil numbers support in a particular year as they could only be viewed retrospectively from previous data. Ian Pearson stated that a fuller explanation could be provided at the next meeting.

Melanie Ellis added that the numbers were generated by the October census. Melanie Ellis stated that with further investigation she should be able to see how these figures were comprised.

Catie Colston raised a question regarding the School Improvement Team under section 11 of the report. The proposed change to the service regarding how it would be funded was noted under section 11.2. Not all might be aware that a consultation had recently taken place and Catie Colston felt it would be worth clarifying what this would mean.

In response to Catie Colston's question Ian Pearson report that up until 2022/23 School Improvement Services within local Authorities had been funded through Government grant money. The consultation had taken place at the end of 2021 and had been carried out to help the Government consider whether to allocate the grant. The view had been taken by the Department of Education not to allocate the grant and therefore school improvement would need to be factored into the de-delegation arrangements when the Schools' Forum set the budget for each year. The consultation had concluded before Christmas and subsequently the DfE had clarified their response to the consultation. The responses to the consultation showed that around 75% had not wished to take the route proposed by the Government however, regardless of this view this was the approach adopted. The approach would include a two stage process including 50 percent of the grant being removed in the first year and the whole amount in the second year.

Ian Pearson further explained that it had been assessed how much 50 percent would be as this would essentially be the gap that would need to be funded through de-delegations. This sum had been reduced slightly due to money held in the reserve fund. Another conversation would be required in the following year when the whole of the grant was removed to decide on a suitable level of funding for de-delegation.

The Chair invited the relevant members of the Forum to vote on each of the recommendations as follows.

SCHOOLS FORUM - 24 JANUARY 2022 - MINUTES

Recommendation 2.1:

That representatives of maintained primary schools should agree to de-delegate funds in the 2022/23 financial year for:

- *Behaviour Support Services*
- *Ethnic Minority Support*
- *Trade Union Representation*
- *Schools in Financial Difficulty*
- *CLEAPSS*
- *School Improvement*
- *Statutory and Regulatory Duties comprising:*
 - *Statutory accounting functions in respect of schools*
 - *Internal Audit of schools*
 - *Administration of pensions for school staff*
- *Health and Safety Service to Schools*

Jonathon Chishick proposed that the recommendation be approved by maintained primary school representatives and this was seconded by Keith Harvey. At the vote the motion was carried.

Recommendation 2.2:

That representatives of maintained secondary schools should agree to de-delegate funds in the 2022/23 financial year for:

- *Behaviour Support Services*
- *Ethnic Minority Support*
- *Trade Union Representation*
- *CLEAPSS*
- *School Improvement*
- *Statutory and Regulatory Duties comprising:*
 - *Statutory accounting functions in respect of schools*
 - *Internal Audit of schools*
 - *Administration of pensions for school staff*
- *Health and Safety Service to Schools*

Chris Prosser proposed that the recommendation be approved and at the vote the motion was carried.

Recommendation 2.3:

That representatives of maintained special, nursery and PRU heads should agree to de-delegate funds in the 2022/23 financial year for:

- *CLEAPSS (Special schools and PRU only)*
- *Statutory and Regulatory Duties comprising:*
 - *Statutory accounting functions in respect of schools*
 - *Internal Audit of schools*
 - *Administration of pensions for school staff*
- *Health and Safety Service to Schools*

Jon Hewitt proposed that the recommendation be approved by maintained special, nursery and PRU representatives and this was seconded by Maria Morgan. At the vote the motion was carried.

SCHOOLS FORUM - 24 JANUARY 2022 - MINUTES

RESOLVED that:

- A fuller explanation and detail to be provided on the difference in numbers accessing the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service at primary and secondary level.
- Each of the recommendations set out under section two of the report were agreed.

73 High Needs Block Budget 2022/23 (Jane Seymour)

Jane Seymour introduced the report (Agenda Item 8) which set out the current financial position of the High Needs Block (HNB) budget for 2021/22 and the position as far as it can be predicted for 2022/23, including the likely shortfall. The report was similar to the report brought to the Forum in December 2021 and therefore Jane Seymour stated that she would highlight the difference. The purpose of the report was to seek approval of the overall HNB and that the transferred funding from the Schools' Block should be used for invest to save purposes, subject to further information being provided at the next meeting in March 2022.

Jane Seymour drew attention to paragraph 3.7 of the report. The predicted spend for 2022/23 was approximately £244k higher than estimated in November 2021, mainly due to some additional independent school placements. Jane Seymour highlighted however, that the overspend in the block had reduced since the last meeting as was now £5,196,855. Without carried forward underspends, the shortfall for 2022/23 would be £1,480,178. The reason that this was lower than detailed at the last meeting in December 2021 was because the high needs settlement had been more than expected by about £910k.

The figures for the block were set out in more detail under Table One of the report on page 61. The table showed the transferred funding from the Schools' Block, which as £300,200. Members of the Heads Funding Group had requested more detailed information regarding actual spend against the HNB over the last three years and this information would be incorporated within the report for the next meeting in March 2022.

Jane Seymour drew attention to the end of the report, which highlighted that consideration needed to be given to how the money transferred from Schools' Block should be used. An outline of how this funding could be used had been included within the consultation with schools however further detail and proposals could be found under Table 10 on page 74 of the report. Jane Seymour reported that initiatives were being proposed that would improve early intervention and prevent exclusions and costly specialist placements.

Jane Seymour provided detail on each of the proposals included within Table 10. Jane Seymour highlighted that the second proposal regarding funding for SEN in early years, required further discussion. Nursery representatives had felt that there were other areas within early years where spending could help early intervention in addition to improving the capacity of the EDIT Team. There would be further discussion on this area with the Early Years Funding Group.

Jane Seymour reported that further work was required regarding impact and actual cost savings against each of the proposals. A further report would be brought to the next round of meetings in March 2022 for agreement. At the current meeting agreement was sought on rest of the HNB budget proposals contained within the report.

Jonathon Chishick referred to table one within the section of the report on place funding. He noted that there was no total at the bottom of the 'current number of pupils' column or for further education (FE). If further education was excluded then the budgeted number of places was 601 and if this was added to the current number of pupils it was 712. He therefore queried if 712 needed to be budgeted for. Jane Seymour reported that the reason that the information was set out like this was because the budget could not be

SCHOOLS FORUM - 24 JANUARY 2022 - MINUTES

increased for places by seeking additional funding from the ESFA, unless it was for academies or FE, an uneven playing field, which pushed up costs. When additional place funding was required above the official planned placement number. The cost of additional places was taken therefore out of the relevant top up budget. Jane Seymour understood it was confusing and stated that this could be set out differently if required. Jonathon Chishick felt that it was important to be clear about how many pupils needed support. Jane Seymour assured the Forum that these children had been budgeted for but they had been budgeted for in a different part of the HNB. Jane Seymour stated that it could be made clearer how many places were being budgeted within the report.

Reverend Mark Bennet noted under the same table that the current number of pupils in special schools was 440 against 365 places. He queried if this was placing pressure on capacity of the special schools and whether any of this pressure was diverting back into main stream schools. Jane Seymour reported that the number of places did not bear any relation to the physical capacity of the schools. It was a notional number of places that the DfE was willing to recognise and fund through the formula and it was based on the number of children that were historically placed so not reflective of current reality. Jane Seymour added however, that special schools were under pressure. These schools took as many pupils as they could within their physical capacity, which was the main limiting factor. Sometimes there was a small number of children that had to wait for places and if this was the case then additional support would be funded to ensure their needs were being met until they were transitioned. It was an area that needed to be continuously monitored and it was a national issue. Providing additional provision for children with moderate difficulties formed part of the SEND Strategy.

Reverend Mark Bennet queried if the table could be amended so that what Jane Seymour had explained could be made clearer in the headings. Reverend Mark Bennet stated that he would also be interested to see some information on the actual capacity of existing provision so that pressure in the system could be judged.

Gemma Piper stated that it was recognised that the cost of the placements at some provision such as Engaging Potential was more cost effective. Gemma Piper asked if any work had been done regarding expanding some of the smaller provisions, where the cost of placements were known to be significantly less. Jane Seymour confirmed that currently detailed work on expanding Engaging Potential had not been carried out. Engaging Potential was an independent school and not a local authority maintained provision that could be expanded however, this did not mean that negotiations could not take place. Early stage discussions had begun on this due to the success of the provision particularly with children who were Emotionally Based School Avoiders (EBSA). The SEND Strategy would be refreshed over the next 12 months and this was likely to be something that was looked at. Jane Seymour reported that the number of places for children with EHCPs had been increased at iCollege and there was now primary provision. A lot of effort and resource was also being put in to the new SEMH resource in Theale.

The Chair invited the Forum to vote on the recommendations listed under section two of the report. Jon Hewitt proposed that the recommendations be supported and this was seconded by Maria Morgan.

RESOLVED that:

- Jane Seymour to present it clearer within the report how many places were being budgeted for.
- The Schools' Forum agreed the overall HNB budget for 2022/23.
- The Schools' Forum agreed that the transfer of funds from the Schools Block should be used for invest to save purposes, subject to a further detailed report on the usage of funds being brought to the next round of meetings in March 2022.

74 DSG Funding Settlement Overview 2022/23 (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 9), which set out the confirmed Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation for 2022/23. The final allocations had been received in December 2021 and were set out in the report.

Regarding the Schools' block, Melanie Ellis drew attention to the table under 5.1. The growth allocation had now been received, which was £874k. The estimate had been £900k. As recommended by officers and agreed by the Schools' Forum this funding would be allocated to schools according to the agreed funding formula.

Melanie Ellis moved on to the High Needs Block (HNB) and reported that an additional £910k had been allocated. This was released by the DfE for additional costs that were not foreseen when the original allocations were made. The detail on this was included within the previous report on the HNB.

Melanie Ellis reported that the Central Schools Services Block had been finalised and had only changed by £7k. This money would be put towards the historic deficit of £70k. The figures for early years had also been received and were detailed under section eight of the report.

The table under section 9.1 of the report showed the actual deficit at 1st April 2021, the forecast position in 2021/22 and the forecast for 2022/23 based on these levels of funding.

Jonathon Chishick understood that a couple of extra grants schools had been receiving for PE and Sport Premium were coming to an end in July 2022. He queried if the DfE had allocated any funds through the DSG to replace this funding. Melanie Ellis stated that she had not seen any detail on this within the funding allocations. Ian Pearson noted the point and stated that this would be looked in to in time for the next Forum in March, though the DfE had not given timescales for announcements.

RESOLVED that:

- Melanie Ellis to look in to whether any replacement funding was planned by the DfE as a result of the PE and Sport Premium Grants ending in July 2022.

75 School Funding Formula 2022/23 (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 10), which set out the final school funding formula allocations for 2022/23. The table under section five of the report showed the final allocations that schools would receive and this was after the quarter percent transfer to the HNB.

Ian Pearson added that the money allocated to each school was significantly determined by pupil numbers on roll. So there might be an increase in the per pupil value however, a school might see a decrease in its budget due to a decrease in pupil numbers.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

76 Early Years Block Budget - update on Deficit Recovery Plan (Avril Allenby)

Avril Allenby introduced the report (Agenda Item 11), which set out how the Early Years deficit was progressing.

Prior to the pandemic the deficit in the Early Years Block (EYB) had been looked at and a deficit recovery plan had been put in place over a five year period and included a reduction across rates. The detail on this was set out in the table under section 3.1 of the

SCHOOLS FORUM - 24 JANUARY 2022 - MINUTES

report. Avril Allenby highlighted that due to the nature of the budget some figures were actual and some were estimates.

Lisa Potts reported that the current position of the EYB was set out in the table under 3.3 of the report. The table showed the amount saved to date based on actual hours for Summer and Autumn 2021 and gave a figure of £70,600. An estimate of £27,898 had also been provided for spring hours within the table based on hours during this period for 2021. The provisional total amount towards the deficit was £98,498. Lisa Potts added that the target figure for year one had been £123,202 however highlighted that the provisional figure was currently based on estimates and some providers were expecting spring hours to be higher.

Avril Allenby reported that there was additional funding coming into early years, which was agreed as part of the spending review. This was detailed under section four of the report. Consideration needed to be given to this locally regarding how it would be transferred through in to the local funding formula bearing the deficit recovery plan in mind. Discussion on this would take place at the Early Years Funding Group.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report and that a further report would be brought to the next meeting in March 2022, to agree this block.

77 **Central School Block Budget 2022/23 (Lisa Potts)**

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 12), which set out the budget for services funded from the Central Schools' Services (CSSB) block of the DSG.

Ian Pearson drew attention to section 4.3, which detailed that the final allocation had been notified and was £7k higher than the initial allocation. This £7k would go towards reducing the prior year deficit of £70k.

Catie Colston noted the high cost against National Copyright Licenses and queried if there was anything that could be done to bring this down. Ian Pearson commented that this. Ian Pearson reported that effort was made to buy collectively however, costs were set and this was outside of the Local Authorities control.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

78 **Growth Fund 2021/22 (Melanie Ellis)**

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 13), which aimed to inform Forum members of payments made to schools from the Growth Fund budget in 2021/22.

Only one school had applied and been approved for growth funding, which was the Calcots, for the amount of £38.5k. Further detail could be found within the report.

All schools had been invited to make a funding request after the October 2021 census data, if they felt that they met the growth fund criteria.

The table on page 100 of the report showed the forecast balance in the growth fund and the forecast amount remaining at 31st March 2023 was £786,767.

Gemma Piper queried what happened to contingency funding. Melanie Ellis confirmed that the funding was placed in this category in case there was another application received. If this funding was not paid out the balance in the fund would increase.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

79 DSG Monitoring 2021/22 Month 9 (Ian Pearson)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 14), which reported 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 commented that the report provided detail on quarter three/period nine. Figures within the report provided detail on the overall position of each of the blocks and this was set out under Table One. Table One showed previous outturn positions and the direction of travel for the current year. The surplus/deficit position detailed was what was forecast at this point of the year and was not a final figure. The deficit/surplus column gave an indication of how each of the blocks was performing against what was previously predicted.

Ian Pearson stated that it was worth noting that overall deficit within the DSG was a combination of all the blocks, although the majority of the deficit sat within the HNB. There had currently not been a request from DfE to provide a deficit recovery plan against the net DSG deficit.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

80 Forward Plan

Jonathan Chishick noted bids to the Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund were being considered at the next Heads Funding Group. He asked if the bids were awarded if this would come out of next year's budget or the current year's budget. If next year, he queried if extra provision needed to be added to the budget for this fund.

Ian Pearson stated that was possible that further bids might be submitted and therefore consideration needed to be given to whether these bids could be placed on the next HFG agenda. Previously an additional meeting had been set up and it was possible that this might have to happen again.

Ian Pearson explained that they did not currently know what the call on the fund would be however, it had been agreed at an earlier Forum meeting that the pot of funding should be topped up to £200k. Melanie Ellis added that the de-delegations had now been agreed and the budget allocations had to be submitted to the DfE imminently. Further bids to the fund would therefore have to be taken out of the following years allocation.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

81 Date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Schools' Forum would take place on 14th March 2022 on Zoom.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 6.10 pm)

CHAIR

Date of Signature