

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 20 JUNE 2022

Present: 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 (Academy School Governor), Paul Davey (Maintained Primary School Governor), Jacquie Davies (Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher), Richard Hand (Trade Union), Keith Harvey (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Richard Hawthorne (Academy School Headteacher), Jon Hewitt (Maintained Special School Headteacher), Catherine McLeod (Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent Provider Representative), Gemma Piper (Academy School Headteacher), Chris Prosser (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), David Ramsden (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), Campbell Smith (Academy School Governor), Graham Spellman (Roman Catholic Diocese) and Charlotte Wilson (Academy School Headteacher)

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

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Michelle Harrison, Caroline Johnson, Councillor Ross Mackinnon, Michelle Sancho and Phil Spray

PART I

95 Election of Chair and Vice-Chair 2022/23

Ian Pearson invited the Schools' Forum to nominate and vote on the position of Chair for the coming year.

RESOLVED that Graham Spellman would continue as Chair of the Schools' Forum for the 2022/23 municipal year.

Graham Spellman invited the Schools' Forum to nominate and vote on the position of Vice-Chair for the coming year.

RESOLVED that Catie Colston would continue as Vice-Chair of the Schools' Forum for the 2022/23 municipal year.

96 Minutes of previous meeting dated 14th March 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on the 14th March 2022 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

97 Actions arising from previous meetings

Action Mar22-Ac1 was in hand.

98 Declarations of Interest

Melissa Cliffe declared an interest in Agenda Item 18 by virtue of the fact that she was the Headteacher at Basildon Primary School which had submitted one of the bids due to be considered by the Forum and reported that, as her interest was a disclosable

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pecuniary interest or an other registrable interest, she would be leaving the meeting during the course of consideration of the matter.

Jacque Davies declared an interest in Agenda Item 18 by virtue of the fact that she was A governor at Basildon Primary School which had submitted one of the bids due to be considered by the Forum and reported that, as her interest was a disclosable pecuniary interest or an other registrable interest, she would be leaving the meeting during the course of consideration of the matter.

99 Membership

Jess Bailiss reported that two elections had been held recently and Paul Davey had joined the Forum as the new maintained primary governor representative and Catie Colston had been elected as the new academy governor representative.

100 School Balances 2021/22 (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 7), which set out for information purposes the year end balances for all maintained schools, highlighting those schools with a deficit or significant surplus. This was the second year with a significant increase in school balances. Melanie Ellis reported that this matched the picture across local authority areas nationally. Table two summarised the balances of West Berkshire maintained schools by fund.

Melanie Ellis reported that table four under section five of the report showed those schools with a main school surplus balance greater than 10 percent of their funding in 2021/22.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

101 School Energy Bills (Adrian Slaughter/Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 8), which aimed to provide schools with an update on 2022/23 Energy Costs through the Council's Central Energy Contract for electricity and gas.

Melanie Ellis drew attention to section four of the report where it could be seen from the analysis carried out to date that enough provision had been made within budgets to cover the overall spend for electricity and gas. Melanie Ellis warned however, that it was possible this could change.

Melanie Ellis reported that schools had received a new supplementary grant from Government for 2022/23, which was aimed at covering inflationary pressures as well as the Health and Social Care Levy. Within the report there was an offer from Adrian Slaughter and the Energy Team for schools to get in touch if any further information was required on a school by school basis.

Richard Hand asked if the October 2022 increases in energy prices would impact schools as he was conscious that the cap was going to be increased again at this time. Melanie Ellis believed that the Energy Team purchased at various price points throughout the year. Melanie Ellis would feed the question back to Adrian Slaughter and he could provide some information to go out with the minutes.

RESOLVED that:

- Melanie Ellis would ask Adrian Slaughter for an answer to the question regarding whether if and how the October 2022 increases would impact schools in light of the cap being increased at this time.
- The Schools' Forum noted the report.

102 Briefing Note - DSG High Needs Block and the DfE 'Delivering Better Value in SEND Programme' (Ian Pearson)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 9), which aimed to provide an update on the Dedicated Schools' Grant, High Needs Block (HNB) overspend and West Berkshire Council being invited to join the DfE's 'Delivering Better Value (DBV) in SEND Programme'.

The report was for information and addressed the overspend in the HNB in the context of what the Government had decided to do to address the issue facing local authorities. There was recognition that there were growing deficits across many authorities within their HNBs and therefore the Government had set up two programmes. The first programme was called the Safety Valve Programme and this was for authorities with extremely high deficits. There was then a lower tier programme called the Delivering Better Value in SEND Programme and West Berkshire, along with many other authorities, had been invited to join this. There was a timescale for when West Berkshire would likely enter the programme, which was spring 2023. This was because West Berkshire was in tier three of the Delivering Better Value in SEND Programme, which consisted of authorities with lower deficits. Local authorities in the first tier of this programme were those that had the highest deficits (but below the threshold of the Safety Valve Programme) and the starting point for these authorities was summer 2022 with tier two starting in the autumn.

The DfE was hoping to address deficits through a review of SEN services in the area. Remedial advice would be provided on approaches being taken and whether any changes were required to the SEN Strategy to help drive costs down. This should not be viewed as disconnected to proposals in the SEN Green Paper, which had been published in May 2022 alongside the Education White Paper/Bill. Ian Pearson stated that there would be more to report on once West Berkshire had started the programme in the spring.

Catherine McLeod asked if the programme also covered early years with regards to early intervention. Ian Pearson confirmed that it would cover early years and he also highlighted that in the current financial year, through invest to save initiatives, some funding had been assigned to early years and specifically the area of speech and language. The more these issues could be addressed early on, the greater benefit there would be to children and also in terms of the level of support that would have to put in place subsequently and the cost of this support. It was hoped that the Green Paper would address this issue in depth.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

103 Vulnerable Children's Fund - Annual Report for 2020/21 (Michelle Sancho)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 10), which provided a review of the Vulnerable Children's Grant (VCG) 2021/2022.

Ian Pearson explained that the Schools' Forum had agreed expenditure within the High Needs Block for the VCG and accountability needed to be provided for this expenditure through reporting on how the money had been spent and the impact. The VCG was a new fund and the report set out some of the background and what the funding was used for.

The grant was aimed at new arrivals, including in-year arrivals in schools, who were presenting with a level of need but where there was no obvious source of funding.

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The report set out that in 2021/22, 52 pupils from 26 settings were supported. The small pie chart on page 26 showed clearly that the majority of children presenting with a need that had been supported by the grant, had social, emotional and mental health needs.

Ian Pearson highlighted that positive feedback had been received from schools accessing the grant. Although the grant did not provide a long term solution for schools it enabled schools to take stock of what the needs were, before addressing them initially and then working out how needs could be addressed in the longer term.

Paul Davey asked if the grant was available to refugee children without English as a first language. Ian Pearson explained that theoretically a school could access the grant on behalf of any child that was presenting with issues that were preventing a child from accessing learning. However, he suggested that it would be worth looking at other funding route options. There were two main groups of refugee children being provided for in West Berkshire and these were from Afghanistan and the Ukraine. The Government was providing education funding for these two groups. The funding had been deployed through support services or directly to schools, which could then be used to buy support. Funding had already been received for Afghan refugee children and was due to arrive for those from the Ukraine in July 2022. Ian Pearson explained that this was dedicated funding for refugee children and their needs.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

104 Trade Union Facilities Time - Annual Report for 2021/22 (Richard Hand)

Richard Hand introduced the report (Agenda Item 11), which informed members about the activities of the teaching trade unions.

Richard Hand provided an update on paying conditions given the current situation and the possibility of an indicative ballot. He reported that the independent teacher pay review body was due to make its recommendations by the end of term. The indication was that there would be a two year deal and new teachers would be given an increase of seven and eight percent, which would take it to the £30k promised as part of the manifesto in 2019. Experienced teachers could expect a three and two percent pay rise with a sliding scale between the two points. The NEU had written to the Education Secretary and would be sending a letter the following day once the inflation figures had been published.

Catie Colston referred to the part of the report on grievances and noted that there had been an increase in these in the last year. Catie Colston queried if this was part of a trend and if anything could be learnt from it. Richard Hand did not believe it was part of a trend however, would look at the figures in more detail to see if there was something emerging.

Ian Pearson referred to the funding figures on page 34 of the report. He noted that the funding envelope was just over £55k and this had been divided across the three unions NEU, NAHT and ASCL. It was noted that there was not a line for NASUWT and this was likely because there was not a representative at this time. If a NASUWT representative was appointed he queried how the money would be divided so that they could have facilities time in a year when it had been allocated to others. Richard Hand was unsure of the answer on this and had used the table provided by Abi Witting in HR Services. Richard Hand stated he would be happy to check and Ian Pearson suggested that they continue the conversation outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED that:

- Richard Hand would look into figures on grievances to see if the increase over the last year was part of a trend.
- The Schools' Forum noted the report.

105 Therapies Contract (Jane Seymour)

Jane Seymour introduced the report (Agenda 12), which sought to inform the Schools' Forum about the re commissioning of the therapy service for children who had speech and language therapy, occupational therapy or physiotherapy written into their Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) as an educational need. West Berkshire Council had a statutory duty to provide these therapies for children with EHCPs,

The provision of speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy for children who did not have an EHCP was the responsibility of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in Health.

The contract currently was held by Berkshire Health Foundation Trust. The current contract cost West Berkshire Council £323k per annum and this was funded from the High Needs Block (HNB).

It was agreed in 2021 by the Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) Children's Programme Board that therapies should in future be commissioned on a Berkshire West footprint as a joint arrangement involving West Berkshire Council, Brighter Futures for Children (Reading) and Wokingham Borough Council, with Wokingham as the lead authority. Together the three local authorities had agreed a new service specification for the joint service, based on existing service specifications. The contract was advertised in February 2022 with a submission date of 29th April 2022. Tenders were currently being evaluated by a panel consisting of representatives from all three areas. The new contract was due to commence in September 2022. Each area would then purchase an agreed amount of therapies.

Due to procurement regulations it was not possible to give any further details on the process at this stage however, it was expected that there would likely be an increase in the cost of the contract due to inflation and salary costs. It was also possible that increases might be sought in line with increasing demand for therapies in schools given the level of EHCPs had increased.

The final outcome of the process would be reported to the Schools' Forum once a decision had been made.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

106 DSG Outturn 2021/22 (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda item 13), which detailed the outturn of the services funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), highlighting any under or over spends, and to highlight the cumulative deficit at 31 March 2022.

Melanie Ellis reported that at the beginning of the last financial year there had been a cumulative deficit of £1.5 million and this had increased to £1.7m by 31st March 2022. The 2021/22 DSG expenditure budget was set at £1.6m higher than available funding and this was treated as an in-year deficit against the High Needs Block (HNB). Overall DSG spend for 2021/22 was £372k less than budgeted, helping to reduce the in-year deficit to £1.27m. The deficit against the whole of the DSG cumulatively was £2.96m.

Melanie Ellis provided an overview of each of the blocks. The Schools Block had a surplus of £1.6m. This was largely due to the Growth Fund, which had been reduced over the last two years.

The Early Years Block (EYB) had overspent by £67k and there was a deficit recovery programme in place. There was a cumulative deficit in the block amounting to £900k.

The Central Schools' Block was underspent by £8k with a cumulative deficit of £64k, which would hopefully reduce when the next budget was set.

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There had been an in year deficit of £1.2 million in the HNB and the cumulative deficit in the block was £3.6 million.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

107 Deficit Schools (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 14), which provided an update on the outturn position of the two schools that set a deficit budget in 2021/22 and three schools that planned to repay their deficits by the end of 2021/22.

Melanie Ellis reported that there had been two schools with a licensed deficit of £77k between them. The schools had closed the year with a small overall surplus.

There were three schools that had planned to repay their deficits in 2021/22 and all had managed to do so. Detail on these schools was included under section 5.2 of the report.

Melanie Ellis drew attention to section six of the report, which detailed the schools that had ended 2021/22 with unplanned deficits. There was a total closing deficit between these schools of about £153k. These were the schools that would be monitored closely going forward. The theme for what had caused the schools to go into deficit was staffing costs and wrap around care. Four of the five schools had their deficit license underway with the exception of Hermitage, which was planning to be out of deficit soon.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

108 Forward Plan

The Chair invited comments from the Schools' Forum regarding the Forward Plan. Jess Bailiss highlighted any changes that were required.

RESOLVED that:

- An item would be added to the Forward Plan for the next meeting in July, providing an update on the Therapies Contract.
- The Schools' Forum noted the Forward Plan.

109 Date and format of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Schools' Forum would take place on 18th July 2022. It was agreed that the meeting would take place virtually on zoom.

110 Exclusion of the Press and Public

109 RESOLVED that members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the under mentioned items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as contained in Paragraphs 2 and 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.

(Jacquie Davies and Melissa Cliffe left the meeting for the following agenda item.)

111 Part II - Schools in Financial Difficulty Bids from Theale and Basildon Primary Schools (Melanie Ellis)

(Paragraph 2 – Information identifying an individual)

The Schools' Forum considered an exempt report (Agenda Item 18), which summarised the bids that had been received from schools to access funding from the Primary Schools in Financial Difficulty de-delegated fund.

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RESOLVED that:

- The Schools' Forum approved the bid from Theale CE Primary School.
- The Schools' Forum rejected the bid from Basildon CE Primary School, but suggested it could be revised and resubmitted.

(Jacquie Davies re-joined the meeting.)

112 Part II - Engaging Potential Contract (Jane Seymour)

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

The Schools' Forum considered an exempt report (Agenda Item 19), which sought a decision from the Schools' Forum on a request from Engaging Potential for an inflationary increase in their contract price.

RESOLVED that the recommendation in the exempt report was approved.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 6.40 pm)

CHAIR

Date of Signature