

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 18 JULY 2022

Present: Didem Allen (Post 16 Provider Representative), Reverend Mark Bennet (Church of England Diocese), Councillor Dominic Boeck, Jonathon Chishick (Maintained Primary School Governor), Melissa Cliffe (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Catie Colston (Academy School Governor), Paul Davey (Maintained Primary School Governor), Jackie Davies (Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher), Emily Dawkins (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Richard Hand (Trade Union), Catherine McLeod (Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent Provider Representative), Maria Morgan (Maintained Nursery School Headteacher), Gemma Piper (Academy School Headteacher), Chris Prosser (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), David Ramsden (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher) and Phil Spray (Maintained Primary School Governor)

Also Present: Karen Felgate (Contracts and Commissioning Manager), Kate Pearson (Service Manager Commissioning & Procurement) (Ian Pearson (Head of Education Services), Jessica Bailiss (Policy Officer (Executive Support))

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Avril Allenby, Melanie Ellis, Michelle Harrison, Keith Harvey, Jon Hewitt, Councillor Ross Mackinnon, Campbell Smith, Graham Spellman and Charlotte Wilson

(Vice Chair, Catie Colston in the Chair)

Catie Colston opened the meeting and announced that it would be Jonathan Chishick's last meeting as he was standing down as a governor (after 28 years) and from the Forum. Jonathan Chishick was elected to the Forum in 2016 and he was thanked on behalf of the Forum for his commitment and contribution over the years.

Didem Allen had joined the Forum as the new post 16 representative from Newbury College and was welcomed to the meeting.

PART I

113 Minutes of previous meeting dated 20th June 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th June 2022 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

114 Actions arising from previous meetings

It was noted that actions Jun22-Ac1 and June22-Ac3 were in-hand.

June22-Ac2, Trade Union Facilities Time, figures on grievances: Richard Hand reported that he had obtained figures on grievances for West Berkshire. There were currently five live grievance cases. One grievance case had resulted in a settlement and therefore not progressed. Another case involved a staff member who had left and therefore the process had not progressed. One of the cases had involved the Trade Union defending a member of staff against a grievance and this highlighted that it was not just members lodging grievances that was dealt with, although the majority of cases were. There had been several cases of informal grievances that had not been escalated.

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Richard Hand explained that the escalation of grievances was not encouraged due to the process being very time consuming. Richard Hand explained that he had attended a national conference and anecdotally there seemed to be a growing number of grievances nationally. Grievance cases did seem to be rising and it was thought that this might be due to resilience post covid and staff members feeling overlooked, when workload and expectations had risen.

Richard Hand reported that there had also been a rise in grievances being lodged without the Trade Union being consulted. The guidance was always for advice to be sought from the Trade Union in the first instance to see if a matter could be resolved informally.

115 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

116 **Schools' Forum Membership and Constitution from September 2022 (Jess Bailiss)**

Jess Bailiss introduced the report (Agenda Item 5), which aimed to review and where necessary update the membership and Constitution of the School's forum for 2022/23.

It was reported that there had not been any changes to legislation requiring a change to the Forum's current practise. Table 1 showed that the number of pupils in each sector had remained broadly the same and therefore no changes were proposed to the structure of the membership at that time.

Section 4.2 of the report detailed Forum members approaching the end of their term of office. Jess Bailiss reported that Jon Hewitt had confirmed that he had consulted his special school colleagues and would continue for the further term as the special school representative. David Ramsden had been approached about consulting other secondary heads to establish whether they wished to appoint him for a further term. Jess Bailiss also added that an election would be held in September 2022 to elect a new primary maintained governor representative to take over from Jonathan Chishick, whose term was also due to end in September.

Finally it was concluded that some of the wording under the membership section was amended following the last time the constitution came to the Forum in 2021, to clarify and make the section clear.

It was proposed that the Forum approved the membership and the Constitution from September 2022. The Chair invited the Forum to vote on the proposal and at the vote the motion was approved.

RESOLVED that the Forum's membership and Constitution from September 2022 was approved.

117 **Schools' Waste Contract (Kate Pearson)**

Kate Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 6), which aimed to inform schools on the options available for future provision for the Waste Recycling Collection and Disposal Service in light of the expiry of the current contract on 31st March 2023.

Kate Pearson reported that current contract served 85 school sites throughout the West Berkshire District Council area. The Council had been responsible for the procurement of the contract and was the contract manager. The report detailed the reasons as to why this approach was being moved away from moving forward, including issues with the contract management and the amount of time it consumed. The proposed options would bring management of the waste contract in line with the catering and cleaning contracts, which schools' managed directly.

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Going forward schools could go out to procure independently or opt to be part of the Council led procurement process. Schools would however, need to take on the contract management in house rather than this responsibility sitting with the Council as it did currently. A decision on this was being sought from schools by 30th September 2022 to allow time for re-procurement by 31st March 2023 when the current contract was due to expire. Kate Pearson highlighted that a draft timetable for the procurement process was included under section 6.5 of the report.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

118 **Early Years Block Budget - Update on deficit recovery plan (Avril Allenby)**

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

Lisa Potts reported that they now had the outturn figures for 2021/22. This was also the first year that a deficit recovery plan had been in place for the block. The deficit had reduced by about £56k which was lower than the target of £130k. The plan had been to make lower savings in the first two years of the five deficit recovery plan but there was concern that achieved savings in the first year had been lower than planned. The overall deficit in the block had reduced from £970k to £914k.

Lisa Potts reported that the deficit recovery plan would be reviewed along with the rates for 2023/24. If changes were required to the original deficit recovery plan then the Early Years Funding Group would need to be consulted.

Ian Pearson thanked Lisa Potts for her update and was aware that she and Avril Allenby were having regular conversations with the Early Years Funding Group on the matter. It was important to be aware that it was a very difficult budget to manage and it was important to be realistic about expectations and what could be delivered. The aim was to balance the budget in the block by the end of the five year deficit recovery plan period and due to planned savings not being achieved in the first year, those involved in the budget would need to look at remodelling the deficit recovery plan. Any remodelling would have to take in to account the impact on the different provider groups. Once the plan had been looked at again it would need to be brought back to the Forum for consideration. It was suggested that a report be brought back to the October round of meetings that provided a direction of travel and views from the Early Years Funding Group as part of the planning process. A more detailed plan would then need to be brought back for sign off at a later meeting. Paul Davey supported the proposal that further information on the direction of travel should be brought back to the next meeting of the Forum in October.

Reverend Mark Bennett stated that it was being heard that developmental losses as a result of covid had been substantial particularly in the lower years of primary school. Part of the challenge was getting children well educated at an early age whilst managing the funding model. If further detail was to be brought to a future meeting it would be helpful to know the impact operationally and whether the group of children that needed increased support were being reached. Ian Pearson commented that a much more enlightened approach had been adopted in forming the current year's budget because there had been recognition that children in early year's settings had a range of needs that were not being addressed as effectively due to insufficient resources. There had been difficulties accessing speech and language services due to waiting times, so the Forum had transferred funding from the High Needs Block to put some additional resource into this area to address the issues. It was important that early years settings were supported, potentially through the High Needs Block or through the development of a prevention strategy, which the Council was currently working on. Children and families needed to be

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supported however, there was no easy solution and issues could not be solved solely by the Early Years Funding block.

Catherine McLeod commented that the sector was extremely stressed and was facing a recruitment crises. It was understood that the block needed to achieve savings however Catherine McLeod stressed that it needed to be kept in mind how hard it was for the sector at the moment.

Cate Colston agreed that the plan should be re-visited along with the forecast, whilst considering what the possible ramifications were of any plans to save money. The Forum would need to take a view on how realistic and feasible any plans were.

Maria Morgan referred to the comments made by Ian Pearson and reported that the Department for Education was also funding support for settings over the next two years as part of the covid recovery process. This would involve the three maintained nurseries supporting private, voluntary and independent settings in the district. The work was funded by the DfE so would be of no cost to the settings.

Ian Pearson referred to Cate Colston's comments regarding the impact of achieving possible savings and highlighted that as part of the reporting and decision making process a full Equality Impact Assessment would have to be completed.

RESOLVED that:

- The Forum noted the report;
- A further report would be added to the work programme for October 2022 that provided a direction of travel regarding the deficit recovery plan for the Early Years Block including views from Early Years Funding Group.

119 DSG Monitoring 2022/23 Month 3 (Ian Pearson)

Ian Pearson introduced the report (Agenda Item 8), which reported on the forecast financial position of the services funded by the Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG), highlighting and under or overspends, and to highlight the cumulative deficit on the DSG.

The report provided an overview of the DSG, which was then made up of four budgets including the Schools Block, the Early Years Block, the High Needs Block and Central School Services Block. It provided an indication regarding whether each block was on track.

Ian Pearson drew attention to section 4.3 of the report, which detailed that for 2022/23 the budget had needed to be set at £1.7m above the allocation. There was good news as highlighted in section 5.2, that the quarter one forecast showed an in-year deficit of on £1.6m against the in-year efficiency target in the HNB, which was an improvement of £100k.

The report went on to detail the cumulative deficit, which was £2.96 against the HNB and the forecast year-end deficit on the DSG was £4.6m. It was possible that this figure could change as it was still early in the financial year. David Ramsden echoed Ian Pearson's comments because they were often looking at overspends early in the year, so for there to be a £100k improvement was very positive.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

120 Forward Plan

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RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the forward plan and that an additional item would be added to the meeting in October 2022 regarding the Early Years Block deficit recovery plan.

121 Date and format of the next meeting

RESOLVED that the next meeting on Monday 17th October 2022 would take place virtually.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 5.40 pm)

CHAIR

Date of Signature