

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2023

Forum Members Present: Reverend Mark Bennet (Church of England Diocese), Melissa Cliffe (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Councillor Heather Codling (Executive Portfolio Holder: Children, Education and Young People's Services), Councillor Iain Cottingham (Executive Portfolio Holder: Finance and Corporate Services), Paul Davey (Maintained Primary School Governor), Gemma Duff (Maintained Primary School Governor), Richard Hand (Trade Union), Keith Harvey (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Richard Hawthorne (Academy School Headteacher), Jon Hewitt (Maintained Special School Headteacher), Trevor Keable (Academy School Governor), Maria Morgan (Maintained Nursery School Headteacher), Gemma Piper (Academy School Headteacher), Chris Prosser (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), David Ramsden (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), Lesley Roberts (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Campbell Smith (Academy School Governor), Graham Spellman (Roman Catholic Diocese) and Phil Spray (Maintained Primary School Governor)

Also Present: Avril Allenby (Early Years Service Manager), Rose Carberry (Acting Principal Adviser for School Improvement), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director - Children and Family Services), Melanie Ellis (Acting Head of Finance and Property), Nicola Ponton (Acting Service Manager for SEMH) and Jessica Bailiss (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Jacquie Davies, Jo Lagares, Michelle Sancho, Jane Seymour, Charlotte Wilson and Lindsay Wood

PART I

1 Election of Vice-Chair

The Chair invited the Schools' Forum to nominate and vote on the position of Vice-Chair for the remainder of the year.

RESOLVED that Keith Harvey would be Vice-Chair of the Schools' Forum for the remainder of the 2023/24 financial year.

2 Minutes of previous meeting dated 19th June 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th June 2023 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 Actions arising from previous meetings

Action Jun23-Ac1 and Jun23-Ac2 were completed.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

5 Membership

Jess Bailiss reported that there was still one academy governor vacancy on the Schools' Forum. An election was held late September however, no nominations were received. An election would be run again at a later stage. It was confirmed that no other members were currently approaching the end of their term of office.

6 2024/25 Consultations: Schools Funding Formula and Scheme for Financing Schools (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 7) that set out the requirements and changes for setting the primary and secondary school funding formula for 2024/25 and sought approval of West Berkshire Council's funding proposals to go out to consultation with all schools. The report also sought approval of the proposed consultation on the updated Scheme for Financing Schools (SFS).

The Chair drew attention to the recommendation and suggested the Forum consider recommendations 2.1 (1), (2), (3) and (5) (areas set out below) initially and revisit recommendation 2.1 (4) once agenda item eight on the draft de-delegations had been discussed.

Melanie Ellis reported that the report set out the proposed areas of consultation, which would be undertaken with schools for a period of three weeks. The areas of consultation included:

- (1) The Schools Funding Formula;
- (2) A potential block transfer;
- (3) Additional funds;
- (4) De-delegations;
- (5) The SFS.

Melanie Ellis drew attention to the Briefing and Consultation Document for Schools in Appendix A. Melanie Ellis referred to the recent matter in the press that the Department for Education had made an error with schools' funding and this meant that much of the information provided in the report would need to be revised in time for the consultation to go out. Melanie Ellis proposed that the consultation be delayed and extended by one day to provide time for the information to be revised. Schools' funding had been due to rise by 2.7 percent per pupil however according to the news it was expected to only rise by 1.9 percent.

Melanie Ellis referred to section five on sparsity as this was the only area where West Berkshire had diverged from the National Funding Formula (NFF). In the last couple of years, as a result of consultation responses, the Schools' Forum had approved the minimum level.

For 2024/25 the local authority was required to move ten percent closer to the NFF across all factors. The tables under section five showed the 2024/25 NFF values for sparsity compared to the minimum that could be set and it could be seen that these figures were getting closer over time. A question on whether schools supported the NFF sparsity factor being applied in full or at the minimum was included within the consultation.

Melanie Ellis drew attention to section six on block transfer, where local authorities could choose to transfer up to half a percent of the schools block to other blocks of the DSG, with approval from the Schools' Forum. Without Schools' Forum agreement or where a local authority wished to transfer more than half a percent, a disapplication request must

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be submitted to the Secretary of State by 17th November 2023. A question on whether schools supported a transfer of funding was included in the consultation.

Melanie Ellis drew attention to section 6.13, which detailed that the Local Authority was part of the Delivering Better Value (DBV) in SEND Programme. The programme recommended reviewing areas of increased costs and to find a practical solution to try and bring costs down by a number of one off schemes. As a result, the Local Authority had asked for a one percent transfer to be modelled which, if approved, would be used to fund the work required as a result of the DBV Programme. A question on this was included in the consultation.

Melanie Ellis reported that section seven on Notional SEN was provided for information and did not require a question in the consultation. This was to help schools understand what the funding should cover.

Melanie Ellis drew attention to section nine and reported that each year the Schools' Forum had to agree the criteria for additional funds. The Local Authority would be informed of the Growth Fund allocation around December time. From 2024/25, falling rolls funding was also included within the schools' block DSG allocations and therefore a question on whether this should be re-introduced in West Berkshire was included.

Section 11 covered the SFS and Melanie Ellis reported that there had been minimal changes to the scheme. Section 11.4 detailed that the Heads Funding Group (HFG) had undertaken two detailed meetings about surplus balances in schools and had requested further information from schools with excess balances. The table under 11.5 showed the schools with a balance in reserves that was more than ten percent of their annual funding. As a result of discussions, the HFG had recommended that the SFS should contain a clawback mechanism for schools with balances over ten percent of the budget share, subject to a minimum balance being retained by the school of £50k. A question on this had been included in the consultation to see if schools would support a claw back mechanism going forward. The funding would be re-distributed to schools or the High Needs Block depending on which block the funding had come from initially.

Melanie Ellis highlighted that all the questions proposed were included in section 12 of the document. Provisional allocations modelled on the different sparsity and transfer options were included in Appendix Ai 1.

Keith Harvey referred to the Government's error on schools' funding and queried if the 1.9 percent included the teacher's pay increase. Melanie Ellis believed that this was included in funding but was unsure if it was included within the percentage quoted. Melanie Ellis would look into this and ensure it was clarified in the consultation.

Gemma Piper referred to the potential funding transfer. In the previous year it had been difficult to commit to this when there had been uncertainty about what it would be used for. Gemma Piper asked if any information would be included in the consultation around where this funding would be prioritised if approved and what impact it would have. Melanie Ellis reported that sections 6.8 to 6.13 provided suggestions from Jane Seymour on how the funding would be used if approved. Gemma Piper noted this however, felt that the information needed to specifying the impact each suggestion would have, for example in terms of savings. The information provided guidance however, not the value required to help school leaders make a decision. Melanie Ellis stated she would seek further information from Jane Seymour to be included with the consultation.

Reverend Mark Bennet referred to section seven on the notional SEND Figures and queried if anyone had reality checked the figures against what was happening in schools. Melanie Ellis confirmed that a formula had been used that had been provided by the DfE. It was felt that schools would need to give a view on whether this was what was being experienced in reality.

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Keith Harvey commented on the transfer of funding and did not feel that transferring one percent from the Schools Budget to the High Needs Budget would deliver better value.

Richard Hand referred to the DfE's miscalculation of funding and that it was anticipated that this could be up to £55k to £100k for secondaries and for primaries around £17k. Richard Hand queried if there was an idea of which schools would be most adversely affected in West Berkshire. Melanie Ellis expected larger schools to be impacted the most because many smaller schools were protected within the formula and received the minimum level. Melanie Ellis stated it was difficult to know the impact until the figures had been revised and confirmed that this would be done by Friday 20th October.

Lesley Roberts noted that maintained schools were being asked for funding through de-delegations for services such as high needs and school improvement, and queried what academies contributed to these services. Trevor Keable confirmed that academies paid separately for each child.

Trevor Keable queried how the consultation voting worked and queried if there was an opportunity for further discussion. Melanie Ellis reported that the consultation results would be brought back to the next round of meetings. The Schools' Forum would then consider the results and make a decision on each of the areas. The Chair clarified that this meeting would take place on 4th December 2023.

Chris Prosser referred to the transfer of funding and commented that historically the Schools' Forum had voted in line with the view of schools provided through the consultation. This had not always seemed fair because not all schools contributed to the consultation.

Trevor Keable queried why a clawback was being recommendation for schools with balances over ten percent when the DfE had recommended 20 percent through a parliamentary question in 2020. Melanie Ellis reported that 10 percent was reached through a discussion with the HFG. Gemma Piper was aware that the ESFA advised that schools had a five percent running surplus. Keith Harvey was aware of the parliamentary question referred to and believed it was referring to academies having a carry forward of no more than 20 percent, rather than maintained schools.

RESOLVED that:

- Melanie Ellis would look in to whether the expected 1.9 percent increase in school funding included the teacher's pay increase.
- Melanie Ellis would approach Jane Seymour about providing further information on the impact/value of each of the suggestions on how transferred funding could be used.
- The Schools' Forum approved that the consultation be undertaken with all schools on the areas set out in recommendations 2.1 (1), (2), (3) and (5)

7 Draft De-delegations 2024/25 (Lisa Potts)

Lisa Potts introduced the report (Agenda Item 8), which set out the details, costs and charges to schools of the services on which maintained school representatives were required to vote (on an annual basis). This information would be included in the consultation with schools if approved by the Schools' Forum.

Lisa Potts stated which services the de-delegations consisted of. Previously all de-delegations had been based on pupil numbers from the October census. This information would be available within the next couple of weeks.

At the HFG, it had been queried why there was a difference between how funding was calculated for the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS) compared

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to other services. It was questioned whether this should continue to be funded based on pupil numbers with English as a second language, or based on pupil numbers like the other de-delegated services. This was being looked into.

Lisa Potts highlighted that the costs for the School Improvement Team had increased and this was because the area had previously been funded by a grant. Some savings from the grant had been used to off-set costs in 2023/24 however, moving forward in to 2024/25 the level of underspend was much lower causing the cost to be pushed up.

Lisa Potts explained that other areas had increased in cost by about three to four percent, which was the normal amount expected to cover the cost of staffing.

The Chair referred the Forum back to the recommendation 2.1 (4) of the previous report (Agenda Item 7), which was to approve the information on the proposed services to be de-delegated to go out to consultation with schools.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum approved that the information on de-delegations as set out in recommendation 2.1 (4) of agenda item 7, be included in the consultation with schools.

8 **DSG Monitoring 2023/24 Month 6 (Michelle Sancho/Lisa Potts)**

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RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum approved that the information on de-delegations as set out in recommendation 2.1 (4) of agenda item 7, be included in the consultation with schools.

9 **Forward Plans**

The Schools' Forum noted the Forward Plan and Contracts Forward Plan.

10 **Date and format of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the Forum would take place virtually on 4th December 2023 at 5pm.

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Due to there being a number of new members, it was suggested that a meeting should take place in person during 2024. The Chair suggested that this could be looked into for the new year.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum give consideration at its meeting in December, to when it would like to meet in person during 2024.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 5.45 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature