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Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2023

Present: Reverend Mark Bennet (Church of England Diocese), Catherine Bernie (Maintained Special School Headteacher - substitute for Jon Hewitt), 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), Jackie Davies (Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher), Richard Hand (Trade Union), Keith Harvey, Vice Chair, (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Trevor Keable (Academy School Governor), Gemma Piper (Academy School Headteacher), Chris Prosser (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), David Ramsden (Maintained Secondary School Headteacher), Lesley Roberts (Maintained Primary School Headteacher), Ant Sizer (Maintained Secondary School Deputy Headteacher), Campbell Smith (Academy School Governor) and Edwin Towill (Academy School Headteacher – substitute for Charlotte Wilson)

Also Present: Rose Carberry (Principal Adviser for School Improvement), Melanie Ellis (Acting Head of Finance and Property), Nicola Ponton (SEN Manager), Jane Seymour (Service Manager, SEN & Disabled Children's Team), Jessica Bailiss (Democratic Services Officer) and Michelle Sancho (Acting Head of Education Services)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Melissa Cliffe (Maintained Primary), Gemma Duff (Maintained Primary), Michelle Harrison (Maintained Primary), Richard Hawthorne (Academy), Jon Hewitt (Maintained Special School), Jo Lagares (Maintained Primary), Maria Morgan (Maintained Nursery), Graham Spellman (Diocese), Phil Spray (Maintained Primary), Charlotte Wilson (Academy) and Lindsay Wood (Academy)

PART I

1 **Minutes of previous meeting dated 16th October 2023**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th October 2023 were approved a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

2 **Actions arising from previous meetings**

It was noted that there were responses from the relevant Officers for actions Oct23-Ac1 and Oct23-Ac2 included within the table.

RESOLVED that an in-person meeting of the Schools' Forum would take place on 11th March 2024.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

4 **Membership**

Jess Bailiss reported that there were still a couple of vacant positions on the Forum including an Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) provider and non-school post 16 representatives. It was hoped these positions would be filled soon. Another election for the vacant academy governor position would be held in the new year.

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It was confirmed that no other Forum members were currently approaching the end of their term of office.

5 **School Funding formula 2024/25 (Melanie Ellis)**

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 6), which set out the results of the consultation with all schools on the proposed primary and secondary school funding formula for 2024/25 and made a recommendation to the Schools' Forum.

Melanie Ellis went through the consultation responses to each of the questions as set out in section five of the report.

Question 1 – mirroring the National Funding Formula (NFF).

All schools that had responded had supported mirroring the NFF as closely as possible.

Question 2 – Applying the sparsity factor.

Of the schools that had responded to the consultation, 17 had supported applying the minimum sparsity factor and seven had supported the full sparsity factor.

Melanie Ellis reported that the Heads' Funding Group (HFG) had wished for the area to be fully discussed by the Schools' Forum because there had only been 24 responses to the consultation from over 70 schools.

Trevor Keable asked for an explanation on the sparsity factor and the consequence of each option for schools. Melanie Ellis reported that the NFF gave a set amount of funding for sparse schools and it related to the distance to the next nearest school. Over the last couple of years, rather than following the NFF, the Schools' Forum had opted for the minimum sparsity factor to be applied. This meant that a sparse school would receive a lower amount of funding and funding that remained in the pot would be distributed across other non-sparse schools.

Lesley Roberts was of the view that the funding was available to support sparse schools and therefore these schools should receive it. Lesley Roberts reported that she had a conflict of interest as her school was one of the sparse schools and would therefore benefit if the full amount was awarded. It was felt that with funding getting tighter for schools, the schools that the funding was designed for needed the support.

Gemma Piper reported that when the matter of sparsity had been discussed at the HFG, she had asked how many of the schools that had responded were small schools and if this was a true representation of the number of small schools versus the number of large schools, giving a balanced view. Gemma Piper commented that it was known that the funding was critical to small schools and it had been queried previously what the negative impact would be on these schools if the funding was not available. Gemma Piper was mindful that the consultation response showed a clear split in favour of the minimum sparsity factor however, it was queried if the small schools were truly represented in terms of the impact. Gemma Piper acknowledged it was a difficult measure however, commented that she would be in support of full funding for sparsity.

Reverend Mark Bennet stated that as the Diocese representative he represented quite a large number of small schools. If a change was going to be made that would have a negative impact on those schools, he felt further information on the strategic background was required, to set out how the impact would be dealt with.

The Vice Chair asked for clarification regarding the impact on schools. Melanie Ellis reported that if the sparsity factor was applied in full then sparse schools would benefit. Reverend Bennet stated that the issue was that some smaller schools would not qualify as sparse schools. Melanie Ellis clarified that all small schools would qualify however,

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they would receive a lower amount. The allocation would remain the same however, a lower value would be applied in total to sparsity.

Paul Davey queried what proportion of schools in the West Berkshire area would benefit from the sparsity funding. Melanie Ellis believed it was about 10 or 12 schools but would double check this point.

(Later in the discussion Melanie Ellis confirmed that 22 schools received some sparsity funding in West Berkshire, of which 10 received more than £8k. Of the 24 schools that had responded to the consultation only 6 were sparse schools.)

Question 3 – any shortfall or surplus in funding was addressed by adjusting the AWPU values.

Melanie Ellis confirmed that schools that had responded to the survey were in support of this.

Question 4 – what percentage of transfer of funding would be supported from the Schools' Block to the High Needs Block.

Melanie Ellis reported that 22 schools had supported a zero percent transfer and two schools had supported a 0.25% transfer.

Chris Prosser read out the following statement on behalf of Richard Hawthorne, which was linked to the disapplication request and also reflected the views of many other Head Teachers. Chris Prosser stated that he agreed with the issues set out:

“I have two issues with this decision. Firstly, this was not discussed during the recent HFG meeting on 21st November 2023 and secondly, that the proposal from West Berkshire flies in the face of a very clear outcome from the consultation, which saw the vast majority (22 schools) of respondents recommend that 0% was transferred. Given that the disapplication was made by the DfE deadline of the 17th November 2023 (before the HFG meeting), I find it incredible that this was not even mentioned by anyone from West Berkshire, let alone opened up for discussion by the floor. Furthermore, it is the only item from the consultation where there seems to be a deviation from the recommendations of the consultation. Surely knowing this would have alerted officers to the potential controversial nature of the disapplication and therefore warranted further discussion at HFG.”

Chris Prosser added that in conclusion to the comments from Richard Hawthorne, he would have liked there to be a discussion and an explanation of the rationale as to why the disapplication had been submitted at the point it had been.

In response to this, Melanie Ellis reported that the matter had been discussed at the HFG on 21st November 2023 under the item on the consultation results. It had also been mentioned at the HFG in October 2023, when it was being considered by the Local Authority (LA). At the November meeting, Melanie Ellis had made the HFG aware that the disapplication had been made by the LA and that it had needed to be made prior to the Schools' Forum meeting due to the deadline set by the Department for Education (DfE), which was the 17th November 2023. Melanie Ellis reported that she had advised the HFG that the DfE would require further information before a decision could be made including the minutes of the current meeting. Melanie Ellis had advised the HFG that she would set out the reasons for the disapplication in the report submitted for the Schools' Forum and this could be found set out at the bottom of page 15 of the agenda pack. Melanie Ellis believed that the Vice Chair had asked a question at the HFG regarding whether the minutes from the Schools' Forum on 4th December would be submitted to the DfE. Melanie Ellis confirmed therefore that although a full discussion had not taken place, the matter had been discussed and those in attendance had been given the opportunity to raise any questions.

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David Ramsden felt that Chris Prosser had summarised the views of several Headteachers. There was an issue of credibility when it had been indicated through the consultation that a zero percent transfer was supported and subsequently a decision for something different had been made. David Ramsden stated that he would be interested to know the logic for the disapplication. David Ramsden stated that whilst the Delivering Better Value Programme (DBVP) was taking place and they were waiting for the advice from this project on how to reduce the deficit, he did not feel any funding should be transferred.

AnnMarie Dodds reported that there was largely a sequencing issue, in that the DfE's timescales did not fit with the Schools' Forum's timescales. Ideally, detailed conversations would have taken place at the HFG and Schools' Forum prior to a decision being made about the disapplication request however, due to timescale differences this had not been possible. Ultimately the decision sat with the LA to submit a disapplication request. AnnMarie Dodds stated that this essentially placed a marker in the sand with the DfE and did not pre-empt any decision that would be made by the Schools' Forum. This marker could not however be placed post the Schools' Forum due to the DfE's deadlines. By submitting the disapplication request, the LA was flagging with the DfE that it might want to have a further conversation about a disapplication request. The DfE would take into account all minutes from Schools' Forum meetings where the matter was discussed. AnnMarie Dodds reassured the Forum that it was not about the LA trying to do something that was not legitimate and that had not been discussed with headteachers.

AnnMarie Dodds referred to David Ramsden's point about the DBVP. AnnMarie Dodds had met with secondary headteachers the week previously and it was clear that consequences to the LA from the DBVP were significant and had not been as well communicated or understood as they could have been. The DBVP was not a pump priming programme but was a transformation programme. This transformation had to deliver a turnaround in spending on Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) so that the HNB Budget could be balanced. Currently there could be overspend in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) without consequence to the LA. However, come March 2026 any overspend in the DSG would have to be covered by the LA and the corporate reserve would need to be great enough to cover the overspend on the DSG. The overspend in the DSG was greater than the revenue reserve of the LA and therefore without any additional spending over the next two years the LA would be bankrupt. The consequence of bankruptcy to the LA was that commissioners would take over the running of the LA. This would mean that the LA would not have authority in any decision making around how money was spent.

AnnMarie Dodds acknowledged that the position faced in the DSG was being faced by many other LAs. However, to fail to address the current deficit position could result in the LA being bankrupt by 2026. This could result in non-statutory services not being delivered. The DBVP was an opportunity to look at how money was being spent on the DSG. The £1million associated with this was not aimed at plugging the gap but rather at transformation. The LA was currently in the process of forming proposals about services that would be considered at the LAs Budget Board with the aim of balancing the LAs budget. If the overspend in the DSG was applied to the LA currently, it would not be able to set a balanced budget and would not be able to do so in two years' time if the issue was not addressed.

AnnMarie Dodds further explained that part of the question that would be asked by the DfE on the DSG was regarding where block transfers had been carried out and there would be an expectation from the DfE for the LA to articulate conversations on this. The LA could legitimately request a 0.5 percent transfer from the Schools' Block into the HNB. Given that West Berkshire was part of the DBVP there was an expectation that this measure would be taken. A 0.5 percent transfer would equate to just over £600k and

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although this was minimal against the deficit in the DSG of around £9 million, it was significant in signalling the intent to take measures to address the overspend position. The DBVP submission was due to be submitted to the DfE by the 14th December 2023. A multimillion pound deficit needed to be recovered over the next two years against the HNB to bring the DSG into balance. AnnMarie Dodds stressed that the LA was not trying to do something in a covert way but had needed to meet the deadlines of the DfE to enable further conversations and consideration of the matter to take place.

Councillor Iain Cottingham reiterated and endorsed the points raised by AnnMarie Dodds. The LA was facing significant financial deficit over the next two years. At the end of quarter two the LA had a deficit of £3.3 million against general reserves of £7.2 million. Councillor Cottingham stated that £14m needed to be found next year and ideas were being discussed around efficiencies. The main areas of pressure were children's and adult services. Councillor Cottingham stated that without the half a percent transfer the LA would be facing bankruptcy in 2026 resulting in the loss of control to commissioners.

Gemma Piper stated that she understood the sequencing issue and thanked AnnMarie Dodds for the explanation. A situation was being faced where there was a legacy of information around how money had been spent, including on the invest to save proposals, and a lack of clarity over time on what savings would be made. In the past, this had led to schools and trusts not wishing to see any money transferred. Gemma Piper was frustrated that schools had not been informed about the financial situation sooner. There was a host of levers that might be used, given the deficit faced. Gemma Piper stated that the block transfer was just one of the many levers that could be used, and other levers involved non-statutory services and invest to save packages that she highlighted did not have a direct financial saving allocated. Gemma Piper stressed that it was important to note that the funding transfer was not the only lever and understood why there was a clear mandate from school leaders to request no transfer be carried out. It was a problem that would not be solved by this one action alone.

Reverend Bennet understood what had been stated from the LA's point of view however, it also needed to be considered from schools' point of view. If it was agreed that block transfer would move one set of money from one provision to another, it should be noted that mainstream schools were facing increasing demands to cater for children with additional needs as set out in the consultation responses. The LA was facing challenges in meeting the social care burden for children and schools were on the front line of this. Reverend Bennet did not feel that a 0.5 percent transfer would make a big enough difference to solve the LA's solvency issues. Moving money out of the school block would put schools under additional pressure.

Edwin Towill thanked AnnMarie Dodds for her explanation, which he felt was very clear and articulate. He sympathised with the situation faced by the LA but the average uplift for schools the following year was due to be 1.9 percent however, if the transfer went ahead this would be reduced to 1.4 percent. Edwin Towill stated that it would not be possible to run his school on a 1.4 percent uplift. He would have to cut services, and this would in turn increase the SEN need.

Edwin Towill further stated he had viewed the documentation for the meeting carefully and referred to paragraph two on page 16 of the pack. He highlighted that it stated that the disapplication had been made to transfer funding whilst progress was being made on reducing the deficit. Edwin Towill explained that the Draft SEND strategy 2023-28 was then referenced as seeking to reduce the HNB expenditure. Edwin Towill stated that he did not have confidence in the draft strategy in reducing deficit and therefore if a 0.5 percent transfer was used as a stop gap to enable the strategy to work, this made him very nervous.

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David Ramsden commented that in previous iterations the aim of the SEND Strategy had been to increase provision in schools due to the cost of expensive out of county placements. David Ramsden agreed that AnnMarie Dodds' explanation of the problem had been excellent however, it signified that there had been a communications issue. He apologised that he had not attended the last HFG meeting however, felt that a clear in depth discussion should have taken place at this group. This would have helped Headteachers feel clearer about the situation when it felt slightly underhand. David Ramsden also felt that it was not helpful to imply that if the 0.5 percent transfer did not go ahead this would bankrupt the Council. He did not agree that this was the case.

David Ramsden highlighted the frustration by headteachers due to the communication issues and also because they had been in the situation before. The deficit in the HNB had been discussed for many years and some headteachers had dedicated a great deal of time to looking at cutting services in a careful prioritised way. If this had taken place, then the deficit might not be as large as it currently was. David Ramsden sympathised with the position of the LA and he stated that he did not wish to see control lost in the way described. He however, felt that the communications and legacy of the situation was extremely concerning.

AnnMarie Dodds highlighted that the SEND Strategy was in draft form because it had not been accepted. AnnMarie Dodds agreed that the SEND Strategy was not going to deliver the level of savings required. In terms of a long term financial strategy, it was felt that the DBVP would dictate the areas of business that needed to be looked at in terms of reducing the spend. AnnMarie Dodds accepted the points raised regarding communication issues and appreciated there had been a lack of clarity. AnnMarie Dodds stated that her early learning from her time so far at West Berkshire was to be open, honest and upfront in communicating the nature and scale of the problem. Once proposals resulting from the DBVP had been formed by Officers, it was important that these were shared with Headteachers to give an early indication of what was in the programme. AnnMarie Dodds agreed that the 0.5 percent of funding would not address the issue being faced and was less than 10 percent of the current deficit however, it was a signal of intent to the DfE about doing things differently.

Lesley Roberts stated her understanding when joining the Schools' Forum that the meeting was a partnership whereas it felt like schools were being 'done to', even though many headteachers had shared the difficulties and pressures they were under. It was important to invest in schools in West Berkshire. The amount of money being debated was small in relation to the deficit, however, was phenomenal to schools. Lesley Roberts commented that this could push schools towards academisation and felt that it was important that decisions were taken in partnership and not in a 'done to' approach.

Jacque Davies queried where the matter would fit in with the LA's capital assets portfolio and if this could be used to help solve the revenue problem. Councillor Cottingham commented that there were only certain things that could be done in terms of selling assets and transferring capital into revenue. Areas had to qualify for the transformation programme, and this was quite narrow in its scope. Any spend had to have a long term benefit for the residents of West Berkshire. Councillor Cottingham further reported that the LA had come under new Administration from May 2023 and the past could not be changed. The same Government had also been in power for the last 13 years and one of the things Councillor Cottingham was hearing on a re-occurring basis was regarding the lack of investment from central government into education and services. Councillor Cottingham stated that he fully understood the push back from schools regarding losing the half a percent. This equated to about £10k per school and likely equivalent to two TA posts, which he understood was significant to budgets. Councillor Cottingham agreed that a transfer would be a statement of intent to the DfE that effort was being made to

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reduce the deficit of £9m and without this the LA would be bankrupt. A plan of action to reduce the deficit was required.

David Ramsden stated that he had not consulted headteacher colleagues on his following suggestion however, queried if a 0.25 percent transfer would be a more palatable compromise. He understood what had been said about being seen to put money aside and felt it could return the discussion to the partnership approach referred to, which was very important at the Schools' Forum.

The Vice Chair noted that the view in the consultation regarding the transfer was very clear however, the view from the LA was also very clear.

Gemma Piper asked for clarification from AnnMarie Dodds regarding the disapplication procedure and if what was decided by the Forum would make any difference to this. AnnMarie Dodds stated that the DfE would ultimately make the decision. AnnMarie Dodds felt it was possible that if the Forum were to agree the 0.25 percent, this would signal an intent to work together in the new DBVP challenge. It was clarified that the reason 0.5 percent had been submitted to the DfE was because this was the maximum that could be applied for without needing approval. AnnMarie Dodds felt it was likely that if 0.25 percent was approved by the Forum, then the situation could be concluded. It would signal a different intent rather than one of confrontation, which the LA was keen to avoid given the challenges faced over the next two years.

Paul Davey echoed comments regarding the helpfulness of the explanation. He queried where the rest of the £9m would come from in the next two years. It did not feel like there was a solution at scale that was going to reach a resolution. Paul Davey referred to the point made by Councillor Cottingham regarding the loss of £10k or two TAs and stated that this would close the school that he was a governor at. He queried how many schools would have to close as a result of the matter being faced, and secondly queried what else would have to be agreed financially. AnnMarie Dodds reported that the DBVP would have multiple lines of approach to the situation. It was not about closing schools as there was a certainty about the number of pupils in West Berkshire that were funded through the DSG. The challenge was about the HNB spend and the need to reduce the spend in this area and reach a balanced position. AnnMarie Dodds commented that it looked unlikely that change in Government would change the situation due to the main approach being one of inclusion. This would place more pressure on keeping children in maintained schools. There was no indication that there was more money coming into the system and it was a challenge being faced nationally. AnnMarie Dodds reiterated that it was not about closing schools but about bringing the HNB into balance.

Councillor Heather Codling noted that there was a will to want to work together. It was felt that such conversations needed to happen more often with further ideas on ways to work together, to help keep children in mainstream schools and within their local community.

Lesley Roberts queried if the HNB Budget covered ages 0 – 25 and what proportion was taken from other areas. It was confirmed that the HNB covered ages to 0 – 25. AnnMarie Dodds reported that the funding for Children in Care at university that were known to the LA came from the social care budget and not the HNB Budget. The HNB Budget was money that was spent on SEND from ages zero into further education but not beyond into university.

Gemma Piper commented on the legacy of focusing on the deficit and subsequently not taking the action necessary over the years. Gemma Piper noted the point from Councillor Codling regarding keeping children in the right place and in mainstream schools, however she stressed caution needed to be taken when suggesting children were better off in their local setting than having to travel further to a special setting. The reality was that there were such high needs that the specialist provision that those children required,

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regardless of where it was, was what they must receive. Gemma Piper stressed that they needed to be really careful about how such provision was provided to ensure it was sustainable both financially and educationally.

The Vice Chair suggested that given the complexity of the discussion it would be advisable to vote on a proposal at the current stage. Having listened to other members of the Forum, it was proposed and seconded that 0.25 percent was transferred from the Schools' Block to the HNB, whilst noting that this was contrary to the view of the majority of schools that had responded to the consultation. At the vote with all school members the motion was carried.

It was agreed that votes on other recommendations set out in the report would take place at the end of the discussion.

Question 5 – supporting a transfer to support any of the other funding blocks.

Melanie Ellis confirmed that there was no support for anything other than high needs.

Question 6 – should there be a falling rolls fund.

Melanie Ellis confirmed that 12 of the schools that had responded had not supported the fund and seven had supported it. The HFG had recommended this be discussed in full at the Forum.

The Vice Chair noted that there were no comments from members of the Forum and therefore suggested the recommendation on this should reflect the majority of the responses from schools in not supporting the fund.

Question 7 – setting the criteria for other funds outside of the schools formula

Melanie Ellis reported that 100 percent of those schools that had responded had agreed with the criteria set for accessing additional funds.

Question 8 – Delegations

Melanie Ellis reported that this would be discussed as part of item eight later on the agenda.

Question 9 – Scheme for Financing Schools containing a clawback

Melanie Ellis reported that this area had been discussed at the recent HFG however, there had been a desire to better understand the implications. A further meeting of the HFG was due to take place on 5th December 2023 to discuss the matter and it would be brought back to a special Schools' Forum meeting later in December.

Question 10 – Other changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools

Melanie Ellis reported that all schools that had responded supported the other changes to the SFS.

Keith Harvey invited the Schools' Forum to vote on each of the following recommendations set out in the report under section 2.1. It was noted that a vote had already taken place for recommendation 2.1 (d) concerning a transfer of funding. Recommendation 2.1 (g) on the de-delegations would be considered later on the agenda and recommendation 2.1 (h) regarding a claw back would be considered at a later meeting of the Schools' Forum.

2.1 (a) To mirror the Department for Education's 2024/25 National Funding Formula (NFF) to calculate the funding allocations. It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation should be approved. At the vote with all school representatives the motion was carried.

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2.1 (b) To address any surplus or shortfall in funding by adjusting the AWPU values. It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation should be approved. At the vote with all school representatives the motion was carried.

2.1 (c) Based on the discussion, it was proposed that the recommendation was to go for the full NFF sparsity factor rather than the minimum. It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation should be approved. At the vote with all school representatives the motion was carried.

2.1 (e) Based on the discussion and consultation results it was proposed to not reinstate the falling rolls fund. It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation should be approved. At the vote with all school representatives the motion was carried.

2.1 (f) To approve the criteria to be used to allocate additional funds. It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation should be approved. At the vote with all Forum members the motion was carried.

2.1 (i) To approve the other changes to the 2023/24 Scheme for Financing Schools. It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation should be approved. At the vote with all maintained school representatives the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that:

- In considering recommendation 2.1 (d), it was agreed by the Schools' Forum that 0.25 percent be transferred from the Schools' Block to the HNB.
- Recommendations 2.1 (a), (b), (c), (e), (f) and (i) were approved as set out above.

6 Budgets for Additional Funds (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 7), which set out the proposed 2024/25 budgets for the Growth Fund and Additional High Needs Fund.

Melanie Ellis reported that additional funding was received from the Department for Education (DfE) and the amount was normally announced later in December. The growth funding allocation was based on the difference between primary and secondary numbers on roll between the October 2022 and October 2023 census. In 2024/25, for the first time, funding would also be allocated for falling rolls.

Estimates had been provided using a calculator provided by the DfE and it was estimated that West Berkshire would receive £140k for falling rolls and combined with growth funding would receive about £647k. Melanie Ellis reported that it was not thought that any of this funding would be required for growth as there was still enough in the historical growth fund. The proposal was therefore to put the funding received into the schools funding formula to distribute to all schools.

Melanie Ellis reported that because the Forum had just voted to not reinstate a falling rolls fund, this allocation could also be put into the schools funding formula.

The second recommendation within the report was regarding funding that had been traditionally set aside from the High Needs Block to award to schools that qualified for the additional funding. The recommendation was that £150k be set aside for this.

The Vice Chair invited the Forum to consider the recommendations set out in section 2.1 and 2.2 of the report.

It was proposed and seconded that recommendation 2.1 to agree that the DfE funding allocation for growth and falling rolls was distributed to all schools via the school formula be approved. At the vote with all school representatives the motion was carried.

It was proposed and seconded that recommendation 2.2 to set the additional high needs fund at £150k be approved. At the vote with all Forum members the motion was carried.

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RESOLVED that recommendations 2.1 and 2.2 be approved as set out above.

7 Final De-delegations (Lisa Potts)

Lisa Potts introduced the report (Agenda Item 8), which set out the details, cost and charges to schools of the services on which maintained school representatives were required to vote on an annual basis. Appendix A to the report provided a breakdown of costs based on the most recent census data and the amount individual schools would be charged.

Lisa Potts reported that one difference from previous years was that there had been a suggestion to calculate the Ethnic Minority Service on a per pupil basis rather than the number of learners that had English as an additional language (EAL) as it had been previously.

The Vice Chair invited the Forum to comment on the recommendations within the report and no comments were raised.

The Vice-Chair invited the Forum to consider the recommendation under section 2.1 of the report. It was proposed and seconded that representatives of maintained primary and secondary schools opt to recharge the cost of the Ethnic Minority Service on a per pupil basis rather than based on students with English as an additional language (EAL). At the vote with maintained primary and secondary representatives the motion was carried.

The Vice-Chair invited Primary School Representatives to vote on the recommendation under 2.2 of the report as follows:

2.2: That representatives of maintained primary schools should agree to de-delegate funds in the 2024/25 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

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation be approved. At the vote with maintained primary members the motion was carried.

The Vice-Chair invited maintained secondary head representatives to vote on the recommendation under 2.3 of the report as follows:

2.3: That representatives of maintained secondary schools should agree to de-delegate funds in the 2024/25 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

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- Health and Safety Service to Schools

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation be approved. At the vote with maintained secondary members the motion was carried.

The Vice-Chair invited maintained special, nursery and PRU head representatives to vote on the recommendation under 2.4 of the report as follows:

2.4: That representatives of maintained special, nursery and PRU heads should agree to de-delegate funds in the 2024/25 financial year for:

- Trade Union Representation
- 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

It was proposed and seconded by the maintained special and nursery headteachers that the recommendation be approved. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that:

- In considering recommendation 2.1 it was agreed that the cost of the Ethnic Minority Service be recharged on a per pupil basis rather than based on students with English as an additional language (EAL)
- Recommendations 2.2 to 2.4 were approved by the Forum.

8 Update on HNB Invest to Save Projects (Jane Seymour/Nicola Ponton)

Jane Seymour introduced the report (Agenda Item 9), which aimed to provide an update on the Invest to Save initiatives agreed in 2022-23 and seek permanent funding within the High Needs Block. Jane Seymour drew attention to the projects that had been funded initially in 2022/23 as invest to save projects set out in section 4.1 of the report. Jane Seymour highlighted that the early years SEND training project (31,324) had subsequently been funded from an alternative source, so consideration was only required on the other three projects:

- Additional 0.4FTE post in Early Development and Inclusion Team (EDIT) £26,390
- Additional 1FTE SEMH worker £41,490
- Additional I-College places £90,000

Jane Seymour stated that the report set out the impacts of each of the above projects in detail. Each of the projects aligned with the SEND Strategy in trying to reduce pressure on the HNB. Jane Seymour added that in view of the position facing the HNB there was a change to the recommendation in the report, which was originally that the projects should continue into next year through permanent funding from the HNB. It was now proposed that if the schools block transfer or claw back went ahead that potentially the projects could be funded from this funding, if agreed by the Schools' Forum.

AnnMarie Dodds apologised for the late change in the recommendation however, given the discussions and difficulties facing the HNB it was not felt that the original recommendation was legitimate. AnnMarie Dodds stated that what she was seeking was agreement in principle from the Schools' Forum that the activity supported achieving savings in the longer term. This was not withstanding the point made by Gemma Piper earlier in the meeting regarding evidencing savings achieved through investment. AnnMarie Dodds reported that if agreement was reached in principle, then information would return to the Forum at a later stage regarding how the activity would be funded, given the pressures in the HNB.

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Michelle Sancho highlighted that the latest version of the agenda pack included the recommendation from the HFG under section eight.

Chris Prosser raised the point that when transfers of funding from the Schools' Block to the HNB had been agreed in the past, the funding had been used for invest to save projects. He felt that it would make sense for the 0.25 percent transfer to be used for the initiatives set out in the report.

Michelle Sancho commented that there had been uncertainty around if a transfer would be agreed in advance of the meeting. Based on the comments from Chris Prosser it would make sense for there to be a proposal for the projects to be supported by the transfer. The Vice-Chair felt that this proposal should be brought to a future meeting and not considered at the current meeting. AnnMarie Dodds felt that given that there were other issues for discussion including the claw back and the DBV, decisions could not be taken in isolation where the HNB was concerned. It was important to ensure there was enough time to provide consideration to what savings would be made and how this could be quantified. A trail needed to be provided that was auditable and demonstrated that the decisions being taken around HNB spend were legitimate in terms of the long term position.

The Vice Chair suggested the Schools' Forum indicate through a show of hands if it agreed in principle with taking the matter forward.

RESOLVED that

- the Schools' Forum was supportive in principle of the projects set out in section 4.1 of the report.
- Information would return to the Schools' Forum at a later stage regarding the invest to save projects.

9 Provisional DSG Funding Settlement Overview 2023/24 (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 10) that set out the provisional Dedicated Schools Grant for 2024/25. The allocation would be confirmed later in December 2023.

Melanie Ellis highlighted that a half a percent transfer was referenced in the report and a refreshed version that detailed a 0.25 percent transfer would be brought to the meeting in January 2024.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

10 High Needs Block Budget Proposals 2024/25 (Jane Seymour) - Verbal Update

Jane Seymour introduced the item (Agenda Item 11) and provided a verbal update on the High Needs Block (HNB) Budget proposals for 2024/25. Jane Seymour reported that as with previous years they had been looking at the HNB and the likely position at the end of the financial year and for the new financial year.

Jane Seymour reported that in December 2022 it had been predicted that by the end of 2023/24 there would be a £9m overspend, which included the deficit budget set for the current year plus previous years rolled forward. This prediction was still looking to be accurate.

Jane Seymour reported that because the impact from the Delivering Better Value Programme (DBVP) was not yet known, it was not possible to provide an accurate position for 2024/25 in terms of the in-year spend. The reason for this was also because the timeline for the DBVP had not aligned well. Potential savings would need to be calculated based on the impact of the DBVP. Jane Seymour reported that although they were not currently able to provide a position for 2024/25 this was what they were currently working on.

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RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the update and that more detail would be brought to the next meeting.

11 **Draft Central Schools Block Budget 2024/25 (Lisa Potts)**

Lisa Potts introduced the report (Agenda Item 12), which set out the budget proposal for services funded from the Central School Services Block (CSSB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and to propose measures to enable the budget for this block to be balanced. Lisa Potts reported that the information was currently draft because they had not yet received the final figure for the allocation for next year. They were still also waiting on costing information relating to the licensing.

The provisional allocation was quarter a percent lower than for the current year. This was positive because in previous years there had been a substantial reduction in the grant. The table under 5.1 of the report showed the budget requirement for the services that fell within the CSSB for 2023/24 compared to 2022/23. There was an expected shortfall on the block for 2024/25 of about £39k however, it was believed that there might be some scope for savings around the Capita System. It was hoped that this could help to balance the block. Further information would be brought back to the next meeting in January 2024.

Trevor Keable noted that the current income from fines was £11k and queried if this was an area that would be pushed to try and generate increased income. Lisa Potts clarified that this was around fines for parents taking children out of school during term time. The Vice Chair was aware that schools took different approaches to fines but did not believe there was a LA wide agreed way forward on this. It was suggested that Lisa Potts look into this in time for the next meeting.

RESOLVED that:

- Lisa Potts would look into whether there was a LA wide agreed approach to fines for parents who took children out of school during term time.
- The Schools' Forum noted the report.

12 **Delivering Better Value Programme Update (Jane Seymour)**

Jane Seymour introduced the report (Agenda Item 13), which aimed to inform the Schools' Forum about the Delivering Better Value Programme (DBVP) and its initial findings. The report set out the process that had been gone through since about July 2023. The three modules of the DBVP were detailed under section 3.2 of the report. It was reported that the output of module three was an implementation plan that addressed the key priority areas.

Jane Seymour reported that modules one and two had taken up a large amount of time and it had not been possible to begin work on the implementation plan until these modules were completed and all the data compiled that needed to be pulled together. The window of time to pull together the implementation plan would be very tight and was currently underway. This could be shared with headteachers following the meeting and was yet to be approved by the DfE. Jane Seymour reported that they were trying to concentrate on change that was transformational and would change systems in the longer term so that a suitable positive could be reached. Jane Seymour detailed some of the areas that were being looked at as part of this.

Reverend Mark Bennet noted the report mentioned unit costs and wondered if these were per pupil or weighted for need. Jane Seymour reported that this was the weight pupil cost for children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) at mainstream school, a maintained special school or out of area school. It analysed the unit cost of

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children across the board with EHCPs. Reverend Bennet commented that EHCPs could vary a lot between different children, even in similar settings, and the numbers were not going to be so great as to provide statistical validity. Jane Seymour confirmed there was a need weighing in the analysis but it was also about ensuring they were spending in the right places.

Chris Prosser referred to the work carried out as part of module one and two and queried if this would inform the SEND Strategy or if anything had changed within the Strategy as a result. AnnMarie Dodds confirmed that the SEND Strategy was not agreed and required further work. Evidence would be used to reshape the SEND Strategy and reshape a financial strategy through the DBVP. The final SEND Strategy would have to link to the evidence obtained through the DBVP and the financial recovery programme for SEND.

Jacquie Davies queried if the data on the number of EHCP learners in iCollege was being considered as part of the process and if outcomes for learners were being considered. Jane Seymour confirmed that children in iCollege had been considered, particularly places created for children with EHCPs, in that they were more cost effective and achieved better outcomes than the alternative independent and non-maintained sector. Regarding outcomes, there had been some limitations due to the speed in which the exercise had needed to be carried out however, case studies had looked at outcomes.

Catherine Bernie stated that there had been some dispute of the unit costs and the data represented. This was something that would need to be revisited in order to make sure the information accurately represented the picture being presented. Otherwise, it would be difficult to consider the DBVP in its true form.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

13 Early Years - Entitlement Changes (Avril Allenby)

Avril Allenby introduced her report (Agenda Item 14) which provided the Forum with an overview of the new Early Years Entitlement and the timeline for introduction. There were some major changes to the childcare offer approaching from April 2024. These changes were detailed in section two of the report. Avril Allenby reported that some funding was being allocated for these changes and further detail would be included in the next report brought to the Forum in January 2024.

RESOLVED that the Forum noted the report.

14 Deficit Schools (Melanie Ellis)

Melanie Ellis introduced the report (Agenda Item 15) which provided details of the nine schools which were requested to submit a license deficit application for 2023/24.

RESOLVED that the Schools' Forum noted the report.

15 Forward Plan

The Schools' Forum noted the forward plan and contracts forward plan.

16 Date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Schools' Forum would take place virtually on 19th December 2023 at 5pm.

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(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 7.00 pm)

CHAIR

Date of Signature