

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 14 DECEMBER 2016 FROM 9.30 AM TO 12.07 PM**

Schools Representatives

Helen Ball	Primary Head - Polehampton Infant
Ali Brown	Primary Head - Nine Mile Ride Primary
Sally Hunter	Primary Head - Wescott Infant
Elaine Stewart	Primary Head - Aldryngton Primary
Mandy Turner	Primary Head - Shinfield Infant
Sylvia Allen	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Liz Meek	Special School Head - Addington School
Ginny Rhodes	Secondary Head - St Crispins
Janet Perry	Academy Business Manager - The Holt School
Maggie Segrove	Headteacher - Oakbank Free School
Mary Davies	Academy Headteacher - Maiden Erlegh
Corrina Gillard	Headteacher - Emmbrook Infant School
Kerrie Clifford	Maintained Nursery Acting Headteacher
Jay Blundell	Special School Headteacher - Foundry College
Paul Miller	Governor - St Crispins - Chairman
John Bayes	Governor - Foundry College - Vice-Chair
Ian Head	Governor - Aldryngton Primary

Non School Representatives

Richard Dolinski	Wokingham Borough Council Representative
Mary Parker	Early Years Representative
Gail Prewett	Early Years Representative

Also Present

Alan Stubbersfield, Interim Assistant Director of Learning and Achievement
Hawa Bedwa, Interim School Finance Manager
Collette Sutton, Interim Head of Finance People Services
Arabella Yandle, Democratic Services

7 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Anne Andrews, James Taylor, John Ogden and Brian Prebble.

8 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 July 2016 and the Extraordinary Meeting of the Schools Forum held on 21 September 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

9 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

None received.

10 RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS FROM THE SCHOOLS FORUM BRIEFING

Minutes from the Schools Forum Briefing held on 7 December were noted. Responses to the questions raised in the Schools Forum Briefing were addressed under the Agenda items to which they referred.

11 BUDGET MONITORING

The Forum considered a report, presented by the Interim Schools Finance Manager, on Agenda pages 19 to 24 together with clarifications provided on Agenda page 17 as a result of questions at the Schools Forum Briefing.

The Interim Schools Finance Manager drew the attention of the Forum to columns on Appendix A outlining the differences between the budget and the actual figures in the 2016/17 Budget. She stated that the figures included in-year adjustments in funding based on revised allocations in the Direct Schools Grant (DSG) for 2015/16 being confirmed after the budget had been finalised (Agenda p 17 point 8), this sum being carried forward to the 2016/17 Budget as agreed at the Forum on 18 May 2016. Due to this, and a brought forward surplus from General Funding, the reserves going forward were, whilst lower than budgeted, an increase on the June figure to £552k.

In response to questions as to the likelihood of an injection of funds into next year's budget following finalisation of allocations in the DSG, the Interim Schools Finance Manager commented that this information was not currently available and that they could therefore not forecast any changes to the DSG for 2016/17.

The Chair highlighted that the budget had been overspent by over £1 m and indicated a number of lines that were significantly overspent. These were:

- 1.2.4 Fees for Independent Special Schools
- 1.3.3 Education Out of School
- 1.4.10 Pupil Growth/Infant Class Size
- 1.6.5 Miscellaneous

In response to questions regarding Fees for Independent Special Schools, the Interim Assistant Director of Learning and Achievement stated that the SEN Team had been approached for further information on this. A paper was circulated for consideration by the Forum containing data relating to the nature and costs of placements in the last year and the Interim Assistant Director of Learning and Achievement suggested that the paper highlighted issues around transition into KS 1 and when moving from KS2 to KS3, particularly in relation to pupils with ASD or SEMH. He commented that the need to accommodate pupils who would normally have attended Southfield Special School had impacted costs, but indicated that this would be a short term situation and was not expected to impact the 2016/17 Budget to the same degree. He also clarified that any cost relating to the Academisation of Southfield was being borne by the Council.

Jay Blundell, Headteacher of Foundry College, commented that Foundry College had taken pupils from Southfield Special School and had funded this.

Following discussion, the Chair clarified that the first two lines listed above were responsible for the larger proportion of the overspend and that the Schools Forum had less influence over these amounts.

The Forum questioned the amount listed under 1.6.5 Miscellaneous as it exceeded the permitted maximum of 0.1% of the Schools Budget by £168 k. The Interim Schools Finance Manager circulated a paper detailing a breakdown of this amount, which was attributable to internal recharges.

Concerns were raised about the overspend in general and about the internal recharges specifically which make up a significant part of it. The Interim School Finance Manager indicated that the figure was a fixed rolling figure. The Chair referred the Forum to a figure at the bottom of Appendix A listed as Central Overhead Costs and requested clarification as to whether this related to the portion of Miscellaneous Expenses attributed to internal recharges or was additional to this amount. The Interim School Finance Manager indicated that internal recharges were an integral part of the provision and suggested that it could be listed separately from the Miscellaneous Items in future for clarity. She also clarified that a pre-existing limit to central expenditure was no longer in place.

The Vice-Chair questioned the amounts for Early Year Contingencies (1.1.3) and School Specific Contingencies (1.1.2), seeking clarification as to what they are and the likely spend and as to whether the amounts or any surplus would go back into the budget at the end of the year as this would improve the position of the 2016/17 Budget. This clarification is attached to the minutes.

Actions: That

- internal recharges be listed separately from Miscellaneous Expenses and extracted from other lines in future;
- clarification be provided in the minutes as to whether internal recharges are still being spread throughout the other budget lines as well as being included in Miscellaneous Expenses;
- clarification be provided in the minutes as to the status of the contingencies budgets listed in the Budget Monitoring Report; and
- clarification as to the status of the forecast deficit in the light of this.

CLARIFICATIONS

In response to action point:

- clarification be provided in the minutes as to whether internal recharges are still being spread throughout the other budget lines as well as being included in Miscellaneous Expenses and extracted from other lines;

The following documents are attached:

1. Revised Budget Monitoring Report;
2. Revised Budget Workings including distributed recharges, narrative and S251 line numbering.

In response to action point:

- clarification be provided in the minutes as to the status of the contingencies budgets listed in the Budget Monitoring Report;

Clarification is to follow

12 FINANCIAL PRESSURES ARISING FROM EDUCATION SERVICES GRANT REMOVAL

The Forum considered a report and presentation on Agenda pages 25 to 38, presented by the Interim Assistant Director of Learning and Achievement, outlining the impact of the removal of the Educational Support Grant (ESG) from April, which would result in a

funding gap. He proceeded to detail a package to meet this funding gap, highlighting proposals to claim a sum of £380 k from the DSG (equating to a portion of the rebased ESG) and to raise £370 k by top slicing the Early Years and Childcare DSG allocation.

He went on to clarify that the top slice, whilst previously unlimited, had now been limited in the regulations to 7%. He stated that Wokingham Borough Council had not previously laid claim to this top slice and that, following discussion and re-calculation with colleagues, showed a proposed top slice at 4.08% for 2017/2018. He then informed the Forum that the remaining funding gap of approximately £1.1 m would be partly met by an uplift in the Wokingham borough Council subsidy leading to a final identified funding shortfall of £723 k.

Members of the Forum representing Early Years raised concerns that a top slice would result in a net loss of income due to the reduction in other areas of their funding and asked for clarification as to whether the claw back of the Early Years Contingency referred to in Agenda Item 11 would be ring-fenced for Early Years provision.

In response to questions from the Forum, it was clarified that the sum referred to in the report as DSG claimed back to replace the ESG did in fact represent a proposal that the projected increase in pupil funding of £15 per capita which was being paid for by the removal of the ESG be redirected to cover the cost of the functions that had traditionally been covered by the ESG.

In response to questions, the Interim Assistant Director of Learning and Achievement clarified that the final decision as to any redirection of this increase was that of the Forum itself and individual schools.

The Forum put forward a suggestion that the model for buying of services from the Council be changed to one where individual schools could choose what services to buy in. This was felt to be particularly important for academies that were part of a trust as they paid a fee to the trusts for similar services and felt they would be being charged twice for some services and were not able to access the open market. The Interim Assistant Director of Learning and Achievement commented that there were elements of the services provided by Wokingham Borough Council that were not recharged to academies when they bought in a particular service. He stated that the Council would need to carry out a lot of investigative work about potential levels of buyback to be able to set up an alternative model. Liz Meek, Head of Addington School, commented on the concept of a buy in model, stating that there were statutory levels of service and that these needed to be done well. She stated that the cost of buying in services from external bodies and independent providers was far in excess of the costs outlined in the budget if the Council was to provide the services and that the payments to the Council for its services were a form of insurance against problems an individual school might face in the future. She indicated that there was no level of means testing applied to the services.

In response to questions, the Interim Assistant Director of Learning and Achievement clarified that the figures allocated to School Improvement represented posts and that at the current moment all School Improvement Officers worked in early years and primary. He stated that regulations did not indicate what School Improvement should look like, but what aspects had to be carried out.

Concerns were raised about the forward planning and a need to improve the strategic and medium term planning process. The Interim Assistant Director of Learning and

Achievement indicated that the Forum was empowered to make a decision as to whether schools would provide a set figure of £380 k or a figure adjusted to actual income levels. There was a general consensus that more information would be required from Officers before the Forum would be able to make a decision and that this information would be presented to the Schools Forum Meeting on 18 January 2017.

Actions: that

- clarification would be provided on what the scenario would be in regards to the budget and the top slice percentage if the figures looked at for this decision cycle were markedly different to the actuals that emerge;
- confirmation in regards to the proposed change of the business model to one of 'buy in' from 2018/19 or suggestions of alternative models;
- clarification be provided in the minutes as to the number of pupils on role and the figure of £380 k and how the sum of £15 per capita was reached;
- clarification on the expectation of receiving this amount from academies;
- clarification on the impact of staff reductions on the service level provided by WBC;
- clarification would be provided in the minutes on the figure allocated to premature retirement and redundancies referred to during the Briefing on 7 December;
- figures would be provided that would show the costs allocated on a per capita basis; and
- a business plan will be presented at the Meeting on 18 January 2017 outlining the budgetary position if the Forum agrees to the proposals or if the Forum disagrees with the proposals, what the services are and a judgement as to whether services are needed or could be cut.

CLARIFICATIONS

In response to this action point:

- clarification be provided in the minutes as to the number of pupils on role and the figure of £380 k and how the sum of £15 per capita was reached;

Wokingham Borough Council NOR = 25,500. £15/pupil was the information provided by DfE therefore, $15 \times 25,500 = £382k$.

In response to this action point:

- clarification would be provided in the minutes on the figure allocated to premature retirement and redundancies referred to during the Briefing on 7 December;

This figure is the continuing revenue contribution to the retirement fund originating from Berkshire CC, for funding of teachers pensions having left under those conditions, administered by RBWM for the county unitary authorities.

13 DRAFT 2017/18 BUDGET

The Forum considered a report, presented by the Interim Schools Finance Manager, on Agenda pages 39 to 46 outlining the indicative School Budget in advance of the Dedicated Schools Grant settlement. She stated that, to date, the DSG settlement had not been confirmed, but that the projections would be updated when this was received. The attention of the Forum was drawn to an amended Schools Budget that had now been reconciled.

The Chair clarified that the income figures were based on current pupil numbers and the current year's income level and that this would change when the DSG settlement was

confirmed. He highlighted a number of expenditure streams that had changed significantly. They were the same ones as those listed in the minutes for Agenda item 11, but with the addition of Provision for Pupils with SEN and the Pupil Premium.

Reference was made to the issues surrounding contingencies and recharges that had been discussed as part of Agenda item 11.

Actions: that

- the Interim Schools Finance Manager present a report at the Schools Forum on 18 January 2017 including a narrative for each line that has changed explaining why and incorporating the detail referred to in Agenda item 11; and
- the SEN Team Manager to present a report on 18 January 2017, as a part of the report in the Forward Plan, outlining where the sum allocated to fees for pupils at independent special schools and abroad is going and what the risks are for the future and the trends over time.

14 DE-DELEGATION REPORT

The Forum considered a report, presented by the Interim Schools Finance Manager, on Agenda pages 47 to 48. She clarified that the Behaviour Support Services referred to on page 47 applied to primary schools only.

The Forum commented on the fact that the rates paid by schools was the same no matter the size of the school and that this meant that for a small primary school the per capita cost was a lot higher than for a large primary or a secondary school. The Forum was reminded that a set payment was a decision that had been agreed by the Forum historically but it was acknowledged that this needed to be looked at again.

Actions: that an analysis of fixed and variable costs be presented to the Schools Forum at the meeting on 18 January 2017 so that schools are able to make an informed decision as to whether to return to a per capita funding basis.

15 EXCEPTIONAL NEED SPEND

The Forum considered a report and presentation on Agenda pages 49 to 53, presented by the Interim Assistant Director of Learning and Achievement. He stated that, following a decision to reduce this amount by £50 k for the year 2016/17, the current budget had incurred an overspend and he asked that the Forum agree to reinstate the £50 k for the 2017/18 budget, giving a total of £200 k.

Resolved: that the Exceptional Need Funding be increased to £200 k for the year 2017/18.

16 FORWARD PROGRAMME

In the light of discussion at today's meeting, the Forum considered and noted the Forward Programme of work and dates of future meetings. An updated forward plan is attached to the minutes.