

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
SCHOOLS FORUM  
HELD ON 19 JULY 2017 FROM 9.30 AM TO 10.50 AM**

**Schools Representatives**

Helen Ball	Primary Head - Polehampton Infant
Ali Brown	Primary Head - Nine Mile Ride Primary
Sally Hunter	Primary Head - Wescott Infant
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary
Elaine Stewart	Primary Head - Aldryngton Primary
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Ginny Rhodes	Secondary Head - St Crispins
Derren Gray	Academy Headteacher - The Piggott School
Janet Perry	Academy Business Manager - The Holt School
Jay Blundell	Special School Headteacher - Foundry College
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School
Keith McConaghy	School Business Manager - Oakbank
Paul Miller	Governor - St Crispins - Chairman
John Bayes	Governor - Foundry College - Vice-Chair

**Non School Representatives**

James Taylor	Wokingham and Bracknell College
Mary Parker	Early Years Representative
Gail Prewett	Early Years Representative

**Also Present**

Jane Winterbone, Interim Head of Learning and Achievement  
Luciane Bowker, Senior Democratic Services Officer  
Coral Miller, Interim Schools Finance Manager

Councillor Mark Ashwell, Executive Member for Children's Services attended as an observer.

**59 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Anne Andrews, Emma Clarke, Ian Head and Jonathan Peck.

**60 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 24 May were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the correction of a typing error on page 6.

**Matters arising**

**Early Years votes**

It was noted that the Agenda template had not been updated to reflect the Forum's decision to allow two votes from the Early Years representation. Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Elections Specialist agreed to change the Agenda template accordingly.

**Funding mechanism for primary schools**

Please note: amendments were made to these minutes at the meeting held on 18 October 2017

Jane Winterbone, Interim Head of Learning and Achievement explained that the difference between an additional 30 pupils in a maintained school and 30 pupils in a new school was that there was a diseconomy of funding in relation to new schools. A report containing an analysis of Growth Spend with the updated position would be submitted to the next meeting of the Forum. Jane circulated a Growth Spend 2017/18 – Current Forecast Expenditure paper.

### **Recoupment of business rates investigation**

Coral Miller, Interim Schools Finance Manager agreed to carry forward this action and report back to the Forum at the next meeting. The Chairman, Paul Miller agreed to meet with Coral outside of the meeting to discuss this issue.

### **The position of academies seeking help with redundancy costs**

Jane stated that there were no funds within the budget to help academies with redundancy costs. Funds could be used from the de-delegated pot, however this was only available to maintained schools.

### **Consistency of figures**

It was asked that reports be more consistent and that a clearer format be used in the monitoring reports. The Forum asked that this action be continued.

## **61 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **62 BUDGET 2017-18 AND REVENUE MONITORING**

Coral Miller stated that the report provided details of the schools revenue monitoring 2017/18. She explained that the report was due to be updated to include the schools' submissions at the end of the summer term. At this stage it was anticipated that the Centrally Retained and the De-delegated budgets would be fully spent year end.

Coral stated that as shown in Appendix A, the only variance was a forecast overspend of £385k in the High Needs Block, although the service was looking to contain this.

During the discussion of the item the following comments were made:

- Janet Perry, Holt School Business Manager stated that she had looked at past papers submitted to the Forum and she had noticed that the papers submitted in December projected a surplus for the March 2018 budget. Also, the report in Agenda Item 54.1 showed a column D that had not been presented to Forum before and this showed a projected outturn of zero. Janet noticed a significant difference between this report and previous reports, with this report presenting a deficit of £385k at the end of next March. Janet was seeking clarification as to why the numbers had shifted so substantially;
- Coral stated that she was reviewing with senior officers the 2017/18 financial position to ensure the forecast was correct. The current position was as stated in the report;
- Jane stated that the £385k deficit was due to the High Needs Block, she was working to contain this deficit;
- Janet emphasized that a predicted surplus in previous reports seemed to have disappeared and she was looking for an explanation as this was a significant amount of money. Jane agreed to investigate this with John Ogden, Head of Finance and ensure that there was a report back to Forum with the minutes;
- Paul summarised that what seemed to have happened was that between the draft budget that was submitted in December and the column called 'Revised 2017/18

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Budget as at April 2017' there looked to have been a movement of about 1.3 million which was the balance that was being carried forward supposedly at the end of March from the December figures;

- Carole Simpson, Colleton Primary School Business Manager noted that the new format of the report was easier to read and interpret;
- Paul stated that it was important to have consistency in the report formatting;
- The Forum asked for the addition of a row that summed up Total Expenditure in the same way as for Total Income so that the totals for each could be seen;
- It was agreed that there would not be report format changes from meeting to meeting unless agreed by the Forum;
- John Bayes, Vice-Chairman stated that he would like to have more clarity between the positive and negative figures;
- Ginny Rhodes, St Crispins School Headteacher asked to ascertain if there was a critical issue or not. Jane stated that she would get more clarity on the points raised with John Ogden, but any projections were also dependent on the final settlement from the government. Jane stated that the final settlement normally arrived by the end of July, so it may be possible to give a final position with the minutes;
- Paul stated that he would investigate the issue raised by Janet with John, Coral and Jane;
- Derren Gray, Piggott School Headteacher asked what was the narrative behind the following:
  - The decrease from £250k to 0 in the 'additional school grants' row in Total Income from column C to D;
  - The decrease in 'support costs' in the Centrally Retained Schools Block from £265k to 0;
  - The disappearance of the miscellaneous row which was £97k;
  - The disappearance of the cost of servicing Schools Forum which was £4k.

Paul asked Jane and Coral to investigate all the issues raised.

Jane stated that she had discovered that there had been an agreement with Northern House that the Local Authority would pay for top ups for children, including for children from outside of the Borough. However, the normal funding agreement was that the host funding authority would pay for the place funding and each local authority would pay for top ups. When Northern House became an academy an agreement was made that this local authority would pay all for tops and then recoup the top up money from the other authorities. It appeared that at the moment Northern House had charged a greater amount of top up to Wokingham Borough Council than the likely recoupable amount from other authorities, therefore there was a risk to the High Needs Block budget in terms of that amount, which was included in the £385k.

Jane stated that additionally, there was an agreement of a £200k payment to the Oaks resource base Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) provision which had not been profiled in the budget.

John Bayes noted the variance in the High Needs Block row in the Total Income block that also needed clarification.

**RESOLVED** That:

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- 1) Jane Winterbone would investigate with senior officers about the discrepancies between budget monitoring reports and ascertain the real budget position and report back to the Forum as soon as possible;
- 2) The new report format was adopted and any changes in formatting would be subject to approval by Schools Forum;
- 3) Future reports would clearly identify positive and negative figures.

### **63 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK REVIEW AND PROJECTION**

Jane Winterbone went through the High Needs Block report which was set out in Agenda pages 15-18. Jane stated that all the figures contained in the report had been provided by the Finance department. Jane explained that work was being undertaken to address the significant growth in the High Needs Block budget of the Dedicated Schools Grant over the last year. Since 2014 the age range had been extended to include 0 to 5 and 18 to 25 year olds. This age range extension had led to a significant increase in funding requests. Wokingham Borough had seen an increase of 9% of Education Health Care Plans (EHCP).

Jane pointed out that the Local Authority was not expecting an increase in the High Needs Block based funding on the figures released to date. The final arrangements for 2018/19 were still out for consultation, but the range of disparity between authorities in the 2017/18 settlement was significant. As an example, Nottingham was allocated 20.5% growth whilst Wokingham was allocated 7%.

Jane stated that she was carrying out a comprehensive analysis of the core function, including a review of staffing which amounted to a cost of half a million pounds. Once this review was complete she would report back to Schools Forum with recommendations.

Jane stated that in terms of school placements, including Looked After Children, there were a number of measures to be taken. An SEN specialist was auditing all EHCP thresholds and process around the decision making of those. Jane stated she was personally reviewing any proposals for new independent specialist places.

Jane pointed out that there were risks around parental preferences which also needed to be considered. Jane believed that it was important to stimulate the local market.

Jane believed that part of the solution was to utilize the residential provision at Northern House to reduce costs. Jane explained that the Local Authority was already funding 69 places at Northern House. If a child that could go to Northern House did not go there but elsewhere, the Council was effectively double funding that child. Not only was it more cost effective to use local providers, it was also part of the SEN strategy to keep children in the local community.

Jane stated that an analysis of the 0-5 cohort was being undertaken in order to predict the expenditure needs.

Jane explained that resource spaces were funded by various different arrangements. It was necessary to undertake an analysis of all the resource spaces and their level of usage, and to make important, potentially difficult decisions in relation to places that were funded but not fully utilised.

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Ginny asked if Northern House as an academy could refuse a place to the Local Authority, she wondered if this was another risk. Jane agreed to investigate and report back.

James Taylor, Wokingham and Bracknell College Vice-Principal asked Jane how the Council intended to use the SEN capital build money. Jane stated that this information had been released after the production of this report, and confirmed that there was £297k capital build money per year for three years, she expected it would form part of the plan in capital funding.

Members of the Forum asked, for comparison purposes, what the growth in EHCP in Nottingham was. Jane would find out and report back.

Jane stated that a review SEN banding and of the exceptional needs funding process, decision making and impact was proposed. Some work had already started, including the review of pathways. Jane believed that all necessary work would be ready in time for December, which would give the Forum the background information to make the decisions for the 2018/19 Budget. The Chairman asked that this information be presented in October.

Jane informed that she had met with each of the headteachers of resource spaces and they were aware that some difficult decisions may be taken following the reviews mentioned above.

In response to a question Jane clarified that the £200k to the Oaks resource centre was an ongoing annual commitment.

In response to a question Jane stated that she was trying to find out how long the agreement for top ups with Northern House was for. It may be necessary to clawback, however it was important to be careful to retain specialist staff and guarantee stability in the school.

Jane explained that the High Needs Block review involved a circle of improvement which could be put into a diagram with the following parts:

- The Strategy – our ambition for pupils with SEND
- Analysis of the current cohort data
- To define the provision that we currently have, test it against resources in a gap analysis
- To develop a plan to move forwards

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The report be noted and
- 2) The Forum would continue to review the High Needs Block and receive further updates during the year.

## **64 FOUNDRY COLLEGE**

Jay Blundell, Foundry College Headteacher stated that the report which was set out in Agenda pages 21-24 had been written in March, and the numbers listed in the appendix had now increased from 71 to 82. Jay reported that there were 44 pupils on roll for September, and this was a worrying position. Of these 44 pupils:

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- 7 pupils were SEN and awaiting for places at other schools on the completion of EHCP processes,
- 6 pupils were under managed moves with both secondary and primary schools,
- 20 pupils were from permanent exclusions, but the school was only funded for 15 permanent exclusion places.

Jay stated that Foundry College provided a service for all Wokingham schools, and it was important to plan strategically based on schools' needs and the capacity to deliver the service. Jay proposed a review of the commissioning level. Jay stated that the budget was stretched and that the current financial year was projecting an overspend approaching £200k, this was manageable for this year but not for subsequent years.

Jay explained that the Virtual School had been able to contribute to this year's budget, however it was not certain if this would continue in future years.

Jay stated that there had been plans in the past for capital development of the school which did not happen, therefore there was a capital fund available which was helping with the school's finances.

In response to a question Jay stated that the school needed new premises and that there was no physical capacity to meet its needs. A short term solution had been found for this year, but would not be available for next year. A building of a small primary school size was needed to meet the needs of the school. Jay stated that she had contacted Wokingham Borough Council, but there were no funds for a new build or properties available.

John Bayes confirmed the need for new premises and added that due to space pressures most classrooms held two lessons at the same time. He pointed out that given that the children had a tendency to disruptive behaviour, it was a very challenging situation.

Ginny Rhodes pointed out that Foundry College used to be at Foxwood House and asked what happened to the funds raised from the release of that site. John Bayes explained that that building belonged to the Council and it just returned to the Council when Foundry College left it, the College made no financial gain from it.

Jane Winterbone stated that since the introduction of the academies programme by the government, local authorities were not allowed to dispose of sites until permission was given by the Department of Education. Jane agreed to investigate the current status of this particular site and report back.

**RESOLVED** That the Forum noted Jay Blundell's concerns and asked Jane Winterbone to undertake the necessary work to find a solution for the issues raised.

## **65 DE-DELEGATED AND CENTRALLY RESTRAINED BUDGETS**

Coral Miller went through the report which was set out in Agenda pages 25-26. The report clarified the budget relating to de-delegated funds and the centrally retained budget, and also proposed use of the contingency funding.

Coral stated that the contingency fund was to support schools in financial difficulties not of their own making. Schools in this situation should contact her for an assessment. Any decision would need the agreement of the Director of People Services and would be communicated to the Schools Forum.



During discussion of the item the following points were made:

- In response to a question Jane stated that the £321k shown in column F (Behaviour support services – Primary only) was a decision made by the phase;
- Jay Blundell stated that the £321K had been factored in her budget planning. She was seeking clarification in relation to the fact that some schools listed in the report were in the process of becoming academies;
- Coral explained that if a school became academy between April and August the de-delegated money was given back to the school. If a school become academy after 1 September the Local Authority was allowed to retain the money. Coral believed that there were two schools that had converted to academy status since April. Jane stated that the Local Authority would absorb the cost, potentially from contingencies, and would not clawback from Foundry College;
- Jay Blundell stated that she may have to charge academies for places at Foundry College;
- Jane agreed to inform Jay of conversion dates;
- Members felt that the amount charged for Insurance and Staff Supply Cover were too high and were not good value for money;
- Coral agreed to investigate and report back.

Paul Miller stated that he remembered conversations with Alan Stubersfield, Jane Winterbone's predecessor about an Early Years move to a traded services set of arrangements. It was agreed that Paul and Jane would discuss this outside of the meeting.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) There would be no detriment to Foundry College's Budget plan for 2017/18 as a result of schools' academisation in the year;
- 2) The report be noted.

## **66 FORWARD PROGRAMME**

The Forum considered and noted the Forward Programme of work and dates of future meetings as set out on Agenda page 29.

Coral confirmed that a Task and Finish Group had been set up to look at the new funding formula, this would be discussed at the October meeting.

Jane stated that the new secondary school strategy was being submitted to Executive on 27 July, she would communicate with secondary federations about the proposals. Paul asked that the relevant reports, including current and future Borough forecasts of pupil numbers by age be submitted as background papers to the Growth report.

The Chairman encouraged Forum members to consider hosting the next meeting on 18 October at one of the Borough schools. Luciane Bowker would contact Forum members about the venue for the next meeting.

**RESOLVED** That the Forward Plan be noted.

## **67 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Please note: amendments were made to these minutes at the meeting held on 18 October 2017

### **National Funding Formula Task and Finish Group**

A Task and Finish group had been established to ascertain the implication of the new funding formula proposed by the government to Wokingham Borough schools. It was expected that by the time the Forum met again in October, a lot of activity would have taken place over the summer in relation to the new funding formula. The Chairman asked that the group report back to Schools Forum with its findings and suggestions at the next meeting.

### **Beechwood Primary School**

The Chairman reported that the Beechwood Primary School's headteacher had approached him and asked that due to the difficulties the school was facing, that Schools Forum allow for a grant to the school. Paul had written back explaining that Schools Forum did not have the ability to release grants to individual schools. However, he had advised the school to contact the Schools Finance Team at the Council who would be able to assess the situation and maybe use the contingencies budget to help the school.

### **Change of meeting time**

It was proposed by Derren Gray that it would be better to start the meetings later. Forum Members agreed to change the starting time to 10am.