

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2017 FROM 10.00 AM TO 11.40 AM**

Schools Representatives

Helen Ball	Primary Head - Polehampton Infant
Ali Brown	Primary Head - Nine Mile Ride Primary
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary
Elaine Stewart	Primary Head - Aldryngton Primary
Sylvia Allen	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Derren Gray	Academy Headteacher - The Piggott School
Jay Blundell	Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher - Foundry College
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School
Ben Godber	Academy Headteacher - Bohunt
Jonathon Peck	Director of Finance and Operations - Maiden Erlegh
Keith McConaghy	School Business Manager - Oakbank
Paul Miller	Governor - St Crispins - Chairman
John Bayes	Governor - Foundry College - Vice-Chair
Ian Head	Governor - Aldryngton Primary

Non School Representatives

Anne Andrews	Oxford Diocese
UllaKarin Clark	Wokingham Borough Council
Mary Parker	Early Years Representative

Also Present

Madeleine Shopland, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Carole Burrow, Interim Lead Officer School Admissions
Coral Miller, Interim Senior Finance Specialist, Schools
Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist, People Services
Jane Winterbone, Interim Assistant Director, Education
Jackie Whitney, Service Manager, Customer Services

17 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Emma Clarke, Kerrie Clifford, Corrina Gillard, Sally Hunter, John Ogden, Janet Perry, Gail Prewitt, Ginny Rhodes, Paul Senior and James Taylor.

An apology for lateness was received from Ben Godber.

18 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum on 18 October 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

19 MATTERS ARISING

In response to a question from John Bayes regarding the distribution of the PE grant of £250,000, Coral Miller indicated that it was passported from the Department for Education (DfE) to the schools. Paul Miller stated that it appeared as a separate line item and went on to question why it had not been shown in that way in previous years and if it was a new

item. Coral Miller commented that there was likely to have been a presentation error previously and that it was not new.

The Forum asked that John Ogden be asked to respond to the following outstanding actions:

- Provide a breakdown of how the contingencies money to Early Years was being used in future monitoring reports;
- Information on the volume entrance so that it could be identified what the run rates were for 2016/17, how they compared to 2017/18 and what was expected for the rest of the year;
- Reconsider the introduction of traded services charges.

Lynne Samuel commented that the Early Years report to the Forum's January meeting would include a breakdown of how the contingencies money to Early Years was being used. The Forum would be asked what information they would like to see on a regular basis.

Paul Miller reminded the Forum that at the previous meeting the proposal to move half a percent from the 2018/19 Schools Block Budget to the High Needs Block had not been agreed. The Council had then applied to the DfE to be allowed to move the half percent from the School Block Budget. Coral Miller was asked to inform the Forum when a response and approval was received from the DfE.

The Forum discussed the traded services charges. The charges were part of the trading account and would continue.

20 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

21 SCHOOL ADMISSIONS UPDATE

Carole Burrow and Jackie Whitney took the Forum through a report regarding the School Admissions Process Improvements which was set out in Agenda Pages 17 to 19.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:

- School Admissions was part of the Customer and Locality Services.
- Over the last 12 months a review of all school admissions processes, workload, technology and resources had been undertaken. A number of improvements and efficiencies including the following had been made:
 - Upgraded technology to allow customers to apply online, at a time and place that suited them;
 - Auto acknowledgement emails sent to receipt applications;
 - Reduction in print costs and signposting to online information where possible;
 - Emailing correspondence, such as offers, considerably reducing the number of paper responses;
 - Some automated checking which represented a time saving; and
 - Approximately 15,000 calls per year were being redirected through the Customer Services Team.
- The Forum was informed that the traded services fees generated for 2017 amounted to £16,051.35.

- Elaine Stewart asked about admission appeals becoming more complex and time consuming. Carole Burrow commented that place planning could be difficult and that there were minimal places available in some areas and year groups. Anyone who had applied for a school place and been refused had the right to an appeal. Carole Burrow also commented that placing children who did not have a Statement of Special Educational Needs but did have complex behavioural, educational or social needs, could be complicated.
- Families split between a number of different schools was an increasing issue. Brian Prebble questioned whether the admission criteria could be amended so that siblings were a higher priority. Carole Burrow commented that there had been a consultation on the matter several years ago. It was likely that those living in the designated area without siblings might feel disadvantaged by any such change. The Forum was informed that if a child was diverted to a school any siblings were afforded protected designated area sibling status. This was highlighted in the Parent's Guide.
- Paul Miller asked how far in advance the admissions policy was set. Jane Winterbone stated that consultation on admission arrangements was carried out approximately 18 months in advance. Helen Ball asked who decided what information was contained in the consultation. The Forum was informed that this was discussed by the School Admissions Forum.
- John Bayes commented that he wanted to see more financial information to provide assurance with regards to the value for money offered by the service. He questioned how much was spent on appeals. Carole Burrow commented that the Council had a statutory responsibility to undertake admission appeals. There were approximately 200 appeals per year. The majority of money spent on appeals went towards salaries and internal recharges. Coral Miller was asked to provide a breakdown of the School Admissions budget and savings made. Jackie Whitney emphasised that there had been a big reduction in printing costs. The Council was going through the 21st Century Council process and consideration would be given to refining processes even more where possible.
- In response to a comment from John Bayes, Jackie Whitney clarified that the Forum would not yet see a change in the relevant budget line as a number of the improvements which had been implemented were reasonably new.
- Jane Winterbone stated that the Forum would be provided with benchmarking information regarding the spend on school admissions by other similar local authorities. She emphasised that School Admissions was lean and efficient with a number of good processes in place.
- The volume of appeals was unlikely to reduce significantly in future for various reasons.
- Helen Ball stated that it would be useful to ask schools for their views on the improvements. Jackie Whitney indicated that there would be a lessons learnt on people, processes and technology following the secondary school applications process. The views of families and schools on the process would be sought. This had not yet been undertaken due to resourcing issues. Mary Parker asked that pre-schools also be consulted. She emphasised that their printing costs had increased. Carole Burrow informed Forum members that families could visit the Council offices if they wished and paper copies of the appeal form would be provided. Jane Winterbone suggested that Mary Parker and Helen Ball be invited to participate in the consultation.
- Paul Miller asked that the results of the consultation be shared with the Forum.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the School Admission Update be noted;
- 2) Coral Miller provide a breakdown of the School Admissions budget and savings made at the next Schools Forum meeting;
- 3) the Forum be provided with benchmarking information regarding the spend on school admissions by other similar local authorities.

22 REVENUE MONITORING

Coral Miller went through the Revenue Monitoring report which was set out in agenda pages 21 to 24.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:

- Coral Miller explained that the report provided details of the revenue budget position as at 31 October 2017.
- The report detailed the expected out-turn for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in the financial year 2017/18. For reporting purposes the assumption was made that the centrally retained amounts and contingencies would be fully spent.
- The Forum was reminded that the de-delegated items funding came from the contribution made by maintained schools and that any underspend therefore belonged to the maintained schools.
- The forecast as at 31 October 2017 showed an overspend of approximately £1.081million, which was an improvement on the September figure due to a reduction in the High Needs Block expenditure of £251,000.
- In response to a query from John Bayes, Coral Miller clarified that column C represented the current forecast.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

23 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK

Jane Winterbone provided an update on the High Needs Block.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:

- Drilling down into the High Needs Block, £250,000 had been found.
- Some progress had been made with the clawback from other local authorities around the Northern House top up.
- Jane Winterbone indicated that the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) audit report would be considered by the People Services Leadership Team in the next week. The report was positive and stated that the quality of the EHCPs had improved.
- Jane Winterbone explained that it was important to understand the thresholds and to ensure that pupils were not being transferred to EHCP at too low a level. With regards to the conversion of Statements of Special Educational Need to EHCPs for post 16 pupils, some pupils who had been found to have been transferred at a low level attended mainstream settings and had transferred to college with very little additional help and therefore could have been stepped down through the review process.

- It was noted that a comprehensive service action plan had been produced as a result of the EHCP audit. Recommendations included how the service should be undertaking regular similar audits itself in future.
- The resources base review had been completed. The review had produced a large number of recommendations, including that the banding be reviewed. There was a suggestion that there would be a two phase approach to the banding. It was proposed that a High Needs Block Sub Group work with Finance on the High Needs Block including around the costing of any changes to the banding. Brian Prebble, Jay Blundell, Derren Gray and Ali Brown volunteered to be part of the High Needs Block Sub Group in response to a request from Jane Winterbone. Ginny Rhodes had also previously expressed an interest in participating.
- It was vital to get the commissioning of resource spaces right.
- Jane Winterbone emphasised that there was a definite need to look at some of the gaps which were causing primary school children with ASD in particular to go out of the Borough too early.
- A very thorough review report had been produced and would be taken to the People Services Leadership Team. It was suggested that the summary report be taken to the Forum's January meeting if available. Forum members could request that they be sent the full report should they wish.
- Jane Winterbone commented that in the past there had been similar reviews, the recommendations of which had not been progressed. She had agreed to come back in the new year to take the implementation of the review recommendations forward, making sure that it was agreed which of the recommendations would be taken forward.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the update be noted;
- 2) a summary of the Resource Bases Review report be brought for consideration at the next meeting of Schools Forum.

24 2018/19 CENTRAL SCHOOL SERVICES BLOCK

The Forum considered a report regarding the 2018/19 Central School Services Block which requested that Schools Forum support the Council's proposals to fund the statutory education functions of the authority for 2018/2019.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:

- Coral Miller advised that the DfE had introduced a new block, the Central School Services Block (CSSB) for 2018/19, to fund local authorities for the statutory duties they held for both maintained schools and academies.
- The CSSB brought together funding previously allocated through the retained duties element of the Education Services Grant (ESG) and funding for ongoing central functions, such as school admissions, which had been previously top-sliced from the Schools Block.
- The DfE provisional allocation for the CSSB block was £922,000, a 2.5% reduction from last year's centrally retained amount.
- The Forum noted the proposed allocation for 2018/19 for the different statutory duties.
- The Forum was advised that the School Admissions budget had reduced and remained challenging.
- Jane Winterbone stated that the Education Welfare Service budget had also reduced. This was an area of concern. Finance colleagues and Shan Ratcliffe, the Virtual

Headteacher, would meet to discuss this. The volume of children in the Borough meant that the delivery of the statutory work around Education Welfare Services was extremely tight. Paul Miller commented that other local authorities would be facing similar pressures and questioned whether benchmarking and sharing of good practice could be carried out. Jane Winterbone commented that the statutory responsibilities were the same regardless of whether the local authority was big or small. Wokingham had previously shared some of its Education Welfare Service function with other authorities. Paul Miller commented that the sharing of resources could be beneficial. It was noted that some of the larger authorities had much bigger trading arms which helped to support the delivery of the statutory duties.

- Jay Blundell asked whether the Virtual School was included and was informed that the Virtual School could not be DSG funded and had to be core funded.
- Coral Miller drew attention to the education services offered to schools such as Educational Psychology, various therapies and health services that had been previously funded by the Education Support Grant. The Council continued to provide these services without funding from the DSG. It was noted that the estimated cost of these services was over £1million.
- Elaine Stewart stated that the £72,000 budget for the Standing Advisory Committees for Religious Education (SACRE) seemed large, and questioned what this was spent on. Jane Winterbone informed the Forum that the SACRE produced an annual report of its work. Paul Miller asked that this be provided to Forum members. Anne Andrews also commented this was a much larger budget than other neighbouring SACREs. Coral Miller commented that this had been allocated to the SACRE budget line previously and agreed to look at this further.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted

25 SPLIT SITE FUNDING

The Forum considered a report regarding Split Site funding in 2018/19 which was set out in Agenda Pages 29 to 30. The Forum was asked to support the Council's proposals to use the split site criteria factor in the 2018/19 school block budget.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:

- A local authority school block funding formula could include a factor to provide additional funding to schools that operated on more than one site.
- The Forum was advised that schools sharing facilities, federated schools and schools with remote sixth forms or remote early years provision were not eligible for split site funding.
- Examples of clear trigger points included the sites being a minimum distance apart, as the crow flies, and the sites being separated by a public highway.
- There had been one application for the split site funding from Charvil Piggott where additional costs had been incurred across two sites. Coral Miller explained that at present the Council supported the school through the growth fund. It was proposed to support the school by providing a lump sum payment based on the DfE national funding formula proposed lump sum of £110,000. This would be funded by removing the growth fund support currently made to the school of approximately £100,000, with the remaining £10,000 funded from the school block budget.
- The transfer from the growth fund to the split site fund would cost the school block £10,000.
- Carol Simpson expressed concern about the possible creation of a precedence and commented that a set of criteria should first be agreed.

- John Bayes commented that Charvil Piggott was clearly a split site and should qualify for split site funding. However, a set of criteria should be developed for any future applications. Paul Miller proposed that Charvil Piggott should qualify for split site funding.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the proposal be approved;
- 2) split site funding criteria be developed.

26 GROWTH FUND APPROVAL FOR 2018/19

The Forum considered the 2018/19 Growth Fund Criteria Report as set out in Agenda Pages 31 to 34.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:

- The Forum was asked to support the proposal to 'topslice' the School Block budget by £800,000 in order to fund the 2018/19 growth fund which existed in order to fund the Council statutory duty to ensure there were sufficient school places in the Borough.
- Coral Miller advised that this was a significant reduction on the 2017/18 'topslice' of £1.3million, increasing the school block allocation to schools by £500,000 in comparison to the current year. Coral explained that this reduction was the result of the tightening up of funding criteria.
- Coral took the Forum through the appendices to the report.
- There was a contingency of approximately £100,000, mainly for bulge classes and classes that were not currently known about.
- Jane Winterbone reminded the Forum that the criteria applied had been previously agreed.
- Elaine Stewart commented that there appeared to be no additional factors added into the monies for growing schools. Jane Winterbone indicated that the criteria related to the basic entitlement money and was always intended to be a stop gap and triggered on the full funding on the census.
- Elaine Stewart expressed concern that the agreed criteria did not make accommodation for pupil led factors funding for schools as they were growing. Sylvia Allen commented that would be difficult to build in.
- Paul Miller suggested that Piers Brunning be asked to ascertain whether some funding could come out of the contingency. He also suggested that the contingency be added to the regular update on contingencies so as to highlight how it was or was not being allocated.

RESOLVED: That the proposal be approved.

27 DRAFT SCHOOL BLOCK BUDGET 2018/19

The Forum received a report which provided an update on the draft 2018/19 budget.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:

- The budget presented was an estimate. The actual budget was expected to be released next week.
- There would be a number of changes to the school block funding from 2017/18 to 2018/19. Previously the actual unit cost per child was the same for both Primary and Secondary; however, in the 2018/19 budget, the DfE had introduced separate

unit costs for Primary and Secondary; the Primary Unit of Funding (PUF) and Secondary Unit of Funding (SUF) and an additional amount for premises which included lump sum, business rates and other premises costs.

- The final funding allocation would be available from 18 December 2017 when the DfE had checked and incorporated the October 2017 census number into the funding calculation.
- Coral Miller took the Forum through Table A which compared the 2017/18 unit cost with the new 2018/19 unit cost and premises allocation. Under the new regulations, at least 99.5% of the amount received through the school block must be allocated to schools and the growth fund.
- Coral Miller would clarify whether the Reception uplift was continuing when the new guidance was issued.
- The changes agreed by the Task and Finish Group and used in setting the budget included;
 - Adjusting the minimum funding guarantee (MFG) to 0% so no school lost funding per pupil from last year. Any positive MFG required an application to the Secretary of State;
 - Reduction in the Lump sum of £25,000 per school;
 - Increase Primary prior attainment to £500;
 - Cap the gains to 3%;
 - Change ratio to 1:1.28.
- In response to a question from Paul Miller, Coral Miller confirmed that a number of models had been considered and the one used had been considered the most appropriate.
- Appendix A detailed the numbers on roll by school. There were a number of reductions in some of the secondary school numbers in particular which would have an impact on individual school funding.
- Appendix B looked at the unit costs after the Minimum Funding Guarantee. This included premises costs as well as pupil led factors. Coral Miller explained that the reason that some schools were losing out on the per pupil factor was that the premises cost was fixed whereas the pupil led factor was variable. The big reduction in unit costs for Bulmershe School for last year was highlighted. Coral Miller clarified that this was because the school's business rates had been overstated in the previous year and was now being claimed back.
- Appendix C detailed the actual amount that the schools were likely to receive. 45 schools would gain whilst 18 would see a reduction.
- Sylvia Allen asked about the 2019/20 budget. Jane Winterbone suggested that the Task and Finish Group look at moving to the second phase towards the national funding formula once the 2018/19 budget was settled. The Chairman thanked the Task and Finish Group and Finance staff for their hard work.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

28 CONTINGENCIES UPDATE

The Forum received a report regarding the 2017/18 Contingencies Breakdown. The report detailed how the Council had applied the de-delegated school contingency.

During the discussion of this item the following points were made:

- Coral Miller advised that there were now two claims on this funding, both of which had been approved. She provided further detail regarding the case of 'School B.'
- The Forum was notified that £69,510 of contingencies had not yet been committed.

- Jane Winterbone commented that there was unlikely to be other claims on the fund at present.
- In response to a question as to whether the payment would be a grant, Coral Miller confirmed that it would.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

29 FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Forum considered the Forward Programme of work and dates of future meetings as set out on Agenda page 49.

The Forum requested a summary of the Education, Health and Care Plan audit report, if available, at the January meeting.

An update from the High Needs Block Task and Finish Group would be provided at the Forum's February meeting.

Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist, People Services, was introduced to the meeting.

It was noted that the meeting on 17 January 10am would be hosted by Bohunt School.

RESOLVED: That the Forward Programme be noted.