

Please note: amendments were made to these minutes at the meeting held on 15 January 2020

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 18 DECEMBER 2019 FROM 10.00 AM TO 12.00 PM**

Schools Representatives

Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Corrina Gillard	Primary Head - Emmbrook Infant
Sylvia Allen	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary
Nick McSweeney	Headteacher - The Emmbrook School Secondary
Ali Brown	Primary Head - Nine Mile Ride Primary
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Ben Godber	Academy Head - Bohunt School
Derren Gray	Academy Head - Piggott School
Ginny Rhodes	Academy Head - St Crispins School
Paul Miller	Governor - St Crispins - Chairman
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School
Shirley Austin	Academy Head - Forest School

Non School Representatives

Ian Morgan Early Years Representative

Also Present

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services
Jim Leivers, Children's Services Consultant
Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist
Alan Voyzey, Interim Schools Finance Specialist

14 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Forum elected a Chairman for the 2019/20 academic year.

RESOLVED: That Paul Miller be elected as Chairman of the Schools Forum for the 2019/20 academic year.

15 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

The Forum elected a Vice-Chairman for the 2019/20 academic year.

RESOLVED: That Brian Prebble be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Schools Forum for the 2019/20 academic year.

16 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Carol Cammis and Sal Thirlway.

17 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 16 October 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the addition of Lorraine Mortimer and Fiona Wood to the list of attendees.

18 MATTERS ARISING

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Focus of Future Meetings

Paul Miller stated that previous meetings of the Forum had focussed largely on financial matters. Whilst finance would remain a key element of the Forum's work, Paul felt that discussion on broader educational issues such as admissions and high needs should feature more on the agenda for future meetings.

De-delegated Contingency Underspend

Lynne Samuel reported that, for 2020/21 budget setting, it was proposed that £50k be realigned from de-delegated contingency to the staff cover budget, reflecting the increased costs in this area.

Funding for Foundry College

This was covered in the High Needs Block Update report on the Agenda. Jay Blundell stated that the 2019/20 budget figure of £960k should be £970k. This would be discussed outside the meeting.

2018/19 Central Block "Miscodings"

Lynne Samuel reported that a review of the transactions involved had identified that the miscoded spend was all DSG related and was, in part, a result of business rate adjustments. Further work was ongoing to establish options for resolution in-year. Additional checks and balances would be put in place for future years.

Early Years Block and Provider Reserve

Lynne Samuel reported that the schools' finance team were working on the presentation of a termly reconciliation report that would provide the Schools Forum with greater visibility on the Provider Reserve Fund held within the Early Years Block.

Schools Formula Changes

Lynne Samuel reported that, further to the discussion at the previous meeting, the idea of transferring 0.5% of the Schools Block budget to the High Needs budget would not be pursued in 2020/21. Sal Thirlway had written to Schools Forum members confirming this decision.

19 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

20 2019/20 REVENUE MONITORING

Alan Voyzey presented the Revenue Monitoring report which was set out in Agenda pages 17-22. The report provided an update on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) position as at 30 November 2019.

The report stated that the anticipated overspend at year end had increased by £350k to £3.32m. The increased expenditure was attributable to higher costs (allocated grants) in the High Needs Block. This represented 2.3% of the total budget of £142.86m.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

21 2019/20 CONTINGENCY UPDATE

Alan Voyzey provided an update on the 2019/20 Contingency Fund, as set out on Agenda page 23. The report stated that the Contingency Fund was unchanged from the previous report with £77k uncommitted.

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RESOLVED: That the Forum note that the Contingency Fund allocation was unchanged from the previous report on 10 July 2019.

22 DRAFT 2020/21 SCHOOLS BLOCK BUDGET

The Forum considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 25 to 30, which gave details of the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group in relation to the draft Schools Block Budget for 2020/21. This included a consultation with all schools on the proposed indicative budgets in early January 2020. Feedback from schools would then be considered at the January meeting of the Forum prior to submission of the final proposals to the DfE in accordance with the notified deadline.

The report stated that the DfE may make changes to the Schools Block Funding for 2020/21, with the final funding allocation due to be announced by 20 December 2019.

Derren Gray (Chair of the Task and Finish Group) gave details of the issues considered by the Group, including the principles and factors used to model the propose formula for 2020/21. Derren stated that there were no significant changes to the formula compared to 2019/20 and that there had been a focus on protecting small primary schools.

Appended to the report was a schedule which provided details of:

- A comparison of pupil numbers in 2019/20 and 2020/21;
- The budget for the current year and an indicative budget for 2020/21;
- Details of the increase (or decrease) in school numbers for 2020/21.

The Forum discussed the format of the schools' consultation outlined above. It was suggested that the consultation schedule include an additional column which provided schools with an indication of what their provisional 2020/21 budget would have been if pupil numbers had remained static from the October 2018 Census.

It was also suggested that the Forum have a broader discussion on the impact of funding and demographic changes on the viability of small primary schools. Jim Leivers proposed that a strategic review of primary school provision in the Borough be undertaken in the summer of 2020.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Funding Formula Task and Finish Group be thanked for their work in developing options for 2020/21;
- 2) the proposed consultation schedule be approved, with the addition of an extra column providing schools with an indication of what their provisional 2020/21 budget would have been if pupil numbers had remained static from the October 2018 Census;
- 3) the deadline for school responses to the consultation be confirmed as 10 January 2020;
- 4) the consultation covering note to schools include an explanation for the short timeframe of the consultation;
- 5) Derren Gray approve the consultation document to be sent to schools;

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- 6) the consultation feedback be considered by the Schools Forum at its meeting on 15 January 2020;
- 7) following confirmation by the Schools Forum, final proposals be submitted to the DfE in line with the notified deadline;
- 8) a strategic discussion on the future of primary school provision in the Borough be held in the summer of 2020, with reports to the Schools Forum as necessary.

23 GROWTH FUND UPDATE 2019/20 AND 2020/21

Piers Brunning submitted a report, set out on Agenda pages 31 to 35, which gave an update on the Growth Fund which existed to fund or part-fund the planned expansion of school places in response to rising demand.

The report stated that planned spend in 2019/20 included the expansion of six maintained primary schools, three established primary Academy/Free Schools, one Free Secondary School and pre-opening payments for three new primary schools.

Piers stated that there was currently pressure for places at Key Stage 2 and that pressure for places at Key Stage 1 had reduced. The aim was to limit, as much as possible, the number of families travelling across the Borough to get their children to school.

In the ensuing discussion, members of the Forum made the following points:

- The Schools Block Budget report on the Agenda indicated a reduction of 211 primary school pupils. At the same time the Council was proposing to open new primary schools with potential capacity of 600.
- It was clear that population distribution was changing in light of the extensive new house building. Providing new school places in development areas whilst protecting existing schools would be a difficult challenge with potentially unforeseen consequences.
- Jim Leivers referred to the earlier discussion on the need for a strategic discussion on the future of primary provision across the Borough.
- It would be important to engage with all WBC Members in discussing future primary school provision not just those Members in the new housing development areas.
- It would be useful for the Forum to receive improved data about in-year numbers and trends for primary schools in order to inform the discussion. Piers confirmed that this was achievable.
- The potential major housing development at Grazeley would have significant demand implications. However, if proceeding, it was unlikely to materialise until 2030.
- Ginny Rhodes stated that, in spite of repeated requests, schools were still waiting for data on school admission preferences. Jim Leivers confirmed that the data would be circulated as quickly as possible.

RESOLVED That:

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- 1) the Forum notes that the Growth Fund position is unchanged from the previous report to the Forum on 10 July 2019;
- 2) the Forum notes that the likely need to carry forward any positive balance from 2019/20 to 2020/21;
- 3) the Forum notes that, subject to any carry forward, the current draft budget indicates that growth needs can be met within the expected £800k Growth Budget;
- 4) the Forum receive further information on in-year numbers and trends for primary school places;
- 5) schools receive information on school admission preferences as a matter of urgency;
- 6) the Forum give further consideration to the process for engaging with elected Members on the future provision of primary school places across the Borough.

24 2020/21 PROPOSED DE-DELEGATED BUDGET

The Forum considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 37 to 42, which sought approval from the maintained primary and secondary schools for a list of de-delegated items and the basis of cost allocation.

The report stated that funding for de-delegated services must be allocated through the funding formula but could be passed back to maintained primary and secondary schools with Schools Forum approval. The list of de-delegated items was:

- Contingencies (including schools in financial difficulties and deficits of closing schools).
- Behaviour Support Services (commissioned from Foundry College for primary maintained schools).
- Support to underperforming ethnic groups and bilingual learners.
- Staff Costs Supply Cover (long-term sickness, maternity, trade union and public duties).
- Licenses and Subscriptions.

The maintained primary and secondary representatives voted on each line of proposed de-delegations set out in the Appendix to the report. Each proposed de-delegation item was approved unanimously.

Clarification was also sought on the reasons for variations in insurance cover/premiums between maintained primary and secondary schools and academies.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the proposed maintained primary school de-delegation items for the 2020/21 budget, set out in the Appendix to the report, be approved;

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- 2) the proposed maintained secondary school de-delegation items for the 2020/21 budget, set out in the Appendix to the report, be approved;
- 3) further clarification be provided on differences in insurance cover between maintained primary and secondary schools and academies.

25 2020/21 EARLY YEARS BLOCK UPDATE

The Forum considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 43 to 44, which provided details of the 2020/21 funding announcements made by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in advance of the DSG Settlement in December 2019.

The report stated that the Funding Agency had confirmed that, for the vast majority of settings, funding rates for 2020/21 would be increased by 8 pence per hour.

RESOLVED: That the announcements made by the Education and Skills Funding Agency be noted.

26 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK UPDATE

The Forum considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 45 to 50, which provided an update on the 2019/20 High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Budget together with a deficit recovery action plan.

The report stated that figures previously reported to the Forum forecast a year-end deficit of £2.75m for the High Needs Block. Despite significant planned investment in new capacity indications were that the deficit would continue to increase over coming years based on projections of children and young people requiring Education, Health and Care Plans and special and high needs support.

Lynne Samuel reported that a meeting with the DfE had been arranged for 4 February 2020. The meeting would discuss the deficit recovery plan and the proposed next steps.

In the ensuing discussion, Forum members made the following points:

- It would be useful for the Forum to receive improved background information on High Needs funding as a basis for a more informed discussion on future strategies.
- It was suggested that discussions take place between now and an update report to the Forum in March 2020.
- There was general concern about operational processes and issues under the SEND service.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the High Needs Block update report be noted;
- 2) a further report be submitted to the March 2020 meeting of the Forum setting out the key strategic challenges involved in developing a sustainable financial model for the service following the February meeting with the DfE;
- 3) Jim Leivers discuss the operational concerns relating to the SEND service with Sal Thirlway.

27 SCHOOL ADMISSIONS UPDATE

The Forum considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 55 to 57, which gave an update on the Council's School Admissions arrangements.

The report stated that the School Admissions team had been transferred out of Children's Services into Customer and Localities under the 21st Century Council change programme. It was now apparent that this change had not delivered the intended benefits to the process of school admissions. Consequently, the team was reverting back to Children's Services.

At the same time, a Task and Finish Group would be established to consider the challenges facing the service and develop sustainable solutions. The Task and Finish Group would include Council Officers, head teachers, elected Members and other representatives. The Group would look at issues such as current practice challenges, SEND admissions, Fair Access and Managed Moves and data/forecasting.

It was suggested that a further report be submitted to the Forum, providing more detail on the new school admission arrangements.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the School Admissions update be noted;
- 2) the proposed future actions in the report be supported;
- 3) a further report be submitted to the January 2020 meeting of the Forum, setting out more detail on the proposed new Admissions arrangements.

28 FORWARD PLAN

The Forum considered the Forward Plan, set out on Agenda page 59. The Forum noted the additional items requested at the meeting:

- January 2020 – further details on School Admissions arrangements;
- March 2020 – briefing on the High Needs Block;
- Summer 2020 – discussion on future of primary provision across the Borough.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Forward Plan, as amended, be noted;
- 2) dates for future meetings in 2020/21 be confirmed at the next meeting of the Forum.