

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
SCHOOLS FORUM  
HELD ON 15 JANUARY 2020 FROM 10.00 AM TO 10.50 AM**

**Schools Representatives**

Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Corrina Gillard	Primary Head - Emmbrook Infant
Sylvia Allen	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary
Helen Ball	Primary Head - Polehampton Infant
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
Ginny Rhodes	Academy Head - St Crispins School
Paul Miller	Governor - St Crispins - Chairman
Shirley Austin	Academy Head - Forest School
Sian Lehrter	School Business Director - The Holt School
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School

**Non School Representatives**

Graham Howe	Wokingham Borough Council
-------------	---------------------------

**Also Present**

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist  
Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services  
Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist  
Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager  
Alan Voyzey, Interim Schools Finance Specialist

**29 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Emma Clarke, Paul Gibson, Derren Gray and Sal Thirlway.

**30 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 December 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following change:

That on page 7 of the agenda, Item 22 on the third bullet point, where it says '*in school numbers*' this be changed to in '*schools budgets*'.

**30.1 Update for Matters Arising**

**Variations in insurance cover**

Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist stated that she had spoken with the insurance specialist within the Council and had been advised on the context of schools insurance, she offered to share this information with schools. There was a consultation with the Department of Education (DofE) which would indicate what the national picture was. However, the comparison between primary, secondary and academy schools was not

straight forward, it was not possible to compare like for like as the schemes were different. She proposed to wait to see what the national picture was after the consultation and bring back more information to the Forum.

Schools Forum members were interested to know more about the reasons why some insurances were more expensive than others (maintained schools compared to academy schools) and asked that this item be brought back to the next meeting with the result of the consultation.

### **High Needs Block and SEN provision**

Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services stated that there were concerns over the provision of SEN services in the Borough. The department was facing difficulties in recruiting the right staff to provide the service. There were vacancies in the SEN team which consequently affected the delivery of services.

Ginny Rhodes expressed concern over the capacity issue and in particular the fact that schools did not have a named officer whom they could contact in the Local Authority. Carol Cammiss advised that if schools had any specific issues they could contact Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning, Achievement and Partnerships directly.

Carol Cammiss stated that the service was moving towards a new structure in which officers would be linked to a particular school or to a number of named children. She confirmed that there was political willingness to put in the resources that were needed to improve SEN services in the Borough. The department was seeking to recruit more officers to the SEN team, however it was important to ensure that the right people were employed.

It was agreed that the Forum would receive an update report on High Needs Block, and SEN at the next meeting in March.

### **School Admission arrangements update**

Carol Cammiss stated that the School Admissions internal structure was changing, with this service soon returning to be under Children's Services. It was recognised that some specialism had been lost as a result of the 21 Century programme and that the service was not operating at the right level. This issue was being addressed and the Forum would receive an update report at the next meeting.

### **31 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **32 2019/20 CONTINGENCY UPDATE**

Lynne Samuel advised that there were no changes from the last time this was reported to Schools Forum.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted.

### **33 2019/20 REVENUE MONITORING REPORT**

Schools Forum considered the 2019/20 Revenue Monitoring report which was set out in agenda pages 15-20. Lynne Samuel stated that there was only one change since the last meeting, with the Foundry budget now correctly reflected at £970k, an increase of £10k on that reported previously. She confirmed that Sal Thirlway was in conversations with Jay

Blundell about outreach services offered by Foundry College, and this was not yet reflected in the figures.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted.

### **34 FINAL 2020/21 BLOCK BUDGET**

Schools Forum received the Final 2020/21 Block Budget report which was set out in agenda pages 21-24. Alan Voyzey, Interim Schools Finance Specialist presented the report.

Alan Voyzey stated that the final settlement had been received on 19 December 2019. The final allocation was very close to the indicative budget, with a variation of only £1,098. He pointed out that there were changes for individual schools depending on the school's characteristics. The variance for each school could be seen in appendix A of the report.

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

- In response to a question Alan Voyzey stated that there had been only three responses to the consultation. Officers interpreted this low level of response to mean that schools were happy with the method;
- Members asked about the reduction in funding for Bulmershe. Alan Voyzey stated that this was due to a reduction in deprivation factors. However, this was a reduction on the previously reported indicative budget for 2020/21, with the school still receiving a significant increase on the current year's budget;
- the school had seen significant increases in previous years;
- It was recognised that the Task and Finish Group had been very effective and had helped the Budget setting process.

Schools Forum members asked Officers to provide an indicative budget to schools, so that schools could start their budget planning. Officers agreed to send this indicative budget by the end of the week. It was understood and accepted by all that this was provisional at this stage of the process.

Upon being put to the vote Schools Forum agreed to recommend the submission of the Budget to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) Schools Forum recommends the submission of the 2020/21 Block Budget as presented in the report to the ESFA; and
- 2) Schools would receive indicative budgets by the end of the week.

### **35 EARLY YEARS 2020/21 BUDGET**

Schools Forum considered the Early Years 2020/21 Budget report which was set out in agenda pages 25-28.

Lynne Samuel presented the report as set out in the agenda papers. Officers were seeking Schools Forum approval to the proposed 5% centrally retained fund.

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

- Ian Morgan urged Officers to be mindful of the effect of centrally retaining 5% on the voluntary sector. He believed that many settings were on the edge and struggling financially. He was concerned with the predicted 6% increase in the living wage and how this would impact the finances of Early Years settings;
- Ian Morgan asked Officers to reconsider the 5% centrally retained fund (which he recognised was lawful) in view of the fact that it was possible that many settings might have to close as a result of not being able to operate within their budgets;
- Ian Morgan stated that this represented an increase in funding because of the extra 1.8% AP;
- Kerry Clifford agreed that many settings were facing financial difficulties. She stated that it was important to have clarity on exactly how the 5% retained money was being used;
- The Chair stated that Schools Forum could decide not to agree to the proposed 5% retained fund;
- Lynne Samuel stated that it was not yet certain what the hourly rate would be;
- It was recognised that the 5% did not fully cover the support for the administration of the Early Years structure in the Local Authority.

After discussing the item, Schools Forum agreed that it would be important to have more information on the implications of the 5% funding retention on the hourly rate. It was agreed that the Task and Finish Group would undertake further investigations and that the item would be brought back to the next meeting for a final discussion and decision.

Kerry Clifford asked that an indicative budget be sent to Early Years settings to help with budget planning.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The Task and Finish Group would undertake further investigations around the proposed Budget, including the impact of the 5% retained fund; and
- 2) A report containing more information, including hourly rates will be brought back to the March meeting.

**36 FORWARD PROGRAMME**

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

The following items were added to the next meeting in March 2020:

- High Needs Block update
- SEN update
- School Admissions update
- Schools Insurance update
- Early Years 2020/21 Budget

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist stated that the next three meetings of Schools Forum were scheduled to take place in the Council Chamber due to the unavailability of David Hicks 1. She advised that Forum could be held at a school or in the Town Hall (with a small charge for the Town Hall).

Schools Forum members were asked to check their availability to host Schools Forum and liaise with Luciane Bowker directly; otherwise the Town Hall would be booked for those meetings.