

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 9 DECEMBER 2020 FROM 10.00 AM TO 10.47 AM**

Schools Representatives

Shirley Austin	Academy Head - Forest School
Jay Blundell	Pupil Referral Unit Head - Foundry College
Ali Brown	Primary Head - Nine Mile Ride Primary
Corrina Gillard	Primary Head - Emmbrook Infant
Derren Gray	Academy Head - Piggott School
Luke Henderson	Primary Academy Head - Sonning C of E Primary
Sian Lehrter	School Business Director - The Holt School
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Paul Miller	Governor - St Crispins - Chairman
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary - Vice Chairman
Ginny Rhodes	Academy Head - St Crispins School
Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Liz Woodards	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary

Non School Representatives

Sal Thirlway	Assistant Director Learning Achievement and Partnerships
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Also Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist
Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager

18 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Emma Clarke and Councillor Graham Howe.

19 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed at a later date by the Chairman.

20 MATTERS ARISING

2021/22 DSG Budget Planning

As agreed at the last Schools Forum meeting, schools were consulted again about the possibility of transferring 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block (HNB). The outcome of the consultation was that most schools were in favour of this proposal and consequently no disapplication has been requested. 35 votes were cast, 19 in favour and 16 against.

School Admissions Task and Finish Group

Brian Prebble expressed concern that the School Admissions Task and Finish Group had not yet met, and now there was no time to make any changes to the admission arrangements for the next academic year.

Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning and Partnerships apologised that he had been unable to arrange a meeting. He assured Forum that a meeting would be arranged in the spring term.

The Chairman asked that an update on the School Admissions Task and Finish Group be added to the Forward Plan, preferably in the January meeting.

Growth Fund questions

Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist would follow this up with Piers Brunning, Strategy and Commissioning Places Specialist and bring and bring an update to the Forum in January.

Insurance

Lynne Samuel stated that further discussions with the Task and Finish Group had been delayed due to lack of capacity within the service.

Going forward, schools would no longer be offered insurance as a de-delegated service and would have the option to opt out of the insurance offered by the Council. The Council was working towards a funding model to make insurance more affordable to schools. Lynne Samuel assured Forum that the Council's offer would not be more than what had been paid in the past, but was not necessarily going to be cheaper than the RPA. Schools would be allowed to make a decision in regards to insurance. This would be discussed further in the De-delegated report item presentation.

Carole Simpson stated that she was in agreement with these proposals.

21 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

22 2020/21 REVENUE MONITORING REPORT

Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager presented the 2020/21 Revenue Monitoring report.

Katherine Vernon stated that an in-year deficit of £2.9m was projected, with the budget pressure continuing to be within the HNB. Taken with the brought forward deficit of £3.36m, a forecast cumulative deficit of £6.26m was now projected.

Katherine Vernon stated that the increase £289k from what was reported in October was due to increased numbers and cost of: Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) in mainstream schools; out of borough placements and post 16 placements that were received in-year.

Katherine Vernon stated that all schools' forecasts had now been received and as predicted schools' budgets had been negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, it seemed that this impact was not as bad as initially anticipated. Seven schools were now predicting a deficit position.

Katherine Vernon stated that schools that converted to academies took their balance with them so the balance on schools reserves was £2.8m.

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

- Katherine Vernon stated that it was hard to say exactly what impact Covid-19 had had on schools' budgets;
- Lynne Samuel stated that schools had been doing a lot of work to offset the difficulties created by Covid-19. It would take a long time to work out the real impact of Covid-19 on this year's budgets, there was a big range of circumstances to be considered;
- Liz Woodard stated that her school had lost around £100k in income from play clubs, so the school had had to stop improvement projects to avoid going into deficit. She also stated that it was not wise to go too low on reserves (below 4% to access government funding), so the funding from the government was in reality not accessible;
- Katherine Vernon confirmed that maintained schools had reported significant loss of income as a result of the pandemic, in the region of £600k;
- Carole Simpson stated that as well as offsetting the loss of income with not undertaking discretionary activities, staff were not being replaced that would otherwise have been replaced;
- Brian Prebble added that there was a cost with staff that could not be furloughed.

The Chairman stated that the £2.9m in-year variance in the Budget was very significant, he believed that the HNB Forecast Budget (which was not balanced) generated shortly after the Budget was submitted would be showing an overall deficit close to this variance figure, and whilst disappointing, this shortfall had been predicted. However, the DfE required the Local Authority to submit a balanced Budget each year. He asked that a forecast column (reflecting the March 2020 Forecast) be included in the report for the January meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) A forecast column will be added to the next report.

23 2020/21 CONTINGENCY UPDATE

Katherine Vernon presented the 2020/21 Contingency Update report.

Katherine Vernon stated that there had been no applications or allocations made in the current financial year. The £57k which was available in the contingency item would be carried forward if not used.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

24 DRAFT 2021/22 SCHOOLS BLOCK BUDGET

Katherine Vernon presented the Draft 2021/22 Schools Block Budget report.

Katherine Vernon stated that the Task and Finish Group had discussed the principles to be used in the local funding formula for the 2021/22 financial year. The discussions were supported by consultations with schools and were as follows:

- The Primary / Secondary ratio would remain unchanged at 1 : 1.29
- The formula factors would be moved by a third towards the National Funding Formula (NFF) rates
- Lump sums were modelled at £150k and £135k. £120k was discarded early on as this negatively impacted our smaller schools.

- The Minimum Funding Guarantee would be set at +1.0% to provide year on year increases in per pupil funding with a cap on gains to be decided

Katherine Vernon informed that 97% of schools consulted were in agreement to apply for a disapplication for the all-through school so that the minimum per pupil levels were applied to the primary and secondary school in the same way as other Wokingham schools.

Katherine Vernon informed that 54% of the schools consulted were in favour of transferring 0.5% of the Schools Block to the HNB, and that had been taken into account in the calculations.

Derren Gray stated that the Task and Finish Group had settled on £135k lump sum because this had the least impact, only impacting one school; and it was closer to the national funding formula.

Katherine Vernon stated that the result of the October census had been taken into account in the preparation of the draft Budget. The pupils' characteristics would not be available until later in December and the figures for the Piggott Schools could not be changed in the model so this would change slightly following the acceptance of the disapplication.

Derren Gray stated that there had been an increase of around £2m in the Schools Block from the figures discussed in November, which enabled a bit of flexibility in the funding formula.

The Chairman thanked Officers and the members of the Task and Finish Group for the work that was undertaken to model the draft Budget, enabling a transparent and easier discussion.

Derren Gray thanked Katherine Vernon for her work in developing the draft Budget.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Schools Forum agreed with the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group for the 2021/22 Schools Block Budget; and
- 2) Schools Forum agreed that a consultation with all school on the proposed indicative budgets be undertaken in December, with the views of schools to be considered by Schools Forum at the January meeting.

25 2021/22 PROPOSED DE-DELEGATED SERVICES

Lynne Samuel presented the 2021/22 Proposed De-delegated Services report.

Lynne Samuel stated that the report provided an update on the proposed De-delegated Services for the 2021/22 financial year.

Lynne Samuel stated that those services currently de-delegated have remained the same for a number of years, with changes to the funding allocation basis taken forward in 2019/20 to charge some services on a 'number on roll' basis, better reflecting the size of each maintained school.

Lynne Samuel stated that insurance would no longer be a de-delegated service. The report contained a list of the services that continued to be de-delegated.

Lynne Samuel stated that there was challenge in continuing to fund de-delegated services with more schools becoming academies.

Lynne Samuel went through each individual de-delegated service:

Contingencies – it was proposed that this be held at £50k. Lynne Samuel pointed out that although it could be argued that schools may be entitled to contingency funds in relation to Covid-19, the £50k would not be sufficient to cover all the costs relating to pressures arising from the pandemic for all maintained schools.

Behaviour Support Services – the schools finance team was working with colleagues at Foundry College to inform de-delegated proposals for the coming financial year, this funding arrangement was being reviewed.

Support to underperforming ethnic groups and bilingual learners – the funding of this service was being reviewed, taking into account the reduction in the number of maintained schools and the increase in staffing costs.

Staff costs supply cover – there was no proposal to change this for the next financial year.

Licensing and Subscriptions - there was no proposal to change this for the next financial year.

It was generally agreed that schools be informed of the proposals ahead of the January meeting where a decision regarding this item would be made.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the report be noted; and
- 2) Schools Forum members representing maintained schools would disseminate the information contained in this report to their clusters.

26 FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Forum considered and noted the Forward Programme of work and dates of future meetings as set out on Agenda page 43.

The following items were added to the Forward Programme:

13 January 2021

- School Admissions Task and Finish Group update

17 March 2021

- Early Years Task and Finish Group update