

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 13 JANUARY 2021 FROM 10.00 AM TO 11.04 AM**

Schools Representatives

Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Emma Clarke	Primary Head - Farley Hill Primary
Corrina Gillard	Primary Head - Emmbrook Infant
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary - Vice Chairman
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
Shirley Austin	Academy Head - Forest School
Sian Lehrter	School Business Director - The Holt School
Liz Woodards	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary
Iain Thomas	Deputy Head – Foundry College

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
Piers Brunning, Strategy and Commissioning Places Specialist
Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager

30 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Sara Attra and Jay Blundell.

31 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 9 December 2020 and of the extraordinary meeting held on 11 December 2020 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the correction that Emma Clarke had been present, and would be signed at a later date by the Chairman.

31.1 Matters arising

Growth Fund

The Chairman thanked Piers Brunning, Senior Specialist Strategy and Commissioning for the additional information in relation to Growth Fund which was included in the Agenda pack.

School Admissions Task and Finish Group

Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director Learning Achievement and Partnerships stated that the first meeting was now scheduled for the following week and he apologised for the delay in setting this up.

Insurance

Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist stated that setting up the Insurance Task and Finish Group had unfortunately been delayed. However, she stated that internal work was progressing and the Task and Finish Group would be re-convened as soon as possible.

32 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

33 2020/21 CONTINGENCY UPDATE

Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager presented the 2020/21 Contingency Update report.

Katherine Vernon stated that there had been no applications nor allocations made in the current financial year in respect of the de-delegated allocation that was approved by Schools Forum at its meeting on 18 December 2019.

Ian Morgan stated that it had been agreed that the Early Years Contingency update would be included in the report.

Katherine Vernon stated that it was easier to report Early Years Contingency at the end of the three terms, with the census information. Therefore this would be included in the March report.

The Chairman asked that a line about Early Years Contingency be included in future reports, with the explanation that a detailed report would always be produced for the March meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) Early Years Contingency would be included in future reports.

34 2020/21 REVENUE MONITORING REPORT

Katherine Vernon presented the 2020/21 Revenue Monitoring report.

Katherine Vernon stated that an in-year deficit of £2.76m was projected, with the budget pressure continuing to be within the High Needs Block. Taken with the brought forward deficit of £3.36m, a forecast cumulative deficit of £6.12m was projected to 31 March 2021.

Katherine Vernon stated that this represented a positive improvement of £145k (smaller deficit) on that reported previously to Schools Forum, with the main movements due to:

Savings:

- Addington – January starters on lower bands than previously forecast
- Post-16 – expected learners did not start in September
- Wokingham Resource Base – leaver
 - Offset by costs
- Increase in Wokingham academy mainstream top-ups

Katherine Vernon pointed out that a forecast column had been added to the report, as per Forum's request.

Lynne Samuel stated that going forward, reports would include more information on activity data.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

35 2021/22 PROPOSED DE-DELEGATED BUDGET

Katherine Vernon presented the 2021/22 Proposed De-delegated Budget report.

Katherine Vernon went through the services that were included in the De-delegated Budget:

Contingencies – there had been no allocations in the current year, and it was proposed to keep £50k for contingencies.

Behaviour support – this was for primary schools only and the service was commissioned from Foundry College. A review of Foundry College funding was being undertaken, as it was recognised that the funding from the De-delegated Budget did not fully cover their costs.

English as an additional language (EAL) – there had been an increase in staff costs. The local authority had used the general funds to avoid the full impact of this increase to schools.

Staff costs supply cover – this was regularly overspent, so it was proposed to increase this budget. The fact that more schools were converting to academies had been taken into account.

Licences and subscriptions – the same fixed rates had been kept.

Katherine Vernon confirmed that Insurance was no longer a de-delegated service.

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

- The Chairman pointed out that the De-delegated Budget had changed from £750k to £891k;
- Katherine Vernon stated that this did not represent an increase in the underlining year on year De-delegated Budget expenditure, but the fact that there were fewer maintained schools over which to spread the total costs;
- Carole Simpson asked what would happen if schools did not approve this Budget. The Chairman explained that in that instance the service or services not approved would be removed from the De-delegated Budget and schools would have to fund those activities directly from their own budgets;
- Lynne Samuel stated that services would not be immediately stopped if it was decided that they should no longer be funded by the De-delegated Budget. Should this happen, a review would have to be carried out;
- In response to a question Lynne Samuel stated that the local authority was aware of the difficult financial situation resulting from the increasing number of school academisations and its implication on maintained schools. A review of the model would have to be undertaken for the 2022/23 financial year;

- Corrina Gillard asked that schools be given as much notice as possible of changes to this Budget resulting from schools academisations;
- Corrina Gillard suggested that a Task and Finish Group be formed to look at this issue, she believed that going forward this situation was unsustainable;
- In response to a question Lynne Samuel stated that a review of the activity within the services would be undertaken;
- Liz Woodwards suggested that the services provided within the De-delegated Budget could be provided as traded services. Lynne Samuel stated that different funding models would be considered;
- In response to a question, Lynne Samuel stated that there was not an immediate reduction in the cost of licences and subscriptions as a result of schools academisation;
- In response to a question Lynne Samuel stated that Officers believed that it was wise to keep £50k in the contingencies to keep this funding available for schools;
- Members raised concern over the increased cost to the supply cover line, and asked that this be reviewed.

The Chairman asked each maintained primary and secondary schools representatives to vote on each individual service within the De-delegated Budget, and there was unanimous approval of all services by each of the phases. It was agreed that the Contingencies would be amended to the balance that was left from this year, with the assumption that this would be at least £50k by the end of the financial year.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Schools Forum maintained schools' members approve the proposed De-delegated Budget for 2021/22; and
- 2) A review of the De-delegated funding arrangements will be carried out for the 2022/23 financial year.

36 FINAL 2021/22 SCHOOLS BLOCK BUDGET

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

Katherine Vernon stated that the indicative budgets were forwarded to schools on 11 December 2020 as part of the Consultation Process, following consultation on the budget setting principles undertaken earlier in the autumn term. Responses to the latest stage of the consultation were requested by 8 January 2021. However, no comments had been received.

Katherine Vernon stated that the request for disapplication for the Piggott School had been approved and the formula had been updated accordingly.

Katherine Vernon stated that pupil characteristics had been updated for the October 2020 census, and the final Budget also included updated Business Rates figures for 2021/22.

Katherine Vernon informed that the pupils' numbers at Alder Grove Primary had been increased to reflect the increase in intake from one to two classes from September 2021.

Derren Gray thanked Katherine Vernon and her team for the work that was undertaken to produce the final Budget.

Upon being put to the vote Schools Forum Members unanimously voted to approve the 2021/22 Schools Block Budget.

RESOLVED That Schools Forum approves the 2021/22 Schools Block Budget.

37 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK UPDATE

Sal Thirlway stated that work was continuing from what was reported to Forum in December. He stated that questions could still be sent to his team about the High Needs Block (HNB) papers that were discussed in December.

Sal Thirlway stated that the SEND Strategy consultation was open until the end of January. Work was continuing in relation to the new special school and many other areas of work in relation to the HNB.

Sal Thirlway stated that the SEND Strategy was a multi-agency strategy. It was recognised that there was a need to prioritise to reduce the HNB deficit and to support the children in the most cost effective way whilst still maintaining quality.

The Chairman asked Sal Thirlway to strongly consider using the fund that was transferred from the Schools Block to the HNB to enhance the Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) process and activity levels.

Sal Thirlway stated that the service was considering various areas for investing the additional funds, including home to school transport.

The Chairman asked that the next HNB report specifically includes a breakdown of the incremental activities that will be generated by the additional funds that were transferred from the Schools Block to the HNB.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The HNB verbal report be noted; and
- 2) The next HNB report will include a breakdown of activity relating to the 2021/22 funds that have been transferred from the Schools Block to the HNB.

38 SCHOOL ADMISSIONS TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE

Sal Thirlway stated that the first meeting was scheduled for the next week. The focus of this meeting would be to finalise the terms of reference and set the key priorities going forward. Sal would report back to the next meeting of Schools Forum

RESOLVED That the verbal update be noted.

39 FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Forum considered and noted the Forward Programme of work and dates of future meetings as set out on Agenda page 59.

The Chairman pointed out that the Early Years Budget 2021/22 was going to be discussed at the next meeting in March, and confirmed that the Early Years Task and Finish Group will have met to review the draft figures before the next meeting.

A School Admissions Task and Finish Group update was added to the next meeting.

