

An amendment was made to the minutes at the 13 October 2021 meeting.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 14 JULY 2021 FROM 10.00 AM TO 12.35 PM**

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
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
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School
Liz Woodards	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary
Iain Thomas	Pupil Referral Unit Deputy Headteacher - Foundry College

Non School Representatives

Rebecca Margetts	Wokingham Borough Council
Sal Thirlway	Assistant Director Learning Achievement and Partnerships

Also Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Piers Brunning, Senior Specialist Strategy and Commissioning (People and Place)
Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager

51 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Sian Lehrter and Amanda Woodfin. Amanda Woodfin was substituted by Chris Conian.

52 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 March 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

52.1 Matters Arising Update

Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager presented the Matters Arising update.

Insurance

Katherine stated that following the removal of insurance from the de-delegation arrangements, and the introduction of a revised charging methodology for the 2021/22 financial year, of the 35 maintained schools: 18 went for the RPA and 17 stayed with WBC.

Of the 17 who chose to stay with the council, 5 had signed up for the 2 year deal which was offered to fix prices until the end of the council's current insurance contract. Because

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of the low numbers, it was unlikely that this offer would continue after the contract finished for 2023.

Early Years

The DfE was changing the funding methodology for this year, the income received used to be based on the January census, with an adjustment after the end of the year. However, it was recognised that this year the January census would be understated, so they summer head count would be used and divide the difference between the two for the spring term. The adjustment for this year would not be known until November.

In response to a question Katherine Vernon stated that providers should not be affected as they would be funded by the hours that they provided.

Ian Morgan stated that the had informed settings that the adjustment would not be known until September. He believed that some smaller settings relied on the additional income from the adjustment. However, there was a general understanding and acceptance of the current situation.

Ian Morgan asked if this year's arrangements were likely to carry on in the next year. Katherine Vernon stated that she had had a meeting with the DfE, but it was not certain which arrangement would be used for next year.

De-delegated review

There was a commitment to have a meeting in September to review the remaining de-delegated services. Three Headteachers and School Business Managers had volunteered to take part in the review.

High Needs Block training

There was a lot of interest in the training, sessions being planned for September. Schools Forum were offered the option to have a dedicated training session, however members did not show interest in this offer.

School Admissions Task and Finish Group

This would be discussed during the presentation of item 54.

2021/22 High Needs Block Budget

Schools Forum had not yet received correspondence from the Council's Finance Director confirming the Council's understanding of the complexities of the deficit in the HNB.

Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning and Partnerships stated that appropriate response was being collated in relation to questions raised at the last meeting, and those raised in writing following the meeting in December last year.

2020/21 Contingency update

The Chairman pointed out that it had been agreed that future reports would include information about Early Years and Growth Fund.

Financial support to Foundry College

The Chairman asked that an update on how the £400k additional funding for Foundry College was being used be given at the December meeting of Schools Forum.

53 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

An amendment was made to the minutes at the 13 October 2021 meeting.

There were no declarations of interest.

54 RATIFICATION OF DECISIONS MADE ON 17 MARCH 2021

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist stated that due to technical difficulties, the last meeting of Schools Forum on 17 March 2021 was not live-streamed. As Schools Forum is a public meeting, legal advice was sought and it was recommended that Schools Forum formally ratifies the decisions made at the last meeting.

Upon being put the vote, Schools Forum unanimously voted in favour to ratify the decisions made on 17 March 2021.

RESOLVED That: Schools Forum ratifies the decisions made at the 17 March 2021 meeting.

55 SCHOOL ADMISSIONS TASK & FINISH GROUP UPDATE

Sal Thirlway apologised that the report in the agenda was the report presented to the October meeting of Schools Forum rather than the most up to date report. He offered to circulate the updated report with the minutes.

Sal Thirlway stated that the Task and Finish Group had met twice since October. At the April meeting the group focused on the Fair Access Protocol, feedback received and the forward plan for the group.

The group met again in July with the intention to sign off the Fair Access Protocol. However, it was decided to delay this to take into account the new School Admissions Code which comes into effect on 1 September 2021. Discussions were had about how to improve the management of waiting lists, and how schools can manage their own waiting lists. Conversations were also had about the secondary strategy consultation. Due to the imminent end of term, this consultation would take place in the Autumn term.

Sal Thirlway stated that it was important to prepare for possible bulges in the future and involve schools in the planning to prepare for them.

The group was also alerted to a Post-16 consultation which was going to be launched in the Autumn term, in preparation for a Post-16 strategy review.

The group was going to review its Terms of Reference, including its title, in recognition of the fact that the group was a substantive sub-group of Schools Forum and an ongoing entity, rather than a 'task and finish' group. There was also going to be a review of the membership structure to ensure it had the right level of involvement.

Brian Prebble had been elected chairman of the group.

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

- Ginny Rhodes believed that significant additional provision was needed for secondary school places for September 2022. She stated that it was important for schools to understand the strategy in order to prepare their marketing campaigns and open days. She stated that open days would start in September 2021 and she was seeking to understand the planning arrangements and decision making for secondary school places for September 2022. She was concerned that previously, schools had been

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approached about additional places for September 2021 very late in the application process, and there had been a commitment to not be in this position again;

- Sal Thirlway stated that conversations with schools about potential additional places would start much earlier this year, he anticipated to start discussions in September. He stated that it was difficult to be precise on estimates so early in the year;
- Ginny Rhodes was concerned that September was too late as parents would not know if there would be additional tutor groups or not;
- Sal Thirlway affirmed that he would endeavour to expedite the process;
- In response to a question, it was confirmed that the responses to questions raised by Amanda Woodfin at the last meeting had been circulated via email. It was agreed to re-circulate this information to members of the Forum;
- Shirley Austin confirmed that an email was sent in response to Amanda Woodfin's questions. However, she pointed out that the email failed to give satisfactory answers to the questions raised. She was concerned that there was still no assurance that schools would be informed about school place numbers on national offer day as the software was not ready yet. She asked that Schools Forum be kept informed about this situation and the conversations which were taking place in the Task and Finish Group;
- Emma Clarke also asked that information about primary places be shared with schools early in the process, especially if an extra class was required. She suggested that the information be distributed in January;
- Sal Thirlway stated that a new school admissions portal was being built which would enable real time reporting and would be accessible to all schools. However, building this portal would take at least another 12 months. He stated that work was being undertaken to deliver the information requested by schools as early as possible;
- Shirley Austin was also concerned that not all children in Year 6 with EHCPs had been placed for September 2021;
- Sal Thirlway agreed to review and circulate the responses to the questions previously raised by Amanda Woodfin.

There was recognition of the fact that Officers were doing everything they could to meet the request for early information about school placements. It was agreed that the revised answers to the questions raised previously would be circulated within 30 days of this meeting.

Councillor Margetts agreed to talk with Sal Thirlway about this issue outside of the meeting.

Brian Prebble stated that the membership of the Task and Finish Group had been discussed and there was a desire to keep it open to all schools, not limited to Schools Forum members only, with a potential rotation of members.

In response to a comment, Sal Thirlway stated that the primary focus of the group remained school admissions. However, as the group was evolving it was important to keep the school community informed about the wider strategy and planning surrounding school admissions and education.

The Chairman suggested that in relation to the quorum of the meeting, it be specified in the Terms of Reference that of the five minimum quorum, at least three should be school representatives.

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The Chairman suggested that the group presents two reports yearly to Schools Forum, with one report in January and the another in July. The reports are to give details of the progress and outcomes of school admissions in the Borough.

The Chairman suggested inviting a school admissions expert to join the group. He also commented that he was concerned with the idea of rotating membership as it could mean losing valuable expertise and slowing down progress.

Brian Prebble stated that a two-year membership had been suggested.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Schools Forum noted the update on the work of the School Admissions Task and Finish Group;
- 2) Schools Forum would be kept informed about discussions taking place in the School Admissions Task and Finish Group;
- 3) Schools would be given information about school placements as early as possible;
- 4) Sal Thirlway would review the answers to the questions raised by Amanda Woodfin at the previous meeting and circulate it to Schools Forum within 30 days.

56 2020/21 REVENUE OUTTURN REPORT

Katherine Vernon presented the 2020/21 Revenue Outturn report.

Some of the main points made Katherine Vernon are listed below:

- There had been a net overspend of £3.17 million, representing 2.2% of the 2020/21 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation. The original overspend forecast was £2.8 million, so there was a negative variance;
- The Schools Block was underspent by £196k, partly because of the Growth Fund, and also £55k underspend from the de-delegated fund;
- Supply maternity cover was overspent by £100k, the budget for this line was going to be increased for the next year and would be discussed during the review of the de-delegated items;
- The HNB had had a further adverse movement of £239K since the last report to Schools Forum, mainly relating to mainstream top ups;
- The final outturn on tutor packages and direct payments was £66K higher than forecasted;
- The private hospital education was £62k higher than forecasted, the budget process for private hospital education was going to be looked at for better forecasting in the future;
- Schools balances for maintained schools showed an increase of £1.9 million.

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

- In response to a question Katherine Vernon stated that the review of the de-delegated item, which had been planned for June, was now going to start in September;
- Corrina Gillard suggested setting a date before the end of term;
- The Chairman was concerned that by reporting that the Growth Fund budget allocation was spent in year, rather than reporting the actual underspend could create difficulties

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with the DfE in the future. He asked that it be clearly reported at the budget planning stage any carry forward lines in the report;

- The Chairman stated that there was a reported overspend of approximately £6.5 million, of which around £400k was Growth Fund carry forward, and £55k was a contingency reserve; schools were carrying balances of £4 million. Therefore, the overall carried forward net deficit for education for the local authority at 31 March 2021 was much lower, at about -£0.5 million, than the reports shared at Schools Forum would suggest.

The Chairman thanked Katherine Vernon and her team for the transparency and much improved quality of the report.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

57 2021/22 REVENUE MONITORING REPORT

Katherine Vernon presented the 2021/22 Revenue Monitoring report.

Some of the points made during her presentation are listed below:

- There was a deficit of £2.4 million, this represented a small positive improvement since the last meeting of Schools Forum;
- There was a forecast underspend of £33K on the Schools Block in respect of funds held for the Growth Fund;
- The in-year deficit in the HNB was now forecast at £2.45 million, with an improvement of £82k on that reported previously;
- There had been a recoupment from Chiltern Way in relation to top ups for children out of the borough;
- The £55k underspend in contingencies had been carried forward.

The Chairman asked that future reports include the Growth Fund underspend.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

58 GROWTH FUND UPDATE

Piers Brunning, Senior Specialist (People and Place) Strategy and Commissioning presented the Growth Fund Update report.

Some of the points made during his presentation are listed below:

- The purpose of the Growth Fund was to fund the growth in demand for school places in the Borough. There was continuing growth in Key Stage 2 due to families moving into the area and localised issues in Key Stage 1 which were linked to the strategic development of certain locations in the borough;
- There was pressure for places in Years 7 and 8. There was a complication in that there were more places in September at the start of the new school year than on national offer day. It was believed that this was as a result of families sending their children to independent schools and no longer requiring a school place;
- Another complication in planning was the element of 'unknowability', for example, the recent arrival of families from Hong Kong had not been considered when planning for school places and was causing challenges for school admissions;

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- The funding for 2021/22 relied on carry forward from last year. Once the figures were finalised for the primary schools commitments, this would be reported to Schools Forum;
- In order to meet the demand for places in Year 7 for September 2021 a number of schools had agreed to increase their capacity this year;
- Payments were going through to support a number of projects, as listed in the report;
- There may be a small surplus, after allowing for the carry forward by the end of the year.

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

- Ben Godber stated that schools had been approached in March and asked to take on additional children, with funding to support them. He asked why the report did not list all the schools that had agreed to take on additional children;
- Piers Brunning stated that some schools had been asked to increase their admissions number with the expectation that their numbers would drop back to the original admission number by the start of the school year. Other schools were expected to sustain the additional numbers into the new academic year, and only those schools would be given the additional funding. If it transpires that schools are not dropping back to their original numbers and are having to incur additional costs, a conversation about funding will take place with those schools;
- Members asked for a greater level of detail and transparency in the reporting of school admissions;
- In response to a question, Piers Brunning stated that the opening or not opening of Matthews Green School was a decision for the Director of Children's Services in conjunction with the Lead Member for Children's Services. He was unable to guarantee when the school would open;
- Corrina Gillard expressed concern that there were 71 empty spaces in local primary schools, causing significant budgeting difficulties for those schools. She was concerned that the opening of another primary school would exacerbate those difficulties;
- Sal Thirlway stated that neighbouring schools would be engaged and informed about the potential decision to open a new school;
- Corrina Gillard asked that not only the neighbouring schools be engaged, but that other schools be informed too, as parents were prepared to travel across the borough to take their children to their preferred school;
- Shirley Austin stated that it was important to be very clear about numbers when planning for future places, because of the significant impact on existing schools;
- Councillor Howe stated that current capacity at schools and the financial impact of opening more schools in the borough was going to be considered;
- The Chairman stated that a few years ago it had been agreed that the Growth Fund would only be used to increase the number of school places. The option of supporting a decrease in numbers had not been used. Given the impact that new schools were having on existing schools, he wondered if the funding of decreasing numbers should be considered;
- Carol Simpson was of the opinion that this could be considered for schools with falling numbers on a temporary basis;
- Piers Brunning stated that preliminary conversations had already taken place about temporary arrangements for falling roll;

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- Katherine Vernon stated that the National Funding Formula Task and Finish Group was due to discuss the funding of temporary fall in roll. It was agreed that the discussions and recommendations would be reported to Schools Forum;
- The Chairman asked for an explanation about the discrepancy of the reported £800k Growth Fund reported in October 2020 and the figure of £1.2 million now being reported;
- Piers Brunning offered to provide a variance analysis to Schools Forum. Sal Thirlway agreed to expedite this work and circulate the information as soon as possible.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Growth Fund update report be noted; and
- 2) A variance report would be produced and circulated to Schools Forum as soon as possible.

59 BUDGET PLANNING – 2022/23

Katherine Vernon presented the 2022/23 Budget Planning report. This report included a timeline of the plans.

An initial meeting of the Task and Finish Group had already taken place, the preliminary figures and new guidance would be released on 22 July.

The first stage of the National Funding Formula consultation had opened, there were no changes to the Funding Formula for 2022/23. Locally, there would be a gradual move toward the new National Funding Formula.

The Chairman asked that a line be added for the planned meetings of the HNB and Early Years Task and Finish Groups.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

60 UPDATE ON HNB & SEND INNOVATION & IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The Update on HNB and SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme (IIP) was presented by Matthew Booth, IIP Strategic Lead and Daniel Robinson, IIP Operational Lead.

Some of the points made during the presentation are listed below:

- The report contained details of strategies being implemented to alleviate the pressure on the NHB;
- The HNB deficit was approximately £2.5 million, this did not include previous cumulative historical pressures;
- With respect to the National Funding Formula, Wokingham did not benefit from local deprivation factors;
- The government increased the funding for HNB in recent years by 23%. However, the demand for services had increased by around 60% in the same period;
- There were approximately 1,400 children with EHCP in the borough, this represented a 60% increase since 2017/18;
- There was a high conversion rate from children being assessed for EHCP and receiving one. A significant amount of work was undertaken to ascertain the

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appropriateness of the high number of EHCPs being issued and it was found that if anything, some younger children were arriving in Year 7 without EHCPs that should already have one;

- The number of EHCPs for Wokingham was lower than its statistical neighbours in the South East;
- Improvements in early intervention were likely to further increase the number of EHCPs;
- The aim of the IIP was to deliver the SEND Strategy by:
 - 1) Strengthening local provision and quality of local practice
 - 2) Improving the efficiency of processes (including timeliness and quality of EHCPs and the Annual Review process)
 - 3) Ensuring effective Transitions at all ages and stages
 - 4) Strengthening sufficiency of local provision, more effective strategic commissioning and Value for Money, and greater impact on outcomes
 - 5) All of the above enabled through effective and meaningful coproduction
- The lack of local provision was the main cause of the pressure on the HNB. There was a compelling business case to invest in local provision in order to alleviate the pressure on HNB and prepare for future increase in demand;
- Providing local provision would also alleviate pressure in other budgets such as home to school transport;
- The new special school was going to provide more local provision and was set to open in 2022;
- Work to implement the SEND Strategy was being undertaken in partnership with all stakeholders;
- Wokingham was allocated £1.26 million from the DfE High Needs Provision Capital Allocation for 2021/22. Detailed plans were currently being drawn up for the use of this funding;
- The management of the HNB deficit was under constant review, with a focus on value for money and delivery of local provision.

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

- Emma Clark expressed concerned about a child who was still waiting to be allocated to a special school for the new academic year in September. She suggested that budget meetings should be held in a more timely manner, in line with term holidays. Officers did not believe that this was a budgeting issue and agreed to discuss this specific case outside of the meeting;
- Shirley Austin believed that there were issues around budgeting and funding children in local schools, as she had experienced difficulties in securing funding for a Learning Support Assistant for a SEN child at her school;
- Sal Thirlway stated that aligning funding could be a frustrating process. The delays could be due to the time taken in finding the right provision for the child's needs;
- There was disagreement about the transparency, communication and opportunity for Headteachers to attend Panels;
- Sal Thirlway agreed to speak to Headteachers about the issues raised;
- Ben Godber asked for information about the next steps and the direction of travel going forward;

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- Matthew Booth stated that Ofsted had recently visited and been positive about the steps taken in the last two years. One area of focus picked by Ofsted was about Transition, the service was looking to expediate improvement in this area in the next six months;
- Matthew Booth agreed to present a timeline of the work being undertaken by the IIP to Schools Forum;
- Ginny Rhodes stated that colleagues at the Secondary Headteachers Federation had expressed both satisfaction and curiosity at the recent Ofsted findings. They noted that with the exception of the Headteacher of the special school, no Headteachers had been involved in the inspection. They were interested to know what involvement teachers had had at the inspection. She also asked for clarification on the element 2 of the funding presented in the report and how schools were being universally funded. She was also interested to know what the parental perennial issues were;
- Corrina Gillard informed that she had been involved in the Ofsted inspection and the Transition Group;
- Sal Thirlway stated that Ofsted Inspectors determined who they wished to speak to, this inspection had focused on the progress of the written statement of action;
- Daniel Robinson stated that all Panel's feedback was sent to the SENCO and the parent of the child it affected, this could be sent to the Headteacher too if requested. With respect to the question about element 2, it was a concern around consistency and understanding what is happening;
- Shirley Austin stated that neither herself nor the SENCO had received any feedback from Panels. Daniel Robinson agreed to contact her about it outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The update report be noted;
- 2) A timeline outlining the work of the IIP would be presented to the next meeting of Schools Forum;
- 3) A response to the questions raised at Secondary Headteachers meeting would be provided to Schools Forum;
- 4) Specific issues raised during the meeting would be addressed directly with Headteachers outside of the meeting.

61 FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Forum considered and noted the Forward Programme of work and dates of future meetings as set out on Agenda pages 87.

The following items were added to the Forward Programme:

13 October

- Update on De-delegated items
- IIP timeline
- Funding of temporary fall in roll numbers
- Schools Forum membership review

8 December

- Update on additional funding of £400k to Foundry College.

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62 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Venue of meetings

A discussion was had about the options going forward which were:

- To continue with virtual only meetings via Teams;
- To go back to face to face meetings; or
- To trial a hybrid approach in which members would have the option to attend in person in the Council offices in Shute End or to join virtually via Teams

Having considered all the options, it was decided that the October meeting would be a hybrid meeting and that the venue of future meetings would be kept under review.

Schools Forum membership structure

There was a requirement to review Schools Forum membership yearly, this review would be undertaken in October.

Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman

The elections of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Schools Forum would occur in the next meeting. As such, the Chairman asked colleagues to consider how they would like Schools Forum to be chaired and consider putting themselves forward for the position.