

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 8 DECEMBER 2021 FROM 10.00 AM TO 12.20 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
Luke Henderson	Primary Academy Head - Sonning C of E Primary
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	Trustee - The Circle Trust - Chairman
Shirley Austin	Academy Head - Forest School
Sian Lehrter	School Business Director - The Holt School
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School
Liz Woodards	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary

Non School Representatives

Rebecca Margetts	WBC Councillor
Heather Tomlinson	Interim Assistant Director for Learning and Partnerships

Also Present

Hayley Rees, Category Manager, Prevention & Early Intervention
Madeleine Shopland, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist
Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager
Daniel Robinson, SME – WsoA (Ordinarily Available & Graduated Approach)

12 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Amanda Woodfin. Amanda was substituted during the meeting by Chris Coniam.

13 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 October 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman requested that a table of Matters Arising actions be produced at the end of future minutes for ease.

14 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

15 MATTERS ARISING UPDATE

The Chairman noted that there were no financial matters arising.

The Chairman went on to comment that it had been agreed that there would be an update on additional funding allocated to Foundry College at the December meeting. Whilst there was not a specific agenda item on this it was referenced within the budget monitoring report.

It was suggested that it would be helpful for the number of Forum members voting for a particular recommendation, be recorded in the future.

An update on the new funding formula calculation which appeared to favour academies as opposed to maintained schools, had been requested. Lynne Samuel indicated that this was something which was monitored. Carol Simpson commented that it related to the Growth Fund and falling rolls in the consultation, which was only being offered to Good and Outstanding academies and not maintained schools. Lynne Samuels agreed to pick this up.

RESOLVED: That the matters arising update be noted.

16 PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A WOKINGHAM BOROUGH EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

The Forum received a report regarding a proposal to establish a Wokingham Borough Education Partnership.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The report explained the rationale and purpose of the intention of establishing an education partnership.
- Heather Tomlinson felt that the proposal reflected the voice of school leaders. She emphasised co-production and collective strategic direction.
- Schools Forum had a specific remit around schools' finance. Other big strategic issues may be better dealt with by a partnership.
- The terms of reference had been produced by school leaders and Forum members were invited to comment.
- Proposed core membership was based on a premise of the election of several members from different groups, such as the Schools Forum, Wokingham Primary Heads Partnership and the Wokingham Secondary Heads Foundation. The process to secure inclusion of Executive Headteachers from Multi Academy Trusts was still to be determined
- The Chairman asked about the development of the strategic vision and the partnership's contribution to this. Heather Tomlinson indicated that the group would have the remit to commission working groups and to steer priorities and coproduction.
- Ben Godber asked, in addition to consultation, what decision making the partnership would have. Heather Tomlinson responded that it was for the group to determine priorities and the outcomes required of working groups.
- The Forum discussed membership of the partnership. It was confirmed that Schools Forum would have three members on the partnership. It was agreed that the Forum would consider its nominees at the next meeting in January. The Chairman requested that the Forum be informed of the primary and secondary headteacher nominations prior to this meeting. It was hoped that an initial meeting of the partnership would be held in mid-January.
- 16 Forum members voted in favour of the proposals.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report and the proposal to identify representation on the Wokingham Borough Education Partnership be noted.
- 2) Schools Forum consider and nominate its three members for the Wokingham Borough Education Partnership, at its January meeting.

17 2021/22 REVENUE MONITORING REPORT

The Forum received the 2021/22 Revenue Monitoring Report.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Katherine Vernon advised that the in-year deficit was projected at £2.9million down from £3,1million. This movement related primarily to the Schools Block. A decrease had been seen against the forecast Growth Fund expenditure for this year.
- With regards to the High Needs Block, there was a small net movement of £65,000.
- Increased expenditure of around £465,000 related to in year academic movements. There was an increase in funding to Wokingham mainstream schools, Further Education colleges and Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools.
- The above has been largely offset by the £400,000 for the Foundry which would not be drawn down this year. Through ongoing discussions with the Foundry, Officers were aware that there remained a significant financial challenge.
- Katherine Vernon provided an update on contingencies held.
 - There had not been any calls on the Schools Block De-delegated contingencies.
 - With regards to the Early Years Provider Reserve Fund, in late November the formal notification of the adjustment for the last financial year had been received. There was a clawback of £90,000, which was being investigated further. A meeting would be held with the Early Years Task and Finish Group to discuss this and the rates for the next financial year.
 - There had been a reduction in forecast for the Growth Fund.
 - Discussions around extra mid phase secondary and primary classes that might be needed from January, continued. The forecast for those had been reduced to 3 months from 7 months. Katherine Vernon advised that this was important for the Growth Fund as whatever was left over this year could be carried over to the next year, so less would be needed from the Schools Block to cover the Growth Fund for next year. For next year £1.8million would be needed for growth, but this would reduce should the £160,000 carry forwards. £1.6million was estimated as growth fund income into the Schools Block for next financial year.
- Ian Morgan asked whether the claw back would be taken from reserves. Katherine Vernon indicated that the claw back would need to be factored in the rates for 2022/23.
- Katherine Vernon confirmed that the clawback had been unexpected.
- The Chairman asked what the level of Early Years reserves was. Katherine Vernon commented that this was being worked on.
- Lynne Samuel clarified that the clawback referred to the last financial year. Officers had to consider the impact of the clawback for the last year, look at how this impacted the current year's position, and how this would impact on recommending funding levels for the following financial year.

- Officers would confirm the reserve funds for the current financial year. Ian Morgan commented that he believed it was approximately £200,000.
- Ian Morgan questioned whether the Early Year allocation would be late. It was hoped that the hourly income rates for WBC would be available prior to Christmas.
- The Chairman commented that the profiling of the current High Needs Block demand had enabled the recognition of the shift in profile of young people and their lowered overall funding requirements.
- Lynne Samuel reminded the Forum that when the High Needs Block budget had been set, the scale of the financial challenge around the Foundry for this financial year, had been known, which was why £400,000 had been earmarked as a line in the budget. Whilst the £400,000 had since been removed, the financial challenge remained. Foundry's reserves were considered to be at a sensible level.
- The increasing number of Education, Health and Care Plans created issues around provision and a financial challenge across the Borough.
- Ginny Rhodes referred to the Resources Bases detailed on page 38 of the agenda. She commented that the consultation regarding resource spaces had been ongoing for approximately 4.5 years. She felt that there was still no clarity for schools, which she felt was an unacceptable strain on school's finances and a challenge to financial planning.
- Ginny Rhodes went on to ask where the information regarding mainstream Post 16 Resources had come from, as the figures were unfamiliar to her. Katherine Vernon commented that this was top sliced and came from historic data, which had not been updated for several years. It was the number that the Department for Education recognised as the academy secondary schools having in post 16 high needs places. Work would be undertaken to update this.
- Paul Gibson and Shirley Austin welcomed the review of the post 16 resource spaces and agreed that the figures provided with regards to their schools were unfamiliar. Sian Lehrter confirmed that the funding was provided as part of academies general annual grant.
- The Chairman questioned whether the sections for income could be shown above the sections of expenditure in future.
- Derren Gray referred to the empty places in the Resource Base. He noted the forecast and actuals for the primary settings and commented that work was being undertaken on the number of places that would be funded, going forwards. He requested an update on this and questioned the actuals figures for the secondary places. Lynne Samuel indicated that this information could be updated and made clearer. There were Service Level Agreements in place for some secondary schools which Finance would not always have access to. Ginny Rhodes commented that she believed that the numbers provided for secondary schools were the actual number for September. The Oaks was at 20 because although it had capacity for 25 pupils, it was winding down and was not admitting for Year 7.
- The Chairman commented that it would be helpful to understand the actual place numbers for Chiltern Way. Lynne Samuel indicated that the table could be split out for Chiltern Way in the same way as other schools.
- Sara Attra commented that it would be useful to have the band value for the resource spaces in future reports.

RESOLVED: That the report and the forecast position for the 2021/22 year be noted.

18 UPDATE ON HNB & SEND INNOVATION & IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Daniel Robinson provided an update on the High Needs Block, and the SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The Forum was advised that the presentation detailed the work that would be undertaken to try and bring the local authority and area to a break-even position regarding income via the High Needs Block, by 2025/26. It also detailed the improved performance and outcomes linked to SEND.
- Daniel Robinson outlined the current position.
- Officers had projected that the areas with the highest spend were Social Emotional and Mental Health, Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Severe Learning Disabilities and Speech Language and Communication Needs. Daniel Robinson highlighted the growth in expenditures, for the different areas, should no changes be made to processes.
- Approximately 2,300 Education, Health and Care Plans were anticipated by 2025.
- Daniel Robinson highlighted projected funding against spend up to 2025. Without mitigation, total spending was projected to be around £57million against funding of £30million, which would take to a current cumulative deficit of £11million to a cumulative deficit of £45million.
- Work had been divided into three workstreams:
 - i) Systems (in house)
 - Panel decisions and paperwork – processes had been in place since April and were working well.
 - Complex Case Forum – the forum which made decisions on the out of Borough placements had been in place for the last four decisions and was working well. It provided a clear audit trail as to why decisions were made.
 - SEND – staffing structure had now been defined and permanent staff were being appointed.
 - Learning Achievement Partnership – work was being undertaken on the delivery of this and the support of EHCPs.
 - Recruitment – it was hoped by summer that at least 75% of the SEN team would be permanent. The Forum was advised that those interim staff that had been in place for several months would remain during the recruitment of permanent staff to allow a handover.
 - Local Offer – the Council was undertaking a strategic review of the local directory including the local offer. The ability for families to get support and where to access this, was under consideration.
 - SEND transport – the SEND transport service had been recommissioned for the year.
- Inclusion (collaboration):
 - Ordinarily available (Schools) – Officers had undertaken 10 visits with Headteachers and SENCOs.
 - Ordinarily available (health) – several meetings had been held with health colleagues. Daniel Robinson was of the view that the ordinarily available offer from health was current insufficient to support what the Borough needed. It was not entirely clear what services were available under an EHCP. Work was being undertaken with health to make this clearer and more robust.
 - Element 2 link - £8.8million of this was allocated to schools. Wokingham was one of the worst funded local authorities with regards to Element 2.
 - Outreach – a fully serviced outreach service was vital.
 - SENCOs and Preparing for Adulthood training – the Innovation and Improvement Programme was undertaking a lot of work in this area.

- Transitions Group – clear pathways with Preparing for Adulthood were being identified.
- IIP - provision development – Daniel Robinson indicated that he had presented to Members and Senior Officers regarding the work undertaken with Finance. In terms of the financial implications of Independent, Out Of Borough placements, consideration needed to be given to increasing provision within the Borough.
 - Addington Special School – an initial approach had been made to request two additional sites to increase capacity and reach. Daniel Robinson indicated that he was working with various teams on what the scope of that project would be.
 - Request for two additional sites for special schools with a focus on social and emotional mental health needs and behaviour.
 - Outreach – clarity and investment – Addington and Foundry.
 - Oak Tree – the delay of this site was discussed. Easter 2023 was currently the anticipated open date.
 - Health Support – work was being undertaken with the Clinical Commissioning Group, Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust, Berkshire Healthcare Trust and Children and Young People’s Integrated Therapy, about what services they could provide. It was hoped that health provision could be increased.
 - Education Psychology service – there was a national shortage of Educational Psychologists. The service was stretched which impacted on what could and could not be delivered.
- Four new small special schools would help to reduce the number of out of Borough placements.
- It was hoped that work with colleagues such as health, increased inclusion and other factors could reduce the projected number of EHCP’s by 2025.
- With all the mitigations in place the spending could potentially be £31million by 2025, giving an in-year deficit of £1.8million.
- Daniel Robinson referred to a possible increase in the charges for children from Outside Of the Borough coming into the borough.
- The Chairman asked about the level of capital investment required should four new schools be planned for. Daniel Robinson indicated that Members requested that he report back after 10 weeks after he had met with the Estates and Planning teams to help firm this up. He was of the opinion that it would outweigh the implications should no action be taken. He would keep updating as matters progressed.
- Members were advised that the strategy for building schools did not currently incorporate special schools.
- The scope and size of the new special schools would not be huge, and they would be spread around the geographic area if possible.
- Lynne Samuel commented that High Needs Block capital funding was received annually but that it would not be at the level required to meet the investment needs discussed. In terms of engagement with the Education Skills and Funding Agency regarding the deficit management plan, the Council would be able to demonstrate the potential impact that additional capital investment would make in terms of being able to balance revenue to resources in the longer term.
- With regards to the resource spaces, Daniel Robinson commented that it was important that the information provided was up to date. The Chairman commented that not knowing what the Service Level Agreements were could have an impact on schools’ budget planning. He asked whether the Service Level Agreement values would not change in terms of the budget planning for 2022/23 and was informed that they would not.

- Ginny Rhodes emphasised that it was helpful to understand that the income of the resource spaces would not change immediately.
- The Chairman commented that a third of the High Needs Block was going towards Independent and Non-Maintained Schools and the planned work did not address this area. Daniel Robinson advised that conversations were being held with Directors around the country to discuss this matter.
- In response to a question from Shirley Austin regarding the calculation of the deficit, Daniel Robinson advised that it had included factors such as the cost per placement for Independent and Non-Maintained placements, resource spaces and the amount of top up replaced in Mainstream placements, and also Out of Borough Mainstream placements.

RESOLVED: That the update on the SEND IIP and associated programme actions be noted.

19 DRAFT 2022/23 SCHOOLS BLOCK BUDGET

Katherine Vernon presented the draft 2022/23 Schools Block Budget.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The provisional October census data had been received. There had been an increase of in the region of 750 pupils last year. Initially modelling had been based on an income of £126million. This had now increased to £130million. The Growth factors which were based on the number of pupils from one year to the next had also been updated.
- Katherine Vernon took the Forum through the results of the consultation with schools.
- Katherine Vernon highlighted the draft figures that would be sent round to schools for comment. The £128million referred to, took off the £1.5million which it was recommended would be retained for the Growth Fund next year. Only schools that had received a drop in pupil numbers of 4% or more compared to last year would receive less funding than last year.
- The Age Weighted Pupil Unit had increased for all levels and the amount allocated to the minimum per pupil funding level had decreased. The Minimum Funding Guarantee allocation had reduced compared to last year.
- Derren Gray thanked Katherine Vernon for the work that she had put into the different models.
- The Chairman referred to Appendix D of the 2021/22 Revenue Monitoring Report, which detailed the Growth Fund and the figure recommended to be taken out of the Dedicated Schools Grant to allow growth across the Borough. He questioned how the 2022/23 figures had been reached. He was informed that for 2021/22 £800,000 had been retained from the Schools Block funding and £475,000 was carried forwards, giving £1.2million available to spend for this year. Discussions were ongoing around primary contingency and secondary contingency relating to additional classes for January. Officers highlighted the commitments for new classes of just over £1million for this year. The difference between what was available and what was to be committed for the year was £260,000. The Chairman questioned how much of the £1million remained as a contingency and was informed that it was £163,000, which could carry forward should the additional classrooms not come into effect in January.
- Clarification was sought on the levels of contingency.

- Ginny Rhodes thanked Officers for the improved reporting. She went on to refer to the formula for the Growth Fund and questioned whether the Growth Fund was funded to schools on the number of places that the Local Authority had requested, for example for a bulge class, or on the numbers of pupils that started at the school. Katherine Vernon confirmed that it was the number requested as this was the number that the School would have had to plan for. Derren Gray added that work was being undertaken around the best way to forward fund those contingency places. Of the 240 secondary places in the contingency, 180 were for Year 7. Last year 101 places were funded but only 67 pupils had taken up the places. There was disparity between the four secondary schools with regards to funding. Shirley Austin agreed and emphasised the need for accuracy of these predictions.
- Derren Gray indicated that the 95% funding methodology had been applied. In addition, the 2023/24 figures were provisional, and there were no secondary contingencies in 2022/23. The figures would be updated over the year.
- The Chairman asked the Forum whether they were comfortable with £1.8million as a Growth Fund figure for 2022/23. Eleven Forum members indicated that they were, and one indicated that they were not.
- In January it would be known whether the contingency set aside for possible primary and secondary classes, had been required. If it was not taken up it would be carried forward and added to the Dedicated Schools Grant allocation for 2022/23.
- Forum members expressed concern that although the Schools Forum had voted that there not be a move of half a percent from the Schools Block Fund to the High Needs Block Fund, Officers had exercised their powers to apply to the Education, Skills and Funding Agency for a disapplication. The consultation of schools had also asked that this half percent move not be vired.
- The Chairman commented that he had believed that Officers were required not to request a disapplication should the Forum and the results of the consultation vote against such a disapplication.
- Lynne Samuel explained that within the guidance there was the ability for the local authority to submit for a disapplication. Reference had been made in the report at the previous Schools Forum meeting and also at the School Business Manager briefing. She apologised that it had been insufficiently highlighted.
- It had not been an easy decision by the Director of Children's Services to apply for a disapplication and was set in the context of the considerable financial challenges that the Borough faced. Lynne Samuel commented that ideally Officers would have been able to share information presented in the High Needs Block update presentation at an earlier stage, to inform collective discussion.
- It was recognised that a disapplication would reduce the funding available to the individual schools though the Authority Proforma Tool.
- It was confirmed that the Education, Skills and Funding Agency had been informed that the Schools Forum and consultation did not agree to a disapplication and had not yet indicated whether it accepted the local authority's recommendation that the transfer be made.
- Liz Woodards questioned whether a disapplication would mask the fact that the authority was one of the worst funded for Element 2, and whether this should be emphasised. Lynne Samuel advised it was a difficult balance and Officers understood the pressure that individual schools were under. There was a specific funding formula for each block. Officers would look to ensure that they were funded appropriately. The Education, Skills and Funding Agency would request various information in the consideration of the request for a disapplication, including Schools Forum minutes and the outcome of the consultation.

- It was possible that the request for a disapplication could be refused.
- Brian Prebble asked that if the disapplication was approved Officers be very clear as to how the half percent would be spent, as this had not been the case in the past. Lynne Samuel indicated that should this decision be made, Officers would come back to the Forum in order for a collective decision to be made as to how this funding would be targeted within the next financial year.
- Councillor Margetts asked how communication around the decision making could be improved going forwards. Lynne Samuel commented that Officers had worked hard to build relationships and transparency and would learn lessons.
- Corinna Gillard commented that the decision to apply for a disapplication did not aid the development of a partnership. It was important that when a vote was taken, the outcome of it was listened to.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the update on the Schools Block Budget be noted;
- 2) the results of the consultation with all of the schools be noted.

20 REVIEW OF DE-DELEGATED SERVICES

Lynne Samuel took the Forum through the report regarding the review of the de-delegated services.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Previously when the Forum had looked at de-delegation for the current financial year, it had committed to a review of the remaining de-delegated items for the 2022/23 budget setting. The report detailed work undertaken to date.
- All maintained schools had been contacted and encouraged to be part of the process. What had started as one group had divided into two smaller groups to look at different de-delegated items.
- De-delegated items were only an option for maintained mainstream schools. As the number of schools which academized grew, this number decreased. This changed the landscape and the ability to de-delegate.
- Each of the de-delegated services had been reviewed. The cost of some of them had reduced as the number of maintained schools had reduced. Others had a more fixed cost regardless of the number of maintained schools.
- Lynne Samuel highlighted the recommendations which had come out of discussions.
- De-delegated contingency – no funds had been allocated in this financial year and the £55,000 had been brought forward from last financial year. There had been no call on it within year to date.
 - It was recommended that the principle of a de-delegated contingency be retained but that no additional funds be de-delegated for the 2022/23 financial year.
 - It was also recommended that an annual review continue to be undertaken to consider whether the balance should be topped up in the case of a draw down.
 - It was recommended that there be a timeframe for discontinuation (2-3 years) linked to the annual review cycle, should there be no call on the funds.
 - The Group had recommended that the criteria and process be refreshed to ensure clarity for all maintained schools.

- With regards to supply cover, it was identified that costs against this were undertaken via the Payroll system. Some process issues had been identified which would be corrected going forwards. Forum members were advised that the supply arrangements were more a cost sharing arrangement rather than an insurance policy commissioned on behalf of schools. Recommendations were as follows:
 - That supply cover continued to be delegated for the 2022/23 financial year on a per pupil basis.
 - That a rolling 3 year average for maintained schools be considered for setting future year requirements.
- With regards to licenses and subscriptions, costs associated with one of the systems had broadly been funded 50% through de-delegated and 50% through the Central Schools Services Block. The Group had recommended that this be removed as a de-delegated offer and the full £150,000 be funded through the Central Schools Service Block for 2022/2023. The Group also recommended that for 2023/24 onwards, and once the cost base for the new contract was known, any non-statutory costs be considered with relevant areas of Learning Achievement and Partnership, in setting their traded offer to both maintained schools and academies.
- Support to underperforming Ethnic Minority Groups and Bilingual learners, and also the Foundry Primary Behaviour Outreach Service, presented more of a challenge as they were staffing based. The costs of the service did not flex according to the number of maintained schools. Work was ongoing in these areas.
- Lynne Samuel stated that they would go back out to all maintained schools to ensure that they had seen the draft findings of the report.
- Corinna Gillard indicated that feedback would be provided to all headteachers on what the Group had discussed so far and its findings.
- Lynne Samuel thanked all those who had been involved in the Group's work.

RESOLVED: That the update on the review of the de-delegated services and the recommendations made be noted.

21 DECLINING/GROWING ROLLS - GEOGRAPHY

This item was deferred to the Forum's January meeting.

22 SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN 2021/22

The Forum considered the forward programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The item around declining/growing rolls had been deferred to the January meeting.
- On behalf of the secondary headteachers, Derren Gray requested that SEN not send consultations which needed a response within the Christmas holiday period. Ginny Rhodes asked that none be sent out until after the holiday period. Heather Tomlinson agreed to feed this back.
- An update on High Needs Block would be brought to the January meeting. The Early Years budget would be considered at the March meeting.
- Shirley Austin requested that the numbers for secondary school places could be brought to the Forum as soon as they were available, including the out of Borough numbers, so that these could be considered in relation to the budget. An item on this was added to the January meeting.

RESOLVED: That the forward programme be noted.

Matters arising and actions:

- To include a table of matters arising at the end of future minutes.
- To record how many Forum members have voted for recommendations in future minutes.
- Update on new funding formula calculation.
- Schools Forum to consider and nominate its members for the Wokingham Borough Education Partnership at its January meeting. The Forum to be informed of the primary and secondary headteacher nominations prior to this.
- Confirmation of level of Early Years reserves for the current financial year.
- Resources Base – High Needs Block – Chiltern Way figures to be recorded in a similar way to other schools.
- Band value for resource spaces to be included in future Revenue Monitoring reports.
- With regards to the Schools Block Budget should recommendation of disapplication be approved, Officers to bring a report back to Schools Forum discussing how the 0.5% would be spent.
- The item around declining/growing rolls had been deferred to the January meeting.
- SEN be requested not to send consultations to secondary headteachers immediately prior to the Christmas holidays.
- An update on High Needs Block would be brought to the January meeting.
- The Early Years budget would be considered at the March meeting.
- A report on secondary school numbers would be taken to the January Forum meeting.