

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 11 JANUARY 2023 FROM 10.00 AM TO 11.04 AM**

Schools Representatives

Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Corrina Gillard	Primary Head - Emmbrook Infant
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary - Vice Chairman
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Derren Gray	Academy Head - The Piggott School
Andy Hinchliff	Academy Head - St Crispin's School
Paul Miller	Trustee - The Circle Trust - Chairman
Shirley Austin	Academy Head - The Forest School
Debra Briault	Secondary Academy School Representative
Chris Connian	School Business Manager – Bulmershe

Non School Representatives

Morag Malvern	Wokingham Borough Council
Sal Thirlway	Assistant Director for Learning, Achievement and Partnerships

Also Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager
Ming Zhang, Interim Assistant Director for Learning, Achievement and Partnerships

25 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Ali Brown, Paul Gibson, Ben Godber, Lynne Samuel and Amanda Woodfin.

Amanda Woodfin was substituted by Chris Coniam.

26 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7 December 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

26.1 Matters Arising

Members were informed that the Christmas tree chart would be available for the March meeting.

All other items of matters arising from the last meeting had been actioned or would be discussed during the meeting.

The Chairman requested that a Consultation item be added to the July meeting of the Forum.

27 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

In response to a question about annual renewal of declarations, Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist explained that it was expected that every

Member of the Forum would have at least one interest - in the school they represented. It was up to Members to declare additional interests that could cause a pecuniary interest in the items being discussed. It was agreed that this would be discussed outside of the meeting.

28 2022/23 REVENUE MONITORING REPORT

Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager presented the 2022/23 Revenue Monitoring report.

There had been no material changes since the last report was presented to Forum in December.

It was pointed out that there had been a change to the Growth Fund forecast for the new St Cecilia's School which was due to open this month, this was as detailed in the report.

Andy Hinchliffe stated that schools had not yet received confirmation on the number of additional places that were required for 23/24, and asked that this information be shared with schools.

Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning and Partnerships agreed to flag this up with the School Admissions Team and get the information circulated.

Shirley Austin asked that this information be shared with all schools for planning purposes. She pointed out that there were six weeks until offer day, so there should be some indication of numbers. Sal Thirlway agreed to share the information with the caveat that the numbers are subject to continued change up until National Offer Day.

The Chairman asked that if there were variances in the Growth Fund month to month, the variances be identified and be included in the numerical report. For example to show the £85k relating to St Cecilia and any differences resulting from the change in planned numbers.

The Chairman asked if it was possible to include a column for 24/25 with draft numbers. Katherine Vernon agreed to include this information in the next report, with the understanding that those figures were likely to change.

RESOLVED That the report be noted and that future reports would include the additional information requested during the meeting.

29 HNB / DSG MANAGEMENT PLAN & SAFETY VALVE UPDATE

Sal Thirlway presented the HNB / DSG Management Plan and Safety Valve Update report.

Given the timing of the last meeting, there was limited change from the last time this was presented to Forum. The date of the final submission of the proposition was Friday 13 January. Feedback from the DfE on the proposals would be received on 24 January, and any amendments required would be made prior to the final submission on 3 February. Following that, the Safety Valve Team would determine if the proposals were acceptable to put forward for ministerial decision.

A lot of activity had been undertaken in producing the proposals, and helpfully there had been weekly conversations with the DfE in preparation for the submission of the plan.

The following comments were made during Sal Thirlway's presentation:

- The plan had identified savings in the region of £57 million over the six-year period of the programme;
- It was anticipated that the cumulative deficit would be £40 million at the end of the six-year period;
- A 50% contribution towards this deficit was being sought from the DfE;
- The Council, through an Equalisation Reserve Fund would fund the other 50%;
- It was expected that at the end of the six-year period a balanced Budget would be achieved, and the cumulative deficit would be cleared;
- Through the various workstreams, it was expected that the cost of delivering services against the HNB would be reduced.

Sal Thirlway pointed out that although the report still contained the assumption of a 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the HNB, this would be taken out as there was strong indication that the disapplication request would not be approved. The Equalisation Reserve Fund would be used instead to fund the amount.

Corrina Gillard asked: if the disapplication was approved, would the Council take it? And take it in future years? Sal Thirlway stated that the transfer would continue to be sought in future years and was part of the proposals, but this would always be subject to consultation with schools.

The Chairman observed that, according to the report, the next year Block Budget spend for the HNB would be around £36.2 million. This represented around £4 million growth from this year's expected spend. He noted that there was a line on spend of DFG Growth Fund Reserve of £86k this year and £375k next year, however he could not identify these figures in the Growth Fund.

Katherine Vernon explained that the Growth Fund figures were moving and therefore were not correct in the report. She confirmed that there was £406k in reserves for Growth Fund, any funds not spent this year would be carried forward to next year. The report showed the impact of Growth Fund on all the DSG, not just in the HNB.

Sal Thirlway explained that the Safety Valve and the government were looking to achieve a balanced budget for the DSG, although it was understood that the deficit was generated from the HNB mainly.

The Chairman noted that a drop in spend of £1.2 million was being predicted in the second year of the programme and asked for details of how this would be achieved.

Sal Thirlway explained that all the savings would be delivered through the 20 or so workstreams which had been previously outlined to Forum. These savings were being double checked before the submission on Friday. A report would be submitted to Forum in March with the outcome of the proposals' submission.

Sal Thirlway informed that the statutory instrument that ring fenced the deficit had only been extended for a further two years. Therefore, even if Wokingham was not accepted as a Safety Valve authority, it was necessary to continue with the mitigating actions to tackle the deficit.

In response to a question Sal Thirlway confirmed that if the 0.5% disapplication was not allowed this year (which was highly likely), the local authority would be seeking 1% transfer in the next year through consultation.

It was emphasised that it was important that future consultations be carried out in good time and transparently.

RESOLVED That the update report be noted.

30 2023/24 DRAFT EARLY YEARS BUDGET

Katherine Vernon informed that Wokingham had received the maximum possible increase of funding for Early Years, which was good news for the local authority. There had also been a significant increase in the Maintained Nursery Supplement.

A meeting with the Early Years Task and Finish Group was being planned for the next week, and the team was working on models to present to the Task and Finish Group.

Ian Morgan agreed that the confirmation of the increase in funding was positive and he hoped that this increase would be transferred to providers.

Kerrie Clifford agreed that this increase was positive, and she too was looking forward to finding out how this would translate to providers and the maintained nursery.

Corrina Gillard asked for more information about the Maintained Nursery Fund. Katherine Vernon explained that they received additional funding to fund a headteacher. As a maintained nursery, their funding was only from the Early Years Block. She confirmed that this fund was just for Ambleside and not for nurseries within maintained schools.

Katherine Vernon drew attention to the Teachers Pay and Pensions Grant (TPPG) which would affect the maintained nursery classes. This was included in the funding for Ambleside through the Maintained Nursery Supplement, however it was necessary to find a way to include this for the nursery classes in maintained schools.

In response to a question Katherine Vernon stated that the TPPG was to fund qualified teachers. She recognised that there were some teachers in independent providers and it was important to find a fair way to fund them the TPPG too.

Ian Morgan noted that the formula was based on total PTE's and it seemed that more clarification was needed from the DfE to work out how best to fund this to providers, maintained nursery classes and the maintained nursery.

Katherine Vernon agreed to seek clarification from the DfE and feed this back to the Task and Finish Group.

Katherine Vernon explained that the Provider Reserve Fund had always existed, the Hardship Fund was still being worked on and it was likely to come from Reserve Funds that were not spent last year.

The Chairman asked for an update on the development of a process to grant access to the Hardship Fund. Sal Thirlway agreed to seek an update on the progress of this and provide it with the minutes if possible. It was agreed that an update would be added to the March meeting agenda.

The Chairman asked for clarification on the mention of a clawback on the Provider Reserve Fund. Katherine Vernon explained that the funding given was based on the January 2022 census, and this was updated following the January 2023 census. This was an adjustment to reflect the actual number of hours and not a 'clawback'.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

31 2023/24 FINAL CENTRAL SCHOOL SERVICES BLOCK BUDGET

Katherine Vernon informed that there had been a slight increase in the final allocation from what had been anticipated. The majority of this had gone to fund copyright licences. Any remaining balance was to be added to the Statutory Duties line as agreed at the previous meeting.

The Chairman highlighted the fact that the total cost of Central Services was much higher than the amount the local authority was allocated from the DSG.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

32 2023/24 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK BUDGET UPDATE

Sal Thirlway stated that there were no substantial changes from the last time this was report to Forum. There had been a meeting of the HNB Task and Finish Group and they were working through the preparation of the Budget to be submitted in March.

Of note was the fact that there were challenges in relation to the increase in inflation, which meant that the resources available did not cover the inflationary growth.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

33 2023/24 PROPOSED SCHOOLS BLOCK BUDGET SUBMISSION

Katherine Vernon informed that the final allocation had been received on 16 December, the tables in the report showed the numbers and the difference between what was anticipated and the actual allocation. The APT tool, used to work out all the Budgets was received on 20 December, the team had been working over the Christmas period to finalise the Budget submission.

The model included everything that had been agreed from the consultation:

- 0.5% MFG;
- The minimum National Funding Formula (NFF) rates against each factor;
- Increased notional SEN in line with national average, with a total of £14.9 million allocated through the model;
- More factors were used in the notional SEN calculation, which was Option 1 from the consultation;
- The minimum per pupil level was used for the Growth Fund calculation (this would be brought to the next meeting for discussion);
- A new inflation uplift for new and growing school rates was included, as this had not increased since 18/19;
- The disapplication for the all-through school had now been approved;
- The 0.5% transfer had not been included in the calculations;
- The Growth Fund reserve was being retained as it was expected that this would be needed for next year;

- All local authorities had been notified of a new grant, the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant (MSAG), which was additional funding that school would receive over and above the schools block allocation. This would be received in the next year 24/25.

If the schools block budget was approved, schools would receive the amounts shown in page 54 of the agenda. All schools would receive an increase, apart from 11 schools which had seen a decrease in pupil numbers.

Derren Gray thanked Katherine Vernon and the team for all the hard work undertaken to prepare the Budget.

In response to a question Katherine Vernon explained that in relation to the new MSAG, maintained schools would receive the funding from the local authority and academies would get it from the ESFA.

Upon being put to the vote, Members voted unanimously in favour of approving the Budget submission as presented in the report.

RESOLVED That Schools Forum approves the 2023/24 Proposed Schools Block Budget Submission.

34 F40 UPDATE

Councillor Morag Malvern informed that the F40 Group represented areas where government funding appeared to be lower than in other local authorities. This group aimed to remedy this situation and Wokingham was now taking part in the group.

The participation in the group gave Wokingham access to a lot of information through emails. Councillor Malvern offered to share the information received with Schools Forum.

Sal Thirlway stated that it was very positive that Wokingham was taking part in this lobbying group and offered to produce a briefing note to support Councillor Malvern's work.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The update report be noted;
- 2) Councillor Malvern would share the email communication from the F40 Group with Schools Forum; and
- 3) A briefing note would be produced in support of the work being undertaken with F40.

35 FORWARD PLAN

The following items were added to the Forward Plan:

March 2023

- Update on the Safety Valve programme submission
- Update on the development of the Early Years Hardship Fund

July 2023

- Schools consultation – pre-consultation paper

36 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman pointed out that there were two vacancies in the Forum's membership, one for a maintained primary school representative and one for an academy representative. He asked that an effort be made to fill those vacancies, possibly targeting Governors and trustees to give the Forum a wider breath of expertise.

It was announced that this was Sal Thirlway's last meeting as he was leaving the Council. The Chairman, on behalf of Schools Forum thanked Sal Thirlway for his contribution over the last few years, his support was much appreciated.

Ming Zhang addressed the meeting and introduced himself as the Interim Assistant Director for Learning and Partnerships, currently undertaking a handover with Sal Thirlway, he was looking forward to working with Schools Forum in the future.

Matters arising

- Add a Consultation item to the July meeting
- To discuss the need to declare Declarations of Interest
- Confirmation to schools on the number of places required for 23/24
- In relation to the Revenue Monitoring Growth Fund report: to include any variances month to month and a 24/25 column with draft figures
- To receive an update report on the Safety Valve submission and in particular the breakdown of how and where savings will be achieved
- Update on the progress of shaping a process to grant access to the Hardship Fund for Early Years settings. Add an item of update on this to the March meeting.
- A briefing note in support of the work of the F40 Group be produced.