

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 24 MAY 2017 FROM 9.30 AM TO 10.45 AM**

Schools Representatives

Helen Ball	Primary Head - Polehampton Infant
Ali Brown	Primary Head - Nine Mile Ride Primary
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary
Elaine Stewart	Primary Head - Aldryngton Primary
Sylvia Allen	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Ginny Rhodes	Secondary Head - St Crispins
Derren Gray	Academy Headteacher - The Piggott School
Janet Perry	Academy Business Manager - The Holt School
Corrina Gillard	Headteacher - Emmbrook Infant School
Jay Blundell	Special School Headteacher - Foundry College
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School
Ben Godber	Academy Headteacher - Bohunt
Jonathon Peck	Director of Finance and Operations - Maiden Erlegh
Emma Clarke	Primary Head - Farley Hill
Paul Miller	Governor - St Crispins - Chairman
John Bayes	Governor - Foundry College - Vice-Chairman

Non School Representatives

Anne Andrews	Oxford Diocese
Alison Swaddle	Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services
James Taylor	Wokingham and Bracknell College
Mary Parker	Early Years Representative
Gail Prewett	Early Years Representative

Also Present

Neil Carr, Principal Democratic Services Officer
Jane Winterbone, Interim Head of Learning and Achievement
Collette Sutton, Interim Head of Schools Finance
Katherine Vernon, Accountancy Assistant

50 MANCHESTER BOMBING

The Forum held a minute's silence to remember the victims of the Manchester bombing.

51 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by:

Ian Head (Governor, Aldryngton Primary);
Carol Simpson (School Business Manager, Colleton Primary);
Keith McConaghy (School Business Manager, Oakbank).

The Chairman welcomed new attendees to the Forum:

Emma Clarke (Headteacher at Farley Hill Primary);
Jonathan Peck (Director of Finance and Operations at Maiden Erlegh);
Collette Sutton (Interim Head of Schools Finance).

52 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 29 March 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendments:

Minute 42 (Page 11) – Amend the spelling of Darren Gray to Derren Gray;

Minute 43 (Page 12) – Amend the fifth bullet point to read “Elaine Stewart stated that she felt uncomfortable with the idea of sustaining a 5% surplus of places in schools”.

53 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

54 UPDATE ON REQUESTS RAISED AT PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Forum considered a report, set out on Agenda pages 15 to 18, which provided an update on a number of matters arising from previous meetings. The report addressed the following issues:

- A detailed analysis of all internal recharges for 2016/17 compared to 2015/16. During the discussion the following points were raised:

The Forum requested more detail on the work of the Corporate Transport Unit including the services provided by the unit, any trends in the level of recharge and the number of families using home to school transport across the Borough.

The Forum requested more information on any significant variations in the level of other recharges between 2015/16 and 2016/17, for example in relation to operational property.

- Clarification on the process for consulting school leaders on the provision of additional school places. The report stated that the Council was committed to briefing schools on place planning. Decisions to expand a school or open a new school were made by the Council's Executive and were based on publicly circulated written reports. During the discussion the following points were made:

The Chairman stated that the Schools Forum membership contained a significant amount of knowledge and experience which could be used to inform the decision making process relating to school place planning across the Borough. To date this knowledge and experience had not been utilised.

Jane Winterbone confirmed the Council's intention to improve the levels of transparency and engagement relating to school place planning. This would include discussions with the new Executive Member for Children's Services.

Alison Swaddle (Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services), confirmed that the key messages from the Forum would be fed back into discussions about improving the decision-making process.

The Chairman referred to the EFA Schools Forum guide, specifically paragraph 13 which stated that “Consultation must take place when a local authority is proposing a

contract for supplies and services which is to be funded from the Schools Budget and is in excess of the EU procurement thresholds”.

Derren Gray referred to the report submitted to the March 2017 meeting of the Forum on Pupil Movement and Lagged/Double Funding (Minute 43 refers). The report had sought the Forum’s approval to a revised mechanism for funding primary schools for the additional cost associated with opening a new class until school formulaic funding was sufficient to make the class sustainable. It was confirmed that the Forum did not approve the proposed funding mechanism at the March meeting. The Chairman suggested that this issue be considered at the July meeting in association with the updated report on the 2017/18 Growth Fund.

- Confirmation that the 2016/17 expenditure on redundancy costs did not exceed the budget. Derren Gray requested clarification on the position of academies in relation to requests for help with redundancy costs.
- Clarification on the operation of Just Around the Corner as a registered charity but not a registered education provider. The position was noted.
- Clarification on instances where SEN transport was funded and families also received Disability Living Allowance (DLA) – DfE had confirmed that receipt of DLA did not disqualify an individual from benefitting from free transport to school. The Forum would be updated if this position changed.
- John Bayes confirmed that a report on Foundry College, requested by the Forum, had been completed and forwarded to Officers and would be circulated as part of the review of the High Needs Block funding and expenditures in July.
- Collette Sutton confirmed that the issue of recoupment of business rates was under investigation and would be reported back to the Forum.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the report be noted;
- 2) the Forum receive a further report on Internal Recharges with more detail on the work of the Corporate Transport Unit and other significant year to year variations in the level of charges;
- 3) the Council’s commitment to improved transparency and consultation with the Forum be welcomed;
- 4) the proposed mechanism to fund primary schools for the additional costs associated with opening a new class be considered at the Forum meeting on 19 July 2017;
- 5) the Council’s responsibilities to consult with the Forum, as set out in the EFA Schools Forum guide, be noted;
- 6) clarification be sought on the position of academies seeking help with redundancy costs and be reported back to the Forum;

- 7) the report on Foundry College be considered at the July meeting of the Forum;
- 8) the potential for recouping the supplemental business rates allocated to Contingencies in 2016/17 be investigated and reported back to the Forum.

55 2016/17 OUT-TURN INCLUDING CONTINGENCIES BREAKDOWN 2016/17 AND GROWTH ANALYSIS

The Forum considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 19 to 29, which gave details of the final out-turn position for the 2016/17 Schools Budget. A series of tables gave further detail in relation to the following issues:

- Schools Opening Balances/Reserves at 1 April 2016;
- Schools Final Out-turn 2016/17 (Budget v Actual);
- Schools Final Out-turn 2016/17 (Budget/Forecast March 2017/Actual/Variance);
- Schools Final Out-turn 2016/17 – Main Movements from March 2017;
- Contingencies 2016/17;
- Growth Fund 2016/17.

The report stated that the final Out-Turn for 2016/17 showed an in-year deficit of £821k, mainly due to overspending on the High Needs Block. The closing balance (reserves) at 31 March 2017 was £1.356m which would be carried forward to 2017/18.

As discussed at the March 2017 meeting, members of the Forum had expressed serious concerns about the monitoring and reporting of the Schools Budget during 2016/17. Further concern was expressed about the significant variances reported between March and the final Out-turn report. Collette Sutton reported that, as a result of the problems identified during the year, changes had been made to reporting structures and steps were being taken to recruit permanent staff to key posts. A forensic analysis would also be undertaken to examine any errors occurring during the year.

Jane Winterbone stated that a report would be submitted to the July 2017 meeting of the Forum which reviewed expenditure against the High Needs Block in 2016/17 and a projection for expenditure in 2017/18. This was a very significant piece of work involving detailed analysis of individual cases across the Borough.

It was also hoped that the final settlement for 2017/18 would be available for the July meeting.

John Bayes suggested that a more consistent and clearer format be used in the monitoring reports, i.e. a combination of brackets and red colouring to indicate minus figures.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the 2016/17 Schools Budget Final Out-Turn be noted;
- 2) the steps being taken by the Council to strengthen budget monitoring procedures and to recruit key members of staff on a permanent basis be welcomed;
- 3) closer monitoring and reporting of the following areas take place in 2017/18:
 - Budget variances in year;
 - High Needs Block;

- Growth Fund (more detail and clarity around academies and maintained schools' Growth Fund budgets);
 - Contingencies;
- 4) a report on the High Needs Block element of the Schools Budget be submitted to the July 2017 meeting of the Forum;
 - 5) the Council be requested to introduce a more consistent approach to minus figures within the budget monitoring reports.

56 GROWTH SPEND PROJECTION 2017/18

The Forum considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 31 to 33, which gave details of the Growth Spend in 2016/17 and an update on additional funding considered for primary school expansion. The report also gave details of arrangements for lagged funding and pupil movement funding considered at the previous meeting of the Forum.

The report stated that in 2016/17 an original budget for Growth Spend was agreed by the Schools Forum at £1.3m. During the year budget projections suggested that the final spend could be as high as £1.492m. The end of year position was £1.339m. Within the overall spend, actual spend against Montague Park and Bohunt were significantly higher than the original budget. All other schools were subject of an underspend or a small overspend.

An updated Appendix was tabled which set out the current forecast of Growth Spend for 2017/18. Jane Winterbone confirmed that meetings would be held with all new schools (Charvil, Windmill, Wheatfield, Montague Park and Bohunt) in the next few weeks in order to establish a more detailed understanding of projected costs within 2017/18. A report would then be submitted to the July meeting of the Forum which would enable a debate based on the most up to date financial information for the new schools in the Borough.

Janet Perry asked about any recent changes to the funding regime for new schools as, in her experience, start up grants were set for a five year period. It was confirmed that this would be clarified in the report to the next meeting of the Forum. The report would also include reference to the proposed mechanism for funding primary schools for the additional costs relating to opening a new class (see Minute 54 above).

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Growth Spend Out-turn for 2016/17 and the latest Growth Spend Projection for 2017/18 be noted;
- 2) a further report be submitted to the July 2017 meeting of the Forum following discussions with the new schools in the Borough.

57 NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA UPDATE

The Forum considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 35 to 37, which provided an update on the National Funding Formula (NFF). The report stated that the Government had created NFF in order to address problems with the current funding system, with similar schools in comparable local areas receiving very different levels of funding.

The Council's response to the NFF Stage 2 consultation stated that the proposed funding position was unfair as it did not address the Borough's current low-funded base.

In light of the upcoming General Election it was confirmed that there had been little recent Government activity relating to NFF.

The report highlighted two key issues to be addressed by the new NFF regime - support for schools in financial difficulties and the effect on growth expansion projects involving new schools rather than expansion of existing schools. Appended to the report was a table showing the impact on the Borough's schools of the NFF based on current understanding of the proposals.

Jane Winterbone reported that the Task and Finish Group, set up at the March 2017 meeting of the Forum, had not been able to meet yet, but dates were being circulated for a first meeting. Members of the Forum were invited to consider joining the Task and Finish Group.

Brian Prebble stated that the Forum had previously agreed that there would be no clawback in relation to schools with a budget surplus and sought confirmation that this was still the Forum's position. This followed communication from the Council on the subject of School Reserves and possible clawbacks.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the update on the National Funding Formula (Fairer Funding) be noted;
- 2) schools work with the Council to achieve appropriate NFF allocations and to develop an accurate financial reporting position to ensure that any emerging deficits are addressed appropriately;
- 3) the NFF Task and Finish Group agree Terms of Reference at its first meeting and a further volunteer be sought to join the group;
- 4) the Forum's previously agreed position of no clawbacks on budget surpluses be confirmed.

58 FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Forum noted the Forward Programme and dates of future meetings as set out on Agenda page 39.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Schools Forum's Forward Programme for 2017/18, be noted;
- 2) the agenda for the July 2017 meeting include:
 - Revenue Monitoring;
 - Final settlement and variance;
 - Budget 2017/18;
 - High Needs Block – review and projection;
 - Growth Fund - analysis and projection;
 - Contingencies breakdown;
 - Review of resource bases.