

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 17 OCTOBER 2018 FROM 10.00 AM TO 11.50 AM**

Schools Representatives

Helen Ball	Primary Head - Polehampton Infant
Emma Clarke	Primary Head - Farley Hill
Sally Hunter	Primary Head - Wescott Infant
Elaine Stewart	Primary Head - Aldryngton Primary
Sharon Finn	Primary Head – Lambs Lane (as a substitute for Emma Clark)
Sylvia Allen	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Ginny Rhodes	Secondary Head - St Crispins
Paul O'Neill	Secondary Head - Embrook
Janet Perry	Academy Business Manager - The Holt School
Corrina Gillard	Headteacher - Emmbrook Infant School
Kerrie Clifford	Maintained Nursery Acting Headteacher
Jay Blundell	Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher - Foundry College
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School
Paul Miller	Governor - St Crispins - Chairman

Non School Representatives

Shahid Younis WBC Representative

Also Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Coral Miller, Interim Senior Finance Specialist, Schools
Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist, People Services
Bob Watson, Lead Specialist, Finance

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Paul Miller was elected Chairman for the 2018/19 academic year.

2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

John Bayes was appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2018/19 academic year.

3 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Ali Brown, Maggie Callaghan, Carol Cammiss, Derren Gray, Jim Leviders, Brian Prebble, James Taylor and Marion Standing.

The Chairman explained that both Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services and Jim Leviders, Interim Director of Children's Services had been unable to attend this meeting due to the fact that the service was currently undergoing an Ofsted inspection.

4 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 July 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5 MATTERS ARISING

Governor vacancy

The Chairman stated that as a result of Ian Head, governor representative, stepping down, there was now a primary school representative vacancy in the Forum. The Forum was informed that this vacancy could be filled by a headteacher, a governor or a school business manager, and it was up to the primary phase to appoint someone. Corrina Gillard agreed to raise this with the primary phase and keep the Forum informed.

Early Years feedback

Gail Prewett informed that a meeting between Early Years providers and the local authority had taken place and this had been very positive. There was now more clarity as to how services were being charged and how support was going to be delivered.

Kerry Clifford agreed that it was positive that communication was improving and this should continue. She expressed disappointment that not many providers had been present at a recent meeting arranged specifically for leader of the Early Years settings.

School Admissions benchmarking and cost of legal challenges

The Chairman stated that Jim Levers had indicated that the service did not have the resources to carry out this research. Schools Forum had the option of asking for this piece of work to be commissioned. The Chairman suggested and the Forum agreed to defer the discussion of this possibility to the next meeting when it was hoped that Jim Levers would be able to attend and discuss the idea in more detail.

High Needs Block (HNB) Task and Finish Group

Ginny Rhodes expressed great concern over the lack of progress in tackling the HNB difficulties. She stated that this state of inertia added to the pressure on funding and ultimately impacted the children for whom the local authority had responsibility.

The Chairman stated that Patricia Davies, former Interim Assistant Director of Education had identified two strands of work. One was at the strategic level, looking over a longer horizon at building/commissioning new specialist schools and increasing resource places; the second, reflecting Schools Forum's responsibilities, was looking at addressing the short and medium term HNB funding and expenditure programme.

The following points were made during the discussion of the HNB:

- Members of Schools Forum recognised that there had been many changes at senior leadership level, however, there was an urgent need to put a strategic plan in place to address this difficult situation;
- Janet Perry questioned if there was a link between the multiple changes in leadership and the HNB difficulties;
- Janet Perry would like to know who was responsible for the HNB situation. She stated that Schools Forum had been criticized by the previous Director of Children's Services for not tackling the expenditure challenges, however, Schools Forum's powers were limited and its responsibilities did not extend to executive decision making;
- Councillor Younis stated that there was no blame culture in the Council and that a collective effort was being made to address these challenges;
- Corrina Gillard stated that problems with the HNB had been identified a several years ago and that it was frustrating that no action had been taken to tackle them. She stated that Jane Winterbone, former Interim Assistant Director of Education had commissioned a Resource Place Review (late 2017/early 2018) and it was disappointing that no action had been taken as a result;

- Sara Attra expressed frustration that she was unable to communicate with the local authority about resource base places and funding for those places;
- Jay Blundell stated that it had been agreed that Foundry College would be expanded, with an increase of places from 47 to 85, however, it was not clear where the base funding for these additional places was going to come from, and she had been unable to speak to anyone from the local authority to confirm the funding;
- Councillor Younis reassured members that work was being undertaken to address these challenges;
- Bob Watson, Lead Finance Specialist stated that the pressure on HNB was being faced by many local authorities nationally. The Council recognised that having interim staff in strategic leadership posts had not helped the situation and the Council was looking to redress this situation. Bob Watson commented that Wokingham had faced difficulty in recruiting permanent staff, with one reason given that the Borough did not qualify for London weighting;
- Schools Forum members expressed serious concern and frustration that the HNB was not being managed properly and that whenever this was questioned the local authority repeated the same unsatisfactory explanations;
- Sara Attra stated that another issue was the lack of data, there was no information about how many children were expected to need specialist places;
- The Chairman stated that it was important to continue the financial planning undertaken by the HNB Task and Finish Group and to involve Schools Forum members in the strategic planning.

Councillor Younis agreed to investigate the issues raised by Schools Forum outside the meeting.

6 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

7 REVENUE MONITORING REPORT

Coral Miller, Interim Senior Finance Specialist, Schools went through the 2018/19 Schools Revenue Monitoring report which was set out in Agenda pages 18-22.

Coral Miller stated that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) shortfall had increased by £260k from that reported to Schools Forum in July, with a year-end deficit of £1.853m now anticipated.

Coral Miller explained that the HNB pressure continued, with a further adverse movement of £130k. This was mainly due to nine more commissioned places in post-16 Out of Borough provision at £6k per place which reduced the HNB income by £54k. An additional five places in a local maintained special school to help reduce the reliance on Out of Borough placements and increases in “top up” funding further increased unplanned expenditure by £76k.

Coral Miller stated that the HNB deficit was now forecast at £1.731m by the end of the 2018/19 financial year. A Special Educational Needs (SEN) Strategy Group had been established, chaired by the Assistant Director for Education, with input from Finance, Strategic Commissioning and relevant schools. The group were considering service planning in light of pressure on resources and would identify all possible action for delivering a balanced budget position and reduce deficit.

Coral Miller stated that the expenditure in the Central Services Block had also increased, with an overspend of £125k now anticipated. This was as a result of further DfE guidance over copyright licences for both academies and schools which from 2018/19 need to be funded from this block.

Coral Miller reported a small increase in the provision for Growth Fund of £5k.

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

- Janet Perry asked if refunds from previous years were expected. Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist, People Services explained that the Department for Education (DfE) had confirmed that this was not expected;
- The Chairman stated that the predicted 1.4% overspend of the overall Budget represented a 10% overspend in the HNB;
- Carol Simpson asked why school contingency had gone up. Coral Miller explained that this related to underspends in the de-delegated schools specific contingency last year that had been carried forward, however the provision for maternity/paternity cover had been reduced due to overspends last year in this area.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

8 DE-DELEGATED SCHOOLS CONTINGENCY

Coral Miller went through the De-delegated Schools Contingency report which was set out in Agenda pages 23-25, she stated that this related to maintained schools only.

Coral Miller explained that schools with exceptional circumstances could apply for funding from this contingency and Finance would visit the school to understand their unique situation. Any funding granted from this contingency was subject to approval by the Assistant Director of Children's Services.

Coral Miller stated that there had been one claim made on the contingency this year which had been approved. This was for a school that had been involved in a confidential investigation of a senior staff member. The school had provided a detailed breakdown of the costs and requested a contribution of £43k which the local authority agreed to.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

9 FINAL SETTLEMENT FOR EARLY YEARS AND HIGH NEEDS BLOCK

Coral Miller presented the Final Settlement for the Early Years and High Needs Block report which was set out in Agenda pages 28-31.

Coral Miller stated that the report provided information on additional allocations made to Early Years providers, following confirmation of the DfE recoupment figure. She informed that the estimated number of children used to calculate the Budget funding had been greater than the actual number of children in the Early Years phase during the financial year 2017/18. This difference (fewer) in children numbers led to the recoupment. The Finance team had anticipated a recoupment for the year and had intentionally set aside sufficient funding from the Early Years Block Budget to settle the recoupment without impact upon providers. The level of funding set aside was sufficient to settle the recoupment and to allow a small further distribution of funds to providers.

Coral Miller stated that providers would receive a further distribution of £0.16p per hour in relation to the 2017/18 balance of 'set aside' Early Years funding.

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

- Ian Morgan asked if the £707,350 included the £229k expected growth;
- Coral Miller stated that this was part of the 96% funding that was passported to providers;
- Kerry Clifford stated that it was impossible to know how many people would take up the 30 hours of free childcare for working parents;
- Ian Morgan pointed out that the birth rate was dropping;
- Coral Miller stated that the growth provision was for 93 children, if this was subsequently not taken up, the local authority would have to give back the difference;
- Ian Morgan stated that it was important to be transparent about the process but thanked the officers for their diligence and support.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

10 2019-20 SCHOOLS BUDGET UPDATE\CHANGES

Coral Miller presented the 2019/20 DfE Summary Budget update report which was set out in agenda pages 34-38.

Coral Miller stated that the DfE guidance was issued in July and provided an indication of budgets for the upcoming financial year. The information showed the estimated DSG for Schools Block and HNB for 2019/20. These figures would be subject to change and the actual DSG allocation would be announced just before the end of December 2018.

Coral Miller informed that a Schools Block Task and Finish Group had been 'recalled' to review the Schools Block allocation and work through options in more detail.

Coral Miller went through the changes listed in the report. She highlighted that the local funding formula would continue for 2021, the New Funding Formula would not be implemented until (at least) after that date.

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

- Carol Simpson was of the opinion the Schools Forum were unlikely to approve a request to passport money from the Schools Block to the HNB, unless a robust strategic plan was implemented;
- Janet Perry asked that papers and up to date information be circulated in advance of future Task and Finish Groups meetings to enable a more constructive discussion;
- Coral Miller stated that due to the sensitivity of the data for the Task and Finish Group, and to ensure just the Group saw the option, it would not be possible to email this information before the meeting, however Coral confirmed that she would find a way of providing this information to the Group before the Task and Finish Group meeting;
- Coral Miller stated that the figures used in the models could not be 100% accurate, the DfE would confirm the actual allocation in late December;
- Members asked for confirmation of which new schools would open next September. It was agreed that Piers Brunning, Strategy and Commissioning (People and Places) Senior Specialist would be invited to attend the next meeting to clarify the questions raised in relation to new schools;

- Members urged the local authority to be mindful of the impact of opening new schools to existing local schools in respect of pupil numbers;
- In response to a question Coral Miller stated that Budget would be discussed in December and January, the final submission was on 21 January 2019;
- Coral Miller informed that she would be attending a DfE conference the next day and that there were many points that she wished to clarify. She would report back to Schools Forum on her findings after the conference.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Piers Brunning would be invited to attend the next meeting to inform the Forum about the processes around opening new schools and expanding existing schools;
- 2) The Schools Block Task and Finish Group would meet and discuss different models and report back to Schools Forum at its meeting in December with a proposed model;
- 3) The report be noted.

11 FORWARD PROGRAMME

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

The Chairman pointed out that there were changes to the calendar of meetings and explained that the *27 February* and *15 May 2019* meetings were cancelled as they were deemed unnecessary.

The meeting on 27 March 2019 was moved to 6 March 2019.

12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Teachers pay grant

Coral Miller stated that to support the pay award for September 2018-March 2019 the DfE had allocated a grant called the Teachers Pay Grant. The rates would be £16.40 per pupil for primary schools, £26.54 per pupil for secondary school and £65.65 per place for special schools.

Coral Miller stated that the estimated figure for the financial year 2019/20 were £28.29 per primary school pupil, £45.56 per secondary school pupil and £113.46 per special school place. She clarified that Wokingham did not qualify for London fringe allowance.

It was agreed that the details of the amount per pupil and a link to the website would be included with the minutes.

In response to a question Coral Miller stated that she would check if PRUs were included. *Coral has since confirmed that PRU's are included.*

The link below contains the information requested by Schools Forum:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-pay-grant-methodology/teachers-pay-grant-methodology>

Pensions

Schools Forum was informed that there was going to be an increase in employee contributions September 2020-23, the rates had gone up to 23.6%, representing a 7% increase. The DfE had committed to help until 2019/20, after that there would be a Spending Review 2019/20. Coral Miller asked schools to factor this cost into their budgets. *Subsequently Coral informed that the DfE said that they would fund a 100% for the first year 2019/20 of the costs.*

In response to a question Lynne Samuel stated that there was a degree of uncertainty in relation to future grants/support, pending the outcomes of the Spending Review 2019.

Business rates

Coral Miller stated that in previous years the Council had funded the difference between budgeted and actual costs, but this would not be possible going forward, as the Local Authority could not hold contingency from the Schools Block Budget, 100% of this funding needed to be allocated to schools and academies.

In response to a question Coral Miller stated that the worse affected school was going to have to pay £50k, but the average was between £1k and £6k.

Bob Watson stated that business rates were set by the central government and the local authority was merely the collecting agency.

Janet Perry pointed out that academies, who had charity status, paid much reduced business rates in relation to maintained schools.

Free school meals

Coral Miller agreed to look into the increase and report back to the Forum.

The link below contains the information requested by Schools Forum:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-school-meals-supplementary-grant-2018-to-2019>

Catering contract

Sylvia Allen stated that it had recently come to light that the Council was paid 12 pence per school meal to administer the catering contract, this amounted to a significant amount of money. There had been a lack of transparency as schools were previously not aware of this and it was not understood how this money was spent. She reported that as a result many schools were considering pulling out of the contract.

The Chairman noted that Schools Forum guidelines and responsibilities required the Council to bring the details of any contract for school to Schools Forum before the contract was tendered.

Coral Miller and Lynne Samuel would look into this and report back to the December Schools Forum.

Schools Forum Guidance

The Chairman asked members to read the recently updated online resources in relation to Schools Forum.

Schools Forum Powers and Responsibilities:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/740721/Schools_forum_powers_and_responsibilities.docx.odt

He stated that there was also a self-assessment available, which will be discussed at the next Schools Forum with a view to using it to assess Schools Forum's effectiveness.

Schools Forum Self Assessment Toolkit:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/647443/Schools_forum_self-assessment_toolkit.odt

Other relevant guides can be found at the link:

<https://www.gov.uk/search?q=Schools+Forum>