

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOL FORUM
HELD ON 12 DECEMBER 2018 FROM 10.00 AM TO 12.15 PM**

Schools Representatives

Emma Clarke	Primary Head - Farley Hill Primary
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary
Elaine Stewart	Primary Head - Aldryngton Primary
Corrina Gillard	Primary Head - Emmbrook Infant
Lou Slocombe	Primary Head - Radstock Primary
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Ginny Rhodes	Academy Head - St Crispins School
Derren Gray	Academy Head - Piggott School
Janet Perry	Academy Business Manager - Holt School
Jay Blundell	Pupil Referral Unit Head - Foundry College
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School
Ben Godber	Academy Head - Bohunt School
Paul Miller	Governor - St Crispins - Chairman
John Bayes	Governor - Foundry College - Vice-Chair

Non School Representatives

Shahid Younis	WBC Representative
James Taylor	Wokingham and Bracknell College
Ian Morgan	Early Years Representative

Also Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Piers Brunning, Senior Specialist (People and Place) Strategy and Commissioning
Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services
Paul Doherty, Assisatnd Director for Education
Jim Leivers, Interim Assistant Director for Education
Coral Miller, Interim Senior Finance Specialist, Schools
Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist, People Services
Katherine Vernon, Finance Specialist, Schools

13 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Sylvia Allen, Ali Brown, Maggie Calagham, Paul O'Neill, Jonathan Peck, Gail Prewett and Marion Standing.

14 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 October 2018 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the change below, and signed by the Chairman.

Janet Perry asked that the sentence stating that '*academies paid much reduced business rates in relation to maintained schools*' be deleted. The Chairman stated that the sentence was not inaccurate but agreed to have it deleted.

15 MATTERS ARISING

School Admissions Benchmarking

Jim Leviers, Interim Assistant Director for Education asked Schools Forum if there was funding available to commission this piece of work.

The following comments were made during the discussion of this item:

- Schools Forum had been asking for benchmarking for the last two years in order to understand how the service provided by the Local Authority compared, financially, with other local authorities;
- Jim Leviers asked Schools Forum to consider how important this piece of work was and if members wished to invest in commissioning it;
- Paul Miller stated that the school admissions service cost approximately £450k, however it was not known how this compared with other local authorities;
- In response to a question Coral Miller stated that the budget for school admissions had reduced from previous years;
- It was not clear how this piece of work would be funded and if it was worth spending the necessary money to carry out the work.

Paul Doherty, Assistant Director for Education stated that he would look into undertaking the benchmarking exercise with resources from within his department. He stated that the volume of school admissions work was variable, and that mid-year school admissions created a lot of work. He stated that he would update Schools Forum at the next meeting.

Members noted that with the new houses around the Borough there had been an increase in the number of mid-year school admissions.

High Needs Block

It was reported that a High Needs Block Task and Finish Group had now been set up and that this would be discussed later in the Agenda.

Catering contract

Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist, People Services explained that the schools catering contract was operated as a traded service, therefore individual schools had the option on whether to buy in or not, as such any retender would not fall under the criteria set out in the Schools Forum powers and responsibilities guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE).

Lynn Samuel stated that there was no agreed rate per meal, therefore it was unclear where the quoted 12p was derived from.

Lynn Samuel stated that the Council funded the maintenance and upkeep of kitchens for schools who bought in to the contract through the management charge levied for the service and an element of non-ring-fenced capital funds. The supplier operated a profit share (rebate) with the Council based on the overall performance of the contract each year. This was completely independent of the management fee paid by schools. The level of rebate received from the contract in the last financial period did not exceed the investment made by the Council under the current contract.

Lynne Samuel stated that as with the catering contract, both Broadband and ICT operated as a traded service where schools made individual decisions to buy in or not.

Lynne Samuel stated that the briefing note would be circulated with the minutes and she offered to speak to any school who had bought into the contract who wished further clarifications.

Corrina Gillard asked what rebate rate was received last year and who made the decision as to how much the contract cost, she felt that the purported 8k charge to draw up the contract was expensive. Lynne Samuel agreed to find out who the contractor was and report back to Schools Forum.

16 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Julia Mead, School Business Manager at St Sebastian's CE Primary declared a personal interest on the Growth Fund item, on the basis that the Keys Academy Trust had submitted a bid for the new Shinfield West School.

Derren Gray, Headteacher at the Piggott School declared a personal interest in relation to the Draft 2019-20 Schools Block Budget item, on the basis that his school was an all-through school.

17 2018/19 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK UPDATE

Jim Leviers presented the 2018/19 High Needs Block (HNB) update. He stated that the anticipated overspend in the HNB was likely to increase rather than decrease in the future, and he pointed out that there was no immediate solution to the current situation.

Jim Leviers informed that in Wokingham there were:

- 867 young people with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) whose needs varied, of which 750 had significant needs;
- Of these 867 young people, 340 were placed in special schools;
- Of the 340 pupils in special schools, 133 were placed outside of the Borough in specialist places (this number had gone up every year).

Jim Leviers stated that the number of young people coming into the system was increasing and the Local Authority had failed to address the anticipated increase in demand.

Jim Leviers stated that this was a national issue and that many other local authorities faced similar challenges in relation to HNB deficit. There had been a national increase in the production of EHCP of 35% since the introduction of the Families Act 2014. The national HNB deficit would exceed 250 million this year. The government had indicated that they would be looking to address this deficit, however they were asking Local Authorities to provide details of plans to tackle the issues.

Jim Leviers stated that there was an indication that the home to school transport budget in Wokingham would be overspent by £600k by the end of this financial year.

Jim Leviers stated that some ideas had already been identified by senior officers to start to address the HNB deficit, mainly around increasing the number of specialist places within the Borough.

It had been proposed that Addington School be expanded by approximately 50 places. However, this was time lagged and the impact of the expansion would not be seen until the 2020 financial year.

Foundry College, although not specialising in High Needs, had a number of High Needs pupils, therefore the Local Authority was also proposing to expand Foundry College by approximately 30-40 places. This was pending planning application and refurbishment works, and would impact on the 2020 financial year.

Jim Leviers stated that another issue in relation to local provision was that Northern House School, which had converted to academy status 18 months ago, had recently undergone an Ofsted inspection and the resulting report was very damning. This represented a challenge for the Local Authority and a huge problem for the children and education in Wokingham.

Jim Leviers reported that out of the 72 places available in Northern House, Wokingham used approximately 30 places at any one time. Removing these children would potentially cost 2-3 million, therefore, given the current financial situation, it was not viable. As a consequence of that, a decision had been made at senior level not to place any new children in the Northern House School until such a time as the Local Authority was satisfied that the children would be safe there.

Jim Leviers stated that the Regional Schools Commissioner was considering whether to seek out a different sponsor for the school. Jim reported that the Local Authority had had conversations with the new headteacher, who was already taking some positive steps towards improvement.

Jim Leviers stated that there was a service level agreement between the Local Authority and Northern House which would expire on 31 December, and this needed to be re-negotiated. It had been agreed to retain the status quo until March 2019, under a new service level agreement in which the Local Authority would insert a number of performance measures to hold the school to account. Jim explained that the Local Authority did not want to risk the sponsors walking away as this would increase the pressure on the HNB.

Jim Leviers stated that previous agreements with the Northern House had been generous to the school, he assumed this was because there had been a need for places at the school. This agreement needed to be re-thought through and he was going to be working on it.

Jim Leviers stated that the conclusion that came out of the Resource Places Review was that most schools were under resourced, in the region of around £100k per school, and would need more funding which would have to come out of HNB. There was also a recognition that unless local schools could provide places, the costs to HNB would continue to go up.

Jim Leviers stated that this area was much neglected in education and local authority engagement, as this should have been tackled over the last three years and it was important to do something about it now.

Jim Leviers informed that the Addington expansion report was going to be submitted to the Executive for formal approval in January, and Foundry College expansion was being progressed.

Jim Leviers stated that 0-25 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy was in the process of being updated and would soon go out to consultation with schools and key partners.

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

- Lynn Samuel stated that the Local Authority was waiting for confirmation from central government on what the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was going to be, so the HNB Block Budget for 19/20 was not yet finalised;
- Ginny Rhodes felt burdened about the impact the HNB deficit was having on individual children's education. She worried that the financial situation was influencing panels decisions in relation to awarding EHCPs;
- Members recognised that it was positive to see some strategic development in the right direction, however, it was worrying that the Budget would continue to increase;
- Jim Levers stated that local authorities could not continue to pick up the increased cost of HNB caused by the 2014 legislation, he believed the government would have to help local authorities;
- Coral Miller stated that all local authorities in the south were working together and bidding the government for more funding;
- Paul Doherty stated that as well as working collectively with other local authorities, Wokingham would be asking for a separate meeting with the DfE, specially taking into account the fact that Wokingham was the worse funded local authority in the country;
- In response to a question Lynne Samuel stated that the Local Authority had already started discussions with the DfE at a recent meeting;
- Jim Levers informed that an application had been made to the DfE to set up a new free school;
- Paul Miller stated that a HNB Task and Finish Group had been set to look in more detail at possible solutions to the HNB deficit;
- Councillor Younis stated that the first meeting had taken place and they were in the process of setting up priorities, dates for future meetings were being identified;
- In response to a question Jim Levers stated that Council leaders and elected Members were acutely aware of the current situation;
- In response to a question Coral Miller stated that the Local Authority had an obligation to submit a balanced Budget to the DfE;
- The Chairman suggested that officers should concentrate on working out a 'real' budget;
- In response to a question Jim Levers stated that the decision to overspend was for the Local Authority to make.

The Chairman thanked officers for the report, which had provided transparency and enabled a better understanding of the challenges faced by the Local Authority in relation to the HNB deficit.

In response to a question Jim Levers stated that he had arrived in Wokingham to cover the post of Children's Services Director, which Carol Cammiss had now been appointed to permanently. He had then covered the post of Assistant Director for Education, which now Paul Doherty had been appointed to permanently.

Carol Cammiss, Children Services' Director stated that there was a serious commitment within the senior leadership team to get it right and to be more transparent. She stated that the team wanted to work together with Schools Forum and asked members to contact her or Paul Doherty if any clarification was needed.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

18 REVENUE MONITORING REPORT

Coral Miller presented the 2018/19 Schools Revenue Monitoring report which was set out in Agenda pages 16-19.

Coral Miller stated that as of 31 October 2018, an overspend of £2,432 million was anticipated in the DSG, this worked out at 1.78% of the total Budget, of which £2.3 million related to the HNB.

Coral Miller stated that Appendix A contained a summary of the 18/19 School Revenue Monitoring Report and Appendix B contained a detailed breakdown of 18/19 revenue monitoring.

In response to a question, Lynne Samuel confirmed that £125k deficit from the centrally retained block was in relation to licences, this was as a result of clarification from the DfE as to which block the licences should relate to. It was confirmed that the Central Block was for every child, including those at academies.

Some members felt that academies were not aware that the Central Block was for every child.

Carol Cammiss asked members to report directly to herself or to Paul Doherty if the communication between schools and the Council needed improving.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

19 18-19 CONTINGENCY BREAKDOWN

Coral Miller presented the 18/19 Contingency Breakdown report which was set out in agenda pages 21-24.

Coral Miller stated the report contained information about how the contingencies fund was being spent. This fund was available, if needed, to maintained schools only.

Coral Miller stated that there had been two claims approved in this financial year. Further to the previous report to Schools Forum, a claim had been approved for a school which had had a business rate adjustment which was unexpected by the school of approximately £51k. This school had already lost a significant number of pupils from 2017/18 which resulted in a significant reduction in its budget for 2018/19. The Local Authority decided that this was an exceptional situation and agreed to fund it for one year only.

In response to a question Coral Miller stated that this money would be recovered next year.

Coral Miller stated that there was £81k in the contingencies fund not yet committed.

In response to another question Coral Miller stated that she had not received further proposals from schools to convert to academy status this year, therefore, even if the schools that had benefited from this fund now, applied to convert, it would not affect this financial year.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

20 GROWTH FUND UPDATE AND 2019/20 REQUEST FROM SCHOOLS BLOCK BUDGET

Piers Brunning, Senior Specialist (People and Place), Strategy and Commissioning presented the Growth Fund Update and 2019/20 request from Schools Block Budget report which was set out in agenda pages 25-29.

Piers Brunning stated that the Local Authority had a statutory duty to provide school places for the residents in the Borough. He explained that there was a conflict of interest in the national arrangements, in that Schools Forum did not have direct responsibility for the provision of school places, however it was responsible for agreeing the Growth Fund Budget. He stated that without the Growth Fund agreement it was not possible for the Local Authority to plan the increase in additional capacity in the Borough.

Piers Brunning stated that, despite a reduction in birth rates, one of the pressures that were identified was in relation to primary school places, due to the exceptional rate of new house building in the Borough.

Piers Brunning stated that the new developments were concentrated in certain areas of the Borough.

Piers Brunning stated that the Shinfield West School could have opened in temporary accommodation in 2016, however due to publicity around that time, around 30 children that could have been placed at Shinfield West were placed at other schools. Last year all the school places in local schools in the Shinfield area were filled, and the Local Authority was in need of a new school in that area.

Piers Brunning stated that a few years ago there had been a shortage of school places in the Earley area, with children at the time having to be diverted out of the area. The political view was that it was not acceptable to have to send children to schools out of their area of residence.

Piers Brunning informed that there was no data as to who moved into new houses, however the new houses that were being built were family homes, therefore there was an expectation that the demand for school places would increase. He stated that GP registration information was not a reliable source of data, as people sometimes did not register their family with a new GP.

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

- Members asked if Piers Brunning had taken into account the fact that people were living longer and were having fewer children;
- Piers stated that he had taken that into account and pointed out that there was a significant cost to school transport if children had to be transported to a school far away from their residence;
- Members asked if there had been a consideration of the impact of building new schools to existing schools;
- Piers Brunning stated that there had been a consultation on the plans for new schools;
- In response to a question Piers Brunning stated that academy schools were their own admission authorities and therefore could set their own admission numbers;
- Piers Stated that the current legal advice was that schools were not obliged to carry on with their Published Admission Number (PAN) through all school years;

- Members were worried that there was an assumption that families with young children were moving into the new houses, and that may not be the case;
- Piers Brunning explained that capital decisions had to be made to plan for the future, however it was impossible to be completely accurate with predictions, and this was acknowledged in the Primary School Strategy;
- Piers Brunning stated that the actual number of school applications for entry into September 2019 would not be known until 15 January, very late in the budget setting process;
- Members were informed that there was a very small window of opportunity to change the Budget if there was an indication that setting up a new school would be disastrous for existing schools;
- Some members felt anxious about the accuracy of predictions based on the last 3-4 years, when schools were perhaps opened too early, having a catastrophic effect on admission numbers of existing school;
- Members questioned if it was cost effective to open a number of small schools rather than investing in bigger schools;
- Some members stated that it might be useful to see an analysis of how accurate predictions had been in the past;
- Jim Levers was interested to know if members could offer a better model to predict numbers;
- In response to a question Piers Brunning stated that there had been a Borough wide debate about the infrastructure around the building of new communities and consultation about the proposed new schools;
- Piers Brunning added that some of the existing schools had site constraints which limited their expansion, including in relation to lack of car parking.

Members asked that Piers Brunning be invited to attend all meetings where Growth Fund was due to be discussed.

Carol Cammiss stated that she was aware of the pressures and understood the concerns that Schools Forum had raised. She offered to discuss these issues with the Executive Member and bring back a review to Schools Forum for further discussion.

In response to a question Piers Brunning stated that the £800k Growth Fund Budget for 2019/20 was for a range of planned expansion of school places, for both current commitments and new schools. He explained that should a decision be made not to proceed with a new school, this would be credited back to the Growth Fund.

RESOLVED That Schools Forum approves the Growth Fund Budget of £800,000 for 2019/20.

21 DRAFT 2019-20 SCHOOLS BLOCK BUDGET

The Chairman explained that the report contained options for the 2019/20 School Block Budget which had been reviewed by the Task and Finish Group. There would be a further opportunity to look at the model just before its submission to the DfE in January 2019.

Coral Miller stated that the Task and Finish Group had looked at various options. The first option was to keep the Funding Formula the same, with small adjustments, mainly around Minimum Per Pupil Funding which was £3,500 for primary school and £4,800 for secondary school. She stated that most local authorities were using this option.

Coral Miller stated that another option was to go straight to the New Funding Formula (NFF), however it was felt that option allocated too much money for deprivation areas, and Wokingham was not a deprivation area according to the DfE.

Coral Miller stated that it was not certain when the NFF would come into effect, and that there was an extension of another year.

Coral Miller stated that the Task and Finish Group was recommending the adoption of option 1, which was described in detail on page 33 of the agenda. Option 1 protected schools with a minimum funding guarantee per pupil, this option was recommended until there was more clarity around the proposed NFF, and was consistent with the funding approach applied in 2018/19.

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

- The Chairman explained that an issue had been identified in relation to the guidance given by the DfE to calculate the funding for all-through schools. Instead of using the number of primary children times £3,500 and the number of secondary children times £4,800, the DfE was using an average of £4,000 per pupil, and this disadvantaged schools with a larger number of secondary school pupils in relation to the number of primary school pupils. This presented a challenge for the only all-through school in the Borough which had approximately 10 secondary pupils to 2 primary pupils. There was a process called 'disapplication' in which Schools Forum could instruct Coral Miller to apply to the DfE asking for this rule not to be used in this case. If the DfE did not agree to this disapplication and Schools Forum decided to tweak the model, every school would incur in a reduction in its funding;
- Coral Miller tabled a paper containing a model based on the 'fairer' calculation of £3,500 per primary pupil and £4,800 per secondary pupil, which was dependent on applying for disapplication and the DfE agreeing to the disapplication;
- The Chairman reiterated that if the DfE did not agree to the disapplication the reallocated money would have to be found from the Schools Block Budget;
- Coral Miller informed that she had contacted the DfE and they said that in order to apply for disapplication the Local Authority would have to demonstrate the impact on other schools, the rationale for the proposal and carry out a consultation with affected schools; also, it was noted that a disapplication application should have been made by 20 November;
- Members believed that it seemed disproportionate to penalise all-through schools that had a small primary phase;
- In response to a question Derren Gray stated that he was considering his options, including 'divorcing' the primary school;
- In response to a question Coral Miller drew attention to the last two columns in appendix B which showed that relative to the proposed option 1 model of funding, some schools were getting more than the minimum per pupil funding, it was those schools that would likely see a reduction in funding compared to the model funding if the DfE did not agree to the disapplication.

Members were not completely clear with the numbers and asked that the Task and Finish Group looked at the three models again, taking into account the possible disapplication. Members also instructed Coral Miller to carry out the Consultation in order to apply for disapplication. It was noted that there was urgency in this work as the Budget would have to be submitted on 23 January.

In response to a suggestion Coral Miller stated that the Local Authority was not allowed to have a contingency in the Budget.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Task and Finish Group would meet again to discuss possible models, including the effect of the possible disapplication;
- 2) A consultation would be carried out to find out the schools' opinion around the funding arrangements;
- 3) That the Local Authority would apply for disapplication; and
- 4) The Task and Finish Group would make a recommendation on a preferred option to Schools Forum in January 2019.

22 2019-20 PROPOSED DE-DELEGATION BUDGET

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

23 EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOLS FORUM

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

24 INDUCTION FOR NEW MEMBERS

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

25 FORWARD PROGRAMME

This item was deferred to the next meeting.