

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
SCHOOLS FORUM  
HELD ON 18 MARCH 2015 FROM 9.00 AM TO 11.50 AM**

## **Schools Representatives**

Phil Armstrong	Maintained Nursery Headteacher
Sally Hunter	Primary Head - Wescott Infant
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary
Elaine Stewart	Primary Head - Aldryngton Primary
Ginny Rhodes	Secondary Head - St Crispins
Ann Keane-Mayer	Secondary Head - Waingels College
Mary Rome	Pupil Referral Unit - Foundry College Headteacher
Derren Grey	Academy Headteacher - The Piggott School
Janet Perry	Academy Business Manager - The Holt School
John Bayes	Governor, Chairman
Mike Hutchinson	Governor

## **Non School Representatives**

Ian Pittock	Wokingham Borough Council
Matthew Marsden	WBC Childrens Services
Clare Sheppard	Early Years Forum
Charlotte Wilkinson	Early Years Forum

## **Also Present**

Tricia Harcourt, Senior Democratic Services Officer  
Donna Munday, Schools Finance Manager  
Kathy Roberts, Service Manager Access and Inclusion, Children's Services  
Alan Stubbersfield, Interim Head of Learning and Achievement, Children's Services  
Alison Pugh, Early Years Team Manager (for Items 34 and 35)

## **31 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Ali Brown, Louisa Gurney, Christine Hyatt, Liz Meek, Nick Dyer, Wazir Khan, Paul Miller, and Stephen King.

## **32 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 14 January 2015 and the adjourned meeting held on 22 January 2015 were agreed, subject to the following corrections:

- Minute 25 – Declarations of Interest - should refer to Item 26 not Item 25.
- Minute 26 – Early Years Funding – Free Entitlement Review – in the Resolution 2<sup>nd</sup> line delete ‘..to c..’ and delete everything after ‘...quality of provision.’
- Minute 27 of reconvened meeting – Draft 2015/16 Schools Budget – in the paragraph before the Resolution on Agenda page 14 it should be recorded the Janet Perry had left the meeting before the vote and that 2 people abstained.

## **33 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

In relation to Item 34 – Early Years funding for 2 year olds and Item 35 –Early Years – Complex Needs Inclusion Subsidy Review –Update, it was noted that Charlotte Wilkinson was the owner of an early years provider.

## **34 BUDGET PLANNING**

The Forum received and considered a report set out on Agenda pages 23 to 26 giving suggestions of a new way of budget planning for the future and detailing the process and background behind the setting of the 2015/16 budget, to address concerns raised at the last meeting.

Matt Marsden said that in reviewing the 2015/16 budget setting process, weaknesses had been identified, and the report set out suggested actions to improve the process in future. The key issues to address were:

- to engage the Forum with budget discussion earlier in the year;
- to have a medium term vision of the future to better enable strategic planning;
- to create a less formal meeting space in which appropriate exploratory discussions can take place.

The suggestions in the report were to:

- develop a 3/5 year medium term financial plan, each year;
- create a Forum sub Working Group to review and challenge the assumptions of the plan, particularly in relation to central funding;
- present a high level indicative budget for the following year to the Forum in July.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- no additional funding/grant is received for the growth in pupil numbers in September until the following financial year;
- this lack of up-front funding is a national issue, our neighbouring authorities are in a similar situation, and Local authorities are lobbying for a change;
- funding the growth affects current school budgets, but there is no possibility of obtaining a loan from another part of the Council's budget;
- to avoid schools having late information it may be possible to provide models showing the high level impact on types of schools, but not for individual schools - this is work that could be done in the Working Group
- this year when testing the budget, the information given by the Department for Education (DfE) was wrong, and even now we only have indicative figures for some allocations, which will not be finalised until June;
- the additional funding mentioned by the Government was to fund the new requirements around the extension of provision of services to 19 to 25 year olds;
- recent national publicity has shown that Wokingham Borough receives the lowest level of Guaranteed Unit of Funding per child in the country;
- People need the right level of knowledge/ understanding, as it is hard to challenge the issues without that. Training could be possible through the National Association of School Managers;
- Setting up a small working group in an informal setting/environment would allow more working together and open discussion on proposals;
- Benchmarking information can be discussed – the official statistics for 2013/14, the first year after the reforms are on the DfE website, however the information on academies is for 2011/12, so is a bit out of date;

It was suggested that the Working Group be time limited and given specific tasks. Suggestions for tasks and draft Terms of Reference will be circulated electronically to all Forum Members, with the membership appointed at the Forum meeting on 20 May.

**RESOLVED:** That:

- a Forum sub Working Group be created to review and challenge the assumptions budget planning, particularly in relation to central funding;

- suggestions for tasks for the Working Group and Draft Terms of Reference be circulated electronically before the May meeting of the Forum;
- a 3/5 year medium term financial plan be developed;
- a high level indicative budget for the following year be presented to the Forum in July.

### **35 SCHOOLS BUDGET 2014/15 - FINANCIAL MONITORING**

The Forum received and considered a report set out on Agenda pages 27 to 32, detailing the projected outturn position for March on the 2014/15 Schools Budget funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), including Education Funding Agency funding and the Pupil Premium Grant.

Donna Munday presented the report which listed the material movements from the approved budget which had given an net increase in the projected final outturn surplus position since July 2014 of £462,000; from £1,004,000 to £1,466,000. Appendix A on Agenda pages 29 and 30 includes a commentary on the material movements; the main ones were:

- Increased spending to fund pressures on pupil growth for infant classes of £209,000;
- Saving of £145,000 on fees for out of Borough placements
- Saving of £150,000 on anticipated underspend by the Moderation Panels.

The table in Appendix B on Agenda pages 31 and 32 gave a breakdown of the central expenditure lines over the last three years; the allocations in the current budget and proposed allocations for 2015/16. This could be used to inform discussions by the Working Group.

**RESOLVED:** That the 2014/15 Schools Budget Monitoring Report be noted.

### **36 FINAL 2015/16 SCHOOLS BUDGET**

The Forum received and considered a report set out on Agenda pages 33 to 35, detailing the Final Schools Budget for 2015/16, which has to be submitted to the DfE by 31 March 2015.

Donna Munday presented the report and pointed out that although this has to be submitted to the DfE by 31 March 2015, some of the allocations from them will not be finalised until June. Changes made from the previous version are highlighted in the table on Agenda page 35:

- Increase recoupment to academies/free schools based on estimated additional pupil numbers;
- Additional adjustment for free schools.

Donna mentioned that there were other potential pressures that were not reflected in the budget:

- Possible increase in fees charged by Independent Special Schools;
- Request to continue to contribute to fund Aspire;
- Impact of another secondary school converting to academy status;
- Possible increase in the capacity at Foundry College.

In relation to the four summary of Central Expenditure, on Agenda pages 31 and 32 which had been circulated with the monitoring report, concerns were raised about the amounts detailed in the commentary against several lines for 'Recharges'. In response Officers indicated that they were amounts passed to the main Borough budget to cover support

services provided by other Council services departments, such as HR, charges for floor space occupied by central staff, IT support etc. More details and clarification would be provided; consideration of this could be a task for the Working Group.

Mary Rome expressed concern at the listed reductions in the amounts in the 2015/16 budget for lines 1.3.1 – Pupil Referral Units and 1.3.3 – Education out of School, as they were not as agreed at the January meeting of the Forum. Alan Stubbersfield apologised for the lack of communication on this issue.

In relation to line 1.4.1 Ginny Rhodes pointed out that she was not aware that St Crispin's School had been asked to have bulge class in 2015/16.

Mary Rome asked that her abstention on this item because of opposition to the amounts in lines 1.3.1 and 1.3.3 be recorded, and subject to that it was

**RESOLVED:** That the Schools Budget as set out on Agenda page 35 be adopted and submitted to the Department for Education for the purpose of the s251 return by 31 March 2015.

### **37 EARLY YEARS FUNDING- FUNDING FOR 2 YEAR OLDS**

The Forum received and considered a report, set out on Agenda page 17, which gave an update on the spending of capital and trajectory funds which had been allocated to the development of funded places for two year olds since 2013.

Alison Pugh presented her report indicated that the allocations received from the Government in 2013/14 and 2014/15 was £150,649 capital funding and £321,019 trajectory funding to develop places in early years settings for funded two year olds. The capital funding has been spent but only approx. £30,000 of the rest of the funds, with £270,000 remaining.

There was a proposal that the £270,000 underspend be carried forward to the Early Years budget in 2015/16 to fund potential increases in the demand for two year old funded places, with £100,000 used to for the further development of places and the remaining £170,000 be kept as a contingency fund for possible additional funded places.

Early Years and Nursery representatives pointed out that there was demand in areas of the Borough where there was no capacity – Wokingham and Woodley –so there are eligible children waiting for places. Also that, because this is quite new, some families are only just understanding that they may be eligible, so more may come forward.

There was general feeling that as the situation was fluid, it was not necessary to keep a contingency, as any unforeseen increase could be taken from the existing Early Years contingency.

**RESOLVED:** That £100,000 of the underspend of £270,000 from the allocation of the two year old funding be carried forward into the Early Years Budget for £2015/16.

### **38 EARLY YEARS - COMPLEX NEEDS INCLUSION SUBSIDY REVIEW - UPDATE**

The Forum received and considered a report, set out on Agenda pages 19 to 21 giving an update on the allocation and use of the Complex Needs Inclusion Subsidy (CNIS) to Early Years providers.

Alison Pugh presented her report and explained that there has been an overall allocation of £108,000 which can be allocated to Early Years settings to use to provide additional support for early intervention of children with additional needs. Currently settings are using the subsidy to provide one to one support with the child. The funding is allocated per child per term and has been supporting about 35 children per term. An Early Intervention Grant can be awarded to settings in situations of exceptional need in supporting several children.

The funding is part of the Early Years block and has been used successfully. Applications for funding are considered by a CNIS Panel, which must demonstrate how the impact of the additional support will be achieved. However, comment was made that the application process to obtain the additional funding was incredibly time consuming and costly in staff time.

The extra money would also contribute to financing the additional work involved with cluster moderation and the new expectation on Early Years providers to attend person-centred reviews in line with Education and Health Care Plan requirements for children in the setting. Settings in receipt of this funding may be included as part of an annual funding audit and practice and impact will continue to be regularly monitored by the Early Years Support Services. The Early Intervention Grant would also continue to be allocated from this budget and settings be encouraged to share examples of success with others.

**RESOLVED:** That £108,000 continue to be allocated from the Early years budget in 2015/16 to enable Early years providers to appropriately meet the needs of children with SEND (Special Education Needs and Disability) and that the maximum rate be increased to from £825 per term per child, to £1000 for a child attending for 15 hours per week.

### **39 REVIEW OF THE MODERATION PANELS**

Following a request at a previous meeting that the work of the Moderation Panels be reviewed, Alan Stubbersfield reported that a review would now be carried out by Kathy Roberts and brought the May meeting of the Forum.

The review would be looking at how the decisions are made, the threshold criteria, and benchmarking. A consultation paper will be circulated to Headteachers.

The Headteachers on the Forum pointed out that one of their main concerns was the use of professional time of school staff costs involve in making applications and attending the Panel meetings to present their case. The general feeling was that the process was incredibly cumbersome and needed changing. It was suggested that the process for Early Years providers to access CNIS could also be reviewed, as there were similar concerns.

Alan Stubbersfield indicated that he had noted the Forum's comments.

### **40 FORWARD PROGRAMME**

The Forum considered and noted the Forward programme of work set out on Agenda page 37 and agreed that the 5 Year Strategic Plan item in May should be a discussion item.

#### **Dates of Future Meetings**

The dates of future planned meetings were noted:

20 May, 15 July, 23 September, 21 October and 16 December 2015  
20 January, 16 March, 18 May 2016.

Meetings start at 9.00/9.15am except 20 May meeting which will start at 1.00pm.