

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 16 JANUARY 2019 FROM 10.00 AM TO 11.17 AM**

Schools Representatives

Helen Ball	Primary Head - Polehampton Infant
Ali Brown	Primary Head - Nine Mile Ride Primary
Emma Clarke	Primary Head - Farley Hill Primary
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary
Elaine Stewart	Primary Head - Aldryngton Primary
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
Paul O'Neill	Secondary Head - Emmbrook School
Derren Gray	Academy Head - Piggott School
Kerrie Clifford	Maintained Nursery Head - Ambleside Centre
Jay Blundell	Pupil Referral Unit Head - Foundry College
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School
Paul Miller	Governor - St Crispins - Chairman
John Bayes	Governor - Foundry College - Vice-Chair
Anne Kennedy	Academy Co-Head – Holt (deputising for Janet Perry)

Non School Representatives

Paul Doherty	Assistant Director Education
Karen Edwards	Early Years Representative
Ian Morgan	Early Years Representative

Also Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Francesca Cannarella, Head of SEN
Coral Miller, Interim Senior Finance Specialist, Schools
Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist, People Services
Emma Slaughter, Early Years Consultant
Katherine Vernon, Finance Specialist, Schools
Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services
Emily Waddilove, Curriculum Development Advisor

26 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Corrina Gillard, Janet Perry, Marion Standing, James Taylor and Shahid Younis.

27 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12 December 2018 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the amendments listed below, and signed by the Chairman.

Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist People Services stated that where it said '*contract*' on page 9 it should say 'contact'.

Derren Gray stated that where it said *'that he was considering his options, including 'divorcing' the primary school'*, it should say 'that he had considered decoupling the primary school'.

28 MATTERS ARISING

School Admissions Benchmarking

Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services stated that the benchmarking exercise was being carried out with two other local authorities and two county councils, this would be brought to Schools Forum for consideration at a future meeting.

Growth Fund and the Number of School Applications

Paul Miller stated that Piers Brunning, Senior Specialist (People and Place) Strategy and Commissioning, had not contacted Schools Forum, therefore it could be assumed that the number of school applications had been as anticipated and in line with the Growth Fund plan. Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist People Services agreed to follow this up.

Paul Miller stated that Schools Forum would like to review the next Primary School Strategy when this is ready. Carol Cammiss confirmed that this strategy was being drafted and agreed to bring it to Schools Forum when available.

29 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

30 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK UPDATE

Carol Cammiss stated that an overspend of 2.9 million on the High Needs Block (HNB) was currently anticipated. There had been a further increase in spend due to 10 children/young people with Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND) having been placed in Out of Borough high cost specialist provision.

She informed that the Local Authority was required by the Department of Education (DfE) to submit a HNB financial recovery plan should the HNB deficit in any year exceed 1% of the Schools Block Budget. A plan was being drawn up and would be ready by June, this plan would be brought to Schools Forum for review in due course.

Paul Doherty, Assistant Director for Education stated that the first meeting of the High Needs Block Strategic Group had already taken place.

Paul Miller asked if Schools Forum was contributing to the Strategic Group, and Paul Doherty reassured him that it was, and that other 'expert' school' leadership contribution was being sought.

RESOLVED That the verbal update of the High Needs Block be noted.

31 REVENUE MONITORING REPORT

It was noted that the Revenue Monitoring report had a variance from Budget driven principally by the High Needs Block (HNB) overspend which was discussed during the verbal update of the HNB.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

32 18-19 CONTINGENCY BREAKDOWN

Lynne Samuel stated that the 18/19 Contingency Breakdown report had not changed since the last time it was reported to Schools Forum.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

33 19-20 CENTRALLY RETAINED BLOCK REPORT

Lynne Samuel stated that in 2018/19 the Central School Services Block (CSSB) had a budget of £944k which had increased to £946k for 2019/20. She explained that during the course of 2018/19 the DfE had clarified that the Council now had to fund copyright licences from this Block. The funding of the Council's statutory duties had therefore been reduced by £129k (to accommodate licence costs), with only £817k remaining to be allocated towards the cost of statutory duties for 2019/20. Lynne Samuel stated that the allocation of £946k for 2019/20 did not reflect the total cost of the services.

In response to a question Lynne Samuel stated that the Council subsidised the remaining cost of the statutory services from the general funds.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Schools Forum accepted the allocation proposed; and
- 2) Schools Forum noted that the provision was significantly less than previously allocated and significantly less than the actual costs incurred.

34 19-20 DE-DELEGATION REPORT

Lynne Samuel stated that the De-delegated report contained in the agenda was the deferred paper from the last meeting of Schools Forum.

The Chairman explained that prior to 2019/20, a single financial figure for each of the primary and secondary phases was provided. A Schools Forum decision was made to change to a calculation based on the number of pupils in schools for each phase. Therefore, the total De-delegated figure was the same, but the allocation to each school was different and more reflective of school size.

The Chairman stated that this item required a number of votes for approval and that only maintained schools were entitled to vote.

In response to a question, Lynne Samuel stated that any underspend could be refunded to schools or go back to the respective item; this was a decision to be made by the maintained schools.

In response to a question the Chairman explained that the Task and Finish Group had considered each cost group and decided what the most appropriate basis for its allocation was. The Task and Finish Group had concluded that a fixed fee for the licences was more appropriate as the cost did not vary based upon the number of pupils at the school, unlike the other lines which did vary depending on the number of pupils.

Members questioned if temporary funding from the De-delegated fund were returned by the beneficiary. Members believed that Schools Forum had previously agreed that beneficiaries would return the money as if it was a loan. Lynne Samuel questioned this and agreed to double check the agreement and the timing of it.

Upon being put to the vote, the maintained primary school representatives agreed to the following de-delegated items:

- Contingency (school in financial difficulty and def. of closing schools)
- Licences/subscriptions
- Insurance
- Staff costs - supply cover
- Support to underperforming Ethnic Minority Groups and bilingual learners
- Behaviour support services

Upon being put to the vote, the maintained secondary school representative agreed to the following de-delegated items:

- Contingency (school in financial difficulty and def. of closing schools)
- Licences/subscriptions
- Insurance
- Staff costs - supply cover
- Support to underperforming Ethnic Minority Groups and bilingual learners

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The maintained schools voted and decided on the delegated items as described above; and
- 2) Officers would confirm the arrangement regarding beneficiaries re-funding of loans from the De-delegated Fund.

35 19-20 SCHOOLS BLOCK BUDGET

Lynne Samuel tabled a paper which was circulated to Members.

The Chairman stated that Schools Forum had received a presentation in December with the options around the 19/20 Schools Block Budget. Schools Forum was informed, at that meeting, that the DfE had decided on the way that all-through schools were to be funded, which was to assume that the ratio of primary and secondary pupils was fixed. However, the Wokingham experience with its one all-through school was that the ratio of primary and secondary pupils was not the same. The Task and Finish Group was asked to look at different models, with the intention of spreading the burdens of a recalculated allocation evenly across all schools in the Borough, regardless of the phase they were in. Officers had presented a model (within the DfE toolkit of models) with such a revised allocation to the Task and Finish Group. However, this model seemed to heavily penalise three schools in the Borough (as would the other available models), and it had not been possible to incorporate the necessary changes to spread the burden more evenly across all schools. With this background, the initial Budget which was proposed to Schools Forum in December was considered the most appropriate model for the 19/20 allocation.

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

- Derren Gray stated that three schools were still adversely affected by the proposed Budget, and one school in particular was being penalised by the per pupil funding system; he wished it to be recorded that Schools Forum had asked that individual schools should not be penalised by the funding system;
- The Chairman stated that the Council would write to the DfE indicating that the system they proposed for all-through schools was not appropriate;

- Ginny Rhodes pointed out that Schools Forum had requested different models to be presented. The Chairman stated that the different models that the finance team had tested had shown similar outcomes;
- Derren Gray stated that Schools Forum had resolved that a consultation with schools would be carried out, and questioned if it was legal for Officers not to comply with a Schools Forum request;
- The Chairman stated that Schools Forum could decide not to approve the proposed Budget and request a consultation before the Budget submission, even if this resulted in a late submission;
- Derren Gray stated that he had concerns over the process;
- John Bayes pointed out that the rules that governed Schools Forums and stipulated the decision making process were complex;
- Paul Doherty stated that if Schools Forum asked for a consultation this would be supported by the Local Authority;
- It was pointed out that a delay in the submission could adversely affect all schools in relation to their planning and decision making.

After a robust discussion, Schools Forum was asked to vote, through a show of hands, and make a decision in respect to the submission of the proposed Budget. The result of the vote was as follows:

- 2 votes against
- 8 votes in favour
- 10 abstentions (approximately)

RESOLVED That the 2019/20 Schools Block Budget be approved for submission.

36 19-20 EARLY YEARS INCLUDING CENTRALLY RETAINED

Lynne Samuel stated that it was proposed that 5% was retained centrally, equating to £506k for 2019/20. This reflected an increase of 1% on that retained for the current financial year, ensuring 95% was still available to fund Early Years' providers, in line with DfE guidance.

Lynne Samuel stated that the proposed increase in centrally retained funding did not represent an increase in central costs within the Council, but a change to Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) block allocation for SEN Early Years Inclusion. The cost of this provision was approximately £160k and was previously funded from the HNB. Retaining 5% for 2019/20 allowed £100k of these costs to be more appropriately funded from the Early Years Block rather than the HNB.

Coral Miller, Interim Senior Finance Specialist Schools stated that from the census and budget information available, early indications were that this approach would allow for an increase in the hourly rate of 7p for 3 and 4 year olds, with 2 year old funding being held at the current hourly rate. However work on the January census remained ongoing. The hourly rate for providers could not be confirmed until all information was received and verified (around June time). As providers needed an estimate budget in February, this would be provided based on the January census numbers.

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

- Ian Morgan was concerned that the numbers were dropping yearly, however, the centrally retained rate was increasing;

- In response to a question, Emma Slaughter, Early Years Consultant stated that previously the Early Years SEN was funded from the HNB, Early Years had effectively been receiving the service free of charge;
- Lynne Samuel confirmed that there was no change to the services provided, the only change was that the service was no longer to be funded by the HNB;
- Ian Morgan stated that the cost to Early Years had increased;
- Emma Slaughter stated that the actual cost of the service was more than 5%;
- Carol Simpson asked if there was a similar service (and potential cost) to schools. Coral Miller stated that schools were funded by the general fund which funded Educational Psychologist Service ;
- Elaine Stewart stated that schools had been advised to expect to have to pay for Educational Psychology Services in the future;
- Paul Doherty confirmed that the Council's Educational Psychology Service operated as a traded service to all schools, including academies. This service would undergo an internal review to ascertain its suitability. He also stated that there was no definitive view about the future arrangements for this service at the moment;
- In response to a question Paul Doherty stated that the Educational Psychology Service was composed of a small team which was under pressure due to the amount of work;
- Ian Morgan was concerned that the Early Years Block was funding a statutory function of the Council;
- Kerry Clifford pointed out that if the £100k was not funding the Early Years' SEN, it would not be passed on to providers anyway.

The Early Years representatives were concerned over the estimated numbers. It was suggested to make the Budget proposal conditional on the predicted numbers materialising.

Carol Cammiss stated that the Local Authority was funding over and above what was required, she was confident that this was the best estimate and affirmed that if the numbers were 'wildly' wrong, the Local Authority would come back to consult Schools Forum.

Ian Morgan stated that he understood the pressures in the HNB. He asked that information on how the SEN allocation for Early Years was spent be presented to Schools Forum, Emma Slaughter agreed to share this information based upon the last year.

Upon being put to the vote the Early Years representatives agreed to the 2019/20 Early Years Budget, including the revised centrally retained figure.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The 2019/20 Early Years including centrally retained Budget be approved for submission; and
- 2) Schools Forum would receive a report containing a breakdown of Early Years SEN allocation.

37 EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

The Chairman stated that the DfE had set a Schools Forum self-assessment tool kit in order to review the effectiveness of Schools Forums. He encouraged Members to fill in

the form and send it back to Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist. The results of this exercise would be discussed at the next meeting in March.

RESOLVED That Schools Forum Members would be sent the self-assessment toolkit for completion and return it to Luciane Bowker.

38 FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Forum considered and noted the Forward Programme of work and dates of future meetings as set out on Agenda page 53.

It was noted that there was a typing mistake in the Forward Plan, and it was clarified that the meeting in March was on 13 March. The following item was added to the March Meeting:

- Review of the Schools Forum self-assessment questionnaire

Members agreed to consolidate the June and July meetings to one meeting in July. It was decided to hold a meeting on 10 July.

39 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Jay Blundell wished to thank colleagues on the work around de-delegated funds to Foundry College.

Francesca Cannarella, Head of SEN thanked all the heateachers that had attended the SEN Panel for their contribution.

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