

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
SCHOOLS FORUM  
HELD ON 13 MARCH 2019 FROM 10.00 AM TO 11.00 AM**

## **Schools Representatives**

Helen Ball	Primary Head - Polehampton Infant
Ali Brown	Primary Head - Nine Mile Ride Primary
Emma Clarke	Primary Head - Farley Hill Primary
Sally Hunter	Primary Head - Wescott Infant
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead 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
Kerrie Clifford	Maintained Nursery Head - Ambleside Centre
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School
Paul Miller	Governor - St Crispins - Chairman
John Bayes	Governor - Foundry College - Vice-Chair

## **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  
John Edgar, Virtual School Headteacher  
Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services  
Elaine Munro, Principal Educational Psychologist  
Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist, People Services  
Emma Slaughter, Early Years Consultant  
Katherine Vernon, Finance Specialist, Schools

## **40 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Sylvia Allen, Jay Blundell, Paul Gibson, Ben Godber, Coral Miller, Marion Standing and Elaine Stewart.

## **41 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 January 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **42 MATTERS ARISING**

The Forum considered the Matters Arising paper which was attached to pages 13-15 of the agenda.

## **School Admissions Benchmarking**

Paul Doherty, Assistant Director for Education stated that the information contained in Appendix A had been obtained from the Department of Education (DfE) website, this benchmarking data was publicly available.

Paul Doherty stated that the service had noted the low cost figure for Oxfordshire County Council, and Officers intended to visit them to find out more about how they were achieving such low cost for their school admissions.

Paul Miller, the Chairman, stated that Wokingham compared well against the other local authorities listed in table, however it was good practice to explore ways in which to save money.

### **Growth Fund and number of school applications**

Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services stated that a decision had been made not to open Shinfield West Primary this year. The reason was that this proposed new school had received (only) 8 first preference and 8 second preference applications. The service was mindful not to create new surplus places in other primary schools in that area and the impact in the local community. The local ward members had been informed of this decision.

Carol Cammiss stated that, with all the new houses that were being built, the school was likely to be needed in the next academic year. She would revisit the situation next year.

In response to a question Carol Cammiss stated that when this school opened it would open as a one form entry school.

Ginny Rhodes wished it to be recorded that she was grateful for the detailed information that schools had received in relation to school applications for the next academic year. She stated that this helped schools with budget planning.

Paul Miller stated that as a result of Shinfield West not opening this year, there should be a saving in the Growth Fund spend. He asked for the savings figures to be presented at the next meeting.

### **De-delegated contingency & business rates adjustment**

Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist, People Services stated that Officers were reviewing the adjustment through the Authority Proforma Tool (ATP) and that this money would be recovered in the next financial year.

In response to a question Lynne Samuel stated that this did not set a precedent to other schools, going forward recoument would be treated differently.

### **Declaration of interests**

Paul Miller stated that he had had a conversation with the Monitoring Officer regarding declarations of interest. He explained that Forum members had an obligation to declare an interest when there was a conflict of interest in relation to one of the items in the agenda. Should an interest be declared, the member who declared the interest would be allowed to take part in the discussions but not in the voting of the item. He apologised that this process was not followed at the last meeting, however this did not affect the outcome of the decision.

### **Early Years SEN allocation**

Schools Forum noted the update.

#### **43 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Schools Forum Members felt that it was unclear what constituted a conflict of interest. Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist stated that a conflict of interest happened when there was potential financial gain to be had by making a decision one way or another. However, she pointed out that most reports that were submitted to Schools Forum were for notification only, and not for decision making.

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **44 2018-19 REVENUE MONITORING REPORT**

Lynn Samuel stated that due to additional funds that were being released from central government to support Special Educational Needs (SEN) children, the anticipated year end position had improved by £321k, with a deficit of £2.6m now forecast.

Lynne Samuel stated that Wokingham's share of the additional funding package from central government was £415k for each of the 2018/19 and 2019/20 financial years, this impacted only the High Needs Block (HNB).

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted.

#### **45 CONTINGENCIES UPDATE**

Lynne Samuel stated that there had been no changes since the last meeting, there was an £81k saving in the contingency item. A more detailed report on contingencies would be presented at the next meeting.

**RESOLVED** That the verbal report be noted.

#### **46 2019-20 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK BUDGET CONSULTATION**

Lynne Samuel stated that DfE requested that the Council submit a balanced Budget against the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) provided, regardless of the reality of budget pressures experienced. The report included an early forecast for the upcoming financial year providing information on the potential budget pressures.

Carol Cammiss stated that a Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) consultation was currently underway, for which the deadline had been extended to 21 March to allow all views to be taken into account. Various proposals to increase the capacity for specialist spaces were being pursued, such as the expansion of Addington School. It was recognised that it was necessary to increase the number of specialist places within the Borough. A draft strategy had been drawn up, this was supported by elected Members, and therefore there should not be any delays in approval and implementation. Additionally, Members were lobbying the government for more financial help towards the HNB.

Paul Miller stated that it was positive that there was now more transparency and sharing of information in relation to the HNB. However, he pointed out that the HNB deficit was still significantly high.

Carol Cammiss stated that joined-up work was necessary to tackle the challenge of the HNB deficit. She informed that Wokingham's position was not unique, many other local authorities were facing pressures in the HNB. It was recognised that more specialist

schools were needed in the Borough in order to cope with the expected increase in demand. She emphasized that there was no intention to move children from their out of Borough placements where they were already settled, this was about planning for the future and becoming more efficient.

Keith McConaghy asked if the £1.6m deficit included the increased cost of expanding Brambles. Lynne Samuel stated that the report reflected the current financial position.

Paul Miller stated that table 2 in the report was simple and easy to understand, and he would like Schools Forum to continue to receive the information in that format.

Paul Doherty informed that the bid to government to open a new specialist school in Wokingham had not been successful. However, a joint bid to open a specialist school with Reading had been successful and that this school may need to use the land/premises that the unsuccessful Wokingham specialist school had previously planned to use. This joint venture now required a high level of negotiation, agreement between the two local authorities and political support to move forward.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted.

#### **47 2019-20 COMBINED SCHOOLS BUDGET REPORT**

Lynne Samuel presented the 2019/20 Combined Schools Budget report. The total DSG Budget, including the four blocks was £134.264m. The report included a breakdown of each of the four blocks on page 30 of the agenda.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted.

#### **48 TRADED SERVICES UPDATE**

Paul Miller informed that Janet Perry had identified that the traded services charge (in like for like services) for academies and maintained schools seemed to differ, and Schools Forum had asked for clarification on this issue.

Paul Doherty stated the traded services could be summarised in three groups:

- Services that were not charged to academies nor to maintained schools
- Services that were charged equality for academies and maintained schools
- Services that were offered to maintained schools because they were statutory, and charged to academies (this was where more clarity was needed)

Paul Doherty stated that it was not clear what the statutory services were for maintained schools. Officers were in the process of reviewing all the traded services and checking with the DfE to gain more clarity. The service was half way through completing this analysis.

In response to a question Paul Doherty stated that there had been a delay in completing this piece of work due to the Ofsted inspection. However, this would be completed without delay and with due diligence. Given the delay, Members suggested extending the deadline for schools to make a decision in relation to the traded services.

Paul Doherty informed that the local authority had the discretion to provide non-statutory services to all schools if this was deemed important. For example, the asbestos training programme was offered to all schools. Paul Doherty was of the opinion that schools should not have to pay for data, this charge would be removed.

Paul Doherty stated that traded services were not in the remit of Schools Forum, he suggested that if there was enough interest a group could be created to look at traded services in more detail.

Paul Miller stated that traded services had a direct financial impact on schools, and therefore believed that traded services principles and polices should continue to be presented to Schools Forum.

Carol Cammiss agreed to extend the deadline and advise schools.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The deadline for schools to sign the traded services contract would be extended; and
- 2) Schools Forum wished to continue understanding the principles behind the traded services offered by the local authority.

#### **49 EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOLS FORUM**

Paul Miller stated that a survey had been sent out to Schools Forum Members asking about the effectiveness of Schools Forum. He stated that 13 responses were received, most questions scored high points meaning that those areas were apparently working well. Based on the responses, the areas for improvement were:

- Induction pack
- Clarity around the election process
- Timing and format of information
- Location of meetings
- How Members seek the opinion of, and feedback to the groups that they are elected to represent

Paul Miller reminded Members that back in 2016 Schools Forum decided to continue with its current membership structure, at that time it was believed that Schools Forum would cease to exist or change its format as a result of the New Funding Formula. However, this expected change had not happened and since the last time this was discussed 12 schools had converted to academy status. It seemed appropriate to now bring back a review of the Schools Forum membership structure. There was also a desire to become more effective and review the governance arrangements. There was a general concern that Schools Forum was limited in its democratic involvement in the decision making. Schools Forum felt that decisions were being made by Officers and brought to Forum for notification only, however Schools Forum could make valuable contributions to the decision making process.

It was agreed that a report would be brought back to the next meeting of the Forum for a full discussion about membership and governance.

**RESOLVED** That a report will be brought to the next meeting of the Forum to review Schools Forum membership and governance.

#### **50 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Derren Gray informed that he had started the consultation about decoupling the primary from the secondary school. Paul Doherty stated that he would need to write the Secretary of State and the Regional Schools Commissioner to seek their approval.

In response to a question Lynne Samuel stated that the Early Years rates had now been confirmed, and they were the same as last year's rates.

Paul Doherty wished to express his gratitude to Officers on their contribution towards the ongoing Ofsted inspection.

## **51 FORWARD PROGRAMME**

The Forum considered and noted the Forward Programme of work and dates of future meetings as set out on Agenda page 32.

The following items were added to the next meeting on 10 July 2019:

- Secondary School Place Planning
- Schools Forum Governance and Membership Review

Members were reminded that the next meeting would be held at the Ambleside Centre.