

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 2019 FROM 10.00 AM TO 11.40 AM**

Schools Representatives

Sylvia Allen	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School
Helen Ball	Primary Head - Polehampton Infant
Jay Blundell	Pupil Referral Unit Head - Foundry College
Ben Godber	Academy Head - Bohunt School
Derren Gray	Academy Head - Piggott School
Anne Kennedy	Academy Head - The Holt School
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Ginny Rhodes	Academy Head - St Crispins School
John Bayes	Governor - Foundry College - Vice-Chair
Paul Miller	Governor - St Crispins - Chairman

Non School Representatives

Graham Howe	Wokingham Borough Council
Sal Thirlway	Assistant Director for Education
Karen Edwards	Early Years Representative
Ian Morgan	Early Years Representative

Also Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services
Lynne Samuel, Senior Financial Specialist People Services
Katherine Vernon, Finance Specialist Schools
Alan Voyzey, Interim Senior Finance Specialist Schools

1 TO AGREE TO POSTPONE THE ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

The Chairman, Paul Miller proposed to postpone the election of Chairman and Vice-chairman to the next meeting when the new membership would be established. This was agreed by the Forum.

RESOLVED That the election of Chairman and Vice-chairman be postponed to the next meeting.

2 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Ali Brown, Emma Clarke, Corrina Gillard, Stephanie Holding, Sian Lehrter, Nick McSeeney, Biran Prebble, Carol Simpson and Elaine Stewart.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10 July 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the correction on page 11, where it said £270 it should say £270K.

4 MATTERS ARISING

Reports presentation

Paul Miller stated that the minutes made reference to various requests for the way in which information within reports is presented to be amended at the last meeting. He recognised that WBC Finance was going through a transition period due to staff changes; however, he urged that these requests be carried out going forward.

Page 9 – reference to using the underspend in the contingencies to cover the overspend in the staff cover

Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist People Services stated that she was still working through the de-delegated allocation. It was agreed that this would be discussed at the December meeting.

Page 9 – reference to the £32K reduction in funding for Foundry College

Jay Blundell asked Officers to look into this issue and report to Forum.

Page 9 – resolution 2: The 2018/19 misallocations to Central Block would be reversed as soon as possible (in this year's figures)

Lynne Samuel agreed to report back on this at the December meeting.

Page 10 – resolution 1: The contingency breakdown report will be split into two reports: one for maintained schools and one for Early Years, as standing items

Lynne Samuel agreed to include the split in future reports.

Page 12 – sharing the Primary and Secondary Schools Roll Projections report with headteachers

Carol Cammiss stated the report would be circulated with the newsletter.

Page 14- reference to informing schools of the names of new SEN staff

Carol Cammiss stated that the schools had been sent this information, she agreed to include it in the headteachers' newsletter.

5 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

6 REVENUE MONITORING

Lynne Samuel presented the Revenue Monitoring report which was set out in agenda pages 19-24.

Lynne Samuel stated that the anticipated year end position had improved significantly by £1,236k, with a deficit of £2.97m forecast, mainly due to reductions in the overspend predicted in the High Needs Block (HNB).

Lynne Samuel stated that the Budget also included the additional income allocated by the Department of Education (DfE) for schools to cope with the increase in teacher's pension expected in September 2019 and another year's allocation of the teacher's pay grant from April to March 2020.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

7 CONTINGENCIES BREAKDOWN

Lynne Samuel stated that the Contingencies Breakdown had not changed since the last meeting of the Forum.

The Chairman asked that, especially for the benefit of those not in attendance, the Contingencies Breakdown report be included even when there are no changes.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The verbal report be noted; and
- 2) The Contingencies Breakdown report will be included in future agendas even when there is no movement.

8 FINAL 2018/19 EARLY YEARS SETTLEMENT AND UPDATE ON 2019/20 BUDGET

Lynne Samuel presented the Early Years Budget Update for 2018/19 and 2019/20 report which was set out in agenda pages 25-30.

Lynne Samuel stated that in July each year the confirmation of the previous year's financial settlement is received. The DfE used information from the January 2019 census to make appropriate budget adjustments. The 2019/20 settlement was still subject to further change and would not be finalised until July 2020.

Lynne Samuel stated that the Local Authority set up a Providers Reserve within the Early Years Block to fund growth within the sector.

Lynne Samuel stated that the Local Authority set an hourly rate for 2018/19 based on the estimated number of known children in that year, with an element of expected growth, and incorporating a provision for unknown growth which was set at £187k.

Lynne Samuel stated that the amount not used in 2018/19 from the original allocation by the DfE was £209k, however the DfE updated the 2018/19 settlement in July 2019 and this has increased the 2018/19 budget by £221k.

Lynne Samuel stated that the allocation and increased funding levels together resulted in a final allocation of £429k which was passed on to providers.

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

- Ian Morgan asked for confirmation that the Local Authority had taken a smaller contingency in 2019/20 than in 2018/19;
- Lynne Samuel stated that when making a decision on the contingency, the Local Authority had to make sure providers would not run into difficulties, but also not to over-estimate. She would double check the contingency for 2019/20;
- Paul Miller asked what happened to the money due to providers that were no longer in operation, he wondered if this money went back to the pot and was redistributed;
- Lynne Samuel agreed to check and report back to Forum. However, she believed that there were no such cases in Wokingham, Karen Edwards seemed to think that there might have been. They both agreed to liaise about this outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) Finance Officers would report back to Forum about the final financial allocation to providers who were no longer operating.

9 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK UPDATE

Lynne Samuel presented the HNB update report which was set out in agenda pages 31-35.

Lynne Samuel stated that the anticipated year end position had improved significantly from that reported to Forum in July, there was now a £2.75m deficit forecast, representing a positive movement of £1.23m. The improved position was the result of both increased funding from the DfE and lower expenditure forecasts associated with ongoing scrutiny and deficit recovery plan actions.

Lynne Samuel stated that the Local Authority was waiting for feedback from DfE on the recovery plan that had been submitted. Work was ongoing to increase the capacity for places within the Borough. The situation was still very challenging and there was no scope to deal with the deficit if no additional funding from the DfE was received in future years, and there was no certainty that there would be additional funding in the future. Therefore it was important to continue to work to try and find a more permanent solution.

Lynne Samuel stated that Local Authorities were informed of the increased funding allocation for next year's Budget on the previous Friday (11 October), and not in time to be included in the report.

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

- Members asked that a further update, including any developments in the recovery plan be brought to the December meeting of the Forum;
- Jay Blundell stated that Foundry College would like to be part of the solution, however they had had a reduction of £32k in their budget, also there had been no uplifts for the last 8-9 years. She also pointed out that there were 13 pupils with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) currently enrolled at Foundry College; she believed that Foundry College was not the right setting for these children and the college did not receive additional funding for them. Carol Cammiss asked to speak with Jay Blundell about this situation outside of the meeting;
- Paul Miller asked that future HNB reports include a separate budget line for each of Foundry College and Addington School.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The HNB update be noted;
- 2) The HNB update reports be presented to Forum, including separate budget lines for Foundry College and Addington School.

10 UPDATE ON 2020/21 SCHOOLS FORMULA CHANGES

Lynne Samuel presented the Update on 2020/21 Schools Formula Changes report which was set out in agenda pages 37-39.

Lynne Samuel stated that The Operational Guide for 2020/21 had now been published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), and was the first of several publications which set out the procedures to be followed in determining the budgets funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). She stated that the DfE fact sheet could cause some confusion for schools as it only provided illustrative allocations whereas the final allocations for 2020/21 would be based on updated data and pupil numbers and determined by applying the authority's local allocation formula. The Task and Finish Group would be reviewing the criteria for inclusion in the local formula. Lynne Samuel went through the changes as described on page 38 of the report.

Derren Gray, who chairs the Task and Finish Group, stated that the Group had been looking at three different allocation models. The recent announcement by the DfE gave more money than had previously been thought. He stated that this reflected increased inflationary factors and additional funding recently announced by the government. There was a current national consultation on making the Minimum Per Pupil Funding levels a mandatory requirement from 2020/21.

Paul Miller stated that there were three Schools Forum representatives and four colleagues from schools in the Borough on the Task and Finish Group, who were engaged in working out the best model for Wokingham. It was helpful to have the insight of the Task and Finish Group to enable more clarity in the decision making process.

Paul Miller suggested that a similar Task Finish Group could be set up for the Early Years sector. The Early Years representatives agreed that this was a good idea and officers agreed to contact them to organise it.

Lynne Samuel stated that Forum should consider the possibility of transferring 0.5% of the Schools Block to the HNB. She acknowledged that this was previously not accepted by Forum and that in previous years the Local Authority had applied for disapplications which were declined by the DfE. However, due to the ongoing pressure on the HNB, this option should be explored. The timeline to apply for this was very tight as the disapplication would have to be submitted before the next meeting of the Forum.

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

- Derren Gray stated that the Task and Finish Group had modelled the 2020/21 Budget assuming this proposal was not approved, in view of the increased allocation in the Schools Block and the guaranteed minimum 8% increase in the HNB;
- In response to a question Derren Gray stated that there were no representatives from special schools in the Task and Finish Group;
- Members felt that it was inappropriate to make a decision on the possibility of moving 0.5% from the Schools Block to the HNB at this meeting due to the fact that this had not been on the agenda and there was no formal representation or paperwork to consider;
- Members were informed that the deadline for applying for disapplication was on 11 November;
- Paul Miller suggested the possibility of consulting with Schools Forum via email;
- Lynne Samuel stated that she was aware that there was much work to be undertaken to resolve the deficit in the HNB, however there was an opportunity to collectively do something about it;
- Some members stated that they were opposed to this proposal as it would take away money from schools;

- Some members questioned why this proposal had not been on the agenda. Lynne Samuel apologised that this was giving the wrong impression to Forum. She stated that there was a desire to be transparent with Forum, and that this was an option that needed to be considered under the current circumstances;
- Members asked if the Local Authority intended to apply for disapplication if this proposal was refused. Carol Cammiss stated that a decision had not yet been made;
- Sara Attra stated that the special schools provisions in the Borough were running in a deficit position, there had been no uplift for five years. She also stated that there should be a representative from special schools in the Task and Finish Group;
- Members felt that this information could have been shared earlier. Carol Cammiss stated that the Local Authority was still waiting for the DfE feedback, and she agreed that there was work to be done around our own special schools. She was considering other alternatives and was likely to ask for an extension to the disapplication date.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

11 SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP REVIEW

Paul Miller presented the Schools Forum Membership Review which was set out in agenda pages 41-45.

Paul Miller stated that this report was a continuation of the review that had started at the last meeting. The membership review sought to improve the efficiency of Schools Forum and ensure that the representation reflected the make up of schools in the Borough. He stated that Ginny Rhodes and Brian Prebble had facilitated the selection process with their respective phases.

Ginny Rhodes stated that she had discussed with secondary headteachers and it had been agreed by the Secondary Federation that seats on the Forum would be reviewed annually and confirmed by majority vote by the Federation members on the first Federetaion meeting of the year. The aim was to ensure the right balance of headteachers, governors and schools business managers.

Paul Miller stated that Brian Prebble had led on the selection of maintained school primary representatives, as described on Appendix A. There was a total number of 9 seats for primary representatives, there were still 3 primary academy representatives to be confirmed.

Paul Miller stated that it had been recognised that Early Years should hold 2 seats.

Paul Miller stated that it was proposed not to specify a duration of term of office in an effort to maintain expertise within Schools Forum. However, he stated that it was important to ensure that the skills and expertise fo the membership continued to be relevant.

RESOLVED That Schools Forum adopt the new structure with effect from the December meeting.

12 FORWARD PROGRAMME

Ginny Rhodes expressed concern that School Admissions Forum had been cancelled many times over the last two years.

Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Children's Service, Learning Partnerships and Achievement introduced himself to the Forum. He stated that this issue had come to his

attention and he was considering options about how to move forward with School Admissions Forum. He suggested bringing a proposal to the next meeting of the Forum.

Ginny Rhodes stated that it had been incredibly helpful to receive the numbers of school admission preferences last year and asked to be supplied with this information again.

Karen Edwards stated that this would also be helpful for Early Years to help with the children's transition into primary school. Carol Cammiss agreed to supply this information.

The Forum considered and noted the Forward Programme of work and dates of future meetings as set out on Agenda page 47.

The next meeting of the Forum will be 11 December and the following items were added:

- Election of Chairman
- Election of Vice-chairman
- School Admissions Forum review

13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor Howe addressed the Forum and introduced himself as the Member for Remenham, Wargrave and Ruscombe. He stated that he had more experience with primary schools than secondary schools due to his role as a school governor over many years. He was looking to improve his knowledge of secondary schools by meeting headteachers.

Councillor Howe mentioned a Solar in Schools project which hoped to help to reduce energy costs, and as a result improve the money available for discretionary educational spending.

Paul Miller stated that there would be a training session before the next meeting, from 9-10am. This was primarily for new members of the Forum, but was open to any members that wished to attend.

The Chairman, Paul Miller, expressed his gratitude to members of the Forum that were standing down after this meeting. In particular Paul Miller thanked John Bayes for his contribution to Schools Forum over many years, recognising his involvement as a chairman and vice-chairman to the Forum.

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