

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 15 JULY 2020 FROM 10.00 AM TO 11.22 AM**

Schools Representatives

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| Carol Simpson | School Business Manager - Colleton Primary |
| Emma Clarke | Primary Head - Farley Hill Primary |
| Corrina Gillard | Primary Head - Emmbrook Infant |
| Helen Ball | Primary Head - Polehampton Infant |
| Brian Prebble | Primary Head - Rivermead Primary |
| Nick McSweeney | Headteacher - The Emmbrook School Secondary |
| Ali Brown | Primary Head - Nine Mile Ride Primary |
| Julia Mead | School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary |
| Ben Godber | Academy Head - Bohunt School |
| Derren Gray | Academy Head - Piggott School |
| Ginny Rhodes | Academy Head - St Crispins School |
| Paul Miller | Governor - St Crispins - Chairman |
| Sian Lehrter | School Business Director - The Holt School |
| Sara Attra | Special School Head - Addington School |
| Shirley Austin | Academy Head - Forest School |
| Jay Blundell | Pupil Referral Unit Head - Foundry College |

Non School Representatives

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| Graham Howe | Wokingham Borough Council |
| Sal Thirlway | Assistant Director Learning Achievement and Partnerships |

Also Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist
Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager
Alan Voyzey, Interim Schools Finance Specialist
Piers Brunning, Strategy and Commissioning Places Specialist
Nicki Raine, Education and Schools Funding Agency

47 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Paul Gibson and Liz Woodards.

48 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4 March 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date, subject to the correction that Jay Blundell be included in the list of attendees.

Matters arising

Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist agreed to provide an update in relation to the number of children placed in out of Borough independent non maintained schools and the level of funding (as mentioned on page 13).

49 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

50 2019-20 REVENUE OUTTURN REPORT

Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager presented the 2019/20 Revenue Outturn report. She stated that the 2019/20 in-year Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) outturn position was a net overspend of £1,785k, representing 1.25% of the 2019/20 DSG budget. Together with the brought forward deficit balance of £1,572k, the overall DSG deficit at the end of 2019/20 was £3,356k, representing 2.35% of the £142,947k 2019/20 DSG. She stated that in previous years the local authority had been required to submit a recovery plan to the DfE, but the rules had changed this year and this was no longer required.

The Chairman pointed out that the Growth Fund did not show any variance and asked if this was correct. Katherine Vernon confirmed that there had been an underspend of £200k which had been carried forward. The Chairman stated that this should be reflected in the report.

Katherine Vernon stated that further discussions with Piers Brunning, Strategy and Commissioning Places Specialist were ongoing about how the £200k money would be reflected in the financial plans.

Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist agreed to correct the presentation of the £200k in the 2019/20 report.

Ian Morgan asked about the £376k surplus in the Early Years Block Expenditure. Katherine Vernon stated that that was a change in the income that happened in the year, she confirmed that the whole Early Years Block had been spent.

Ian Morgan asked for more information about the Early Years contingency. Katherine Vernon stated that once the final figures were released, there would be a reconciliation and the figures would be presented to the Forum.

Lynne Samuel stated that the final settlement was expected at the end of July, and the finance team would be working during the summer to finalise the report, this would be presented to the Schools Forum at its October meeting.

The Chairman drew attention to the overspend on the High Needs Block (HNB) and the significant figure shown in the fees for pupils at independent special schools.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

51 2020-21 REVENUE MONITORING

Katherine Vernon presented the 2020/21 Revenue Monitoring report. She stated that the HNB continued to represent a pressure. The cumulative forecast deficit was £4,889k.

Katherine Vernon stated that due to Covid-19 situation, the review work that was planned had been interrupted.

Katherine Vernon stated that although the expansion of Addington presented a pressure, this was lagged funding which would be received next year.

Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning Achievement and Partnerships stated that some of the expenditure was part of a broad review which was linked to work being undertaken to increase the provision of specialist places within the Borough and ultimately reduce the deficit in the HNB. He stated that more children were being placed in the Borough as a result of the Council's strategy.

Ginny Rhodes asked if all Year 6 SEND children had been allocated a place at Year 7 in September and if this would have an impact on the budget. Sal Thirlway stated that not all Year 6 children had secured a place in Year 7 and there could be some impact in September 2021, but they were looking to mitigate that impact and to keep as many children in the Borough as possible.

In response to a comment, Sal Thirlway stated that as well as investing in creating more placements in the Borough, there was also a whole range of activities in reviewing and improving operational processes.

The Chairman complimented Officers on the work which had already been undertaken to tackle the HNB overspend, including speaking to the Department for Education (DFE) and taking senior strategic decisions. He asked that a report be brought to Schools Forum detailing the long term strategy, so that Forum could have a clear picture of the long term financial plan.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) The HNB Strategy would be presented to Schools Forum.

52 CONTINGENCY REPORT

Katherine Vernon stated that there had been no applications nor allocations made in the current financial year in respect of the de-delegated allocation that was approved by Schools Forum at its meeting on 18 December 2019.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

53 GROWTH FUND UPDATE 2020/21

Piers Brunning presented the Growth Fund update 2020/21 report.

Piers Brunning stated that the plan would be delivered with the allocated budget of £800k. The plan included the expansion of three maintained primary schools, three primary academies and one secondary academy school and the pre-opening grant payments for three new primary schools.

Piers Brunning stated that there were plans to open new schools. The Alder Grove CoE Primary Free School (formerly Shinfield West Primary School) would open in September 2020; and noted that this year all Shinfield schools were fully allocated. Two further new primary schools were planned to open in 2021, these were in north Wokingham (Matthews Green) and in the Arborfield Strategic Development Locations.

Piers Brunning stated that there were some localised pressure points, notably in Woodley this year due to a high birth rate. However, this pressure was not expected for next year. The Council was considering the pressure on places for KS2 children.

The Chairman thanked Piers Brunning and stated that Schools Forum was looking forward to receiving a more detailed report, containing the future plans at the next meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) A Growth Fund report, including the long term growth strategy would be submitted to the next meeting.

54 PROPOSAL FOR BUDGET CONSULTATION – 2021/22

Katherine Vernon stated that the Budget Task and Finish Group had over the last couple of years improved the budget setting process, therefore with schools Forum's agreement it was recommended that this Task and Finish group would continue. The group had already met and this year the intention was to start consulting with schools earlier in the process. There would be a consultation with schools on the general principals in September, and a further consultation when more information was available.

Derren Gray confirmed the plan of action and invited more members to join the task and finish group. A number of members offered to join (Corrina Gillard, Ben Godber, Julia Mead and Emma Clarke) and were asked to contact Derren the finance officers directly.

The Chairman asked that an update on the initial feedback from the September 'principals' consultation be given at the meeting in October.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The proposals for budget consultation and the revised timetable be noted; and
- 2) An update on the work of the Budget Task and Finish Group be provided at the next meeting of Schools Forum.

55 INSURANCE UPDATE

Lynne Samuel stated that the finance team had had to prioritise its workload due to the current Covid-19 situation, and as a result some of the work that she had committed to undertake had not taken place. In terms of insurance it was interesting to see what had been covered or not been covered in the last few months. She would undertake this work during the summer and would bring an update on the de-delegated budget for the December meeting.

In response to a question Lynne Samuel stated that she would be working with the Schools Forum members who had previously volunteered to review the insurance issues.

Carol Simpson suggested that information be gathered from schools to find out what schools had been able to claim or not through their insurances during this period. Lynne Samuel agreed to submit this question to schools and update Schools Forum at the next meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The verbal update be noted; and

2) Schools Forum will receive an update on Insurance at its next meeting.

56 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK

Sal Thirlway stated that with the pressures of Covid-19 the service had had to prioritise its workload during the last three months.

During his presentation the following points were made:

- The HNB continued to have a deficit and this had increased since the last report to Schools Forum;
- The local authority was investing to create more places within the Borough in order to reduce costs;
- There was now more understanding of what was needed in order to address the HNB deficit;
- A new funding model had been agreed and it included the expansion of Addington School and the creation of a new school in partnership with Reading;
- The new special school would be located in Wokingham;
- A new trust provider had been found for the Northern House, this was the Chiltern Trust;
- There was increased help for the inclusion support services at schools;
- There was a review of specialist resource centres in the Borough;
- There was a review of home to school transport arrangements for SEND learners;
- There was a range of activities that were being undertaken to reduce the HNB deficit.

Sal Thirlway stated that he would present a HNB report at the next meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The verbal report be noted; and
- 2) A High Needs Block update would be submitted to the next meeting.

57 FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Forum considered and noted the Forward Programme of work and dates of future meetings as set out on Agenda page 49.

The following items were added to the next meeting:

- School Admissions Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference
- Budget Task and Finish Group update
- Insurance update
- Covid-19 impact on schools

RESOLVED That the report be noted and the added items be included in the agenda for the next meeting.

58 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman stated that Forum had agreed to review its membership annually to ensure that it reflected the schools make up in the Borough. He proposed to conduct this review at the next meeting. He also proposed to send out a questionnaire to Forum members to gain feedback on the work of the Forum.

The Chairman stated that members had been very positive about the training session which took place earlier in the year, and proposed to offer another training session later in the year.

Councillor Howe wished to place on record his gratitude to Headteachers and their teams during this challenging situation, they had been doing a great job in keeping the Borough's children educated.

Shirley Austin pointed out that the Borough had an above national average attendance at local schools.

Sal Thirlway also thanked Headteachers for their work during this time and especially in relation to the most vulnerable children.

The Chairman thanked Alan Voyzey, Interim Schools Finance Specialist for his work with Schools Forum in Wokingham, this was Alan's last meeting.