

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 13 OCTOBER 2021 FROM 10.00 AM TO 12.20 PM**

Schools Representatives

Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Emma Clarke	Primary Head - Farley Hill Primary
Corrina Gillard	Primary Head - Emmbrook Infant
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary - Vice Chairman
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	Trustee – The Circle Trust - Chairman
Shirley Austin	Academy Head - Forest School
Sian Lehrter	School Business Director - The Holt School
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School
Liz Woodards	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary
Iain Thomas	Pupil Referral Unit Deputy Headteacher - Foundry College

Non School Representatives

Sal Thirlway	Assistant Director Learning Achievement and Partnerships
Rebecca Margetts	Wokingham Borough Council

Also Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Piers Brunning, Senior Specialist Strategy and Commissioning (People and Place)
Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist
Richard Tipping, Category Manager, SEND Sufficiency
Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Paul Miller was elected Chairman for the 2021/22 academic year.

2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Brian Prebble was elected Vice-Chairman for the 2021/22 academic year.

3 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted by Amanda Woodfin, she was substituted by Chris Coniam.

4 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 July 2021 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the correction below, and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning and Achievement asked that the word 'inspection' on page 16 be changed to 're-visit', in relation to Ofsted.

4.1 Matters arising update

All the matters arising from the last meeting were covered in the discussions during the meeting.

5 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

6 2021/22 REVENUE MONITORING

Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager presented the report and stated that a forecast deficit of £9.6m was now being projected, mainly in relation to the HNB, due to the increased numbers of EHCPs and new starters in the new academic year.

There had been no applications to the De-delegated Contingency fund and information in regard to the Early Year's Provider Reserve Fund would be known in November and reported to Schools Forum in December.

The Chairman asked that future reports include a column for each of the funds, with the balance that is being carried forward. The De-delegated and Early Years funds would be in-year balances and for the Schools Block Growth Fund, this would be the brought forward reserves, the in-year allocation and any in-year spend to date.

Piers Brunning, Senior Specialist Strategy and Commissioning (People and Place) made the following points in relation to the Growth Fund:

- The projected spend on Growth Fund would be significantly higher than anticipated at the time of planning the Budget;
- There were mid-phase pressures, particularly in relation to primary places. This was mainly because of the influx of British families moving into the Borough from overseas, particularly from Hong Kong;
- There were difficulties in relation to mid-phase data which made planning more complicated;
- There had been a challenge within the secondary sector and the impact of parental preferences. Very few families had expressed a first preference for the Forest School, and subsequently places had to be offered from the waiting lists (in accordance with admissions law), this had had an impact in the allocation of places for boys;
- The service was considering the secondary phase issue in planning for next year, and it was hoped that the recent positive Ofsted rating for the Forest would mean that more parents would list the school in their preferences;
- The secondary phase also faced the issue of mid-phase applications and the Local Authority's duty to provide a school place;
- The Chairman asked why there was an overspend of £108K in the primary places, he wished to know the background;
- Piers Brunning stated that this was to fund additional classes that had not been included in the initial planning;
- The Chairman asked how many pupils, roughly, the increase in reserves of £318K represented;
- The Chairman explained that it was important to understand the detail behind the increase from £800K to £1,400m in the Growth Fund;
- Piers Brunning stated that it was a combination of the potential need to create two extra classes in primary schools and two extra classes in secondary schools. It was

not certain if this provision would be needed from for the remainder of the year or from January;

- The Chairman asked for clarification if this was a contingency fund;
- Piers Brunning stated that half of this fund was for places in Years 8 and 9 and the other half was to fund places in Years 5 and 6. The £150K represented 2 classes for 70 children;
- The Chairman asked that the report include a paragraph to state that the £300K was in relation to 2 secondary school classes and 2 primary school classes;
- In relation to the need for 90 additional places for September 2022, Ginny Rhodes asked for information on the funding for these places;
- Piers Brunning pointed out that there was a consultation on secondary places taking place currently, to identify local needs. Work was also being undertaken to agree additional capacity with schools;
- Piers Brunning stated that the Capital Programme was agreed by Council;
- Piers Brunning suggested that once an action plan was drawn up, that this would be shared in a bulletin with schools. He emphasized the importance of being transparent and the fact that individual agreements with schools had implications on other schools;
- Ginny Rhodes expressed concern over the timeline, and added that headteachers needed time to plan for additional places;
- Sal Thirlway reiterated the point that there was a desire to be transparent and work together with schools, including on the broader strategy;
- Councillor Margetts expressed concern that the demand for places was likely to increase in the future, and asked for reassurance that this was being planned for;
- Piers Brunning stated that the current projections predicted a raise and then a fall in demand. The caveat was that projections were inevitably wrong, as this depended on various factors, including national decisions in relation to house building for example;
- In response to a question Piers Brunning stated that the strategy to deal with the bulge involved creating some permanent places and some temporary places in schools. The longer term strategy involved planning to be able to build a new secondary school should the need arise;
- In response to a comment, Sal Thirlway stated that the current consultation was seeking the views of colleagues, parents, carers and educational experts to shape the strategy;
- Ben Godber stated that he appreciated the fact that the influx of people arriving from Asia had had an impact on the demand for places, however he believed that the need for additional places had been expected. He questioned the accuracy of the planning data as it had been badly underestimated. He pointed out that schools had been asked to take on additional places with very little time for planning;
- Piers Brunning explained that the strategy that the service was working to was currently out of date, the pandemic had delayed the process of implementation of a new strategy;
- In response to comments Piers Brunning stated that the Secondary Strategy was going to be built in partnership with the school community;

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Revenue Monitoring reports will continue to include the contingencies, and will include information about Growth Fund carry forward, as discussed during the meeting;
- 2) The Growth Fund report will include detail around the additional £300K;

- 3) A bulletin containing regular updates on place planning would be shared with schools;
- 4) Schools Forum would be regularly updated on the progress of the Secondary Strategy; and
- 5) The report be noted.

7 UPDATE ON HNB AND SEND INNOVATION & IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist presented the report and informed that there had been a negative movement of £650K in the HNB.

During her presentation the following points were highlighted:

- There had been negative movements in the forecasts of:
 - £133K in mainstream schools, representing an increase of 33 pupils (7%);
 - £263K in other Local Authority Special Schools, representing 17 pupils (30%)
 - £219K in Independent and Non-maintained Special Schools, representing 16 pupils (13%);
- The model was continuously being monitored, with the aim to improve information;
- The forecast that was made in July had taken into account assumptions on what was likely to happen in September in the new academic year and during the financial year. However, the increases in total number of places were more than expected;
- There had been an increase in the number of EHCPs that attracted top up funding from the HNB in the Early Years settings, from 4 at the beginning of the year to 12, and this was significant in terms of trend;
- The number of Out of Borough Special School places had increased from 57 in June to 73;
- There had been an assumption that there would be 1,066 EHCPs in September, however the actual position was 1,132 EHCPs;
- There would be more communication and engagement with stakeholders in relation to Therapy Services. Wokingham, Reading and West Berkshire councils were working together to develop joint commissioning of Therapy Services to achieve best value for money. Forum would be kept updated on the progress of this initiative;
- A longer term financial modelling for the HNB was being considered, more detail on this would be presented to Forum in December;
- A number of HNB training and awareness sessions were going to take place before the next Schools Forum meeting in December.

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

- The Chairman stated that the quality of reporting was much improved and it was much clearer. He wished to thank the team for their work in achieving this;
- The Chairman asked to add an item on HNB Funding Model in the December agenda;
- Carol Simpson asked why there were more empty spaces than filled spaces in resource spaces;
- Richard Tipping, Category Manager SEND Sufficiency stated that this issue was being looked at as part of the resource spaces review. The outcomes of the review and recommendations would be in the final report;
- Richard Tipping believed that there had been some confusion as to what sort of placements the resource spaces should be delivering, more clarity was needed, as well as a service level agreement;

- In response to a question, Richard Tipping confirmed that there had been funding of empty places, due to the way the current funding worked;
- The Chairman asked if there was an opportunity to re-use the places that were over-funded in the next year. Richard Tipping stated that this had already been corrected from September with a new funding model;
- Sara Attra asked if all the bands were being looked at. Richard Tipping stated that over the next year each individual child would have their banding reviewed;
- The Chairman asked for an update on the additional funding for Foundry College. Lynne Samuel stated that the review had started with Foundry College and there had not been enough time to conclude the review before the Budget was set. It was then decided to set aside £400K for Foundry College to protect them from potentially going into deficit during the year, as a buffer. Foundry College's Budget was still under review and recommendations for the next year would be brought to Schools Forum in December, as well as the final position in regard to the £400K which was allocated for this year;
- Daniel Robinson, SEN Consultant stated that the Innovation Improvement Programme (IIP) now had permanent staff working for it. The IIP team were looking for the innovation aspect of the improvement plan in order to plan for the future;
- He apologised that there had been a delay in the Foundry College review due to Covid work pressures. He was due to meet with Foundry College in the following week to continue the review.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) HNB Funding Model be added to the December agenda;
- 2) Schools Forum would receive an update on the additional funding allocated to Foundry College at the December meeting; and
- 3) The report be noted.

8 DSG BUDGET PLANNING 2022/23

Katherine Vernon presented the report and stated that the results of the consultation would be known in November. Schools Forum were being asked to support the Budget plans and the results of the consultation.

Wokingham Borough Council were advised at the end of July of the primary and secondary units of funding, and there was a 2% increase for the Schools Block. The Growth Fund factor would not be known until December. The figures used by the DfE were based on the census data from last year, the final funding allocations in December would take into account the pupil numbers from the October 2021 census.

The Early Years allocation would be received in December.

The Task and Finish Group had met and worked on a model including the 2% increase. The Group also looked at the Lump Sum for primary and secondary schools (currently £135K) to be modelled at £135K, £121.3K (NFF) and £128.5K, aiming to spread as much money as possible to all schools.

The consultation with schools would start in November after the October half term. This consultation would be on the principles of funding, a further consultation would take place once the numbers from the October census were known. Schools would be asked again

about the disapplication (proposed 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the HNB). The consultation also included a de-delegation review for maintained schools.

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

- The Chairman explained that although the DfE allocated £1.6m to the Growth Fund, it was within Schools Forum remit to decide how much of this fund was given to Growth Fund;
- Derren Gray, Chairman of the Task and Finish Group confirmed that he was comfortable with the work and progress of the funding formula. He stated that this was the first time that there were no 'winners and losers' under the current model every school was a winner;
- In relation to Lump Sum, Derren Gray stated that there was variation between schools in the lower levels. The Group was looking into this;
- The Task and Finish Group would meet again once the results of the consultation were available;
- The Chairman questioned the need/justification to increase the Growth Fund from £800K to £1.3m. He pointed out that this extra money was to fund predicted future need for places, however the projections were not accurate and this money could be spent in schools instead;
- Derren Gray agreed to look into the Growth Fund at the Task and Finish Group and to work with Piers Brunning on projections for 2022/23 and future years;
- Sal Thirlway confirmed that it was for Schools Forum to set the Growth Fund, he pointed out that there had been unforeseen circumstances this year which had led to the need for additional funding for Growth Fund;
- The Chairman was concerned over the figures presented in relation to this year's Growth Fund. He stated that overallocation to the Growth Fund meant that there was less funding for the pupils in all schools;
- Sal Thirlway stated that there was a desire to be prudent with allocations to avoid pressures on the Schools Block;
- Ben Godber clarified, and wished it to be recorded, that Bohunt had not received any Growth Fund for over two years, since the school had been full;
- Brian Prebble stated that the School Admissions Group had seen figures and it was known that there was pressure for school places in certain school years. He believed that Piers Brunning would be able to work out a more precise amount for Growth Fund;
- Lynne Samuel suggested having a dedicated Task and Finish Group session on Growth Fund to work out the assumptions for this year and the contingency for future years;
- The Chairman explained that the falling roll funding was very narrowly defined and it did not address geographical changes in pupil volumes. It only addresses local short term shortages;
- Carole Simpson was concerned that the falling roll fund was driven by planning data, the accuracy of which was questionable;
- Corrina Gillard stated that two headteachers had raised the issue that their three-year budget plans were predicting future deficits of potentially upwards of £200K potentially. They had been seeking support from the Local Authority, however they had been advised that they would not get support until they reached deficit. This was linked to falling rolls and she suggested that these schools be supported now and not just in the future;

- Liz Woodward stated that there had been a significant fall in the number of births during the pandemic period, and suggested that this be considered in the future planning;
- Shirley Austin stated that the Forest School had not received any funding for fall in rolls.

Katherine Vernon stated that the consultation being sent out to schools covered five sections, as set out on the report.

The Chairman suggested adding the Task and Finish Group's recommendation to the questions and making the questionnaire less wordy by attaching explanations as appendixes.

Derren Gray explained that often the final DfG allocation was more than expected, and the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) was then adjusted. He agreed to review and re-word the questions.

There was a debate about the proposal to transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block to the HNB. Sal Thirlway stated that there was a duty to consult with schools on this proposal. There was agreement that the language used in the question needed to be clearer so that schools were made aware of the implications of the 0.5% transfer.

Lynne Samuel pointed out that there were other opportunities for discussions and clarifications with schools, such as the School Business Managers Briefing.

There was a general consensus that Schools Forum's recommendations should be shared with schools, as it was agreed that Schools Forum had a more detailed understanding of schools' finances.

In response to a question the Chairman explained that the 0.5% equated to £600K.

Upon being put to the vote Schools Forum decided not to support the 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the HNB.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Language will be added to the consultation questionnaire being sent to schools stating that Schools Forum does not support the recommendation to transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block to the HNB;
- 2) Geographical fall in rolls be added to the December agenda;
- 3) The report be noted.

9 SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP REVIEW

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist presented the Schools Forum Membership Review report. She explained that this was the annual review of the Forum's membership which occurred at the beginning of every new academic year.

The report took into account the number of pupils in each phase of education. In view of the fact that in recent years more schools had converted to academy status, the recommendation was to increase the number of primary academy representatives by one

and reduce the number of maintained primary representatives by one, with no changes to the overall number of members.

Members were in favour of the recommendation. Brian Prebble informed that he was leading and seeking the recruitment of another academy primary member for Schools Forum.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Schools Forum update the current membership structure to reflect the increase in the number of academy schools in the Borough;
- 2) The number of maintained primary representatives be reduced to 5 and that the number of academy primary representatives be increased to 4.

10 SCHOOL ADMISSIONS WORKING GROUP UPDATE

Brian Prebble stated that the Group had met and finalised its Terms of Reference and the Fair Access Protocol. Three more primary headteacher representatives were being sought to complete the membership.

Brian Prebble informed that the Group had discussed the following points:

- Challenges facing admissions and the number of foreign national coming into the Borough;
Challenges in relation to data available to school admissions and a new system to improve it;
- Currently waiting lists rolled over automatically, however the Group recommended that this be changed. It was proposed that parents be made to re-apply to continue on waiting lists, making waiting lists more up to date;
- Information to schools about upcoming places. It was agreed that on National Offer day schools would be notified of their numbers (with the knowledge that this would/could change);
- The next meeting would be looking at designated areas which needed to be reviewed and consulted upon in time for admissions in 2023/24. There had been a lot of new house building in the Borough and the current designated areas needed reviewing.

The Chairman asked Schools Forum to note that the terms of reference for the Group now included political representation. He also drew attention to the fact that although Schools Forum had an interest in the working of the Group, school admissions decisions sat with the Executive function of the Council.

Sal Thirlway stated that the previous School Admissions Forum had had political representation. This Group included cross-party political representation.

Sal Thirlway confirmed that school admissions decisions were taken by the Executive, however there was a desire to include, to listen to and report back to Schools Forum as an interested party.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

11 FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Forum considered and noted the Forward Programme of work and dates of future meetings as set out on Agenda page 101.

The following items were added to the 8 December meeting:

- HNB Funding Model
- Geographical fall in rolls funding

A discussion took place about venue and format of future meetings. There was consensus that attendance had improved with virtual meetings, as this was more convenient for most members. It was agreed that the hybrid arrangement could be confusing. Therefore, it was decided that the meetings would continue to be held virtually via Microsoft Teams until further notice.

Carol Simpson stated that the New Funding Formula Growth Fund calculation seemed to favour academy schools. The Chairman asked Lynne Samuel to investigate this issue and report back to Schools Forum.

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