

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 12 JANUARY 2022 FROM 10.00 AM TO 12.00 PM**

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 |
| 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 |
| Amanda Woodfin | Headteacher - Bulmershe School |

Non School Representatives

Ian Morgan, Early Years representative
Heather Tomlinson, Consultant Learning Achievement and Partnerships

Also Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Piers Brunning, Senior Specialist Strategy and Commissioning (People and Place)
Hayley Rees, Category Manager, Strategy and Commissioning
Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist
Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager
Helen Watson, Interim Director of Children's Services

Others in attendance

Councillor Graham Howe

23 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Rebecca Margetts.

24 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 December 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

24.1 Matters Arising Update

The matters arising update was presented by Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist.

Lynne Samuel asked to provide the requested explanation on the calculation of the new funding formula (how it differs for academy and maintained schools) at the next meeting.

The confirmation of level of Early Years reserves for the current financial year was as stated in the Revenue Monitoring report, under section 6. This would be discussed in the March meeting.

Heather Tomlinson, Consultant Learning Achievement and Partnerships explained that not sending out SEN consultation was contrary to legal advice. Daniel Robinson, SEN Consultant had spoken with the headteachers who had made the request and an agreement had been reached.

Shirley Austin stated that the SEN consultations were sent out during the school holidays, although it was clarified that school days would not count. She strongly requested that these consultations should not be sent out at the end of the term or during school holidays, as this was impacting on the staff's mental health, which was more important than legal deadlines. Heather Tomlinson agreed to pass this on to Daniel Robinson.

Derren Gray clarified that the first preferences for Piggott did not include children from Charvil, so there were another 30 preferences to be included.

The Chairman advised that the other outstanding items would be discussed during the meeting or under Any Other Business.

25 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

26 2021/22 REVENUE MONITORING

Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager presented the 2021/22 Revenue Monitoring report.

Katherine Vernon informed that:

- The financial position was similar to the one presented at the last meeting in December. There was positive movement of £84k in the High Needs Block (HNB) due to income from out of Borough placements at Chiltern Way Special Academy;
- There had been no applications in the current financial year in respect of the de-delegated contingency fund, the £55k would remain held in reserves;
- The Early Years provider reserve fund of £146,500 was set aside as part of the 2021/22 Budget setting. A Task and Finish Group had been set up to discuss the 2022/23 Budget and deployment of these reserves;
- There had been no calls on the Growth Fund, however this could potentially be required before the end of the financial year.

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

- Katherine Vernon confirmed that it was unlikely that the £200k held in the Growth Fund would be required by the end of this financial year;
- Lynne Samuel pointed out that due to the timescales for the publication of the Agenda and the Christmas holidays, there had been limited time to reflect and update the reports;
- The Chairman asked that future reports include a heading indicating which month the forecast was for, rather than using 'A' and 'B', to make it clearer;
- There was consensus that the quality of the reports was much improved;

- The Chairman asked what was the financial impact of the changes in numbers (page 31 of the Agenda). Katherine Vernon stated that the changes in IMS had been reflected in the last report in December so there were not many changes. She added that the reports incorporated the numbers that were anticipated;
- It was requested that a line be added to future reports advising if there were any significant movements and highlighting where these were.

Lynne Samuel stated that any feedback on the reports format was welcome, as Officers wanted the reports to be useful.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) Feedback on reports could be sent directly to Lynne Samuel and Katherine Vernon.

27 FINAL 2022/23 SCHOOLS BLOCK BUDGET

Katherine Vernon presented the Final 2022/23 Schools Block Budget report.

During the presentation Katherine Vernon made the following comments:

- The final allocation was received just before Christmas. The allocation was only £15k different from that which had been anticipated;
- The model now included all the pupil's characteristics;
- The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) had not yet made a decision on the request for disapplication of half percent from the Schools Block. Therefore, the report contained two models: one with the half percent and one without it;
- If half percent was taken out 54 schools would see an increase in their budgets, without viring the half percent 58 schools would see an increase in their budgets. A decrease in pupil numbers was the reason that a small number of schools would not see an increase in their budget allocations if the half percent was taken out;
- There was an additional grant, in respect of the Health and Social Care Levy, that had been announced which would positively affect the Schools Block and the HNB. The final amount would be announced in the spring. This grant would be passported straight back to schools.

The Chairman explained a vote was required in order to instruct Officers on the Budget submission to the DfE. However, the outcome of the decision by the ESFA in relation to the request for disapplication was not yet known.

After discussions, it was decided that a recorded vote would take place on whether to approve the attached Budget, with the understanding that the vote was on the model (model A or model B would be submitted depending on the approval or not of the request for disapplication).

Lynne Samuel clarified that the mechanics of both models were the same.

Upon being put to the vote, 18 Members voted in favour of approving the Budget and one Member abstained.

Lynne Samuel stated that Schools Forum would be informed of the ESFA's decision in relation to the disapplication request as soon as possible.

Ben Godber believed that if the disapplication was approved, some schools would receive allocations which would be below the national funding agreement for Age Weighted Pupil Funding (AWPU). In response Katherine Vernon stated that the AWPU for primary was £3,217, for KS2 it was £4,536 and for KS5 it was £5,112. The model allocations are higher than these AWPU figures.

In response to a question Lynne Samuel explained that the EFA was provided with lots of information and evidence as part of the disapplication process, such as Schools Forum minutes, the results of consultations with schools and links to Schools Forum recordings.

There was a discussion about the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) for secondary school pupils. Katherine Vernon agreed to check and report back to Schools Forum.

RESOLVED That Schools Forum approves the Final 2022/23 Schools Block Budget for submission to the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Subsequently Schools Forum was informed that the ESFA did not approve the request for the disapplication.

28 2022/23 PROPOSED DE-DELEGATED BUDGET

Katherine Vernon presented the 2022/23 Proposed De-delegated Budget report.

The Task and Finish Group had met and proposed that only the Staff Costs Supply Cover would be funded from the de-delegated Budget. This fund was to cover maternity/paternity pay, union duties and jury service cover. This fund was for maintained schools only, and the cost was £27.06 per pupil.

The Task and Finish Group recommended not to continue with Contingencies, but to carry forward the £55K in reserves in case this was needed. This would be reviewed every year.

The Licenses and Subscriptions would be completely funded by the Schools Central Block.

The Behaviour Support Services was no longer going to be funded through de-delegation. Discussions were ongoing about the funding mechanism for those services. It was likely that they would be funded from the HNB.

The Support to Underperforming Ethnic Groups and Bilingual Learners was likely to become a traded service.

Emma Clarke pointed out that there was a big increase in the cost for the service, in particular for small schools.

A recorded vote on the proposal to de-delegate Staff Costs Supply Cover was taken, with the following results:

- Five primary maintained school members were in favour
- The sole secondary school member was in favour

A recorded vote was taken on the proposal to not de-delegate Contingencies, Licensing and Subscriptions, Behaviour Services and Support to Underperforming Ethnic Groups and Bilingual Learners with the following results:

- Five primary maintained school members were in favour
- The sole secondary school member was in favour

Members asked that the information about the costs of the traded services be provided to schools as soon as possible. Lynne Samuel agreed to provide communication as early as possible.

Corrina Gillard thanked Officers for their work in setting up the working groups and coming up with the proposals.

Lynne Samuel wished it to be recorded that this had been a very useful exercise.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The proposal to de-delegate Staff Costs Supply Cover be approved;
- 2) The remaining £55K Contingencies from the previous year will be carried forward as a reserve and be reviewed in future years; and
- 3) Contingencies, Licensing and Subscriptions, Behaviour Support Services and Support to Underperforming Ethnic Groups and Bilingual Learners no longer be funded from the de-delegated Budget to maintained schools.

29 2022/23 CENTRAL SCHOOL SERVICES BLOCK BUDGET

Lynne Samuel presented the 2022/23 Central School Services Block Budget report.

During her presentation the following comments were made:

- The allocation for the 2022/23 Central Schools Services Block was £995K, this represented an increase of £50K from this year's allocation;
- This Block provided a contribution to the Council's costs of delivering statutory duties, and the operational guidance allowed for a number of headings;
- £145K was top sliced for government arranged licences and there was no local control over the figure;
- Schools Forum was asked to agree to £448K for the delivery of statutory regulatory duties as follows:
 - £117K for Education Welfare
 - £49K for Asset Management
 - £236K for other ongoing duties
- The appendixes provided a breakdown of the figures. The breakdown was broadly the same as this year's, the only significant difference was the increase in supporting system and information costs which was previously part funded by maintained schools through de-delegation;
- The overall cost to the Council of delivering statutory duties was much higher, at around 2 million, this Block budget was a contribution towards the total cost;
- The School Improvement Service had historically been funded by a separate grant. However, the government had indicated that this arrangement would change so that this service would be funded by the Schools Block. At this stage there was no further detail about this proposal.

Amanda Woodfin asked if the allocated amount for Education Welfare allowed for improvement of the provision. Lynne Samuel stated that it did not, as this was not the total cost of the service, it was only a contribution towards it. Where there was a need to further invest in services, the Council funded additional costs.

Amanda Woodfin pointed out that the demand for Education Welfare services had significantly increased recently due to the pandemic. Lynne Samuel stated that this could be reflected upon in future discussions at Task and Finish Groups, especially in view of the potential changes to the funding of Schools Improvement.

It was agreed that it would be useful to have a further discussion in Schools Forum about the funding of Education Welfare services, with a report to include information about the total cost of the service to the Council.

Brian Prebble asked how the changes in senior leadership in the Council affected the costs on the Central Schools Services Block. Lynne Samuel explained that the Central Schools Services Block provided a contribution only to the total costs of services, when there were fluctuations, they did not affect the overall amount available from this Block.

In response to a question Lynne Samuel stated that a full review of traded services would take place during the year, and schools would be consulted.

It was agreed that timeline for the traded services review work be presented to the March meeting of Schools Forum.

In response to a question Lynne Samuel explained that references to the cost of the IT system referred to the Capita system used by the Council and not IT systems at schools.

In response to a question Lynne Samuel agreed to include a percentage as well as the total number of the allocation for the Central School Services Block. She explained that the DfE had used historical commitments to calculate the formula when the four blocks were created. Wokingham had never benefited from historical commitments prior to the four blocks being put in place and therefore was in a better position than other local authorities in terms of feeling the impact of the new funding formula.

A recorded vote took place and Schools Forum unanimously approved, with 19 votes in favour, the 2022/23 Central School Services Block Budget.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The 2022/23 Central School Services Block Budget be approved;
- 2) A report containing information about the Education Welfare Service will be brought to Schools Forum; and
- 3) A timeline for the traded services review work would be brought to the March meeting of Schools Forum.

30 2022/23 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK BUDGET

Lynne Samuel presented the 2022/23 High Needs Block (HNB) Budget report.

During her presentation the following comments were made:

- The report contained an update on the progress of activities around building the HNB Budget for the 2022/23 financial year. There was an additional funding of around £2.2 million through the funding formula. However, due to the increase in the numbers of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP), a deficit of around £3 million was anticipated;
- The Budget setting process took into account:
 - The continued increase in the number of children and young people with an EHCP
 - A review of inflationary increases on top-up bandings across settings;
 - The review of Foundry College
 - Recommendations from the Sufficiency Strategy
- There was a supplementary funding of £965K for which more detail would be received later in the year. This was not included in the funding formula, so it was unclear what this meant for future years beyond 2023/24;
- Sessions explaining how HNB formula was calculated would be offered to those interested before the next meeting in March.

In response to comments Lynne Samuel confirmed that based on the current figures and predictions, there would be a cumulative deficit of around £14 million in the HNB in 2023. She added that the impact of mitigating measures such as the Sufficiency Strategy and others would not be seen in this financial year as they were long term strategies.

The Chairman asked that the information around the strategy for future funding of Foundry College and the potential for it to become a traded service be shared with Schools Forum at the next meeting in March. He pointed out that this could have an impact on schools' budgets.

The Chairman asked what assumptions were being taken in relation to the 30% of the Budget that was being spent on Out of Borough placements. Lynne Samuel stated that this was part of the SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme, around sufficiency of places. However, she pointed out that the demand was increasing so much that a lot of the work was in slowing down growth.

In response to a question Lynne Samuel stated that there were considerations on the number of children moving out and the number of children moving in (in relation to Out of Borough placements) when anticipating the figures during the Budget setting process.

The Chairman asked that the increase in costs per placements also be considered during the Budget setting process.

RESOLVED That the progress on the 2022/23 High Needs Block Budget setting process be noted.

31 FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Forum considered and noted the Forward Programme of work and dates of future meetings as set out on Agenda page 59.

The following items were added to the next meeting:

- Update on the Wokingham Educational Partnership (with potential election of representatives)
- Education Welfare Service
- Traded Services Review timeline
- Support to schools with fall in rolls

- School Admissions Task and Finish Group update

After discussions it was agreed that the next meeting in March would be a hybrid meeting, if possible in David Hicks 1. Luciane Bowker explained that there was a limit in numbers due to the current pandemic, so members would be asked in advance to confirm if they were attending in person or via Teams.

RESOLVED That the Forward Programme be noted.

32 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Helen Watson, Interim Director of Children's Services was welcomed to the meeting.

Commissioning services

Hayley Rees, Strategy and Commissioning Manager explained that the Council currently had a contract with Berkshire Health Foundation Trust (BHFT) to deliver therapy services. This contract included speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy. This was a stand alone contract with BHFT, however there was a project looking to commission these services with West Berkshire and Reading, and bids would be put to the open market.

Hayley Rees asked if there were any members of Schools Forum who would be interested in taking part in the evaluation panel. The evaluation process was lengthy and a substantial amount of time was required in February. West Berkshire and Reading would also have representatives in the evaluation panel.

Hayley Rees informed that a survey had gone out about these services, she also pointed out that these services were funded by the HNB. Anyone requiring more information about this project could contact Hayley Rees directly. Hayley.rees@wokingham.gov.uk

Election of three Schools Forum representative to join the Wokingham Education Partnership

Heather Tomlison informed that she now had the names for primary and secondary schools representatives. She explained that the terms of reference of the Partnership were still under review, and the total number of representatives could change. She suggested that Schools Forum probably already had sufficient representation given the names that had been put forward from the headteachers' association.

Heather Tomlison stated that the intention was for the Partnership to tackle difficult strategy issues, and not to duplicate the work of Schools Forum. However, it was understood that those decisions made by the Partnership would influence the decisions made by Schools Forum.

In response to a comment, Heather Tomlinson stated that the group wanted to include representation from the Early Years and Post 16 phases.

Paul Gibson pointed out that most of the provision for Post 16 in the Borough was in the form of sixth forms within schools, so his representation in the group could cover that section (given that he was the Post 16 representative in Schools Forum).

Brian Prebble informed that of the four representatives from primary schools, one had a nursery attached to their school.

Ian Morgan stated that the Early Years private providers section was very large in Wokingham, with only one maintained nursery school in the Borough. He suggested that if a representative from the Early Years private providers was needed this could be arranged.

Heather Tomlison suggested having a further discussion with Schools Forum about the membership on the Partnership, once potential gaps were identified, after its first meeting. She added that it was important to have the right representation in the group, not necessarily representation from every section.

The Chairman asked that Heather Tomlinson liaises with Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist about the need or not to undertake the elections of Schools Forum representatives to the Partnership.

In response to comments, Heather Tomlison agreed that the length of service for individual representatives on the Partnership would be reviewed when the terms of reference were discussed. It was agreed that a one year term was likely too short a service period.

Falling rolls fund

Schools Forum wished to consider how to support schools who had been suffering with falling rolls though no fault of their own, but due to demographics. The formal Council's policy on this issue was contained in the matters arising document.

The Chairman suggested having a discussion about this issue at the March meeting. Brian Prebble stated that this would be a good time to discuss it, as it fitted in with the work of the School Admissions Task and Finish Group reviewing boundaries and catchment areas.

Ginny Rhodes suggested that going forward this issue should be considered by the Partnership.

There was consensus that this issue should be considered.

The mechanism behind contingency funding

The need to plan for school places in the Borough meant that contingency funds had to be allocated. However, the contingency planning historically had not matched what actually happened on 1 September and 1 January. There was a desire to understand the mechanics of contingency planning and possibly design different models.

Heather Tomlinson agreed to reflect on this with colleagues and get back to Schools Forum on this.

Matters arising

1. Explanation on the calculation of the new funding formula (how it differs for academy and maintained schools).
2. Request that SEN consultations not be sent to secondary schools immediately or prior to school holidays.
3. That future reports include a heading indicating which month the forecast was of, rather than using 'A' and 'B' to make it clearer.
4. That reports include a heading indicating if there was significant movement or not and highlighting where the movement is.
5. To ascertain what the MFG is for secondary school pupils.
6. To ascertain how many schools would be affected should the disapplication be approved.
7. It was requested that information in regards to the cost of traded services be provided to schools as soon as possible.
8. A report to be brought to Schools Forum with information about the Education Welfare service and its total cost to the Council.
9. A timeline for the traded services review work will be presented to the March meeting.
10. To include a percentage with the value of the Central School Services Block Budget.
11. HNB formula explanation sessions would be offered before the meeting in March.
12. Information on the future funding of Foundry College – and the possibility of it becoming a traded service.
13. Heather Tomlison to liaise with Luciane Bowker about the potential need to elect Schools Forum representatives to the Wokingham Education Partnership.
14. A falling rolls item be added to the March meeting agenda.
15. An update on School Admissions Task and Finish Group would be included in the March meeting agenda.