

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 16 MARCH 2022 FROM 10.00 AM TO 11.55 AM**

Schools Representatives

Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Corrina Gillard	Primary Head - Emmbrook Infant
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary - Vice Chairman
Luke Henderson	Primary Academy Head - Sonning C of E Primary
Ali Brown	Primary Head - Nine Mile Ride Primary
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Ben Godber	Academy Head - Bohunt 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

Rebecca Margetts	WBC Councillor
Heather Tomlinson	Consultant Learning, Achievement and Partnerships

Also Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Hayley Rees, Category Manager, Strategy and Commissioning
Daniel Robinson, SEND Consultant
Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager

Others in Attendance

Graham Howe, Executive Member for Children's Services

33 STATEMENT BY THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES EXECUTIVE MEMBER

Councillor Howe addressed the Forum to inform that the Council was concerned about safeguarding issues arising from the current situation in Ukraine and was making plans to accommodate refugees. However, at this time, it was uncertain how many children would arrive and if they would be on their own. It was estimated that around 700 refugees could arrive in Wokingham in the next two weeks. It was not certain how many children would have to be placed in Wokingham schools and what medical services would be required. He wished schools to be aware of this situation.

The Chairman offered Schools Forum's support where possible and shared the sentiment of uncertainty that the current situation presented.

34 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Emma Clarke, Paul Gibson, Lynn Samuel and Helen Watson.

35 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12 January 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

36 MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman went through the list of matters arising on page 14 of the agenda and the following comments were made:

1. *Explanation on the calculation of the new funding formula (how it differs for academy and maintained schools).* This item was carried forward to the next meeting and would be part of the Growth Fund and falling rolls report.
2. *Request that SEN consultations not be sent to secondary schools immediately or prior to school holidays.* This was noted and would be taken into account by Officers.
3. *That future reports include a heading indicating which month the forecast was of, rather than using 'A' and 'B' to make it clearer.* This had been attempted by Officers.
4. *That reports include a heading indicating if there was significant movement or not and highlighting where the movement is.* This was work in progress.
5. *To ascertain what the MFG is for secondary school pupils.* Katherine Vernon had had a conversation with Ben Godber and explained the funding arrangement. Ben Godber had accepted the explanation.
6. *To ascertain how many schools would be affected should the disapplication be approved.* This was no longer relevant as the disapplication had not been approved.
7. *It was requested that information in regards to the cost of traded services be provided to schools as soon as possible.* Katherine Vernon informed that this was still being worked out and the figures were not yet available. This related to two services which were no longer de-delegated: English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Foundry College.

Schools Forum members stated that this information should be provided to support budget planning. Katherine Vernon suggested that the figures from last year be used for budget planning.

Brian Prebble informed that some information had been provided in relation to Weighted Pupil Unit (WPU) for Foundry College only.

Katherine Vernon recommended that maintained schools should use the figures used in previous years to prepare their budgets.

The Chairman pointed out that it would be unfair if the charges subsequently turned out to be more than anticipated, based on last year's figures.

Corrina Gillard stated that, having sat in the review group that looked at Foundry College funding, there was a difference in costings for maintained schools and academy schools. It was safe to prepare for an increase in costs for the support received from Foundry College.

Iain Thomas indicated that the costs would be higher, this was to cover the costs for the services provided.

Ginny Rhodes questioned the reason for the difference in cost between academies and maintained schools, she believed that the unit cost would go up for all schools. Corrina Gillard explained that the cost was equitable but academies paid hourly rates, whereas maintained schools paid as a bulk. If maintained schools were to pay hourly rates they would be entitled to around 232 hours a year.

It was agreed that the cost of the Foundry College service should be equitable for academies and maintained schools. It was suggested that there needed to be more transparency in the mechanism used to calculate the cost of traded services for maintained schools and academy schools.

Iain Thomas informed that the current charge was around £28 per hour for academies and £23 per hour for maintained schools, per pupil. He suggested that the charge would be at least £40 per hour as a basic charge, for all schools, as a suggestion for budgeting purposes.

Ginny Rhodes suggested that this funding mechanism and the commissioning of Foundry College services be discussed at the Wokingham Education Partnership.

Dan Robinson, SEND Consultant stated that the review of Foundry College funding was part of the Innovation and Improvement Programme. He apologised that this work had not been completed yet.

The Chairman pointed out that assumptions would have been made in order to prepare the HNB Budget which was going to be discussed later on in the agenda. It would have been reasonable to have shared those assumptions with schools to support them in preparing their budgets.

8. *A report to be brought to Schools Forum with information about the Education Welfare Service (EWS) and its total cost to the Council.* This would be brought to the July meeting of Schools Forum. Amanda Woodfin clarified that Schools Forum was seeking information in relation to the funding of EWS, the structure of the team and future plans for the service provision, in the context that it was not currently meeting the demand.
9. *A timeline for the traded services review work will be presented to the March meeting.* This would be covered under AOB.
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.* It had not been possible to hold sessions yet, it was proposed that these session be offered in July.
12. *Information on the future funding of Foundry College – and the possibility of it becoming a traded service.* This would be covered during discussions on the HNB item.

13. *Heather Tomlison to liaise with Luciane Bowker about the potential need to elect Schools Forum representatives to the Wokingham Education Partnership. This would be covered later in the agenda.*
14. *A falling rolls item be added to the March meeting agenda. This would be discussed at the meeting in July.*
15. *An update on School Admissions Task and Finish Group would be included in the March meeting agenda. This would be discussed later in the agenda.*

37 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

38 2021/22 REVENUE MONITORING

Kathrine Vernon presented the 2021/22 Revenue Monitoring report.

There had been an increase in deficit of approximately £1 million from the figures reported at the last meeting in January. This deficit increase related to:

- £169k mainstream – both in and out of borough
- £115k special schools – out of borough
- £515k independent and non-maintained special schools
- £143k education other than at school

Katherine Vernon made the following points:

- The figures that were presented to Schools Forum in January were based on November 2021 activity, so this increase represented activity since November 2021;
- Officers were analysing the figures. Some of the movement was outside of the Council's control, such as children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) moving into the borough (of whom the Council had no prior knowledge);
- Some children had to be placed outside of the borough because there were no placements for them within the borough, and the cost of those placements was not known at the time of forecasting;
- There was an ongoing issue with trying to recover money from Health;
- The cost for the summer term had mistakenly been omitted from the figures in relation to the independent and non-maintained special schools;
- Additional invoices that had not been accrued last year had come in this year;

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

- The Chairman expressed serious concern that there was such a significant difference in the forecast since the last meeting in January, in particular in relation to the mistakes made in relation to summer term costings and accruals;
- Katherine Vernon explained that there were some historical issues that were coming to light now, and the service was learning with the process;
- Ginny Rhodes expressed concern that more historical commitments may come to light which would further increase the deficit;
- Daniel Robinson stated that:
 - There were three placements for which the Local Authority believed that Health should contribute towards their costs, this amounted to approximately £117k. This work was ongoing;

- In relation to SEN and historical commitments, the team was looking at a further 50-60 plans to complete the review, and the final figure would be worked out by the end of June;
- The audit trail in relation to historical financial decisions was not available, therefore there were disputes in relation to invoices, in particular with non maintained independent schools. This was the reason for the unknown invoices;
- The children that would have gone to the new Oaktree School through the phased transfers, would have cost around £446k for 25 children. Because of the delay in opening the school, these children would cost upwards of £800k. Placements could cost between £20k and £90k each and this created difficulties in terms of budgeting;

Katherine Vernon continued her presentation:

- There was £55k in contingencies which had not been used and would be carried forward to the next year;
- £126k of the £206,5k of Early Years Provider Reserve Fund had been used to fund new settings in 2020/21. An underspend of around £84k had been expected and this was confirmed to be £90k by the DfE in November 2021;
- A reserve fund of £146,5k was set aside as part of 2021/22 budget setting, and an underspend of around £300k was anticipated this year. The service would know whether there was anything left to distribute to settings once the DfE confirmed the recoupment;
- In relation to the Growth Fund, there had not been any new classes. Therefore there would be a carry forward of £406k into the new financial year to supplement the 2022/23 budgeted Growth Fund allocation of £1,589k.

In response to a question, Katherine Vernon explained that Early Years was funded on the number of hours used. Any unallocated funds after the clawback by the DfE would be redistributed to the providers.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

39 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK UPDATE

Daniel Robinson stated that the report outlined all the plans that affected the cost projections. Wokingham was below the national average projection of overall growth. He informed that 904 EHCPs were being supported within the local area and 517 were being supported out of the area. The primary area of need was Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), closely followed by Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH).

It was anticipated that there would be an increase in need for under 5 year olds, and there was ongoing work to find provision for this need.

The report included projections and outlined the work that was being undertaken to find a solutions.

It was suggested that in chart 1.3, the costs of all in and out of borough placements be included. Daniel Robinson agreed to add this information to the chart.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

40 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK BUDGET 2022/23

Katherine Vernon informed that in 2022/23 there was extra funding for the HNB of around £2.4m and a supplementary grant of £900k. However, with the increase in the number of EHCPs, and taking into account all the information that was available, a deficit of around £3m was projected for next year.

During her presentation she made the following comments:

- It was proposed to increase the top-up rate for mainstream schools by 4%, with the hourly rate now being £461.24;
- A review of 27 post-16 places which were funded from the HNB in Wokingham's mainstream schools was taking place, Schools Forum would be informed of the outcome of this review;
- The funding for Addington School was being kept at current levels, as the school had a carry forward. It was noted that leaders at Addington School were not happy with this arrangement;
- Chiltern Way was continuing with the same funding;
- Non-maintained schools represented 32% of the HNB Budget, this was likely to keep increasing whilst there was insufficient provision in the Borough;
- Education for Post-16 (up to 25 years old), the numbers were stable;
- The budget for Foundry College covered their expenses and the school would receive additional funding from schools as a traded service;
- The budget for Children and Young People Integrated Therapies (CYPIT) was based on existing contract information, any changes would be reported to Forum.

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

- Sara Attra, Addington School - stated that they were disappointed to be the only school to not receive an uplift this year. The school had reserves, but the only reason the school had reserves was because they had not been given an uplift for seven years (apart from last year), they had to be very cautious as they never knew if they would get additional funding;
- Sara Attra wished it to be recorded that 87% of their budget went on staffing. Staffing costs rise year on year, and because of no uplift, she anticipated that the school would go into deficit next year. If no uplifts were given there would be a deficit of £685k by year 4 and in year 5 a deficit of £1,675m. Reserves had not been used on staffing, if the school could have the money they would spend it on therapy provision which would stop some of the out of borough placements;
- Sara Attra emphasised that she predicted an in-year deficit next year. The budget for Addington also included income from other local authorities as traded services. However, as there had not been an uplift in funding, Addington could not increase the charges for their services to other local authorities as they were not allowed to have differential charging between local authorities;
- In response to a question Katherine Vernon stated that schools' reserves were not in the HNB, they were treated separately as were maintained schools' balances;
- Sara Attra explained that she understood that the HNB was severely overspent, however she requested an annual review of Addington funding and a consultation with SEND and Finance;
- Ginny Rhodes expressed concern about the Addington situation, she felt it was regretful that Addington could not charge other local authorities differently. She believed that the cost of SEN provision at schools would go up as a result of the raise in cost of living. She feared that schools would no longer be able to rely on easy staff

recruitment. She asked if it was too late to change the funding for Addington, she felt that Wokingham would effectively be funding places for other local authorities as a result of the lack of an uplift in funding. She wondered if this was setting a perverse precedent for maintained schools, where they would end up spending their reserves because of the lack of security of adequate future funding;

- Katherine Vernon stated that it was possible, following discussions with Addington, to change the budget mid-year;
- The Chairman asked why the full cost of funding Addington had not been reflected in the HNB budget, especially given the context of the overall significant budgeted overspend and the recent movement due to mistakes in forecast planning;
- The Chairman pointed out, that following a review, the budget for Foundry College had risen by 63% this year, he questioned why the same approach had not been taken for Addington;
- Katherine Vernon stated that the income from 40-50 pupils that Addington received from other local authorities was not included in the figures in the report;
- The Chairman asked what assumptions had been made this year in relation to the number of EHCPs, in view of the learning from last year (that the assumption had been too conservative on the average cost profile);
- Katherine Vernon stated that to start the year, in independent non-maintained special schools there were 164 places, this was expected to go up to 191;
- Katherine Vernon stated that the estimate had gone up by £800k, but she did not have the average cost to hand;
- The Chairman asked that those assumptions be shared with Schools Forum;, he also asked what assumptions had been taken for inflation for Out of Borough places;
- The Chairman asked if the likelihood that Out of Borough independent providers may increase their rates further, in view of the extra funding announced for local authorities had been given extra funding, had been taken into account in the planning;
- Katherine Vernon explained that there was an uplift process with the commissioning team, which Out of Borough independent providers had to follow;
- The Chairman asked for information about the assumptions made for the external income received by Foundry College. Katherine Vernon informed that Lynn Samuel had been dealing with that and she apologised that she did not have that information to hand;
- Shirley Austin pointed out that the DfE had proposed some changes to teachers pay over the next two years which involved significant increases. Sara Attra confirmed that she was aware and had used that information in her planning;
- Shirley Austin shared Ginny Rhodes' concern that Addington was not able to charge differently to other local authorities;
- Sara Attra asked if there was any contingency planning in SEND for requests for residential placements. She believed that there was one such request at least once a year, which could amount to £200k per pupil. She anticipated an increase in the number of requests for residential places due to the pressures the pandemic had placed on families;
- Daniel Robinson stated that the Complex Case Referral provided that Social Care and Health paid for most of those cases.

Katherine Vernon informed that this year the Council was in conversations with the DfE about submitting an unbalanced budget, to reflect the reality of the situation.

Carole Simpson asked how confident Officers felt about the HNB Budget, Daniel Robinson explained that the budget included all the information that was available at this point in

time. There was concerned voiced about the lack of local provision and possible increase in demand.

The Chairman asked why a more realistic budget for Addington was not being submitted, given that the budget being submitted to the DfE was going to be unbalanced.

Daniel Robinson explained there had been conversations with senior leaders about the proposed HNB budget, and also with the DfE. The DfE requested a 'reasonable' budget and not the worse case scenario. There was awareness of the fact that the budget did not allow for a safety valve and the conversations were ongoing.

Ben Godber shared the concerns raised during discussions, and asked how the growing number of EHCPs was being factored into the budget planning. Daniel Robinson explained that the average number of EHCPs per month was used in calculations.

Corrina Gillard expressed concern about the budget as presented, however she added that the Improvement Board was looking at placements for under 5 year olds in an effort to alleviate pressures.

Brian Prebble also expressed concern about the budget as presented. Daniel Robinson offered to share with the Forum in July details of how the finance team projected and calculate the spend on EHCPs.

Upon being put to the vote, 9 members voted in favour of the HNB Budget and 7 voted against. Some of the members who voted in favour stated that they were in favour, provided that a deficit budget was submitted to the DfE.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Schools Forum approves the HNB Budget;
- 2) The HNB Budget submission to the DfE includes the deficit as presented;
- 3) It was recognised that the numbers in the Budget were not reflective of the likely outcomes during the year.

41 EARLY YEARS BLOCK BUDGET 2022/23

Katherine Vernon presented the Early Years Block Budget 2022/23.

The proposal was to:

- Increase the hourly rates paid to providers by 21p per hour for 2 year olds and 17p per hour for 3 and 4 year olds, this could be passed on 'straight' to providers; and
- To centrally retain 5% of the allocation for 2022/23 to fund associated statutory duties of the Local Authority. This amounted to £549,938 and it took into account the predicted numbers, which was lower than in the previous year (this represented less than 5%).

Wokingham's allocation for the Early Years Block in 2022/23 was £11,289,225, this was based on the January 2021 census.

Ian Morgan was pleased to note that the discussions at the Task and Finish Group had been considered and that just a generic 5% top slice had not been applied.

Ian Morgan expressed concern over the DfE's three year projections, as they were using 2021 numbers for their calculations. He worried that the funding for next year may decrease, against a context where minimum wages might increase, which would greatly affect the sector.

Upon being put to the vote, the Early Years Budget was approved unanimously, including the centrally retained 5%.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Schools Forum approves the centrally retained element of the 2022/23 Early Years Budget, which will be used to fund the associated statutory duties of the Local Authority; and
- 2) Schools Forum notes the proposals to increase the current hourly rates paid to all providers by 21p per hour for 2 year olds, and 17p per hour for 3 and 4 year olds.

42 FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Forum considered and noted the Forward Programme of work and dates of future meetings as set out on Agenda page 75.

The following items were added to the July meeting:

- School Admissions Task and Finish Group update, including falling rolls
- Task and Finish Groups membership update (verbal discussion)

Forum considered the venue options for future meetings. There was general agreement that virtual meetings were more convenient and enabled wider participation. Therefore, it was decided that meetings would continue to be held online via Microsoft Teams.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The added items be included in the Forward Plan; and
- 2) Future meetings would be held online via Microsoft Teams.

43 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Update on the Wokingham Education Partnership Group

Heather Tomlinson, Consultant Learning Achievement and Partnerships informed that the group had been focusing on sufficiency issues, alternative provision would be discussed at the next meeting.

The Group had established a wide representation in its membership. However, there was no direct Early Years representation in the Group and Heather Tomlinson welcomed Schools Forum input for an Early Years representative.

Members who were sitting on the Group commented how well it had started and felt that the Group would be valuable for future engagement, especially in light of the fact that more schools would become academies.

Ian Morgan offered to look for a volunteer from the Early Years sector, and agreed to volunteer himself as a member if no other volunteer could be found.

Update on the traded services review timeline

Heather Tomlinson informed that she had not discussed this item with Lynn Samuel yet, but she believed that the timeline would be September/October.

School Admissions Task and Finish Group update

It had been suggested that this item would incorporate the discussion about falling rolls.

Brian Prebble informed that there had been a 2% fall in birth rates this year in the Borough, this was also a national statistic. Catchment areas and demographics were being reviewed, with more data to enable discussions around falling rolls.

The Fair Access Protocol had now been approved, this would help with school admissions of Honk Kong and Ukrainian children.

It was agreed that a further update would be presented to the July meeting, with a reflection on falling rolls.

Forum thanked Emma Clark, who was retiring, for her contributions to Schools Forum over the years.

Sian Lehrter announced that she was resigning from Schools Forum as she was moving from the Holt School, she thanked Forum for the opportunity to take part and learn from discussions.

Matters arising

1. Explanation on the calculation of the new funding formula (how it differs for academies and maintained schools) – with the Growth Fund and falling rolls report at the July meeting. Katherine Vernon
2. A report be brought to Schools Forum in July with information about the Education Welfare Service – structure of the team and capacity to meet demand. Heather Tomlinson
3. Training sessions explaining the HNB formula would be offered in July. Lynn Samuel
4. To share with Schools Forum the assumptions made in relation to the cost out of borough placements, including inflation, when preparing the HNB. Lynn Samuel
5. Information about the assumptions made for the external income received by Foundry College when setting the HNB budget. Lynn Samuel
6. Explanation of how the cost of EHCPs are calculated and projected at the next meeting in July. Lynn Samuel