

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 6 JULY 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
Liz Woodards	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary
Ali Brown	Primary Head - Nine Mile Ride Primary
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Derren Gray	Academy Head - The Piggott School
Paul Miller	Trustee - The Circle Trust - Chairman
Shirley Austin	Academy Head - The Forest School
Debra Briault	Secondary Academy School Representative
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School

Non School Representatives

Morag Malvern	Wokingham Borough Council
Sal Thirlway	Assistant Director for Learning and Partnerships

Also Present

Piers Brunning, Schools Planning Manager
Ian Gough, Energy Officer
Hayley Rees, Category Manager, Children's & Young People Commissioning
Daniel Robinson, SEND Consultant
Lynne Samuel, Finance Business Partner - Childrens Services
Madeleine Shopland, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager
Jenny Hooper, Senior SEN Officer
Casey Streat, Energy Projects Assistant

44 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Luke Henderson, Ginny Rhodes and Amanda Woodfin.

45 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 March 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

45.1 Matters Arising

The Chair indicated that the Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Prue Bray, had offered to attend future meetings of the Schools Forum.

Lynne Samuel provided an update regarding the National Funding Formula – Growth Fund and also Falling Rolls. A query had been raised previously through Schools Forum on the National Funding Formula and inequity for maintained schools and academies around Growth Fund. Information reviewed had not suggested a particular issue. However, in order to ensure this was further explored, it was proposed that the issue be further

reviewed as part of the work of the Schools Block Task & Finish Group at the early stages of 2023/24 budget setting.

The Forum was informed that a further consultation had been published on the National Funding Formula which ran until early September([Implementing the direct national funding formula - Department for Education - Citizen Space](#)). Carol Simpson, who had originally raised the query regarding the National Funding Formula confirmed that the new consultation document had referred to her concern. She questioned whether guidance on implications of the questions, particularly around the High Needs Block, would be provided. Lynne Samuel commented that she would look at this once officers had digested the consultation. Carol Simpson confirmed that she was of the view that the issue could be considered by the Task and Finish Group. If schools did not fully understand the implications, it would be difficult to respond. Carol Simpson indicated that the Institute of School Business Leaders had previously provided guidance. It was proposed that a group of Forum members meet online in early September to discuss responding to the consultation. Carol Simpson, Julia Mead, and Derren Gray agreed to be part of this.

With regards to the High Needs Block, a series of online weekly training sessions would be run from mid-August onwards to improve knowledge and information sharing. Colleagues elsewhere in the Council had also expressed an interest in attending and sessions would initially be limited to six attendees to enable greater focus. Dates would be published shortly, and information provided as to how to book on to the sessions. A request had been received from other Council colleagues for a general training session on Schools Finance. Forum members would also be welcome to attend this training.

It was proposed that a Task and Finish Group for High Needs Budget Setting for 2023/24 be established.

In response to a question from the Chairman regarding external Foundry funding and the High Needs Block, Lynne Samuel clarified that there was not a large amount of current income which came into Foundry College from outside the Borough. The predominance of its funding came from the Wokingham High Needs Block. Officers would be meeting later in the week with Foundry to understand how the year's finances were progressing against assumptions made at the budget setting process.

Education Welfare Services and an explanation of how the team was structured and functioned, had been a long standing matter arising. The Chairman requested that this be brought to the Forum's October meeting. Sal Thirlway commented that the White Paper had been issued which made significant changes to the Education Welfare Service, so the October meeting was timely.

Brian Prebble provided an update on falling rolls. The Admissions Working Group had looked at the different formula and whether any schools would meet that criteria. None currently did. The criteria was very strict and a pattern over three years was required. Katherine Vernon added that in order to receive funding it was expected that a school's numbers would get back to normal after a maximum of three years. The Chairman commented that the demographic shift in the Borough was having a detrimental impact particularly on primary schools as the younger population was moving out of the town centre to newer development areas. Sal Thirlway commented that the development of the Admissions Group would help to keep the issue on the agenda. The Chairman asked that

the Admissions Group consider innovative approaches to mitigate what is a growing problem.

46 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

47 ENERGY TEAM PRICING UPDATE

The Forum received an update on energy pricing.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Ian Gough provided an update on the energy framework and contracts in place. He advised that organisations were in a much worse situation with regards to energy than they had been in the previous year. Very significant price increases had been seen in the energy contracts.
- The Council had just tied into a 2022/23 financial year energy contract that was an increase on electricity of 57% and 199% on gas. However, this was from a very low starting position and was against an energy market place which had gone up by 875% in the final three months of the previous financial year.
- The situation was unprecedented and was likely to persist for some time. It was painting a picture for being more energy efficient and an increasing use of renewable energy. By April 2024 it was anticipated that prices would double again.
- All schools had been contacted via a newsletter regarding the changes.
- The Chairman questioned whether guidelines had been shared with the maintained schools on how they should build their budgets for 2022/23 and 2023/24. Katherine Vernon indicated that schools had been informed and asked to build an increase in energy costs into their budgets. However, figures had since further increased.
- Ian Morgan, representing the Early Years providers, asked whether the nurseries could come under the Council's contract if it was more favourable for them. Ian Gough commented that work was currently being done to formalise the arrangements with subsidiary organisations. He offered to discuss the situation further outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the update on energy pricing be noted.

48 APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO SWAG

Sal Thirlway provided an update on the School Admissions Working Group.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The Group would be chaired by Brian Prebble. It would replace a Task and Finish Group which had been looking at school admission arrangements for the local authority and the Borough.
- Reporting to the Borough Education Partnership, the Group's focus would be expanded to take into account broader issues as they related to sufficiency of pupil places and school capacity. The Group's terms of reference would be amended to reflect this.
- Sal Thirlway advised that in addition to the current membership, two places would be made available to members of the Schools Forum, because of its financial links.
- It was proposed that the membership from the Task and Finish Group that were also members of Schools Forum, carry over; Sara Attra, Ben Godber, Amanda Woodfin, Shirley Austin, and Brian Prebble. Hester Wooller would also join the

Group. Brian Prebble requested an additional primary representative. Corrina Gillard agreed to fill this vacancy.

- The Working Group's objectives were noted.
- Sara Attra proposed that there be a representative from SEND. Jenny Hooper volunteered to fill this vacancy.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Admissions Task and Finish Group be dissolved;
- 2) it be noted that the School Admissions Working Group had been established;
- 3) it be noted that Sara Attra, Brian Prebble, Amanda Woodfin, Shirley Austin, Ben Godber, Carina Godber, Hester Wooller and Jenny Hooper would be members of the School Admissions Working Group.

49 2021/22 REVENUE OUTTURN REPORT

The Forum considered the 2021/22 Revenue Outturn Report.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Lynne Samuel advised that no changes were expected but the report was still subject to external audit.
- At the time of budget setting, a deficit of £2.6million was anticipated on the DSG for the 2021/22 financial year. Outturn for the year showed a net overspend of £4.2million, representing 2.6% of total DSG income for the year. Together with the brought forward deficit balance, the cumulative DSG deficit at the end of 2021/22 sat at £10.04million.
- With regards to the Schools Block, key movements in the forecast were around Academy recoupment. The final academy recoupment adjustments for the year were £94,000 below that anticipated in the forecast, largely due to timings of business rates adjustments relating to school conversions. There had been no impact on any individual schools.
- There had been an underspend of £84,000 for de-delegation supply cover.
- The outturn on maternity supply cover was £84,000 lower than forecast, with an overall outturn of £316,000 for the year. This was paying for school staff (teaching and support staff) that were on maternity and paternity leave, with forecasting difficult in advance of payroll processing. Consideration was being given as to how mid-year reporting on this issue could be improved. The funding formula in terms of how de-delegated budgets were set for that item, had been amended slightly. The same level of underspend was not anticipated in the future but would be kept under review. Forum members were reminded that a commitment had been made to undertake an annual review of de-delegated items as part of the budget setting process.
- The Chairman questioned how much had been allocated to this year's budget for maternity and sickness in total, considering there was an £84,000 underspend last year. Katherine Vernon indicated that there was £281,000 for 2023/24. Lynne Samuel stated that October was the mid-point of the year. The October meeting revenue monitoring report would include information about actual costs against the budget and assumptions made.
- The final Growth Fund expenditure for the year was in line with that expected in the forecast. Whilst there had technically been an overspend in year, this had been

planned for and the overspend had been funded from brought forward Growth Fund reserves.

- Derren Gray commented that with regards to the Growth Fund, this had come in under the anticipated figure because additional places in primary and secondary had not been actioned. It was clarified that the overspend relative to the in year planned figure was £69,000, which had come out of reserves.
- With regards to the High Needs Block, the outturn on the High Needs Block had reported a £4.3million overspend against allocated funding of £23.4million (18.5%). An increased level of activity had been assumed in the last year but the number of funded EHCP top ups had been significantly higher. Budget setting assumptions were set on a 14% increase in total funded EHCPs over the course of the year, however the increase actually experienced had been almost 30%.
- The proportion of funded EHCP top ups out of Borough had increased from 23% to 28%.
- Lynne Samuel referred to the cost profile in some detail. The complexity of need and activity was driving the pressure.
- It was noted that inflationary requests from independent and non-maintained providers were considered as part of contractual arrangements in place. Requests were reviewed based on cost analysis providers must submit, with uplifts capped in line with the South West SEND Framework that WBC was part of. The contractual inflation impact for Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools was £20,000 for the 2021/22 academic year, which represented around 0.2% of total spend.
- The Chairman asked what assumptions had been taken for inflation on independent and non-maintained schools for 2022/23.
- Lynne Samuel highlighted balances and reserves. The Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) Regulations 2020 had altered the way in which local authorities were required to account for DSG deficits. This required the establishment of a new statutorily ring-fenced unusable reserve – the Dedicated Schools Grant Adjustment Account.

RESOLVED: That the 2021/22 Revenue Outturn Report be noted.

50 2022/23 REVENUE MONITORING REPORT

The Forum received the 2022/23 Revenue Monitoring Report which provided an update on the 2022/23 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) forecast, as at 31st May 2022.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- At the time of budget setting a deficit of £4.1million was anticipated on the DSG for 2022/23 largely as a result of ongoing financial challenges within the High Needs Block.
- The current forecast had moved by £400,000 and now projected a deficit of £4.5million.
- The movement represented updated assumptions within the High Needs Block on changes for the new academic year in September, along with increases in activity, particularly for those in Early Years Foundation Stage and entering Key Stage 1.
- The Forum was informed that the cumulative forecast for the DSG now projected a cumulative deficit of £14.5million to 31st March 2023. However, there were significant key risks over and above that, of £1.7million.

- With regards to the High Needs Block, there had been increases in expenditure forecast and also refinement of income forecast which partly offset the cost increases.
- Within special schools there had been an increase in the assumption forecast for Addington because of a number of existing pupils moving banding levels at the point of review. The Council was committed to ensuring the financial sustainability of Addington, recognising it as a vital local provision within the SEND Strategy, and joint work would continue to inform early planning for the 2023/24 financial year and beyond.
- There was a forecast increase of £223,000 for Post 16 full time education colleges due to increasing numbers. Lynne Samuel commented that there were some older individuals within the cohort where costed arrangements for the 2022/23 academic year were not yet known. These had been included in the forecast on the assumption that existing costs would continue to the end of the financial year. There was therefore some scope for this forecast to reduce.
- The Forum considered the key risks to the High Needs Block forecast. There were a number of unplaced pupils for September and a considerable amount of work was being undertaken to resolve this. Some of these pupils had current funded top ups so had been included in the forecast with their current setting and funding arrangements. There was both risk and opportunities around this. However, there was an increasing number of very young children coming through that did not currently have a funding arrangement in place.
- Activity in the SEND service had increased significantly. Current indications from assessment activity were for potentially an additional 30 EHCPs per month. Profiling those across the year at a range of average costs indicated a potential in-year risk not currently included in the forecast of around £1.7million.
- Pupil level information informed the forecast. This process was largely manual and time consuming. Assumptions were then built into this. For the first time at this point in the year, Officers had been able to build in phased transfer information into the forecast from September.
- It was noted that in April 2021 there were 4 Early Years funded top ups in mainstream settings. This had since increased to 46 by April 2022.
- In early June a snapshot showed of 128 individuals within the statutory assessment process, 70 of these were Early Years.
- Growth fund and contingencies was still subject to review as place planning requirements are worked through.
- Derren Gray advised that the figure for Piggott for the Growth Fund forecast for July 2022, should read 46 not 34. He went on to question whether the five twelfths allocation had been paid to the primary and secondary schools and was informed that they had.
- The Chairman suggested that the £1.7million should be shown, either built into the forecast or as a separate line. He asked that the date be added to the header of the tables in future.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the report, update on the forecast position for the 2022/23 financial year along with associated risks, be noted.

51 2023/24 BUDGET PLANNING

The Forum was updated on 2023/24 Budget Planning.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The report provided a high level timeline of budget planning for the next financial year. The Primary Unit Funding and the Secondary Unit Funding figures were anticipated in July.
- An initial meeting would hopefully be held with the Task and Finish Group on the Schools' Block prior to the summer break.
- The principles behind the funding of all four blocks would be presented to Schools Forum, prior to Christmas.
- Katherine Vernon asked that those members of the Schools Block Task and Finish Group present at the meeting, remain members of the Task and Finish Group, which was chaired by Derren Gray. A positive response was received.
- Ian Morgan confirmed he was happy to continue to Chair the Early Years Task and Finish Group. He went on to refer to a Early Years national funding consultation. Officers indicated that they would look into this. The Chairman asked that Kerrie Clifton and Karen Edwards be asked if they wished to continue to be members of the Task and Finish Group.
- It was proposed that a High Needs Task and Finish Group be established to progress early discussion on principles for 2023/24 budget setting. Sara Attra, Corrina Gillard, and Debra Briault agreed to be part of this Group. Iain Thomas indicated that Foundry's Business Manager, Raj Arava, would also participate.
- The Chairman sought clarification of the disapplication of the half percent inter Block transfer and the Local Authority's position on this. Sal Thirlway commented that there would be transparency around the authority's intentions around the disapplication.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

52 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK & SEND IIP UPDATE

The Forum considered the High Needs Block and Send IIP update.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Sal Thirlway indicated that following the SEND written statement of action revisit, there was one element which was deemed to be not sufficiently progressed; transition arrangements into adulthood. Work had been carried out on an accelerated performance plan regarding this. An action plan covering six key areas had been developed. Work had been carried out with the DFE SEND Advisor and other colleagues as action against each areas was progressed. A review meeting with the DFE and NHS England would take place next week. Sal Thirlway was satisfied that progress was being made.
- The Council commissioned Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy and Physiotherapy for Children and Young People with an Education Care and Health Plan (EHCP) where therapy had been identified in the Education section of the plan.
- Dan Robinson advised that the tender and bids were in for the Children and Young People's Integrated Therapy service. The process had been elongated due to questions asked by the Panel making the decision. He confirmed that this would impact on the start date.
- Officers referred to the Foundry review in detail. The Forum was advised that the review approach in partnership with Foundry College had been progressing well with stage 1 now completed. Through the IIP, with support from commissioning and Foundry a one-year SLA would be in place by early summer. Dan Robinson felt that this would help with budget planning.

- Lynne Samuel added that the budget and funding for Foundry that year had been set jointly, looking at various factors. A commitment was in place for further work with Foundry to further understand the impact of no longer de-delegating the outreach service and moving to a direct charge system. Officers would be meeting with Foundry to discuss progress.
- Iain Thomas added that the first SLA meeting had been held. Foundry had outlined its concerns and he hoped that an SLA would be in place by September.
- The Forum discussed the outreach service.
- Sal Thirlway referred to local provision planning and what was required in the Borough to support the challenges faced.
- The Forum was informed that conversations had been had with the ESFA and the DFE regarding Wokingham's inclusion in the Safety Valve Programme. The programme was offered to local areas which that faced challenges around its High Needs Block. It would be known by September whether Wokingham had been successful in being accepted in the programme.

RESOLVED: That the update on key programme actions and the Safety Valve Programme be noted.

53 MAINTAINED SCHOOL BALANCES

The Forum considered a report regarding Maintained School Balances.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Overall maintained balances had increased significantly for the second year in a row. Maintained school balances stood at £6m as at 31st March 2022, an increase of £1.26million on those held at the start of the 2021/22 financial year.
- An update on the scheme for financing schools would be brought to the Forum's October meeting.
- Under guidance given to Local Authorities on Schemes for Financing Schools there is a mechanism to claw back excess surplus balances. Wokingham does not currently have this mechanism in place.
- The Chairman commented that it would be useful to receive information regarding the published admission numbers and current roll numbers to understand if challenges were driven by lower pupil numbers.
- The position statement was at 31 March 2022, and as the situation changed, for example rapidly increasing energy costs, this would be kept under review.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

54 SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP REVIEW

The Forum considered a report regarding the Schools Forum membership review.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Schools Forum was required to undertake an annual review of its membership to ensure that it continued to have a representation that was indicative of the schools' make up in the Borough.
- It was anticipated that All Saints Primary School would become an academy by 1 September 2022, and the number of pupils on roll detailed in the report reflected this change. The only difference from the last academic year, was that one primary school had changed to academy status, which represented 239 pupils.

- It was recommended that for 2022/23 the Forum retain the current phase and type member structure.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the information provided for a decision on its membership for the next academic year be considered by Schools Forum;
- 2) the membership structure as currently established be retained.

55 FORWARD PLAN

The Forum considered the Forward programme.

The Chairman noted that it would have been Ginny Rhodes' last meeting as a Forum member. The Forum requested that their thanks be passed on to Ginny for her contribution over a number of years.

RESOLVED: That the forward programme be noted.

Matters Arising:

1. Group of Forum members to meet with Officers in early September to discuss the National Funding Formula consultation.
2. Education Welfare service – item to be brought to October Forum meeting.
3. Falling rolls - The Chairman asked that the Admissions Group consider innovative approaches to mitigate what is a growing problem.
4. Maternity and sickness - The October meeting revenue monitoring report would include information about actual costs against the budget and assumptions made.
5. Revenue monitoring - The Chairman suggested that the £1.7million should be shown, either built into the forecast or as a separate line. He asked that the date be added to the header of the tables in future.
6. The principles behind the funding of all four blocks would be presented to Schools Forum, prior to Christmas.
7. The Chairman asked that Kerrie Clifton and Karen Edwards be asked if they wished to continue to be members of the Early Years Task and Finish Group.
8. An update on the scheme for financing schools would be brought to the Forum's October meeting.
9. The Chairman commented that it would be useful to receive information regarding the published admission numbers and current roll numbers to understand if challenges were driven by lower pupil numbers.

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