

SCHOOLS FORUM

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING HELD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2014 AT SALISBURY ROOM - COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE.

Present:

Mr N Baker (Chairman), Mr M Watson (Vice-Chair), Ms A Burnside, Mrs A Bates, Ms J Hatherell, Mr J Hawkins, Mrs C Williamson, Mrs S Jiggins, Mrs D Rock, Ms I Sidmouth, Roper and Mr A Bridewell

Also Present:

Cllr Richard Gamble

43 Election of Chair

Resolved:

The Forum agreed to appoint Mr Neil Baker as Chair of Schools Forum for 2014/15.

44 Election of Vice Chair

Resolved:

The Forum agreed to appoint Mr Martin Watson as Vice-Chair of Schools Forum for 2014/15.

45 Apologies and Changes of Membership

The Forum noted apologies from:

Mr John Proctor,
Ms Tracy Cornelius,
Ms Mandy Christopher,
Mr David Whewell,
Ms Michele Chilcott.

The following changes to membership were also made:

Mr Steve Clarke is replaced by Mr Nigel Roper.

46 Minutes of the previous Meeting

The minutes of the 13 March 2014 and 18 June 2014 meetings were presented.

An amendment to minute 28 of the 18 June 2014 minutes was proposed. The amendment was agreed and for the minute to read:

“The forum noted that Sue Jiggins would advise in future on filling vacancies for Primary and Secondary Governors.”

An amendment to minute 15 of the 13 March 2014 minutes was proposed. The amendment was agreed and for the minute to read:

“The forum noted that Sue Jiggins would advise in future on filling vacancies for Primary and Secondary Governors.”

Resolved:

To agree and sign the minutes as a true and correct record of the meetings held on 13 March 2014 and 18 June 2014, subject to the amendments detailed above.

47 Declaration of Interests

Ms Ingrid Sidmouth declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 12, High Needs Block 2015/16. For this item Ms Sidmouth declared she would debate and vote on the matter with an open mind.

Mrs Aileen Bates declared a pecuniary interest in item 15, Split Site Allowance - High Needs Provision. For this item Mrs Bates did not vote.

48 Chairman's Announcements

There were no announcements.

49 Trust Board Update

Susan Tanner was in attendance in place of Julia Cramp.

It was announced that new forms had taken effect from 1 September 2014 and that so far it had been going well. It was stated that they were required to publish the transition plan regarding how old statements would move to the new system. This was explained as being made available online, and would also set out the broad intentions arranged by year group.

The SEND service was announced as up and running and work was said to have begun on the SEN place strategy. The SEN strategy had been revisited due to the lack of a strategy since 2010. There was said to be funding reform changes and a local strategy direction.

Work on Emotional and Mental Health was announced as continuing but difficult. It was stated that GPs and schools were being worked with, and that free mindfulness training was available for secondary schools. Oxford Health was said to be developing a self-harm application to help manage anxieties. It was stated that they were working with Oxford Health to find a single point of referral.

It was announced that Early Help had a new-look café which was going well. The Revised Thresholds document was said to have a good flowchart to help decide what route to take. The Education, Employment & Skills Strategy was noted as going to Cabinet for approval on 11 November 2014.

Questions were asked on the gap in provision for 5-10 year olds from abusive homes. It was explained that there wasn't yet a method of clearly setting out the services that are already available, which was stated to be the problem. Susan Tanner explained that this would be taken up with the trust board.

Decision

To note the Trust Board update.

50 Budget Monitoring 2014-2015

Elizabeth Williams, Head of Finance, introduced the Budget Monitoring 2014-15 report. It was explained that there had been a bit of movement in the DSG settlement at the start of the year around high needs places, and that it had yet to be adjusted for academies.

Key areas were said to include the £2million overspend. Top-up budgets for high needs pupils was described as a key area in the overspend. The projected overspend was said to be in a number of areas, including 17% higher spending in named pupil allowances. It was stated that it was difficult to know if this was a change in need, practises, or requests [take away action]. Post-16 top-ups were said to be experiencing more activity than anticipated. The activity was stated as exceeding the number of places funded, especially at FE colleges. Increased identification of high needs students was stated as being the key reason for this.

A £1.2million underspend was identified in the Early Years budget. Despite a higher rate of paying with close to 40% of 2 year olds covered it was explained that they were still underspending. The model was explained as taking into account autumn numbers and was stated as unlikely to change between now and the end of the financial year.

The impact on the DSG reserve was outlined. It was stated that commitments had been made from the reserve, and that last year's underspend on the 2 year olds budget had been ring-fenced to fund the higher hourly rate. It was stated that they had been left with a £2.5million budget surplus on the reserve but that the overspend impact would leave them with little to take forward.

Questions were asked on the 17% increase in named pupil allowances. Questions were also asked on sustainability. It was explained that submissions had been made for exceptional place requests for additional places for 2015/16. It was stated that they expect to hear back in December and would be concerned if they did not get it, but would be able to ease if this was the case.

Decision

To note the budget monitoring position as of the end of September 2014.

51 Reports from Working Groups

School Funding Working Group:

It was heard that the local authority had been picking up the cost of childcare vouchers for maternity leave staff. The working group's recommendations were heard to be proposed as long as the maternity budget was de-delegated.

Decision

The forum agreed that the costs of childcare vouchers for school staff on maternity leave be charged to the central maternity budget for maintained schools as long as this budget continued to be de-delegated and directly to academies as the maternity budget had been delegated to these schools.

Schools Services Working Group:

The need for updated terms of reference for the working group was noted, it was identified that the last update had been in January 2005. These current terms of reference was said to be no longer fit for purpose.

Questions were asked over the future of the working group and the frequency of its meetings. It was stated that the group had been extremely helpful in the past and that it may be useful for the working group to meet twice a year with a revised terms of reference.

It was asked whether the SSWG should meet before the end of the year to look at services currently offered and to revise the terms of reference.

Questions were asked over the membership of the SSWG, as there was no academy or special school representatives.

Decision

For the SSWG to meet on the 6 January 2015 and to revise their terms of reference at this meeting.

52 Schools Revenue Balances 2013-14

Jane Ralph, Schools Strategic Financial Support Advisor, introduced the report for the Schools Revenue Balances 2013-14. Areas of key importance were said to include: the reclassification of balance and permissible thresholds for secondary and primary/special schools.

It was stated that in 2011 the Department for Education withdrew the need for local authorities to have a claw back mechanism in place. It was explained that in response the Schools Forum agreed to remove the Wiltshire Council mechanism, the Controls on Surplus Balances Scheme, from 2013/14. This was said to be a result of turbulence in budgets and the economy. Schools were stated as knowing how best to spend their money.

From 2011/12 it was explained that authorities with 5% of schools that have a surplus of 15% or more for the last 5 years would be challenged.

With regards to the balances themselves it was stated that the table in paragraph 5 showed the 3-year data.

Questions were asked on the local authority process through which schools in deficit can be challenged. The Governing Body must submit a deficit request to the Chief Financial Officer of the LA. A deficit budget will only be approved where the school can demonstrate it has in place an approved Financial Recovery Plan

It was stated that governors should be challenging Head Teachers on the services and should be given the opportunity to ask appropriate questions when equipped with relevant information and correct evidence.

It was said that schools with issues would be identified and more time would be invested into that school from a financial angle.

Decision

For the contents of this report to be noted and for additional work to be prepared and presented to the next Schools Funding Working Group on 6 January 2015.

53 Schools Block - Funding Formula 2015-16

It was stated that at the Schools Forum in June there was a report on government proposals for an additional £350million to be allocated nationally in 2015-16 to increase funding for the lowest funded authorities. It was agreed that the money received by Wiltshire would be used to reduce the number of schools with minimum funding. It was stated that the amount would now be £390million, and that the unit quoted would not change.

It was explained that in July official confirmation came through from the Department for Education of the final Schools Block Unit Funding (SBUF) values for 2015-16. For Wiltshire this was confirmed as £4,309.92 per pupil. It was also stated that the Department for Education also confirmed the arrangements for applying the deduction for Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) savings in 2015-16. It was explained that in 2015-16 this deduction would be applied on a per pupil basis and £7.51 would be deducted from the per pupil amount.

An error was noted in the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service table. It was stated that the true figures were 4 delegated and 3 retain. It was explained that schools could be contacted directly to further understand their responses.

The Forum was asked to decide on the delegation/de-delegation of budgets for central services within the schools block.

Decision

- a) To set the delegation/de-delegation of Central Budgets 2015-16 as follows:**

DfE Heading	Wiltshire Budget	Maintained Primary Schools	Maintained Secondary Schools
Contingencies	Schools Contingency	De-delegate	De-delegate
Free school meals eligibility	Free School Meals Eligibility Service	De-delegate	De-delegate
Licences/subscriptions	SIMS Licence	De-Delegate	De-Delegate
	HCSS Licence	De-Delegate	De-Delegate
	Copyright Licences (excluding the national CLA and MPA Licences)	De-Delegate	De-Delegate
Staff costs – supply cover	Trade Union Duties	De-Delegate	De-Delegate
	Maternity Costs	De-Delegate	De-Delegate
Support for minority ethnic pupils and underachieving groups	Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS)	De-Delegate	Delegate
	Traveller Education Service	De-Delegate	Delegate
Behaviour support services	Primary Behaviour Support Service	De-Delegate	Not delivered to secondary schools

b) It was noted that some of the responses from maintained secondary schools were in favour of de-delegating the budgets for EMAS and Traveller’s Education. It was agreed to maintain the status quo it was also agreed that those schools should be contacted to understand if there was a specific issue that had driven the suggestion for de-delegation.

54 High Needs Block 2015-16

Elizabeth Williams introduced the High-Needs Block report for 2015-16. The report presented an analysis of expenditure on budgets within the High Needs Block of the overall schools budget for 2014-15. This included the projected spend for the current year.

Total High Needs expenditure was stated to be just over £38million. The projected overspend in top-up budgets was estimated to be £3.1million, this was said to be through funding additional places in post-16 places and within special schools. Additional places were stated to be seen on page 6 of the report, paragraph 9. It was said that they expected to hear back from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) on this matter before Christmas, and that money will be asked back for places not given out.

It was explained that other commitments for 2015-16 were two items funded from DSG reserves: support for hard to place pupils, which was stated as £0.4million allocated in total with £0.150million from reserves, and support for pupils transitioning to primary school which was said to be £0.2million. It was stated that there was a need to evaluate and review these before the next year.

Questions were asked on the SEN support budget. It was stated that it covers sensory support teams, specialist SEN teams, and early intervention teams. It was explained that the staffing teams are met through the High Needs Block, but that it needs to be reduced.

It was asked if reducing the number of residential places at Rowdeford School from 23 to 16 would make it less cost effective, as there may be a need to increase out of county placement. It was explained that they are not predicted to be children who would potentially go out of county. None of the children were said to be on care orders, and that there was no statutory obligation to deliver the provision. Worries were expressed on children who may be sent back to families who could not cope with the needs of their child.

Questions were also asked on potentially additional places that have gone to post-16. It was asked where the places had come from, whether they were in the system and if people were aware. It was stated that this had happened nationally and that a new approach to care was needed, as students with more complex needs, who would previously have gone elsewhere, were being dealt with. This was said to include children with Asperger's and autism. The numbers asked for were stated as being higher than the places currently had in possession.

Decision

- 1. The current pressures against the High Needs Block were noted by the forum.**
- 2. The forum agreed to fund a 16 bed flexible residential provision at Rowdeford School from April 2015 in place of the current 23 bed allocation.**
- 3. The forum would look at the saving options and bring back to the 15 January 2015 meeting.**

55 Early Years Block 2015-16

The Early Years Block 2015-16 report was introduced by Elizabeth Williams. It was stated that there had been an under-spend within the 2 year olds block for 2014.

It was asked if there was a need to take up one rate across all types of providers. It was also stated that this needed to be done within existing resources, as no extra money was said to be coming in.

The pupil premium was stated as being valued at £300 per annum per eligible child taking up the full entitlement. This was said to be applied as an hourly rate of £0.53 per child. It was stated that there were issues of knowing who the pupil premiums were.

Decision

The forum noted the contents of the report.

56 Free School Meal Pool - Distribution of Closing Balances

The report on Free School Meals Pooling Scheme was introduced. It was explained that the pool had been introduced in 2001 offering schools to pay into the pool and claim money depending on how many free school meals they offered during the year.

It was stated that the Schools Forum previously decided the Free School Meals Pool was no longer fit for purpose and the scheme had since been closed.

There was stated to still be balance left in the pool and that it needed to be decided how it was to be distributed back to schools. It was estimated that 86% had been paid back and that an estimated £165,000 was left at the end of the year.

It was proposed that redistribution takes into account who paid in and how much was paid since the last cashback. The rationale was stated as being within the report.

Decision

- 1. That the full balance be redistributed to schools following closure of the pool on 31st August 2014.**
- 2. That the balance be redistributed to all schools that have contributed to the pool since cashback was last allocated on 31st March 2012.**

57 Split Site Allowance - High Needs Provision

The report on Split Site Allowance – High Needs Settings was introduced. It was explained that the criteria for split sites was defined by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and that it stated more than one mile on a public highway between the two teaching sites was needed to qualify. The criteria was specific to maintained schools, whereas funding for special schools would need to come from the High Needs budget and a Wiltshire based criteria established.

It was explained that St. Nicholas' School had opened up a second site with financial support and encouragement from Wiltshire Council over one mile away from the main site. There was also teaching on both campuses, and therefore fit the criteria for maintained schools.

The second site at Greentrees School was stated as being less than one mile away, and that a resource base would open spanning both sites.

It was explained that funding would come from the High Needs Block, which was stated to already be under pressure. It was also explained that a set amount was not able to be given out, and that St. Nicholas' School would be given a specific top-up value to reflect that pupils are over a split site.

Questions were asked on the criteria for split site allowance and Greentree's eligibility. It was explained that the split site criteria does not apply to the High Needs Block, the question was raised as to whether criteria was wanted. It was further explained that when considering Greentrees the forum needed to look at funding the extra costs incurred by the split site.

It was stated that not enough was currently known about the extra costs of the Greentrees site. It was suggested that the Greentrees proposal be brought back as a separate case to see if there are any extra costs incurred as a result of their split site.

It was stated that the decision would need to be made promptly in January, as they were not currently in the position with the relevant facts to decide. The regulations which were in place when they were encouraged to develop a split site were stated as not applying at the time of the meeting.

Decision

That the principle of split site allowance be looked at and brought back to the 15 January 2015 meeting.

58 Confirmation of dates for future meetings

Decision

The future Schools Forum dates were confirmed, with the next meeting to be on 15th January 2015, 1.30 pm in Salisbury Room at County Hall, Trowbridge.

59 Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 1.30 - 4.35 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Adam Brown, of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 718038, e-mail adam.brown@wiltshire.gov.uk

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