

Schools Forum

MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING HELD AS AN ONLINE MEETING – THURSDAY 10 JUNE 2021 VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS.

Present:

Neil Baker (Chairman), Aileen Bates, Nikki Barnett, Andy Bridewell, Rebecca Carson, Michele Chilcott, Sam Churchill, John Hawkins, Cllr Ross Henning, Mel Jacob, Georgina Keily-Theobald, Lisa Percy (Vice-Chair), John Proctor, Nigel Roper, Graham Shore, Trudy Srawley, Ian Tucker, David Whewell and Catriona Williamson

Also Present:

Ian Abbot (Lead Professional – Cognition & Learning), Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager), Helean Hughes (Director – Education & Skills), Cate Mullen (Head of Inclusion & SEND), Cllr Dominic Muns (Portfolio Holder for Education), Lisa Pullin (Democratic Services Officer), Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children and Education), Lucy Townsend (Director of Children’s Services) and Cllr Suzanne Wickham (Portfolio Holder for SEND)

1 Apologies and Changes of Membership

Apologies were received from Jon Hamp (Special School Academy Representative), Cllr Laura Mayes (Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Skills), Giles Pugh (Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education), and Lynn Yendle (School Business Manager Springfield School).

Membership changes

Cllrs Suzanne Wickham (Portfolio Holder for SEND) and Cllr Dominic Muns (Portfolio Holder for Education) were welcomed to Schools Forum.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 March 2021 were approved.

Resolved:

That the Chairman approve and sign the minutes of the meeting of Schools forum held on 11 March 2021.

3 Chair's Announcements

The Chair made the following announcements:

Neil Baker as Chair of Schools Forum thanked everyone for his leaving card as he was retiring from Christ Church Primary School in Bradford on Avon and

thus stepping down as Chair of Schools Forum a role that he had held for 14 years. Neil reported that he would miss Schools Forum colleagues and hoped that the true collaboration of the group all wanting the best outcomes for the children would continue.

School Admissions Appeals update

Section 88P of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) requires every local authority to make an annual report on school admissions to the adjudicator. The Chief Adjudicator then includes a summary of these reports in her annual report to the Secretary for State for Education. The report provides information on how the admissions arrangements in the local authority serve looked after children and previously looked after children, as well as providing an assessment of the effectiveness of the Fair Access Protocols.

Wiltshire Council is currently in the process of drafting the report for 2021, which must be submitted by 30 June 2021. Once finished the report will be published on the School Admissions section of the Wiltshire Council website and will be circulated to School Forum in October.

Within the 2021 report, there is limited opportunity to comment on Education Appeals. However, there is a section which provides the option to comment on other matters that have not been included within the report. It is therefore in this section, that we will reference following the change in legislation around the funding for education appeals, that schools within Wiltshire continue to feel the system discriminates against those that are popular and places significant pressures on school budgets. This is despite the fact that the local authority has created options for school to purchase the service on a pay as you go basis and offer discounts to schools that have multiple appeals.

4 **Declaration of Interests**

There were no interests declared.

5 **Public Participation**

No questions or statements had been received prior to the meeting.

6 **Updates from Working Groups**

The Forum noted the update received by way of the minutes of the meeting of the School Funding and SEN working group held on 27 May 2021.

The Forum noted the update received by way of the minutes of the meetings of the Early Years Reference Group meeting held on 27 April and 19 May 2021.

There were no questions raised from the notes of the meetings.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the minutes of the joint meeting of the School Funding and SEN working group held on 27 May 2021 and the Early Years Reference group meetings held on 27 April and 19 May 2021.

7 Dedicated Schools Budget - Budget Monitoring Outturn for 2020/21

Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children and Education) referred to the budget monitoring outturn report as at 31 March 2021 that was circulated with the Agenda. Marie highlighted the following:

- A final overspend of £7.906 million against the overall school's budget which was an improved position than previously reported in part due to staff time supporting Covid activity being chargeable to certain Covid grants;
- The pandemic had created much uncertainty for early years and Officers had worked with the Early Years Reference Group to ascertain what best suited the needs in the sector;
- The Local Authority has a duty of sufficiency for early years and continued to work closely with providers to support them, providing additional financial support whilst following the Covid guidance within the terms and conditions of the grant funding. The intention was for any significant underspends to be re-distributed to settings under the local discretion guidance. However, most still attended settings even if they were different from their usual as dual placements were not allowed due to Covid;
- The EYRG requested that the early years block variance for future years (i.e. for 21-22 financial year onwards) be separately ringfenced. The national regulations assume this is the case anyway and so from 1 April 2021 all variances and logged funding changes will be separately accounted for and reported;
- The 19-20 adjustment based on the January 2020 census data was an increase of £0.539 million. In addition, the 20-21 allocation increased by £0.943 million. This reflected a higher count of children than the previous year;
- The Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) of £1m was the only dedicated funding that early years received, and Officers were pleased to be able to support settings in this way. The payments made totalled £0.418m in 20-21 and it had been agreed that the unclaimed allocation of £0.582M could be rolled forward to support the sector in the 2021-22 financial year which was great news as the impact on settings still continued with bubbles closing and cleaning costs etc;
- The underspend on schools' budgets largely related to the school's growth fund which was helping to offset the overall pressure on the DSG;
- High needs budgets overspent by £11.507m. The biggest areas of overspend were named pupil allowances and top ups, independent special school

packages, and alternative provision. When the level of funding available does not match the local needs the budget cannot be set at an achievable level and so the location of the overspend is not an indication of individual budget issues but that the whole block under significant pressure and the major driver of the overspend is volume;

- The numbers of EHCP's has increased year on year although the number being requested has slightly slowed – this could be due to the reduced face to face contact with pupils due to the Covid pandemic. However, they were now playing catch up with many referrals now being submitted;
- Details were given in paragraph 21 of the report of the volume variance analysis, which showed that the majority of placements had increased in the budgeted unit weekly price which was not necessarily a bad thing that those with higher needs were being supported by those types of placements that were best for them. There was a slight reduction in the Independent Special School fees. Work would continue through the high needs block working group and this would be shared later in the meeting;
- The DSG reserve brought forward of £11.350m was increased by the positive early years block adjustment of £0.539m. The overspend takes the reserve into a deficit position of £18.717m. There had been a request from other Finance Directors and Directors of Children's Services to have details of our high needs position for a national survey and Officers felt it was beneficial for it to be looked at by other pressure groups;
- Officers had a meeting scheduled soon with the DfE regarding the DSG Management Plan and would report back any useful information, insight, or recommendations to both the High Needs working group and Schools Forum. It was anticipated that an updated plan would be brought to the to the October Forum meeting for information, update and approval.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum

- 1) Note the final outturn budget monitoring position and the deficit DSG reserve balance.**
- 2) Note the change in accounting treatment around the early years grant for 2021/22.**

8 Update from the High Needs Block Working Group

Helean Hughes (Director – Education & Skills) and Cate Mullen (Head of Inclusion & SEND) gave an overview on the work of the HNB Recovery Group and highlighted the following:

- The pandemic had had a significant impact on the work of the high need recovery plan, although they were just getting back up to speed. It was

difficult to attribute savings made to just one project and it was proposed that at future meetings of Schools Forum they would receive details of the savings made/identified/action by the high needs block recovery group;

- At the scheduled meeting with the DfE next week Officers would be asking if there was anything else they could suggest to make savings and any findings would be reported back to the Forum;
- The High Needs Block Recovery Plan was very detailed – the three main areas that were encompassed within it were
 - i) Early Intervention and Prevention
 - ii) Statutory Processes
 - iii) Quality Assurance and Monitoring
- There were Officers leading on projects – regular updates were received from them. For some projects it was harder to note the savings achieved and some are longer term pieces of work which will take a while for the savings to come through. There were ongoing discussions about work relating to the development of provision mapping tools to support discussions and decisions relating to funding requests;
- High Needs Block information sharing sessions had been made available to teams within Education and Skills directorate so that they were able to offer support to schools had been well received by colleagues;
- In relation to the System of excellence – a series of engagement (roadshow) events for officers and schools' settings had been taking place. So far four of the hour-long events had been held and two more were planned for external partners. There had been a very good level of engagement in them.

A Governor representative asked if there would be any of these events put in place for Governors. Cate Mullen agreed to liaise with outside of the meeting to discuss this further.

Ian Abbott (Lead Professional – Cognition and Learning) gave an overview of the Dyslexia-Friendly Schools Award and highlighted the following:

- This was a national scheme which leads to a dyslexia friendly BDA (British Dyslexia Association) Quality Mark and was based on “If the child does not learn the way you teach, then teach the way he learns”;
- Dyslexia was prevalent in lots of creative industries and a poem was shared which when read from the bottom to the top gives a different meaning;

- There were a number of benefits in joining the scheme which also fits in with the Council's SEND Strategy;
- There was a two-year programme which ran from initial registration in the scheme. Schools were being supported in their progression of the scheme with narrated PowerPoints, virtual training sessions, DFS network meetings and remote support and schools were coming together to share good practice with each other. There was a clear scheme criterion to follow and after 2 years there would be a verification visit by the BDA and a celebration of good practice; and
- There was a spread of 18 schools across the county currently working towards the scheme (5 secondary and 13 primary schools). If any other schools were interested in finding out more, they should contact Ian Abbott.

The Chair was pleased to note the project and involvement and asked if other schools were able to join the scheme – was it closed, or would it be expanded in the future? Ian Abbott reported that they were considering ways in how the scheme could be extended in the future and that if a school were keen to join the scheme, they could do this via the BDA. Wiltshire Council had supported the current scheme which was open to other schools and it was hoped that schools would continue to share good practice. Resources and training were also available to schools if they were interested.

Helean Hughes reported that Officers would be looking at the impact of the first round of the scheme and then look to get the next steps planned in if schools were interested and wanted to know more about it. The vision was to have all Wiltshire schools as dyslexia friendly schools in the future.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum:

- 1. Note the minutes of the High Needs Block Recovery Group meeting held on 6 May 2021.**
- 2. Note the update on behalf of the High Needs Block Recovery Group**
- 3. Note the update on the Dyslexia Friendly Schools project.**

9 Impact of Changes to Pupil Premium Calculations - f40 Survey

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) referred to the report which sought to provide Schools Forum with an update on the implications of the change to the DfE date for calculating Pupil Premium for schools. Grant highlighted the following:

- The f40 group had collated the financial impact from its members to obtain a wider picture of the implications from moving the Pupil Premium census date from January, back to the previous October;

- The Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) is designed to support pupils and learners using the following three drivers for allocating funding;
 - *Free School Meal Ever6* – pupils from a deprivation background
 - *Service Pupil Ever6* – pupils from a service family
 - *Post-Looked After Child* – pupils who have left local authority care through an adoption or guardianship order
- PPG has always been calculated using the January census however as the January data was the most up to date census information available for the next financial year;
- The DfE when questioned gave the following explanation for the date change:
 - Aligning the census date with mainstream funding to October
 - During Covid, school pupils were not in school during January but were in October;
- There is an impact in moving the date as both locally and nationally there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils eligible for a free school meal (FSM) and the knock on effect will result in a lower number of pupils being eligible for PPG funding. In effect this this would create a lag or shortfall in PPG funding for schools in 2021-22;
- Schools would still be required to support their disadvantaged PPG pupils and be held to account by Ofsted for their progress, despite not being fully funded for those pupils;
- For Wiltshire position this would mean a shortfall in funding of £555k. £493k for primary schools and £62k for secondary schools;
- The results of the f40 survey to its 42 members show that the overall picture shows £36.4m of significant funding that has been lost just from moving the census date;
- The f40 group are asking the DfE to consider either delaying the change or compensating schools for the funding they will miss out on this year as schools will have to find the money from elsewhere to support disadvantaged pupils when funding is already tight and so other parts of their budgets will suffer;
- The Society of County Treasurers (SCT) are doing a survey of DSG deficits across local authorities which would form part of their ongoing pressure for the funding and management of DSG deficits in light of the significant growth in demand in EHCP's. The results of the survey should be available in September and would be brought to the October meeting of the Forum.

The Chair wanted to emphasise that the provision for those disadvantaged learners would still continue despite not receiving the funding but felt it was important for schools to show the DfE how budgets would be under further pressure because of the change affecting funding levels.

Cllr Dominic Muns (Portfolio Holder for Education) asked for an explanation of the impact of the change. Grant Davis reported that there had been an increase in the number of eligible for FSM's between October and January. If the numbers had been taken from January census, they would have been higher, and the funding received based on that figure not the lower October figure. Whilst it would level out, in the meantime this would create a lag and be a funding issue for schools. Cllr Muns asked if the rise was new pupils starting school or if it was the existing pupils now being eligible for FSM when they were not before. Grant Davis confirmed that the latter was the case.

A Forum Member reported that in their school there were 54 PP students in October and then 62 by the spring this was linked to family hardship in the current climate.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the content of the report and the f40's ongoing dialogue with the DfE, along with the work of the Society of County Treasurers.

10 **DfE Consultation - School Improvement Brokerage and Monitoring Grant**

Helean Hughes (Director – Education & Skills) referred to the report which sought to share the DfE's consultation around School Improvement brokerage and monitoring grant. Helean highlighted the following:

- The DfE issued a consultation on 28 April 2021 regarding the future funding levels of the school improvement brokerage and monitoring grant which ran until 26 May;
- The Local Authority responded to the survey highlighting the following major points:
 - a) Any additional responsibilities without funding will dilute the ability to support all pupils and schools
 - b) Although numbers of maintained schools have reduced from 153 in 2017-18 to 126 in 20-21, the grant is used to support all schools and therefore reductions should not be made on a straight-line basis.
 - c) A reduction in grant or, an increase in conditions will mean school support will need to be prioritised and current support will be impacted.
- The grant of £0.531m currently received allows the Local Authority to divert uncommitted central schools services block monies to support the high needs block.

The Chair asked when the responses to the consultation would be shared – Helean Hughes guessed this would be anytime from September 2021 onwards

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the DfE’s consultation, the Local Authority response and future risks around the funding and provision of School Improvement.

11 **Future of Schools Forum Meetings - Remote Meetings Format**

Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children & Education) referred to the report which sought to present the permanent legislative changes around the format of Schools Forum meetings and the responses to the consultation following these changes in legislation. Marie highlighted the following:

- During the pandemic there was a temporary change to the legislation to allow Schools Forum meetings to take place remotely. The ESFA had now made a permanent change to the legislation to allow local flexibility to choose whether to hold meetings remotely or face to face;
- Because of the pandemic the March 2020 meeting of Schools Forum was cancelled, and any still relevant reports were brought to the June meeting. The minimum number of meetings required per year was four. Officers were proposing that Schools Forum consider dropping the March meeting with the option to add it back if/when needed;
- Forum members had been consulted indicating their preferences for meeting arrangements and the majority of responses had agreed that it would be beneficial to hold the December meeting when budget principles were discussed and the January meeting where the budgets were voted on as face to face meetings but to continue with remote meetings for the other meetings – this would also help with the Council’s carbon neutral agenda;

The Chair agreed that for the important decision-making meeting there was not as much conversation with an online meeting and that the proposals put forward to have the two main decision-making meetings face to face would be beneficial.

Resolved: That Schools Forum

1. **Note the permanent change in statutory arrangements around Schools Forum meetings.**
2. **Agree that Schools Forums meetings are held virtually with the exception of the main decision-making meetings which are generally, December to agree formula changes and transfers in**

principal and January, where the schools budget formula is voted on and finalised.

3. Agree that the number of future meetings be reduced to four per annum; January, June, October and December – with the March meeting available as optional should urgent items arise, or decision making be required.

12 **Confirmation of Dates for Future Meetings**

Schools Forum noted that the future meetings would be held on:

7 October 2021 – via Microsoft Teams

9 December 2021 – meeting at County Hall – room TBC

20 January 2022 – meeting at County Hall – room TBC.

13 **Urgent Items**

Helean Hughes gave a farewell to Neil Baker on behalf of Schools Forum who had chaired the Forum meetings so well for the last 14 years.

(Duration of meeting: 1.30 - 3.00 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Lisa Pullin, Tel 01225 713015 or email committee@wiltshire.gov.uk of Democratic Services

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