

SCHOOLS FORUM

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING HELD ON 12 MARCH 2015 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE.

Present:

Mr N Baker (Chairman), Mr M Watson (Vice-Chair), Mrs A Bates, Mr A Bridewell, Ms M Chilcott, Ms A Christopher, Mrs R Collard, Miss Tracy Cornelius, Ms J Hatherell, Mr J Hawkins, Mrs S Jiggins, Mr J Proctor, Mr N Roper, Ms I Sidmouth and Mrs C Williamson

Also Present

Cllr Laura Mayes

15 Apologies and Changes of Membership

Apologies were received from:

David Whewell
Debbie Rock
Amanda Burnside

Amanda Burnside was substituted by Cathy Shahrokni.

16 Minutes of the previous Meeting

Resolved

To agree and sign the minutes as a true and correct record of the meeting held on 15 January 2015.

17 Declaration of Interests

Mrs Aileen Bates declared a pecuniary interest in item 10, High Needs Block 2015-16. For this item Mrs Bates did not vote.

18 Chairman's Announcements

It was announced that item 10 High Needs Block 2015-16 would be taken before item 9 Early Years – Hourly Rate for 3&4 Year Old Free Entitlement 2015-16.

a) Cllr Laura Mayes Introduction

Cllr Mayes, Cabinet member for Children's Services, introduced herself to the Forum. Information on any issues was said to be available through her. The

Chelsea's Choice programme was up and running, most secondary schools had signed up. Discussions would be had with schools that hadn't on why they chose not to.

19 **Trust Board Update**

Susan Tanner, Head of Commissioning and Joint Planning, was in attendance to deliver a verbal update.

The new framework for school improvement services had been published. Schools could be inspected at any time. Triggers for an inspection were noted as including concerns about vulnerable learners.

Carolyn Godfrey had visited Rochdale to learn what could be done to tackle child sexual exploitation.

Ofsted would be carrying out Early-Year inspections from the 16 March 2015 onwards.

Resolved

To note the update.

20 **Budget Monitoring 2014-15**

The report presented the budget monitoring information against the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for the financial year 2014-15 as at 31st January 2015.

Since the last report a lot more detailed work had been done, especially around High Needs.

The projected overspend was £1.604million, which marked an improvement of £725,000.

The biggest improvement was within the High Needs budget. Reductions in the numbers of pupils supported financially and out of county placements were factors in the improvement.

All staff savings not included in the last report had now been taken into account. A small underspend of £0.088million in 3&4 year olds was anticipated, along with the 2 year old DSG Reserve impact.

Taking in to account adjustments the projected balance within the DSG Reserve at the end of 2014-15 is £2.516million. This would enable the projected overspend to be managed within 2014-15 and leave £0.912million to be carried forward to 2015-16. This was noted as a significant reduction to previous years, but was an improvement on the position reported at the previous meeting.

Phase 2 of spending for term-time only back pay would be in the next year. Confirmation had not been received on the £636,000 amount; the actual at P10 was £497,000.

Clarification was sought on how portionment was reached. It was explained to state how the overspend was made up, with an offset left of £900,000. The

reserve went back many years and had been drawn on and contributed to throughout this time. This could not be broken down into individual blocks.

Resolved

To note the budget monitoring position as of the end of January 2015.

21 Reports from Working Groups

a) School Funding Working Group

The recommendations from the working group were considered under item 9.

Resolved

To note the minutes of the School Funding Working Group.

b) Special Educational Needs Working Group

The recommendations from the working group were considered under item 10.

Resolved

To note the minutes of the SEN Working Group.

c) Early Years Reference Group

Resolved

To note the minutes of the Early Years Reference Group.

22 Schools Budget 2015-16

The Education Funding Agency (EFA) had confirmed that the funding formula was compliant for the year.

Additional funding of £5.7million had been received for the Fairer Schools Funding, and an increase in £2.1million for growth in Wiltshire pupil numbers. These both accounted for the £7.8million increase in the 2014-15 funding level.

Key Stages 1&2 had seen an increase of 832 pupils. Secondary School level had lost 341 pupils. The net increase in the county was 491 pupils.

Additional funding was spread among the Per Pupil Funding. The increases were as previously agreed by the Schools Forum.

There had been a small movement in deprivation and prior attainment. These had been funded at previous year's rates increased in line with the percentage increase applied to per pupil rates.

The minimum funding guarantee (MFG) which had received £1,611,101 funding during 2014-15, had now been reduced to £533,217. This was a reduced

reliance on the MSG from schools. The largest MFG reduction had been from £133,628 to £67,647. Schools in receipt of MFG had reduced from 77 to 27. This was noted as demonstrating a lower number of schools being reliant on the MFG to support their funding.

The largest cap had reduced from £117,442 to £53,553, and the number of schools capped in order to fund the MFG had reduced from 91 to 47. The percentage of any gain which schools had been able to retain within their funding had increased from 0.88% to 4.61%.

A question was asked over whether the deprivation had increased because there were fewer people. It was explained that there had been enough money to keep the rates the same and therefore it did not have to be scaled down.

Resolved

To note the report.

23 Early Years - Hourly Rate for 3&4 Year Old Free Entitlement 2015-16

Elizabeth Williams, Head of Finance, introduced the background to free entitlement funding for 3&4 Year Olds.

A consultation had gone out before November 2014 with two options for response: Option A – prefer to continue with differential hourly rates or Option B – prefer to have a single hourly rate for all providers.

There had been a total of 173 respondents which was broken down as follows: 78 Childminders; 1 Independent; 3 Maintained Nurseries; 54 Private; 37 Voluntary.

It was estimated that the affordable rate should be set at £3.81 per hour.

In order to implement the single hourly rate providers must be consulted on what had been done. The EFA had been asked for their advice with regards to the consultation. Reasonable notice was deemed to be around 6 months. Implementation date would be September to fit in with the new school year, this was noted as being around 6 months away.

Implementation options included a transitional approach to implement the change over two academic years with 50% of the gain or reduction being implemented in year 1. This would mean 50% of the gain/reduction being implemented from September 2015 and 100% in September 2016, or a transitional approach which would give protection to those who would lose more than a specific amount of funding.

The SFWG had recommended that this should be implemented, but on a phased basis.

Resolved

- 1. To implement a single hourly rate of £3.81 within the EYSFF for 3 & 4 year olds.**
- 2. To implement a single hourly rate no earlier than September 2015.**

3. To implement through a transitional approach with 50% of the gain/reduction being implemented from September 2015 and 100% from April 2016.

24 High Needs Block 2015-16

Elizabeth Williams presented the report which provided a summary of key pressures on the High Needs Budget (HNB) for 2015-16 and short term proposals to minimise the impact on the budget. It also gave a brief update on the progress of the SEN Strategy which aimed to identify medium and longer term proposals to address the overspend in the HNB.

The need for short-term actions during 2015-16 was brought about by the significant overspend during 2014-15. The reserves were unable to be relied upon to support the HNB during 2015-16. The strategy was explained to bring about longer term actions which would manage the HNB more effectively.

The allocation for 2015-16 was noted as being £37.12million. Wiltshire's share of the national £47million top-up was £0.420million; this figure was based on the proportion of 2-19 year olds within the population.

A large majority of the HNB was spent on places and top-ups for pupils in schools. Places and top-up values for pre-16 pupils in schools amounted to £24million, along with a further £5million budgeted for top-up payments in post school providers.

For the 2015-16 year an extra 200 places were requested. A total of 117 of these had been allocated. This information had been received at the last Schools Forum meeting; however feedback on how this decision was reached was now available. The feedback broadly stated that the money was not available and that the spaces had not been filled in 2014-15. It was felt that there was quite a lot of risk in funding money upfront as the places might not have been filled. It had since been stated by the EFA that if places were filled first then the EFA would fund them the next year.

Paragraph 19 of the report was said to contain the information not available at the last Schools Forum meeting:

"An analysis of the national position indicates that only 22% of additional places requested across the country were agreed. In the South West, applications were submitted for 721 additional places but only 159 were agreed. Wiltshire received 117 of those, 59% of places requested."

A question was asked on whether it was possible to go back and appeal places now that the process was clear. It was explained that it had been instructed that growth money should be used to fund places.

It was noted that Springfields Academy was currently consulting on a change in age range and place numbers. Any change in place numbers over and above that proposed in the report was explained to result in additional pressure on the high needs block.

It was requested to record that the EFA had been invited to the Schools Forum meetings but had not sent apologies and were not present.

Pressures for the 2015-16 year had been worked out by taking into account all the known pupils paid for, any known leavers, and known September 2015 starters. The amount of migration into the county was noted as being of an unknown level at the moment.

The budgeted place funding for pre-16 during 2015-16 was set at £11.958million assuming that an extra 3 places at Larkrise, Saint Nicholas', and Exeter House still needed to be funded. All known and planned places were built into the budget along with planning assumptions. The pre-16 places and top-up funding were discussed and the revised cost pressure in the pre-16 budget 2015-16 was noted as £1.16million.

The post-16 budget was left with a balance of £1,137,541 for the next academic year and part of the current year after known commitments had been taken off. This demonstrated a better position than the 2014-15 period. There was a £289,393 estimated shortfall for 2015-16.

A question was asked on where post-16's go if they do not attend Wiltshire College. There were a range of independent sector providers in the county, and where they went depended on their needs. Lots of work had been done to make Wiltshire College as accessible as possible. It was confirmed that the majority of students from Rowdeford progressed to Wiltshire College.

It was also noted that £420,000 had been received in growth as part of the funding settlement. Savings options totalling £1.991million were proposed in the report.

Split Site Allowance

It was noted that this situation should not happen again and that the wording of split site allowance needed to be chosen carefully.

The revenue consequences of split sites needed to be picked up before capital projects of their nature had begun. This was because they could cause significant revenue pressures within a school. A case by case basis was noted as the best form of approach.

There was agreement that a process needed to be put in place.

The Schools Forum would only grant split site allowance if it had been agreed upon in advance. It was recognised in mainstream schools that where provision was open on more than one site a split site allowance may be payable. It was noted that therefore the principle should be the same for special schools to create equity between mainstream and special schools.

It was noted that St Nicholas Special School fitted in with the SEN and Wiltshire Plan, and was therefore eligible for up to £100,000.

Savings Proposals

The Schools Forum considered the list of savings proposals put forward in the report.

The opening of Greentrees Primary School was already delayed until September 2015. A formal letter from Greentrees Chair of Governors was being waited on.

It was asked if savings principle 9 (renegotiate prices with Independent Providers) was in line with Wiltshire Council's policy of saving 10% on the voluntary sector. It was explained that these would be private providers who worked with a range of local authorities which could have different policies. It would be hard to know the actual figure which would be achieved.

For saving proposal 11 (5% Reduction to top-up funding) it was noted that Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) only related to 11d and that it was in place to limit reductions in Special School funding.

Enhanced Learning Provision cuts ranged per school from £500 to £8800. Resource base cuts per school ranged from £200 to £8000.

Savings would take place from April 2015.

It was noted that the figure estimated on the report may not be the figure saved as were unable to definitively predict what they would be. The Schools Forum would be agreeing in principle to the saving action. It was agreed that regular monitoring reports would be brought to Schools Forum to review progress against the agreed savings

Each savings principle was individually voted on.

Resolved

- 1. To note the current and projected position in relation to High Needs budgets.**
- 2. To agree that going forward a Split Site Allowance must be agreed between the school and the local authority prior to the opening of a separate site. Any split site allowance will be payable through top up rates therefore there is not an official split site allowance.**
- 3. To agree that Saint Nicholas Special School does meet the split site criteria and that it should be awarded £100,000 split site allowance per annum to be paid as an addition to the top up rate.**
- 4. To agree the following savings:**
 - a. To recycle unfilled Enhanced Learning Provision places and unused resource base places.**
 - b. To delay the opening of Greentrees Primary School until September 2016.**
 - c. To save on place funding following the closure of the resource base at The Manor School.**
 - d. To delete or hold all current DSG funded vacancies within the SEND service.**
 - e. To allow secondary schools to roll forward unspent funding for Hard to Place Pupils from 2014-15, but to top up available funding to £250,000.**
 - f. To renegotiate prices with Independent Providers based on 10% reductions from ISP/ISS package contracts and/or reduced numbers of placements with renegotiation to focus on key transition points.**

- g. To cease Transition into Primary School funding.**
- h. To reduce top up rates for named pupil allowances; enhanced learning provision; and resource bases for maintained schools and academies by 5%.**
- i. To meet the £100,000 shortfall through the Special Schools Budget, and for the budget model to be reworked to create new special school top up rates in accordance with minimum funding guarantee requirements.**

25 Schools Traded Services - Governance Arrangements

Julia Cramp, Associate Director, was in attendance to present the report proposing a change in the governance arrangements for managing the process for agreement of service levels and prices for traded services with schools.

In 2005 a proposal had been brought to the Schools Forum which recommended that a sub group be formed to look at traded services. It was now recommended that this be removed from the Schools Forum structure.

It was recommended that this sub group ceased to operate and a Schools Traded Services Stakeholder Group was established. This would include representatives from schools and other stakeholder groups, including governors.

The group would look for feedback on services and what future intentions were from sectors. There would be no decisions or consultations on prices. This group should only need to meet twice per year to enable the Council to communicate any proposed changes in a timely way.

It was asked what the maintained schools equivalent of the ESG was being used for. The ESG was being used for therapies, education welfare, and outdoor education amongst other areas.

The role of the group would be to communicate prices to schools and ensure adequate notice was given to schools of any price changes.

The additional stakeholders were explained as being up for decision depending on how engaged they wished to be in various sectors.

Resolved

- 1. To agree on the principle that there has to be adequate notice for schools to make their purchasing decisions.**
- 2. To take governance arrangements for traded services with schools out of the Schools Forum structure and to cease operation of the Schools Services Group.**
- 3. To establish a Schools Traded Services Stakeholder Group in the local authority including representatives from schools.**

26 **Confirmation of dates for future meetings**

Resolved

The future Schools Forum dates were confirmed, with the next meeting to be on 18 June 2015, 1.30 pm in Kennet Room at County Hall, Trowbridge.

27 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 1.30 - 4.15 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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