

Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Thursday, 4th July, 2019

Present: John Constable, Langley Grammar School (Chair)
Peter Collins, Slough & Eton Church of England Business and Enterprise College
Philip Gregory, Baylis Court Nursery School
Valerie Harffey, Ryvers Primary School
Kathleen Higgins, Beechwood Secondary School
Susan Marsh, Academy Primary Sector
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School
Angela Mellish, St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School
Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School (Observer)
Kathy Perry, Mighty Acorns Day Nursery
Jon Reekie, Godolphin Infant School
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School
Nicky Willis, Cippenham Primary School
Jamie Rockman, Haybrook College
Neil Sykes, Arbourvale School
Nicky Willis, Cippenham Primary School

Observers: Sharon James, SBC Governor Support Officer
Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School
Brenda Scott, Orchard Hill Academy

Officers: Catherine Cochran, Domenico Barani and Neil Wilcox

Apologies: Maggie Waller, Cate Duffy, Vikram Hansrani, Michael Jarrett and Johnny Kyriacou and Maggie Waller

No Apologies: Ray Hinds, Jo Matthews or Carol Pearce

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and all those present introduced themselves.

As noted, apologies for absence had been received from Cate Duffy, Vikram Hansrani, Michael Jarrett, Johnny Kyriacou and Maggie Waller. There had been no apologies from Ray Hinds, Jo Matthews or Carol Pearce.

707. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

708. Any Other Business

The following item was tabled: Recruitment and Retention Fund 2016.

709. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 5 March 2019

The minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 5 March 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

Matters Arising:

Present: please add Jo Matthews, Observer.

Page 3, minute 698: Vikram Hansrani would be asked when Schools Forum could expect regular reports on feedback following the introduction of the new High Needs banding model.

Page 6, minute 701: Neil Wilcox reported that following the previous Forum there had been a further meeting with representatives from the three PFI schools. A decision had been made by SBC to fund the £184,000 and a guarantee given to the three schools that this action would be taken.

The Chair thanked Neil Wilcox for his support and quick resolution.

Any further Matters Arising would be covered by items on the agenda.

710. Update on National Funding issues/Local Funding issues (to include 2019-20 School Budget Update)

Nic Barani explained that the Local Authority (LA) had undertaken a baseline exercise early in 2017 which it had been expected the ESFA would act upon. £500,000 had been incorrectly transferred from Schools Block to High Needs by the ESFA and this amount was now being manually transferred back. The LA had been in contact with the ESFA, requesting they carry out this transfer in the future.

The £500,000 was shown under the 'adjustment' column on the paper entitled '2019-20 School Budget Update' and would be distributed across schools through the local formula. The majority of schools would benefit, and it was planned these monies would be distributed before the end of the current Summer term. The distribution of funds to academy schools would be facilitated by Slough Borough Council (SBC). The schools without any adjustment shown in the paper tended to be those on minimum funding guarantee.

The Secretary of State for Education had acknowledged the national pressures on High Needs budgets which could be addressed through the next Government spending review. Spending Reviews generally occurred every 3 years and Government was currently in the third year of such a cycle. The ESFA had indicated they were considering indicative 3-year budgets in order to support schools.

To date, there was no timeline for the maintained nursery supplement beyond 2020, it was hoped the Teachers' Pay Award would become an integral part of the Schools Block and there were no further updates on grants for Teachers' pension contribution increases.

711. Growth Fund 2018/19

The Growth Fund 2018-19 outturn report highlighted the underspend, the main reason being the underwriting fees of £203,000 for Grove Academy, which was less than agreed by Schools Forum.

It was confirmed that all underspend would be rolled forward into 2019-20 and it was anticipated the underspend would be £164,000 at the end of 2019-20. A number of contingencies had been allowed for although these could be affected by unknown factors.

Schools Forum **NOTED** the contents of the Growth Fund 2019-19 outturn report and **AGREED** the underwriting for Grove of £90,000 to £25,000 (2018-19) and the maximum from £60,000 to £90,000 (2019-20).

712. Annual DSG Report 2018/19

The financial year end position was noted, showing an overspend of £2.292m. There was an underspend on Early Years but the overspend carry forward of £2.86m on High Needs gave an in-year variance of 13%, with an accumulative roll forward of £7.196m (4.43% above the DSG settlement). The cumulative deficit of High Needs was £8.3m but this was not the highest nationally. The majority of LAs were known to be predicting overspends in High Needs and this information was publicly available.

It was confirmed that the DSG was a ring-fenced grant, appearing on the Council's balance sheet as a debtor.

A summary had been provided showing the DSG budget and outturn by block: an accumulated surplus of £221,000 in the Schools Block would be carried forward into the next financial year. It was explained that the CSSBlock was overspent because of the VAT element, due to insufficient time given to claim licenses: the LA planned to claim this amount back from HMRC in the following year. As noted, there was an underspend on the Early Years Block which was due to uptake, with a predicted carry forward of £450,000. It was anticipated the ESFA would recoup a portion of this underspend. There had been a general increase in uptake hours, but these had not been spread proportionately.

The High Needs Block variances were highlighted and the continued increase in demand in the period between 2015 and 2018. The largest areas of spend were described, being independent special schools, out of borough placements and post-16. Graphs had been provided showing year on year analysis and to demonstrate trends of those assessing services and the in-borough movement of SEND pupils. The categorised cost range of pupils indicated that the average cost had come down to approximately £2,000 per learner in 2018-19 although there were still some larger cost ranges being supported. It was confirmed that the budget allocations reflected that there were insufficient funds to meet need. It was pointed out that achieving an underspend in High Needs could not be assumed, with elements of greater need and pressures moving to mainstream schools.

The reserves of maintained schools and nurseries were highlighted, and it was confirmed the LA had now received all budget plans for 2019/20 and financial viability over the next three years was being considered. It was anticipated that the majority of any reserves would be used within that period and the LA would work closely with any schools forecasting deficits. Certain schools showed significant reserves of 5% or 8% and these schools had been approached about how these funds were to be used. To date, all but one school had responded, and, in the majority of cases, these were operational costs with less being capital. It was planned that Schools Forum would be updated on this issue at the second meeting in the Autumn term 2019.

SALT expenditure was queried, and clarity requested on the use of the descriptor 'elsewhere'. It was suggested some schools could be purchasing privately and Nic Barani agreed to work with Vikram Hansrani on this matter.

Further information would be requested from Michael Jarrett on the apparent lower demand in the PVI sector and whether it had been necessary for any schools to close their nurseries.

As recommended, Schools Forum **NOTED** the Annual DSG Report 2018/19. The Chair thanked Nic Barani and colleagues for the comprehensive report.

713. DSG Budget Deficit Recovery Plan

The Recovery Plan paper had been compiled by Vikram Hansrani and, in his absence, Nic Barani would give an overview. It was noted that the Plan had been submitted to the ESFA, who were reviewing all such LA reports, in order to work with High Needs teams across the country to reduce deficits. A 3-year period had originally been given to bring deficits into balance but the ESFA understood the pressure on a number of LAs and had extended the timeline to 7 years. The ESFA were to allocate a specialist to each LA, who would monitor recovery plans and work closely with LAs to make efficiency savings.

The deficit breakdown from 2014-15 showed an underspend of £1.05m moving to an overspend of £8.3m. It was explained it would be difficult to reduce the deficit, due to increased demand which had not been matched by funding. Appendix 1 of the Report outlined some of the efficiency saving strategies the LA planned to make whilst trying to continue to meet need.

It was pointed out that an increased number of parents were now going to SEND tribunals, which was creating additional pressures for all those involved. It was added that on costs to schools continued to rise, although per pupil funding had not increased in five years which was impacting on Special schools. More detail was requested on the re-aligning of Resource Base provision and how Schools Forum might challenge such plans: the running costs of a Resource Base had not changed, and it was agreed this issue would be raised through the High Needs Task Group. It was also agreed it would be informative to know how the number of EHC Plans in the Borough compared with other authorities.

It was noted that in the Autumn term, the LA would be approaching Schools Forum to request a reassignment of £93,000 from the High Needs Block to Early Years (regarding the Early Years Inclusion Fund) along with a request for a transfer of £700,000 (0.5%) from Schools Block to the High Needs Block in year 3 (2020/21).

Neil Wilcox and Nic Barani would clarify whether the historic £184,000 related to the PFI Contribution for Arbour Vale.

Schools Forum appreciated the collaborative working approach from SBC Officers on this issue.

9.00am: Kathleen Higgins left the meeting

714. Review of the Scheme for Financing Schools 2019/20

Nic Barani explained that a number of minor amendments had been made to the Scheme for Financing Schools for maintained schools. A two-week consultation period with maintained schools would commence week beginning Monday 8 July: during that period any questions would be addressed.

The Scheme would be updated following the consultation and it was planned the revised Scheme would be issued in the Autumn term.

A member pointed out that it was now very late in the academic year to go out to consultation and also to obtain governor input. Nic Barani confirmed that the DfE did not attach a timetable to the Scheme and noted that maintained schools should be consulted on dates in future.

715. Update from Task Groups: 5-16, HNB and Early Years (to include annual review of Terms of Reference)

The Service Leads for the Early Years and High Needs Blocks would contact the members of their respective Task Groups, in order to arrange meeting dates.

It was highlighted that the date of the second Schools Forum meeting in the Autumn term 2019 had been moved forward to November and it was proposed the meeting of the 5-16 Task Group should also be brought forward. Nic Barani would circulate a number of suggested meeting dates to members.

All Task Groups were asked to meet before the November Schools Forum meeting.

A list of Task Group members would be drawn up for regular circulation to members. It was added that other members were always welcome to join Task Group meetings but were asked to advise the Chair in the first instance.

The Terms of Reference for the three Task Groups, as circulated, were **APPROVED** without change.

716. Schools Forum Membership

As previously noted, the terms of office for nine members of Schools Forum were due to finish on 31 July 2019. The Clerk had emailed all those concerned to establish whether they wished to stand for a further term. Two vacancies had also been created by a member resigning as at the end of the current academic year and notification received that the 16-19 provider representative had resigned their post.

An email communication had been made with all local schools, inviting nominations for membership, by close of business on Monday 8 July. Any nominations would be followed up in due process.

The Chair explained this would be Susan Marsh's last meeting, as she was moving to a new school: on behalf of Schools Forum the Chair congratulated her on her new role and thanked her for her contribution.

717. Academies Update

There was nothing to report.

718. 2019/20 Forward Agenda Plan/Key Decisions Log

The 2019/20 Forward Agenda Plan and Key Decision Log were noted and would be amended accordingly.

Members were asked to advise the Clerk if they were aware of any meetings or events which would clash with the proposed Schools Forum meeting dates for 2019/20.

719. Any Other Business

Recruitment and Retention Fund 2016

Nicky Willis explained that a grant of £70,000 from DSG underspend had been agreed in 2016 to address issues around Recruitment and Retention in both the primary and secondary phases. Approximately £15,000 had been spent on a branding exercise but the remainder had not been used, leaving a balance of approximately £54,153 which was held by Slough Primary Heads' Association (SPHA). It was proposed this amount be transferred to the Local School Improvement Fund (LSIF). The LSIF was overseen by the Slough School Improvement Board which included both primary and secondary Headteacher representation. Schools Forum **APPROVED** the transfer.

The Chair thanked everyone for their support and wished all attendees a good summer.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 8.15 am and closed at 9.35 am)