

## **Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Wednesday, 9th December, 2020**

**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 School  
Kathleen Higgins, Beechwood Secondary School  
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School  
Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School (Observer)  
Carol Pearce, Penn Wood Primary School  
Jon Reekie, Phoenix Infants  
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School  
Jamie Rockman, Haybrook College  
Coral Snowden, Western House Academy  
Neil Sykes, Arbourvale School  
Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School  
Nicky Willis, Cippenham Primary School

**Observers:** Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School (Observer)  
Chris McNab, Ditton Park Academy

**Officers:** Catherine Cochran and Johnny Kyriacou, Mark McCurrie, Susan Woodland

**Apologies:** Michael Jarrett, SBC, Eleni Ioannides, SBC

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular Mark McCurrie, SEN Strategic Advisor, Slough Borough Council (SBC) and Chris McNab, Vice Principal, Ditton Park Academy as an observer. Introductions were made and Johnny Kyriacou was congratulated on his recent promotion to Associate Director, Education & Inclusion, SBC.

The protocol for holding a remote meeting was outlined and it was noted the meeting would be recorded. An assurance was given that the recording would be deleted when accurate minutes had been produced.

**Apologies:** Apologies for absence had been received from Michael Jarrett, SBC and Eleni Ioannides, SBC. There had been no apologies from Angela Mellish, Kathy Perry or Maxine Wood. It was noted that Chris McNab would need to leave at 10.00am.

### **792. Any Other Business**

Nothing was tabled.

### **793. Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

### **794. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on Thursday 1 October 2020**

The Minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 1 October 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

**Matters Arising from those Minutes:** there were none.

#### **795. Schools Forum Membership and Update**

It was confirmed that Jon Reekie had been reappointed, unopposed, as primary governor representative for a further 2-year term of office. The Clerk had not received any nominations for the secondary academy representative vacancy and it was suggested this be taken forward to members of SASH.

The terms of office for Jamie Rockman and Neil Sykes were due to finish on 16 January 2021: both had expressed an interest in standing for a further term of office and the Clerk would conduct the necessary arrangements.

There continued to be a vacancy for a Vice Chair of Schools Forum and the Chair outlined the role. Any member interested in taking on the position was asked to contact the Chair or Clerk for further information.

#### **796. Update on National/Local Funding Issues**

Susan Woodland explained that the DfE had released a Workforce Fund to cover staff absences due to Covid between 1 November – 31 December 2020, to include supply teachers. However, it could only be applied for if a school's reserves had been reduced to 4% and was only applicable on short-term teacher absence over and above 10%; in special schools 20%. It was confirmed that local schools were aware. There was also a second opportunity to claim for Covid costs incurred between March and July 2020 for schools fitting a given criteria: claims for this funding was open until 22 December 2020.

It was noted that confirmation of the Maintained Nursery Supplement (MNS) for 2021/22 was expected to be released with the final settlement. It was understood that a long-term solution for MNS was being worked on.

#### **9.30am: Coral Snowden joined the meeting**

There had been no further communication regarding Teachers' pensions but schools would be advised of any updates.

The meeting was advised that the settlement was usually received about 18 December but no date for this year had been confirmed. APT would be presented to Schools Forum at their next meeting. No changes were anticipated.

#### **797. Schools Block 2021/22: consultation outcome and Task Group recommendation**

The Chair explained there were two papers, the first giving details of the 2021-22 Schools' Block (SB) consultation, including responses and outcomes. The second paper provided more information about the request to transfer £100,000 to Admissions, as part of the consultation.

The consultation had run from 16 -24 November and had asked schools whether there should be a move to full NFF or to remain at 85%. The consultation responses had been in favour of the move to full NFF which had been supported and was recommended to Schools Forum by the 5-16 Task Group. It was added that the final decision regarding the move to full NFF sat with the LA. More information would be available when the settlement was received and, until the funding was known, the figures were provisional.

A further request to transfer £600,000 from SB to High Needs Block (HNB) had not been endorsed by the Task Group. It was noted the Task Group had not reached their recommendation due to a lack of recognition of the pressures on the HNB, but due to the

DfE's stance. Opinion had been spilt in the consultation on the request to transfer £100,000 from SB to the Central School Services Block (CSSB) in order to support the Admissions team.

The Chair thanked Susan Woodland for all her work and support to the two Task Group meetings which had been held to consider the consultation recommendations.

Schools Forum **ENDORSED:**

the Task Group's recommendation to move to full NFF or as close as the final settlement would allow

and,

the Task Group's recommendation to reject the transfer to the HNB.

It was noted that if the LA did not agree with a decision made by Schools Forum they could apply to the Secretary of State requesting a transfer of the monies concerned. On behalf of Schools Forum, the Chair acknowledged this.

Susan Woodland was asked to provide Schools Forum with an update at the next meeting.

Johnny Kyriacou was invited to summarise his report and he confirmed that Admissions was a crucial statutory service which now fell within his remit. Feedback from schools had resulted in a review of need which had established that the team structure had not changed and was no longer fit for purpose. The breadth of schools and pupil numbers had increased, with admissions becoming more complex whilst the LA retained a role even with schools who were their own admission authority. More sophisticated systems were now required to support vulnerable families and the appeals process, which were weak areas. The proposal to expand the team and change the structure would give the service the capacity to deliver as well as offer support to Fair Access and transport for SEN pupils.

The LA would fund the proposed new Group Manager role and support two further roles plus a Customer Service team. The request to Schools Forum for £100,000 was to fund additional, supporting posts and on-costs within the new structure. It was suggested it would have been useful for the request to be supported by a breakdown of costs.

In answer to a query, it was confirmed that home/school transport sat with Attendance in Michael Jarrett's SBC team and that the new structure now linked close working between Admissions and Attendance.

#### **10.00am: Chris McNab left the meeting**

Johnny Kyriacou assured Forum that the changes were required in order to ensure SBC was compliant in meeting the national admissions code. It was anticipated admission numbers would increase in Slough over the next 10 years, rather than decline. There were a number of new builds expected, due to the Slough regeneration plans and the proposed structure would support this growth.

It was queried whether vulnerable children would be at greater risk if the fund transfer were not agreed. It was confirmed if the funds were not available the team would continue to offer only the statutory minimum. The majority of schools had made a case for an improved service and the proposals would support the increased number of children coming into the system with complex needs.

It was agreed the new proposed post was important but should be kept under review every 12 months. As SBC had to report annually on admissions to the Schools Adjudicator, it was requested that an annual report also be presented to Schools Forum for their consideration along with the request for an annual fund transfer. Within this it was asked that any evaluation should include a survey of schools in order to monitor progress. It was added that the intention was to introduce an Admissions Forum to promote feedback.

#### **10.05am: Navroop Mehat left the meeting**

Susan Woodland pointed out that it might not be possible to move to full NFF until the final settlement was known and that the £100,000 requested could make a difference. In addition, as yet, there was no definitive information received on the Teachers' Pay and Pension grant. Although there were a number of scenarios it was not anticipated the £100,000 would affect affordability. Until the final figures were known, the full NFF might not be achievable.

Johnny Kyriacou confirmed that as SBC was in the middle of a transformation period the proposed structure had been included in consultations. It was noted that the 5-16 Task Group had recognised the need for re-structure and to support vulnerable children which they recommended to Schools Forum.

Schools Forum **APPROVED** the transfer of £100,000 from SB to CSSB.

## **798. Central School Services Block**

Susan Woodland explained there were two further elements involving budget transfers, in line with requests of previous years to reallocate funds incorrectly baselined from 2017-18. The table in appendix 1 was referred to which included a provisional shortfall of £323,801 in the settlement for the CSSB against commitments. This had now been reduced to £223,801 following the Admissions transfer discussed and agreed under agenda item 6.

### **10.25am: Jon Reekie and Johnny Kyriacou left the meeting**

Schools Forum **APPROVED** the request for the provisional budget transfer of £223,801 from the HNB into the CSSB.

### **10.30am: Kathleen Higgins left the meeting**

## **799. Scheme for Financing (maintained) Schools 2020/21: update on consultation**

The report made available outlined the results of the consultation on the revised Scheme for Financing (maintained) Schools. Comments received from schools could be found in appendix 1.

On behalf of maintained schools, Schools Forum **NOTED** the outcome of the consultation and the amendments implemented by the DfE.

It was pointed out there was an opportunity for maintained schools to use RPA collectively. A member supported schools taking up this option individually, rather than via de-delegation.

## **800. High Needs Block Centrally Retained Budget**

Mark McCurrie explained that the supporting paper made available to members informed how the Centrally Retained budgets were being used during the financial year 2020/21.

All areas had been kept to budget apart from Education Resources Services which provided support for CLA (Children Looked After).

There were no changes to report on the previous year. The role of Post-16 Advisor had been created but had remained vacant throughout the year. Consideration was now being given to absorbing this position within the LA restructuring programme by moving it under 'Youth Services' with effect from April 2021.

Schools Forum **NOTED** the outcome of the consultation and the amendments implemented by the DfE.

### **801. High Needs Block - DSG Management Plan update**

A written paper had been tabled for members to note the work being carried out and the reporting timetable. A more significant report, carrying more information, would be provided for the next meeting of Schools Forum, scheduled for Tuesday 19 January 2021: this would also include the DSG Management Plan which would support the budget proposals for 2021/22. It was noted that work was underway, with departmental information being fed into the draft DSG Management Plan. The work on related activities had begun and was outlined:

**Resources Base review:** would impact on the DSG Management Plan for future years. To be considered in January when the data collection had been completed.

**Financial Reporting:** the LA's internal structure had been reviewed and a report would be available for the next meeting of Schools Forum.

**SEND Panel review:** procedures were being considered on how to confirm robust processes were in place. This included a review of the banding matrix to ensure it was being applied consistently.

**Education Initiatives:** discussions were ongoing about working with partners to identify opportunities for new projects.

### **802. SEND Quarterly Banding Update**

It was reported that the new banding system was to be kept under review. Financial trends had been compiled which would inform trends for the next twelve months.

It was noted there had been a large increase of 14% of EHCPs over the past twelve months, significantly higher than what was evidenced in Resource bases and special schools. More work was required on these trends, particularly in mainstream and it was queried whether this was due to more complex needs being supported in mainstream. It was acknowledged that further work was required which would also advise part of the SEND panel process. Members suggested it would be of interest to know if the 14% all had mainstream places.

This work would also feed into the DSG Management plan due to top up as there was a need to consider the 'drivers' and what was required to mitigate circumstances in mainstream schools.

It was pointed out that special schools top-up funding accounted for approximately two thirds of all top-up funding and the LA's average change value of a 2% reduction per EHCP in special schools was queried. It was explained that over the period reported, the total number of pupils placed in special schools within Slough had not significantly changed due to maximum capacity generally being reached in the schools. The data had shown a number of high cost EHCPs had moved out of the special schools during the period, which had reduced the average EHCP value being reported to this meeting.. New pupils entering Slough special schools were placed using the new matrix banding system, at a lower funding rate than those pupils leaving the schools, which was leading to a slightly reduced average EHCP value. More work was to be undertaken to look more closely at this and to consider funding models offering more stability in special schools.

The Chair thanked Mark McCurrie for his three clear reports.

**803. Update from Task Groups: Early Years, HNB and 5-16**

As noted, the 5-16 Task Group had met twice since the last meeting of Schools Forum.

The HNB Task Group was due to meet during the week following this meeting and Early Years were to arrange a meeting for early January 2021.

**804. Academies Update**

Khalsa Primary School was in the process of converting to multi-academy trust status with an aim to take effect from 1 February 2021.

**805. 2020/21 Proposed Forward Agenda Plan/Key Decisions Log**

The Forward Agenda Plan 2020/21 and Key Decisions Log were noted.

It was noted the next meeting of Schools Forum was scheduled for:

**Tuesday 19 January 2021 at 9.15am**

This date was subject to confirmation of receipt of the final APT figures. Members would be advised if there should be any change to the meeting date.

**806. Any Other Business**

Nothing had been tabled.

The Chair thanked all attendees for their time and contributions, wishing all a Happy Christmas and a well-deserved break.