

Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Tuesday, 6th March, 2018

Present: Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School (Chair)
John Constable, Langley Grammar School (Vice-Chair)
Sally Eaton, Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) providers - Early Years
Philip Gregory, Baylis Court Nursery School
Valerie Harffey, Ryvers Primary School
Kathleen Higgins, Beechwood Secondary School
Jo Matthews, Littledown School / PRU
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School
Angela Mellish, St Bernard's Grammar School
Carol Pearce, Penn Wood Primary School
Jon Reekie, Baylis Court Trust MAT / Godolphin Infant School
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School
Nicky Willis, Cippenham Primary School

Observers: Anne Bunce, Headteacher of the Virtual School (for presentation)

Officers: Catherine Cochran, Domenico Barani, Cate Duffy, George Grant, Michael Jarrett and Johnny Kyriacou

Apologies: Helen Huntley and Eddie Neighbour

627. Apologies

The Chair welcomed Peter Collins to his first meeting as an elected member of Schools Forum.

Anne Bunce, Headteacher of the Virtual School, was also welcomed to the meeting. It was noted that following procedural agenda items, the meeting would move to Anne Bunce's presentation.

Apologies for absence had been received from Eddie Neighbour and Helen Huntley. No apologies for absence had been received from Gillian Coffey or Richard Kirkham.

628. Declarations of Interest

In answer to a question, the Chair confirmed that the item on PFI did not impact on individual members. It was noted that the Declaration of Interests paragraph on Schools Forum agendas was to be made clearer and more appropriate.

There were no declarations of interest in items to be discussed at this meeting.

629. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 17 January 2018

The minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 17 January 2018 were approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising from those Minutes:

Minute 617 refers: Cate Duffy confirmed that the revised Schools Forum Constitution had been approved under her delegated powers. The Clerk would arrange for the Constitution to be made available on the SBC website.

8.20pm: Angela Mellish arrived at the meeting

Minute 623 refers: it was confirmed that Nic Barani had sent a copy of the revised De-Delegation Report 2018-19 to Jo Matthews for her information.

The meeting moved to item 7 on the agenda:

630. Virtual School Headteacher's update

Anne Bunce reported that outcomes for pupils accessing the Virtual School in Slough were good or improving, with approximately 50% of pupils now being supported within their home authority compared with the previous figure of 30%, and 70% were now within a 20 mile radius.

The Team was fully established and included eight specialists working in age ranges birth to 25. The child was at the heart of the team's work, with the team having detailed information about each child.

There had been an improvement in the quality of data and record keeping, with a completion rate of 96% on PEPs and three children having returned to mainstream school.

Vikram Hansrani and his team were thanked for their work in getting EHCPs in place.

8.25am: Sally Eaton arrived at the meeting

There had been a marked increase in partnership working with schools and other Slough agencies.

A successful conference had been run in January 2017, along with an annual report and termly newsletters now being produced. Key Stage 2 results had matched both national and local. Work experience had been arranged for all Years 10s during the forthcoming summer holidays and, having appointed a Post 16 specialist, Anne Bunce would be following up possible 6th form admissions. The focus for the next year was for children to be aspirational.

Anne Bunce thanked members of Schools Forum for their support and the Chair thanked Anne Bunce for all the work that had been undertaken and the evident improvements.

8.40pm: Anne Bunce left and the meeting returned to the running order of the agenda:

631. Update on national/local funding issues

Susan Woodland reported that SBC schools finance staff had attended a number of meetings with the DfE and other LAs. Discussions had included:

- Spending review in 2021, with the intention to move to the hard NFF. Neither the required primary legislation or a timetable was yet in place;
- Consideration of methods to move towards NFF;
- Expectation that the spending in Central Block would reduce;
- Review of negative DSG balances, the impact and how this could be managed nationwide;
- A recruitment pool for teachers (following an approach to the DfE) was being considered and a website was being developed;
- Further developments to SFVS;
- Reviewing of SEN top-ups and the relationships between academies and LAs;
- Review of Scheme for Financing Schools, with information due out in the near future.

It was noted that a number of issues around High Needs spend, across the country, were emerging. A member asked what would happen as negative DSG balances increased. Susan Woodland confirmed the majority were impacting on High Needs and Councils, which the DfE was aware of and were investigating.

In answer to a query as to whether SBC's reserves were healthy, it was explained this had been taken to full Council in February 2018. The following link refers (see Appendix C of report of link):

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s50503/Report%20and%20Appendices.pdf>

632. Confirmation of Indicative Budgets 2018-19 & Correction of Baseline

A thank you was extended to those members who had been able to attend the unscheduled meeting of Schools Forum held on 20 February 2018; a quorum had been present, enabling decisions to be made.

George Grant explained it had been understood that the Schools Block information presented to the Schools Forum on 17 January 2018 had been final although further information had subsequently been received.

There had been two errors arising in the baseline submission to the ESFA. As a result, the amount allocated by the DfE to the Schools Block for PFI had been inaccurate and the Central Services School Block (CSSB) had not contained the correct amount, being short by £276,000. It was questioned what had happened to the funding which had been misallocated. This had been included in the High Needs allocation by the DfE as a default position.

The High Needs total budget was £22.2m for 2018-19, against a planned expenditure estimated at £23.4m. However, the report proposed that the anomalies outlined above were to be addressed which would bring the HNB to £21.9m. There had been a consultation held at the unscheduled meeting of Schools Forum held on 20 February where members supported the transfer of this funding from HNB to where it should have been originally. Despite HNB consequently appearing to have lost funds, these should not have been received in the first place. As a result, additional money would be moved into the Schools Block and the CSSB. There was a requirement to recalculate the funding going to schools' individual budgets as a result of the transfer.

Schools Forum members were asked to note the agreed changes which would also reverse the decision made at the January Schools Forum meeting regarding the need to move money from the Schools Block to support the CSSB.

Schools Forum noted the agreed transfers of funding as set out in paragraph 4 of the supporting report as follows:

£176,325 from HNB to the CSSB
£100,045 from HNB to the CSSB for ongoing responsibilities
£548,000 from HNB to the Schools Block for PFI

Schools Forum also noted the revised school budget shares and further noted the adjustment made by the DfE from Resource Units, moving £928,000 from the HNB to the Schools Block.

It was confirmed that the PFI contribution in the Schools Block had always been £500,000. The DfE figure of £548,000 had resulted in more in the Schools Block and it was confirmed this information had been sent out to schools.

The £89,000 difference for Grove Academy's budget share was queried. It was explained that when submitted, the ESFA had noted a change to one of the formulae in the APT. However, a correction was shown in the formula as there were more pupils to take into account. It was asked what had happened about the 'ghost' places which Schools Forum had agreed to part fund from the Growth Fund; Cate Duffy explained if the school did not have as many empty places the Council did not need to pay. It was felt it would be beneficial to know the figure involved and it was agreed this information would be bought back to Schools Forum.

633. 2018-19 Early Years Block

A verbal report was delivered at the meeting. It was confirmed that the overall indicative budget was £15.3m. The EYFF funding rates included increases, had been confirmed and duly published:

3 and 4 year olds: £5.35
2 year olds: £5.58
Deprivation: 75p

It was noted that these rate increases had been positively received by providers.

It was planned to continue with the same level of activity and model for 2018-19 which would require a similar level of centrally retained spend of £790,000. In principle, Schools Forum endorsed this and a detailed report would be presented at the next meeting for formal approval.

At this point, the Chair explained that Sally Eaton's term of office as PVI member of Schools Forum was due to finish at the end of March. The Chair thanked Sally Eaton for all the work she had done as a member of Schools Forum. It was noted that Sally Eaton had expressed an interest in being re-appointed and nominations had also been invited from the PVI sector in line with the Constitution.

634. PFI update report

George Grant explained that clarification had been requested on why High Needs Block (HNB) had carried a charge of £184,000 against the LA's PFI unitary charges since 2013-14. Following examination of previous Schools Forum minutes and LA ledgers, no supporting records could be found to explain the rationale or consent given for this.

The LA's PFI contribution of £809,000 had been split over two blocks when the new blocks came into being, with £500,000 going into the Schools Block and £309,000 into the HNB. The full PFI factor, roughly matching the £800,000 was still paid out of the Schools Block. The additional amount paid from the HNB (£184,000) had not been consulted upon. There was now a need to officially record what should have been carried out four years before.

Schools Forum was asked to acknowledge the action taken and that the LA's contribution to PFI was split between the schools and HNBs.

Schools Forum agreed the proposal that the £184,000 contribution to PFI from the HNB should be recognised for the year 2018-19 only.

The Schools Block contribution was confirmed as £297,000 for 2018/19 only and would be reviewed for the year 2019-20.

The Chair thanked George Grant for all his work in clarifying the overall PFI funding, which was seconded by the Vice Chair.

The Chair added this agreement was not setting a precedent and stressed it was for the year 2018-19 only, but it had been important to regularise this issue as there had been a lack of clarity.

Cate Duffy explained that the LA's contribution to the DSG was not the entire Council PFI contribution: there was also a cost of £1.4m inflation to the LA's budget.

A member pointed out that the PFI schools were covering additional costs such as facilities management, which were not being subsidised. It was felt that academisation made a difference as costs previously supported by the LA now had to be covered by schools e.g. contract management.

It was noted that this agreement for 2018-19 resulted in schools subsidising the PFI costs.

It was suggested a table be produced to show the overall picture of the PFI Unitary Charge costs and the sources of that funding. George Grant agreed to circulate this information which is included in these minutes below:

DETAILS	2016/17	2017/18
COSTS		
Fixed UE	3,639,415	3,639,415
Indexed	2,758,634	2,796,320
Annual Inflation Increase	37,686	97,984
Total UP ANNUAL CHARGE	6,435,735	6,533,719

FUNDING		
1. PFI GRANT	3,677,519	3,677,519
School Contribution for FM		
Penn Wood	154,829	163,379
Beechwood	402,053	410,476
Arbour Vale	476,398	493,091
Sub Total	1,033,280	1,066,946
2. DSG PFI Factor		
Schools Block		
William Penn (Penn Wood)	310,459	310,459
Beechwood	486,826	486,826
LA Recharge (to the Schools Block)	-500,000	-500,000
Sub Total	297,285	297,285
High Needs Block		
HNB Contribution	183,889	183,889
Sub Total - DSG Contribution	481,174	481,174
3. LOCAL AUTHORITY CONTRIBUTION		
Core LA Contribution	934,310	998,628
LA Contribution (via the HNB)	309,452	309,452
Sub Total - LA Contribution	1,243,762	1,308,080
TOTAL FUNDING	6,435,735	6,533,719

635. High Needs Block Budget 2018-19

A forecast had been presented at the previous meeting, showing a substantial overspend carried forward from the previous year. It was explained that it had not been possible to make any savings during the current year. There was a projected shortfall for 2018-19 of £1.2m, leading to a cumulative deficit of £5.88m by 2019. Financial reviews were being conducted as part of a 3-year plan to bring the budget back in line.

To address the deficit a number of strategies and changes were being introduced during the current year which included:

- Special school residential would now have considerable costs met by Social Care budgets;
- Resource Base funding in HNB was lower because of DfE changes to formula;
- Out of borough placements had been adjusted to reflect correct level of commitment;
- Centrally retained was reduced.

A member queried PRU top ups and George Grant agreed to follow this up.

It was pointed out that place funding appeared to have gone down and it was confirmed that Resource Base place funding had been removed from the HNB and was now in schools' delegated budgets.

It was queried whether this had been brought to the attention of schools when budgets had been circulated and a Headteacher member pointed out that not highlighting this to Headteachers was unacceptable. It was requested that a communication should be sent to schools to make them aware. A letter would be drafted regarding the impact and sent to schools following this meeting. It was felt it was important to acknowledge that this information should have been communicated.

A member asked how the HNB deficit was financed in cash terms. Cate Duffy explained that the deficit was financed from the next year's budget. The overspend was £1.5m but SBC was not the only authority in this position, it was a national issue. It was stressed that the work and reviews being carried out were to ensure the best use of the provision available.

Cate Duffy explained that significant effort was being made to ensure the best use of resources and provision being made available, and that the right children were in the right place, receiving the right support. Vikram Hansrani added that the banding review work which was on-going, would strengthen the work to make sure the appropriate level of support and the right type of banding drove inclusion. There had to be an assurance that the provision was the right provision. A future report would come to Schools Forum from the reviews.

A member asked about tops up, particularly with regards to special schools, and if increased numbers were being considered now that decisions had been reached. Vikram Hansrani would follow this up.

Schools Forum noted the changes to the HNB outlined in the report, noting the commitments against the budget and the deficit figures.

Schools Forum noted the Council's strategy to address the deficit and members approved the centrally retained element for 2018-19 of £2.3m, which was a slight decrease on 2017-18.

The SALT provision had also reduced and a number of schools had commissioned the service themselves but could be paying more for the provision. The statutory element was a statutory function which had been part of the clarification work. Cate Duffy explained the provider was being recommissioned and there might be the opportunity to commission the services to schools. A member pointed out that the SLA at Arbour Vale had never cost what had been received and it had become a cost to Arbour Vale in order to run the service.

It was agreed that it would be very helpful for Vikram Hansrani to provide a line by line breakdown of the centrally retained budgets in the detail provided to the HNB working group which was looking at descriptors in their work. The Chair suggested this information should be circulated again and included in a report.

636. Update from Task Groups

5-16: had not met.

Early Years: had not met.

High Needs: it was noted that there were currently two working groups within High Needs, both of which had held initial meetings and Vikram Hansrani thanked all involved for their support.

The first group, which included special school representatives, was focusing on the review of bandings, with an overall aim to ensure that all pupils were supported appropriately. Their first meeting had included the consideration of other LA models.

The second group was a review of Resource Base provision.

Vikram Hansrani would provide updates to both working groups and report any recommendations to Schools Forum. The Clerk would liaise with Vikram Hansrani to circulate the details of the current working group memberships to ensure any interested parties were able to join.

637. Academies Update

There was nothing to report at this meeting although it was anticipated that Arbour Vale would convert to academy status with effect from 1 April 2018.

638. 2017-18 Agenda Forward Plan & Key Decisions and Issues Log

The 2017/18 Forward Agenda Plan and Key Decisions Log were noted and would be updated by the Chair and Clerk.

639. Any Other Business

a) Maggie Waller announced that she would be standing down as Chair of Schools Forum at the end of the current academic year, after 15 years in the role. The election of Chair and Vice Chair for 2018-19 would appear as an agenda item at the July meeting, giving members the opportunity to consider taking on the roles: interested parties were invited to contact Maggie Waller in the first instance.

b) It was noted that the date given for the closure of accounts in maintained schools had been brought forward to Wednesday 28 February, earlier than in previous years. Little notification had been given to schools of this change, which had been compounded by inaccuracies in the supporting documentation. Concern was expressed as this had proved particularly challenging.

George Grant explained that the Government had dictated the earlier closure deadlines. The LA was sympathetic to the challenge for schools and would do all that was possible to support.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 8.15 am and closed at 10.05 am)