

## Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Tuesday, 5th March, 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  
Angela Mellish, St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School  
Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School (Observer)  
Carol Pearce, Penn Wood Primary School  
Kathy Perry, Mighty Acorns Day Nursery  
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School  
Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School  
Nicky Willis, Cippenham Primary School  
Jamie Rockman, Haybrook College (Observer)  
Neil Sykes, Arbourvale School (Observer)

**Observers:** Sharon James, SBC Governor Support Officer  
Brenda Scott, Orchard Hill Academy

**Officers:** Catherine Cochran, Domenico Barani, Michael Jarrett, Neil Wilcox and Vikram Hansrani

**Apologies:** Ray Hinds, Kathleen Higgins, Susan Marsh, Navroop Mehat, Jon Reekie, Cate Duffy, Johnny Kyriacou and Susan Woodland

**No Apologies:** Richard Kirkham

### 693. Declarations of Interest

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, including Neil Wilcox, Director of Finance & Resources and Sharon James, Governor Support Officer, both from SBC and Brenda Scott from Orchard Hill Academy. All those present introduced themselves.

Apologies for absence had been received from Kathleen Higgins, Ray Hinds, Johnny Kyriacou, Susan Marsh, Navroop Mehat and Jon Reekie. There had been no apologies received from Richard Kirkham.

There were no declarations of interest.

### 694. Any Other Business

Jo Rockall had one item to table under Any Other Business.

### 695. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 16 January 2019

The minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 16 January 2019 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

**Page 2, minute 682:** please amend the first sentence to read: '*.... an increase of £5.5m above the 2018/19 amount.*'

**Page 3, minute 683:** please amend the first sentence of the third paragraph to read: *'.... with the DfE about the continuation of school led factors.'*

### **Matters Arising:**

**Page 3, minute 682:** details of the 'little extras' had been published and were available on the DfE website. It was noted that VA schools had already received their payments.

**Page 4, minute 685:** there was nothing to report on the High Needs Deficit Reduction Strategy at this meeting and it was suggested more information be made available at the meeting in July.

**Page 5, minute 685:** no time scale had been set to draw up of a paper exploring the reassigning of funding between blocks as the issue was still under discussion.

**Page 6, minute 686:** it was noted that interim arrangements were in place for Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) support until the end of March; Vikram Hansrani provided a verbal update. The new provider, Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (BHFT) was due to take over as at 1 April 2019. Meetings were continuing with BHFT to confirm all essential details and meetings were also taking place with CCG, who would fund the non-statutory SALT services. There had to be clarity about what the CCG would provide, which CCG recognised. This was a drive to bring parity across all three authorities concerned (Slough, RBWM and Bracknell). When the provider was settled it would be easier, although the situation would continue to be challenging. Schools would receive details of service level agreements for statutory interventions through meetings which were being arranged to take place during March. It was confirmed that 1 April 2019 was the due start date and schools would be kept informed.

**Page 7: minute 691:** it was confirmed that the Schools Forum meeting scheduled for Wednesday 15 May had been cancelled.

**Page 7: minute 692:** the Chair had written to the Secretary of State for Education regarding the proposal to withdraw supplementary funding to maintained nursery schools (MNS). A response had been received from a DfE official (copies of which were made available at the meeting) and it was noted the funding was to be extended until the end of the Summer term 2019. However, there was no indication of long-term plans. The Chair thanked Philip Gregory for providing supporting information and asked that Schools Forum be kept informed of future developments.

### **696. Update on national funding issues/local funding issues**

There were no updates for this meeting.

### **697. Confirmation of Schools Budgets 2019/20**

Details of the final Schools' Revenue Budgets 2019/20 were circulated.

It was explained that adjustments had been made for 3 schools, Ditton Park, Eden Girls and Lynch Hill. Although within the 7-year threshold, they now had pupils in all year groups 7-11 and were no longer treated as new and growing schools; this resulted in a release of funds into the DSG as those schools' anticipated budgets

were higher and had been scaled back to reflect actual pupil numbers. The funds for redistribution were shown in the final column of the paper, indicating an increase in budgets for the majority of schools. It was noted these were the definitive budgets for maintained schools and the detail for academies would inform the ESFA.

Ditton Park and Grove Academy were highlighted and it was confirmed that Nic Barani had contacted these schools to make them aware of the changes to their budgets.

With regards to national issues, there was nothing to report at this meeting.

#### **698. High Needs funding - final proposal for banding model**

Vikram Hansrani apologised as it had been necessary to make the supplementary paper available after distribution of the agenda. The consultation had been extended by a further two weeks, closing on Friday 1 March, which had resulted in the delay.

Further to the banding report delivered in December 2018, the paper included examples of feedback received to a number of the questions and some of the responses from parents and carers which had been particularly positive. Transparency was required about the funding for the children concerned and a meeting had been held for parents and carers, as agreed. The launch of the new banding model was scheduled for 1 April 2019 and support had been offered to special schools on how the model would work, along with workshops.

It had been agreed it would be important to capture feedback and offer reassurances following introduction of the new model and it was proposed this be done in July and December 2019, and April and July 2020. Follow up reports would also be made to Schools Forum.

It was noted that further work was required on weighting to reflect levels of need.

The model of continuing provision was planned to meet the needs of young people on ECHPlans.

Nicky Willis asked about the transfer from Infant to Junior school and the possible implication for new assessments and requests. It was explained that any change in fiscal value would be at the earliest in September and those children in new settings effective 2020 would have a banding under the new arrangements.

It was explained that Infant to Junior movement was being treated as within one phase and arrangements would be made through the Educational Psychologist team, to ensure there was a process in place.

Maggie Waller welcomed the report, which it was felt was clear. Jamie Rockman added that it was important for members to be aware that special schools had shared their concerns about long term funding with Vikram Hansrani and were working with SBC to address these. Overall, special schools supported the new models. It was requested that an update be presented to Schools Forum on this work.

It was pointed out that 55% of respondents had felt very or fairly confident about the new model although it was queried how many had accounted for the 45%.

It was suggested the key monitoring reports would be useful for members of Schools Forum to see and whether they should set the framework. It was felt it would be appropriate for Schools Forum to have such input through the High Needs Task Group.

A member pointed out that during the transitional period there would be two systems running and the lack of parity between children was a potential concern. There was also a need to recognise that within specials needs there were profile areas which did not meet all the categories. There was also concern about the bands moving in denominations of £5,000, which could result in both under and over funding in some instances.

It was suggested there should be further discussion about baseline costs as special schools were funded differently to mainstream.

In answer to a query, Vikram Hansrani confirmed there was a mechanism for reviewing the banding amounts and his team were working closely with finance colleagues. There were two models, but the needs of the children would be mapped against the new framework. There had been extensive work with professionals on the four sub-areas of need to ensure all school settings would be able to work with this model. Feedback indicated that schools understood this.

Mapping for individual students was not feasible and individual top up was very difficult.

There was an expectation that some children would require the top banding level of support: it was noted there were two children in this category at the current time.

It was pointed out that SENCOs might make earlier assessment requests and it was queried what information would be shared with SENCOs. It was explained that emergency assessments could not be started but the training for SENCOs would focus on how to use the new tool. Although there would be two systems in place, the needs of children would start under the new framework.

A member asked if there would be a rebanding during the 20-week period and it was explained that any reassessment activity would not factor into the new banding model.

Schools Forum **APPROVED** the new banding model, to take effect from 1 April, 2019.

And,

**AGREED** to receive reports, as detailed, at key stages during the extended implementation period.

The Chair thanked Vikram Hansrani, and all his colleagues involved, for their work on this: in turn, Vikram Hansrani thanked members for their input.

#### **699. Early Years NFF - results of sector survey**

It was noted that the Early Years Task Group had met since the Schools Forum meeting held in January 2019.

Michael Jarrett confirmed that a survey had been conducted with the sector, which had received favourable support. The questions included in the survey were

outlined and it was noted there had been significant support for the increase to the higher rates. 23 out of 74 respondents had favoured the 2-year old rate remaining the same at £5.58 per hour although the majority of that number did not deliver to that age group. Only 8 out of 75 had been in favour of no change to the increase in 3-4 year old funding. It was noted that the deprivation factor would remain the same.

A great deal of time had been spent on developing the model, which it was felt gave an opportunity to allow contingency for growth and was positive for the sector.

As part of the exercise Michael Jarrett had spoken to neighbouring authorities and confirmed SBC were funding at a higher rate. It was understood those authorities contacted had higher growth and SBC had benefited by implementing the NFF at an earlier stage. SBC was only lower than London boroughs, with a number of independent providers unable to sustain their business. As representative of the sector, Kathy Perry confirmed there was positivity about the increase and the maintaining of nursery schools.

Michael Jarrett confirmed that SBC was aware of their higher rate but there was a regeneration programme in the Slough area and work was required with the sector to expand, to refurbish and improve current provision. The introduction of 30 hours provision had put a great deal of pressure on the sector and there had been a decline in those providers offering 2-year old provision.

The Early Years NFF 2019/20 update report was noted.

#### **700. Update on Central School Services Block (CSSB)**

Susan Woodland explained that Schools Forum had been previously advised of a provisional figure of £636,804.

This figure had been updated to £654,000. There had been some increase in the copyright costs but the overall impact was to reduce the amount required to be transferred from the High Needs to CSSB by approximately £10,000.

#### **701. PFI update**

It was explained that a report in March 2018 had given welcome clarity regarding PFI payments made through the Schools and High Needs Blocks. It had been acknowledged that the Schools Block had contributed just under £300,000 per annum over a period of approximately six years and that a charge of approximately £184,000 per annum had also been made to the High Needs Block over the same period. The reasons for the High Needs Block charge were not properly known. In March 2018, Schools Forum had agreed to continue both payments for 2018/19 and to reconsider for 2019/20.

Nic Barani explained he had been working closely with colleagues on this long-standing issue: it was felt good progress had been made and was near closure. A verbal update would be given at this meeting and a follow up paper could be provided, if required.

Nic Barani explained that the PFI factor for 2019/20 had been fully funded by the DfE so there would be no need for a contribution or top slice. A paper was tabled showing a breakdown of the DSG settlement and, in answer to a query, it was

confirmed that it showed the factor being accounted for. However, it was noted that the ESFA was reviewing the premises factor in the DSG allocation and the Council did not know what would be funded in future years.

It was noted that the Chair and Maggie Waller (as previous Chair) had met with Nic Barani to discuss this issue. Maggie Waller explained it had been hoped the National Funding Formula (NFF) would separate the PFI contribution: the DfE's funding of the PFI factor was good news for schools and for the Council, but there had always been an awareness the ESFA did not know how to manage the premises factor and how long they would provide support for actual historic spend. If this (the DfE's funding of the PFI factor) was to change, it had to be remembered this was a Council contribution being made towards a Council contract. A commitment was therefore requested from the Council that no assumption would be made that it was the responsibility of schools to pick up the funding of the PFI factor.

Neil Wilcox said that the Council's contribution to the affordability gap was too much, but agreed that Nic Barani had done some very good work around this issue. Neil Wilcox added that he had never seen any written evidence of the Council's commitment, despite the Council searching through associated correspondence and that clear evidence was required. Maggie Waller confirmed that she had supporting written paperwork from 2005 onwards, including references within SBC Cabinet and Committee meetings which she would be willing to share with Neil Wilcox outside the meeting. Maggie Waller added that, on a moral level, this was a Council contract which it should not be the requirement of schools to pick up. At the time, PFI had been the only option; it was undisputed that the Council had taken the risk, however there had never been a commitment from the schools to build the three PFI schools.

It was pointed out there had effectively been a top slice to Schools Block over the past 6 years which Schools Forum should have been asked to approve, and reassurance was required that the Council would follow due process in the future.

It was queried that as the £500,000 Council contribution would not come into Schools Block in 2019/20, would £300,000 also no longer go into the High Needs Block. Nic Barani confirmed that the commitment to this contribution was still there. Maggie Waller added that at the time of the PFI contract being put in place the financial advice provided had been to put the figures through the DSG: if the £300,000 came in and went out of the HNB, it would be less complicated.

Neil Sykes asked if the funding from the DfE would have any impact on a school converting to academy status. Nic Barani said not, it was applicable to mainstream schools only.

It was noted that Schools Forum had agreed to take on the £184,000 charge to the High Needs Block for 2018/19 only. It was understood the High Needs Block had been charged for the past 6 years. The Council had 2 proposals on how that would be treated for future years.

In answer to a question, Neil Wilcox said that the £184,000 been used for benchmarking costs. Maggie Waller said as far as she was aware, this was the first time the term had been used; Schools Forum had assumed from information provided the previous year it had originally been used to further fund the unitary charge, but this was the first time that using it for benchmarking has been mentioned. It was felt there had to be debate as to whether this sum should come out of the High Needs Block at all. Neil Wilcox confirmed the Council was trying to

find clarity and it was 'messy' –The Chair pointed out that Schools Forum needed to know what the payment had been for in the first place. Maggie Waller added that benchmarking costs were a Council contract cost. It should not be charged to the High Needs Block which, in the main, provided direct provision for children with additional needs and was hugely in deficit.

The Chair outlined that in 2012/13 the Council had approached Schools Forum for a contribution of around £180,000, which it was believed related to these charges. Schools Forum had rejected the request and asked for a further proposal to be brought back - this had never been forthcoming. It was likely that the changes in Council personnel had not helped in this matter, but it appeared the charge had subsequently been made without any further consultation.

Maggie Waller expressed her thanks to Nic Barani and George Grant (previously SBC) for all their work on this issue and offered to be involved in any further discussions.

Neil Wilcox explained that the Council's David Johnson was taking legal advice on whether this charge could be passed to the PFI schools.

Jo Rockall expressed grave concerns about the potential conflict of interest with David Johnson. Neil Wilcox explained it was not David Johnson who was being instructed to give the advice; however members queried whether it should be David Johnson who was seeking the advice, pointing out this did not show impartiality to schools. Another member asked that the Council share the details of the legal advice they were seeking with the PFI schools involved.

Maggie Waller asked what would happen to the proposed £184,000 charge for 2019/20. Nic Barani explained it was a charge the Council would put through but suggested it be held back. Neil Wilcox acknowledged that mistakes had been made in the past. Confirmation was therefore requested that the £184,000 would not be charged to the High Needs Block and this was agreed by Neil Wilcox. The £309,000 would now remain in General Fund to pay the contribution, without it coming in to the High Needs Block which would be more straightforward. It was further agreed that a paper would be presented to Schools Forum in July 2019, to be informed by further discussions about whether this charge should be paid by schools or from Council funds. Neil Sykes requested that any consultation be made with schools collectively rather than individually.

Neil Wilcox added that the Council was reviewing the High Needs Block and looking at possible Section 106 funding as to whether any of that funding could be allocated into the High Needs Block.

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

It was noted that:

**Early Years:** had met.

**High Needs Block:** had met.

**5-16:** had not met.

## **703. Academies update**

There was nothing to report.

#### **704. Schools Forum membership**

The Chair explained that due to the uncertainty about the future of Schools Forum following the introduction of NFF, a decision had been taken to extend the terms of a number of members until the end of the academic year 2018-19. As a result, the terms for nine members were due to finish on 31 July 2019.

The Clerk would email those concerned to establish whether they wished to stand for a further term. Any vacancies would be shared with the appropriate phase group in order that nominations be invited.

#### **705. 2018/19 Forward Agenda Plan/Key Decisions Log**

The 2018/19 Forward Agenda Plan and Key Decision Log were noted and would be amended accordingly.

As previously noted, the Schools Forum meeting scheduled for Wednesday 16 May had been cancelled. Therefore, the next scheduled meeting was Thursday 4 July.

#### **706. Any Other Business**

##### **Jo Rockall**

Jo Rockall explained that following the National Governance Association campaign regarding school funding, the local MP, Tan Dhesi would be at the Herschel Grammar School at 1.00pm on Friday 8 March to hear concerns. An invitation had been extended to governors across Slough and anyone wishing to attend was asked to contact Jo Rockall in the first instance.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 8.15 am and closed at 9.40 am)