

Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Thursday, 1st October, 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 Haffrey, Ryvers School
Kathleen Higgins, Beechwood Secondary School
Angela Mellish, St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School
Carol Pearce, Penn Wood Primary School
Kathy Perry, Mighty Acorns Day Nursery
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
Maxine Wood, Windsor Forest College Group

Observers: Angela Mumford, Littledown School (Observer)
Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School (Observer)

Officers: Catherine Cochran, Michael Jarrett, Johnny Kyriacou, John Wood and Susan Woodland

Apologies: Ray Hinds and Navroop Mehat

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first Schools Forum meeting of the new academic year. Introductions were made and Michael Jarrett was congratulated on becoming Associate Director, Children & Families, Slough Borough Council.

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

Apologies: The following absences were noted: Ray Hinds and Navroop Mehat. Maxine Wood had advised she would need to leave at 10.00am.

777. Any Other Business

Nothing was tabled under Any Other Business.

778. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

779. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on Tuesday 14 July 2020

The minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 14 July 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

Matters Arising from those Minutes: There were none.

9.05am: Angela Mumford joined the meeting

Angela Mumford was welcomed as an Observer and introduced as Headteacher of Littledown School.

780. Schools Forum Appointment of Vice Chair

The Chair explained there was a vacancy for a Vice Chair of Schools Forum. Nicky Willis had held the role and was thanked for all her work and support.

There was a need for a Vice Chair and any member interested in taking on the role was asked to contact the Chair in the first instance.

781. Schools Forum Membership

The terms of office for Jon Reekie, Primary Governor representative and Ray Hinds, Secondary Academy representative, were due to finish on 4 December 2020. Mr Reekie had expressed an interest in standing for a further term but Mr Hinds would not be standing again.

The Clerk would make the necessary arrangements to invite nominations.

9.10am: Neil Sykes joined the meeting

782. Update on National/Local funding issues (2020/21 and 2021/20)

The Chair invited Susan Woodland to take the meeting through her report.

The National Funding Formula (NFF) had not yet been fully introduced, reaching approximately 85% at this time.

It was confirmed there had been a 2% increase in per pupil-led funding, but that amount might not be evidenced in school budgets until the Regulations changed in line with NFF. The NFF was still predicated on this year's pupil numbers as per the October 2019 census.

The per pupil funding in the local formula had increased to a minimum of £4,180 per primary pupil and £5,215 per secondary.

The MFG had to be set between +0.5% and 2.0% and there was no change to area cost adjustments.

It was confirmed that the DfE's Universal Catch-Up funding premium (£80 per pupil mainstream, £240 per pupil special, AP and hospital) was to be paid in three installments during the current academic year only. The first payment had just been received, based on the October 2019 census figures. At this time, it was unknown when the third tranche would be paid. In addition, £350m was being made available through the National Tutoring Programme for additional targeted support.

Historically, the Central Schools Block funding had been reduced by 20%: this had little effect on Slough because, further to moving the Virtual School, the only commitment now was to the Safeguarding Board. However, there was a deficit.

Teachers' pay and pension grants were to be included in the DSG as the additional teachers' pension funding was to be added to the Central Block but as yet no timeline had been issued. The DSG would be adjusted during the year.

There would be an increase in High Needs, with the Borough receiving 8-12%, equating to approximately £2.4m. This amount would include an adjustment for pupils supported out of borough.

There were no major updates for Early Years, apart from the Maintained Nursery Schools (MNS) sum was to continue.

An Operational Guide was expected in the Autumn and, as soon as the information was received, it would be shared with Schools Forum members.

Some values had increased but banding criteria had changed.

9.15am: Johnny Kyriacou joined the meeting

It was pointed out that when criteria and bands had changed previously it had detrimentally affected those schools with disadvantaged students and it was queried whether a further impact was anticipated on any individual schools.

9.20am Jamie Rockman and Angela Mellish joined the meeting

This was acknowledged but with additionality and the minimum funding guarantee, losses should be minimised. There had not been any implication of changes being made to the MFG with per pupil funding having increased over the past few years and there was no indication protection elements would be removed. More information would be available when the new IDACI was used from the new APT. It was agreed it would be important for the Task Group to consider further and focus on impact.

In answer to a question, Susan Woodland confirmed that the consultation would be shared during the current term and noted it would be helpful to consider when it was to be shared with schools in order to allow sufficient time for response. The proposed dates would be shared with the Task Group.

At the current time the maintained nursery school supplementation funding was only being made available to the end of the Summer term 2021 and further information was awaited. As noted, the Operational Guide, which would give more detail, was expected to be released imminently. Three local nurseries were in deficit and it was confirmed there would be further discussions with schools when the Guide became available. It was planned to be able to report back at the next Schools Forum meeting.

Michael Jarrett confirmed that SBC had raised this issue with the DfE, outlining concerns about the sustainability of nurseries. The outcome of the comprehensive funding review was awaited and it was pointed out that Slough had managed to maintain their network of five nurseries: this had not been the case in a number of LAs as this was a national issue. It was acknowledged some uncertainty remained around MNS.

The Chair thanked Susan Woodland for her comprehensive report, noting that this information would support the discussions to be taken on Schools and High Needs Blocks.

783. Schools Block (5-16 funding) 2021/22 - timeline & proposed consultation

The proposed consultation timeline was outlined: it was noted there was some flexibility and agreement was required on what worked well. Clarity was also required on whether there should be a transfer from Schools Block to High Needs Block and a transfer from High Needs to CSSB. However, at this point it was unknown how much these transfer amounts would be. There was also a need to establish whether local schools wished to move to the full NFF and this would be referred to the Task Group. Suggested meeting dates had been shared in the paper.

There were no major changes to the Schools Block this year although CSSB had to be consulted upon.

It was explained that the timeline was similar to previous years and dates should be agreed as soon as possible. Consideration would be given to sending the consultation out directly after the half term holiday: it was felt schools required sufficient time to consult with their governing boards, particularly given the current situation. The Chair and Susan Woodland would discuss further.

Members of the 5-16 Task Group were asked if they wished to continue sitting on the group and it was noted that other colleagues were welcome to join. Membership and meeting dates would be confirmed.

784. Scheme for Financing Schools (maintained) 2020/21 & proposed consultation

The proposed Scheme for Financing Schools (maintained) 2020/21 and consultation document had been made available for Schools Forum. Susan Woodland explained there were minimal changes, with the only directed DfE change being that maintained schools could now buy into the RPA operated by the DfE. The DfE would adjust the cost from the LA and the LA was currently awaiting further detail about how this would operate.

In answer to a question, it was noted that the majority of LAs did not take the option to de-delegate. It was known that some local maintained schools had opted for RPA and Susan Woodland would contact the schools concerned to establish whether they had been approached to make payments.

Maintained School members **APPROVED** the minor amendments in the Scheme for Financing Schools. Susan Woodland would arrange to circulate the consultation document with a return date of Friday 16 October.

785. Early Years Update

Forum was reminded that the Early Years rate increases, effective 1 April 2020, had been shared at the previous meeting.

Michael Jarrett reported that the local Early Years sector's response to the pandemic had been 'phenomenal', with all providers having remained open during the lockdown. This had involved nurseries and all ten Children's Centres continuing to offer their services.

It was noted there had been an incremental increase to approximately 52% take up which was mirrored nationally. There were continued concerns about the sustainability of providers who were being heavily subsidised which had been discussed with the DfE. This included anxiety amongst child minders who also required wrap-around care funding. Work had commenced on a campaign to promote the entitlement to places and the advantages of Early Years learning, which included advertising on a bus. To date, feedback from the DfE had been favourable. The Early Years Task Group would meet towards the end of this calendar year: any Schools Forum member wishing to join was welcome to do so.

10.00am: Maxine Wood and Kathleen Higgins left the meeting

786. High Needs Block Deficit Strategy

At the previous Schools Forum meeting it had been reported that a positive meeting had been held with the ESFA regarding the Council's DSG Recovery Plan. The DfE had now changed their policy and on Friday 24 July had published their conditions of grant. The DSG Recovery Plan was now to be replaced with a DSG Management Plan and the need had been removed for a formal Recovery Plan. The relevant extract was highlighted to members. The DfE appeared to acknowledge that the majority of High Needs deficits would not be recovered but a plan was still required to demonstrate efficiencies.

John Wood confirmed that Mark McCurrie, Consultant SEN Commissioner had been appointed as additional support in the work to address the High Needs deficit and that Mark McCurrie had presented a paper to the High Needs Task Group at their meeting on Tuesday 22 September.

During September, the ESFA had published a template for the DSG Management Plan and the key features had been highlighted in John Wood's paper to Schools Forum. It was explained that the template did not focus on Blocks alone but linked to SEND strategies, with an expectation to include links to finance. It was felt the template was a useful, 'live' document which had to be coordinated with other pieces of work. Further resources had been required and it had been advantageous to bring in more support to work on the local inspection plan.

The DSG Management Plan would need to be used to prepare the 2020/21 budget, would be discussed with Schools Forum and would have to be published as part of the local offer and on other websites.

Details of mitigated and unmitigated expenditure would have to be provided and there would be a need to report on how the Council engaged with stakeholders in 2021/22. A change in budget structure and reporting would also be required, resulting in more transparency and increased accountability. John Wood confirmed there was a need for the Borough to improve their use of funding, adding that the reporting on out of borough placements was incorrect.

As noted, the High Needs Task Group had met and the proposed future timeline was outlined. Meetings of the Task Group would need to continue until March/April of 2021, in order to set the 2021/22 budget, populate the template and develop the 3-year plan. A number of activities were already underway and a draft report would be made available for the next meeting of Schools Forum, with two Task Group meetings scheduled to take place prior to that date.

The Chair said that the clarity from the DfE was welcome and there appeared to be a recognition that it was about managing the situation rather than recovery. The LA was thanked for having made the additional support available.

A member queried whether the two-week period allowed for LA officers to meet with schools and to review specialist provision, particularly Resource Bases, was enough and what discussions were likely to feature. It was explained that Mark McCurrie was currently setting up meetings with those schools with larger Resource bases and a meeting for all schools with Resource bases. Information was being compiled on resource base funding and other specialist places. Officers had been working with Priory School to develop an agenda and dialogue would be ongoing. It was not anticipated there would be any major changes in provision in the 2021/22 budget. This work would identify changes in provision which could take effect from next year but would impact on the 2022/23 budget. An explanatory document was due to be shared with schools on 2 October 2020.

It was felt two areas needed to change:

- the imbalance between primary and secondary, plus the need to work towards better continuity between the two, particularly in the area of autism;
- more scrutiny was required on how the funding made available for Resource Bases was allocated.

787. SEND Quarterly Update

John Wood and the panel had reviewed the banding model which required further work: any updates to the banding model were now being considered as part of the DSG Management Plan.

It was felt the Borough had become more efficient in its' use of top-up for High Needs and it was indicated there had been a 'tightening up' on expenditure. Although banding amounts could increase these did not always equate with the needs of the child concerned. Therefore, the point scheme was being considered as part of the model but required further discussion and work. It was explained that the points system, which was more sophisticated, already existed in Slough: a child's level of need was assessed, with the assessment details fed into the model, resulting in a point score.

Further consideration was required with regards to special schools and AP as they were funded to absorb increases such as Teachers' pension contributions. The proposed changes to the model would be circulated and consulted upon: more training would then be made available to schools to ensure they were familiar with the process. The number of children involved would be shared with the High Needs

Task Group and an update report would be presented to the next meeting of Schools Forum.

It was noted that, as part of the SBC restructure, John Wood's commission was due to end on Friday 6 November, with phase 2 of the staff consultation due to begin on Wednesday 21 October. Mark McCurrie would be available to provide continuity on the SEND work with schools, Schools Forum and services, with the SEND department remaining within the Education & Inclusion portfolio.

The Chair thanked John Wood for updating Schools Forum and, on behalf of members, thanked John Wood for his contribution whilst working with Slough schools and wished him well for the future.

It was confirmed that the quarterly visual of the banding update would be produced as part of the review which would be shared with Schools Forum.

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

As noted, the HNB Task Group had met and were to confirm further meetings. The 5-16 Task Group were to arrange a meeting, with Early Years to arrange a meeting towards the end of the calendar year.

789. Academies Update

Khalsa Primary School were in the process of applying for multi-academy trust status.

790. 2020/21 Forward Agenda Plan/Key Decisions Log

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

The proposed Schools Forum meeting dates for the academic year 2020/21 had previously been made available. The next meeting was scheduled for:

Wednesday 2 December 2020: provisional start time 9.15am.

10.30am: Peter Collins left the meeting

791. Any Other Business

Covid-19

A member queried whether Schools Forum should be made aware of the expenditure costs incurred by schools in relation to Covid-19 precautions. It was suggested a survey to schools could be an option to establish the impact on school funds.

Susan Woodland confirmed that the DfE would not be offering a second round of funding to those schools which might be eligible.

It was pointed out that the ESFA representative, who had observed the previous Schools Forum meeting, had agreed to highlight the issue of additional costs experienced by schools in ensuring Covid precautions were in place. The Chair would follow up whether this issue had been raised.

Cate Duffy

In light of the Council's future plans Forum noted that Cate Duffy, Director of Children, Learning & Skills would be retiring.

On behalf of Schools Forum the Chair thanked Cate Duffy for her contributions to Schools Forum meetings and for the impact she had made on schools within Slough during her tenure: all best wishes were sent to Cate Duffy for her future.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 9.00am and closed at 10.40am)