

Slough Schools Forum – Minutes of Meeting held on 10 November 2022

DRAFT MINUTES

Present: John Constable, Langley Grammar School (Chair)
Peter Collins, Slough & Eton Church of England Business and Enterprise College
Gill Denham, Marish Primary School
Valerie Harffey, Ryvers School
Emma Lister, Chalvey Early Years Centre
Angela Mellish, St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School
Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School
Jon Reekie, Phoenix Infants School
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School
Jamie Rockman, Haybrook College
Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School
Ben Bausor, Always Growing Ltd
Neil Sykes, Arbour Vale School

Officers: Neill Butler, Strategic Finance Manager, People (Children)
Johnny Kyriacou, Associate Director, Education & Inclusion

Observer Councillor Christine Hulme, Cabinet member
(Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills)

Apologies: Andrew Fraser, Interim DCS and CEO Slough Children First
Carol Pearce, Penn Wood Primary School
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School
Steve Muldoon, Interim Head of Financial Management

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and explained that there was no clerk available for this meeting. Instead, the meeting would be recorded and transcribed afterwards.

918	Notification of any other business None																											
919	Declarations of Interest None																											
920	Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 6th July 2022. These were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting, subject to the following amendments: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ben Bausor and Neil Sykes to be added to list of those present attended the meeting. The Chair asked Forum members to note the introduction of an action log at the end of the minutes, which would be updated as follows: <table border="1"><thead><tr><th>Minute</th><th>Action</th><th>Responsibility</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>906</td><td>Carry forward to next meeting</td><td>Chair</td></tr><tr><td>907</td><td>Completed</td><td>N/A</td></tr><tr><td>909, 910</td><td>Carry forward to next meeting</td><td>Johnny Kyriacou</td></tr><tr><td>911</td><td>To be discussed outside meeting</td><td>Chair/Johnny Kyriacou</td></tr><tr><td>912</td><td>Complete</td><td>N/A</td></tr><tr><td>913</td><td>Carry forward to next meeting</td><td>Chair</td></tr><tr><td>915, 916</td><td>Complete</td><td>N/A</td></tr><tr><td>917</td><td>Carry forward to next meeting</td><td>Neill Butler</td></tr></tbody></table>	Minute	Action	Responsibility	906	Carry forward to next meeting	Chair	907	Completed	N/A	909, 910	Carry forward to next meeting	Johnny Kyriacou	911	To be discussed outside meeting	Chair/Johnny Kyriacou	912	Complete	N/A	913	Carry forward to next meeting	Chair	915, 916	Complete	N/A	917	Carry forward to next meeting	Neill Butler
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921	<p>Schools Forum Membership Update</p> <p>There are still two vacancies for academy members. The Chair will carry this action forward.</p>
922	<p>Update on National / Local Funding Issues</p> <p>Neill Butler (NB) noted that schools will be very aware of the real cost pressures at the moment. The main national issue is that the government still intends to move to a minimum starting salary for qualified teachers of £30k by the end of this parliament in December 2024. There is no indication of how this will be funded or what the impact will be on pay differentials for teachers on higher pay points.</p> <p>NB referred to the consultation on the national funding formula which took place during the summer. The main impact on local authorities is the requirement to move by 10% each year on any local formula factors that are not up to the full NFF level. The main area for Slough is the mobility factor which is funded slightly lower than NFF. NB indicated that the impact on Slough allocations of changing the mobility factor rate to 100% of the NFF would be around £200k additional funding into schools' budgets. The main reason for the impact not being higher is the loss of minimum funding guarantee for some schools, giving a net impact of just £200k.</p> <p>MW noted that the reason the mobility factor has not been previously adopted in the local formula was that although Slough schools have a very mobile population, the actual criteria didn't reflect the actual nature of the churn seen. MW advised that it would be interesting at some point to see the modelling and the impact on individual schools.</p>
923	<p>DSG Monitoring Report 2022/23</p> <p>NB presented the first DSG monitoring report for 2022/23, with a summary to the end of Q2. The half year position showed that the Schools, Central School Services and Early Years blocks are generally on track. The High Needs block is forecasting an overspend of £2.2 million in 2022/23. NB briefly described some of the local authority actions to address the overspend, including structural systems for monitoring spend, and collaborative work with other partners. The result of the LA actions so far has been to reduce the deficit significantly from the 2021/22 level of £4.7 million.</p> <p>Forum members were asked to note the report as the background for the next items on the agenda. There were no questions or comments.</p>
924	<p>DSG Management Plan and DfE 'Safety Valve' Programme update</p> <p>Johnny Kyriacou (JK) updated Forum members on progress towards joining the DfE's 'Safety Valve' programme. He confirmed that the LA is having fortnightly meetings with the DfE, at which a very credible plan has been presented. JK stated that the DfE appeared to have confidence in the LA's plans; they have been questioning all the areas carefully and believe that what the LA is saying is realistic and achievable. The current intention is to submit the bid in February 2023 to join the program by April; this allows the programme to start in the 2023/24 financial year.</p> <p>The Chair asked for clarification about the timescale for actually being accepted formally on to the programme, as this has been in discussion for a considerable period of time. JK confirmed that the bid has to be submitted to the DfE by February, and if successful would lead to inclusion on the programme by April 2023.</p> <p>JK further confirmed that the programme is expected to last for four years, at the end of which the High Needs block would achieve an in-year balance. Some LAs on the programme have a five year plan; SBC believes it can be done in four years. This is a credible strategy which allows for possible slippage into a fifth year if circumstances change.</p> <p>JK asked for clarification on whether the wider schools community feel well informed about the situation. Although the DSG management plan and the safety valve programme have been discussed extensively at Forum and in the Slough Education Partnership Board, there was very low uptake to a recent opportunity for headteachers to hear directly from the DfE adviser.</p>

	<p>The Chair asked Forum members to comment on whether there is a wider understanding of the position or whether some further communication and clarification from the LA would be welcomed. Peter Collins (PC) commented that he personally was very well informed because of his attendance at the other meetings where this is discussed. However, as chair of the secondary heads' association he was conscious of relatively little engagement from other heads not in a similar position, and that this should probably be interpreted as not having particular concerns.</p> <p>Jamie Rockman (JR) asked whether there could be greater visibility of what the likely impacts are going to be, so that there could be general agreement that joining the programme represents an acceptable level of risk. NB accepted this as a fair request and suggested it could be referred to the DSG Transformation Board. JK further commented that he was happy to provide greater transparency on the impact assessments in the appropriate meetings.</p> <p>Maggie Waller (MW) commented that most governors would be fairly oblivious to the issues unless they were Forum members but that the impact of the deficit reduction on services to schools is what would interest them; could there be some form of briefing for governors at some point? Gill Denham (GD) agreed and further commented that whatever actual headteacher awareness levels, they're worrying more about the impact on services than on the process.</p> <p>Ben Bausor (BB) asked whether there had been any briefing for parents, particularly those children have high needs and might have some concerns. JK confirmed that there was parent representation on the DSG Transformation Board through Special Voices.</p> <p>PC commented that given that this safety valve scheme is not unique to Slough, it may be worth establishing whether there is any DfE view about how wider communication should be managed, particularly in relation to governors and the parent community. Inclusion in the safety valve programme would be a really positive step forward for Slough and doesn't need to become a 'more cuts, everything's going to go' - for which there is the potential to not handled carefully. The Chair agreed with PC that it could be viewed very negatively unless communication is handled carefully. JK agreed to raise the issue of communication in other relevant meetings.</p>
<p>925</p>	<p>DSG Timetable 2023/24</p> <p>NB outlined the timetable for agreeing the Schools Block allocation for 2023/24. The APT (authority proforma tool) was expected to be released before Christmas with confirmed figures for numbers on roll and the resulting final DSG allocation. After the Christmas break there would be a meeting with the 5-16 task Group to finalise options around funding. Final proposals for the growth fund, early years and schools block funding would then be presented to Forum for at the meeting on 12th January, with recommendations informing the Cabinet decision on 16th January.</p> <p>The LA has a statutory duty to provide mainstream schools with their budgets allocations for 2023/24 by the end of February, together with indicative budgets for 2024/25 and 2025/26. The last stage in the process would be the LA proposals on the Central Services School block, which would come to Forum for approval in March.</p> <p>The Chair thanked NB for the clarity this paper provided, and it was helpful to understand the impact of tight deadlines imposed by DfE. There were no further questions or comments from Forum members.</p>
<p>926</p>	<p>DSG Block Transfers 2023/24</p> <p>The Chair advised Forum members that the paper for this item had been send as a supplementary agenda due to the extension of the consultation process. The paper summarised the results of the DSG consultation which closed on Monday 7th November and refers to the discussions of the 5-16 task group held on the same day</p> <p>NB reminded Forum members that each year the LA can request to transfer up to 0.5% of the total funds out of the schools block into the other DSG blocks, subject to consultation with schools and</p>

Forum approval. The consultation response rate was disappointing – only 7 schools responded. However, the view expressed by those schools that did respond was clearly in favour of the block transfers proposed.

The Chair advised Forum that the paper itself was essentially a summary of the consultation document and explained the role of Forum in the decision process. Forum members were expected to:

- a) approve, or not, the transfer of £100k from Schools Block to CSSB to support the admissions function
- b) approve, or not, the transfer from Schools block to High Needs block, to a maximum of 0.5% less the transfer to CSSB
- c) endorse, or not, the LA recommendation the basic entitlement factor be used to distribute to schools any additional headroom funding in the final DSG allocation.

The Chair further advised Forum members that some of the 5-16 task group members were involved in discussion after the close of the consultation. Comments were circulated to those members of the task group who were not able to attend and were invited to add any further comments. The Chair asked MW and Jo Rockall (JR) to feed back on the Task group recommendations.

JR advised that the Task group's recommendation was to agree to both transfers, and to endorse the distribution of headroom through basic entitlement. Even though the consultation response rate was low, schools did have the opportunity to respond, and the view from those who did was overwhelmingly in favour. The Task Group had discussed issues including the pressure on school's budgets, the increasing complexity of some of the pupils with whom schools are working, and the reduction of some of the services across the town to support them.

MW endorsed JR's comments, adding that the low response level was surprising but may be due in part to the DfE timescales. MW noted that distribution through basic entitlement had always been the principle adopted when there was any DSG headroom to distribute as this was fair to all schools. MW referred to the discussion about the safety valve programme and the need to minimise the risk of the LA not gaining the support of the DfE. It was acknowledged that progress had been made to reduce the in-year deficit, despite the impact on services and the concerns that have been voiced.

The Chair thanked MW and JR and opened up the discussion to comments/questions from members.

Angela Mellish (AM) asked why the admissions team needed this extra money and whether this request would be repeated in the future. JK advised that a detailed paper was issued last year when the request was first made. This highlighted that the request was to fund the expansion of the admissions staff team, including additional capacity to support the fair access process and deal with the increasing complexity of Slough's admissions requirements. NB confirmed that block transfers are only for one year and the guidance is clear that agreements cannot be for the longer term.

MW asked for clarification about the funding of the CSSB and whether there were pressures from DfE to reduce it. NB confirmed the historic factors in the CSSB have been reducing by 20% year on year since 2021. The LA did have an opportunity to ask for protection but this had not happened. NB stated his intention to go to the ESFA to ask for retrospective protection – this may be unlikely but it is worth trying. The Chair confirmed that NB will be coming back to Forum in March with proposals for CSSB funding in 2023/24, with some indication of the likely future of CSSB funding.

Valerie Harffey (VH) commented that her experience of the admissions service was better in some respects since the transfer was agreed last year, there were still issues in relation to late offers of places but asked whether it would be worthwhile getting feedback from other schools. JK advised that there was a route outside Forum to raise issues with the service. GD asked whether schools might respond to a consultation about admissions, focusing on whether the service has improved. JK replied that this could be considered. The Chair confirmed that it is not the function of Schools Forum to performance manage any of the CSSB service functions, but in the context of setting the budget Forum does have an interest in ensuring that any funding that is being transferred is being spent wisely and

	<p>with relative efficiency. This requires some level of feedback from the LA on the effectiveness of the services. The Chair therefore asked JK to include some comment on the effectiveness of the services when proposals for the CSSB are brought to Forum in March, and confirmed that he, JK and NB would discuss the format of the information presented outside the meeting.</p> <p>Peter Collins supported MW's view that block transfers for this year should be seen as a supportive measure in terms of giving credibility to the safety valve process, and asked whether establishing with the DfE whether a position from Forum about block transfer in future years would be helpful in strengthening and supporting the safety valve process. JK agreed to consider this.</p> <p>The Chair moved the discussion on to making decisions about the proposals brought forward by the LA. Firstly, he proposed that Forum supported the LA's recommendation to allocate any headroom in the school block funding to mainstream schools and academies in 2023/24 through basic entitlement, in line with previous practice. Forum members unanimously agreed to endorse this proposal.</p> <p>Secondly, the Chair asked for Forum's approval to transfer £100k from the Schools block to the CSSB in 2023/24 to support the admissions service. This was agreed by Forum members, with a caveat from NS that the LA considers alternative methods of funding the admissions function in future years. MW supported this view, but commented that care needed to be taken not to create unnecessary complication in considering alternative funding.</p> <p>Thirdly, the Chair sought clarification of the exact sum proposed for the transfer from the Schools to High Needs block. NB confirmed that the figure of £699k in the paper was based on provisional DSG settlement. The actual figure would depend on the final settlement figure and the request was therefore for a transfer totalling 0.5% of Schools Block funding less the £100k already approved for admissions. The Chair confirmed that the principle is a total 0.5% transfer in total across the two requests. Forum members approved the transfer with no further comments.</p>
927	<p>Task Group Update</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that the update from the 5-16 Task Group had been covered in the previous agenda item. The group would meet again in early January to consider the final DSG settlement.</p> <p>NB confirmed that the early years block will meet very early in January prior to bring proposals for Early Years Block to Forum.</p>
928	<p>Academies update</p> <p>JK confirmed that the LA was not aware of any proposed changes of school status from maintained to academy.</p>
929	<p>2022/23 Forward Agenda Plan</p> <p>The Chair advised that following requests from some members, dates for the proposed meetings through the rest of the year had been amended slightly.</p>
930	<p>Key decisions log</p> <p>To be updated after the meeting.</p>
931	<p>Any Other Business (notified at start of meeting)</p> <p>No other business had been notified at the beginning of the meeting.</p>

Key action log – updated 10 November 2022

Minute	Action	Responsibility
906	a) Nominations to be sought for primary and secondary academy representatives 10/11/22 – carried forward	Chair
907	a) Forum members to return comments on the National Funding Formula consultation to the Chair b) Consultation response to be completed by 9th September	Forum members Chair
909	a) LA to report back on the impact of underspend in relation to post 16 learners with SEND. 10/11/22 – carried forward	Johnny Kyriacou
910	a) Full DSG Management Plan to be made available to Forum members following agreement with the DfE. b) LA to produce quality impact assessment reports covering the areas of saving within the High Needs provision. 10/11/22 – carried forward	Steve Muldoon Steve Muldoon
911	a) LA to clarify position in relation to funding for students with SEND placed at the College through fair access. 10/11/22 – carried forward	Johnny Kyriacou
912	a) LA to update the Scheme for Financing Schools.	Neil Butler
913	a) Clarification of the remit, terms of reference and membership of 5-16, EY and HNB task groups. 10/11/22 – carried forward	Chair
915	b) LA officers to consider forward agenda plan and advise Chair	Neil Butler
916	a) Update Key Decisions log b) Establish key actions list	Chair Chair
917	a) Secure a permanent clerk to the Forum 10/11/22 – carried forward	Steve Muldoon/ Neill Butler
924	a) JK agreed to raise issues of how to communicate the progress on the DSG management plan and safety valve programme with DfE and in other related meetings	Johnny Kyriacou
926	a) JC, JK and NB to discuss format of CSSB report for March Forum meeting, to include some assessment of service effectiveness.	Chair
927	a) 5-16 Task Group meeting to be arranged for early January b) EY Task Group to meet early January	Chair Neill Butler