

Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Wednesday, 22nd September, 2010

Present: Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School (Chair)
Julia Shepard, Beechwood Secondary School (Vice-Chair)
Maureen Ball, Baylis Court Secondary School
Barbara Clark, Godolphin Junior School
Diane Lister, Slough Centre Nursery School and Early Year Centre
Maureen Mallinson, Westgate Secondary School
Paul McAteer, Slough and Eton Secondary School
Charlie McGeachie, Montem Primary School
Maggie Stacey, St Anthony's RC Primary School
Lynda Bussley, JTUC (Observer)

Observers & Attendees: Mercedes Hernandez Estrada, Angela Mellish, RC Diocese Slough Grammar School, Jo Rockall, Herschell Grammar School and Mary Sparrow, Wexham School

Officers: Matt Espley, Annal Nayyar, Clair Pyper, Bob Garnett and Arif Dar

Apologies: Jon Reekie and Robin Crofts

PART I

1. **Declarations of Interest**

None were received.

2. **Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th July, 2010 were approved as a correct record.

3. **Matters Arising**

National Funding Context - The Deputy Director of Finance advised that regarding the National Funding Context a report had been circulated which was agreed by Cabinet on Monday 20th September and further information would be provided to the Forum regarding this.

Building Schools For the Future – There would be an update on this taken to Cabinet in October to ensure that Members were fully prepared in terms of the funding position across the secondary spectrum and within the national context. An update would be given at the next Schools Forum.

Primary Places - The Forum was advised that all applications for school places had been met. The opening of the Willow School had been delayed due to a delay in the completion of the building works following adverse weather. However the school would be opened in two weeks. Pupils were being offered accommodation in Beechwood and Wexham Schools at present. There was some limited capacity at present and whilst there were places available not all applicants were offered one of their preferences.

4. Job Evaluation and Harmonisation - Ann-Marie Scott

This item was deferred to a future meeting as Ann-Marie Scott was unable to attend.

5. Medium Term Financial Plan

The Chair advised that this was a contextual item but which inked into the DfE Consultation on Schools Funding. The report detailed the financial situation in terms of the national, Council-wide and departmental perspective including the savings required over the next four years. Following the headlines from the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) the Council would be adding further detail to the budgets. The Council had assumed a 25% to 40% reduction across the next four years. This amounted to a total projected deficit of almost £20m by 2014/15. In 2011/12 the Council was looking to make a saving of £6.8m from support services and overheads in order to protect front line services for one year to ensure that they were in a robust position to realign and reduce costs by 2012/13. The Council had a robust basis to implement the cuts required. The Deputy Director advised that the Council's outturn position and the Dedicated Schools Grant position were both in-line with projections enabling the Council to move forward on budgetary issues with confidence.

Officers reported that the proposed changes to the National Funding Formula were not expected to provide a positive outcome for the authority. Schools had been asked to focus on providing a 10% reduction in their budgets; however the Forum was warned that this may now be a 10-20% reduction. This would probably be required in year three or four of the savings. Schools were currently familiar with a three year budget cycle; although new funding arrangements were expected to fit in with the four year government term and overall spending plans. Therefore it was probable that there may be a one year settlement followed by a 3 year settlement or possibly one four year settlement. The Deputy Director reiterated the importance of planning for the future and advised that a further update would be brought to the next meeting.

Within the Education Directorate £910k of savings had been agreed in February 2010. These had now been identified and included £71k for extended schools, £140k for the removal of an Assistant Director Post, £500K for the creation of targeted Young People's Service and £250k in reduced placement costs for looked after children. Members requested further information on how the reduction in the extended schools budget would impact schools. The funding currently paid for three co-ordinators for the service. However officers agreed that they would clarify whether the reduction was to the co-ordinators or parent link workers and whether there was an expectation that this would be picked up by the schools. It was noted that there would be an opportunity to look at reductions again in terms of available headroom. However there were complex arrangements in place which would need to be disseminated. The Director of Education and Children's Services advised that the cuts would fundamentally change the way in which services would be provided in future.

It was noted that with the reduction in Assistant Director posts the Directorate would aim to have greater integration between departments. A consultation document on the restructure was due to be circulated shortly and would be provided to head

teachers and key personnel. The School Improvement Service could no longer be sustained in its current shape. It was confirmed that the reconfiguration of the directorate would look to ensure a new structure that could be sustained.

The Deputy Director of Finance notified the Forum that the next steps would be to undertake scenario planning following the CSR headlines in October. These would be shared with schools and further reports would be brought back to the Forum in November, December and January. It was expected that there would be joint planning implemented between schools and the local authority and that indicative budgets would be formulated in February and then endorsed by the end of March. The Director of Education and Children's Services advised that savings would be discussed with the Schools Educational Forum. There were deep concerns raised about the general level of Government cuts and the impact that these may have on young people and society in general. The Director advised that the Association of Directors of Children's Services was attempting to ensure that central government was aware of the overall impact of the budget reduction measures.

Resolved – That the current financial position be noted and that further updates be brought to future meetings of the Forum.

6. Rights, Roles and Responsibilities of Schools Forum

The Forum considered a report which was presented in response to a request received at the last meeting of the Forum. The report updated Members on the responsibilities of Schools Forum and included a copy of the Schools' Forums (England) Regulations 2002 which stipulates the issues that the Forum must be consulted on and the issues that it makes decisions on. The regulations set out five main areas where Schools Forum has a role:

- Changes to the Fair Funding Formula
- Contracts
- Financial Issues relating to various specific budgets
- Breaches of the Central Expenditure Limit
- Application of the Minimum Funding Guarantee

It was noted that there had been occasions over the past few years where the Forum had taken a decision on the breach of the central expenditure limit in as much as the policy decisions which the Schools Forum had endorsed had led to such breaches.

Resolved – That the report be noted and that the Roles and Responsibilities Chart be circulated to all Forum members.

7. DfE Consultation on School Funding 2011-12

The Principal Accountant Schools advised that a Task and Finish Group be established to prepare a response to the Department for Education (DfE) consultation on Schools Funding including the creation of a pupil premium for disadvantaged pupils. It was agreed that the dates and membership of the group would be confirmed by the Principal Accountant, Schools. The Forum was advised that a second consultation had been launched in the week preceding the Schools Forum meeting and Members agreed that it would be useful for the same group to look additionally at the second consultation.

Resolved – That a Task & Finish Group be established to work with officers to prepare a response to the Consultation on School Funding 2011-12 before it closes on 18th October 2010 and that the group look at the additional, recently launched consultation.

8. Schools Support Service

The Deputy Director of Finance updated the Forum regarding the delivery of the Schools Support Service which was agreed by the Forum in May 2010 following the weaknesses identified in the financial systems of some of the schools in Slough. The service had created a sound foundation but this needed to be fully established. The support on FMSiS provided by auditors from Deloitte had so far received good feedback from the individual schools involved.

The Forum was reminded that one area where issues arose was in the financial management role of School Governors. The authority had looked at how services could be delivered in order to address this and to meet the needs of the schools. The Council sought quotations to deliver the required support. Reading Borough Council was identified as the preferred supplier and a tailored programme of support was being commissioned. This service was due to begin on 1st October 2010 and the Deputy Director of Finance advised that feedback would be sought immediately to ensure that the service was cost effective, focused and reactive. The Forum was informed that feedback from Governors in Reading was good.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted
- (b) That the proposed contract with Reading Borough Council to deliver a range of Governor Support Services be endorsed.

9. Any Other Business

Special Needs Task and Finish Group - The Chair advised that the Special Needs Task and Finish Group would be meeting in October and an update would be brought to the next meeting of the Forum.

Membership – Members noted the current vacancies that had arisen on the forum from the secondary phase and the existing primary phase vacancies. Nominations for secondary vacancies would be sought through the Slough Association of Secondary Headteachers and following a lack of take-up from governors the current primary vacancies would be offered to Headteachers.

Future Agenda Items – The Director of Education and Children’s Services advised that an item on Academies and Free Schools would be added to a future meeting agenda. It was agreed that a standing item regarding the overall budget position be on each agenda and that a future meeting would include scenario setting in this context.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 8.00 am and closed at 9.08 am)