

Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Wednesday, 11th November, 2009

- Present:** Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School (Chair)
Julia Shepard, Beechwood Secondary School (Vice-Chair)
Maureen Ball, Baylis Court Secondary School
Maureen Mallinson, Westgate Secondary School
Jo Matthews, Littledown Special School
Paul McAteer, Slough and Eton Secondary School
Charlie McGeachie, Montem Primary School
Maggie Stacey, St Anthony's RC Primary School
Barbara Clark, Godolphin Junior School
- Observers:** Lynda Bussley, NUT
- Attendees:** Julian King-Harris, SBC
Angela Mellish, RC Diocese
Councillor Pantelic, Commissioner for Education & Children's Services
Jeff Richardson, Wexham School
- Officers:** Robin Crofts, Matt Espley, Bob Garnett, Annal Nayyar and Ian Sandbrook
- Apologies:** Christine Bamigbola, Jean Robertson, Tony Browne and Felicity Schofield

PART I

16. Declarations of Interest

None were received.

17. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th September, 2009 were approved as a correct record with the following matters arising:-

Budget – The Deputy Director of Finance informed the Forum that a Policy, Prioritisation and Resources Group meeting was due to be held on the following Monday. The cross council position was unchanged from that previously reported at the last meeting of the Forum.

Building Schools for the Future (BSF) – The secondary Headteachers expressed their preference for BSF to proceed and noted their enthusiasm for the project. Secondary Headteachers made officers aware that they were keen to assist with the Readiness to Deliver submission. It was noted that an overall financial package had to be pulled together to move forward and the Council was looking into using capital in a more innovative way. Negotiations were currently taking place on the submission which would be made at the end of February or early March. It was agreed that the Schools Forum would be kept informed on the progress made.

Governor Training/Membership – The Chair informed the Panel that she would be attending the Governors' termly meeting on the 17th November in order to provide further information to governors about the Schools Forum.

18. School Specific Contingency

The Schools Forum received a report which provided a comparator analysis of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) contingency held by all Berkshire Local Authorities. The Schools Forum had requested this information at the meeting in July. The report provided benchmarking figures from other local authorities. It was noted that most budget lines within the contingency had been created to specifically support schools where circumstances had changed during the financial year. Slough's contingency was larger than the other authorities'. However it also contained three other budgets which were significantly larger or did not appear in the other authorities' contingencies. If these were removed Slough's contingency was broadly in line with other authorities. Officers advised that the contingency was fit for purpose and met the needs of schools and the local authority.

A member asked about the funding set aside for sixth day provision. The Forum was advised that the sixth day provision funding for fixed term exclusions was used to support the Behaviour Panel Service. Children on fixed term exclusions were referred to the service when sixth day provision needed to be put in place. Primary schools received approximately one third of the available funding. It was noted that had this had been distributed to schools individually each primary school would have received about five to seven hundred pounds which was ineffective. It was noted that this was in addition to the funding already received by Haybrook College and that the proposal for sixth day provision had been brought to Schools Forum previously following the changes in legislation regarding this. Officers agreed to circulate the previous report to Schools Forum members. The in year pupil growth funding was worked out using a formula and was necessary due to the high level of volatility in pupil numbers in Slough schools. The 14-16 practical learning provision funding was provided through a direct grant. Local authorities decided how best to distribute the funds. The Hard to Place budget was used through school admissions and inclusion services for funding for pupils who would be particularly difficult to place at a school.

Resolved – That the report be noted and that further information on the figures would be provided and linked into the budget build for next year.

19. Significant September Increases

A report on the additional funding distributed to Slough schools through the fair funding formula factor was considered by the Forum. The purpose of the funding was to address significant September increases in pupil numbers. The Forum was asked to agree the allocation of funds to Montem Primary outside of the normal arrangements to reflect the additional form of entry admitted to the school in September. The factor compared pupil numbers between the September pupil count and the January pupil count. Where the number of pupils at a school had increased by 20 an additional allocation of £15,000 was made to the school. It was noted that it was part of the remit of Task and Finish Group to review the funding for next year as there were changes to the funding for nursery provision.

Resolved -

(a) That the information within the report be noted.

(b) That the allocation of funds to Montem Primary outside of the normal arrangements for funding Significant September Increases, to reflect the additional form of entry admitted to the school in September be agreed.

20. Projected Financial Position after 2nd Quarter Budget Monitoring

The Principal Accountant – Schools, informed the Forum of the current year's budget position based upon the second quarter returns. These represented the period from April 2009 to September 2009. Responses had been received from all schools. It was reported that there was a significant increase in the projected balances. This was mainly due to change in the primary phase. There was a large project outlined for the use of a balance which had been delayed. Another factor was vacancies within schools and the problems in recruitment. Officers confirmed that the plans for spending the balances would be looked into to ensure that they were on target. Those schools whose balances had increased to above the threshold had been asked to provide information on the planned use of balances.

The Deputy Director of Finance informed the Forum that it was likely that any future government may decrease the DSG by any balances that were over the threshold. It was suggested a possible option that could be investigated would be to utilise some of the balances to undertake the BSF scheme. A Member noted that schools had worked very hard in certain instances to accrue their balances and that most had good business plans and projects in place for their use. The Chair noted that the potential use of some part of school balances was a reasonable option to consider in planning for the revenue spend for BSF. It was noted that BSF needed to be a collective responsibility between schools and the authority and that this should be looked into in the wider context of what schools would need to spend anyway on BSF.

An officer reported that the format for the returns was as agreed by the Forum in September 2009 and asked for confirmation from the Forum that this was the preferred format or whether any further information was required. It was suggested that the report needed to be more specific about where the significant increase from the primary sector had originated. It was suggested that further information in annotations on the build up of balances could be added or verbalised at the meeting. However, in some instances it was a challenge to get all of the required information from schools. It was noted that the Forum endorsed requests for this information as it was important that this was received in a timely manner. There was also a role for Headteachers associations to play in ensuring that this information was provided to the authority. Officers confirmed that the next budget monitoring report would be brought to the Forum in March.

Resolved – That the Forum note the current estimated outturn across 2009/10 based upon the 2nd Quarter Budget Monitoring.

21. Schools Forum Terms of Reference

The Chair advised that the revised draft terms of reference reflected the current practices of the Forum and the various changes in the roles and responsibilities of School Forums stipulated by central Government.

Resolved – That the terms of reference be approved.

22. Date of the next Meeting

It was confirmed that the date of next meeting would be Wednesday, 9th December, 2009.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 8.00 am and closed at 8.52 am)