

Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Wednesday, 27th February, 2013

- Present:** Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School (Chair)
Julia Shepard, Beechwood Secondary School (Vice-Chair)
Barbara Clark, Godolphin Junior School
John Constable, Langley Grammar
Harry Duffy, Ryvers Primary School
Helen Huntley, Haybrook College
Maureen Mallinson, Westgate Secondary School
Paul McAteer, Slough and Eton Secondary School
Mary Sparrow, Wexham Secondary School
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School
Jean Cameron, Slough Children's Centres
Jo Matthews, Littledown
Nicky Willis, Cippenham Primary School
Philip Gregory, Baylis Court Nursery School
- Officers:** Robin Crofts, Mark Taylor, George Grant, Steve Elson, Rajpreet Johal
(stand-in Clerk)
- Other Attendees:** Julie O'Brien, Our Lady of Peace Junior School, Eddie Neighbour, Slough
Grammar School
- Apologies:** Charlie McGeachie, Kevin O'Driscoll, Maggie Stacey, Virginia Barrett,
Angela Mellish, Lynda Bussley (observer) and Michelle Perkins (Clerk)

PART I

197. Apologies

Charlie McGeachie, Maggie Stacey, Father Kevin O'Driscoll, Virginia Barrett, Angela Mellish, Lynda Bussley (observer), Michelle Perkins (clerk).

198. Declarations of Interest

None

199. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

Minute 190: concerns regarding on-going support from SBC Finance: Maggie Waller reported that a positive meeting had taken place with Ruth Bagley, Robin Crofts, Mark Taylor, Julia Shepard and herself. See also agenda item 5 (below) regarding the new structure and support arrangements.

Minute 192: Early Years: Steve Elson confirmed that Free School Meals data will be used for deprivation funding and that National Insurance numbers are collected already for 5-11 year olds and this will be offered as an SLA service to early years.

Minute 193: DfE Funding Reform 5 – 16: The Chair gave an update on action since the last meeting. An electronic vote was held regarding the two models proposed for primary / secondary ratio (1:1.43 and 1:1.39) and the Schools Forum vote was in favour of the former (11 votes to 6). The LA was informed of the outcome but the recommendation of the Schools Forum was not accepted. It was noted that this was the first time that this had happened. The ratio of 1:1.39 was submitted to the DfE. The

decision regarding the ratio had been delegated to the Chief Executive and Mark Taylor explained that this decision was made in consultation with the Leader and other elected members. He told the Forum that Ruth Bagley had received three letters regarding this and would be responding. Members noted that further letters were to be submitted. Members of the Forum expressed extremely grave concern about unexpected outcomes from the decision in that there were significant unexpected losses (post Minimum Funding Guarantee), far greater than set out in the final model reviewed by the Task & Finish Group and Schools Forum prior to the vote. In one instance cited this could lead to a possible redundancy. John Constable reported that the budget his school (as an example) received from the EFA listed cash values less than those in the model considered by the Task and Finish group. He asked for clarification regarding the basis of any changes, whether these changes were known to the LA and whether they were communicated to schools. It was noted that the changes were in part due to the gains ceiling being made as high as possible in response to the request of the Task and Finish group but it was also likely that other factors affected the outcome also. From those present it was clear that this level of loss was a consistent pattern across the three grammar schools that are academies. Mary Sparrow explained that the reason why many people voted for the status quo was exactly because the impact was uncertain and the evidence base insufficient and this situation demonstrates that. There are secondary schools experiencing far greater losses than were expected. This view was supported by other secondary members and it was felt that the situation was outrageous in terms of the scale of unexpected changes. Julia Shepard referred to the additional losses in Post 16 funding in 2013 which impact greatly on the grammar schools and those schools with larger sixth forms. It was agreed that the further work needed on the formula needs to be progressed immediately (see also Item 6 on the agenda). Primary school colleagues commented on the benefits to the primary phase of changing the ratio, giving a primary perspective, but also stated that they understood the concerns raised by secondary schools. It was noted that this was an elected members' decision.

It was agreed that the LA would carry out an urgent piece of work to analyse the differences in budget and the reasons for those. It was also agreed that the figures submitted to the DfE would be circulated to Schools Forum members.

200. DfE Review of 2013-14 School Funding Arrangements

Paper circulated with agenda. The consultation is seeking views on the new funding arrangements and it was agreed that a joint LA and Schools Forum response should be submitted.

RC provided a brief update on where Slough sits on the various graphs included in the consultation document e.g. middle range of KS3 AWPU amount; low on some where we chose not to use the formula factor e.g. EAL; high end of range on SEN and deprivation factors: high end of range on percentage of funding delegated through pupil led factors – 95.6%.

It was noted that the data behind all the graphs was from October LA submissions and that the DfE is to update from the January submissions.

Need to respond by 26th March 2013. It was agreed that Schools Forum members would be invited to a one-off meeting to be arranged by Michelle Perkins to agree the joint response.

201. Finance Structure and Support Update

Mark Taylor gave a verbal update. He referred to the questions submitted by primary Headteachers and these will be responded to. The Local Authority has now looked at

the structure of support provided to schools and is in the process of establishing a permanent team to provide the support schools require.

George Grant (Directorate Financial Manager) was welcomed to the meeting and he provided an update on how the structure now sits. Aalia Akhtar provides day to day support plus Kate Appleyard to summer to support schools closure of accounts. The LA is recruiting a Principal Accountant with specific schools experience. Reference was made to the possibility of an additional interim resource being made available. George reported he is keen to learn from mistakes that have been made and he wishes to attend Schools Forum. Previous SLAs have been reviewed.

Schools Forum is to be provided with contact numbers of the finance team.

George has written to schools as a way of introduction.

There was some discussion about budget monitoring as there has been no budget monitoring report to Schools Forum this financial year. December's report will be presented once finalised. Schools were asked to advise what information they would like to see in the report and George Grant agreed to follow this up. Report to be provided at the meeting in May.

Robin Crofts referred to work in the LA to review the interface of Audit with schools so that it was more than simply the audit process itself but more pre and post audit work.

202. Formula Review for 2014/15

Mark Taylor reported that the LA will provide support through the Schools Forum and that the Chief Executive is committed to this work continuing. In the light of earlier discussion, the urgency of the work was agreed. However, it was noted that the Terms of Reference for the necessary research need to be agreed – an outline specification - as this is not a purely financial piece of work. The technical financial modelling and support will need to follow initial research to allow a true needs led analysis to be carried out to gather the evidence required to underpin review. It was agreed that the outline specification would be presented at the Schools Forum meeting in May. Jo Rockall and Maggie Waller offered to initiate the work needed to identify possible sources and expertise for the research.

Helen Huntley commented that budgets in other areas could be more closely involved with schools to get true value for money and improve outcomes for families.

Schools Forum re-iterated welcoming Cllr Mann's involvement in Schools Forum.

A comment was made about the need to improve public access to Schools Forum meetings. It was noted that meetings are open to the public and papers and details of all meetings are on the SBC website along with all other Council meetings.

203. Implementation of DfE Funding Reform - High Needs and Post 16

Report circulated with agenda. Steve Elson took members through the report which is to inform the Schools Forum of the current position regarding the High Needs Block in 2013 – 14.

DfE have intended to simplify the process but it was noted that each special school will have more complex financial arrangements to administer as they will need to deal directly with a number of LAs.

Appendix 1 of report shows a breakdown of the budgeted expenditure for the High Needs Block.

It was noted that the costs for schools of the PRU provision have been negotiated between Helen Huntley and the secondary schools. Jackie Wright is working with Post 16 providers as the Post 16 arrangements are complex with both the LA and EFA funding each single student. The High Needs Block needs to be kept under review; the budget is tight and has a limited contingency. An update will be provided at the Schools Forum meeting in autumn.

There was concern expressed regarding the vulnerability of special schools and PRU funding once any out sourced contract is let as funding relies on the LA commissioning places,. Robin Crofts supported this view as it is important that the infra-structure supports the successful policy of providing locally for vulnerable youngsters which is more cost effective and desirable for families.

Jean Cameron asked if any specific provision is made within the High Needs Block for Early Years and it was confirmed that this is not the case.

Jo Matthews referred to Littledown which has operated a primary PRU facility within the special school thus far. This will not be possible under the new arrangements and therefore a primary PRU will be registered separately during 2013/14.

Steve Elson noted that Early Years and High Needs budgets will come out week commencing 4th March 2013.

204. Membership Update and Revised Constitution

Membership: It was noted that the Schools Forum Constitution requires the Membership to be reviewed annually to get the right balance across academies and maintained schools in relation to pupil numbers in each category. The current membership was attached with agenda.

It was noted that the current balance between academies and maintained was correct and also that the representation from primary and secondary academies was in proportion to pupil numbers. It was noted that a key change to regulations is that the phase balance across academy representatives is a matter for the Academy proprietors whenever an election is needed to appoint a new member.

It was noted that there are two vacancies for maintained schools, one of which is as a result of the resignation of Martin Davis who was thanked for his input and support for the Forum whilst a member.

It was noted that it is likely that a further vacancy will arise as the result of Charlie McGeachie resigning from the Forum. The Chair will follow up and check the January pupil numbers and then confirm with the Primary Headteachers what vacancies need to be filled. The clerk will then write to Chairs of Governors and Clerks regarding any remaining Governor vacancy.

It was agreed that Induction training would be arranged for Schools Forum members. Mark Taylor also agreed to look at the provision of training for new Headteachers.

Constitution: the Constitution had been updated in line with local and national requirements and was approved.

205. Academies Update

Robin Crofts provided an update on academies:
Willow is now an academy, James Elliman will transfer on 1st April 2013 and dates for Montem, Colnbrook and Foxborough are to be confirmed.

206. 2012/13 Work Programme and Key Decisions Log

The current Work Programme and Key Decisions Log were noted.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 8.00 am and closed at 9.20 am)