

## **Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Friday, 15th November, 2013**

- Present:** John Constable, Langley Grammar (Vice Chair)  
Paul McAteer, Slough and Eton Secondary School  
Jon Reekie, James Elliman Primary School  
Mary Sparrow, Wexham Secondary School  
Jean Cameron, Slough Children's Centres  
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School  
Debbie Richards, Arbour Vale School  
Nicky Willis, Cippenham Primary School  
Philip Gregory, Baylis Nursery  
Hardip Singh, Khalsa Primary School  
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School
- Observers:** Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School, Helen Huntley, Haybrook College, Kathleen Higgins, Beechwood Secondary School, Lynda Bussley, NUT
- Officers:** Steve Elson, Michelle Perkins (Clerk)
- Apologies:** Maggie Waller (Chair), Maggie Stacey, Virginia Barrett, Paul Adams, Harry Duffy, Angela Mellish, Atul Lad

### **PART I**

#### **263. Welcome and Apologies**

John Constable chaired the meeting as Maggie Waller was unable to attend.

Apologies were received from Maggie Waller (Chair), Virginia Barrett, East Berkshire College, Maggie Stacey, St Anthony's Primary School, Harry Duffy, Ryvers Primary School, Paul Adams, Upton Court Grammar School and Angela Mellish, St Bernards.

John Constable welcomed the following new members to the meeting:  
Debbie Richards from Arbour Vale School who has joined Schools Forum as a representative for maintained special schools.  
Hardip Singh from Khalsa primary school who has joined as the representative for voluntary aided schools.  
Julie O'Brien from Our Lady of Peace junior school wasn't present at the meeting but it was noted that she is also a new member of Schools Forum representing maintained primary schools.

#### **264. Declarations of Interest**

None.

#### **265. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising**

**St Joseph's:** Steve Elson confirmed that St Joseph's wrote back and gave a full explanation of how they are going to spend their carry forward. They also confirmed that they will be paying back an additional £110,000 into the DSG which will make a total of £400,000 paid back from the original £1m.

Eddie Neighbour confirmed that Slough Grammar School is now Upton Court Grammar School which needs to be amended in the previous minutes.

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**Membership:** John Constable confirmed that Maggie Waller wrote to the Academies again as agreed in the October meeting, the result of which is that Jon Reekie is now an official representative on Schools Forum and Nicky Willis is in reserve. Maggie Waller and John Constable are looking at how to streamline the process in future and they will be asking Academies for a main point of contact.

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'January 2104' is to be amended to 'January 2014' in paragraph 6.

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**Cambridge Education:** In terms of Schools Forum involvement in the process at the Operational Board meetings with Cambridge Education Robin Crofts reported that the meetings are related to contractual compliance issues and would be of little benefit to head teachers. It would be more beneficial to sit on the Strategic Group which meets termly.

A replacement for Jackie Wright is being looked at due to her forthcoming departure from SBC. The role is likely to be filled by two people to cover both the SEN elements and Cambridge Education elements.

Robin Crofts clarified that the 2.5% overhead cost of running Cambridge Education is from core funding and there is no charge against the DSG.

Robin Crofts reported that the recruitment for a Finance Officer for Cambridge Education is in the latter stages and a second interview has taken place.

**Skills Force:** Robin Crofts confirmed that Skills Force are providing a service to St Josephs and Beechwood with a contribution from the LA. Cambridge Education are looking at the contribution from April onwards in terms of value for money.

**Speech & Language Service:** Robin Crofts confirmed that he has looked into this as discussed and will be able to give a breakdown of the cost centre.

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**Carbon Reduction Commitment:** Robin Crofts confirmed that the note regarding payment was sent out to schools via the gatekeeper.

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Maggie Waller to write to academies regarding balances as agreed at Schools Forum on 11<sup>th</sup> September.

Correction needed to statement regarding “the Labour Government”. Change to “a potential future Labour Government”.

## **266. 2014-15 Budget Process Update**

Steve Elson presented the report to give an update on the current position as follows:

The draft pro-forma that was sent to the DfE was accepted. The deadline for the final pro-forma to be sent is 21<sup>st</sup> January 2014. The Task and Finish Group will continue to meet to discuss unit values and make recommendations. The primary low attainment units will possibly increase in the same way as secondary and are likely to balance out. There could be some impact on Infant and Junior schools which will need to be looked at.

Two further meetings of the Task and Finish Group have been set up but the DfE won't be providing the data until 14<sup>th</sup> December. The Task and Finish Group proposes to discuss the principles at the next meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> November then meet again in January to do the work and enact them once they have the data to work on. Timescales are tight.

**Action:** Steve Elson will circulate the draft formula that was sent to the DfE.

**Action:** The consultation response that was submitted will be circulated with these minutes.

Jean Cameron reported that the figures for 2014/15 Early Years Block funding will be brought to the December meeting to request Schools Forum's approval to carry forward the substantial amount of money that hasn't been spent. This refers to the overfunding in 13/14 and trajectory funding for September 2014.

John Constable confirmed that the December meeting was likely to be longer than usual as detailed discussion will take place on the three blocks.

Helen Huntley expressed concern about Jackie Wright's departure and also Steve Elson's departure. Steve confirmed that he is likely to continue working for the LA for another four months after December and will have a gradual handover to Atul Lad. Schools Forum welcomes the extension of his role. Robin Crofts clarified that the statutory aspects of Jackie Wright's role stayed with the LA but the support aspects transferred to Cambridge Education. Cambridge Education are looking at moving the statutory aspects over as soon as possible.

## **267. Schools Forums: Operational and Good Practice Guide**

The Operational and Good Practice Guide was circulated for information. It explains how Schools Forums work and includes a table indicating which decisions are with Schools Forum and which are with the LA.

Schools Forum agreed to read them before the December meeting and raise any questions under matters arising.

## 268. PFI

Steve Elson presented the paper which was to inform Schools Forum of the increased costs to the PFI contract and suggest a possible way of dealing with the shortfall. The Benchmarking exercise in November 2012 resulted in an increase in the cost of the contract by £180,334. The first four or five months were covered by the DSG underspend. The paper recommends one way this cost can be covered is from the DSG underspend, then after that half is covered by schools and half is covered by DSG underspend. The LA recommends that the DSG picks up the charge in the first year and then supports it in future years.

This is a significant decision for Schools Forum.

The contract started in 2005 and agreed a contribution from each school based on 10% of the school's budget at the time with increases e.g. for pupil numbers as they increased. . The total contract cost is £7m per year. The majority of this is met by the DfE but the Unitary Charge (the total amount paid back by Slough every year) is £2.2m. There is a total £1m contribution from the three schools and £400,000 from the DSG in recognition of the saving on out-of-borough placements. The £800,000 'affordability gap' is paid by the Local Authority from central funds and was agreed previously.

In summary:

- Schools Contribution = £1m
- DSG = £400,000
- Affordability Gap = paid by the LA, £800,000 (comes through the DSG as an in-out amount).

These are the original figures, this £2.2m has now increased by £180,334 as a result of the Benchmarking exercise.

Robin Crofts provided an explanation of the PFI Benchmarking exercise as follows:

The PFI was introduced in 2004 and started in 2006. The sum was not fixed until the last resource was opened in November 2007. November 2012 was the five year point at which it needed to be evaluated. Costs are based on 2006 although they didn't start until 2007. The figures have been held for 7 or 8 years without any uplift. The catering component was tendered but the other 3 components were benchmarked. Benchmarking was viewed as the preferable route to Tendering as Tendering is likely to result in higher costs.

The figure of £180,334 has been well tested and Robin Crofts has assurances from David Banham. Staffing costs in Slough are higher in this area but overall the Benchmarking outcomes are good in comparison to what was likely to come out through a Tendering process.

Three alternatives are possible:

- 1) Whole cost to be paid by the schools
- 2) Whole cost to be paid by the DSG

3) Whole cost to be split between schools and the DSG.

Mary Sparrow expressed concern about schools losing out if the increase they are suggesting is not in line with the increase in schools funding. Debbie Richards said that there was no reference in the governor's agreement to a Benchmarking exercise and it doesn't cover all the costs of running a building. Schools were not kept informed of the Benchmarking process which started last year and only received notification of the increase two weeks ago. Robin Crofts confirmed that this has been raised with David Banham and will be done differently in future benchmarking exercises.

A fourth option would be to inform the LA that Schools Forum will not endorse use of the DSG and suggest that the LA pick the cost up. Steve Elson explained that Schools Forum can decide not to spend the DSG; the LA would then decide whether to fund centrally or pass the charge on to the three schools. Clauses of the contract need to be checked by the three schools involved.

Schools Forum agreed that there was not enough information at this time to make a decision and they asked to have sight of the contract and some legal advice regarding whether the LA can pass the cost back on to the schools. There is discomfort in using DSG money but also in letting the three schools bear the full cost of the increase.

It was agreed to defer the decision to the December meeting. The decision of Schools Forum will be to decide whether to use DSG to support and if so, to what extent.

Steve Elson highlighted Appendix 1 which indicates the unspent contingency of £708,293 added to school budgets and already agreed by Schools Forum.

Council officers will bring a paper back to the December Schools Forum.

## **269. Review of Accountability for Central Budgets**

Steve Elson presented the paper which informed Schools Forum of the process to review centrally retained DSG expenditure and allow Schools Forum scrutiny of centrally retained budgets. Detail will be given about areas of spend in July 2014. This is important in relation to DSG money which has now moved to Cambridge Education being used in an appropriate way and ensuring value for money and also for those budgets still retained by the local authority.

Schools Forum members are in agreement with the contents of the report.

## **270. Cambridge Education**

Robin Crofts provided an update as follows:

Reviews of the four areas of procurement are taking place along with a cross-cutting review looking at administrative support across the four areas:

- 1) School Improvement
- 2) SEN

- 3) Access
- 4) Early Years

The reviews will take place throughout December and January and Schools Forum will be involved in the process. The 2 main drivers are:

- 1) What can be done more efficiently
- 2) Increasing traded business done with schools

The transition to Cambridge Education has been smooth and successful and staff are happy with the changes in employment arrangements.

**Action:** Robin Crofts will send contact details for the key contacts at Cambridge Education. (Former SBC staff contact details have remained the same)

## **271. Academies Update**

Robin Crofts provided an update as follows:

Montem is on course for transfer on 1<sup>st</sup> December.

Foxborough is on course for transfer on 1<sup>st</sup> January.

Other schools are involved in discussions about potential transfers and updates will be brought to future meetings.

Lynda Bussley raised that 1<sup>st</sup> January is a bank holiday and not good for TUPE arrangements. Robin Crofts clarified that the transfer may take place on 2<sup>nd</sup> January but be counted from 1<sup>st</sup> January in terms of salaries.

## **272. 2013-14 Work Programme and Key Decisions Log**

PFI to be added to the Work Programme for the December meeting.

## **273. Any Other Business**

### **Free School Grant**

John Constable explained that £30,000 was set aside by Schools Forum some time ago to support planning for school places through the 3 original bids for Free Schools. There was subsequently some uncertainty about how many places the Free Schools would provide to Slough children; the funding was put on hold and the money is still allocated.

SASH have requested for the money to be given out; £10,000 each to SASH, Lynch Hill and Khalsa school. There is a commitment from Schools Forum to give the money; the question is when and how to divide the £30,000 across each school in recognition of the work done in bringing the bids forward to provide places. The most straightforward option is to divide the money equally between the three bids. The alternative option is to divide the money in some way in proportion to the number of places delivered for Slough children once pupil numbers are known (in October 2014). The spirit of the decision was to support the bid writing process and the work involved in that.

Questions were asked about whether this sets a precedent for the future, i.e would all future Free School bids receive £10,000. John Constable confirmed it doesn't and any future payment requests would need to come through Schools Forum. Robin Crofts explained that the issue of financial support for Free Schools has been raised at SOG.

Schools Forum agreed to honour the decision and provide the money and are happy for it to be distributed £10,000 each to the 3 Free Schools but to make it clear it was a historical decision and a one off and doesn't set a precedent for the future.

### **Clerk**

Schools Forum noted their thanks to Michelle Perkins for all her efficient work as Clerk as this was likely to be her last meeting.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 8.15 am and closed at 9.37 am)