

## **Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Wednesday, 15th January, 2014**

**Present:** Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School (Chair)  
John Constable, Langley Grammar (Vice-Chair)  
Louise Lund, Barney Bees Day Nursery  
Debbie Richards, Arbour Vale School  
Gillian Coffey, Lynch Hill Primary School  
Paul McAteer, Slough and Eton C of E Business and Enterprise College  
Jon Reekie, James Elliman Primary School  
Mary Sparrow, Wexham Secondary School  
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School  
Jean Cameron, Slough Children's Centres  
Philip Gregory, Baylis Court Nursery School  
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School  
Barbara Clark, Godolphin Junior School  
Maggie Stacey, St Anthony's School

**Observers:** Lynda Bussley (NUT)

**Attendees:** Kathleen Higgins, Deborah Ajose, Helen Huntley, Nicky Willis, Eddie Neighbour, Tony Smith (Cambridge Education), Robin Crofts (Cambridge Education),

**Officers:** Steve Elson and Atul Lad and Rajpreet Johal (Clerk)

**Apologies:** Paul Adams, Hardip Singh, Julie O'Brien and Virginia Barrett

### **PART I**

#### **288. Welcome & Apologies**

Maggie Waller welcomed all present.

Apologies were noted from Paul Adams (Upton Court Grammar), Julie O'Brien (Our Lady of Peace Junior School), Virginia Barrett (East Berkshire College) and Hardip Singh (Khalsa Primary School).

#### **289. Declarations of Interest**

None

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

Minutes of last meeting agreed as accurate with the following matters arising.

Robin Crofts confirmed that Jackie Wright will be leaving Slough Borough Council at the end of January. Chris Aston, interim replacement has started in post and will be covering the statutory responsibilities associated with SEN and Disabled children alongside the contractual compliance arrangements with Cambridge Education.

Robin reported on the possibility of the SEN statutory work passing over to Cambridge Education at a later date.

Robin noted that Steve Elson and Atul Lad are representing the Local Authority (LA) Finance team. The Strategic Director of Wellbeing will decide who will represent her at Schools Forum. Robin clarified that Cambridge Education is not well placed to represent the LA.

Robin Crofts confirmed that key contact details for Cambridge Education have been circulated to all schools. Robin to forward a copy to Schools Forum. It was requested that Robin request LA details be circulated also to Slough schools and Schools Forum.

Maggie Waller noted that the Education Funding Agency (EFA) attended the last meeting and she reported the positive feedback she had received from Mike Fenton (EFA) following the meeting including that *'participants were positively encouraged to contribute to the debates. There was a clear explanation of who could vote on which issues and opportunities for attendees to express contrary views. The inputs from LA maintained schools and academies were equally received.'*

## **291. 2014-15 Budget Process Update (including Formula Report)**

Atul Lad presented the paper and reported that the Task and Finish group met on two occasions. He explained that the unit values will be submitted to the DfE by 21<sup>st</sup> January and schools' budgets done on 23<sup>rd</sup> January. Atul mentioned that the Mobility factor has been removed as agreed at the December meeting and the funding added to social deprivation. He also referred to the increase in the Growth Fund, which is the subject of a later report, but the implications of increasing the Growth Fund to £1.5 million are included in determining the unit values.

He drew members' attention to the Task and Finish Group recommendations that:

- The formula factor unit values in Appendix 1 are supported (see report).
- Schools Forum notes that the following amounts have been added to the 2014-15 Schools Block from previous years' underspends:
  - £567,293 from the 2012-13 unspent contingency
  - £300,000 from the remaining 2012-13 DSG underspend
  - £400,000 from the estimated 2013-14

It was made clear that the Task and Finish group had focussed on the unit values and had looked carefully at the modelled impact on individual schools. The ratio was an outcome of this process.

There was considerable discussion around the financial impact of the unit values, particularly in terms of the impact on the primary: secondary funding ratio. The unit values recommended by the Task and Finish group lead to a change in the primary: secondary ratio, moving it from 1:1.39 to 1:1.38. The Task and Finish group had

looked at a range of models and had looked at the impact each model had on individual schools.

Paul McAteer asked if there was evidence that led to the shift in the ratio.

Maggie Waller referred to the interesting but inconclusive work by Sam Ellis commissioned by the Schools Forum and to a letter she had received from Primary Headteachers outlining pressures including regarding establishing leadership structures. Navroop Mehat made reference to Primary Headteachers' concerns.

Mary Sparrow referred to the need to be cautious as the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) will protect short term but is not guaranteed beyond 2015. She also referred to the reduction in per-student funding post-16 and the removal of transitional protection and the pupil premium increasing at a higher rate for primary pupils.

John Constable noted that £220,000 would be moved from secondary to primary as a result of the recommended change to the unit values and the negative impact of this would be spread across all secondary schools pre MFG. However, it would impact on 5 secondary schools, selective and non-selective after MFG. The gain would be across almost all primary schools after MFG. He also said that it was important to consider the totality of funding for schools in both primary and secondary phases, and whether the other funding sources are increasing or decreasing.

It is because this change had such a specific negative impact on a small number of schools that a greater change was not recommended by the Task and Finish group.

Nicky Willis mentioned that Primary Headteachers are not comfortable taking money from the 5 schools. She mentioned that when children come into education they are coming in below average on entry. Key Stage 1 and 2 results were improving but attainment was still below average on entry to secondary education.. She also referred to comparisons of ratio with statistical neighbours and the national average of 1:1.28.

Maggie Waller noted that comparison with other LAs is difficult as these LAs may not have selection and it is not always clear what is included for the purpose of calculating the ratio.

A member mentioned that there is a difference between an 'average' and a 'median', meaning that the 'average' ratio may not be the most common, as outliers with particularly low ratios could skew the 'average'.

Paul McAteer noted that the link between achievement and funding is not evidenced. He expressed concern that clear evidence had not been provided to support the recommendation being made. He requested that the model with the financial implications of the changes be circulated to Schools Forum members. **Action:** Atul Lad to circulate the model with the financial implications to Forum members..

Helen Huntley reported that the Task and Finish group was mindful of the impact in both phases and did not look at this in isolation. The group also looked at the Growth Fund which will increase by over £1 million and primaries will benefit initially.

She also referred to £1 million in Cambridge Education, money for school improvement, recognising Key Stage 2 results.

Barbara Clark suggested that Schools Forum agree the recommendations of the Task and Finish group as they were working on behalf of the Forum.

Mary Sparrow referred to forthcoming changes in curriculum and how important it is that all schools remain tenable. She said that it was important to find a way forward collectively and there was general support for this approach from both primary and secondary phase members.

Maggie Waller mentioned that the Task and Finish group was not unanimous but that the majority of those on the group were in agreement with the values proposed and this included primary and secondary colleagues, hence the recommendation. She noted that it is important for Schools Forum to pass on a clear recommendation to the LA.

Schools Forum agreed to endorse the recommendation, accepting the unit values proposed but registering concern about the impact.

## **292. Growth Fund**

After the last meeting, officers reviewed the level of the Growth Fund and this had been considered by the Task and Finish group.

Currently, the Growth Fund only supports bulge classes and the first year of permanent expansion. The recommendation to increase the Growth Fund by £1.2 million to £1.5 million will provide funding for each new year group joining the school in a permanent expansion. Currently, when a new year group joins the school there is a lag before funding is triggered at the next census (7 months for maintained schools and 11 months for academies). It was confirmed that academies would receive the full amount of AWPU funding due so that there is no gap.

It was noted that this would support necessary expansion in primary schools initially and secondary schools in 3 to 4 years' time.

Maggie Waller mentioned that the DfE does not fund this funding gap so the DSG will be top sliced across all phases to fund the increase. She offered to write to the DfE to take this up and she asked for support from members and officers in this in order to put a good case with evidence of impact of this lack of funding.

It was noted that the increase can only apply to 2014/15 and that the balance left in this year's fund was only £100,000 approximately.

Schools Forum agreed to accept the recommendation to increase the Growth Fund of £1.5 million.

## **293. 2014-15 DSG Blocks (School Block)**

Atul Lad went through the report to the Schools Forum, detailing the estimated Schools' Block budget for 2014-15: £106,104,552 based on October 2013 pupil numbers.

Centrally held items were agreed at Schools Forum in December bar two items. It was proposed that Schools Forum note that £28,000 previously held to fund a KS3 Coordinator be returned to the DSG. It was proposed that the £30,000 for Broadband maintenance is continued to be held for 2014/15 and included in the Cambridge Education Review of centrally held expenditure. It was noted that any centrally held funding not spent will come back to Schools Forum for re-allocation.

There was some discussion about the funding relating to Schools Improvement and Robin Crofts explained that the funding is being spent mainly on consultants fulfilling the LA statutory duties in relation to monitoring, challenge and intervention. It was suggested and agreed that Schools Forum should be in receipt of evaluation of Cambridge Education spend in centrally retained budgets, whether managed by Cambridge Education or allocated to schools for specific projects. This item will be added to the Schools Forum Work Programme.

Recommendations 2.2 & 2.3 were agreed by the Schools Forum.

In relation to recommendation 2.1 (to note the estimated Schools Block) this was noted but subject to clarification of the funding from the Council relating to the PFI factor being confirmed. Maggie Waller is to request clarification from the Council of the PFI figures implicit in the estimated Schools' Block figures and confirmation regarding the Council's contribution to the 'affordability gap'.

#### **294. 2014-15 DSG Block (High Needs Block)**

Atul Lad presented the report to inform the School's Forum of the estimated High Needs Block budget for 2014-15.

The DfE has given an initial £17,053,097. £241,000 has been added to the Block from the 2012-13 DSG underspend and £29,542 for PFI from Council funding.

Schools Forum looked at Appendix 1 of the report which shows the detail. Atul noted the expenditure lines may change in line with number of places. He also noted that the PFI figure has changed and is now £309,000.

Helen Huntley reported that, at a meeting of the Special Academy Trust, schools had expressed concerns about the High Needs Block to DfE representatives. She referred to Slough's positive policy of having brought back young people from out borough placements and providing within the borough. She said that there may now be a negative impact on Slough compared to other LAs. DfE officials had acknowledged this and promised to take this concern back to the DfE.

Schools Forum noted the estimated High Needs Block but subject to clarification of the overall funding from the Council relating to the PFI factor being confirmed.

**Action:** Maggie Waller is to request clarification and confirmation from the Council regarding the Council's contribution to the 'affordability gap'

#### **295. 2014-15 DSG Blocks (Early Years Block)**

Atul Lad presented a report to inform the Schools Forum of the proposed Early Years Block budget for 2014-15.

Atul noted the Early Years Block for three and four year olds has been estimated at £9,147,255 based on January 2013 numbers; £3,130,366 for two year old places and £1,111,090 carried forward from 2013/14.

Jean Cameron explained the reason for the carry forward was that 2 year old eligibility did not kick in until September 2013 and awareness of places was slower than expected, with only 60% of the target 450 places taken up. She said that the carry forward next year is likely to be less as there is major marketing to raise awareness and there are changes in criteria of eligibility which will include families on working tax credit. Jean Cameron asked for schools' support in raising awareness and will circulate information to schools.

Gillian Coffey asked if Jean could confirm that there will be no shortage of places as the target is rising to 1073 and she said that they are looking at how to provide the places.

There was discussion about the implications of the new requirement for primary schools in relation to free school meals for KS1 pupils. Steve Elson noted that it may be that a grant will be available but there is no information as yet from the DfE. Schools Forum agreed to keep an eye on the implications of free schools meal as there may be revenue issues.

Schools Forum agreed the recommendations to note the estimated Early Years Block for 2014-15 and agreed the carry forward into 2014/15 for two year old funding.

Schools Forum also agreed the two central expenditure items shown in the Appendix of the report: £41,070 for Behaviour Support and £1,428? for Trades Union duties.

## **296. Cambridge Education**

Robin Crofts reported there are five reviews taking place of the work Cambridge Education is undertaking for the LA: Schools Improvement; SEN and Children with Additional Needs; Access; Early Years and Children's Centres and cross cutting Business Support processes. There will be a Strategic Partnership meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> January to look at the review so far. There have been meetings with headteachers and groups and the outcomes will be shared. He agreed to provide verbal feedback at the Schools Forum.

## **297. Academies Update**

### Academies:

Montem (from 1<sup>st</sup> December 2013)

Foxborough (from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014)

There will be another 9 or 10 over the next 7 to 9 months, bringing the total to over 30 of the 48 schools.

**298. 2013-14 Work Programme and Key Decisions Log**

An item is to be added to July meeting on the Work Programme: dates of future meetings.

**299. Membership**

Maggie thanked Harry Duffy for his contributions to Schools Forum and it was noted that his term of office ends at the end of this month.

Membership is to be reviewed once January census figures have been received.

Michelle Perkins wrote to academies last term asking for contact details of 'academy proprietors' to facilitate the election of Schools Forum academy representatives. The response was disappointing with only nine replies received out of twenty one. The Chair is to write again.

**300. Any Other Business**

Modelling of the impact on individual schools of the unit values which lead to the 1:1.38 ratio to be sent to members of the Schools Forum.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 8.15 and closed at 9.45)