

Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Wednesday, 17th September, 2014

Present: Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School (Chair)
John Constable, Langley Grammar (Vice-Chair)
Debbie Richards, Arbour Vale 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
Robin Crofts, Cambridge Education
Nicky Willis, Cippenham Primary School
Helen Huntley, Haybrook College
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School
Hardip Singh, Khalsa Primary School
Katheleen Higgins, Beechwood School
Carol Pearce, Penn Wood Schhol

Observers: Dawn Bailey (Slough Learning Partnership),

Attendees: Angela Mellish, Northampton Diocese, Eddie Neighbour (Upton Court Grammar School), Jo Matthews (Littledown School)

Officers: Julie Pickering (for PFI Item only), Atul Lad, Matt Redwood and Rajpreet Johal (Clerk)

Apologies: Jane Wood, Louise Lund and Philip Gregory

PART I

348. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies were noted from Philip Gregory, Jane Wood and Louise Lund.

Maggie Waller welcomed Matt Redwood, Head of Education Services and School Improvement (Slough Borough Council), Carol Pearce (Penn Wood School) and Dawn Bailey (Slough Learning Partnership) to the meeting.

349. Declarations of Interest

John Constable, Paul McAteer, Debbie Richards and Mary Sparrow mentioned their membership of the Slough Learning Partnership Steering group which might be pertinent to item 6 on the agenda.

350. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

Membership; Maggie Waller reported that Barbara Clark and Paul Adams resigned over the summer and there are vacancies for academy membership. John Constable had agreed to follow this up with academy proprietors later this term, following the October census which will confirm numbers of members required.

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Maggie Waller and John Constable had sent a letter to the Rt. Hon. Nicky Morgan MP, Secretary of State for Education, on behalf of Schools Forum, stating concerns about levels of funding. Copies of the letter were circulated.

A recent letter received from the Trades Unions regarding facilities time arrangements was also circulated.

Kathleen Higgins requested that the words 'in the short term' be deleted from the paragraph which referred to her comment on PFI.

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Debbie Richards asked for clarification regarding a pensions deficit. Atul Lad confirmed that a sum of £500k had been paid centrally in respect of 2013/14 (on behalf of maintained schools). However, members of the Forum queried this and it was agreed that Atul would bring details back to the next Schools Forum or to the Task and Finish group.

It was noted that St Joseph's School has balances earmarked. Atul Lad reported that the school thanked Schools Forum for its support and indicated that it was not in a position to repay further sums though they would wish to if they could. Clarification was requested regarding St Joseph's current budget position; Atul Lad to bring this to the next meeting. It was noted that the original support from Schools Forum was not a loan. It was agreed that any future arrangements between Schools Forum and a school, should they arise, should be carefully recorded to ensure clarity.

Some clarification was provided regarding Cambridge Education School Improvement funding. It was stated that, in the main, the funding supports the statutory elements i.e. monitoring, challenge and intervention but that some can be deployed for school development.

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Revised Growth Fund 2014-15: Atul provided clarification and drew members' attention to the flow chart included in the meeting's papers about how new schools are funded differently.

Coral Miller reported that Audit is looking at fraud guidance for schools which could be added to the Scheme for Financing Schools.

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It was noted that the Primary Heads' Association does not have a Chair currently and there may therefore be gaps in communication.

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Key Decisions Log: it was noted that the first Key Decisions Log (September 2012 to July 2014) will be posted on the Slough Borough Council website with a link to the Schools' Forum papers.

351. PFI Update

An update report was submitted to the School's Forum as discussed at the last meeting.

Julie Pickering reported that Slough, along with only three other Local Authorities across the country, had been accepted as part of the DfE pilot looking at potential savings within PFI. A start up meeting had been held and Julie reported that the team was very good: Val Knight and Steve Hazelton (Local Partnerships). Val Knight is leading the project and will aim to have a report ready by October / November which will show areas of savings.

Positive meetings have been held with QED and Pareo as part of the investigation into potential savings.

Meetings have also been held with the three PFI schools' Headteachers. Further meetings are scheduled as well as a workshop in October.

Updates on PFI are to be provided at the October / November Schools Forum.

Kathleen Higgins stated that it was helpful to meet Val Knight and to understand what the DfE pilot was about: identifying savings.

Carol Pearce asked that Chairs of Governors be involved in future meetings and Julie Pickering confirmed that this was planned.

A timeline for the process was requested.

352. Balance Control Mechanism

Atul Lad provided an update on the report previously submitted to the Forum on the Balance Control Mechanism which informed the Forum of the surplus balances held by individual schools, and whether the schools have plans to use those balances in the following year.

It was reported that, of the relevant 17 schools, 16 had responded with comprehensive detail. Planned spend included e.g. capital, ICT, staffing, school improvement and infant free school meals. Western House had not submitted a return but has now become an academy which takes the school out of the Balance Control Mechanism.

Discussion took place about academies sharing information about surplus balances, which has the support of academy members on the Forum. It was agreed that members present would raise this as a principle in the phase groups and that Atul Lad would look at providing a possible template for the information.

Robin Crofts noted that the trend is that balances have been decreasing rapidly, particularly over the last year, and that this is a concern given increasing pressures.

353. Changes to Schools and Early Years finance regulations 2014

Atul Lad provided an update on the report submitted to the Schools Forum. The report informs Schools Forum of the DfE's proposed new School and Early Years Finance Regulations 2014 and additional grant conditions for the DSG. He drew attention to some of the key changes including:

Regulation 3 in the Appendix to the report makes amendments to the School's Forum Regulations 2012 regarding representation for Alternative Provision (AP) and special academies. It was noted that this is already in place in Slough as Helen Huntley represents both.

It was also noted that Schools Forum is also now required to discuss places being commissioned by the LA and others in special schools, resource units and AP as well as arrangements for paying top ups. It was agreed that Atul Lad would include this in the annual Work Programme to ensure timely discussion on the relevant Schools Forum agenda.

Regulation 14 (1) Atul confirmed that funding for 19 – 25 year olds in special academies and maintained special schools will come through the EHC Plan and not be funded through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

Regulation 14 (3) implements the increase in the value of an AP place from £8,000 to £10,000 per annum. It was noted that this is a positive move and provides greater financial stability.

It was agreed that with these changes, the High Needs Block Task and Finish group should be re-convened before half term. Atul Lad to arrange this.

It was agreed that a brief response to the consultation would be sent voicing concern about the overall funding pressures on the DSG which the changes in the High Needs Block would be a part of and also the impact on these overall on schools' budgets.

354. Centrally held DSG under spend items

Atul Lad provided a summary of the report submitted to the Schools Forum. The report informs the Forum of the brought forward balance of £1,317,000 from 2013-14 and the options available for the distribution and retention of this brought forward balance.

It was clarified that this one-off funding available arises from underspend in centrally held budgets including some Cambridge Education retained elements. It was noted that the 13/14 underspend is substantial and it is unlikely that there will be significant sums in 14/15 and beyond.

There were three proposals put forward in the report:

1. Appendix A: Slough Learning Partnership business case.
2. Appendix B: business case for the High Needs Block
3. To retain any remaining balances as Schools Block provision.

Jo Rockall stated that if any funding was to go out to all schools it should be distributed on pupil numbers to ensure equity.

Members discussed the very detailed Appendix about High Needs future pressures – showing a pressure of £300, 000 to meet increased demand for 2015/16. Jo Rockall asked how confident we could be regarding predicted figures and Atul confirmed that the predictions are based on individuals already in the system so they are robust but, if anything, may be over stated. It was noted that £300,000 gives a good cushion as even one out borough placement could cost that much or more. Debbie Richards stated that autism is the biggest area of increased need and this is a longer term strategic issue.

John Constable introduced the comprehensive Slough Learning Partnership business case, drawing attention to the range of options proposed. He also gave some background about the establishment of the Slough Learning Partnership, set up as a charitable trust and developed as a strategic partner of the Teaching School Alliance.

Robin Crofts referred to the importance of having a robust continuum of school improvement support and challenge going forward, not just the statutory elements.

Jo Rockall said that the Slough Learning Partnership had been set up by Headteachers across Slough, both primary and secondary, and that there was a responsibility to it. Helen Huntley stated that the idea for the organisation came from Headteachers but still needed proper due diligence in supporting future funding. Carol Pearce asked for more information, including impact measures and uptake figures, to underpin future decisions and ensure value for money.

Kathleen Higgins stated that Headteachers had identified school development work as a top priority and asked if it remained so currently. It was noted that the Primary Headteachers' group had not had time to discuss recently and would wish to discuss longer term arrangements for school development work.

Members discussed the options proposed and it was agreed that Options 1 and 2 be supported at this time:

Option 1: £60,000 from 2013-14 DSG underspend be allocated to cover operating costs and contingency until the end of August 2015 and

Option 2: £100,000 from 2013-14 DSG underspend be allocated to enable the Slough Learning Partnership to deliver a range of additional school improvement services during 2014-15.

It was noted that the range of activity within Option 2 would be discussed with Headteachers' groups and at the Headteachers' conference and an update be brought to the Schools Forum by November.

It was also agreed that there would be discussions about the possibility of establishing a joint venture between Cambridge Education and Slough Learning Partnership for aspects of school improvement from 2015/16 going forward and that this would be brought back to the Schools Forum in December.

With regard to the remaining proposals regarding the High Needs Block and the Schools Block it was agreed that this would be confirmed at the point of agreeing the blocks in December but that the £300,000 seemed sensible with the remainder being allocated to the Schools Block to support the known pressures in 2015 /16.

355. 2015-16 Budget Process Plan

Atul Lad reported that the Task and Finish group had met and the consultation has gone out to schools and includes a proposal for the introduction of capping and Reception uplift.

356. Cambridge Education

RC reported that Cambridge Education is at the end of the first year of the contract and looking at KPIs which are included in the Annual Report which will be going to Elected Members. The budget for the second year of the contract is under discussion with the LA.

Ofsted have been inspecting Early Years / Children's Centres with nine inspections on Children's Centres having taken place recently. Jean Cameron said that one report had been received: Penn Road has received 'Outstanding'.

357. Academies Update

Robin Crofts reported that Parlaunt Park and Western House have moved to academy status.

He also referred to Cambridge Education currently working with Godolphin Infant School which is facing significant difficulties.

Cambridge Education is also looking at an academies' protocol to see how they might work with vulnerable academies should those academies wish to do so.

358. 2014-15 Work Programme and Key Decisions Log

Noted

(Note: The Meeting opened at 8.15 am and closed at 10.20 am)