

Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Wednesday, 12th November, 2014

Present: Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School (Chair)
John Constable, Langley Grammar School (Vice-Chair)
Paul McAteer, Slough and Eton C of E Business and Enterprise College
Jon Reekie, James Elliman Primary School
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School
Jean Cameron, Slough Children's Centres
Philip Gregory, Baylis Court Nursery School
Kathleen Higgins, Beechwood Secondary School
Robin Crofts, Cambridge Education
Nicky Willis, Cippenham Primary School
Helen Huntley, Haybrook College
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School
Hardip Singh, Khalsa Primary School
Carol Pearce, Penn Wood School

Attendees: Angela Mellish

Officers: Coral Miller, Matt Redwood and Joanne Roxby (Clerk)

Apologies: Mary Sparrow, Maggie Stacey and Lynda Bussley

PART I

359. Apologies

Apologies were noted from Lynda Bussley, Maggie Stacey and Mary Sparrow

Maggie Waller welcomed Joanne Roxby (clerk) to the meeting and Coral Miller who is replacing Atul Lad on an interim basis.

360. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

361. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

The previous minutes were approved subject to the amendment of minute 353 as follows:

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

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Maggie Waller drew members' attention to the response from David Laws MP which was circulated at the meeting. This letter had been received by Maggie Waller and John Constable in response to their letter sent to the Rt. Hon. Nicky Morgan MP,

Secretary of State for Education, on behalf of Schools Forum, stating concerns about levels of funding. Members noted the response.

It was noted that the previous minutes had been amended in line with Kathleen Higgins' request that the words 'in the short term' be deleted from the paragraph which referred to her comment on PFI.

Pensions deficit: It was noted that clarification had been received that the £500k pensions deficit had been paid on behalf of some maintained schools whilst other schools had paid direct. Clarification of the exact sums for the schools concerned is being sought. Nicky Willis asked if this sum will come back into the available DSG and it was confirmed that this was the case and it would form part of the forthcoming discussions about the DSG underspend once final details are clear.

John Constable gave an update on St Joseph's School having had discussions with the Headteacher, Ciran Stapleton. John Constable referred to the Schools Forum decision in July 2012 that the grant from headroom was to support St Joseph's finance and development plan over the next three years. In October 2012 Forum reiterated its support for St Joseph's to provide financial stability over 3 to 5 years. It was noted that, although the original financial support was not a loan, that the school had been able to return £400,000 in 2013. The school has utilised the remaining funding in relation to matters connected with the original leasing issues and their ongoing impact, as was originally intended. The Headteacher had reiterated thanks to Schools Forum for the support. Atul Lad had also had a conversation with the school prior to his departure in relation to the school's revenue balance and the LA was satisfied with the response.

Nicky Willis informed Schools Forum that she is now Chair of the Primary Heads' phase group.

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Maggie Waller referred to the PFI pilot which is ongoing and which is identifying potential areas where there may be savings. Kathleen Higgins agreed that the pilot was helpful but that it was not about how any gap in funding would be addressed. It was noted that the report from the PFI pilot will be brought to Schools Forum in December.

Balance Control Mechanism: It was noted that there had not yet been an opportunity for discussion at the Primary Heads' phase group about academies sharing financial information about balances. SASH had discussed the principle and had agreed to sharing information but had not yet discussed the approach in any detail. Both phase groups are to discuss further.

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It was reported that the High Needs Task and Finish group had met and it had been agreed that the group would combine to meet with the SEN Schools Organisation Group (SOG) at a meeting on 10th December. It was also confirmed that a report on the commissioning of places would be brought to the December Schools Forum.

Helen Huntley asked for clarification about the reference to Regulation 14(1) of the Schools and Early Years Regulations and the funding of 19-25 year olds in special schools and academies. It was confirmed that this funding is outside of the DSG and funded by the Education Funding Agency.

Helen Huntley asked that the previous minutes (para 353) be amended to make clear that the increase in value of an Alternative Provision place is an increase to 'base funding'.

It was noted that the Early Years Task and Finish group would be re-convened shortly.

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Kathleen Higgins referred to her comment noted in the previous minutes regarding school development work and asked members to note that she had not been asking if such work was still a priority, as it clearly is, but asking for clarification about current and future strategy from both the LA and Cambridge Education.

John Constable reported that discussion regarding the Slough Learning Partnership activity would take place at the forthcoming Headteachers' conference and an update be brought to the Schools Forum in December. In response to a question from Nicky Willis, he clarified that a report on a possible joint venture with Cambridge Education would be brought to the next meeting and that the business case originally presented was still current.

362. Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring 2014-15

Matt Redwood presented the report on Q1 Budget Monitoring. He noted that this was only the first quarter and asked members if they had any comments or questions.

Maggie Waller noted that some of the currently predicted percentages were high, in particular Slough Centre Nursery and that high balances had been a trend for this school for some time. Schools Forum requested that LA officers bring back further information from the school to Schools Forum. It was suggested that there may be some historic funding in place that is coming to an end.

Robin Crofts referred to the percentages within the Balance Control Mechanism i.e. 5% and 8% and discussion took place about the appropriateness of these now, particularly for larger primary schools. It was agreed that a review of the Balance Control Mechanism would take place when the Schools Forum considered the Scheme for Financing Schools for 15/16.

Helen Huntley proposed that the effect of new resource provision and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) should be taken into account.

363. 2015-16 Budget Process Update/Consultation

Coral Miller reported the results of the recent consultation with schools and the proposals discussed by the Task and Finish group.

She reported that seven schools had responded. Maggie Waller said that receiving only seven responses was disappointing. Coral stated that six of these had agreed with the introduction of a 'reception uplift' which would mean additional funding for just 14 schools. The Task and Finish group had also supported this and Schools Forum agreed to the introduction of a 'reception uplift' in 2015/16.

Coral Miller reported that six of the seven responses had supported the introduction of capping. John Constable referred to the Task and Finish group discussions based on modelling and reported that 3% had been the consensus of the Task and Finish group. Schools Forum agreed to the introduction of capping at 3% in 2015/16.

Schools Forum agreed that the existing formula factors should remain for 2015/16.

There was some discussion about the primary: secondary ratio. Nicky Willis raised this and asked if there was a way this could be looked at again in a simple way. It was noted that when reviewing the value of the individual factors any resulting impact on the ratio would be seen since it is the impact of the values of each factor that lead to the ratio which is not set separately. It was also noted that the introduction of a national funding formula could cut across any local considerations.

Coral Miller agreed to provide benchmarking data as she had been working on this in another LA. It was noted by several members that any benchmarking data needed to be from statistical neighbours but also that it was important to look at relevant LAs to take account of issues around selection as this has such a big impact in Slough.

Jo Rockall suggested that data expressed in percentage terms would be more useful than raw figures.

364. ESG reduction

Matt Redwood gave a verbal update on the ESG. He explained that the ESG is a contributing strand of funding in the Council's overall budget allocation.

ESG is reducing substantially in 2015/16: in the region of £600,000. However, this is in the context of the overall financial position of Slough Borough Council where funding is reducing by about 30% over four years. The Council's budget setting process has to match income to expenditure across all departments of the Council. A reduction in ESG is not linked directly to the provision of services in Children's Services but is part of the overall position across the Council. It is likely that where there are significant changes in provision there will be appropriate consultation. Robin Crofts added that this would also be picked up through the contract between Cambridge Education and the LA.

365. Cambridge Education

Robin Crofts provided an update. He reported that the three year contract with the LA to deliver Education services is funded through the DSG and core funding (for early years and Children's Centres) Cambridge Education is at the end of the first year of the contract and discussion is currently taking place about the next phase. This includes what funding will be available and any changes in scope that may be required. He said that this could have a bearing on services and would be brought back to Schools Forum under the standing item on the agenda. A report will go to the Education and Children's Service Scrutiny Committee on 4th December.

Nicky Willis asked if a fixed base sum had been agreed for the duration of the contract. Robin Crofts explained that modifications can be negotiated up or down in both funding and specification Kathleen Higgins asked if negotiations are funding

or standards driven. Robin Crofts indicated that they are funding driven but that Cambridge Education's priorities remain early years, school improvement and raising standards. He also clarified that there could be an impact on any potential joint venture with the Slough Learning Partnership

366. Academies update

Robin Crofts reported that, following the Parlaunt Park and Western House academy conversions, no further schools are currently in the formal stages of transfer.

He referred to a draft academy protocol which is being developed regarding the relationship between Cambridge Education, the LA and academies. This is looking at ways to engage more formally with academies around school improvement and other areas.

Matt Redwood referred to this having been discussed at SSEF and phase groups.

Helen Huntley asked about how SBC arrives at decisions about what to spend on Education. Matt Redwood explained that this is dealt with by Corporate Management team (CMT) and the Section 151 officer (Treasurer role) who then make recommendations to the elected members for a final decision. Robin Crofts added that recommendations are made to the various directorates to e.g. identify savings.

Schools Forum members requested a breakdown of planned central expenditure for 2014/15. Matt Redwood referred to the Section 251 information available on line.

Robin Crofts explained that pressures in the last four to five years have been associated with the national financial situation and the financial challenges in the area of social care.

Helen Huntley mentioned how schools are supporting the LA in meeting 'Early Help' targets although the funding goes to the LA. She stated that if schools have pressures on their budgets this would have to go. She stated that there is a need to identify savings by more efficient liaison with the LA regarding 'Early Help'. Matt Redwood agreed to progress discussion about this.

367. Work programme and Key Decisions log

The Key Decisions Log and Work Programme were noted. It was noted that the Work Programme had been updated after the Schools Forum papers had gone out and that the updated version would be circulated with the minutes.

368. AOB

It was agreed that the Schools Forum meeting on Wednesday 10th December would be a little longer than usual and aim to finish at 10.00 a.m. as there will be a long agenda.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 8.15 am and closed at 9.35 am)