

Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Wednesday, 10th December, 2014

Present: Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School (Chair)
John Constable, Langley Grammar (Vice-Chair)
Jean Cameron, Slough Children's Centres
Gillian Coffey, Lynch Hill Primary School
Philip Gregory, Baylis Court Nursery School
Kathleen Higgins, Beechwood Secondary School
Helen Huntley, Haybrook College
Paul McAteer, Slough and Eton C of E Business and Enterprise College
Carole Pearce, Penn Wood School
Jon Reekie, James Elliman Primary School
Debbie Richards, Arbour Vale School
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School
Hardip Singh, Khalsa Primary School
Mary Sparrow, Wexham Secondary School
Nicky Willis, Cippenham Primary School

Attendees: Angela Mellish

Officers: Robin Crofts, Kevin Gordon, Coral Miller, Julie Pickering and Matt Redwood, Joanne Roxby (Minutes)

Apologies: Lynda Bussley, Navroop Mehat, Maggie Stacey and Jane Wood

PART I

369. Apologies

Apologies were noted from Maggie Stacey, Navroop Mehat, Lynda Bussley and Jane Wood.

Introductions were made around the table and Maggie Waller welcomed Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director Professional Services, SBC.

370. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

371. Minutes of previous meeting 12th November 2014

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It was noted that Maggie Waller and John Constable were to meet Fiona Mactaggart to brief her as a follow up to the letter to the Secretary of State regarding schools' funding.

It was noted that SASH had agreed in principle to academies sharing balances information and the detail was yet to be discussed and also that the Primary Headteachers' group is to discuss also.

It was noted that a report on commissioning places (SEN) would now be brought to the January Schools Forum.

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The Early Years Task and Finish group is to be re-convened and 9th January is possible date. (*Note: now confirmed.*)

An update was requested regarding the balance for Slough Centre Nursery. Coral Miller is pursuing this.

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The link to Section 251 budget information was provided:

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/council/strategies-plans-and-policies/budget-statements-for-schools.aspx>

372. Slough Learning Partnership

John Constable gave a brief update. Slough Learning Partnership has recruited 1.6 FTE new members of staff. A further update on specific activities will be brought to the January Schools Forum.

Discussions are ongoing with the LA and Cambridge Education and costed proposals for 2015/16 will also be brought to the Schools Forum.

373. PFI Update

Julie Pickering (JP) gave an update on the DfE (Local Partnerships) pilot and noted that the full report from Local Partnerships is confidential as it is commercially sensitive but that the three PFI schools' Headteachers had commented on its accuracy.

Schools Forum agreed to set up a Task and Finish group to enable some members of the Forum (in addition to the three PFI schools) to become more familiar with the report and the pilot so that they can feed back to Schools Forum. As well as the three PFI schools, Maggie Waller and John Constable agreed to join the Task and Finish Group and MW agree to contact any schools' members of Schools Forum not present to invite them. Matt Redwood agreed to attend also. JP suggested that three one hour meetings of the group would be needed before the end of February 2015.

JP clarified that the Council is looking to reduce its commitment regarding the affordability gap i.e. to reduce the £500,000 per annum element of its contribution. There is also the on-going issue of £180k per annum increase in operating costs as a result of the benchmarking exercise in 2012 which is being discussed separately with the three PFI Schools.

Mary Sparrow stated that Schools Forum could not make longer term commitments and that, should any future decision be made about this by the Forum, it could only be a year on year one. Members of the Forum endorsed this.

MW asked why capital could not be used to pay for the Council contribution and referred to an example of this elsewhere. A response is to be made to Schools Forum on this question.

Helen Huntley asked what would happen if a request for funding from DSG came to Schools Forum in the future and it was refused. MW stated that the Council could appeal to the Secretary of State.

It was noted that JP's contract is to end on 19th December and it was asked who would continue the work. JP will be completing a detailed handover to Joseph Holmes and MW agreed to email Joseph Holmes to follow this up. MW asked for clarification about the 2014/15 sum of £500,000 which has been withheld from the DSG and asked when this was to be returned and asked that Schools Forum should be given a commitment regarding this.

JP noted that the current work of the pilot could impact on timing and advised that that was why the Task and Finish Group's work needs to be completed by end of February. Joseph Holmes will present the completed report to the Forum meeting on 25th February 2015.

Schools Forum requested a commitment from the Council that, in future, no monies will be top-sliced from the DSG without a request to Schools Forum and Forum approval.

374. Growth Fund Update 2014-15 and 2015-16 Budget

Schools Forum was asked to agree to creating a Growth Fund for 2015/16 (an annual decision) and also to consider the criteria and level of funding. The report proposed two options for funding: full AWPU rate or 66% of the AWPU rate. There was discussion about the two options and what a reduced AWPU might fund and about the overall pressure on the DSG, given that the DfE does not fund this and the DSG has to be top-sliced.

It was noted that, whilst the Growth Fund is currently allocated to expanding primary schools, this will work through to secondary schools in time and it not a short term pressure.

Schools Forum agreed to create a Growth Fund for 2015/16.

It was noted that the proposed top slice was smaller than previously as there was some carry forward from a contingency and also some funds had been recouped from the DfE for academies. It was clarified that the need would normally be about £1 million a year.

It was noted that it was important that arrangements should not deter schools from expanding.

The option of full AWPU was agreed for 2015/16 so £850K will be top sliced from the Schools Block budget. Officers agreed to investigate other LAs' approach, particularly in areas of rapid expansion like Slough and bring that to Schools Forum before any decision for 2016/17.

375. Centrally Retained DSG

Coral Miller circulated a corrected Appendix to the report.

Debbie Richards queried a pensions issue relating to Arbour Vale School and Coral Miller agreed to follow this up outside the meeting.

The principle of distributing the final underspend by numbers on roll was re-affirmed.

A revised final position will be brought to the January Schools Forum and will also include the position for the High Needs Block.

The £500k pensions deficit being returned to the DSG will form part of the final total. This money was paid from the DSG rather than billed direct to a number of schools who owed it and this needs to be repaid to the DSG. A commitment that this not be repeated is requested from the LA. Paul McAteer mentioned that auditors had suggested challenging the value for money of the pensions' arrangement and it was asked that this be followed up by the LA. MW is to invite Joseph Holmes to January Schools Forum.

376. De-delegated budgets

Coral Miller introduced the report asking that the schools' members (maintained schools only) vote on whether or not to de-delegate the two budgets concerned in 2015/16 (staff supply cover costs (Trades Unions) and Behaviour Support (SEBDOS)) and whether this should be at the same unit cost as in 2014/15.

Kevin Gordon gave some background on the Trades Union area. He explained that he had written to schools in March 2014 and had limited positive response regarding maintaining a central service and therefore no arrangements were made to provide this. He agreed to check if schools had been told that no central service was being provided.

It was clarified, however, that the de-delegated amount under discussion here is to compensate Montem Academy in part for the release of Lynda Bussley. Nicky Willis noted that other Trades Unions funded similar services and/or members pay.

Members of Schools Forum requested more information on what Lynda Bussley had provided for schools in order to inform a decision. The decision regarding this budget was deferred until January when this further information would be available. MW agreed to email Lynda Bussley to clarify.

With regard to the budget for SEBDOS (previously known as Behaviour Support), the relevant members of the Schools Forum voted. There were 2 votes for de-delegation and 1 abstention by primary maintained schools' members and 2 votes for de-delegation by secondary maintained schools' members. This budget was therefore approved for de-delegation in both phases at the unit costs proposed.

Helen Huntley agreed to clarify why the primary cost was higher than secondary.

Jean Cameron asked if the SEBDOS budget concerned was separate from the SEBDOS budget for early years and this was confirmed.

377. Membership

A review had been carried out of the membership of the Schools Forum in relation to the pupil numbers in maintained schools and academies (October census).

It was noted that Maggie Stacey had stood down from Schools Forum and thanks was given for her long service and valuable contributions over the years she had been a member.

Mary Sparrow also told Schools Forum that she is leaving Slough for a new post in January. Members of the Schools Forum wished her well in her new role and thanked her for her valuable contributions to the Forum.

Following the two resignations and the review of pupil numbers it is necessary to fill three academy vacancies. To maintain the balance across phases in relation to pupil numbers this would mean electing a primary member and two secondary members. It is for the academy proprietors to decide whether they appoint to these phases but Schools Forum wishes to suggest that this be the case. John Constable is to follow up with academy proprietors and suggest this.

The balance of pupil numbers in maintained schools requires a replacement to be found for Mary Sparrow (secondary maintained school).

378. Cambridge Education

Robin Crofts (RC) reported that the Cambridge Education contract has reached the end of year 1 and a refresh is underway for year 2 including any changes in scope. Cambridge Education's annual report has been to a recent Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel and three other reports were referred to: Attainment and Progress; Transport and Strategy for School Improvement as well as an Academies' protocol which is available on the SBC website:

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MIId=5187>

379. Academies update

Robin Crofts (RC) reported that no further academy conversions had taken place. Cambridge Education is engaging with academies, with 8 academies now involved in a School Improvement cycle e.g. autumn term visits and strategy action groups. Cambridge Education is working with Godolphin Infants around post Ofsted improvement.

RC fed back on the national picture where LAs are linking more formally with academies. Recent communications at a national level suggest there is a tightening up around academy conversion, especially Trusts e.g. questioning whether secondary schools are best placed to lead on primary improvement.

380. Work programme and Key Decisions log

The proposed meeting for Wednesday 1st July 2015 was agreed.

381. A.O.B.

Coral Miller (CM) requested that SEN top up payments from the LA be changed from monthly to termly. It was agreed that this may be possible for maintained

schools (in respect of children with statements) but that for special schools and resource bases the risk of financial instability is higher. It was agreed that this be further discussed by the High Needs Task and Finish group once CM produces information on cash flow.

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