

Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Wednesday, 15th January, 2020

Present: John Constable, Langley Grammar School (Chair)
Peter Collins, Slough & Eton CofE Business and Enterprise College
Valerie Haffrey, Ryvers School
Ray Hinds, Baylis Court School
Kathleen Higgins, Beechwood Secondary School
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School
Angela Mellish, St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School
Carol Pearce, Penn Wood Primary School
Jon Reekie, Godolphin Infant School
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School
Coral Snowden, Western House Academy
Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School
Nicky Willis, Cippenham Primary School
Jamie Rockman, Haybrook College
Neil Sykes, Arbourvale School

Observers: Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School and Ishrat Fatima, Slough Borough Council

Officers: Catherine Cochran, Domenico Barani, Michael Jarrett, John Wood and Neil Wilcox

Apologies: Philip Gregory and Maxine Wood

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular new member Coral Snowden and in attendance Ishrat Fatima, Acting Accountant at Slough Borough Council.

Apologies were received from: Philip Gregory and Maxine Wood. There were no apologies from Kathy Perry.

All those present introduced themselves.

746. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

747. Any Other Business

Nothing was tabled.

748. Update on Membership

The Clerk informed the meeting that following due process Philip Gregory, Headteacher of Baylis Court Nursery and Peter Collins, Headteacher of Slough & Eton CofE School, had been re-appointed unopposed as nursery maintained and secondary academy school representatives respectively on Schools Forum.

The Chair added that Maxine Wood from Langley College (Windsor Forest Colleges Group), who had sent apologies on this occasion, had been appointed as 16-19 provider representative.

749. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on Tuesday 12 November 2019

The minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 12 November 2019 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

Valerie Haffrey should have been included under the heading of 'Attendees' and that Ray Hinds represented Baylis Court School.

Matters Arising from those Minutes:

There were none.

750. Update on National/Local Funding Issues

This issue was included under agenda item 6.

751. Final 2020-21 DSG Settlement

At the meeting on 12 November 2019 Schools Forum had agreed a £500,000 transfer from the High Needs to Schools Block in relation to PFI, in order to correct inaccurate baselining. The DfE had informed the LA that the funding for PFI had now been allocated in the premises factor within the Schools Block and the transfer was unnecessary. The LA would make an adjustment to reverse the transfer. It was acknowledged that part of the PFI funding was the LA's contribution. This would need to be kept under review in future years when the DfE advised how PFI was to be dealt with.

The final DSG settlement was higher than originally estimated, with an additional £1.6m against the projected amount for 2020-21, and an overall £7m increase from 2019-2020 when growth had been taken into account.

It was noted that the DfE had raised the Primary Unit Funding (PUF) and Secondary Unit Funding (SUF) rates by 2% rather than the anticipated 1.84%.

752. Schools Block 2020-21: Final Authority Proforma Tool (APT) and budget timeline

The APT (final formula factors and values) had not yet been finalised but were due with the ESFA by Tuesday 21 January. Nic Barani explained that the figures had been released later than in previous years and therefore, submission was due later. The final APT would be shared with Schools Forum members electronically.

The deadline for LAs to publish school budgets was Wednesday 26 February following receipt of confirmation from the ESFA. Schools would be advised when this information became available and would receive their proformas. It was anticipated this would be before the Spring half term (*week beginning Monday 17 February*).

Schools Forum requested assurances there would be no significant changes between the final APT submission and the consultation model. Nic Barani would carry out further work on the consultation version, adding a commentary to be shared with members, along with the final budget settlement: this was expected to be middle to late February.

753. Central Schools Services Block 2020-21

Nic Barani confirmed this item referred to services funded from the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB). Schools Forum were asked to agree the types of provision for 2020-21, as outlined in the report and as agreed in previous years. To support these functions a request was being made to transfer £250,000 from High Needs to CSSB.

8.28am: Angela Mellish arrived at the meeting

Costs were as per 2019-2020, apart from a small increase in copyright licences.

It was confirmed this process would need to be repeated for the year 2021-22 but no major changes were anticipated.

Schools Forum **APPROVED** the transfer of £250,000 from High Needs to CSSB and **AGREED** the service allocations as detailed.

754. Early Years Block 2020-21: including Centrally Retained and proposed formula

The settlement for the Early Years Block 2020-21 was £14.3m, of which 5% could be withheld to support central services. The report reflected an annual piece of work, indicating the proposed breakdown of how that funding would be utilised, using a formula previously approved by Schools Forum. As there was no provision for 2-year-old funding it had been accounted for in the same way as 3-and 4-year-old funding. It was proposed that the strategic formula should be reduced although it was confirmed that SEBDOS would remain the same and could not be reduced.

A revised settlement was due in July 2020, based on January 2020 census figures. Therefore, as in previous years, these figures were subject to change dependent on parental up take of provision. In Slough it was known that there had been a positive increase in those taking up 2-year old provision from 33% to 63%. There were ongoing discussions with parent champions and providers: a number of strategies had been introduced and campaigns would continue to promote increased participation. Take up was not affected by demographics and it was noted that nationally the LA was performing better than a number of its' neighbours.

It was explained that there was no requirement to retain a central percentage for High Needs so any such decision would be made by the LA concerned. An element of funding within Early Years was Inclusion funding but this was not a direct transfer from High Needs. It was acknowledged that the funding received did not meet need.

Schools Forum **AGREED** the proposed use of centrally retained funds at 5% across the Early Years Block 2020-21, as outlined.

755. 2019-20 DSG Budget monitoring report (all blocks)

The total DSG settlement of £67m (after academy recoupment) was noted, along with the allocations by block. The DSG before academy recoupment was £170.3m. The projected forecast for DSG was due at the end of March 2020 and no variations were currently anticipated. No variations were currently anticipated regarding the support grants.

Schools Block: a table had been included in the report to show the breakdown of the Schools Block funding, with 0.5% allocated to the Growth Fund. The underspend of £0.3m related to the Growth Fund and the underwriting of Grove Academy. Therefore, £303,000 was to be rolled forward.

Early Years: It had been drawn to members' attention that Early Years funding for 2020-21 was based on take up rates and that the January 2020 census figures would affect the actual funding received. It was pointed out that In January 2019 the settlement had been revised downwards in line with the census.

An overspend was currently projected for the current financial year (approximately £0.1) although uptake had increased, by approximately 4.5% for the PVI sector so this amount could be reduced.

It was noted that the majority of funding streams broke even although historically there was a projected underspend on 2-year olds. The July data would confirm the expected small overspend in the PVI sector for which the LA was expecting some reimbursement from the ESFA. The carry forward from 2018-19 would be just over £50,000 which would be used as contingency.

As noted, the Early Years campaign was being promoted again, with an added emphasis on disability access and those not yet diagnosed. This became difficult when parents/carers would not disclose information. There was also increased pressure on the Early Years sector for children with additional needs and it was queried whether some of the funding could be used for preventive work. Michael Jarrett agreed that a small amount might be used from 2-year olds but 3 and 4-year old funding was restricted. It was noted that parents were not taking up the 2-years offer.

Confirmation had been received from the DfE of funding for maintained nurseries in the following year although no further commitment had been made. Strategic planning was difficult without knowing the future of funding and Michael Jarrett confirmed he had been working with Headteachers on possible options. The potential loss of the supplementary funding stream should be considered a risk.

High Needs: it was reiterated that the majority of LAs were experiencing financial pressures in this Block. A S215 data review had been conducted which had shown a possible cumulative national deficit between £1.2bn and £1.6bn by 2021. If the Government's additional funding promise for 2021 of £750m materialised the national deficit could be in the region of £450m and £850m.

Slough had been one of 32 authorities requested to submit a DSG recovery plan. The High Needs block was projected to overspend by an estimated £13.2m by the end of 2019-2020, 56% of the total annual settlement. £8.3m was the cumulative deficit balance rolled forward from previous years resulting in a projected in-year overspend of £4.9m.

A table had been provided, showing the expenditure pressure points. This included £1.3m top-up funding, which following analysis showed an increased number of pupils with EHCPs, and a rebanding at Arbour Vale resulting in approximately 127 revised pupil packages at a cost just under £1m.

The number of placements at the high end of the banding model had risen, with more learners and increased unit costs. There was also a projected overspend of £1.2m on out of Borough placements and costs had increased at post 16 with the expectation this budget would increase. £0.7m worth of invoices relating to the financial year 2018-19 were not accrued thereby increasing the 2018-2020 end of year position from £2.86m to £3.56m, and the cumulative position from £8.3m to £9m.

CSSB: there was a projected underspend, with a carry forward of £15,000. This was due to staffing efficiencies in the Admissions Team and VAT which could be claimed against copyright licenses. This was a genuine underspend which could not be held in reserve. The claim would be made via HMRC and reimbursement would be made to that fund. It was added that this was subject to change due to further possible staff related expenses.

With reference to the whole DSG it was queried whether an accurate picture was being given by DfE of those LAs nationally showing a surplus. John Wood confirmed that some LAs did carry a surplus; they tended to be large LAs within large counties and able to take up the bulk of the pressure. However, the number of LAs going into DSG deficit was likely to increase. Approximately 20% of LAs had been asked to submit recovery plans. It was agreed it would be of interest to know other LAs' High Needs Block expenditure and it was felt this information would be publicly available. John Wood suggested that Slough's deficit was disproportionate to the size and profile, when compared against other LAs.

9.15am: Neil Wilcox left the meeting

The Chair thanked Nic Barani and his team for all their work in compiling the comprehensive report.

Schools Forum **NOTED** the financial position and **APPROVED** the deficits to be rolled forward into the new financial year.

756. High Needs Place Change Notification

Three reports were tabled at the meeting by John Wood, Interim Service Lead - Inclusion (*following the meeting these reports have been made publicly available*). The document outlining the DSG recovery plan gave a summary of the information submitted to the ESFA by the LA in November 2019 and referred to the DfE's response (*referenced under the item 'DfE response and update'*).

Information on academy SEND baselines, and the main changes in the 2019-2020 position were highlighted. This included an increase of 13 pupils at Arbour Vale and the Pitstop provision taken on by Haybrook (it was confirmed these were not new places, but funding was now made via the ESFA). There had also been an increase of 40 places at the Windsor Forest Colleges Group and it was anticipated this figure would increase further in November.

It was explained that a further review of Resource Bases and specialist provision was needed and, as a result, further changes could be anticipated.

John Wood confirmed that written communication would be sent to Headteachers within 2-3 weeks of this meeting giving a summary of the position as at the last review, the actions implemented, the current provision in place and the further work required. Examples were given of incomplete documentation since the introduction of the new banding system and it was stressed that more comprehensive structures were required. A further detailed report, on Resources Bases and specialist provision would be shared in due course.

John Wood noted the request for a further breakdown by type of provision, maintained and academy school in any future reports.

757. SEND Banding quarterly update

The first quarterly update following the SEND banding review had been made in September 2019. John Wood stated he would provide a general update electronically and further analysis would be contained within the next report.

The new system was still embedding and there was need for further work regarding hearing impairment and SEMH. There had been a trend for schools to use the new banding matrix differently to panel officers and challenges had been made against panel decisions.

Feedback had generally been positive. The banding model had been adopted by RBWM and had been praised by Ofsted in the recent Local Area Re-inspection.

It was acknowledged that if SEND issues were not identified at the Early Years stage, this could lead to behaviour issues later in school. Michael Jarrett confirmed that training was available for Early Years but the take up was low.

EHCP assessments had also been made for children on the point of transitioning to a new phase: as a result, the LA had introduced an additional review level prior to transition. A member outlined the difficulties experienced at primary level in obtaining EHCPs, with a number not being granted until pupils reached Year 6 despite repeated applications. There was an appreciation amongst members that this was an extremely complex area but the financial impact on schools had to be considered along with the possibility of creating a further issue with a rise in the pupil exclusion numbers. John Wood stressed that there was a need to reduce the number of EHCPs but this was not about setting targets for individual schools. The birth rate was going down in Slough, but concerns were increasing, and these factors had not been included in the previous piece of work.

A breakdown against the different banding levels was requested.

More information would be provided for the next Schools Forum meeting, reporting on the improvement work necessary.

758. DSG Deficit Recovery Plan: DfE response and update

A copy of the DfE's acknowledgement of the LA's DSG recovery plan had been made available with the agenda. The DfE had offered support to further develop the plan, with a request for clarity on a number of issues, the first three quoted in the letter being key. This included a lack of estimated numbers of future EHCPs, limited firm plans around savings proposals and a request for how certain calculations had been reached.

It had been noted that savings had been transferred between blocks and a DSG recovery plan should not have included High Needs. The ESFA did not expect any further block transfers.

DfE representatives were due to visit the LA for a meeting on Wednesday 22 January to discuss the recovery plan. Work was in hand to address the issues raised but time scales were tight. The plan required considerable work as the deficit was disproportionately high and needed to be brought under control. Although the deficit was high, the LA believed it was underfunded, as was the case for a number of LAs. It was stressed to Forum that it would not be possible to achieve a break-even balance within three years.

There was a need to prepare for the meeting with the DfE which it was hoped would result in establishing what was required, with time scales and expected outcomes. It was expected there would be 6-7 months to finalise any proposals. The DSG recovery plan would be revised and proposals presented to Forum to allow for 2021/22 budget planning. It was agreed that the National Funding Formula (NFF) would impact on schools and add further complexities.

It was pointed out that Slough's figures were disproportionate to statistically and physically neighbouring authorities and more information as to why Slough was an outlier could be provided to members.

9.50am: Ray Hinds left the meeting

A member asked that the LA consider the unintended consequences of SEND tribunals. It was acknowledged that the expectations placed upon schools were challenging and there was a need to give priority to the children involved. It was added that, if the LA were not in the current deficit situation, consideration could be given to increasing inclusive support work. It was acknowledged there was a need to be more inclusive but not all the funding available was for SEND.

Neil Sykes and Jamie Rockman offered their support to work with LA colleagues on this issue and it was agreed the High Needs Task Group should arrange to meet with some urgency.

LA colleagues would report back to Schools Forum members on the DfE's response, following the meeting scheduled for Wednesday 22 January.

759. Update from Task Groups: 5-16, HNB and Early Years

None of the Task Groups had met since the last meeting of Schools Forum.

As previously noted, the High Needs Task Group would arrange to meet as soon as possible.

760. Academies update

There were no academy conversions to report.

761. 2019-20 Forward Agenda Plan/Key Decisions Log

It had been proposed to hold a Schools Forum meeting in April, to replace the meetings scheduled for Tuesday 3 March and Wednesday 13 May.

The Chair would discuss this further with LA contributors and members of Forum would be kept informed of any change.

The Key Decisions Log was noted for information.

Any Other Business

Nothing had been tabled.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 8.15am and closed at 10.00am)