

Slough Schools Forum - Meeting held on Tuesday, 14th July, 2020

Present: John Constable, Langley Grammar School (Chair)
Peter Collins, Slough & Eton Church of England Business and Enterprise College
Philip Gregory, Baylis Court Nursery School
Valerie Haffrey, Ryvers School
Kathleen Higgins, Beechwood Secondary School
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School
Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School (Observer)
Jon Reekie, Phoenix Infants
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School
Jamie Rockman, Haybrook College
Neil Sykes, Arbourvale School
Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School

Observers: Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School and Annie Wood, Funding Stakeholder Engagement Team, ESFA

Officers: Catherine Cochran, Michael Jarrett and John Wood and Susan Woodland

Apologies: Ray Hinds, Angela Mellish, Nicky Willis and Maxine Wood

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting it had been some time since the last meeting and that this meeting was primarily for information to update members.

In particular, the Chair welcomed Susan Woodland upon her return to take up the role of Interim Group Accountant following the departure of Nic Barani in June, and to Annie Wood in the role of Observer from the ESFA.

Annie Wood introduced herself as a member of the Funding Stakeholder Engagement Team at the ESFA, who wished to support Schools Forums at this time: she would not be able to answer any questions during the meeting but would be able to feedback to colleagues if asked. All members of Schools Forum introduced themselves.

The attention of all those present was drawn to the meeting protocol which had been shared previously. It was noted the meeting would be recorded and all were in agreement.

Apologies were received from: Ray Hinds, Angela Mellish, Nicky Willis and Maxine Wood. There were no apologies from Carole Pearce, Kathy Perry or Coral Snowden. It was noted that Navroop Mehat would be late and that Peter Collins would need to leave at 3.10pm.

762. Any Other Business

Nothing was tabled.

763. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

764. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 15 January 2020

The minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 15 January 2020 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

Under Those Present: please note the correct spelling of the surname Harffey.

Page 4, under High Needs: S215 should read S251.

Matters Arising from those Minutes: There were none.

765. Update on National/Local Funding Issues

It was confirmed there had been little change to funding since the last meeting, apart from costs related to Covid-19, which would be raised later on the agenda.

There had been one change to the Conditions of Grant for the DSG. A recovery plan was to have been submitted to the DfE by Tuesday 30 June. This date had now been relaxed, with criteria issued which should be adhered to if the ESFA requested certain information. The Schools Forum would be kept updated of any such activity.

766. Confirmation of School budgets 2020/21

It was noted that the final APT had contained one minimal variance compared to the version seen by Schools Forum, which related to an adjustment in pupil numbers at Grove Academy.

It was confirmed that all budgets had been shared with schools as scheduled.

767. Update on Growth Allocations/Issues

It was explained that the Growth Fund supported schools with funding for new places, due to the lag in funding. These funding amounts were reviewed annually by Schools Forum. In November 2019 Schools Forum had agreed the mechanisms for the year 2020/21 (for permanent new classes, bulge classes, numbers over PAN etc).

Appendix A of the report outlined the outturn figure for 2019/20, with the only change from previous versions being the removal of the contingency items. There was a carry forward of £284,000 which was higher than generally considered necessary. In 2020/21 the top slice would be £600,000 which it was considered would be sufficient.

It was noted the heading on Appendix B 'Estimated 2019/20 Requirements' should read '2020/21'. It was confirmed that St Mary's had now fully expanded, with Wexham School funded for 210 last year, their PAN had now expanded to 240 so they would be supported for one additional class. Funding for the underwriting of Grove Academy which the Local Authority (LA) had entered into with the DfE and had been raised over a number of years. It was noted it had been requested that

£47,000 be included for April through to August but Susan Woodland would be carrying out a piece of work to reconcile how that figure had been reached.

Grove Academy had reduced their admission number to 120 for September 2020 entry. It appeared that the DfE had been informed of this at the same time as the LA who had wanted an entry number of 150 for 2020/21. As this had been late, it was possible the DfE would not fund the class. The LA did not want the school to be underfunded so a line had been added to cover if the school should lose their case with the DfE. Schools Forum were advised primary numbers were increasing at Grove Academy although the new buildings were not ready, which could result in a third class having to be opened if there were sufficient successful appeals etc.

Members were alerted to the note on Appendix B indicating the AWPU amounts quoted would be checked and updates issued to ensure schools were clear (**NB:** revised papers issued 15 July 2020).

Appendices C & D had been included to give an indication of amounts which could be requested for future top slice.

It was explained that there was a large Year 6 cohort across the authority which was likely to create a need for bulge classes for Year 7. This issue would be discussed further by the LA with schools and SASH.

The underspend in 2019/20 was queried, along with that in 2018/19, both of which were in the region of £200,000+ and whether the correct amount had been allocated and how it would be used going forward. It was confirmed any underspend was rolled forward and reduced the top slice. £200,000+ would possibly be more than necessary but was dependent on whether it was used for contingency classes. It was for Schools Forum to ensure there was an appropriate mechanism in place to retain a contingency fund.

Tony Madden returned to Appendix B which allowed for a provisional primary class and a provisional secondary class, along with the fifth Year 7 class at Grove Academy, which would not be required if funded by the DfE. The underwriting would not come to Schools Forum until it reached 50% of the LA's obligation. The lowest possible carry forward could be £300,000 if none of those areas were required but it was probable the Year 7 bulge classes and the fifth Year 7 class at Grove Academy would be needed.

With regards to funding of the 150 places at Grove Academy it would be for the Academy to advise the LA and, if the DfE would not fund, the LA would release the monies. It could be too early for Schools Forum to decide whether they wished to transfer any of the funds to the DSG as it was anticipated these funds would be required.

It was added that the top slice had previously been reduced from £900,000 to £800,000 and as the amount was now in excess of that of the previous year, it was queried whether there would be a proposal to reduce the top slice further. It was hoped the top slice could be reduced to £750,000 or possibly £650,000 in the following year.

3.00pm: Tony Madden left the meeting

768. Annual DSG Report 2019/20

Schools Forum was updated on how the DSG had been utilised in 2019/20.

Schools Block: there was a carry forward balance due to a residual amount from the Growth Fund and a small underspend in 2019/20 giving an overall cumulative carry forward of £313,000.

Early Years Blocks: it was noted that the LA expected confirmation of the final adjustment to be received from the DfE by the end of the current month. The underspend was due mainly to DAF and Growth Fund: it was added that if the Growth Fund were not used it would normally be recouped by the ESFA.

Central Schools Services Block (CSSB): was showing an underspend because of an £18,000 carry forward due to Licenses last year, where it appeared the VAT refund had not yet been received from the DfE. Susan Woodland was following this up.

It was noted there were minor underspends on Admissions and Assist Management.

High Needs Block: currently showing a £14m overspend although this was reflective of a number of local authorities. A great deal of work had been undertaken by John Wood's team which was ongoing. John Wood's report would give more detail.

The Chair thanked Susan Woodland for the comprehensive report.

A member referred to the school balances contained within Table 5: concerns were expressed about Nursery funding, as three local nurseries were in deficit and it was queried whether there was any update available about long-term commitment. Susan Woodland explained there had not been any further updates regarding nursery funding and it was unknown whether the Maintained Nursery School (MNS) funding would continue beyond the current year. The LA was aware of concerns and had been in correspondence with local nurseries about the difficulties experienced in managing their budgets.

Michael Jarrett added that the concerns regarding MNS funding had been raised directly with the DfE via a webinar attended by representatives from a number of local authorities. The LA wanted to make informed decisions but there was uncertainty about the supplement and the settlement was awaited, which would enable that information to be shared with the nurseries: it was hoped these figures would be available by the end of the current month.

In addition, there was an issue attached to funding entitlements and confirmation was awaited on whether it would be funded on actuals or projections. Susan Woodland explained that a meeting held with the DfE in March/April had suggested funding would be on actual participation. It was pointed out that if this were to be the case there would be a severe impact on not just MNS but the whole EYFS sector. It was already known that families were adjusting the way in which they took up their entitlements.

It had been pointed out there were three particularly large school balances on Table 5 and it was queried whether this was a trend and if the LA had any concerns. Susan Woodland explained she had not had the opportunity to find out the reasons or the history behind these, due to budgeting pressures and Covid. However, it was confirmed the LA would not expect schools to be holding such large amounts of money and there was a piece of investigative work to be conducted to establish the reasons.

3.10pm: Peter Collins left the meeting

Phil Gregory thanked Susan Woodland and Michael Jarrett for highlighting the MNS issue and also thanked Schools Forum for having written to the Secretary of State outlining concerns in January 2019. It had continued to be difficult to manage financially, with the MNS settlement to the LA having been reduced by 33% and it was unknown how much could be cut back further. It was added that although nurseries sat within the EY sector, a number were maintained schools. The supplementary funding would only last until March 2021 and it was questioned whether nurseries would still be able to operate in the summer of 2021. Nursery colleagues would continue to work with the LA on their deficit budgets and it was anticipated there would be a need for difficult discussions.

Susan Woodland stressed it was hoped the DfE guidance on future funding would assist and the LA was aware of the pressure on nurseries. A piece of work was scheduled to be carried out around this issue.

Annie Wood agreed to pass on the concerns expressed about the long-term levels of concern about the future of maintained nurseries and the need for clarity.

With regards to High Needs, John Wood felt there was a need to review independent and out of borough spend which were showing two large increases. It was suggested the baseline budgets had not been lifted for a considerable time in line with demand and the reasons for this were yet to be followed up. Therefore, the budget was possibly not realistic and it might be considered it had been overspent. The majority of places were not a high cost so could be considered as part of the local offer.

It was queried whether there was a common theme as to why some young people were in independent or out of borough placements. It was explained the main reason was that the majority of local specialist places were full but there was possibly not yet the right balance. Such places were not too expensive or too far away, with a number being barely over the border charging no more than Slough schools. There was possibly no need for more special school places in Slough as it was queried whether the LA should be applying for a special free school. However, Slough was a small local authority with good special schools and all the evidence was not yet available.

A member added that, given the suggestion out of borough and independent were not more expensive, it meant High Needs was underfunded to which John Wood did not disagree. He added that maintained schools were uplifted, with a years' lag in funding, whereas independent places were commissioned, there was no planning for them. The creation of High Needs had historically been based on places, whilst

mainstream was based on population growth. High Needs was underfunded especially considering Slough's demographics.

Schools Forum noted the overall deficit on 2019/20 DSG which would be reversible on the next year's DSG.

769. High Needs/SEND Review Update 2020/21

John Wood explained he would be updating Schools Forum on three areas of work: the Centrally Retained Budget 2020/21 and minor changes, the DSG Recovery Plan and the Resource Base review.

Centrally Retained: a summary of changes put forward at the end of the last financial year had been included in the report made available prior to the meeting. There had previously been an issue for schools around the lack of support for the LA SEND team which had been raised at the January 2020 Schools Forum. This had now been addressed with funding allocated to appoint business support with a financial specialism, in order to give the necessary support. The other area was funding for SALT and LAC and some early interventions initiatives. The first line of the table circulated showed the additional funding for the business roll and hard to place pupils reduced in line with the revised protocol, where there had been double funding and a lack of clarity. The funding had been reduced in line accordingly. All reductions as listed were on the last 2 years actuals due to carrying vacancies and the money had been reinvested.

The increase in SALT for £252,000 was for the contract with Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Service, allowing a proposal for some additional local SALT support for local children. LAC budget was as based on the previous years' expenditure. The Post-16 advisor role had been in the previous budget and was to support those with EHCPs in their career options: an appointment had been made but they had left and the post was being retained. The net increase of these changes was £100,000 on the £2.3m although these were only interim measures as part of the DSG Recovery Plan.

DSG Recovery Plan: at the Schools Forum meeting in January a provisional brief had been shared prior to the LA's meeting with the ESFA on Wednesday 22 January. All those LAs with an overspend, above a certain amount on their DSG had been asked to submit such a DSG Recovery Plan to the ESFA. The LA's meeting had taken place as scheduled and this was now delayed feedback to Schools Forum. Overall, the meeting had been positive, with the brief made available as appendix A of the report provided for this meeting.

For 2020/21 High Needs was increased by £2m and it had been suggested if that funding were to go into the budget it would be of no immediate benefit and could be used for other projects. Such a move would delay recovery but could be beneficial long term and this approach had been agreed. The ESFA had acknowledged some of the pressures on Slough created by mobility, immigration issues, with half plus of cases to SEND panel being from the BME community. The ESFA had acknowledged these trends and were aware the increase in approval of requests for assessments was a national issue, reflecting more evidence of the increase in demand.

It had been noted that for some LAs it would be impossible to clear their deficits, but there was a need to demonstrate there was a robust plan in place.

The LA had not been able to commit as much to the recovery as had been planned due to Covid but additional staff support was to join the LA, with a focus on the DSG recovery work.

Resource Bases: the review had yet to be finalised and it was planned to adhere to the original timetable (as submitted to Schools Forum in January).

Discussion followed about the timing of the Resource Base review consultation with schools in September. John Wood confirmed It was planned to complete data analysis over the summer and to involve all schools, Resource bases and the High Needs Task Group. It was felt a wider-school consultation was required but it was acknowledged the timeline was 'tight'. Anything agreed would not take place before September 2021, but any such changes would need to be included in the 2021/22 budget. Ideally, John Wood explained the consultation would need to go out to schools early to mid-September for draft proposals to come back to the October meeting of Schools Forum. He added that some key issues had been identified such as the identity of Resource Bases and the difference between primary and secondary, but no recommendations could be carried out without presentation to Schools Forum.

The Chair confirmed the process for ratification of any proposals would be reviewed in line with the proposed meeting dates for Schools Forum.

John Wood confirmed that wider local provision had to be taken into account when commissioning places, as Slough could not rely on being self-sufficient. It might not be necessary to create additional places if Slough were able to commission places over the border.

770. Early Years Update

Michael Jarrett reported that one of the major issues was the budget uncertainty for nursery schools, which had already been highlighted.

The Early Years Task Group had met on Friday 31 January to discuss the Early Years Funding Formula. Four options had been agreed which had then been shared in consultation via Survey Monkey. Response had been excellent and there had been an overwhelming vote in favour of increases (effective from 1 April 2020). Entitlements had been agreed:

2-year olds: £5.59 to £5.67, an increase of £0.08 per hour
3/4 year olds: £5.38 to £5.49, an increase of £0.11 per hour
Deprivation: £0.75 to £0.72, a reduction of £0.03 per hour
Pupil Premium: to remain the same at 53p per hour

It was noted the increases had been well received by the Early Years sector and the 95% pass through rate had been maintained.

The major concern remained around the funding issues for the Autumn term 2020.

771. Impact of Covid-19 on School Finances: DfE Guidance on Exceptional Costs

Susan Woodland confirmed there were two main elements: £600m Catch Up as a one-off grant and £350m grant for a national tutoring programme for those most disadvantaged pupils during the year 2020/21.

It was explained that the DfE's Covid financial assistance element would not cover the loss of any self-generated income. The most likely costs to be reimbursed would be increased costs in premises, utilities, hygiene, additional cleaning, supporting FSM for eligible children etc.

There were limits on the possible funding available which were dependent on pupil numbers, with different elements for special schools and alternative provision.

There would not be as much support for Early Years as the DfE had been felt the DSG payment would continue and therefore the impact would not be as great on that sector. In the case of PPI nurseries, as they were not covered by the DSG, the DfE had considered they could apply for the business rate scheme. If they were not receiving private income they should have considered the job retention scheme and the furloughing staff.

Susan Woodland would follow up a member query on whether the Catch-Up funding would come into the LA, prior to being shared with maintained schools and confirmed there was Headteacher discretion on spending as long as the funding was spent on small groups.

It was pointed out that applications for funding were dependent on carry forward monies and members were advised to study the DfE guidance.

772. Impact of Covid-19 on School Finances: Local perspective

It was the overall feeling that schools would find their budgets difficult to manage in the following year due to the impact of Covid-19.

A Headteacher member pointed out it was regrettable that, if a school had underspent due to careful financial management in order to finance development needs, they would not be able to claim for exceptional costs incurred due to Covid-19. A number of schools had worked hard to build a small reserve, invariably to spend on a necessity for instance a new curriculum model in line with DfE and Ofsted requirements. The impact of Covid-19 would be felt longer term on school budgets and costs would continue, particularly if there were a second spike.

It was suggested the Catch-Up funding would not be helpful until more information were made available to support schools in planning for the new year.

Annie Wood agreed to take these two points back to the ESFA.

It was not expected that such balances would be added to a school's budget going forward but Susan Woodland agreed to investigate.

Update/confirmation since the meeting:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-schools/school-funding-exceptional-costs-associated-with-coronavirus-covid-19-for-the-period-march-to-july-2020>

“Funding is available to schools that are unable to meet such additional costs from their existing resources, or which they could only meet by drawing down on reserves and undermining their long-term financial sustainability.

Schools are not eligible to make a claim against this fund if they expect to add to their existing historic surpluses in their current financial year (September 2019 to August 2020 for academies and April 2020 to March 2021 for maintained schools). This means schools cannot claim if they began their current financial year with an accumulated historic surplus and expect to increase that surplus this year and thereby finish the year with a higher level of reserves than they started.”

Schools Forum agreed to keep this issue under review.

773. Update from Task Groups: 5-16, HNB, Early Years (to include annual review of Terms of Reference)

The 5-16 Task Group had not met but a plan of work would be drawn up, in discussion with Susan Woodland, and a meeting date would be arranged for the Autumn Term.

The HNB Task Group had not met.

As noted, the Early Years Task Group had met on Friday 31 January.

Schools Forum **APPROVED** the Task Group Terms of Reference, without change, for the academic year 2020/21.

774. Academies Update

It was reported that Khalsa Primary School were in the process of applying for multi-academy trust status.

775. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

The Clerk informed the meeting that the Chair’s two-year term of office was due to end, adding that the Chair was willing to stand for a further two-year term. Schools Forum unanimously **ENDORSED** the reappointment of John Constable as Chair.

The Chair thanked members for their confidence.

As the Vice Chair was not at the meeting this item was deferred to the first meeting of the new academic year.

776. Forward Action Plan 2020/21 & Key Decision Log

Proposed Schools Forum meeting dates for the academic year 2020/21 had been tabled as follows:

2020

Thursday 1 October at 8.30am

Wednesday 2 December

2021

Tuesday 19 January

Wednesday 10 March

Thursday 13 May

Tuesday 6 July

These dates followed the traditional pattern, with a reserve meeting in May. It was noted that meetings were likely to be held virtually at least during the Autumn term. Attendees would be advised of meeting arrangements and informed of any date changes.

The Key Decisions Log was noted for information.

Nothing had been tabled for discussion under Any Other Business.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and wished all a good summer.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 2.30 pm and closed at 4.05 pm)