

Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Wednesday, 24th March, 2021

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 Harffey, Ryvers School
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School
Angela Mellish, St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School
Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School (Observer)
Carol Pearce, Penn Wood Primary School
Jon Reekie, Phoenix Infants
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School
Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School
Jamie Rockman, Haybrook College
Neil Sykes, Arbourvale School

Officers: Catherine Cochran, Michael Jarrett and Susan Woodland

Apologies: Kathy Perry and Nicky Willis

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologised for the change in meeting date: the link to remote meetings of Schools Forum could be found on the corresponding agenda paper posted on the SBC website.

Attendees were reminded of the remote meeting protocol. It was noted the meeting would be recorded and an assurance was given that the recording would be deleted upon the production of accurate minutes.

Apologies:

Apologies for absence had been received from Kathy Perry and Nicky Willis. No apologies for absence had been received prior to the meeting from Kathleen Higgins, Coral Snowden or Maxine Wood.

It was noted that Michael Jarrett would be joining the meeting at 9.30am.

822. Any Other Business

Nothing was tabled.

823. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

824. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 19 January 2021

The Minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 19 January 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

Matters Arising from those Minutes: there were none.

825. Schools Forum Membership update

The Clerk reported there had been no response to the proposed secondary academy representative nominee put forward by SASH. Lack of response was taken to indicate

approval, and as a result, Eddie Neighbour was appointed as an Academy representative unopposed for a 2-year term.

826. National/Local Funding issues update

Susan Woodland explained there was little change to report since the last meeting of Schools Forum. Current consultations were drawn to the attention of members:

School Business Rates (consultation closes 5 May): removing the administrative role allowing funding to be paid directly from government to schools. Members hoped the LA would support this proposal as it would be beneficial to the majority of schools.

High Needs Special funding formula, although there would be a SEND review consultation conducted later in the year. This was about how government funded LAs and was based on historical spend and currently based on forecasts for 2017/18 spend with a view to adding actuals. If this were to go ahead it was anticipated SBC would gain by about 8% and receive approximately £11.5m. There had been a great deal of discussion about using a later year in order to be more accurate but actual spend was being reviewed due to projected spend. It was not anticipated changes would be made until the SEND consultation had been completed: it was added that the introduction of a sparsity factor would not affect Slough schools.

The Workforce Fund for Schools form was available and had to be submitted by 31 March 2021. There were a number of prerequisites attached and Schools could not claim if they had in-year surpluses of more than 4% of revenue funding.

In answer to a question, it was confirmed that although the Teachers' Pay and Pension grant would now be incorporated in the AWPU amount, alternative providers, special schools and early years providers would continue to receive a separate grant.

827. Confirmation of Schools Budgets 2021/22

An update on school budget allocations for 2021/22 had been made available to members prior to the meeting. It was explained that the APT had been predicated on the submission made to the DfE and agreed by full Cabinet on 22 February 2021.

It was confirmed that the budget information circulated was the final version and maintained schools had been notified of their budget allocations before the required date of 28 February 2021.

828. Update on Centrally Retained Items: all blocks 2021/22

It was confirmed that Early Years had previously been agreed by the Task Group (to be covered under minute number 10 on the agenda).

The High Needs centrally retained element was known but there had been insufficient time to produce a report for this meeting. This work had been completed by Johnny Kyriacou (Associate Director, Education & Inclusion) and was deferred to the next meeting of Schools Forum. There was only a need for LA to inform Schools Forum, so no decisions were required.

There had been no changes to the CSSB and there was nothing further to report on centrally retained items.

It was explained that the academy recruitment figures had not yet been received: Susan Woodland would update Schools Forum on these for 2021/22 when the detail became available.

829. DSG Management Plan update

It was agreed that agenda item number 9 would also be taken under this item.

Mark McCurrie explained that the DSG Management Plan (the Plan) was being formulated for the end of year in order that the Plan contained 2020/21 figures to support the roll forward forecast figures for future years. The EHCP figures had been based on the previous SEND2 return.

A significant number of areas within the Plan were under review and being closely scrutinised by the LA. Johnny Kyriacou had updated a number of Forum meetings on the progress of the Plan.

It was explained that the funding mechanism for special schools and the SEND banding matrix required further review as there were still some discrepancies between scores agreed by panels and those expected by schools. The banding matrix remained under consideration to ensure it was fit for purpose. Review of the matrix would incorporate alternative provision and also linked to the Resource Base review work.

There was also a great deal of work underway on therapy services which would impact on the centrally retained budget.

The Plan had to be presented to Schools Forum for scrutiny at least once a term and, to meet this requirement, it would be an agenda item in the summer term: it was felt the earlier meeting scheduled for May would still be useful although if the Plan were made available in July it would be more up to date. It was agreed to include the Plan on the agenda for both meetings.

It was noted this would be Mark McCurrie's last meeting and that changes of personnel within the LA's SEN department were ongoing.

On behalf of Schools Forum the Chair thanked Mark McCurrie for all his work over the past months, adding that members were aware that a great deal of work had been put into developing the Plan.

Schools Forum wished to share that there were some concerns about who would lead on updating the Plan in future. It was explained that Johnny Kyriacou would be taking ownership of the service, bringing SEN and Inclusion into the service and that Johnny Kyriacou was dedicated to moving the service forward on behalf of the LA and children in Slough.

830. SEND Quarterly update

This item had been covered under the previous item.

A member explained they were aware of an error made by the LA on the place top-up funding received by schools with attached resource bases: the top up received was £10,000 rather than £6,000 and it was requested that schools concerned should be made aware of this as soon as possible. On behalf of the LA it was acknowledged this affected academy schools and linked to "filled and 'unfilled' places on the LA's return. Communication had been made with the ESFA, who had advised an adjustment to the top up regarding the £4,000 variation. The ESFA's response would be reviewed to establish how this would be managed and all schools concerned would be advised.

9.30am: Michael Jarrett was admitted to the meeting

The member concerned explained they had contacted the ESFA and understood the LA had to amend the error and revised budget shares would be issued. It was noted the LA

had put this to the ESFA as a suggestion as it would be a preferred option to manage the situation.

It was agreed a workable solution was required and it was requested that an update be given to Schools Forum at their next meeting.

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

The Chair welcomed Michael Jarrett who explained there was positive news to report concerning the Early Years Funding Formula and increases for 2-year old provision and 3 and 4 year old entitlement across universal and extended services at £0.06p. The Early Years Task Group had met to consider four options which had been reduced to two. The two options had been put to the sector and approximately 60 responses had been received from providers, more than the previous year.

Option 1 was the option favoured for 3 and 4 year old funding, including the same amounts for deprivation at £0.72p and Early Years Pupil Premium at £0.53p. The SEN inclusion grant had been reduced from £50,000 to £40,000. The budget balanced, and available grants had been maximised: it was noted that in this area Slough was the highest funded LA in the South East and providers were receiving the best funding. It was hoped this would support the sustainability of the sector as a number of providers had expressed concerns. Michael Jarrett confirmed he maintained regular contact with the DfE who were yet to confirm a number of outstanding issues.

Schools Forum **NOTED** the conclusions in the report and **AGREED** the recommendation of Task Group for the introduction of Option 1. Michael Jarrett would advise providers accordingly, and Option 1 would come into effect from Thursday 1 April 2021.

On a further issue, Michael Jarrett confirmed he was meeting with, and working with local nurseries regarding the uncertainty attached to Maintained Nursery Schools (MNS) supplements. Funding was in place until the end of September 2021 but no commitment had been made about the period 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. This was a national issue for the sector and Michael Jarrett explained he was in regular contact with the DfE raising local concerns. However, the financial pressures could lead to a need to consider options and the future of MNS and EYS in order to balance budgets. The LA was aware, as were Schools Forum.

Phil Gregory, nursery headteacher representative was invited to comment and he thanked Michael Jarrett for his support. It was confirmed this was a serious issue for the sector, making it difficult to plan ahead and causing a great deal of anxiety. It was noted that Schools Forum had written previously to the DfE on this issue, and it was agreed the support of Schools Forum would again be appreciated. The Chair agreed to draft a letter of concern to the DfE, on behalf of Schools Forum, in consultation with Michael Jarrett and Phil Gregory.

Members felt the continuing uncertainty of this issue and the use of repeated short-term arrangements was unsatisfactory. It was confirmed that LA Members were aware of the financial pressures and local officers would continue to raise it with them.

On behalf of Penn Wood Michael Jarrett was thanked for his support. The attention of Schools Forum was drawn to the fact that schools with nursery classes were also experiencing funding issues: due to a drop in numbers during the lockdowns, numbers had dropped. Numbers were now rising with no funding available. Michael Jarrett acknowledged this was due to funding 'following the child' but it was hoped government would make an adjustment to support the stability of increased numbers. However, such confirmation was yet to be received.

There had been no meetings of the HNB or 5-16 Task Groups.

832. Academies update

The conversion of Khalsa Primary School to multi-academy trust status had taken effect from 1 February 2021.

833. 2020/21 Proposed Forward Agenda Plan/Key Decisions Log

The Forward Agenda Plan 2020/21 and Key Decisions Log were noted.

It was noted the Schools Forum meetings for the remainder of the academic year were currently scheduled to be held on:

Thursday 13 May 2021

Tuesday 6 July 2021

It was intended that both meetings should go ahead and it was suggested these would be held virtually. Members would be advised of any changes to these arrangements.

834. Any Other Business

Nothing had been tabled.

The Chair thanked everyone for their time and contributions.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 9.00 am and closed at 9.55 am)