Slough Schools Forum - Meeting held on Thursday 10th March, 2022

AGREED MINUTES - *approved at Forum meeting on 6th July 2022*

Present: John Constable, Langley Grammar School (Chair)
Peter Collins, Slough & Eton Church of England Business and Enterprise College
Gill Denham, Marish Primary School
Valerie Harffey, Ryvers School
Emma Lister, Chalvey Early Years Centre
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School
Angela Mellish, St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School
Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School
Jon Reekie, Phoenix Infants School
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School
Jamie Rockman, Haybrook College
Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School

Officers: Kamaljit Kaur, Interim Finance Business Partner
Johnny Kyriacou, Associate Director, Education & Inclusion

Observer Councillor Christine Hulme, Cabinet member (Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills)

Apologies: Andrew Fraser, Interim DCS and CEO Slough Children First
Coral Snowden, Western house Academy
Carol Pearce, Penn Wood Primary School
Sabi Hothi, Group Manager
Neil Sykes, Arbour Vale School
Tony Madden, Development Manager
Ben Bausor, Always Growing Ltd
Chelsea Barnes, Principal Educational Psychologist - GM Inclusion, Education Services, Education and Inclusion

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that there was no permanent clerk available for this meeting. Instead, the meeting would be recorded and transcribed afterwards.

889.	**Notification of Any Other Business** There were none.
890.	**Declarations of Interest** There were none.
891.	**Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 19th January 2022** Accepted as an accurate record. **Matters arising from the minutes** Maggie Waller asked if there was any update on that school improvement funding situation that was discussed at the last meeting. Johnny Kyriacou confirmed that there is no plan to ask maintained schools for de-delegation for school improvement functions. The future of school improvement is subject to an ongoing discussion with headteachers.
892.	**Schools Forum Membership Update** The Chair confirmed that because of the lack of a permanent clerk, schools have not yet been formally approached to provide nominations for the remaining school vacancies. This will be actioned as soon as possible.
893.	**Update on National/Local Funding Issues** Kamaljit Kaur confirmed that there were no updates or changes that Forum needed to be informed of.

894.	**DSG Monitoring Report 2021/22** Kamaljit Kaur presented the latest DSG monitoring report. There were no significant changes to the Early Years or School block positions. An increased pressure on the High Needs block of £400k was due to additional out of borough placements, leading to a projected overspend of £5.2 million rather than £4.8 million reported last time. The Chair thanks Kamaljit for the report and asked Forum members to note the latest DSG position.
895.	**DSG Schools Block 2022-23 - Confirmation of APT submission and schools' budgets** Kamaljit Kaur confirmed there were no changes to the schools' block funding formula following the submission of the APT. Gill Denham raised the issue of non-national domestic rates. At the last meeting it had been stated that these would now be paid directly from SBC so that schools would not have to pay and reclaim. However, the DfE website stated Slough schools should be continuing with previous arrangements. Valerie Harffey made the same point. KK confirmed that she would follow up with the ESFA and issue a clarification for all schools.
896.	**CSSB budget 2022-23** Kamaljit Kaur presented the paper outlining the proposed CSSB breakdown for 2022-23. There were few changes from 2021-22, only that the copyright license fee has been increased. The historic misallocation to the High Needs Block still requires Forum to approve a transfer from High Needs back to the CSSB as in previous years. Last year the request was for £220k; for 2022-23 the request is for a balancing figure of £185k. Johnny Kyriacou pointed out that as part of further due diligence work, some irregularities had been identified within the CSSB, including spending which wasn't allocated to the right block. Potentially the CSSB may need to increase, depending on what services schools want; for example, around the attendance service, where some funding for that function comes via the high needs block. Another example is if schools want funding for fair access in some form that benefits all schools, this would need to come from the CSSB as well. It was acknowledged that it is too late to make any changes for the 2022-23 financial year; the intention was to highlight the issues in order that there can be a discussion with schools about what they want, what services the LA can deliver and whether these are appropriately funded. The Chair asked for confirmation that any proposed changes would be for the 2023-24 financial year; this was confirmed by JK. The chair summarised by confirming that in line with its statutory responsibilities, there were two things for Forum to do; firstly agree the budget allocations within the CSSB, and secondly agree the budget transfer from high needs into the CSSB to correct the historical imbalance. The Chair reiterated that this is request has been approved for several years in succession, but can only be approve for a year at a time. Valerie Harffey raised a query about an individual post-holder named in the paper. The Chair confirmed this should have been picked up at proof reading and that the name would be removed from the online version of the paper. Maggie Waller raised a concern that some items were effectively being funded from the High Needs block when they shouldn't be, because the historical error has caused problems in properly allocating costs to the services provided. MW asked whether there should be further lobbying of the DfE to put this right. KK confirmed that in 2017-18 when the CSSB block was created, it was intended to cover historic costs for services provided. In authorities where there is a majority of maintained schools, any gaps or misallocations can be rectified by de-delegation from schools budgets, but this is not an option in Slough because of the majority of academy schools. KK also confirmed that the overall CSSB funding rate is reducing, so that there is a reduction of about £40k in 2022-23 compared to 2021-22. The Chair asked whether it's the DfE's intention to eliminate the CSSB. KK confirmed that it was, as it covers historic costs which should be absorbed into other areas, but the timescale for this is unknown. Peter Collins asked whether the sharper focus on the provision of statutory elements only might lead to some things that are currently in place not happening or being done differently in the future. Are we agreeing to the transfer of funds to support anything which may end up being a service that becomes cut at some point over the life of this budget? What would happen in that situation and is there a role for Forum here? JK confirmed that if a service was reduced or cut then would need to be a discussion as to whether the money is spent on something else, or whether it goes back into the pot.

	PC also asked what the role of Forum was in ensuring that there is effectiveness and value for money, so that the public money is being used in in the right way to achieve the ambitions for which it is intended. JK responded that these services should be under scrutiny by Forum and that the local authority should be open to feedback; he would be happy to pick this up through the Slough Education Partnership Board. The Chair thanked JK for his response and pointed out that the annual DSG report, which is on the agenda for the May meeting, is intended to include comment about the impact of spending. More detailed scrutiny could be picked up through other boards Forum members approved the budget transfer of £180,815 from High Needs block to the CSSB for 2022-23 and agreed to allocation within the CSSB as proposed by the local authority.
897.	**EY centrally retained budget 2022-23** Kamaljit Kaur presented the paper setting out the Early Years block centrally retained budget for 2022-23. Essentially the spending pattern is similar to 2021-22 with a £4k increase but overall a similar proportion of the funding being centrally retained. The Chair noted that the PVI representative was unable to attend this meeting and asked for comment from any other Forum members with an early years perspective. There were no questions or comments. Forum members agreed the use of the central retained funding as proposed by the local authority.
898.	**DSG Management Plan update** The Chair confirmed that there were two papers associated with this item. The first is a covering paper from Johnny Kyriacou which explains the context of the second paper, which is a report for Slough Borough Council Cabinet which has also been circulated to all headteachers. The Chair stated that the purpose of this item was for Forum members to note the council's current position on the management of the DSG deficit and the issues which have been addressed, and to make any comments or ask any. JK summarised the context of the main report, which had been presented to the Cabinet meeting on 9th March. JK noted that the projected in-year deficit on the High Needs block had been reduced from £7.2 million in 2020-21 to £4.9 million in 2021-22 and commented that this was a significant achievement. To get there, the team had looked at everything from placements to decision making; everything was still driven by the needs of children and where they need to be placed but was being done more robustly. The paper set out what the council intended to do, with a clear and transparent rationale. Separately to that is the safety valve program so the safety valve program is an initiative from the DfE to target LA's is where there is a large overspend such as ours. You can find examples Agreements between LA's and the DfE online if you type safety valve program DfE. You can look at places like Kingston, Hammersmith and Fulham they've got agreements with DfE, you can see those publicly to see what their projected spend was and the things that they've said that they would put in place. JK commented on the importance of Slough being able to join the DfE's safety valve programme, which would hopefully result in the DfE looking to write off some or all the historic cumulative overspend if the in-year deficit can be brought under control. DfE are very robust and require clear plans that are achievable. JK also commented on the possibility of looking at preventative which would represent opportunities to invest to save; the DfE were likely to look favourably on such an approach, whereby there is sensible spending on some of high needs funding in the shorter term to reduce spend in the long term. The Chair invited Councillor Hulme to add any comments that she wished to from the council's perspective. Cllr Hulme commented that there is a great anxiety in the Council that if we do not begin to address this, we will end up with a further liability, and that the council is very grateful to all its partners in all the sectors across the town in helping us to try and address these fundamental issues. In terms of the DSG Cllr Hulme confirmed that it is unusual to have a DSG-focused paper at cabinet level, but this is an indication that this has a high profile within the Council and will be monitored closely to make sure that we are making the right decisions for our children in the right way. The Chair asked for questions and comments from Forum members. Maggie Waller referred to the SEND panel and asked whether any more had been done to secure health attendance and contribution, particularly in relation to complex EHCPs. JK confirmed that a more robust approach at panel meant that appropriate funding is being sought where needed, which is one reason why the spend has come down so much this year. CCG colleagues have created a working group to

	look at the tripartite panel again, which looks at the funding between LA, social care and health. A model of 33% from each sector has been agreed but only as a principle that everybody has an input into it. The actual division of funds would not be 33% if the need was more heavily weighted towards one service than another, so for example if it was 80% health, they would be expected to pick up most of that cost. There is a realisation that all partners need to come together, and the local authority is engaging with partners and talking to them about funding to make sure that the right funds are paid by the right people. Peter Collins commented that the Cabinet paper had been circulated to headteachers in both the primary and secondary phases to enable them to pass comments back through Forum representatives The general view of secondary heads seemed to be that it's very helpful to have this clear 'state of the nation' and the stronger sense of direction of travel. There is probably a resigned sense of satisfaction that we've got to this point now, so we can start moving on. Navroop Mehat commented that there had been a lot of ongoing conversations around this in different groups, and that a lot of views had already been expressed. Gill Denham commented that in her own recent experience there have been problems very recently in the last month which she has raised with JK. Although the direction of travel seems to be positive like the changes and you need time to bed down, and there are still considerable staffing issues which are impacting on the quality of decisions. The Chair asked about the reference in the report to the lack of consideration of existing models in other authorities for the SEND banding matrix. It was confirmed that it had been based on a model from Essex, but that there had been relatively little adaptation of the model to the Slough context. Although the model was received positively at the time, it has ended up costing more going forward. The model is being reviewed as soon as possible. The Chair noted that it would be helpful if schools could know the time scale on the review and in particular the potential impact on children in September. JK confirmed he would come back to Forum on this. Valerie Harffey confirmed that she was on the task group for that banding review and that while the group did look at more than one model, the one that was adopted could well have been more bespoke. VH also questioned whether more money would be expected from schools when budgets are tight. Peter Collins noted that the banding review which introduced the current matrix had taken place alongside one of the many resource base reviews. The consequence was that decisions about resource base funding and provision were being made at the same time as banding provision. These are separate things which clearly need to complement each other, but they shouldn't have been decisions which were made at the same time. It's easy to see now that that was a really bad thing to do, but at the time it seemed to make some sense; there is a lesson here about process. Maggie Waller picked up a point in the minutes of the previous meeting where it was stated that a report would come saying how the transfer that had been agreed from Schools Block to the High Needs block was being used and what the impact of that would be. JK stated that additional funding was offsetting the pressure on post-16 placements. The Chair questioned the message that this gives to other headteachers who would want to know how transferred funding from the Schools block, which is for provision for 5-16 year olds, would be used to address high needs for the same age range. JK agreed he would come back to Forum with further information on this. The Chair confirmed that Forum would note the contents of the report and that the DSG management plan would be a standing item on the agenda for May and for July. JK confirmed that the planned meeting with the DfE to discuss the safety valve programme is in April; presuming that meeting goes ahead, then there would b e a written or verbal update at the next Forum meeting.
899.	**Task group update** The Chair confirmed that none of the three task groups had met since the previous Forum meeting in January. Johnny Kyriacou had referred earlier to some other tasks groups being set up by the local authority; these are not subgroups of Forum but are being set up to look at aspects of the DSG management plan. The Chair requested that the work of these groups be reported back to Forum in the May and July meeting as part of the DSG management plan update.

900.	**Academies update** Johnny Kyriacou confirmed that there were no changes to school status to report.
901.	**2021/22 Revised Forward Agenda Plan/Key Decisions Log** The Chair pointed Forum members to the forward agenda plan and advised that the agendas for the May and July meetings would be confirmed in consultation with the local authority. The Chair also confirmed that the key decisions log would be updated for the May meeting.
902.	**Any Other Business** Gill Denham asked that the next meeting could be scheduled to avoid primary school SATS, currently scheduled for the week commencing 9th May. The Chair advised that the remaining meeting dates would be agreed with the local authority, but this would be taken into consideration.
	The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance. Meeting closed at 10.30am.