

Slough Schools Forum – Minutes of Meeting held on 13th January 2023

DRAFT MINUTES

Present: Ben Bausor, Always Growing Ltd
John Constable, Langley Grammar School (Chair)
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
Neil Sykes, Arbour Vale School
Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School

Officers: Neill Butler, Strategic Finance Manager, People (Children)
Johnny Kyriacou, Associate Director, Education & Inclusion
Tony Madden, Development Manager, Place Strategy
Steve Muldoon, Interim Head of Financial Management

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

Apologies: Peter Collins, Slough & Eton Church of England Business and Enterprise College
Andrew Fraser, Interim DCS and CEO Slough Children First
Carol Pearce, Penn Wood Primary School

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

932	Notification of any other business The Chair notified the meeting of one short AOB item.
933	Declarations of Interest None
934	Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 10 November 2022, including matters arising and action log These were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting. The Chair recorded his thanks to Nick Pontone from SBC Democratic Services for support with the distribution of the agenda, and for updating the online record of Forum meetings. Jamie Rockman (JR) referred to the key action log and minutes 910 and 924 and asked whether the request for an impact assessment on the DSG management plan had been actioned yet. Steve Muldoon (SM) confirmed he hasn’t seen one but will chase and ensure it gets circulated. Maggie Waller (MW) asked if there had been any update from the DfE in relation to the retrospective Central School Services Block protection. This question was held over and dealt with later in the meeting under minute 940.

The Chair reminded Forum members of the action log at the end of the minutes, which would be updated outside this meeting:

Minute	Action	Responsibility
906	<i>Carry forward to next meeting</i>	Chair
907	<i>Completed</i>	N/A
909, 910	<i>Carry forward to next meeting</i>	Johnny Kyriacou
911	<i>To be discussed outside meeting</i>	Chair/Johnny Kyriacou
912	<i>Complete</i>	N/A
913	<i>Carry forward to next meeting</i>	Chair
915, 916	<i>Complete</i>	N/A
917	<i>Carry forward to next meeting</i>	Neill Butler
924	<i>Complete</i>	N/A
926	<i>Ongoing</i>	Chair

935 Schools Forum Membership Update

The Chair apologised that no further progress had been made in regard to filling the two current vacancies on Forum for Academy members. This would be progressed before the next Forum meeting in March.

936 Update on National / Local Funding Issues

NB confirmed that there were no specific updates to report, and noted that the main issues facing schools were going to be the support for the cost of energy beyond April 2023, and the pressure caused by the Government commitment to raise the starting salary for teachers' to £30,000 by the end of the current Parliament.

The Chair noted that that schools should have received notification of an energy grant for capital projects to put energy saving measures in place.

937 Resource Provision and AP Commissioning

Johnny Kyriacou (JK) introduced this item as a straightforward paper to update Forum on the number of places commissioned in academies by the Local Authority. This provides transparency and complements the LA's overall place planning strategy which is due to be presented to cabinet in February.

NB drew attention to the appendix showing the commissioned places for September 2023 together with any changes from the current year. NB confirmed these places have been agreed with the individual schools.

JR asked why some of the resource bases, eg Wexham and Priory were not listed. NB advised that the report only concerns places commissioned in academies, and not maintained schools. This is because LA has to notify the DfE directly because of the different funding arrangements for academies. NB commented that in the future it would be helpful for Forum to see the overall Slough picture including maintained schools as well as Academy-based resource provision.

JR again emphasised the importance of an impact assessment; there were serious concerns about cutting AP or resource provision places without an impact assessment at a time when schools need support and help, for example which Haybrook would normally provide. JK advised that there were ongoing conversations between the LA and Haybrook and that he would also check whether a formal impact assessment has been completed.

Forum members **noted** the report.

938

Growth Fund – Confirmation of 2023/24 top slice

Tony Madden (TM) introduced this item, confirming that the report is brought annually at this time of year, to clarify the conditions that would apply for distribution of the growth fund in the following year, and to confirm DSG top slice for 2023/24.

TM confirmed that the Growth Fund could be used to:

- support growth in pre-16 numbers
- support additional classes
- meet infant class size regulation
- meet the cost of new schools.

TM confirmed that the funding rate was based on AWPU, with the figure used at secondary being an average of KS3 and KS4 rates.

Bulge classes have been funded in the past. If a bulge class is opened, the Growth Fund funds 30 places in full for all schools up until March of that year and for academies for the remainder of the academic year because of the difference between the financial years for maintained and academy schools. For an academy Forum has also agreed funding in the second year of the bulge class, to account for the long lag in funding for any pupil who joins a school after the October census. The LA has not opened any bulge classes for some years now but the principle and policy will remain in place because of the potential pressure in some primary year groups in certain areas of the town.

TM asked Forum members to note that there were currently only two permanent expansions in progress – both in secondary at Wexham and Westgate Schools. In 2023/24 this reduces to Wexham only, and in 2024/25 there will be no permanent expansions in progress. However, Growth Fund will still be needed to account for bulges, larger classes, etc. Larger classes are funded where the LA asks schools to do this, eg by going over 30 at key stage 2 or asking secondary schools to take over PAN. If this is agreed in advance, the extra places are funded on a termly basis. The advantage of this is that with a bulge class, 30 places are funded in one area of the town, whereas with the larger classes policy, smaller numbers of additional places can be created in the right areas of the town according to need. Overall, this is likely to require less Growth Fund support.

TM explained the recommended top slice for 2023/24. The permanent expansions require £188k and a contingency sum of £177k is proposed. TM noted that that the way the LA presents Growth Fund information is under review and a simpler presentation will be adopted when the end of year outturn is presented in May. The top slice for 2022/23 was £950k; the actual expenditure has been £675k, including £150k contingency. The amount required in 2023/4 is £565k, of which £177k is a contingency sum; this was broadly in line with the Schools Block modelling underpinning the Forum discussion in November 2022.

NB noted that at the time of the November meeting, the DfE had not confirmed the DSG funding for growth. The final DSG settlement has allocated £900k. The LA believes that only £565k will be required; the surplus becomes additional headroom for allocation.

MW commented that it was good that less funding was needed, and endorsed the notion of keeping the reporting simple while ensuring that the funding was not lost, and that Forum retained a way of checking on the fairness of how funding was distributed.

Navroop Mehat (NM) asked if it is possible to get a list of schools who have agreed to go above 30 in key stage 2? NM also noted that there seems to be some confusion about this policy in admissions. NM gave an example where a child is taken into a school mid-year eg as SEND or CLA; although not part of an agreed strategic conversation with the LA, and hence without Growth Fund support, this triggers discussions with admissions and potentially leads to pressure to take more children without funding. TM confirmed that this issue should be taken up with Sabi Hothi.

	<p>In response to the Chair, TM reconfirmed that the Growth Fund would be used where going over 30 in a class is a planned strategic request by the local authority to deal with a bulge in a particular area, where the best way to deal with that is to allocate those children as a small group to one or more different schools, taking them over 30 in that year group. The alternative – to create a bulge class -</p> <p>might not be appropriate because of the geographical distribution of the pupils, or there might be a significant number of them, but not enough to justify a whole class.</p> <p>The Chair thanked TM and NB for their work on this item, and confirmed that Forum noted the proposed Growth Fund top slice for 2023/24.</p>
<p>939</p>	<p>DSG Management Plan and DfE “Safety Valve” Programme update</p> <p>The Chair reminded Forum members that this was a standing item for each Forum meeting.</p> <p>JK advised Forum members that the update on the Safety Valve programme is very positive. The LA is about to submit documentation ahead of the 4th February deadline. DfE have been supportive and provided positive feedback in discussions; JK stated that DfE believes Slough is one of the best LAs in the country for its approach to the DSG Management Plan and have recommended it to other authorities involved in or applying for the programme.</p> <p>The Chair commented that it was likely that the DfE would praise a management plan which does what they expect it to do and points to a significant cost reduction, but that school leaders – especially those working in alternative provision - nevertheless had concerns about the impact on services for young people. The Chair asked to what extent the LA was confident that the DfE recognised the potential impact of those cost reductions.</p> <p>JK responded by noting that that the DfE advisors require credible plans and an approach which will be sustainable. Alternative provision is one element of the wider DSG management plan, but school leaders, and in particular JR, have raised concerns. JK advised that aspects of the management plan are based on benchmarking and looking at other local authorities, and comparing with the historic issues in Slough. The LA has arrived at the figure for AP commissioned places by what it believes to be a more balanced approach, and was being transparent about that</p> <p>JR commented that this was not just an issue about AP, but needed to be seen in the context of SEND in general. Haybrook is now looking at a deficit budget position which is going to stop it providing some services. The concern is while the LA has done very well in reducing the in-year spend down from £4.7 to £2.2 million, this is at the expense of putting Haybrook into a £400k deficit position which means that it is not going to be able to meet the full needs of young people. JR questioned whether this is absolutely right thing that we should be doing for our young people in order to get on the safety valve program.</p> <p>JK confirmed there was an ongoing dialogue in various forums, including the DSG Transformation Board of which JR was a member. JK further confirmed the need to ensure that this remains a standing item on the Forum agenda. The Chair agreed and advised that as a statutory meeting with minutes which are in the public domain, the role of the Forum here is to ask questions, and ensure that comments and concerns are recorded.</p> <p>MW commented that while we understood the need to bring the DSG back into a more balanced position, and applauded the hard work so far to achieve this, she doubted whether DfE was really aware of the impact of the measures being presented. She urged for the impact assessment to be robust and shared with Forum and the DfE. JK confirmed that the DfE are aware of everything that the LA is doing, and are aware of disagreements. School leaders have had an opportunity to feed in to the plan through various meetings and forums. However, we need to recognise that in some areas there will be disagreements and there may be an impact.</p>

	<p>Valerie Harffey referred to an article in Schools Week about local authorities on the safety valve programme, which suggested saying that due to circumstances beyond their control – eg salary increases, inflation etc. – they had been unable to meet the terms of the programme and had funding taken away. JK responded that he had not seen this but was not aware of any concerns about the programme being expressed by other local authorities.</p> <p>The Chair thanked JK for his comments.</p>
<p>940</p>	<p>DSG 2023/2024 – Confirmation of DSG Settlement</p> <p>NB presented the updated DSG settlement for 2023/24, based on pupil numbers from the October census.</p> <p>NB confirmed that in addition to the numbers-based adjustment to Schools Block, an additional funding allocation of nearly £5.5m would be going into maintained schools and academies, distributed as the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant. This would bring the overall funding increase over the current year 2022-23 to around 5.35%.</p> <p>NB drew Forum members’ attention to the modelling in the appendix to the paper which set out the funding and the proposed allocation within the Schools Block. After taking account of the Growth Fund top slice and the requirement to move the mobility factor closer to the NFF rate, the estimated headroom is just over £800k. The LA’s proposal, in line with the Forum discussion in November 2022, is to distribute this increase AWBU (base funding) by between 1.8 and 1.9%. To actually allocate that money next year into mainstream schools and academies.</p> <p>NB confirmed a significant increase of 7.4%, in the Early Years block, which is related mainly to an increase in the hourly rate for 2 year olds, and also increased funding through the Maintained Nursery School supplementary. This recognises that the different cost pressures within the early years block. NB further confirmed an increase in the central services block of 5.6%, and in the high needs block of 9.7%.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Neil and reminded Forum members that there were two things for Forum to agree; firstly to approve the provisional decision from November 2022 for a 0.5% transfer from School's Block to the CSSB and the HNB, and secondly to recommend the overall budget for the DSG. NB confirmed that the November decision to distribute any headroom via AWPU did not need reconfirmation as this was a decision on a principle independent of the amount of headroom which had been supported by the consultation with schools.</p> <p>MW raised her point from earlier in the meeting about the possibility of DrE retrospective Central School Services Block protection. NB confirmed he was still looking in to the apparent historical underfunding issue with the CSSB. NB noted that because the overall historical funding level reflected in the CSSB is relatively low, Slough is not seeing the reduction in the block that some other local authorities are. There appears to be some funding through that block that is incorrect and this will be reviewed before coming back to Forum in March as part of an update on the non-schools block budgets for 2023-24.</p> <p>NB also advised that the Early Years block proposals are going out to consultation with providers, following a meeting of the Early Years Task group this afternoon. The outcome of that consultation will be brought back to Schools Forum, most likely as an email exchange due to timing issues.</p> <p>JR asked how the increase in the High Needs Block funding will be distributed across special schools, and referred to DfE documentation indicating a 3-5% increase in top-up banding funding. NB advised that the guidance is quite clear and that the AP and special schools needed to be funded by an additional 3.8%. which will be included in budgets.</p>

	<p>The Chair noted that the 5-16 task Group members had discussed the final DSG settlement with NB last week but had no further comments to make.</p> <p>In relation to the 2023/24 DSG settlement, Forum members then</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) confirmed the 0.5% transfer from Schools Block to the CSSB and HNB as provisionally agreed at the November 2022 meeting. b) endorsed the local authority's proposals for the overall 2023/24 DSG allocation c) noted the local authority's commitment to redistribute the headroom in the Schools Block through AWPU.
941	<p>Task Group update</p> <p>The Chair noted that the 5-16 Task Group had met in the previous week, and the Early Years Task Group would be meeting that afternoon, as noted in Minute 940.</p>
942	<p>Academies update</p> <p>JK confirmed there were no updates</p>
943	<p>2022/23 Forward Plan agenda</p> <p>The Chair drew attention to the forward agenda plan, noting that substantive items in March would include consideration of the non-schools block budgets for 2023/24 and the Q3 DSG monitoring report. The Chair also confirmed that the intention was still to hold meetings in both May and July, but this would be confirmed in March.</p>
944	<p>Key Decisions log</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that this had been updated following the previous meeting.</p>
945	<p>Any Other Business (notified at start of meeting)</p> <p>The Chair noted that this would be JK's last Schools Forum following his appointment as Assistant Director for Education with Warwickshire County Council. He thanked JK for his contributions to Forum over the last few years, noting that much time had been spent 'riding the storm' and taking a significant amount of difficult questioning and challenge at Forum meetings. On behalf of Forum members, the Chair thanked JK for his openness and transparency in discussions both in Forum meetings and in discussions outside, and wished him well for the future.</p> <p>JK responded, referring to the significant strength of partnership work between the LA and school leaders in Slough and his gratitude for the experience of working in Slough alongside dedicated professionals.</p>

Key action log – updated 13 January 2023

Minute	Action	Responsibility
906	a) Nominations to be sought for primary and secondary academy representatives 10/11/22 – carried forward 13/01/23 – carried forward	Chair
909	a) LA to report back on the impact of underspend in relation to post 16 learners with SEND. 10/11/22 – carried forward 13/01/23 – carried forward	Johnny Kyriacou
910 934 937	a) Full DSG Management Plan to be made available to Forum members following agreement with the DfE. b) LA to produce quality impact assessment reports covering the areas of saving within the High Needs provision. 10/11/22 – carried forward 13/01/23 – carried forward	Steve Muldoon Steve Muldoon
911	a) LA to clarify position in relation to funding for students with SEND placed at the College through fair access. 10/11/22 – carried forward 13/01/22 – JC and JK to discuss outside meeting	Johnny Kyriacou
913	a) Clarification of the remit, terms of reference and membership of 5-16, EY and HNB task groups. 10/11/22 – carried forward 13/01/23 – carried forward	Chair
917	a) Secure a permanent clerk to the Forum 10/11/22 – carried forward 13/01/23 – carried forward	Steve Muldoon/ Neill Butler
924	a) JK agreed to raise issues of how to communicate the progress on the DSG management plan and safety valve programme with DfE and in other related meetings	Johnny Kyriacou
926	a) JC, JK and NB to discuss format of CSSB report for March Forum meeting, to include some assessment of service effectiveness. 13/01/23 – ongoing	Chair
938	a) LA to review the presentation of Growth Fund budget and allocation for Forum meeting in May 2023.	Neill Butler Tony Madden
940	a) LA to investigate historic underfunding of CSSB and possibility of retrospective adjustment/protection from DfE, and report back to Forum with update in March 2023.	Neill Butler