

Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Wednesday, 11th September, 2013

Present: Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School (Chair)
John Constable, Langley Grammar (Vice Chair)
Barbara Clark, Godolphin Junior School
Gillian Coffey, Lynch Hill Primary School
John Constable, Langley Grammar (Deputy Chair)
Harry Duffy, Ryvers Primary School
Helen Huntley, Haybrook College
Paul McAteer, Slough and Eton Secondary School
Jon Reekie, James Elliman Primary School
Mary Sparrow, Wexham Secondary School
Maggie Stacey, St Anthony's RC Primary School
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School
Jean Cameron, Slough Children's Centres
Jo Matthews, Littledown
Nicky Willis, Cippenham Primary School
Philip Gregory, Baylis Court Nursery School
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary

Observers: Councillor Pavitar Mann, Kathleen Higgins

Officers: Robin Crofts, Michelle Perkins, Steve Elson and Atul Lad

Apologies: Paul Adams, Kevin O'Driscoll, Virginia Barrett, Lynda Bussley and Angela Mellish

PART I

240. Welcome and Apologies

Introductions took place and Councillor Pavitar Mann, Lead Member for Education & Children services and Kathleen Higgins, new Headteacher at Beechwood Secondary School, were welcomed as observers.

Maureen Mallinson sent her apologies. As Maureen is retiring from Schools Forum from October, thanks were noted for her valuable input as a Governor and Business Manager.

Apologies were also received from Virginia Barrett, East Berkshire College, Lynda Bussley, NUT, Paul Adams, Slough Grammar School, Angela Mellish, St Bernard's and Father Kevin O'Driscoll, St Joseph's.

241. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Robin Crofts asked for proposals for Chair of Schools Forum. Barbara Clark proposed Maggie Waller and this was seconded by Jon Reekie. Robin Crofts then asked for proposals for Vice-Chair of Schools Forum. Paul McAteer proposed John Constable and this was seconded by Jo Rockall. It was confirmed that Maggie Waller will be Chair of Schools Forum and John Constable will be Vice-Chair.

242. Declarations of Interest

None

243. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of 3rd July were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Asbestos survey – shortly after the meeting the following clarification was received and is included within these minutes for completeness:

The successful contractor is known and we are in the standstill period. Surveys will start soon after this. Slough is surveying all community buildings and domestic properties, the full programme of surveys will take 6 months. Work will start on the first properties by the start of October. Steve Elson will try and get the programme for completion of the school surveys by the end of September as well as an accurate idea of the cost of the surveys. All schools and academies will be surveyed.

244. Confirmation of Final DSG Allocations 2013-14

Atul Lad presented the paper which was to inform Schools Forum of the current 2013-14 DSG position and to note the DfE's revisions as follows:

The Early Years block has been increased by £448,639 (see paragraph 5.2)
The High Needs block has been increased by £319,166 (see paragraph 5.3)
There has been a net decrease in the DSG in total (see Appendix 1)

Schools Forum was asked to note the current position.

It was suggested at the Task and Finish group on 10th September that a report will be brought back to a future meeting (November or December) on the individual blocks in order to compare them to the previous year. Schools Forum members confirmed that this would be helpful. Steve Elson agreed to check which elements Schools Forum agrees and which it notes.

It was asked whether the increased monies would be given straight to the providers. Steve Elson confirmed that the increase in Early Years money will accommodate the increasing numbers of pupils.

It was asked whether 'current' DSG position means that the figures will change. Steve Elson confirmed that the figures will change each time a school converts to academy.

A question was asked about 'Growth Fund' and it was confirmed that this is now paid by the LA including to academies.

Robin Crofts advised schools to exercise caution because if there is any supplementary money left over it would be advisable to carry it over to the next year. Steve Elson and Atul Lad confirmed they would be doing a forecast in December of the DSG and hope to add underspends to the 14/15 budget rather than 15/16.

245. Balance Control Mechanism (2012-13 Carry Forwards)

The report was presented to inform Schools Forum of the surplus balances held by individual schools and whether the schools have plans to use those balances in the following year. The report only refers to maintained schools. However, it had been agreed in a previous meeting that Maggie Waller would write to academies later in the term and ask them to share information about balances.

Atul Lad explained that maintained schools have the right to carry balances forward but if they exceed a particular threshold they need to provide plans as to what the surplus amounts will be spent on. There are three schools that exceed the threshold, two of which are low amounts: Holy Family £166, Beechwood £5,431 and St Joseph's £490,616. (See section 3).

Schools Forum was asked to note these amounts.

It was asked whether there was a plan in place for St Joseph's. Maggie Waller confirmed that the current position is not known and it was agreed that further clarification is needed. Steve Elson confirmed that he is seeking an update and will bring further information to the next Schools Forum.

Schools Forum agreed that if at any time there is the option to claw back money from a school this would come back to Schools Forum.

246. New Regulations Consultation

Steve Elson presented the report which is to inform Schools Forum of the proposed new Schools and Early Years Finance Regulations 2013 and for Schools Forum to decide if they want to raise anything in response to the consultation. Steve advised that the deadline for responses to be sent to the DfE is 11th October 2013.

Steve explained some of the changes which affect Slough and responses were agreed as follows:

Regulations 6 and 12: The LA has to give mainstream schools their budgets earlier; mainstream schools are to be advised of their block budget by 28th February. Special Schools, PRUs and sixth forms are to be given their budgets later towards 31st March. Previously it was 15th March. Following discussion it was agreed that a sentence be included in the response to suggest that post-16 budgets should be available earlier.

Regulation 9 (7): requires local authorities to put any unspent Growth Fund from 2013-14 into 2014-15 school budgets. This seems sensible though it is currently unlikely that Slough will have any underspend in the Growth Fund in 2013-14.

Regulation 9 (8): allows local authorities to carry over to 2014-15 unspent de-delegated funds to be used for the same purpose as in 2013-14. This recognises that de-delegated funds are only taken from maintained schools and if any underspend is put into the following years' formula it will be distributed among maintained schools and academies.

Regulation 14 (2): provides that SEN places, whether filled or unfilled, do not count towards a school's pupil numbers for the purpose of calculating its budget through the mainstream funding formula. This caused some confusion nationally in 2012-13 and the Slough formula was operated by only not counting filled places in resource units. This does mean that Schools with resource bases may lose funding in 2014-15 as unfilled places will be removed from their overall numbers but it is correct as they do receive £10,000 per place. Helen Huntley expressed concern that schools could be disadvantaged where places are not filled. Maggie Waller suggested a sentence be included in the response that schools are concerned about the longer term impact.

Regulation 15: has been amended to ensure that, for maintained special schools, the separate calculation for sixth form places will cease from 1st August 2014 so that all places, including sixth form, are funded at £10,000 per place. This is logical though it does mean a drop in funding for sixth form places that are currently funded at more than £11,000.

Schedule 3, paragraphs 1 and 2: allow local authorities to set a lump sum of up to £175,000 (previously £200,000) and now allows different lump sums for primary and secondary schools. Steve Elson explained that this was discussed at the Task and Finish group and if relevant will be brought back to the next Schools Forum.

Schedule 3, paragraph 3: has been amended to reflect the use of data from the new early years foundation stage profile in deciding whether a pupil attracts prior attainment funding. Steve Elson explained that this also came up at the Task and Finish Group as there is concern that there is no information about what data will be used. Clarification will be asked for in the response to the DfE.

Schedule 3, paragraph 4: allows pupils who did not achieve level 4 in Mathematics or English to attract prior attainment funding. This has changed from being those who did not achieve level 4 in both Mathematics and English. Concern was noted that non entries are deemed to have achieved Level 4 and this could skew data in Slough and this should be noted in the response. It was also mentioned that there will not be levels after 2016.

Schedule 3, paragraphs 7 and 8: provides that the allocation of funding through the mobility factor applies where more than 10% of pupils in a school are mobile rather than for any number of pupils as in 2013-14. Steve Elson will include in the response to the DfE that the basis of funding and outcomes are not matching. Most importantly, this factor is narrow and does not address adequately the degree of turbulence in Slough, as it is more like a factor reflecting casual admissions than true mobility in Slough. This matter was discussed at the Task and Finish group and will come back to a future Schools Forum meeting.

New Conditions of Grant: allows local authorities to cap or scale budgets only to the extent that it is required to fund the minimum funding guarantee. Steve Elson confirmed that this was the approach used in Slough's formula in 2013-14.

General Changes

Regulation 4: this is regarding membership and will be picked up later on the agenda.

Schedule 2 paragraph 8: allows local authorities to retain a falling rolls fund for good and outstanding schools if the schools' capacity is likely to be needed within the next three years to meet rising pupil numbers. Schools Forum agreed for a response to be made to state that the falling rolls fund is welcomed but disagreeing with it only being good and outstanding schools. They would welcome being able to set local criteria to allow this to apply, for example, to a school where places will be needed and where, for example, a clear trajectory of improvement can be demonstrated.

Schedule 2 paragraph 11: the previous position allowing local authorities to retain funding centrally for Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) allowances for schools has been deleted since schools will be excluded from the CRC scheme with effect from 1st April 2014. Schools Forum has previously agreed payments to cover CRC allowances for 2010-11 and 2011-12. 2012-13 and 2013-14 are therefore the final years that the allowances will need to be funded for.

Action: Steve Elson will send the draft email response to the DfE consultation to Maggie Waller and Robin Crofts so that a joint LA / Schools Forum response can be agreed and submitted.

247. Membership Update

Maggie Waller confirmed that she has reviewed pupil numbers over the summer.

The current pupil numbers show approximately 50% of pupils in academies and 50% in maintained schools. A balance of 50/50 academy representation and maintained schools representation is therefore appropriate (8 maintained, 8 academy) and this is the current position.

In terms of academy representation across the phases, 46% of academy pupils are in primary academies and 58% in secondaries. This would suggest that 4 primary academy and 4 secondary academy representatives would be pragmatic. Maggie Waller suggested that academies be asked to consider a recommendation that Jon Reekie be nominated as a primary member and the current secondary vacancy not be filled in order to reflect the pupil number balance and provide the total 8 members. In addition, it was suggested that academies be asked to consider nominating Nicky Willis as the next primary member when a further vacancy arises, which is likely in January 2014 when the October pupil numbers are confirmed. Academies can, of course make alternative nominations. Schools Forum agreed the recommendations.

Action: Maggie Waller to write to all academies to make those recommendations.

Robin Crofts pointed out that in terms of membership it is important to sustain history but also to recruit new members. Schools Forum endorsed this.

In terms of maintained schools' representation 75% of pupils are in maintained primary schools and 25% in secondaries. This would mean having 6 primary representatives for maintained schools and 2 secondary. Schools Forum agreed to seek any nominations from Primary Headteachers and Governors.

Action: Maggie Waller will write to Chairs of Governors of maintained primary schools and Maggie Stacey will raise it with the Primary Headteachers to ask for nominations.

248. 2014-15 Budget Process Plan

Steve Elson presented the report on the Budget Process Plan which informs Schools Forum of the deadline of 31st October for local authorities to inform the DfE of the factors they intend to use in the funding formula for 2014-15. This work is being carried out in the Task and Finish group meetings. Schools Forum confirmed that all schools will be consulted from 7th October until 18th October and a further update will be brought to Schools Forum on 16th October. The timetable (see Appendix 1) will evolve and be added to.

Steve Elson and Atul Lad confirmed that they will report progress back to Schools Forum as a standing item going forwards up until January. It was noted that it may be necessary to agree some last minute things by email if they are not ready in time for the October Schools Forum meeting.

Jean Cameron pointed out that it is important to closely monitor the Early Years Block formula. Steve Elson confirmed that he will add this to the Work Programme to review at the November Schools Forum meeting.

Nicky Willis noticed that Steve Elson's name was missing from the timetable after January. Schools Forum endorsed the continued work being done by Steve and the support being given to Atul and thanked them both for all their work so far.

Helen Huntley asked for some clarity about what is being managed by Cambridge Education. Steve Elson confirmed he will bring a report on the central expenditure items and accountability to the October meeting.

Clarification was requested regarding what happens to unspent funds that have transferred to Cambridge Education and it was noted that this is written into the contract. Robin Crofts confirmed that funding will still come from the DSG and Cambridge Education will facilitate the spending via Schools Forum. The retained organisation will link with Cambridge Education/Mott MacDonald – some decisions will need to be endorsed by the LA and some unilateral decisions can be made from within the contract. Cambridge Education cannot make unilateral decisions about DSG. Robin Crofts confirmed that he will be able to provide more details at the next Schools Forum meeting once the contract has been signed. Mott MacDonald will be talking to Schools Forum and relevant financial issues will still be signed off at Schools Forum.

Robin Crofts explained that his future attendance will be as part of Mott MacDonald but there will also need to be an LA advisor to sit on Schools Forum. Jean Cameron also confirmed that she will also be part of Mott MacDonald but will still sit on Schools Forum to represent Children's Centres.

249. Academies Update

Robin Crofts provided a verbal update on academies as follows:

Haybrook / Littledown are due to transfer on 1st October.
Montem is due to transfer on 1st November, although there is some uncertainty.
Foxborough's transfer has been put back to 1st January 2014.
There will be further schools transferring to academy status over the next year and 70-75% of schools are likely to be academies in twelve months time.

Robin confirmed that he will draw in more information about movement to academies in general.

Robin confirmed that the collective of schools in Slough remains strong in comparison with other authorities. There is an emphasis on looking for local solutions. This has been demonstrated in the development of Free Schools.

250. 2013-14 Work Programme and Key Decisions Log

Schools Forum agreed that a substantive / standing item is needed on Cambridge Education for the next two or three meetings.

Schools Forum members were reminded that the meeting on 16th October will be held at East Berkshire College Langley Campus at the usual time of 8 for 8.15am.

Action: Michelle Perkins to check whether parking will be available and circulate the details.

251. Any Other Business

Robin Crofts confirmed improvements in exam results as follows:

KS1 results have increased significantly.

KS2 results have increased marginally.

KS4 results have increased substantially with a 7% increase in 5 A*-C grades.

There are 11 new Headteachers in Slough.

The transfer to Cambridge Education is due to happen on 1st October. Robin Crofts and Jean Cameron will both be transferring over. Information will be provided via general communications as well as Schools Forum.

Jean Cameron confirmed that the take up of two year old places is going well. The eligibility criteria are the same as that for free school meals.

Thanks were given to Robin Crofts for his invaluable support and contribution to Schools Forum.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 8.15 am and closed at 9.40 am)