

Slough Schools Forum- Meeting held on Thursday, 5th July, 2018

Present: Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School (Chair)
John Constable, Langley Grammar School (Vice Chair)
Peter Collins, Slough and Eton CofE
Valerie Harffey, Ryvers Primary School
Kathleen Higgins, Beechwood Secondary School
Helen Huntley, Haybrook College/PRU
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School
Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School
Carol Pearce, Penn Wood Primary School
Kathy Perry, Mighty Acorns Day Nursery
Jon Reekie, Baylis Court Trust MAT/Godolphin Infant School
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School
Nicky Willis, Cippenham Primary School

Observers: Jamie Rockman, Haybrook College

Officers: Catherine Cochran, George Grant, Michael Jarrett, Tony Madden (part of meeting) and Susan Woodland

Apologies: Gillian Coffey, Philip Gregory, Jo Matthews, Angela Mellish, Domenico Barani, Cate Duffy, Johnny Kyriacou and Vikram Hansrani

No Apologies: Richard Kirkham

The Meeting opened at 8.15am

640. Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. In particular, Jamie Rockman as an observer on this occasion, who would be replacing Helen Huntley at Haybrook College and Kathy Perry, new PVI representative member from Mighty Acorns Nursery, who had a wide knowledge of early years.

All those present introduced themselves.

Members noted that this would be Helen Huntley's last meeting and the Chair thanked her for her valuable contributions as both a member of Schools Forum and as a champion of children and young people with special needs.

Apologies had been received from Nic Barani, Gillian Coffey, Cate Duffy, Philip Gregory, Vikram Hansrani, Johnny Kyriacou, Jo Matthews and Angela Mellish. No apologies had been received from Richard Kirkham.

8.17am: Navroop Mehat and Tony Madden arrived at the meeting

641. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest in items to be discussed at this meeting.

642. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 6 March 2018

The minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 6 March 2018 were approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising from those Minutes:

Minute 629 refers: It was confirmed that the Schools Forum Constitution 2017 had been posted on Slough Borough Council's (SBC) website.

Minute 631 refers: George Grant was thanked for providing the information regarding SBC reserves, noting that the link to the website area had been provided in the minutes.

Minute 635 refers: Clarity had been requested about PRU top-ups and it was confirmed that Nic Barani had followed this up.

Minute 639(b) refers: George Grant thanked maintained schools for their support of the Local Authority (LA), following the LA's request to close accounts and provide information earlier than in previous years.

643. Update on National/Local Funding Issues

Susan Woodland advised that LA Finance staff had attended DfE workshops, and the DfE were scheduled to issue new guidance documents in July. These documents were expected to indicate the 'way forward' for schools' funding and the LA would share this information with members when it became available, with a supporting summary.

Susan Woodland provided a number of updates.

Growth for 2019/20 would be reviewed in line with spend over previous years. There would be an area for adjustments but what this would cover was unknown. The levels schools would be funded on, in addition to the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG), would be based on 2017/18 funding values but further information was expected in the guidance.

It was known the minimum per annum overall pupil levels would increase to £3,500 for primary pupils and £4,800 for secondary pupils in 2019/20.

There was to be a new audit tool to replace SFVS, effective from 2019, but there were no indications what this would entail.

There would also be a spending review but there was uncertainty over the time scale and the possible impact of Brexit. With effect from 2020/21 there was an expectation that the LA would need to start reducing historical elements of the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB). In Slough this currently affected the Virtual School (£100,000) and LSCB (£30,000) allocations. Alternative models would need to be explored for 2019-20 block allocation. It was queried whether these elements could be transferred into another funding block. Concern was expressed about any possible implications for the Virtual School and George Grant agreed to advise the Headteacher although it was noted that it would be important to identify all possible options of dealing with this change.

Complete contracts for purchasing were also being promoted. Information had been published and would be shared with schools, who would need to consider what best suited their setting.

Susan Woodland was thanked for advising Schools Forum of these forthcoming changes.

Susan Woodland further explained that a 50% move to National Funding Formula (NFF) had been agreed by Schools Forum for 2018/19. Schools Forum members were asked what their preferences were as the Finance team would be carrying out draft modelling for 2019/20 over the summer. It was pointed out there was uncertainty about when the full NFF would take place which could alter plans. It was suggested there should be modelling as per the current arrangement of the 50% move towards NFF (status quo), 75% and a maximum. With regard to the reallocations to different blocks agreed for 2018/19, it was noted that moving monies had been a decision taken for only one year. Susan Woodland noted that the baseline for 2017/18 would be used as the starting point by the DfE. George Grant explained that the first 5-16 Task Group meeting of the new academic year would consider this. Increased clarity would possibly be available later in July, with estimates and documents which should outline what the NFF would be for 2019/20. It was confirmed there remained a number of unknowns. It was suggested the 5-16 Task Group should meet in early September and report back to the first Schools Forum meeting of the new academic year. Susan Woodland agreed to circulate suggested meeting dates by email and information about when the consultation with schools was likely to take place.

Again, it was stressed that more detail was anticipated when the DfE documents were issued.

The meeting moved to item 6 on the agenda:

644. Growth Fund 2017-18: update

It was noted that Schools Forum had agreed the criteria for 2018/19 at their January 2018 meeting.

Attention was drawn to the supporting Appendix A showing there had been no change apart from the £90,000 towards the opening of Grove Academy, of which Schools Forum had agreed to fund up to 50%. This was not yet finalised, due to uncertainty about the cost of underwriting and would be reported to Schools Forum at the January 2019 meeting.

Tony Madden took Schools Forum through the Appendices setting out the out-turn for 2017/18 which was £85,000, after the contribution towards Grove Academy, and the estimates for 2018/19. The estimate was based upon agreed DSG £900,000 top slice, plus £85,000 carry forward and forecast an underspend of £200,000.

In Appendix B, any known changes including reductions in PAN were noted. James Elliman had been removed as it had been understood they were to reduce their admission number. However, this would not now happen until 2019, which Tony Madden was to discuss further with the School; if a fourth teacher had been appointed the issue would be referred to Schools Forum.

It was pointed out that there was pressure on schools due to a lack of funding after the first year of bulge classes where such classes failed to fill and this impacted year on year; the issue might be exacerbated by the recent drop in inward migration to the town. It was suggested this issue, and its implications, should be discussed further by Schools Forum at their January 2019 meeting.

The descriptor columns in Tony Madden's report were discussed and it was suggested the information be presented under one 'Growth Fund' column. Susan Woodland reminded members that the LA also had to fund academies 5/12s and advised caution. It was agreed that Tony Madden and Susan Woodland would review the layout of the report.

9.00am: Tony Madden left the meeting

The meeting returned to the running order of the agenda:

645. Schools Forum Membership

The Chair explained that Slough Schools Forum had comprised 20 members, with a broad representation across maintained schools, academies and other settings. The Children's Centre position had been deleted bringing the current membership to 19. As noted, Kathy Perry had joined as PVI representative, following the recent end of Sally Eaton's term of office. There was currently a vacancy for Arbour Vale as the only maintained special school in Slough, but the school was in the process of converting to academy status and therefore it was likely the full membership would become 18.

The Chair had reviewed the January census figures. The only change was to ask members to endorse the recommendation to review the vacancy for an academy representative from both special schools and Pupil Referral Units in the autumn term as there would be a vacancy created by Helen Huntley's retirement. Due to the current uncertainty about the academisation timescale for Arbour Vale, the headteachers of Arbour Vale and Haybrook would be invited to attend as observers until the situation became clear.

It was agreed that the situation should be reviewed in October 2018.

646. Annual DSG Report 2017-18

George Grant presented a comprehensive report on the 2017-18 DSG out-turn across Early Years, Schools and High Needs Blocks, together with a commentary on the impact of spending. Schools Block had broken even, Early Years showed a surplus and the High Needs Block had overspent (noted in Table 1 of the report).

Within the Schools Block the majority of funding was passed to schools hence the break-even position. The impact of the centrally retained expenditure was detailed in supporting Appendix C.

The Early Years Block underspend of £818,000 was primarily because of demand-led 30 hours provision, with slower than expected uptake (reflecting the national picture). The reasons for the variances were set out in paragraph 4.3.6.

High Needs was significantly overspent: this was not new information, but it was significant and of concern accounting for an accumulated deficit now of £5.5m.

The situation in Slough was reflected across the country and there was a national task group of Children's Services working on this issue, with a view to lobbying Government. There was not enough funding allocated to High Needs and it was not anticipated that this would lead to any developments in the short term, and possibly medium term. It was anticipated the deficit balance could increase before it improved.

The report outlined the main pressures and causes of overspend (see 4.4.6 and 4.4.7) and gave a year on year analysis within the report. The main factor was an increase in out-of-borough placements for complex needs.

It was noted that a range of initiatives was being explored to reduce the High Needs Block deficit over the next three years and a report would be presented to Schools Forum when potential savings had been quantified.

Members made it clear that the current reviews should focus on value for money and provision, not just savings.

Peter Collins stated clearly, on behalf of Headteachers involved in the Resource Base review group, that the group was assured the focus was about provision and ensuring that children were receiving the correct support in the right setting. On behalf of the LA, it was confirmed that the review was intended to ensure children were placed in the right provision for them whilst making the best use of the funding available.

It was noted that language was very important and that identifying this review as being about potential savings was not helpful.

With regard to the Banding Review, it was noted that schools felt that top up bandings did not recognise economies of scale, which should be given recognition. Schools could be in danger of going into deficit and the Forum had to be mindful of the pressures on schools.

It was noted that there had been overspending on 'hard to place' funding due to the lack of places available in Years 10 and 11; it was stressed these had not been vulnerable students, there had just not been enough places available. This should not have been funded from the High Needs Block and had amounted to approximately £200,000.

There was a strength of feeling among members that the High Needs Block required more attention at Schools Forum to ensure a high standard of provision was maintained.

Paragraph 4.6.6 contained a table giving an overview of maintained schools' balances; it was felt the majority were reasonable. It was noted that one was in deficit and following meetings with the LA, a plan had been put in place to deal with the situation; two schools highlighted had low balances and had agreed budget plans in place for the new academic year. The LA felt the schools would benefit from the support given.

A member asked what action was being taken for those schools that had a large surplus. George Grant explained the schools with high balances were approached by the LA to understand why. The schools quoted in the report had planned for specific projects i.e. premises etc.

It was queried whether the process was robust enough. George Grant confirmed that forward plans were known, the large expenditure was not in isolation and there should be long term planning to be aware of how resources were being used. There were time scales in place and the LA did challenge and address such schools. It was felt the system was robust and in line with academies. It was also noted that the DfE monitored school balances.

It was pointed out that the Growth Fund outlined in the report did not match that in Tony Madden's report. George Grant agreed to follow this up and would advise members accordingly (**Update**: the differences noted were in relation to back payments which had been honoured in 2017-18).

George Grant was thanked for his full and informative report and it was agreed that this should be an annual report to Schools Forum.

647. Review of the Scheme for Financing Schools 2017-18

It was noted that the DfE had published directed revisions for LAs to include in their local Scheme for Financing Schools. Changes to arrangements for loans were one issue. It was known that a number of LAs were making loans to schools. George Grant added that it had not been necessary to support schools in a deficit situation in this way previously but there now had to be a clear mechanism in place showing how the LA would operate. Loans could no longer be used by any LA to support a deficit. The report proposed putting in place a licensed deficit scheme. It was explained that if a school were in deficit there was a need to provide a scheme of support. There would be criteria in place if a school were to apply for the fund and details would be going out to maintained schools with the Scheme for consultation.

It was questioned whether the LA would be consulting on the principle only and it was confirmed that more detail would be included in the information sent to schools. It was pointed out that there were now a low number of maintained schools in Slough, with reduced funding and there could be a situation where there were no surpluses to fund such a scheme.

It was questioned whether the method of licensed deficits should be introduced for Slough schools and members felt that the full detail of any proposal for a consultation on such a change should have been presented to Schools Forum first, as it was the Schools Forum that ultimately agreed changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools. George Grant agreed a document outlining the detail of the proposed licensed deficit scheme would be circulated to members by email prior to the consultation with schools.

648. Early Years Centrally Retained 2018-19

Michael Jarrett presented a report outlining the proposed use of £791,000 centrally retained funds across the Early Years Block. It was noted that for 2018-19, the DfE had mandated a reduction in centrally retained funds for English LAs from 7% to 5%. It was noted that this was a pressure alongside the roll out of 30 hours' provision. It was noted that there could be changes depending on take up.

The details of the centrally retained Early Years funding for 2018-19 set out in the report, including paragraph 4.5, were noted and lines of expenditure approved.

It was noted that, during previous years, funding had been made available to Littledown for behaviour support but the take up had been poor. It was suggested this should be reviewed to possibly introduce a pay-as-used system and Michael Jarrett would discuss this further with the Headteacher of Littledown. In answer to a query, Michael Jarrett confirmed he did not understand why this was the case, querying whether there was a misunderstanding amongst providers, as it was advantageous to start such support in the early years. It was noted that there was a need to raise the profile and market the provision. It had been suggested this issue applied also to the Disability Access Fund and it was noted that work had already been carried out around this.

649. Update from Task Groups (to include draft Terms of Reference)

5-16: had not met.

Early Years: had not met.

High Needs: had not met although the two groups looking at Resource Bases and Banding were continuing.

Draft Terms of Reference for all three Task Groups had been circulated with the agenda and were **APPROVED** by Schools Forum.

The meeting moved to item 12 on the agenda:

650. Academies update

There was nothing further to report.

651. Proposed Forward Agenda Plan 2018-19 & Key Decision Log

The proposed Forward Agenda Plan 2018/19 & Key Decisions Log were noted and would be updated by the Chair and Clerk. Proposed dates for Schools Forum meetings were:

Tuesday 9 October 2018

Tuesday 4th December 2018 (**Update:** this is a change from the date listed in the Schools Forum papers which members are asked to note)

Wednesday 16 January 2019

Tuesday 5 March 2019

Wednesday 15 May 2019

Thursday 4 July 2019

The dates would be checked against Primary Headteacher and SASH meetings.

It was agreed the venue and start time would remain the same.

The meeting returned to item 11 on the agenda:

652. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

The Chair thanked Helen Huntley for her contributions to Schools Forum and all her hard work and support for vulnerable children and their needs, which was acknowledged by all present.

As noted at the previous meeting, the Chair would be standing down at the beginning of the new academic year and nominations for the position were invited:

John Constable was proposed by Peter Collins to be Chair of Schools Forum for two years, seconded by Helen Huntley.

Any member interested in taking on the role of Vice Chair was asked to contact John Constable or Maggie Waller.

A presentation was made to Maggie Waller, thanking her for all her work and dedication as Chair of Slough Schools Forum.

Meeting closed at 10.05am