

## Slough Schools Forum - Meeting held on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2021

**Present:** John Constable, Langley Grammar School (Chair)  
Ben Bausor, Always Growing Ltd  
Peter Collins, Slough & Eton Church of England Business and Enterprise College  
Valerie Harffey, Ryvers School  
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School  
Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School  
Carol Pearce, Penn Wood Primary 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:** Johnny Kyriaco, Sabi Hothi, Tiran Khehra (Clerk), Councillor Christine Hulme (part)

**Apologies:** Gill Denham, Philip Gregory

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, apologised for the rearrangement of the date, and explained that Councillor Christine Hume, Cabinet member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning and Skills, would be joining the meeting briefly to introduce herself.

Those attending were asked to introduce themselves when speaking for the benefit of the Clerk. The meeting was held remotely and would be recorded; it was confirmed that the recording would be deleted upon approval of the minutes.

### **863. Any Other Business**

There were no notifications.

### **864. Declarations of interest**

There were none.

### **865. Minutes of previous meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2021**

The Chair reminded Forum members that the last meeting was five months ago and that it may be difficult to judge the accuracy of the previous minutes.

Minutes were agreed as a correct record.

#### **Matters Arising from those Minutes:**

Nothing was noted.

### **866. Schools Forum Membership Update**

The Chair informed everyone at the end of last year there were two vacancies for academy members: one for primary and the second for secondary. Following the usual processes, Gill Denham, Executive Headteacher at the Marish Academy Trust has been appointed to fill the primary vacancy. As members represent individual schools as opposed to Trusts, Gill will be noted as representing Marish Primary School.

There is still a vacancy for a second member following Kathleen Higgins retirement at the end of last term. The Chair will be writing to secondary schools for any nominations for this post.

There are two colleagues whose terms have come to an end effectively at the end of the winter term. The Chair will write to both Coral Snowden and Peter Colins regarding whether they would like to continue their post as their terms end by January 2022.

Philip Gregory, Headteacher at Baylis Court Nursery, is returning at the end of the term and this will create a vacancy which will be discussed with the local authority. The Chair and Forum wished Philip all the very best for the future.

**867. Update on National/Local Funding issues**

Kamaljit Kaur confirmed that any updates would be covered later in the agenda.

**868. DSG Budget Monitoring Report 2021/22**

This report was presented by Kamaljit Kaur who took members through the content of the report. The School Budget Monitoring Report is for everyone to note the current position of the DSG. The recommendation is for Schools Forum to note the contents of the report; a summary of the DSG's position for this financial year according to all blocks.

There will be a small overspend in the Schools Block due to growth fund. The main issue is High Needs Block; however, this is not limited to Slough but is presently a national issue. Nationally, the High Needs Blocks are overspending.

Kamaljit stated that Johnny Kyriacou would go into more detail when presenting his item on the DSG Management Plan. Currently, the overspend on DSG is £19.6 million up till last year and it is projected there will be a £4 million overspend on High Need Blocks this financial year. There is a risk that the overspend may increase as there have been some additional costs from prior years that were not approved last year; the council is working closely to evaluate these costs. If there are any changes, these will be reported to the Forum. The cumulative overspend figure reported to ESFA is £24 million and this was also reported to Cabinet.

The Chair stated the report reflected present expectations and as the report is for information only, it should be noted. Further discussion on the DSG Management Plan can follow later in the agenda.

The Chair opened the floor to any questions/comments.

Peter Collins queried the comment in the report that there is risk that there may be additional costs due to under accrual not been put through last year, asking how much of a risk this was thought to be, what the likely figure could be and whether future discussion was required. In response Kamaljit Kaur confirmed there is uncertainty in the figure, and that it is projected it could potentially be £0.5 million. The problem arises because the out of borough schools do not always invoice on time, there have been many changes and a high level of staff turnover in the council in recent years; invoices from out of borough schools from 2017/ 2018 and 2018/2019 have been received.

Peter highlighted that the potential £0.5 million is a significant risk and that this should be minuted need in case maybe needs to be an action for the Forum. The Chair confirmed that the Forum notes this figure with an element of concern and its potential implications. This will be picked up in the DSG Management plan and the strategy for high needs.

**869. DSG Funding Update 2022/23**

The Chair set the context of the agenda item. The monitoring report looks in the previous item looks at the current year; the funding update paper looks at the latest position nationally and its impact on the DSG for the forthcoming year 2022/23.

Kamaljit Kaur presented the report, taking members through the key points. The funding update is based on the current allocation, which uses information from the 2020 autumn census. This will be updated to reflect the 2021 census and when the budget is set in January, the Forum will be informed of the correct allocation.

There has been an increase nationally by £2.3 billion in 2022/23 but the allocation for Slough currently shows a 1.2% increase which is £1.8 million, which is lower than the national increase of 2.9%. We need to wait for the funding confirmation based on the updated census to be issued which is usually in mid-December.

For the National Funding Formula, there is a per-pupil rate which is for primary schools is at £4,265 and £5,525 for secondary schools. Slough's figures are already closer to the national so fewer schools will be uplifted to these levels. Budgets would also reflect the impact of decrease in primary pupil numbers. This means that although there is an overall increase in our funding, individual schools may receive less funding if their numbers have decreased.

The High Needs Block is expected to see an increase of £2.3 million, representing an 8% increase; this is below the London average of 8.21% and the national average of 8.4%. The figure for Slough of 8%, is less than anticipated in Slough's Action Plan.

The Central Block will also see a reduction of 6%; this was expected. There is nothing the council can do about this; the CSSB was created for historical commitments and the amount of funding for these is slowly being decreased. The allocation is a decrease of 3.8%, Hopefully Slough might gain a 2% uplift; if not, this will need to be incorporated into the model to compensate.

The Chair summarised the overall picture for the Schools Block as the Government is saying schools should receive a minimum 2% increase; the total amount Slough has been allocated is 1.2% but the figure is to be revised when the number on roll as confirmed by the Oct 2021 census is considered.

The Chair opened the floor for questions.

Maggie Waller referred to the Maintain Nursery schools in paragraph 7.4, where the report talks about supplementary grants only continuing to 2021/22 and asked if there anything the Forum can do to raise concerns given that we don't know if the funding will continue will go beyond that point.

Kamaljit Kaur responded that no rates have been given for EY. The ESFA is aware of the concerns. The LA will wait for the information and if there are any changes these will be reported to the Forum. The Chair confirmed that Forum members would want to collectively register concern for the maintained nursery schools.

Ben Bausor stated that from a PVI perspective in April there will be a significant impact uplift in national minimum wage and asked how will this affect maintained nursery schools. He confirmed he would want to support any actions that raises these concerns, thinking about the impact this could have. Johnny Kyriacou confirmed that he is the lead for Early Years and that any questions about early years funding; hopefully funding could be confirmed in January.

There were no further questions.

#### **Cllr Hulme entered meeting (9.25am)**

The Chair welcomed Cllr Hulme, Lead Member for children services, lifelong learning and skills and invited her to introduce herself. Cllr Hume explained that she had been appointed in May 2021 to lead this portfolio. Her main priorities would children safeguarding, response to the SEND report, working with health colleagues, and improving children services.

Cllr Hulme welcomed the idea of visiting Forum members in their school settings. Cllr Hulme confirmed she would be attending the next Schools Forum meeting in January and would be meeting with the Chair offline to discuss school finances and understand the work of the Forum.

**870. DSG Management Plan**

Johnny Kyriacou provided a verbal update on the DSG Management Plan. He explained that the key objective is to look at the spend as presented here with £23/24 million cumulative overspend and nearly £5 million in year deficit. There is a clear need to look at reducing the spend and the LA has been working internally to do this. The LA has been invited to be part of the Government's 'Safety Valve Programme', the initial meeting with the DfE about this meeting will happen early in 2022.

There is development in controlling the spend. In recent meetings with DfE they have said it was not necessary to get to a zero in-year balance but it was important to become sustainable. At the next meeting a more detailed picture will be presented, and the LA will meet with school leaders at the Slough Education Partnership Board on the 7th of January to go over a plan so that there is a wider understanding.

The Chair asked where the DfE fit into these discussions and the monitoring of the plan? Johnny Kyriacou responded that the spend must be reduced irrespective of whether Slough is on the Safety Valve Programme. To be part of the programme, a plan needs to be produced which is credible. A meeting with DfE was meant to take place in November, but this has been pushed back by the DfE to February. It was reiterated that it would be good to get on to the programme; if successful a 5-year contract will be signed and DfE would provide project management support.

The Chair asked for clarification about the Safety Valve Programme; the Local Authority demonstrates as sustainable approach going forward which balances the DSG, then there is a high probability historic deficit is written off. Johnny Kyriacou confirmed that this was the case in simplistic terms, but the DfE did not want to relay the message they are writing deficit off. There is an acknowledgement there is a rise in national demand and that the situation is not necessarily about the LA overspending.

The Chair commented that the strategy for getting to this position is under development and there are Forum members who are a part of the process in formulating the strategy; they share serious concerns about the impact of any form of deficit reduction in the High Needs Block.

Peter Collins confirmed, for the purpose of the minutes, that there has been discussion within the secondary head teacher group about the financial implications of the savings that need to be made. As Chair of SASH, Peter had written to the LA on behalf of SASH about concerns and the impacts of the cuts particularly in relation to Haybrook College. Secondary headteachers have concerns about the provisions on Haybrook and will be playing an active role in raising these issues and working in partnerships with those making the decisions so that the impact is minimised, but the financial objectives achieved at the same time.

The Chair asked for confirmation as to what could be reported at the next meeting in January. Johnny Kyriacou confirmed that he was hoping the plan could be brought to the next meeting. The Chair reminded all members that the role of the Forum here is to act as a consultative body; Forum's decision making power in relation to the High Needs block are limited to authorising transfers of funds between blocks. However, there is a clear remit to ask questions and scrutinise the LA's plans.

**871. Schools Block 2022/23**

The Chair introduced the two parts of the item; first was the school formula for 2022/23 and second was the LA request to transfer 0.5% of school funding across to the High Needs block to support the reduction of the deficit. This is a repeat of the request that has come to the Forum in previous years.

Kamaljit Kaur then presented the report. The LA has been moving towards full National Funding Formula (NFF), and Slough is very close to national funding formula allocations. The modelling for the 2022/23 schools block was based on the provisional allocation, which was given by the DfE; this was detailed in an appendix to the report.

Once the funding is issued, a similar approach, aligning with the NFF, will be taken. If there is a 2% growth as indicated by DfE this will be given to schools. With regard to the requested transfer of 0.5% from school block to high need block, the LA urgently needs this to happen as part of the DSG management plan. A report will be presented to the Forum in January on the 0.5% transfer.

Another issue is that the Central Service Block was incorrectly funded from 2017-18 and we need to transfer the funding from High Needs Block to Central Service Block, as in previous years. There needs to be a decision made on whether this can be done and if it is sustainable, this can be decided at the next meeting.

A change from previous years is the Non-Domestic Business Rate (NDBR); schools are now being funded for this. However, schools will receive their funding without NBDR. The LA will directly invoice the ESFA, and they will give the LA the funding. Schools will therefore not have to worry about paying NBDR, although will receive a non-payable invoice for their records.

The Chair summarised key points for Forum to consider. Last year, the Forum agreed to move close as possible to the NFF rates; at the time there was an uncertainty if the full NFF could be afforded because schools didn't know exact pupil numbers. In fact, the formula landed at 99% of NFF. This means this year there is no change to the structure of the formula. There is a requirement is to consult with all schools if there is a change to the formula; as there is no change for 2022/23 so there is no need to consult. However, the Forum is a democratic body and the views of schools across Slough tend to follow the views of the Forum and the 5- 16 Task Group. The Forum does want to take this back to phase groups to ensure some informal consultation with them, so that Forum members have a sense of what schools want, particularly in relation to the potential block transfer.

A decision will be made in January about block transfer. Kamaljit Kaur confirmed she would provide modelling of two scenarios: one for school budgets without the 0.5% top slice and the second with top slice. The Chair confirmed that the Forum's position at this stage is that the LA has the right to ask for a block transfer, but the school community has the right to accept or decline. In the past the request has been refused not because there is a fundamental objection to the transfer taking place but because there was no strategy as to how the deficit in the High Needs Block would be addressed. The Chair then opened the floor to any questions/comments

Maggie Waller asked whether the formula included elements which are not normally used such as sparsity. It was confirmed that the LA is not using sparsity; the data is provided by ESFA, and although the NFF rate is included it is not being used and is not being taken into calculations.

Maggie Waller also asked what the implications would be if the money cannot be moved from the High Needs Block to the Central Block. Kamaljit Kaur confirmed that the implications will be in the management plan, and this can be presented at the next meeting.

**872. Early years update**

Kamaljit Kaur provided a brief verbal update on EY funding. There is a reduction in last year's funding by £285,000, there will be impact on this year's funding. This is linked to participation rate and there no practical implications for services.

**873. Scheme for Financing Schools**

Kamaljit Kaur presented the report, which was relevant to maintained schools only and proposed an adjustment to the scheme for financing schools in relation leaving the European Union. The details were provided in the appendices, highlighting all the changes eg to procurement laws.

Jon Reekie pointed out that at the end of the report where banks are listed, it stated Lloyds TSB; however these are two separate entities, and this has been raised before but has not been changed. It was agreed that this would be changed in the final version.

The changes were approved by maintained school representatives, subject to confirmation from the secondary representative who was unable to attend the meeting.

**874. Academies update**

There were no updates for this meeting.

**875. Forward agenda plan**

The Chair proposed the Forum keeps all four meetings currently in the forward agenda and the LA will confirm dates.

The next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 19th January 2022.