

Slough Schools Forum - Meeting held on Wednesday 6th July 2022

DRAFT MINUTES

- 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
- Officers:** Steve Muldoon, Interim Head of Financial Management
Johnny Kyriacou, Associate Director, Education & Inclusion
Tony Madden, Development Manager
- Observer** Councillor Christine Hulme, Cabinet member (Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills)
- Apologies:** Andrew Fraser, Interim DCS and CEO Slough Children First
Neill Butler, SBC Finance Business Partner - People Children
Coral Snowden, Western House Academy
Gill Denham, Marish Primary School
Maggie Waller, Holy Family 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.

903	Notification of Any Other Business None.
904	Declarations of Interest None
905	Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 10th March 2022 These were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting. There were no matters arising.
906	Schools Forum Membership Update The Chair referred to the updated membership summary in the agenda pack. Forum members were asked to note slight changes to the dates at which some members' terms of office would end; this was bring them more into alignment with the academic year and to simplify the process of filling vacancies. There were no objections to these adjustments. The Chair noted that Carol Snowden's term of office ends at the end of this term, and asked Forum members to endorse a vote of thanks to Carol for her service on Forum. The Chair asked Forum members to note that there was still a vacancy for a secondary academies member, and that a further vacancy for a primary academies member would be created following

	<p>the end of Carol Snowden's term. In addition, there was currently no nominated 16-19 representative from the Windsor Forest colleges group. There would be a process to fill these vacancies in the autumn term.</p>
<p>907</p>	<p>Update on National / Local Funding Issues</p> <p>Steve Muldoon gave a verbal update on national and local funding. The annual teachers' pay award consultation would take place over the summer break, with the outcome to be confirmed in September. The DfE's ambition to raise the starting pay for newly qualified teachers £30,000 per year by the end of the current Parliament is still in place – this means by December 2024. As yet it is unclear what progress there is on this proposal, which may be hindered by the potential knock-on issue of pay differentials.</p> <p>Slough Borough Council is going through a finance restructure, announced recently by the section 151 officer. The scope of the restructure covers corporate financial management and so includes the children's finance team, and the accounts payable and receivable team. There is currently a consultation period with another three weeks to run. No redundancies are expected from this; the current team is quite heavily resourced by interim staff, so none of the permanent staff are at risk. There could be some movement between teams, with opportunities for rotation or promotion. Once this process has run its course there will be a recruitment process to backfill some of the vacancies from early autumn.</p> <p>Steve Muldoon explained aspects of the Council's budget process for 2023-24. Savings totalling around £16 million have been proposed and the relevant departments are preparing action plans, business cases and equality impact assessments. The robustness of those proposals across different areas of the Council will be reviewed together along the potential impact. This is in preparation for scrutiny committee meetings in October, prior to savings proposals being put to the Cabinet for approval.</p> <p>In late December/ January period the council will find out what the local government funding settlement is going to be and whether there are any differences to the assumptions built into the budgets; after some refining, the full budget will go to Cabinet and Council in February/March.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Steve Muldoon for the transparency about some of the issues and welcomed the greater stability within the finance team given the turbulence in recent years.</p> <p>The Chair reminded Forum members that, over the course of the last few years the local formula had moved progressively closer to the national funding formula rates; in 2022-23 Slough schools are operating with a budget effectively based on the national funding formula. The current system is an <i>indirect</i> national funding formula, whereby the DSG Schools Block settlement is based on the national funding formula rates, but local authorities then allocate this funding to school budgets based on the local formula agreed with the schools forum.</p> <p>The Government has now launched a consultation on implementing a <i>direct</i> national funding formula; this means that individual school budgets would be set centrally and nationally without the application of any local formula. This is an important consultation which covers quite significant proposals, including flexibility around transferring funding to the high needs block, the role of indicative SEND budgets, growth and falling roles funding and premises funding.</p> <p>The Chair stressed the importance of responding to the consultation, which closes on 9th September. LA officers agreed that the Forum response should be separate from that of the LA. It was agreed that Forum members who wished to should send comments to the Chair who would collate a response at the beginning of the autumn term for submission by the deadline.</p>

<p>908</p>	<p>Growth Fund Report 2021/2022</p> <p>Tony Madden presented this report to inform Forum members of the Growth Fund outturn for 2021-22, provide a best indication of the outturn for the current year 2022-23 and the current projection for 2023-24.</p> <p>Tony Madden drew Forum members' attention to the presentation of primary place planning in three areas West, Central and East, which each have very different requirements and different scenarios. The West area has a significantly reduced birth rate, creating a surplus in all year groups; the central area is under mild pressure in some year groups, but with an increased surplus at Reception, while the East is full in all seven year groups. There is built capacity around Slough for this pressure but some schools have reduced their PANS and the LA doesn't necessarily have access to those places. However, the LA does not need any new schools at primary level.</p> <p>At secondary level there are the right number of schools, in the right places across the town. The peak demand is expected over the next two years for year seven and there is enough capacity at secondary level.</p> <p>Tony Madden confirmed there were no changes to the process for allocating funding through the growth fund. Criteria had been agreed in January 2022; the funding would be allocated based on bulge classes, expansion by form of entry, larger classes or numbers in excess of PAN, and new schools.</p> <p>The financial outturn for 2021-22 is £21,814. The list of schools qualifying for growth funding is reducing every year, with only two schools that qualify for permanent expansion funding in 2022-23, which are Westgate and Wexham. This is the last qualifying year for Westgate ; the final year for Wexham will be 2023-24. The main purpose of growth funding going forward is about contingencies and for bulge classes; there is pressure in many primary year groups, and the LA wants to hold some funding in reserve.</p> <p>For 2022-23 there is a DSG top slice of £950k as previously agreed by Forum. Tony Madden reminded Forum members that 2022-23 is a 'catch up' year as a result of the decision taken to align growth fund payments for academies with the academic year, with two commitments against the growth fund, as opposed to every other year having one. The forecast topslice for 2023-24 for next year is only £300,000.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Tony Madden for a clear presentation and asked Forum members to note the contents of the report. There were no comments or questions.</p> <p><i>Tony Madden left the meeting.</i></p>
<p>909</p>	<p>DSG Annual Report 2021/2022</p> <p>Steve Muldoon presented the main points of the provisional annual report on the 2021-22 DSG. The report remained provisional at this stage as some school census information required confirmation. Steve Muldoon pointed out the cumulative deficit of £20.6 million in April 2021, with a further £4.8 million through the year to then arrive at a £25.5 million deficit by March 2022. The predominant driver of the continued increases in the deficits is the High Needs block. In parallel with this is the DSG management plan which is being reviewed and discussed prior to an imminent submission to DLUHC</p> <p>Forum members' attention was drawn to the detail in the report regarding the variances between budgeted and actual for each of these school blocks. This included the drivers for the overspend in the high needs block, for example, an overspend of £1.1 million on independent special places, is the area that is of main concern.</p>

The report also showed projected maintained school balances; these were generally, with just a small number of schools carrying forward a deficit at the end of the year. Steve Muldoon reminded Forum members that schools in deficit should have a three year recovery plan agreed with the Council which sets out the school's plans to return to a surplus position. The three schools concerned did improve their position within the year and the LA will continue to work with them to make sure that this continues and they return to a surplus position.

The Chair thanked Steve Muldoon for the detailed report and asked for questions or comments on the DSG position as outlined in that report, noting that Forum had been kept well informed of the DSG position throughout the year.

Jamie Rockman observed that there is a large positive surplus in relation to post 16 learners and asked whether that is special or mainstream, and asked whether there was any adverse impact on the learners with SEND. The Chair advised that this should be taken away as a question for the LA to address and provide some more information.

There were no further questions.

910

DSG Management Plan

Johnny Kyriacou presented a brief recap and update on the DSG Management Plan with a supplementary agenda paper circulated prior to the meeting. It was well known that Slough has a very large cumulative deficit in the high needs block, possibly one of the highest in the country. All local authorities with deficits are required to have a management plan to address this situation. Because the Slough cumulative deficit is so high, the Council has been invited to be part of the DfE Safety Valve program; participation in the programme requires a credible plan to bring down the in year deficit, with the aim of reducing the deficit to zero within the next three to five years. If this is achieved, then the DfE would consider writing off the cumulative deficit and essentially allowing the LA to start again from zero. Form members were reminded that SEND services are under pressure following the outcome of the local area SEND inspection.

It was emphasised that the process is about efficiencies not cuts, ensuring that the LA is spending the money in the right way and in a prudent way. Over the next five years, the LA is looking to save around £7 million. There is a new SEND management team in place, decisions are being made more robustly, openly and transparently. This has resulted in savings of around £2.5 million, reducing the projected in-year deficit for 2022-23 from £7.5 million down to around £4.9m.

The supplementary agenda paper set out the broad areas being targeting for efficiencies, for example, independent non-maintained special schools, having a effective panel decisions, and looking at the commissioning of special services for young people with sensory impairments.

Johnny Kyriacou acknowledged that previously there had been a less robust approach to financial management within high needs, in addition to the strategic management of service; this is now changing. The key area where decisions are made is the SEND panel which is now is open to everybody who wants come and look at the process; this is intended to give confidence that young people are at the heart of the decision-making process and that finance is not the driver of the decisions. In terms top-up funding, the current model that was essentially good at the time of its implementation but now needs review.

The Chair thanked Johnny Kyriacou for the report and helpful summary of the area areas of focus, and invited questions or comments.

Jamie Rockman returned to the question asked earlier; what is the impact of the savings on the vulnerable young people? With predicted savings for post 16 about £2.7 million, there is concern about the impact that on the services provided for post 16 pupils; does the LA know anything about the impact, for example whether the NEET figures have increased for those with or without SEND?

Johnny Kyriacou confirmed that he couldn't answer this question right now but it should be raised at the next board meeting.

Neil Sykes expressed concern about the potential saving and asked whether this was accurate as placements have only recently been confirmed for post 16 SEND students.

Johnny Kyriacou responded by acknowledging that over the last year there had been a significant improvement in internal financial processes and the personnel that have been brought in. The position is as accurate as it can be at this point in time, but there are still issues that needs to be ironed out.

Neil Sykes confirmed that that was encouraging but still had some concerns because it was quite a considerable saving, and he suspect that would be significantly reduced when more information becomes available. Johnny Kyriacou confirmed that the LA would have a closer look at this.

The Chair thanked Steve Muldoon and his team for the production of this report and Johnny Kyriacou for taking Forum through a helpful summary of the areas under focus. He confirmed that the progress of the plan would be monitored by Forum a standing item in every meeting during the course of next year; although there is obvious interest in the actual savings members will be concerned about the potential impact and would welcome further comment from the LA on the impact on service delivery. Steve Muldoon suggested that with these concerns there ought to be quality impact assessment reports produced as part of the savings initiatives, and that these should align with how the overall Council budget savings are approached.

Steve Muldoon confirmed that the full DSG Management Plan would be made available to Forum members following agreement with the DfE.

There were no further questions.

911

High Needs Budget 2022 / 23 – Allocation of Centrally Retained Funds

Johnny Kyriacou presented the report setting out the allocation of centrally retained funds within the High Needs Block; this is funding retained by the local authority to carry out its functions in line with the guidance on the high needs block. He advised that some budgets have been reduced, which may have some impact on schools. One example of this is the “hard to place pupils” funding, which has reduced to £60k from a previous level of £220k and is likely to be reduced to zero by next year. The reason for this reduction is that it is not what the high needs funding is intended to be for; the LA and schools will need to work with each other to look at alternative funding sources if that work is to continue.

Funding for “Earlier Interventions” has been increased; this is to look at intervention initiatives so the LA would welcome groups or headteachers looking into the use of that fund; this is the fund to be used to look at early intervention and early prevention for children with special needs and disabilities, and to support children at risk of exclusion.

The Chair thanked Johnny Kyriacou for the report, noting that Forum doesn't have any decision making powers over the high needs centrally retained funds. Questions were invited.

	<p>Peter Collins asked about hard to place funding and the plan to reduce that ultimately to zero; what would this mean in terms of the rare but expensive occasions where there is a student, usually Year 11, where the outcome from FAP is commissioning of a place through the College, rather than placement in school, and which therefore needs to be paid for. The risk is that one or two secondary schools, through the fair access process for receiving a child, then end up picking up a really expensive bill in terms of provision that they may not have the in-year funds for. Johnny Kyriacou confirmed that essentially the high needs block money is supposed to be used for children at risk of exclusion or for children with SEND, and agreed to look at such scenarios to ensure there would be clarity in the future.</p>
912	<p>Update to the Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools</p> <p>Steve Muldoon confirmed that the paper presented set out a minor change to the current Scheme, raising the tendering threshold for schools from £10,000 to £25,000.</p> <p>The Chair noted that Maggie Waller was unable to attend this meeting but had sent in comments which were read out. These supported the proposal but asked that wording be included to emphasise that where schools still consider it to be appropriate to seek three quotes for less than £25,000 to ensure for value for money that they still do this. Steve Muldoon confirmed that certainly within the Council, there was still an expectation to get three quotes where there is not a formal tender process.</p> <p>Angela Mellish asked which year's scheme the change referred to and pointed out that it was difficult to find an up-to-date version on the Council website – or indeed anywhere else. Steve Muldoon confirmed that the change was to the current scheme, but that there would be a consultation in the autumn on any further changes proposed by the DfE. He agreed to check that the timeline for consultation was appropriate for the Forum agenda planning.</p>
913	<p>Task group update</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that the Forum had formal three task groups covering 5-16, early years and high needs. The membership and purpose of these groups was not clear to the new finance leads within the LA.</p> <p>The Chair agreed to consult with the LA outside the meeting with the intention of clarifying the remit of each group, and to bring revised terms of reference and membership lists to the October meeting.</p>
914	<p>Academies update</p> <p>The Chair noted that this standing item provides an opportunity to report on any changes of status of maintained schools. This is important to note as there are calculations that need to be done around the balance of numbers of pupils in maintained schools and nursery schools to ensure the appropriate numbers of members from each sector.</p> <p>Steve Muldoon confirmed that the LA was unaware of any proposed conversions to academies.</p>
915	<p>2022/23 Forward Agenda Plan</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that the draft forward agenda plan had been produced for the local authority for consideration and had been drawn up on the basis of the workflow in previous years. Six meetings were being provisionally scheduled for 2022-23 in line with the usual pattern.</p>
916	<p>Key Decision Log</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that the key decisions log had now been updated and covers the academic year 2021/22. The log contains brief details of all the decisions that have been made and will be updated after every meeting going forward.</p>

	Steve Muldoon asked whether there was an active action log to ensure actions from the meetings do not get overlooked and forgotten. The Chair confirmed that this is not something that Forum has had previously, but that this would be trialled with this meeting's minutes.
917	<p>Any Other Business (notified at start of meeting) No other business had been notified at the beginning of the meeting.</p> <p>The Chair reminded the Local Authority of the request to secure a permanent Clerk for the autumn, which was noted by Steve Muldoon.</p>

Key action log

Minute	Action	Responsibility
906	a) Nominations to be sought for primary and secondary academy representatives	Chair
907	a) Forum members to return comments on the National Funding Formula consultation to the Chair b) Consultation response to be completed by 9 th September	Forum members Chair
909	a) LA to report back on the impact of underspend in relation to post 16 learners with SEND.	Johnny Kyriacou
910	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.	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.	Johnny Kyriacou
912	a) LA to update the Scheme for Financing Schools.	Neil Butler
913	a) Clarification of the remit, terms of reference and membership of 5-16, EY and HNB task groups.	Chair
915	b) LA officers to consider forward agenda plan and advise Chair	Neil Butler
916	a) Update Key Decisions log b) Establish key actions list	Chair Chair
917	a) Secure a permanent clerk to the Forum	Steve Muldoon (or delegated officer)