

# Slough Schools Forum – Minutes of Meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023

**DRAFT MINUTES – for approval at meeting on 09.11.2023**

**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  
Jon Reekie, Phoenix Infants School  
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School  
Jamie Rockman, Haybrook College  
Maggie Waller, Holy Family Primary School  
Rhodri Bryant, The Langley Academy  
Neil Sykes, Arbour Vale School  
Emma Lister, Chalvey Early Years Centre

**Officers:** Neill Butler, Strategic Finance Manager, People (Children)  
Neil Hoskinson, Associate Director for Education and Inclusion  
Sarah Hockley, Interim Strategic Finance Manager, People (Children)

**Observer** N/A

**Apologies:** Gill Denham, Marish Primary School  
Angela Mellish, St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School  
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.

<b>957</b>	<b>Apologies</b> Received as from Gill Denham, Angela Mellish and Carol Pearce
<b>958</b>	<b>Notification of any other business</b> None
<b>959</b>	<b>Declarations of Interest</b> None
<b>960</b>	<b>Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 14 July 2023, (including matters arising and action log)</b> The minutes of previous meeting held on 14 <sup>th</sup> July 2023 were agreed as an accurate recollection of the previous meeting. There were no matters arising.
<b>961</b>	<b>Schools Forum Membership update</b> The Chair confirmed that colleagues whose terms of office were ending had been contacted to confirm whether they were happy to continue. The membership list had been updated, although technically remained provision for academy representatives as endorsement by the proprietors was required. The Chair noted an error in John Reekie's term of office which would be changed.  The Chair welcomed Rhodri Bryant, who has come forward to fill the vacant secondary academies representative. Rhodri will represent The Langley Academy, but as the CEO of the Arbib Trust, he also brings knowledge of the primary sector.

	<p>The Chair noted that there were still vacancies for a primary academies representative, and for a representative from the Windsor Forest Colleges group as a 16 to 19 Provider. The Chair agreed to contact the Windsor Forest group to remind them of the vacancy.</p>
<p><b>962</b></p>	<p><b>Update on National/Local Funding issues</b></p> <p>Neill Butler updated Forum members on the Teachers pay grant and the increase in teacher pay from the first of September. The increase is 6.8% for M1 and 6.5% for all other scale points; this will bring M1 up to £30,000 excluding any weightings in line with the government pledge from 2018 to ensure all qualified teachers would receive a minimum of £30k. This will be subsidised through a grant; for the period Sep 2023 through to Apr 2024, the grant will be paid in October, and will represent 7/12 of that period. The grant will then also be paid to all mainstream schools and academies for the financial year 24-25. This is because at this stage it will not be included in the National Funding Formula allocations. NB confirmed that academies would then get a further grant for the period Apr 2025 to August 2025.</p> <p>The Chair asked whether the government has published a methodology paper for this grant. NB confirmed that this had been done and that it outlines how the government is going to allocate the money to individual schools based on pupil numbers and lump sum.</p> <p>NB then updated Forum on the funding formula for 2024-2025. The provisional DSG for 24-25 has been announced, providing an increase of about £8.6 million in funding for Slough schools and academies which represents about 5.3% increase overall. Early modelling suggests that national funding formula factors can be maintained as in previous years and could also move 10% closer to applying the national factor for mobility. This is the one factor in Slough that isn't applied 100% to mainstream schools and academies. The modelling also indicates sufficient headroom within the allocation to go out to consultation on a 0.5% transfer between the schools block and other blocks.</p> <p>NB referred to the reinforced, autoclave, aerated concrete (RAAC) problems, and confirmed that only one school has been identified with this issue in Slough. Remedial work is being undertaken at the school at the moment with the intention of the full removal of RAAC in summer 2024. NH added that the main costs for this school are staffing and some equipment to cover revised lunch arrangements.</p> <p>NH commented that nationally there was unprecedented pressure on admissions; significant movement over the summer, and local authorities reporting high levels of in-year transfers. SBC received 800 applications in the initial 2 weeks leading up to September, and continues to receive over a hundred a week since then. NH confirmed that the LA is looking to increase schools up to their PAN in order to maximise funding levels.</p> <p>RB confirmed his full support for getting pupils into school, but pointed out that he had received a letter telling him to take an additional class because the school's PAN in year 6 is 90, when the school had capped numbers at 60 for the last 3 years. He questioned how a school can be expected to suddenly find a teacher and additional adults where this was not planned. NH accepted that but confirmed that the demand is unprecedented and has caught out a number of LAs with the movement in to the UK. LAs including SBC didn't plan for something they weren't expecting. RB emphasised that schools needed funding for these situations and that this discussion should continue outside the meeting.</p> <p>The Chair asked for clarification if this increased demand is outside the provision for growth fund this year. NH confirmed if schools were operating with 60 pupils in a year group while their PAN remained at 90 then this did not meet growth fund criteria. PC commented that as a member of the place planning committee, he did not think we should be in a position where a school has been asked to take 30 children unexpectedly. PC further noted that there had not been an emergency place planning committee meeting call to talk about that and look at the implications of this across the town. NH emphasised that there had been a lack of planning because the situation wasn't anticipated.</p>
<p><b>963</b></p>	<p><b>2022 / 2023 DSG Out-turn</b></p> <p>NB presented a high level summary of the 2022/23 DSG outturn. He noted that the LA had received £10.8 million in payment from the DfE as part of safety valve agreement. The deficit at the beginning of 2022-23 was £25.5 million, and the DfE has already written off £10.8 million of this by providing additional cash to the local authority. This means that the cumulative deficit at the end of 22-23 is £14.8 million with an actual in year deficit of almost £97k. However, there was still an overspend of about £800,000 in the high needs block last year, which was offset by an underspend in the schools and Early years blocks.</p>

	<p>The Chair asked whether the underspend in the schools block was related to the growth fund; NH confirmed this was the unneeded contingency. The Chair noted that underspend in the Growth Fund normally happens every year because contingency is not used; the underspend is then rolled forward to form part of the following year's growth fund. NB confirmed that this was correct.</p> <p>PC acknowledged that Forum members are aware of the pain that the safety valve has caused in terms of difficult decisions and to see the impact of that in terms of £10.8 million coming in and starting to 'see the tide turning' is very pleasing.</p> <p>NB confirmed he would bring further detail to the next meeting in relation to the 4 DSG blocks and where the underspend and overspends were.</p>
<p><b>964</b></p>	<p><b>2023/24 DSG and Safety Valve programme update</b></p> <p>NH confirmed that the first Safety Valve report had been presented to the DfE, and was now being brought to Schools Forum for information and comment. NB noted that the plan was showing about £2.8 million underspend for the key year which is in 2 years' time, however, this is largely wiped out by the project costs of outstanding EHC plans, estimated to be about £2.6m. A balance of £200k left with 2 years to go is not a strong position, so will have to be watched closely.</p> <p>NH noted that some young people placed into resource provision are probably going to need a special school in the future, and the LA is doing some work on that moving forward. Additionally, the LA is doing some internal work to look at the average funding to a maintained school and to a resource provision to make sure that that schools are not underfunded if they are taking pupils that are more complex.</p> <p>NH further advised that the LA is looking to make further savings within staffing and home school transport, looking at a number of cases where transport arrangements might have to be changed. Unlike most local authorities, the majority of Slough special school children go to one special school and they work with us very well in terms of transport.</p> <p>MW asked about the reference to a new banding matrix funding ready for implementation in March. Asking for clarification as to which area of the funding that applies to and what the process is in readiness for implementation. NH confirmed that it was already built in within the safety valve agreement as one of the things the LA was required to do and confirmed it will be across the board. MW asked if there is a planned consultation for this? NH confirmed that the LA would get a timetable out shortly.</p> <p>The Chair thanked NH and added that Forum will continue to have regular reports on the on the safety valve program and the usual monitoring of the DSG through the rest of this year as a standing item on every agenda.</p>
<p><b>965</b></p>	<p><b>2024/25 DSG Budget setting timetable</b></p> <p>NB referred to the proposed timetable for the setting of the 2024-25 DSG budget. The LA would be consulting with all mainstream schools and academies on the funding formula for 2024-25 and on the transfer of 0.5% out of the schools block in to the high needs block. Historically, we have transferred £100k from the high needs block into the central school services block. This is not needed any longer from 2024-25; part of the work undertaken for the Safety Valve identified £258k of spend that was being charged to the DSG that should have been charged to Slough's General Fund and has been amended for this year. SBC asked to remove the funding out of the DSG, which in effect is making a saving of £250k.</p> <p>Within the DSG safety valve plans, the 0.5% transfer from schools' block to the high needs block has been included on the advice of the DfE. Consultation with schools on block transfers has to be done each year; the consultation will take place for 4 weeks, and will be reported back to Schools Forum on the 9<sup>th</sup> November. Schools Forum need to consider responses when making the final decision.</p> <p>The authority pro forma tool (APT) is expected to be out in mid-December. The provisional DSG is announced normally about a week earlier. That is when the modelling would take place, and consultation with the 5-16 working group. Schools Forum is on 11<sup>th</sup> January, where the outcomes from that will be presented to Schools Forum. Political ratification is required by the 15<sup>th</sup> January, with the deadline to get the APT to the DfE is the 22nd January. Published budgets for mainstream schools will also include indicative budgets for 2025-26 and 2026-27. The Schools Forum meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> March will include approval of the Central School Services Block.</p>

	<p>NB advised the consultation would ask whether schools approved the 0.5% transfer, and how any headroom within the schools block should be allocated.</p> <p>The Chair asked where NB saw work of the 5 to 16 task group fitting in and how this would address the issue raised in last meeting, where it was agreed to look at the impact of the NFF rates on the primary/secondary funding ratio. After some discussion it was confirmed that this was about ensuring a thorough shared understanding amongst all the relevant parties across both phases of how that ratio is arrived at. JC proposed to liaise with NB outside the meeting to confirm when the 5-16 Task Group should meet.</p> <p>MW asked clarification that Slough is now at NFF rates for everything and is therefore aligned with the NFF. NB confirmed this was the case with the exception of the Mobility Factor.</p> <p>VH asked who is on the 5 to 16 Task Group. The Chair noted that the members were himself, JR, PC, MW, NM, and that there was effectively a vacancy for another primary colleague. VH confirmed that she would be happy to be involved, and this was endorsed by Forum members present.</p>
<b>966</b>	<p><b>Local School Improvement Fund update</b></p> <p>The Chair confirmed that the Local School Improvement Fund will now be delegated out to spend through the primary and secondary headteacher associations. There will be an allocation made for this year, and in due course a report back on how that is being spent.</p>
<b>967</b>	<p><b>Task Group update</b></p> <p>The Chair asked for confirmation from the LA about the status of the EY and High Needs Task Groups.</p> <p>NB confirmed that Early Years group is led by Trish Hamlin from the LA. The group will meet to discuss the early years DSG settlement. The main discussion points are around the split between core funding for early years children and base funding, and also the allocation to deprivation, which is one the only mandatory factor that we have to put an allocation to. The LA works with representatives from all providers on the allocation of the early years funding. The Chair asked what the Forum representation is on that group, specifically whether there is anybody from a primary school which receives EY funding? NB agreed to check this.</p> <p>Following some discussion about the oversight of High Needs expenditure, it was agreed that there was no need for a specific High Needs Task Group linked to Schools Forum. The LA has a number of strategic groups established or proposed with headteacher representation and along with discussion at the Partnership Board, there is reckoned to be sufficient representation from schools.</p>
<b>968</b>	<p><b>2023/2024 Forward Agenda Plan</b></p> <p>The Chair asked Forum members to note the forward agenda plan as a work in progress and that there would most likely be changes to agenda items going forward. Forum members were asked to note meeting date changes which had been necessary due to clashes with phase-specific meetings. .</p>
<b>969</b>	<p><b>Key Decisions Log</b></p> <p>Log will be updated after meeting, then circulated with the minutes.</p>
<b>970.</b>	<p><b>Any other business</b></p> <p>The Chair thanked NH and NB for their preparatory work and all the discussions that have gone on behind the scenes to get Forum processes back on track this year, with meetings scheduled at the right times with the right agenda in place. The Chair also welcomed Sarah Hockly as Neill Butler's replacement and wished her well during the handover period.</p>