

Slough Schools Forum – Minutes of Meeting held on 11 January 2024

DRAFT MINUTES – for approval at meeting on 13 March 2024

Present: John Constable, Langley Grammar School (Chair)
Ben Bausor, Always Growing Ltd
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
Emma Lister, Chalvey Early Years Centre
Gill Denham, Marish Primary School
Angela Mellish, St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School
Valerie Harffey, Ryvers School
Navroop Mehat, Wexham Court Primary School
Neil Sykes, Arbour Vale School

Officers: Neil Hoskinson, Associate Director for Education and Inclusion
Sarah Hockley, Interim Strategic Finance Manager, People (Children)
Tony Madden, Development Manager
Len Brazier – SBC Send Lead

Observer: Angela Mumford, Littledown School
Cllr Puja Bedi, Lead Member for Education & Children's Services

Apologies: Sue Butcher, Director of Children's Services
Peter Collins, Slough & Eton Church of England Business and Enterprise College
Claire Fletcher, Penwood 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.

986	Apologies Received as from Sue Butcher, Peter Collins and Claire Fletcher.
987	Notification of any other business None
988	Declarations of Interest None
989	Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising The minutes of previous meeting held on 9 November were agreed as an accurate recollection of the previous meeting. There were no matters arising.
990	Schools Forum Membership update The Chair recorded thanks to Carol Pearce who has resigned from Forum. Clare Fletcher, Headteacher at Penwood School is replacing Carol as a maintained schools representative. The Chair noted that there is still a vacancy for an academies member within the primary phase and would refer this back to SPHA. MW noted the importance of maintaining governor representation on Forum. The Chair noted that there were a number of members whose terms officially ended on 31 st December 2023, and would write to ask if they were happy to have their term of office extended for another 2 years.

<p>991</p>	<p>Local and National Funding Update/Announcements</p> <p>SH commented that she had looked through ESFA updates for updates, which were minimal. DSG allocations were announced in December for both the schools and early years blocks, with subsequent work on these blocks at LA level to be discussed later in the agenda.</p> <p>A High Needs place number change report was completed in November; this feeds into the high needs funding with a high need place notification outcome expected in mid or late January.</p> <p>Pupil premium rates have been announced for 2024-25. These are paid quarterly either to the local authority for the maintained schools, or directly to academies, special schools and alternative provision. There are slight increases but no significant changes. Primary rate has increased from £1,455 to £1,480, secondary from £1,035 to £1,050, and previously looked after children from £2,530 to £2,570 across phases.</p> <p>SH commended on the National Tutoring Programme, noting that nationally a significant proportion of NTP grant was clawed back as unused. The ESFA was looking to run webinars to support schools to make the most of their funding.</p>
<p>992</p>	<p>Safety Valve Programme</p> <p>NH confirmed that he had prepared a presentation for the SEND Partnership Board with some background information which would provide additional detail for these headlines and would be sent to the Chair for distribution.</p> <p>NH reminded Forum members of the predicted High Needs deficit of £27m at the end of 22-23 on which entry into the safety valve agreement with the DfE was predicated. The DfE had agreed to pay £27 million pounds of additional funding over a 5 year period subject to certain conditions and the elimination of the in-year deficit.</p> <p>The key year is 2024-25, with an expectation of a balanced in-year budget. The safety valve agreement then suggests a positive balance and a surplus of £400,000 in 2025-26 which will contribute to the cumulative deficit reduction. Additional funding from the DfE would then eliminate the cumulative deficit by 2026-27. The LA received the first tranche of funding £10.8 million; looking forward, further payments are expected following a defined schedule. The conditions within the safety valve agreement focus on dealing with demand for EHCP provision, independent special school places, post 16 provision, ARPs in schools and all alternative provision. Progress in these areas against the agreement is RAG rated – all five areas were rated green following reviews in September and December.</p> <p>There are then 5 identified risks which are around escalating cost pressures, workforce, reputation, legal and economic. The only area where the LA is currently not RAG-rating as green is legal because of the risk of a backlog of complaints about timescale of EHCP approval escalating to tribunal level.</p> <p>The Chair thanked NH and commented that it is encouraging to hear that things are progressing according to plan. There were no immediate questions from Forum members.</p>
<p>993</p>	<p>Resource Provision & AP Place Commissioning</p> <p>The Chair welcomed Len Brazier as SEND Commissioner and current Head of SEND to give a verbal report on the present position with ARPs, the possible movement to specialist resource provision and designated units, and an update on the position of numbers for 2024-25.</p> <p>LB noted that in September 2022 the total number of places in the resource bases across nursery, primary and secondary, was 292. In September 2023, that was reduced to 252. The safety valve agreement requires the LA to ensure that it has the right support in place, which means looking at specialist resource provision, wider provision within mainstream schools, and then designated units as the most complex provisions. This provision is being discussed by the 0-25 SEND Sufficiency working group which includes a number of headteachers from both primary and secondary phases. LB expressed thanks to the headteachers for contributing to a discussion which he is aware has been ongoing for a long time.</p> <p>LB gave an example of the level of discussion, noting that one way of moving forward and rationalising the provision across the authority to meet the needs coming through would be to focus on aligning provision with the four categories of need in the code. This would mean primary SRPs focused on cognition and learning, communication, interaction, SEMH and sensory, with further RPs matching this provision in</p>

	<p>secondary. DUs would offer more complex provision, but ensuring there is a follow-through from primary through to secondary.</p> <p>LB commented on the place planning process, noting that there could be a shortfall of around 20 places in specialist provision in September 2024. There is work to do to meet the need within to avoid significant costs associated with out-of-borough provision.</p> <p>NM asked for a clearer timeline on when the LA was expecting thinking to have a conclusion around resource basis. LB confirmed that nothing will change overnight and it wouldn't be this academic year. NM asked if LB has spoken to all schools that have a resource base? LB confirmed that this wasn't yet the case.</p> <p>NM asked when schools would be consulted on the plans. LB confirmed that he didn't know yet. NM advised that she wanted to be able to report back that there has been some movement made, but also wanted to highlight that although there are 22 pupils known to the LA that need to have a specialist provision, there will be others in primary schools that also need that specialist provision; these will be pupils where the school is still trying to get EHCP approval. LB confirmed he would be happy to provide a written answer on the timescale for consultation outside the meeting.</p> <p>NH noted that a revised joint commissioning strategy needs to go to cabinet by the end of the financial year, which means being drafted by early February. This will set out the principles behind revised joint commissioning, looking at places for 2025, 2026 and 2027.</p>
<p>994.</p>	<p>Growth Fund</p> <p>TM introduced the item on the 2024-25 Growth Fund, confirming that the paper is shared in January every year to set out the criteria that should be applied for allocation of the growth fund and the top slice that the LA is recommending should be allocated.</p> <p>TM noted the demographic changes which affected the demand on Growth Fund. Following significant growth in recent years, the birth rate has been dropping in the west area, leading to surplus primary capacity in the west. However, there is significant in-year pressure in the central and east areas, particularly with higher primary year groups. Two bulge classes have been opened this year already at Marish and Godolphin Junior, and Ryvers School have increased class sizes since April 2023. Secondary schools are at the peak of demand for year 7. All Year 7 pupils have got a school place, and there are some pressures in upper year groups. Most of the available capacity is at Grove Academy, with some also at Wexham. Places are sufficient for future demand.</p> <p>TM noted the current thinking to use bulge classes and increased class sizes rather than proposing full form-of-entry expansions. However, the LA would be seeking expressions of interests from schools that might want to expand by whole or partial forms of entry. TM drew members' attention to the DfE criteria for the growth fund, and also commented that falling roles funding was not judged to be required at this point. No changes were being proposed to the criteria for accessing growth funding, including the second year of support for academies because of the different financial year and lagged funding mechanism.</p> <p>Although there is expected to be an underspend on 2023-24, likely to be around £120k, this is absorbed into the DSG because of the overall deficit. TM confirmed that the recommendation was therefore for a top slice from Schools Block of £500k in 2024-25. This included commitments to bulge of around £91,000, and a high contingency sum of £409,000. This is a higher contingency there than we would normally have, and potentially covers 6 in-year primary classes.</p> <p>The Chair thanked TM for a very detailed and comprehensive presentation and asked for any questions or comments. JoR queried the amount of the contingency and asked for some further comment from TM on why it was thought to be necessary. TM noted that that the overall allocation requested was relatively low compared to previous years, so the percentage looks high, and further commented that given that the funding for a secondary class would be around £150,000-£160,000, the level was felt to be reasonable given the pressure we're under and the number of classes we may need. A number of colleagues have met as part of the place planning working group; the initial recommendation is for 4 additional classes on top of what has already been opened, which use the whole contingency if all opened immediately.</p> <p>MW asked what happens to the previous year's underspend being absorbed into the DSG why is doesn't simply offset next year. SH advised that for the DSG and for all blocks, any overspend goes into a ring-fenced reserve, not accessible to SBC for general purposes. Almost the only element in the schools block which goes into the schools block DSG reserve is growth fund, because everything else is either transferred</p>

	<p>to another block or paid to schools. SH advised that she wanted to check movement in and out of this reserve, and the Chair agreed that they would pick this issue up outside the meeting.</p> <p>The Chair proposed that Forum approve the criteria as they are unchanged, and also endorse the £500k top slice for 2024-25. This was agreed by Form members.</p>
<p>995</p>	<p>Proposal for AP Place Funding 2024/2025</p> <p>The Chair asked Jamie Rockman (JR) summarise for his proposal.</p> <p>JR noted that, as part of the DSG Management plan and safety valve programme, funding for alternative provision and particularly preventative alternative provision places has been reduced in Slough over the last few years, with an impact at secondary level more than primary. Schools recognise that the local authority doesn't have a statutory duty to fund preventative alternative provision. However, schools still require that provision to support their young people and try to prevent permanent exclusions across the town, which obviously would have an adverse effect on the funding of statutory provisions. Without preventative alternative provision, it is very likely that permanent exclusions will increase. That burden tends to fall on a small number of schools both at primary and secondary level. The idea behind proposal was to try and collectively fund and develop a preventative alternative provision across Slough which would support all schools across the town as and when they need it, and trying to ensure that all schools are contributing at some point in order to build and develop that system.</p> <p>The Chair thanked JR and confirmed that the proposal had been discussed extensively in the Slough Secondary Headteacher's meeting. He confirmed that the proposal from JR was for an additional top slice of £150k pounds from the 2024-25 schools block to support these provisions, in other words, to spread the cost of the additional provision out amongst all schools.</p> <p>The Chair noted that the 5-16 task group had discussed this at some length in a meeting with SH the previous day; the conclusion was that the group had been very supportive of the principles, but could not see a mechanism in the current version of the formula to actually allocate the funding, primarily due to the tightening of criteria around how you can use money. With this being the case, the purpose of this discussion now was understand what Forum members thought about the principle of trying to use schools block funding to support non-statutory provision, and how pressure could be applied to the DfE to allow this.</p> <p>MW confirmed the detailed discussion from the Task Group and the absolute support for the principle of collaborative or collective funding, as although non-statutory, this element of preventative provision is potentially so powerful in avoiding permanent exclusion. However, the inability to guarantee the funding because of the lack of a mechanism through the formula means that that there is less staffing stability for the provider organization.</p> <p>VH confirmed the support within the Task Group, and the interest in collaborative funding through top slice. NM confirmed it was a positive discussion and suggested that the right approach might be to go to the DfE commissioners and really push them to see how preventative AP funding could be secured.</p> <p>SH confirmed her support for the principles of this, and that by doing so there was a potential for saving long-term funds. However, the schools block funding methodology does not have a way in which this could happen. The only way to top slice the schools block, apart from to fund growth, is to transfer to another block. The most appropriate way of putting this funding somewhere for this purpose would be to put it to the high needs block. However, the issues is the level of attention given to the high needs block because of the deficit, and the DfE Commissioners position that the high neds block can only fund statutory services.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Sarah and advised that even if there were a way of transferring the funding, or putting some sort of collaborative arrangement in place to fund, there was insufficient time given the deadline for APT submission in mid-January. The Chair suggested trying to put some pressure on the Commissioners to come up with a mechanism, and also for Forum to start exploring what we might be possible for 2025-26 so that the proper proposal could be put in place.</p> <p>RB commented that he agreed with the principles but was concerned about what would happen to young people if an alternative model cannot be developed.</p> <p>The Chair summarised the Forum position as being very supportive of the principle of the proposal for collaborative funding of non-statutory alternative provision from the schools block, and beginning willing to press the Commissioners for help in finding a way to move this forward.</p>

<p>996</p>	<p>DSG Schools Block 2024/2025</p> <p>The Chair introduced this item by commending the significant amount of work done by SH and colleagues in the local authority in a very short space of time. The DfE had published the APT later than expected while keeping the same deadline for return. There have been a number of “technical issues” within the structure of the NFF this year, and some changes which had been more challenging to work through.</p> <p>The Chair referred to the meeting of the 5-16 Task Group which had been held the previous day, where the LA proposals had been subject to a significant level of scrutiny and discussion. Forum members were reminded of the powers of Forum in relation to the schools block, which was to comment on the formula proposals and make recommendations to the LA, who retained the decision-making authority.</p> <p>SH noted the majority of NFF factors were kept at the mid-point of the allowable range. Mobility and split site factors were kept at the lower end of the range. A significant change for 2024-25 was to bring the payments for split sites fully within the formula. Payments comprise a base factor for each additional site, and a factor is based on the distance from the main school; the effect is to raise the funding to £84k per additional site, compared to the local level of £34k in previous years. Slough has two schools with split sites, Claycotts and Langley Hall Primary Academy; in 2023-24 each school received £34k for its additional site. LPHA has had two further sites approved by the DfE and therefore receives a significantly higher level of funding than in previous years. The total allocation through the split site factor has increased from £68k in 2023-24 to £305k in 2024-25, reducing the headroom available for distribution to all schools. After applying the NFF based on revised census numbers, and including the £500k growth fund allocation, the remaining headroom level was £0.623m - significantly lower than anticipated at the December Forum.</p> <p>The Chair asked SH to confirm that the split site issue was out of our control because the DfE have changed the criteria and schools can have additional sites directly approved by the DfE. SH confirmed that the information is pre-populated on the APT. SH confirmed she had raised a query with the DfE who had confirmed the approval of the additional sites. The Chair advised that there had been significant discussion about this issue within the 5-16 Task Group and had asked SH to raise a further query with the DfE to ensure that all the criteria for attracting split site funding were being properly met.</p> <p>The Chair summarised the 5-16 Task Group discussion, noting the recommendation to agree the LA proposals for the local formula and endorse the distribution of the remaining headroom through basic entitlement. The Task Group recognised the need to review the position on mobility, which historically has been a factor that was thought not to target the right pupils in the right schools.</p> <p>SH also asked Forum to confirm the November 2023 provisional decision to transfer 0.5% from the schools block to the high needs block. SH confirmed that her understanding was that the additional transfer of £100k to the CSSB which had been made in previous years had not been requested and the assumption was that it was not required. If it proved to be necessary because of a mistake having been made, the £100k would be taken from the 0.5% transfer, with the balance transferring to the high needs block.</p> <p>Forum members therefore confirmed the November 2023 provisional decision to transfer 0.5% to the high needs block, and endorsed the local authority's proposals for the 2024-25 local formula and the distribution of schools block headroom through basic entitlement.</p>
<p>997</p>	<p>Early Years Block 2024/2025</p> <p>The Chair introduced the Early Years block paper which set out the conclusion of the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) modelling following the outcome of the consultation with the EY Task Group. Forum was asked to endorse Slough's Early Years Funding Formula for 2024-25 by noting the conclusions of the work to develop the 2024-25 EYNFF funding model and associated budget development, and the LA recommendation to implement option 2 as per the outcome of the Early Years Task Group.</p> <p>BB commented that the LA had done a fantastic job here of producing a paper with a high level of clarity about the rationale behind the decision-making process. The Chair noted that it was encouraging to hear about the good work going on in the EY sector and the management of finances around early years.</p> <p>Forum members noted the contents of the report and endorsed the decisions made</p>
<p>998</p>	<p>2022/23 Forward Agenda Plan</p> <p>The Chair directed Forum members to the forward agenda for the remaining meetings of the academic year, and noted this would be updated prior to the next meeting in March.</p>

999	Key Decisions Log The Chair directed members to the log and noted this would be updated following this meeting.
1000	Any Other Business (notified at start of meeting) None

DRAFT