

## Minutes of Schools' Forum Meeting

June 27, 2019

### Present

Jo Budge – Head Teacher for Blagdon/Caversham/New Bridge Nurseries, Jessica Wall – Governor for Caversham & New Bridge, Ita McGullion – Manager of Kennet Day Nursery, John Cosgrove – Head Teacher of Christ the King, Peter Kayes – Governor at the Ridgeway (Chair), Richard Rolfe – Governor at Micklands, Ann McDonnell – Business Manager of Blessed Hugh Faringdon, Isabelle Sandy – Business Manager of Kendrick, Ashley Robson – Head Teacher of Reading School, Rachel Cave – Head Teacher of Highdown, Ali McNamara - NEU

### Apologies

Robert Howell – Head Teacher of Alfred Sutton, Justine McMinn – Head Teacher of E P Collier, Cathy Doberska – Head Teacher of English Martyrs, Tonia Crossman – Head Teacher of Emmer Green, Karen Edwards – Head Teacher of The Heights, Steve Butler – Head Teacher of Meadow Park, Simon Utley – Head Teacher of Blessed Hugh Faringdon, Annal Nayyar – Finance Director of Bayliss Trust (Reading Girls), Tracey Green – The Avenue Finance Director, Mandy Wilton – Head Teacher of Cranbury College.

### In attendance

Cllr Ashley Pearce – Lead Member for Education, Mark Fowler – Interim Director of Education, Claire White – Interim Education & Schools Business Partner, Vanessa Hurdle – Minute Taker, Clare Warren – School Support Lead, Richard Pearce – Head Teacher of Churchend.

#	Item	Notes
1	Welcome and apologies	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.  Apologies were noted.
2	Minutes of the meeting held on 14 <sup>th</sup> March 2019	Minutes were agreed from 14th March 2019.  Ali McNamara noted that the minutes cited her as being from Unison rather than the NEU.  Matters arising: The Director of Education post has now been filled. Dr Kate Reynolds will start in September '19.
3	Schools' Forum Membership Update –	It was confirmed that there are two vacancies on the Schools' Forum – one for academy primaries and the other for

	confirmation of representation	<p>maintained special schools.</p> <p>Membership of the Forum to be discussed further under the next item on the agenda.</p>
4	Schools' Forum constitution/terms of reference	<p>Claire White presented.</p> <p>Claire White explained that she had not been able to find a copy of the Constitution for the Schools' Forum.</p> <p>It is good practice to have a Constitution, which should consist of the following three parts:</p> <p>Terms of Reference Membership Procedures e.g. voting</p> <p>The membership of the Forum is important and should be reviewed annually. This would ensure that it meets the statutory requirements for membership. Maintained primary schools, maintained secondary schools, and academies should be proportionately represented. Representation for academy schools does not need to be split between primary and secondary.</p> <p>Table 1 cites the current representation of the Forum and a proposed revision to the membership breakdown, whilst Table 2 provides percentage split based on pupil numbers. Based on the January 2019 census, there are currently more pupils in the primary sector.</p> <p>It was queried if proportional representation had to be so strict. As Reading only has one maintained secondary school, this school has to have representation on the Forum. It is recommended that to achieve a more accurate balance, the number of academy members is reduced from eight to six. In order to achieve this, the primary academy vacancy would be removed. The academy sector could then be represented by two primary members and four secondary members. This would require one of the current secondary members to step down.</p> <p>Secondary academies have already discussed this issue. They were advised to discuss the matter further and to be aware that in time secondary schools will require more representation as their numbers increase. They should consult with all the academies and determine their membership before the next meeting in October. Whatever they decide will be accepted by the Forum. It was noted that any member, who stands down, could still attend as an observer or substitute.</p>

		<p>It was suggested that primary governors are under-represented and that the number should be increased from two to three.</p> <p>There is currently no member from the non-schools 16-19 provision, which should be addressed. A member will be sought from this sector, from Reading College or the Post-16 Partnership Forum. Ita McGullion questioned why a non-school representative was needed, rather than someone from a school. Peter Kayes confirmed that pupils in sixth forms will already be represented by the secondary members. Mark Fowler added that there are a wide range of post 16 providers and it was felt that this addition would add to the knowledge base.</p> <p>Terms of Office – It was suggested that all representatives should be members for three years. Previously it has been one year for Head Teachers and four for governors.</p> <p>Membership of the Schools’ Forum will continue to be reviewed annually. Although there had been no Constitution, the Forum had been meeting all regulations. The ESFA has been scrutinising Schools’ Forums across the country. In particular, the following areas have been looked at: membership, minutes, attendance lists, whether quorate, website – showing dates of meetings and the minutes. Reading’s School Forum complies fully with these expectations. The ESFA can also attend meetings if they wish.</p> <p><b>The Constitution and membership for 2019/20 academic year was approved.</b></p> <p><b>Actions:</b>  <b>Academies to determine their membership and advise the school forum clerk before the next meeting in October.</b></p> <p><b>Mark Fowler to ask the Post-16 Partnership Forum to provide a representative for the non-school post-16 position.</b></p> <p><b>A primary Governor be sought to fill the new maintained primary school position.</b></p>
5	DSG outturn 2018/19 and DSG deficit recovery	<p>Claire White and Mark Fowler presented.</p> <p>The overall position at the end of 2018/19 is a carry forward deficit of £1.6m. The previous budget monitoring report presented to the Schools’ Forum in month 11 showed a £1.794m deficit. This also compares favourably against a deficit of £2.8m at the end of 2017/18.</p>

The deficit is split between four different funding blocks – schools, central school services, early years and high needs. The deficit falls in the high needs block and is offset by underspends in other blocks.

#### Schools Block

The Schools Block was underspent by £273k. £196k of this underspend has already been earmarked for the growth fund in 2019/20, which has a shortfall. There is also a £40k underspend against the equality service as this service ceased in August 2018. It is intended to refund those schools, which paid into this service.

The remaining £37k will also be added to the 19/20 growth fund.

#### Central Schools Services Block

There were no variances in this block.

#### Early Years Block

It was already budgeted that this block would underspend. The position at the end of 18/19 was an underspend of £607k, £241k more than expected. This £241k will be put towards the high needs block deficit. £366k will be carried forward within the early years block towards the 2019/20 budget and contingency.

#### High Needs Block

This block showed an end of year deficit of £2.48m, a reduction of £0.376m from the deficit brought forward. The majority of the overspending is due to top-up funding. The number of pupils receiving top-up funding increased by 10% during the financial year.

Reading is now required to submit a Deficit Recovery Plan to the ESFA. This has happened previously, but is now done more formally and for deficits greater than 1% of the DSG allocation.

A five year Recovery Plan has been produced. Using this plan, the deficit will increase slightly, but will then start to drop from 2021/22. The number of places will continue to rise but the average cost of places should decrease as Reading develops more of its own provision. This includes encouraging inclusion in mainstream schools. Commissioning continues to be strengthened. Someone is currently in post working on this.

A further 25 high needs places have been identified. Blessed Hugh Faringdon will be opening a new unit in July 2019. It is still intended that the new free school will open in 2020/21.

		<p>Two further resource units have also been proposed. John Cosgrove queried whether they will still open. It has not been established where they will be situated yet. One is required in the north part of the borough. They will not open before 2020/21. This will place more pressure on Blessed Hugh Faringdon or the use of out of borough places. It was felt that this matter should be addressed urgently and that the borough needs a secondary resource.</p> <p>Top-ups are still lower than in Wokingham or West Berks for autistic pupils. Places are expected to increase but not the amount of the top-up itself. Top-up funding is currently being reviewed. It has been proposed that there will be two levels of top-up in resources. In 19/20 the number of resource places will increase by five and then by ten in subsequent years. Reading has the final decision on how top-ups are dealt with. If they prove to be a challenge for the current funding level then the Schools' Forum will need to review the situation. It is likely that there will be a paper on this at the next Schools' Forum meeting.</p> <p><b>The overall carry forward of £1.6m deficit was agreed, including the proposed distribution/use of the carry forward per funding block.</b></p> <p><b>The Deficit Recovery Plan was agreed</b></p>
6	DSG budget 2019/2020	<p>Claire White presented.</p> <p>The DSG is not a fixed allocation for the year. The next update on the high needs and early year's allocations will be received in July. The original budget was based on the LAs own estimate. It will need to be monitored. Claire White to update the Forum at the meeting in October 2019.</p> <p>Table 2 details the breakdown of the allocation of the expected £76m DSG Funding between the four blocks. This shows that the original budget expected a deficit of £1.6m.</p> <p>The Growth Fund had been set for those classes that are expanding. Three secondary schools have now agreed to take a 'bulge' class. This will lead to an overspend in this area. There is no contingency funding in place.</p> <p><u>Early Years Block</u> – A contingency is needed for this block as it is difficult to make a reasonable forecast. Both funding and expenditure are based on the actual take up of places at a future date.</p>

		<p>No announcement has been made by the Government on the funding for nurseries. The current lump sum that nurseries receive is due to cease at the end of the summer term 2020.</p> <p><u>High Needs Block</u> – The Recovery Plan will needs to be monitored and reported at each meeting of the Schools’ Forum.</p> <p>The funding for 2020/21 will probably not be announced until Autumn 2019. It is highly unlikely that there will be National Formula Funding in the next few years.</p> <p><b>The DSG budget and pressures for 2019/20 was noted.</b></p>
7	SEND Strategy Update	<p>Mark Fowler gave a verbal report.</p> <p>There are five elements to the SEND Strategy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Data and Information to inform decision making The main reason for this group is the development of comprehensive Early Years data to inform planning and decision making. This is now very well-developed and the final draft will go to the SEND Strategy Board in July.</li> <li>2. Early Identification through to provision This group has a wide range of members. Whilst co-production at a strategic level has significantly improved, more work needs to be done at the operational level. Actions are being implemented to improve the process of listening to the views of children and families, and also involving them in the next stages. Training is being developed and the uptake of this from schools and other establishments is being monitored.</li> <li>3. Improving Emotional Wellbeing This area is concerned with the implementation of the Therapeutic Thinking Schools approach and the Trauma Informed Approach, as well as the Schools Link project next stage of implementation. It will ensure that information and the offer is co-ordinated with regards to supporting improved emotional wellbeing and mental health. The training and support for this is being very well received by schools.</li> <li>4. Preparing for Adulthood An Approaching Adulthood Policy has been developed and</li> </ol>

		<p>approved. The aim of this policy is to enable services to work together to identify early enough those children and young people who may need support to prepare for adulthood. The Policy has been produced using the experiences of young people and their families, who have already gone through this transition period. A Multi-Agency Approaching Adulthood Panel has been formed, which is responsible for identifying and monitoring those children and teenagers who may require continuing support as they enter adulthood.</p> <p>5. Review of Short Breaks Provision</p> <p>The group has been building on provision to support the offer, and now has good bonds with the Parks, Leisure and Culture sections. The Avenue School has greatly increased their offer, as well as the accessibility of their site for other clubs and users. The aim is to reduce the need for families to access higher cost Short Breaks.</p> <p><b>The updates to the SEND strategy were noted.</b></p>
8.	<p><b>Maintained School balances 2018/19</b></p>	<p>Clare Warren presented.</p> <p>School balances have increased from £1,951k to £2,245k. This is because schools have been more prudent in their spending due to uncertainty over funding levels and increasing staffing costs. A number of LAs in the south east are reporting an increase in balances.</p> <p>Eight schools ended 18/19 in deficit. St Anne’s Primary had the largest deficit. The school has now got a new Head Teacher and current budget monitoring is showing that the school’s financial position is improving. All of the other schools with deficit balances are being monitored and will be offered plans to improve their situation. The EFSA has offered to help nominated schools.</p> <p><b>The end of year school balances were noted.</b></p>
9.	<p><b>Maintained School budgets/deficits 2019/20</b></p>	<p>Clare Warren presented.</p> <p>Schools provide the LA with a three year budget plan. The current increase in teacher pensions is being funded for the first year, but the assumption is not after that. Schools are expecting to see a reduction in their surplus balances.</p> <p>Schools have queried whether it is up to the Schools’ Forum to address school balances/reserves. Up until October 2018 the</p>

		<p>Schools' Forum could clawback anything over 5% for primary schools and 8% for secondary schools, although to date the Forum had chosen not to do so as schools when asked had justified the reason for their balances and how they intended to use them. However, it was felt that there was an inconsistency in the regulations in this regard as academies could retain their full balance and needed to ensure they had an adequate level of reserves. It was felt that the same was true for the maintained schools.</p> <p>It was suggested that school budgets could be reviewed and compared to the schools' outturns. This would give an indication as to whether the balance was planned or 'accidental'.</p> <p>Six schools have set a deficit budget, and a strategy for schools in financial difficulty has been put in place.</p> <p><b>The 2019/20 school budgets and the strategy for schools in financial difficulty were noted.</b></p> <p><b>Actions:</b>  <b>To bring back a report in the Autumn showing schools' three year budget plans.</b></p>
<p><b>10.</b></p>	<p><b>Agenda Items For Future Meetings</b></p>	<p>The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2019 (5pm) at the Civic Centre – Council Chambers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DSG budget setting strategy for 2020/21</li> <li>• Initial proposals for school funding formula for 2020/21</li> <li>• High needs strategy update</li> <li>• Budget monitoring 2019/20 month 6</li> </ul>
<p><b>11.</b></p>	<p><b>Any Other Business</b></p>	<p>The issue of primary school admissions was discussed. As primary pupil numbers decrease, this means that many schools are not filling their reception classes as they had in the past. It had been questioned whether there should be a special funding arrangement in place for any unforeseen pressures. This can only be dealt with through the de-delegation of funds for schools in financial difficulty which is an annual decision by the Schools' Forum, and will next be discussed in the Autumn. For the 2019/20 financial year this had been rejected by the Forum.</p> <p>This should not be confused with schools receiving funding from the Growth Fund for bulge classes which are coming to an end. Schools need to revert back to their original structure</p>



		<p>and make staffing adjustments accordingly. Maintained schools receive the funding for an additional 7 months after the additional bulge class has ended to support any necessary changes.</p> <p>The meeting closed at 18.40</p>
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