

Minutes of Schools' Forum Meeting

2nd July 2020

Present

Jo Budge – Executive Head Teacher of Reading Early Years Schools Federation; Julia Cottee, Governor at Reading Early Years Schools Federation; Justine McMinn – Head Teacher of E P Collier; Cathy Doberska – Head Teacher of English Martyrs; Sarah Bernito – Head Teacher of St Annes; Peter Kayes – Governor at the Ridgeway (Chair); Dani Hall, Co-Chair of the Federation between Oxford Road Community School & Wilson School; Simon Utley – Head Teacher of Blessed Hugh Faringdon; Jane Brown – Business Manager of Church End School; Isabelle Sandy – Business Manager of Kendrick; Ita McGullion – Manager of Kennet Day Nursery.

Apologies

Robert Howell – Head Teacher of Alfred Sutton; Tonia Crossman – Head Teacher of Emmer Green; Richard Rolfe – Governor at Micklands; Karen Edwards – Head Teacher of The Heights; Richard Pearse – Head Teacher of Church End; David Littlemore – Head Teacher of Prospect; Rachel Cave – Head Teacher of Highdown ; Annal Nayyar – Finance Director of Bayliss Trust (Reading Girls); Lee Smith – Head Teacher of Holy Brook; Symon Cooke - Head Teacher of The Avenue; Mandy Wilton – Head Teacher of Cranbury; Alison McNamara – NEU; Ben Sims – Reading College; Steven Davies – Strategic Business Partner; Deborah Glassbrook - Director of Children's Social Care; Clare Warren – School Support Lead.

In attendance

Cllr Ashley Pearce – Lead Member for Education; Kate Reynolds, Director of Education & Research; Claire White – Schools & DSG Business Partner; Deborah Hunter – Head of SEND; Ann McDonnell – Business Manager of Blessed Hugh Faringdon; Andrea Latheron-Cassule – Funding Stakeholder Engagement Team, ESFA; Siobhan Egan – Service Manager IT & Data Intelligence; Deborah Talbot – minute taker.

#	Item	Notes
1	Welcome and apologies	<p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting including new members. Introductions were made. Welcome to the Andrea Latheron-Cassule as observer from ESFA.</p> <p>Siobhan Egan read out the protocol for the virtual meeting.</p> <p>Apologies were noted.</p>

2	Minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2020	<p>Minutes were circulated and agreed as an accurate record of the meeting from the 12 March 2020.</p> <p>Matters arising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early Years Pupil premium claims – If providers were having difficulties, they were to contact Early Years Team who would help them go through it. There has been no approach to Early Years at present. - Speech and Language contract – it was raised that number of schools did not feel they were getting the support they should be getting from this contract. CD & DH to update. DH confirmed that she had spoken to the commissioner from the CCG and Rebecca Gurney, the Head of that service and looked again at the number of sessions available to each school and a further meeting is to take place to look at commissioning further support particularly in the resource bases. South Reading schools to contact the speech and language therapist directly. Please contact Deb Hunter if problems persist. - The noxious fumes from the fire in Tilehurst that were causing dizziness, we have heard nothing back and pandemic took over. The fire took place in a printer cartridge factory recycling centre so was toxic. The problem has now been sorted and logged with Health & Safety who gave the schools advice
3	Schools' Forum Membership Update – confirmation of representation	It is noted that there is now full membership and all posts have been filled.
4	Schools' Forum Constitution/Terms of Reference for 2020/21 – Schools/DSG Business Partner	<p>The membership is reviewed on an annual basis in order to keep in line with the statutory requirements. The number of Members must be proportional between, primary, secondary and academies. Table two is using January 2020 census. Shift of pupil numbers from primary to secondary. In order to keep in proportion, the proposal is to reduce the primary maintained membership from 8 to 7 and increase our secondary academy from 4 to 5. So, one of our current primary member's steps down to become a substitute. All the primary members can still attend the meeting as we are very rarely full so they would still have voting rights by virtue of being a substitute.</p> <p>For the Academy membership, Ashley Robson stood down last time and maybe he would like to come back onto the Forum. Isabelle confirmed that Ashley Robson will be interested in joining and coming back onto the Forum as he has maintained his contact with Schools' Forum. Action: Isabelle to approach Ashley Robson and copy Claire White in to see if he is willing to take up the vacant post. Isabelle will make sure it is raised at the next secondary heads meeting to</p>

		<p>ensure equality. HT of the Wren School is changing so there will be a new person in post from September not sure yet whether he is part of the secondary schools forum, but sure he would like to be included in the invitation. Rules say it is for the Academies to choose who their representatives are. People can always attend as visitors or observers. Sarah Berno agreed to stand down as Maintained Primary representative and still attend the meetings as an observer/ substitute.</p> <p>The only statutory change is the removal from part A that it is a Schools' Forum annual decision to agree the carry forward of the DSG (deficit) from one financial year to the next; this is now a local authority decision.</p> <p>The revised constitution is noted and agreed by 12 members with none against and there were no disagreements.</p>
5	<p>DSG Outturn 2019/20 – including update on deficit recovery plan - Schools/DSG Business Partner</p>	<p>Table 1 sets out the outturn compared to the original and revised budget. The actual outturn is a deficit of £1.768 million which is £163,000 greater than last year and £144,000 increase from our actual budget.</p> <p>On the actual high needs block, which is where the bulk of the deficit sits, the overall deficit at the end of the year was £2.090million which is £155,000 less than last year so that's good news. We have paid a little bit off, though this was £466,000 over budget.</p> <p>At one stage it was forecasted to be significantly over budget, but we have managed to pull it back down and pay a small amount off the high needs deficit.</p> <p>Schools block planned overspend which was reported throughout the year is due to the secondary bulge classes £97,000 overspend and has been taken into account when setting the growth fund budget for 2020/21.</p> <p>Central schools services block had a £39,000 underspend which related to staffing in the admissions service and will be carried forward when setting the following year's budget.</p> <p>Early years block had a contingency of £702,000 in year and £416,000 was needed for payments to providers towards the end of the year. Offset against that was an underspend of £94,000 on central budget so the final carry forward was £367,000.</p> <p>On the high needs budget this is a much lower overspend than in previous years. The actual top up funding overspend was £226,000 compared to the previous year where just on top up</p>

		<p>funding we were overspent by over £2million. That's despite the numbers of EHC plans increasing during the year which saw an increase of 123.</p> <p>The actual average cost of placements is decreasing which is in line with our strategy. Table 3 gives a breakdown of the type of placements of where those variables are. There are quite large variances. We are getting far more data which will enable us to track and better forecast.</p> <p>Deficit recovery plan - this had to be submitted to ESFA last year and a virtual meeting took place in June 2020 where they said they were happy with our plan and commended us in doing a remarkable job in reducing our deficit over the past couple of years. They had made some suggestions, one of which was to show and track savings. Claire White is currently looking at how we could calculate what it would have cost if we had not had that strategy in place. We are in a much better place than we would have been had we not had that strategy in place, but it would be good to have figures to show this. The opening of the new Special School is crucial in maintaining the strategy and keeping the average cost down for the assumed continued increase in pupils with EHCPs. The deficit could still be repaid by 2022/23 if the average cost of placements is kept down.</p> <p>Also discussed with the DfE about our top up funding and it was noted that none of our own providers have been given an increase for several years and many settings are struggling, particularly with mainstream. We need to be increasing the funding we pay to our own providers which means we will see our expenditure increase this year but that is part of the strategy to help schools in our local area to support these children.</p> <p>Claire White presented a summary of the figures in the deficit recovery plan. There were no comments submitted at this time.</p> <p>The overall carry forward of £1.768 million deficit was noted. Individual block carry forwards were agreed by 11 members, with none against as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Schools block £90k overspend on growth to be met from 2020/21 growth fund budget.- Schools block £7k overspend on business rates to be met from 2020/21 schools budget.- Central schools service block £39k underspend to be retained within the block and taken into account in 2021/22 budget setting.
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		<p>- Early years block £380,000 underspend to be carried forward to support early years budget in 2020/21 including £276k as contingency.</p> <p>The high needs block deficit carry forward was noted.</p>
-	Maintained School Balances – School Support Lead	<p>Thank you to maintained schools for meeting year-end deadline and done in very difficult circumstances at the beginning of lock down so well done to all of them.</p> <p>School balances have gone up by £614,000 and 11 schools ended up reducing their balances so the majority either maintained their current balance or went up. Clare Warren has worked this year with the School Resource Management Advisor from the DfE which has been helpful and has also helped the schools coming up with their own deficit recovery plans. There are eight schools which have set a deficit for 20/21 which is the same number as last year but not the same schools. Budgets were set prior to going into a pandemic so additional costs due to Covid may be incurred as a consequence.</p> <p>Maintained schools have been providing us with details of their additional expenditure. Loss of income has been a big issue particularly for early year providers who provide wrap around care. Additional grants for the DfE will not cover these costs that will need to be lost in the budgets and could cause many schools to go into deficit.</p> <p>When schools submit their September forecasts, these will be closely reviewed and will submit feedback in October 2020 of what the financial impact has been from Covid to date.</p> <p>Peter Kayes stated it was encouraging the minimal number of schools in deficit and PK congratulated the schools for their hard work on this. We all recognise that this will be a difficult year with many schools struggling.</p> <p>Isabelle asked does Schools Forum want to take a more sympathetic view about deficits given their loss of income - this was agreed by 11 members and none against.</p> <p>The report is noted for information.</p>
7	DSG Budget 2020/21 - including update on top up review and inclusion fund – Schools/DSG Business Partner	<p>Report sets out full 2020/21 budgets and is in the usual format. This is the format we will monitor over the coming year. Not much to report on presently for the DSG allocation of £78.5m, as first changes will be coming through shortly which will be updating early years DSG based on the January 2020 census and updating the high needs block.</p>

		<p>Cranbury has just become an Academy and there will be a recoupment adjustment to the DSG for this.</p> <p>The original overall budget is for an end of year deficit of £2.174 million. This will reduce to £1.787m when the carry forward from 2019/20 has been taken into account.</p> <p>There should be a surplus in the growth fund at the end of the year which will be required to be carried forward for the future new secondary school.</p> <p>Early years block is always difficult to predict as actual expenditure and income will be based on future numbers of children. The carry forward of £276,000 is therefore being set aside as a contingency in 2020/21. There may also be a funding issue where Covid 19 impacts payments to providers especially if we are not back to normal by the autumn term.</p> <p>The High needs block, as mentioned previously, will need to pay out higher top fees to our own providers; this will be reported back to the October meeting. Decision on any increase will be backdated to September.</p> <p>With increases in number of mainstream EHCPs the Inclusion fund where additional money went in may possibly be overspent.</p> <p>Question from Isabelle - why is the growth fund set in preparation for the new school if it is only available for bulge classes? Are you expecting bulge classes in the new free school? The response was that the Growth Fund allocation must fund classes in new schools (and as it grows) as well as bulge classes in existing schools. Funding for new schools is not additional and does not come from any other DfE source.</p> <p>Report is for noting and overall budget for 2021 was noted and noted overall funding block pressures.</p>
8.	SEND Update – Head of SEND	<p>Report circulated earlier today from Deb Hunter. Paper gives an overview reminder of what the SEND strategy priorities are. It was agreed in 2017 and refreshed in last October (2019). Priorities are listed in the report as a reminder to everybody.</p> <p>There are six strands to the SEND strategy. There were five but at the last SEND strategy board this was increased to six again; these are listed in the report.</p>

		<p>Deb Hunter went through the progress to date including the EHCP numbers tabled in the report. In June 2020, there were 1,408 EHCPs which has decreased a little. SEND case officers have worked hard to ensure EHCPs are closed once a young person has finished further education to showing a lower number of EHCPs. Mainstream breakdown 279 EHCPs in primary schools 120 in secondary 36 post-secondary and in special schools there is slightly more for primary and secondary. Big increase in SEMH from primary to secondary.</p> <p>A member asked if the 2 SCD resources in nurseries referred to in the report are maintained ones? Deb Hunter confirmed they are, and they already have a provision in place which Deb Hunter will be meeting with them to find out how it works and what it is. KR said we would not be able to fund capital investment for PVI as these are not maintained schools.</p> <p>Could the resources range from Nursery through to primary? KR stated we are investing in 2 units in primaries.</p> <p>Mental health - we have been meeting regularly with colleagues from across Berkshire. CAMHS numbers have been down, significant eating disorders have increased. Planning going forward we will be offering a stepped care approach to schools for supporting mental health and will be offering a resilience-based programme. Heads to get the questionnaire as well.</p> <p>Q Will there be support for the cost of EP time for this project? - A report will be submitted to SLT.</p> <p>Some of the figures were queried on accuracy, and Deb Hunter will check and issue a revised report.</p> <p>Peter Kayes would like to thank Deb Hunter for the paper and noted that the statistics were helpful.</p> <p>Report is noted for information.</p>
9.	Scheme for Financing Schools Update – Schools/DSG Business Partner	<p>Scheme for financing schools - Maintained schools only. This is a document all LAs must produce for maintained schools and sets out financial relationship with schools. This was last updated by the DfE on 1st April 2020 with minor changes – mainly links included to latest regulations. Due to Coronavirus they have kept changes to a minimum. The main change is to the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) which came in as an option from 1 April for maintained schools. No other changes are being proposed to our scheme at this time.</p>

		<p>We will be sympathetic to deadlines due to COVID-19. Earlier in the year we allowed extra time that schools had to submit their budgets.</p> <p>As there is only one change which is the introduction of RPA as an option for schools (which is statutory), we are proposing this is approved by Schools Forum tonight and this will come into force for the current year.</p> <p>Q - Has there been a good take up of RPA by maintained schools - RPA is the option for maintained schools instead of buying into the Council's insurance scheme. 8 or 9 schools have chosen to go to the RPA. We will review later in the year whether we want to go down the route of de-delegation so that all schools join the RPA.</p> <p>A member commented that VA schools would need diocese permission to sign up to the RPA. Action: Claire White will investigate this.</p> <p>Report is noted and agreed to approve the changes to the SFS as set out in Appendix 1. Agreed by 10 members with none against.</p>
10.	Agenda items for next meeting	<p>The next meeting will be held on October 15, 2020. We don't know yet whether this will also need to be virtual.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSG budget setting strategy for 2021/22 • Initial proposals for school funding formula for 2021/22 • Budget monitoring 2020/21 month 6 (including update on deficit recovery plan) • SEND update • Top Up funding review
11	Any other business	<p>There were no items of any other business and the meeting finished at 18.37pm.</p>