

Minutes of Schools' Forum Meeting

11 March 2021

Members Present

Justine McMinn – Head Teacher of E P Collier; Cathy Doberska – Head Teacher of English Martyrs; Peter Kayes – Governor at the Ridgeway; Richard Rolfe – Governor at Micklands (Chair); Dani Hall - Co-Chair of the Federation between Oxford Road Community School & Wilson School; Julia Cottee – Governor at Reading Early Years Schools Federation; Jo Budge - Executive Head Teacher of Reading Early Years Schools Federation; Tonia Crossman – Head Teacher of Emmer Green; Simon Uttley – Head Teacher of Blessed Hugh Faringdon; Ita McGullion – Manager of Kennet Day Nursery; Ashley Robson – Principal of Reading School; Annal Nayyar – Finance Director of Bayliss Trust (Reading Girls); Louise Baker – Principal of JMA; Richard Pearse – Principal of Churchend; Karen Edwards – Head Teacher of The Heights; Rachel Cave – Head Teacher of Highdown School; Isabelle Sandy – Business Manager of Kendrick; Claire Brown – Business Manager of Prospect School (substitute); Mandy Wilton – Head of Cranbury College; Alison McNamara - NEU.

Apologies

Symon Cooke – Head Teacher of The Avenue;

In attendance

Ann McDonnell – Business Manager of Blessed Hugh Faringdon; Kate Reynolds - Director of Education & Research; Steph Heaps – Schools & DSG Business Partner; Claire White – Schools & DSG Business Partner; Clare Warren – School Support Lead; Gill Dunlop – Pupil & Schools Service Manager; Siobhan Egan – Service Manager IT & Data Intelligence; Corinne Dishington – Service Manager Under 5s; Claire Nicolson – PA; Steven Davies – Strategic Business Partner; Vanessa Hurdle – minute taker.

	Item	Notes
1	Welcome and apologies - Chair	<p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p> <p>Steph Heaps read out the protocol for the virtual meeting and confirmed who was eligible to vote and for which votes.</p> <p>Recording of the meeting commenced. The recording will be retained until the minutes have been approved.</p> <p>Apologies were noted.</p>

2	Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2021 - Chair	<p>Minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting from the 14 January 2021.</p> <p>Matters arising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academy Membership – The Academies have confirmed Ashley Robson, Head of Reading School, as the fifth member. He will hold this position until the end of the academic year when a representative from Maiden Erlegh School in Reading will take his place. It is not currently known who this will be. - Item 8 - Full Costing of Resource Provision – This will be covered under item 7. The report will now be presented to the Forum in June. - Five options for future top-up funding – This will be covered by Claire White during the meeting. - Alternative Provision – Mandy Wilton will present a report – Item 8
3	Schools’ Forum Membership Update – including confirmation of representation - Chair	Richard confirmed that the Forum now had full membership. However, Symon Cooke’s (Head of The Avenue) membership will shortly be expiring. He will be asked if he wishes to remain a member.
4	DSG Budget Monitoring 2021/22 month 11 - Schools/DSG Business Partner	<p>Steph Heaps presented.</p> <p>It was confirmed that there has been no change to the DSG funding allocation since July 2020 and it remains at £79.123m. The only possible change could be in the Early Years block when the funding is confirmed and is based on the January census.</p> <p>The month 11 forecast shows a deficit of £1.533m. This is an increase of £60k from the previous meeting, when the deficit was reported as £1.473m. The variances from the original budget seem favourable with an underspend of £641,589, but this is mainly due to the £622k underspend in the Growth Fund, which will be carried forward into 21/22. There is an overspend in the High Needs Top-up Funding of £367k. This is lower than previously reported due to a reduction in alternative provision places and there is a reduction in the Early Years block surplus.</p> <p>The Schools Block will see the underspent Growth Fund carried forward into 21/22.</p> <p>The Early Years Block has seen a reduction in contingency. Providers have been paid for the Summer and Autumn Term based on the previous year’s census. It is expected that the</p>

		<p>contingency will fall to £35k when the Spring Term payments are made. It is hoped that it will not go into deficit.</p> <p>Table 3 shows how numbers have changed between January 2020 and January 2021 based on provider type. There has been an 11% increase in numbers for childminders, whilst the biggest change is for nurseries with a fall in numbers of 18%.</p> <p>High Needs Block – Table 4 shows the number of EHCPs per year. There has been an increase of 49 EHCPs since January 2020, with the biggest increase being in alternative provision.</p> <p>Table 5 shows the current position of spend for 2020/21 at £15.9m. This is an overspend of £367k and equates to 25 places overbudget. Mainstream is the biggest area, but the highest costs are found in the independent sector, which is overspent by £367k.</p> <p>The overall position is a 1.7% increase overbudget, which still compares favourably to other Local Authorities, which are seeing their deficits almost double. The DSG Deficit Recovery Plan for this financial year forecasts an additional £99k or 4% increase to the High Needs deficit. This means that the year end deficit will be a carry forward of £2.189m</p> <p>Additional places also needed to be budgeted for as part of the long-term strategy not to send pupils out of borough. This is expected to cost £350k, but will lead to savings in the long term.</p>
5	<p>Early Years Budget 2021/22 - Schools/DSG Business Partner</p>	<p>Steph Heaps presented</p> <p>Richard confirmed that a vote would be taken on this item.</p> <p>The report sets out the funding assumptions for 2021/22 and the overall Early Years budget based on the funding that is likely to be received.</p> <p>2020/21 has been a very unusual year due to covid-19 with the funding split altered to 9/12 based on the January 2020 census and 3/12 on the January 2021 census. It is expected that the allocation split will revert back to 5/12 and 7/12 for 2021/22. No further guidance on this has been issued. The January 2021 census has been used for the forecast.</p> <p>The funding rate for two year olds has increased by 2p and for three and four year olds by 6p. This equates to £5.90 for two year olds and £5.28 for three and four year olds.</p>

		<p>Table 1 shows the allocations that were expected for 2021/22 based on the January 2020 census compared with the allocations that Reading now expects to receive based on the January 2021 census. Funding is now estimated to be £11.5m. The table shows a reduction in universal funding for three and four-year olds. This is due to reduction in numbers by 402 or 13.8%. For two-year olds numbers have reduced by 41, which is 11.9%.</p> <p>There has been no increase to the pupil premium grant of 53p per hour or the Disability Access Fund of £615 per pupil per annum.</p> <p>The Maintained Nurseries Supplement Grant will continue in 21/22, but be paid on a different basis to previously as it will now be paid in two parts. The allocations that have been paid for April – August are indicative, but are classed as confirmed funding. They are subject to change based on census data, but will be calculated on the hourly rate of £1.08. For the remaining 7/12 of the year, the Grant is classed as conditional. These conditions have not yet been published and it is not yet known what they will be based on.</p> <p>Overall the Early Years budget has decreased by £0.973m from the £12.48m originally expected in 20/21 to £11.507m. This is due to the reduction in numbers based on the census data used. No surplus is expected for the 2020/21 financial year. If any of the £35k does remain at the end of 20/21 this will be carried forward and used as contingency in 21/22.</p> <p>In 2020/21 all providers received £4.88 per hour for three and four-year olds and £5.63 per hour for two-year olds. It is proposed that the full 6p and 8p increases are passed on to providers. This would give a rate of £5.71 for two-year olds and £4.94 for three and four year olds. This is set out in Table 2.</p> <p>Table 2 – In order to set a balanced budget, funding of £11.5m has been used as well as the 19/20 full year census data. This has then been reduced by 11.8%. This is to reflect the reduction in funding between January 2020 and January 2021. It should not be forgotten that providers will be paid for their actual hours and at the increased rates. It is still not known which census will be used for funding. If the January 21 census is used and numbers increase, this could lead to a deficit, which would have to be addressed in the 2022/23 budget.</p> <p>Corinne Dishington confirmed that the Early Years SEN Inclusion Fund will continue. It is for three and four-year olds.</p>
--	--	---

		<p>Last year the Schools Forum agreed that two-year olds could also be included. The Fund has overspent this year due to the additional needs that settings have requested. This was particularly the case in January 2021 when a lot of children returned to the different settings.</p> <p>Panel is being made aware of a lot more pupils with communication and interaction difficulties. They are now looking into providing two resource bases in the nurseries in 2021/22. Part of the Inclusion Fund will be diverted to support these resource bases.</p> <p>Section 7 – Centrally Retained Early Year’s Budget Proposal requires approval from the Forum. It is proposed that £635k should be centrally retained. The list of services to be paid for using this money are contained in section 7.2.</p> <p>it was suggested that the vote should be for all the services, rather than on an individual basis.</p> <p>17 members agreed the proposal for all services as set out 7.2 with none against</p> <p>Julia Cottee believes that pupil numbers in nurseries will increase over the next financial year and that the census data shows a fall in numbers mainly due to covid. Kate Reynolds confirmed that there has been a decrease in the primary and Early Years population. It is expected that the numbers will continue to fall over the next two or three years. Due to the pandemic, more families have chosen to electively home school their children.</p> <p>Julia also asked about the use of the 3/12 and 9/12 split. Steph confirmed that this split is only to be used in 20/21. From 21/22 the split will revert back to 5/12 and 7/12. The split has been dictated by Central Government.</p> <p>Claire White confirmed that there will be a problem with the budget if the January 21 census numbers are used. Kate Reynolds voiced the fact that Government is being lobbied hard to provide a settled and more consistent funding strategy for Early Years.</p> <p>Jo Budge questioned if there was an update on the funding for the Spring Term 21. The DfE has said that they will only fund for those pupils who were in the nursery on census day rather than for numbers on roll. Steph confirmed that Reading will be funded and paying out based on the January 2021 census.</p>
--	--	--

		<p>There has been no further information on any Exceptional Funding by the Government.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>High Needs Budget 2021/22 - Schools/DSG Business Partner</p>	<p>Steph Heaps presented.</p> <p>The High Needs Budget for 2021/22 was announced in December 2020. It is an 8% per head minimum increase. For Reading the increase will be an increase of £2.246m (10.1%) to £24.658m. Part of the increase, £296k, is for the Pay and Pensions Grant and is, therefore, not new funding.</p> <p>Table 1 shows the allocations, comparing 2020/21 with 2021/22. The import/export adjustment figures for 2020/21 are not yet known and will not be available until July 2021. Reading is a net exporter, meaning that more pupils are placed outside of the borough and funding has to be paid back to Government. A difference between the two budgets is due to Cranbury College becoming an Academy in 2020.</p> <p>Table 2 – High Needs Block Budget – This shows the 2020/21 budget, the forecast for 2020/21 plus the proposed budget for 2021/22. The budget for 21/22 has been set at £25.381m, which is over the allocation of £25.142 and will increase the deficit by £239k. It is expected that it will not be possible to make any payments towards reducing the deficit in 2021/22.</p> <p>The Deficit Recovery Plan – The current position is that the deficit will increase by £90k by the end of 2020/21, with £2.189m to be carried forward to 21/22. It has been assumed that the allocation will increase by 8% for 2021/22 and 2022/23, with 5% increases thereafter. It has also been assumed that the £484k transfer from the schools block to the high needs block will continue until the deficit is repaid. It is estimated that all the other blocks will balance each year and any under or overspends will be dealt with on an individual basis. Places to be funded for the new resources and the new special school have been factored in. The average cost of top-ups has been inflated by 2% and the number of places has been increased by 95 per year.</p> <p>Table 3 shows the Draft Deficit Recovery Plan based on the above factors, but it does not repay the deficit in the time-frame shown. It is estimated that the deficit will be repaid by 2027/28. One of the reasons for the increase in costs in 21/22 is due to the additional place funding in local schools as a one-off cost. This should mean lower costs for the increasing number of places. The plan will be finalised in June and will be brought back to the next Forum. The deficit is likely to change</p>

		<p>as actual figures will be known and a more accurate forecast for 21/22 will be possible.</p> <p>There is a Consultation on the Future Funding of the High Needs Block. This will take effect from 2022/23 The current proposal will not make a difference to Reading’s funding. The DfE is against the idea of funding based on the number of EHCPs as this could lead to more EHCPs being awarded.</p> <p>Katie Reynolds urged Forum members and their colleagues to respond to the consultation. The link to the Consultation was put in the Agenda pack and sent in the on-line meeting chat.</p>
7	SEND Update – Director of Education	<p>Kate Reynolds presented.</p> <p>Kate queried whether this report should still be brought to every meeting as papers are now presented on individual SEND aspects.</p> <p>Kate asked that the huge amount of work that Nicky Stephens and Hester have made in progressing SEND should be noted.</p> <p>The following areas are being looked at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banding System – aim to put into place a system that supports pupils in a different way • Capital – From September 2022 there should be an additional 150 new places for pupils with SEND either in Reading or in the special free school, The Oak Tree in Wokingham. • Admissions – Robust SLAs are now in place with all those schools that have resourced bases. • Review of Alternative Provision – Mandy Wilton to present a paper on this • SEND Newsletter – due to be sent to Forum members • 90% of schools have updated their local offer on the website • 1400 EHCPs – 100% have been completed within the statutory framework. <p>Richard confirmed that there had been some discussion as to whether this paper should be presented at every Forum. SEND was made a rolling Agenda item several years ago when it was felt that not enough attention was being given to this area. As papers are being presented to the Schools Forum, looking at changes in funding and provision, it was felt that an annual review of SEND should be presented going forward at the last</p>

		<p>meeting of the year. Individual papers will continue to be presented as and when required. If members are not happy with this decision, Richard asked that thoughts and comments should be emailed to him for consideration.</p> <p>Claire White gave an update on the Review of the Resource Banding Provision - The review has now been completed. Five out of the six schools contributed to the review by providing details of how they operated their resource provision. A new banding model has been produced for all those schools. For four of these schools, it will mean an increase to their level of banding. Currently this new model needs to be signed off before it can be shared with the schools. It is hoped that the increases to the bandings can be implemented from April.</p>
8.	Alternative Provision Review – Mandy Wilton, Head of Cranbury College	<p>Mandy Wilton presented.</p> <p>A steering group has been formed which is made up of officers from Brighter Futures for Children, the Virtual School, the Special Needs Department, Secondary and Primary schools and Reading College.</p> <p>The steering group has now met twice. The idea is to identify which Alternative Provision providers are being used by schools and stakeholders. This has been achieved by talking to partners and sending a questionnaire to schools. Costs have also been identified.</p> <p>A directory of Alternative Provision will be produced and from that a Commissioning Framework. The aim is to look at more cost-effective ways of purchasing for schools and to drive up competition and quality.</p> <p>The project is currently running to plan, and it is hoped to have it all in place for the Commissioning Framework in April.</p>
9.	Schools Forum Meeting Dates 2021/22 – Schools/DSG Business Partner	<p>The proposed meeting dates for 2021/22 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 June 2021 • 14 October 2021 • 9 December 2021 • 20 January 2022 • 10 March 2022 <p>If there are any issues with the dates, please let Richard know.</p>

10	Agenda items for next meeting	<p>The next meeting will be held on 24 June 2021.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSG Outturn 2020/21 • Maintained School Balances for 2021/22 • DSG Budget and Deficit Recovery Plan for 2021/22 • SEND Strategy Annual Update • Send Top-up review • Schools' Forum Constitution/Terms of Reference for 2021/22 • Update to Scheme for Financing Schools
11	Any other business	<p>Peter Kayes noted that today was Claire White's last Forum meeting before she leaves Brighter Futures for Children. Peter thanked Claire on behalf of the Forum for all the work that she has done.</p> <p>Isabelle asked if the meetings will continue to be held on-line. The issue is that it is a public meeting and the Government gave special permission for the meetings to be held virtually due to the pandemic. It is hoped that it will be possible to have a mixture, some meetings held on-line with others held in the Civic Offices.</p> <p>The meeting finished at 17.50.</p>

Summary of Actions Outstanding

SF Date & Item no.	Action Required	Responsible Person
11/3/21 – item 3	Membership – Symon Cooke to remain a member	