

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON

**Wednesday, 11 February 2015**  
**Robertson House, Stevenage**

## ATTENDANCE:

<b>Chair</b>	Alan Gray
<b>School Members</b>	Richard Haynes (Vice-Chair), Alisdair Skinner, Rob Staples, Ian Morris, Brian Frederick, Nick Daymond, Paul Johnson, Jan Liversage, Karen James, Christine Hall, Tracy Prickett, Carole Connelly, Don Leavy
<b>Non- School Members</b>	Andrew Stevenson, Zoe Hancock, Helen Blay, Linda Collins,
<b>Substitutes</b>	Karen Powell
<b>Officers</b>	Simon Newland, Cheryl Faint, Catherine Tallis, Melany McQueen, Gillian Cawley, David O'Connor, Debbie Orton, Patrick Towey, Lin O'Brien, Waqaas Munir, Sally Orr, Ian Palmer, Ian Hamilton
<b>Apologies</b>	Alison Saunders, Jacky Webby, Liz Hitch, Sarah Lalis, Jonathan Burberry
<b>Others</b>	Mark Watkin,

## 1. Minutes of Last Meeting & Matters Arising

Chair welcomed new representative members Carole Connelly and Don Leavy. Both were elected in recent governor elections.

### Supporting Recruitment in Hertfordshire Schools

Letter to schools is in the process of being drafted from Jan Paine.

Minutes were agreed and taken as an accurate record.

## 2. Standards & Quality in Hertfordshire Schools

Gillian Cawley attended to report to Forum an overview on Standards and Quality in Hertfordshire schools.

Hertfordshire is now in the first or second quintile amongst local authorities for most performance indicators, and was placed 11th amongst LAs for attainment of 5 A\*/C GCSEs including English and Maths. This is a strong and welcome performance. However, progress is still required in reducing the attainment gap for vulnerable groups as well as continuing to improve overall levels of attainment and progress for all.

Forum noted the priorities for future years set out in the Hertfordshire Strategy for School Improvement. Discussion followed on the inter-relationship between resource allocation decisions taken at Forum and these priorities. Comment was made on the significance of effective early year's provision for future progress, and on resource

allocation policies, the challenges of working in the relatively more deprived areas of Hertfordshire, and the adequacy of resources allocated to schools.

Report was noted.

### **3. Energy Update**

David O'Connor attended to update Forum on matters relating to Energy Management issues. Forum noted the improvements in the quality of service compared with previous years, where this was a matter of concern. It was noted that 98% of schools have signed up to the current contractual arrangement for energy supply.

There was some discussion of the implications of current falls in energy prices; currently, most energy is bought in advance. Further information on the approach is available on the Grid.

Schools requested that school offices are to be included in any communication sent to schools, using the "schadmin" e-mail addresses.

There was a debate round the proposed increase of 1.5% in the SLA cost of the energy team, and further clarification of the reasons for this was sought.

The report was noted, and Forum agreed that no further annual report was necessary given the improvements to the service, though one would be welcome if and when issues arose that merited it.

### **4. High Needs**

Debbie Orton introduced Ian Palmer to Forum who provided an update on the key issues regarding special school top ups and places as discussed at the recent meeting of the high needs sub group.

Debbie reported on the DfE Call for Evidence Consultation document regarding SEN funding and informed that the DfE are looking at a national mechanism for distribution of High Needs funding. The DfE are carrying out some research in a number of Local Authorities and have been holding seminars to discuss the issues in the consultation document HCC are required to put in a response by 27 February. The DfE document had been discussed with the High Needs subgroup and a draft response was shared with the Forum.

The following was agreed.

Recommendation 1: Support the principle that special schools with surplus capacity should have numbers reduced over time and increase places at schools where there is a need.

Vote:

For: 15 Against: nil

Recommendation 2: Support the process outlined in the paper for setting special school top ups for 2015-16 financial year

Vote:

For: 15 Against: nil

The report was noted.

## **5. Pension Contributions**

Simon Newland and Waqaas Munir presented a report to Forum on Teachers Pensions (TP) arrears, following on from the discussion at the last meeting of Forum.

It was noted that there were a number of reasons why arrears had arisen, and the passage of time made it impossible to be clear exactly where failings had taken place – not least because in the payroll and pensions management process there were several stages at which problems might be identified and avoided. Nonetheless, some 283 arrears cases had been identified from around 30,000 cases processed since 2004.

There was considerable discussion round the way in which the costs of employer arrears might be met, as between the employing school and all schools collectively (via the DSG). The proposal that costs fall to the employing school was not, at this stage, accepted. Instead it was requested that:

1. Collection of arrears was suspended to give schools further time to search their documentary records so as to establish if material existed which might substantiate an “opt out” for staff for whom contributions had not been paid; or any other relevant information round employment histories.
2. Schools would be consulted on the options for dealing with arrears, as between them being met by employing schools; them being met by schools collectively from DSG (with schools that have settled being reimbursed); or them being met collectively for schools which had not so far settled only.
3. A report back would be made to Forum at the next convenient meeting.

## **6. Creation of Local Pensions Boards**

Patrick Towey attended to provide an update to Forum on the establishment of a local Pension Board for the Hertfordshire Pension Fund. Forum was invited to nominate a member to represent the schools and employers on the Local Pension Fund, and agreed to do so.

It was noted that a set of particular schools would be required for this role, and that it might be that a suitably qualified governor might beneficially take on this role.

It was agreed that invitations to express interest in the role would be e-mailed out to governors, so that a suitable person could be appointed. Forum agreed to delegate to the Chair and Vice-Chair of Forum the Authority to agree a suitable nominee on behalf of Forum.

## **7. Full Time Places Update 2014-15**

Melany McQueen attended to provide the Forum with an evaluation of the Full Time Places scheme for vulnerable 3-4 year olds and to seek their views regarding future direction. She set out progress to date, steps being taken to improve the effectiveness of monitoring of outcomes using the Family Star methodology, and future issues round the scale of the programme.

Forum was supportive of the programme and its aims. IN discussion the importance of promoting and publicising the provision across all settings was emphasised. There was also a debate round whether the proposed level of funding and provision would be adequate and MMQ was asked to return to Forum later in the year if it appeared that there was a strong case for further extension.

For the time being Forum supported the proposals in the report and agreed;

- (i) The base budget for the FT places scheme is increased by £50,000 to £150,000, with a consequential increase in the total budget held for central Early Years Services.
- (ii) There is a guideline allocation within this of £50k of the base budget to short term crisis support for families who meet the family in crisis criteria and £100k for longer term family issues for those children who meet any of the remaining criteria.

Vote:

For: 15 Against: nil

## **8. School Meals**

### **8(a) HCL Proposals for Primary and Special School Meals from April 2015**

Lin O'Brien attended to update Forum on the current financial position of the Primary and Special School meal service provided by Hertfordshire Catering Ltd (HCL) in the light of the new duty to provide Universal Infant Free School Meals from September 2014 and other pressures.

The report set out the pressures on HCL in terms of rising staff costs and other inputs including food. It also set out the large increases in the numbers of meals served and the extent to which cost pressures this year will be absorbed by efficiency savings. However, despite these it would still be necessary for HCL to increase the selling price of meals to schools by 2.3% (5p) to £2.20p from September.

Members of Forum then discussed the case for an increase and recognised the issues facing HCL and the logic behind their approach.

Forum noted HCL report and their proposed actions.

## 8(b) School Meals Price Review

Catherine Tallis presented a paper which set out a series of options round a suggested school meal selling price to be charged to parents of KS2 children from September 2015. The report recommended that a consultation exercise was undertaken with schools, so as to inform a final decision from Forum in April round what increase to recommend.

The report proposed that schools be consulted on a preferred option of an increase of 15p (7%) to £2.30. At that level, income might be broadly expected to cover the direct costs of meal provision (the per meal charge from HCL and the lump sum subscription, with a degree of surplus depending on the size of school, take-up of meals, and proportion which were free.

It was noted that £2.30p was also the level of per-meal funding provided by DfE in relation to the Universal Free Infant Meals programme.

Concern was expressed as there is no mention of Nursery schools in the report. It was agreed that further work to be carried out on this.

Forum therefor agreed the following:

- (i) That schools are consulted on a proposal to increase the recommended selling price for junior-aged meals to £2.30 from September 2015

Vote:

For: 10 Against: nil

- (ii) That the recommended selling price continues to be reviewed annually by Forum.

Vote:

For: 10 Against: nil

## 9. **Forward Work Programme**

The following items have been added to the Forward Work Programme shown in the paper, which is now as follows.

<b>2015</b>		
29 April		Jonathan Burberry
	Schools Budget Monitor 2014-15 Quarter 3	Waqas Munir
	Analysis of the Impact of Capping and Minimum Funding Guarantee	Jonathan Burberry
	High Level Needs	
	Primary: Secondary balance	Simon Newland Jonathan Burberry

	Growth fund, and future outlook for school places	Jonathan Burberry /Simon Newland
	Schools Maintenance Programme	Trevor Mose
24 June	Policy issues arising from new Government	Simon Newland
	Progress on Supporting Recruitment in Hertfordshire Schools	Jan Paine
	Issues for the summer consultation, including Scheme for Financing Schools	Simon Newland
	Out turn report 2014/15	Waqas Munir
October	Initial report on budget strategy	Simon Newland/Jonathan Burberry

#### **10. Information Item – Changes to Teachers’ Pensions**

Noted.

#### **11. Any Other Business**

Info item: Capital Maintenance Allocation and schools to receive funding from the Priority Schools Building Programme.

#### **12. New Members Induction/Training**

Simon Newland provided induction training for new governors’ representatives.

#### **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting of Forum will be held on:

Date: Wednesday, 29 April 2015

Time: 1.00pm - 4.00pm

Venue: HDC, Robertson House, Stevenage