

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON

**Wednesday, 30 September 2015
Robertson House, Stevenage**

ATTENDANCE:

Chair	Alan Gray
School Members	Alisdair Skinner, Alison Saunders, Brian Frederick, Carole Connelly, Christine Hall, Ian Morris, Jacky Webby, Jan Liversage, Karen James, Liz Hitch, Paul Johnson, Rob Staples, Sarah Lalis, Tracy Prickett
Non- School Members	Helen Blay, Linda Collins, Morris Bright
Substitutes	Jeremy Turner (for Nick Daymond), Sarah Bourn
Officers	Catherine Tallis, Cheryl Faint, Jolyon Adam, Jonathan Burberry, Rachael Greenlees, Simon Newland
Apologies	Don Leavy, Nick Daymond, Richard Haynes, Zoe Hancock, David Williams (HCC)
Others	John Grubb, Mark Watkin
Observing	David Williams (NUT)

1. Appointment of Chair and vice-chair for coming Academic Year

Forum re-elected Alan Gray as Chair and Richard Haynes as vice-chair for the coming academic year

2. Minutes of Last Meeting & Matters Arising

It was noted that Sarah Lalis should have been recorded as present at the last meeting. Subject to that, the minutes were agreed and taken as an accurate record.

The question was raised as to why there was no report back on High Level Needs, despite the agreement to receive a further report noted in the minutes. Simon Newland responded that, later on the agenda, officers were proposing an approach to considering the budget for High Level Needs for 2016/17, which would entail a substantial report to Forum in November. He therefore felt it better to defer a general update on progress until that point. However, in November Forum would be informed both of budget issues/options, progress on the SEND strategy and workstreams, and on special school place numbers. It was agreed to amend the Forward work Programme to include these items.

3. Final Dedicated Schools Grant and Updated Schools Budget 2015-16

Jonathan Burberry presented the paper outlining the level of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) available following the announcement of the final 2015-16 DSG.

It was noted that the reduction in the number of 2 year olds was the result of lower than expected uptake rather than a reduced need for provision. An increase in uptake by 2 year olds would result in an increase in expenditure but also extra grant as a result of the recalculation of DSG based on the January 2016 census. However, as funding is based on termly counts, whereas the DSG is based on a January count, there may be some difference between expenditure and the grant received.

Forum noted the changes in DSG and in the Schools Budget since January.

Forum agreed to support the carry forward of the additional DSG resources to 2016-17, as outlined in section 3 of the paper.

4. Schools Budget Monitor 2015-16 Quarter 1

Jolyon Adam reported to the Forum on the Quarter 1 Schools Budget Monitor.

The current forecast projects an underspend of (£2.537m). This is largely driven by an underspend against the budget for Independent Special Schools of (£2.225m) which is a result of a wider strategy to reduce the number of out of County placements.

The forum requested additional detail to be included in the High Needs paper which is to be brought to the next forum by Debbie Orton. Specifically, information about the Keeping Children in Local Provision (KCLP) Service and Specific Learning Difficulties (SPLD) provision which are forecast to underspend by (£0.105m) and (£0.125m) respectively were to be covered, in terms of the size of these budgets, and the services they provide.

The Forum noted the report.

5. Initial Report on School Budget Strategy 2016-17

Forum noted the list of budget pressures and savings presented in the paper, together with the funding gap in 2016-17. This gap results from the fact that the DSG allocation will not take account of cost pressures in 2016-17. The Forum recorded its serious concern at the level of funding. It was agreed that the Chair will write again to the DfE to raise these concerns.

The Forum:

- endorsed the use of £10m of the DSG carry forward to support the Schools Budget in 2016-17;
- supported the approach of planning the high needs element of the Schools Budget at the level of the High Needs block of DSG;
- agreed that the proforma for primary and secondary budget shares, to be submitted to the DfE, should not include any gains capping.

Vote: For: 16 Against: nil

It was suggested that Catherine Tallis' paper, The Financial Health of Hertfordshire Schools, should be circulated more widely.

6. Growth Fund Review

Rachael Greenlees presented the paper which provided:

- a summary of the responses to the summer consultation questions relating to the Growth Fund, and;
- an update of the Growth Fund review process and the proposed next steps.

The Forum noted the response from the summer consultation and agreed that 24 AWPUs are an appropriate and sufficient level of basic resource to fund an additional class.

Vote: For: 17 Against: nil

It was noted that, in the event there was a change to the current pattern of school funding, the level of 24 AWPUs would need to be reconsidered.

The Forum noted the outcomes of the review group meeting and the revised timescale for the Growth Fund review.

7. Primary and Secondary Schools Funding Formula 2016-17

Jonathan Burberry presented the paper to Forum, setting out the illustrative unit values for each formula factor in the primary and secondary funding formula.

The Forum:

- supported the illustrative unit values for each formula factor, for inclusion in the proforma to be submitted to the DfE by 30 October;
- supported the changes to the funding formula in respect of the secondary split site factor, the rent factor and the introduction of retrospective funding adjustments;
- supported the discontinuation of Cluster of Need funding.

Vote: For: 18 Against: nil

It was noted that there would be further discussion in due course on the relativities between primary and secondary funding levels.

8. Minimum Funding Guarantee Exceptions and Pupil Variations

Forum noted the position regarding MFG protection in respect of Samuel Ryder academy.

It was suggested that information on Samuel Ryder's balances would be helpful in further understanding the academy's financial position.

Officers explained that they hoped to attract support from other large authorities to lobby the DfE to permit Growth Fund payments to secondary schools, which are

growing but within their existing admission number. This might facilitate a further attempt in due course to reduce the cost of MFG protection at Samuel Ryder.

Forum supported the pupil number variations for 2016-17 set out in Annex A of the paper.

Vote: For: 16 Against: nil

9. Fund for Small Secondary Schools in Areas of Demographic Growth

Catherine Tallis presented a paper recommending the removal of the £250,000 cap on the Falling Rolls Fund for secondary schools given the particular challenge that the cap presents to very small secondary schools in balancing their budgets. It was noted that the methodology will need reviewing in the future once an evidence base has been built through the work of the Budget Pressures Programme. It was noted that changes to the fund would require the approval of the DfE.

In presenting the paper Catherine Tallis made clear that small maintained secondary schools in financial difficulty will be expected to work alongside the Local Authority to take necessary measures in order to meet projected real terms reductions in budgets over the next four years, in the same way as any other school.

Forum agreed that the criteria for the fund should be amended and the cap should be removed.

Vote: For: 11 Against: nil

10. School Budget Pressures Programme Update

Catherine Tallis presented an update on the work of the Schools Budget Pressures Programme.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- Schools with infant age pupils could face an additional budgetary pressure if the revenue funding for Universal Infant Free School Meals remains at £2.30 once the National Living Wage has been introduced;
- The potential for HfL to develop subscription service to policies and documents that carry a high level of intellectual property e.g. HR Policies to generate funds that could be put back into School Budgets.

The report was noted.

11. Admission Arrangements for Summer-born Children

Simon Newland set out the Government's proposals to change admission arrangements for summer born children. These changes have potentially significant impacts in particular on early year's settings and on school nursery provision, but also elsewhere. However, it is not at all clear how many parents will take up the new

freedoms offered to them. HCC would be undertaking some research on this over the late Autumn and would report back to Forum if it suggests any likely major impacts.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Forward Work Programme is now as follows.

2015		
11 November	Approval of centrally-retained items for 2016/17	Catherine Tallis
	Budget strategy 2016/17	Jonathan Burberry
	Approval of de-delegated items for 2016/17	Catherine Tallis
	Repairs and Maintenance bi-annual report	Trevor Mose
	Proposals for SALT service	t/b/c/
	Child Care for Working Parents Update	Melany McQueen
	HLN – progress on SEND strategy and workstreams	Debbie Orton
	HLN – approach to budget for 2016/17	Simon Newland/Debbie Orton
	Place numbers in Special Schools	Debbie Orton
	Growth fund review	Rachael Greenlees
	Changes to scheme for financing schools	Cheryl Faint
	Future outlook on school rolls and financial implications for schools and overall budget strategy	Pauline Davies
2016		
13 January	Approval of schools funding proforma	Jonathan Burberry
	Approval of schools budget	Jonathan Burberry
	Schools budget savings programme update	Catherine Tallis
24 February	Standards and quality in Hertfordshire schools	Jan Paine/Marcus Cooper
	School meals price review	Catherine Tallis/Lin O'Brien
20 April	HfL Recruitment support out-turn report	Jan Paine
	Repairs and Maintenance bi-annual report	Trevor Mose
22 June	Summer consultation	Simon Newland
	Review of Membership Quotas	Simon Newland

Budget monitors will be submitted quarterly.

13. Any Other Business

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of Forum will be held on:

Date: Wednesday, 11 November 2015

Time: 1.00pm - 4.00pm

Venue: HDC, Robertson House, Stevenage