

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

Wednesday 27 November 2019
Robertson House, Stevenage

ATTENDANCE:

Chair	Alan Gray
School Members	Richard Haynes (Vice-Chair), Dave Allen, Carole Bennett, Geraint Edwards, Robert Fielden, Matt Gauthier, Anna Greetham, John Grubb, Alan Henshall, Jan Liversage, Wayne Morris, Nick Rowlands, Alison Saunders, Gemma Williamson
Non-School Members	Cllr Mark Mills-Bishop
Substitutes	Martin Brown
Officers	Simon Newland, Jonathan Burberry, Debbie Pettit, Cheryl Faint, Juliet Whitehead, Tania Rawle, Melany Knowles, Jennie Newman, Richard Woodard, Michael Francis, Beckie Walsh
Apologies	Cllr Judi Billing, Kit Davies, Tracy Prickett, Nikki Smith, Robert Smith, Gill Worgan, Andrew de Csilléry, Jessica Breakwell, Frances Manning
Observing	Cllr Mark Watkin, Cllr Terry Douris, Dawn Amos (HCC Finance), Tracy Doyle (Finance Director, Longdean), Andy Griffiths (HfL)

1. Minutes of last meeting & matters arising

The minutes were recorded as accurate subject to the following amendment

Item 5 (page 4) – the bullet point was amended to read:

- *“in combination with an answer to the question – is it possible to increase the resource available for school family workers? (Regulations prevent the budget being provided through the historical commitment route from being increased.)”*

Action: SN/JB to confirm

Matters arising

Integrated Therapies: An email update had been provided to Richard Haynes outside of the meeting. However assurance was still sought about the quality and quantity of the service; data and monitoring of the contract

Action: Caroline Inglis to refer back to Julie Reddish/Andrew Knox for a statement and will feedback to Richard to ensure this covers his expectation. Simon Newland will verbally feedback to Schools Forum in January.

2. Schools budget 2020/21 Update

Jonathan Burberry introduced this paper providing an update on the Schools Budget proposals for 2020-21 including options for the allocation of additional resource for primary and secondary schools. Jonathan summarised each of these three options and noted that the first stage of each option was the removal of the £3M funded from carry forward from AWPU funding. The percentage uplifts quoted in the paper would therefore be applied to the lower, adjusted AWPU figure.

As many of the topics covered in this paper were to be discussed in further detail during the course of the meeting, under later agenda items, it was agreed to return to this item at the end of the meeting for decision on the recommendations.

At the end of the meeting, Forum agreed the following four recommendations from this paper:

- (i) To support the budget proposals for the schools' block, subject to the separate decision on how to distribute the additional resource which is covered by item (v) below.

VOTE					
For	15	Against	-	Abstain	-

- (ii) To agree the 2020-21 budget for the Growth Fund which is set out in section 5.5 of this paper,

(Note: the criteria for the Growth Fund had been reviewed and agreed under item 4, so this vote was to agree the budget)

VOTE					
For	15	Against	-	Abstain	-

- (v) To support option 3 for the allocation of additional resource to primary and secondary schools (from section 6 of the paper), to go forward to consultation with schools.

(Schools and academies members only to vote),

VOTE					
For	12	Against	-	Abstain	-

- (vi) To support consulting schools on the other proposals set out in para 6.9.

VOTE					
For	12	Against	-	Abstain	-

It was noted that the other recommendations under this paper had been considered under other agenda items:

- (iii) To agree to the use of an additional £138,000 of carry-forward to support the budget proposals for the central school services block,

This was agreed under Item 10 (Admissions Appeals)

- (iv) To note the budget position for the high needs block,

This was considered under Item 6 (High Level Needs Budget Update)

3. Falling Rolls Fund

This paper, introduced by Tania Rawle, outlines the proposal to retain £1.5M allocation to fund and facilitate longer term solutions for two schools that met the criteria for falling rolls funding in 2019/20.

Forum is asked to agree to retain centrally the existing £1.5M allocation to the falling rolls funding for 2020/21.

VOTE					
For	15	Against	-	Abstain	-

4. Amendments to Growth Fund Criteria

Jonathan Burberry outlined the background to this paper, which sets out proposed additions and amendments to the Growth Fund criteria, to come into effect from April 2020.

Forum:

- supported the proposed additions and amendments intended to clarify and update the Growth Fund
- confirmed its approval of the 2020-21 criteria for the Growth Fund detailed in Annex A of the paper.

VOTE					
For	15	Against	-	Abstain	-

5. Disapplication requests update

Matt Gautier expressed a declaration of interest.

Jonathan Burberry presented the paper to Forum seeking support for a disapplication for a negative pupil number variation (in respect of a bulge class leaving). The paper also provides an update about the assessment that has been carried out of the impact on Astley Cooper and Samuel Ryder of losing MFG protection.

Forum:

- (a) supported the negative pupil number variation relating to a bulge class leaving as outlined in Section 5 of the paper
- (b) noted the developments since September regarding the MFG protection received by Astley Cooper and Samuel Ryder schools, as outlined in Section 6 of the paper.

VOTE					
For	14	Against	-	Abstain	1

6. High Level Needs Budget update

Simon Newland introduced this paper setting out issues arising in relation to the anticipated medium-term position for the High Needs block of the DSG, prior to further consideration of next year's budget at January's School Forum meeting.

There was a discussion about resourcing the proposed new funding arrangements for complex needs in mainstream. An initial estimate of the cost of these changes is £7m, although modelling work is continuing, and the figure is not finalised.

Forum expressed concern about the following:

- the gap between the funding requirement for the new arrangements and the headroom of £1.3m currently available in the high needs budget,
- whether finding the shortfall within the given timescale was an achievable objective,
- the additional costs being charged to the high needs budget connected with social care. (It was requested that details of the rationale for these amounts should be brought to the January meeting.)

A paper about the new funding arrangements for complex needs in mainstream, together with a draft high needs budget strategy covering several years, will be brought to the January Forum meeting.

The Forum noted but did not accept the budget position.

The Forum noted the draft minutes of the High Needs funding sub group (appendix A of the paper).

7. ESC Funding Review

Dave Allen declared an interest.

Richard Woodard presented the paper to Forum which describes the funding review which has been completed in relation to ESCs. It is recognised that there is a need for more places.

Note: Forum requested the following additional information:

- feedback on ESC places

- funding formula and how numbers are devised
- data of number of places/pupils and capacity rates
- sight of the formula
- demography is changing – is there a need to reconsider numbers?
- how well is the resource and how equitably is it being used
- how will need and outreach be met in the new development of Bishops Stortford
- how are the different centres using the available funding
- is the SLA going to tie in

Richard Woodard confirmed that monitoring is evolving.

Forum was asked to agree the recommendations as outlined in No. 3 of the report.

- (i) To continue using the DSPL Model Indicator to distribute funding
- (ii) Further review of the funding of ESCs when the Timpson Review of Exclusions recommendations are acted upon.

VOTE					
For	14	Against	-	Abstain	1

8. Early Years centrally retained items

Melany Knowles presented this paper which detailed the early years budgets for 2020/21 that are classified as central budgets. The budget items shown are the same as for the current year, save that in two cases the amounts have changed.

Forum was asked to defer for the time being consideration of Item 12 in Table 1 – Ludwick Enrichment Group. A small working group will meet before the next forum meeting to further discuss options regarding the group.

There was some discussion round the extent to which resources for quality/school improvement were sufficient and/or equitably allocated across provider types; and similarly the basis on which the relative allocations of funding for the SEND Development Fund and Primary/maintained nursery SEND support had been made as between the school and PVI provider groups. This matter will be explored in more depth at Forum in the new year.

Forum is asked to agree the 2020/21 centrally retained early year's budget listed in Table 1 with the exception of the following items which will be determined in January:

- 6.1 Quality Improvement - £664K
- 6.6 HfL nursery class/school improvement - £250K
- 6.8 SEND Development Fund - £600K
- 6.13 Primary and maintained nursery schools SEND support - £700K

VOTE					
For	15	Against	-	Abstain	-

9. Approval of de-delegated budget items

Simon Newland provided an update on the outcome of the recent de-delegation consultation.

Schools had strongly supported the proposals for de-delegation to support the school improvement and other services delivered via the contract between HCC and HfL. This was the case for each phase, and both for the coming year and the two subsequent years. On that basis, officers were happy to recommend the proposed level of de-delegation to Forum.

In addition, the paper provided information on other de-delegated budgets which needed to be approved. These other de-delegated budgets included contingency support for schools facing financial difficulty, free school meals eligibility and trade union facilities time. It was proposed that these budgets are kept at the 2019/20 levels.

Nick Rowland noted that the positive responses to the de-delegation consultation mirrored the valued work provided by Herts for Learning.

Forum was asked to vote on the following as per the phase / type of school noted.

Robert Fielden declared an interest. It was also noted that the representative of maintained ESCs was not present at the meeting.

Financial Arrangements for HfL Core Contract

i) The proposal for maintained schools to contribute £25.50 per pupil in 2020/21 to enable the continuation of the core HfL contract, specifically to support those elements of the contract which relate to the Council's duties towards maintained schools. This contribution will be accounted for as follows:

- (a) De-delegation of £20.50 per pupil for School Improvement **(voting by phase, maintained primary and secondary schools only)**

VOTE – PRIMARY MAINTAINED					
For	5	Against	-	Abstain	-

VOTE – SECONDARY MAINTAINED					
For	1	Against	-	Abstain	-

- (b) Central Retention of £5 per pupil to cover other activities **(voting by all maintained schools together including Special and ESCs)**

VOTE					
For	7	Against	-	Abstain	-

- (c) That each Special School and ESC pupil (place) is weighted for the purposes of this recommendation as equivalent to 5 mainstream pupils **(voting by all maintained schools together including Special and ESCs)**

VOTE					
For	7	Against	-	Abstain	-

- ii) The principle that the arrangements proposed are for three years, and that with an expectation that the 2019/20 level of services will continue to be provided for the following three years **(voting by all maintained schools together including Special and ESCs)**

VOTE					
For	7	Against	-	Abstain	-

Other de-delegation

Maintained mainstream school members were also asked to agree the recommendations below with each phase voting separately:

- iii) That rates of de-delegation per pupil remain at 2019/20 levels for the following items **(voting by phase, maintained primary and secondary schools only)**
- Determining Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility
 - Trade Union facilities time.

VOTE – PRIMARY MAINTAINED					
For	5	Against	-	Abstain	-

VOTE – SECONDARY MAINTAINED					
For	1	Against	-	Abstain	-

- iv) That the 2020/21 contingency support for reorganizing schools and schools facing financial difficulty continues at the reduced rate of 80p per pupil **(voting by phase, maintained primary and secondary schools only)**

VOTE – PRIMARY MAINTAINED					
For	5	Against	-	Abstain	-

VOTE – SECONDARY MAINTAINED					
For	1	Against	-	Abstain	-

10. Admission Appeals

In June, SF was informed that HCC needed to introduce a consistent system of charging for school admission appeals regardless of school status in order to comply with government guidance.

In this paper, Juliet Whitehead provided an update on the work that has taken place since the June SF meeting including benchmarking work on the appeals service with other local authorities and in particular a visit to a SE LA where we were able to undertake a deep dive exercise regarding the costs and service provision.

The paper also addressed issues that were raised by SF members in the June meeting. These included:

- the timing of appeals,
- potential ways to reduce the number of appeals;
- the costs of venues; and
- the issue of school hoppers.

A question was asked about whether there should be a cap in charges to small schools, as there is a proportionately greater cost to small schools where pupil numbers are low which will have an impact on their budgets. This had been raised as an issue by headteacher groups.

Simon Newland responded by saying that the LA would consider the possibility of providing a cap or some sort of financial support, in exceptional cases, for small schools.

The Admissions Appeals Team has started working with 10 of the schools that use the service the most and who will form the basis of a working group. The working group will be consulted about different options for the service which may reduce costs but this may impact the amount of work that schools will have to do. They will also look at the flow of information, due diligence of what the system could look like.

A question was asked about reducing the cost of appeals using the central schools service block but Simon Newland pointed out that this would significantly reduce the pot and cuts would have to be made elsewhere.

SF was asked to agree to budget for transitional funding of £138K in order to subsidise the appeals for both maintained and academies for the coming year as the proposed charge of £200 doesn't cover the actual cost of appeals. This transitional funding would help the service move towards becoming fully traded.

Forum advised that there are models which could be looked at such as a sliding scale of costs as academies currently have in other Local Authorities.

Forum was asked to vote on the following recommendations. Items (iv) and (v) were to note only:

- (i) that we commence charging maintained schools for administration of admission appeals from April 2020 at the same rate as for academies, in order to be compliant with DfE guidance, which states that all schools should be treated on an equivalent basis in the use of DSG,

VOTE					
For	15	Against	-	Abstain	-

- (ii) that the change per appeal lodged for all schools and academies will be £200 from April 2020 (an increase of £25 per appeal)

VOTE					
For	12	Against	2	Abstain	1

- (iii) that transitional support is provided by retaining a budget of £138k for admission appeals within the Central Schools Service Block budget for the financial year April 2020 through to March 2021 to support the service working towards become fully traded by April 2021

VOTE					
For	15	Against	-	Abstain	-

Items (iv) and (v) were to note only:

- (iv) that Forum notes that a detailed review of the scope for also reducing the costs of the Admissions Appeals Team Service has started with a view to the service becoming fully traded in due course
- (v) that Forum supports the establishment of a working group, with school representation from schools that most use the service, to provide guidance and support to the review in developing the traded service.

11. Central School Service Block

Simon Newland presented this paper, seeking the approval of Forum for the central budgets within the Central Schools Services block.

Mark Mills-Bishop declared an interest as he is a member of SACRE.

Forum agreed the 2020-21 central budgets listed in table 1 in section 4 of the paper.

VOTE					
For	14	Against	-	Abstain	1

12. Forward work programme

The forward work programme and agenda for the next meeting was reviewed

13. Any other business

No further business was raised.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of Forum will be held on:

Date: Wednesday 15 January 2020

Time: 1.00pm - 4.00pm

Venue: Ash Room, HDC, Robertson House, Stevenage