



Schools Forum

Date: 18 March 2021

Time: 8.30 am

Venue: Via MS Teams

Item/Paper

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Public

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 28 JANUARY 2021 – HELD VIA MS TEAMS

Present

School Forum Members

Bill Dowell (Chair)
Mark Cooper – Secondary academy headteacher
Alan Doust – Secondary academy headteacher
John Hitchings – Academy governor
Sabrina Hobbs – Special academy headteacher
Sandra Holloway – Primary governor
Marilyn Hunt – Primary headteacher
Sian Lines – Diocese of Hereford
Kerry Lynch – Primary academy headteacher
Stephen Matthews – Primary governor
David O'Toole – Secondary academy headteacher
Alan Parkhurst – Primary headteacher
Michael Revell – Primary governor
Mark Rogers – Primary headteacher
Andrew Smith – Post 16
Charles Thomas – Professional association representative
Reuben Thorley – Secondary headteacher

Members

Ed Potter

Officers

Karen Bradshaw
Julia Dean
Jo Jones
Neville Ward
Stephen Waters
Phil Wilson
Helen Woodbridge

Observers

Roger Evans
David Vasmer

The Chair recognised the work of schools and early years providers during the pandemic. He acknowledged the wonderful work being done in keeping children engaged, despite the challenges.

Ed Potter added his and the Council's sincere thanks to all schools and providers. He undertook to continue to do whatever the Council can to provide support. He recognised the negative impact of lockdowns on the mental health of our young people.

Karen Bradshaw endorsed the thanks given. She added that the Council continues to lobby for additional finance.

Sabrina Hobbs thanked Shropshire Council for their support on getting special schools recognised as having a need to have their staff vaccinated.

Phil Wilson went through the protocols for the meeting.

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Cllr Nick Bardsley due to illness. The best

ACTION

wishes of Schools Forum were sent to Nick.
Donna Lewis and Darren Reynolds had declined the meeting.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting held in January were agreed as a true record and it was confirmed that the two items identified had been picked up in the agenda.

3. School Revenue Funding Settlement and School Arrangements 2021-22

Jo Jones presented her paper and the figures at point 6 were corrected - the 2020-21 figure states £977m – this should be £977,000. The 2021-22 figure states £959.933m – this should be £959,933.

Budget information is going out to schools before the Council meeting on 8 February but with the caveat that they are not yet formally approved.

Neville Ward gave a warning of a potential issue regarding the Early Years block, which is based on the January 20 census, whereas funding will be based on actuals for 2021 and 2022. However, due to COVID, attendance is not as high as normal so there may be an impact on 2021.

Phil Wilson recorded thanks to Jo Jones for her sterling work on the school budgets.

Marilyn Hunt asked Neville Ward if the January 2021 census included those on roll or registered and it was confirmed that they were all included based on expectations which helps.

Phil Wilson advised that following the government announcement yesterday advising that the earliest return to school will be 8 March 2021, there was a commitment to a further £300m for the National Tutoring Programme to support catch up. Schools are being funded for FSM for children at home extended beyond half term and the Covid Winter Grant Scheme continues to support FSM over school holidays including Easter.

Charles Thomas advised that the NEU and other organisation are putting in funding to schools too to support home learning.

4. Shropshire Schools Forum Constitution

Phil Wilson presented the paper. He advised that there is no requirement to adjust representation as there have been very few academy conversions.

Schools Forum agreed to keep a place for secondary maintained schools.

Alan Doust, Alan Parkhurst, Marilyn Hunt and Sandra Holloway advised (through the meeting chat) that they would be willing to continue as members of Schools Forum and it was agreed that their term of offices for should be extended for a

further four year period.

It was identified that there was a need for more representatives from academies. Bill Dowell (as a member of CSAT) volunteered to fill one of the academy places if it would be helpful. It was agreed that this would be helpful.

Schools Forum members unanimously agreed the constitution.

5. Dedicated Schools Grants Recovery Plan Update

Julia Dean presented the paper. She acknowledged that although it is good news that an extra £3 million is going into the High Needs Block, current needs are growing including a growth in challenging behaviour. A long-term impact of lockdown on SEN is expected. There are a number of ongoing pressures within the budget around post 16, top-up and 6th day provision.

There are some good news stories eg the successful work with TMBSS (although this has been delayed by COVID). Hubs are now established and around 50 pupils are accessing these. The new SEND free school based in Shrewsbury will open from September 2022.

The written statement of action following the recent Ofsted inspection will impact on the high needs budget in a positive way (eg reduction of exclusions of SEN children). There is a need to work on a neuro-development pathway which will hopefully reduce pressure on schools as SEN will have been diagnosed.

Post 16 pressures

Still year on year growth as more students are in the system up to an older age (up to 23) although the average cost per student has fallen. These older students tend to be the more complex and costly. There is a need to investigate the disparity of costs between providers.

6th day provision

There has been an increase in permanent exclusions and a High Needs Task and Finish Group had been considering this. The budget has increased but costs have risen rapidly. Christine Kerry is now leading the work in this important area which can affect life outcomes.

Top-up funding for mainstream schools

This is becoming more costly, but officers intend to continue to improve efficiency.

Alan Doust asked about exclusions and was worried about the language used around preventing permanent exclusions. He asked if the aim is for zero or to significantly reduce. His school only permanently excludes as an absolute last resort and there is a need to be mindful that this is what schools will want to do. Julia Dean explained that there is work ongoing which includes representative headteachers. The issue is that permanent exclusions are increasing rapidly and at more than the national rate. There are real issues to be addressed eg SEND make up 14% of school population yet in terms of permanent exclusion,

70% have SEND. Investigation should take place to ensure needs are recognised and met.

The LA will be working towards no permanent exclusions of children with EHCPs. If a school is not right for a child, the LA and school will work together to move.

Alan Doust advised that schools are struggling in this area and partnership working will be required.

The Chair wondered if this issue needs to be considered by CPG.

Alan Parkhurst advised that Christine Kerry's Inclusion Workstream Group (working under the written statement of action) includes himself, Claire Gaskin and Pete Johnstone. It will report back through CPG/heads briefings etc.

6. Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring 2020-21

Stephen Waters presented his paper and went through the deficit and reasons for it. He advised that the DSG deficit recovery plan includes continuing to work to ensure that costs are kept as low as possible.

It was pleasing to note that for independent special schools, the forecast expenditure is less than expected due to reduction in high cost residential placements. This will reduce further as other hubs/free school come into use.

The Chair asked about the Deficit Recovery Plan and it was confirmed that it is the DFE who require this. However, their focus has not been directed on this due to the pandemic. Stephen Waters advised that guidance remains in place and the LA need to provide information as and when expected and update Schools Forum.

The Chair stressed that Schools Forum must understand this so it would be sensible to have an interim plan for the March meeting and this should be added to the agenda.

Phil Wilson made the point that this is an opportunity to state the position. The uplift in budget and transfer from Schools Block are helpful but there is a need to be realistic.

Mark Rogers was pleased to see the drop in Independent Special School costs. He found it hard to understand the post 16 issue and asked who was paying before. Julia Dean confirmed that 20-25 is a completely new cohort so they are additional numbers. Population figures have not increased significantly. There are more young people with higher needs progressing to college (rather than being NEET). There is an expectation that young people will continue in training. EHCPs were extended to include 16-25 year olds in 2014. Young people are getting a better deal, but it is more costly.

Mark Rogers suggested that the government needs to provide more funding. The Chair suggested that the deficit recovery plan could include these points. Phil Wilson advised that the three-year settlement alluded to a review of this – perhaps need to remind.

Julia Dean added that a SEND review is also happening nationally (although

delayed) as there has been a lot of unrest. All LAs are struggling in the same way.

7. Schools Forum Work Programme 2021-22

Phil Wilson presented his paper which provided an outline programme.

He intended to add (in June/September) Union funding discussion.

Also feedback from the Inclusion Workstream Group.

Schools Forum members were asked to add aspects of school finance to be discussed if they wish.

8. Communications

Lobbying continues and f40 continues to be active.

Pressures schools are under need to continue to be articulated.

Phil Wilson added that there had been a councillor meeting with MPs recently and issues were raised, particularly around unfunded COVID costs.

9. Future meeting dates:

Thursday 18 March 2021

Thursday 17 June 2021

Thursday 16 September 2021

Thursday 4 November 2021

Thursday 2 December 2021

Thursday 13 January 2022

Thursday 27 January 2022 (provisional)

Thursday 17 March 2022

Thursday 16 June 2022

The meeting closed at 09.45