



Schools Forum
Date: 4 November 2021
Time: 8.30 am
Venue: Via MS Teams

Item/Paper
A
 Public

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2021 – HELD VIA MS TEAMS

Present

School Forum Members

- Bill Dowell (Chair)
- John Hitchings – Academy governor
- Sandra Holloway – Primary governor
- Marilyn Hunt – Primary headteacher
- Kerry Lynch – Primary academy headteacher
- Stephen Matthews – Primary governor
- Michael Revell – Primary governor
- Mark Rogers – Primary headteacher
- Andrew Smith – Post 16
- James Staniforth – Post 16
- Tracey Mullinder for Brian Thomas – Special academy headteacher
- Carla Whelan – Primary academy headteacher (absent 9.10 – 9.23 due to activation of fire alarm)

Members

- Gwilym Butler
- Kirstie Hurst-Knight

Officers

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

Observers

- Roger Evans
- Charles Thomas

		ACTION
1.	<p>Apologies</p> <p>Apologies had been received from Alan Doust, Sian Lines, Sue Lovecy, David O’Toole, John Parr, Reuben Thorley.</p> <p>Late apologies were received from Caroline Clode and Alan Parkhurst.</p> <p>The chair welcomed all to the first meeting of the academic year.</p>	
2.	<p>Election of Chair and Vice Chair</p> <p>Karen Bradshaw advised that as there had only been one nomination for each post, Bill Dowell and John Hitchings had been confirmed as chair and vice chair respectively for the year 2021-22.</p>	
3.	<p>Minutes and Matters Arising</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2021 were agreed (by exception) as a true record. Phil Wilson went through the matters arising which had all been completed.</p>	

4. **Updated Dedicated Schools Grant 2021-22**

A summary of the provisional 2021-22 DSG (as presented to Schools Forum in June 2021), and the latest updated 2021-22 DSG announced in July 2021, was shared by Jo Jones.

There was no update to the Schools Block as there had been no academy conversions.

There was no update to the Early Years Block as this had been pushed back to January 2022 due to changes in timing of headcount data.

High Needs Block - import/export adjustment reduced by £240k to £966k, adjustment for Woodlands conversion of £820,000 as they are now directly funded via the ESFA - overall reduction of £580k.

Latest 2021-22 DSG is £104.255m.

5. **School Revenue Funding Update 2022-23**

Jo Jones presented her report. She advised that in July 2021 the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) published schools revenue funding guidance for 2022-23 for local authorities and Schools Forums. Along with the guidance, the Government has published provisional local authority level allocations for 2022-23 for the Schools and High Needs Blocks within the DSG and notional 2022-23 national funding formula (NFF) school level allocations.

For 2022-23 in Shropshire the primary unit of funding (PUF) is £4,747 per pupil and the secondary unit of funding (SUF) is £5,687 per pupil. These will be used to calculate each local authority's Schools Block allocation for 2022-23 using the October 2021 census data. The key elements of the schools NFF were confirmed.

Mark Rogers was encouraged by the move to the multi-year settlement and changes to sparsity rules. However, he was confused by the 0% pay increase for teaching staff when there is record inflation. He noted that the multi-year settlement will be impacted by the NI rise and advised that it is becoming harder to fill posts with quality replacements.

It was confirmed that the final HR policy on pay is awaited before further discussions with headteachers can take place.

The chair suggested further discussion at the next meeting.

PW

Charles Thomas added further budget concerns regarding pay progression through thresholds and the difficulties retaining staff, especially TAs who can easily find better paid opportunities.

6. **Consultation on 'Fair School Funding For All'**

Phil Wilson presented his paper and advised that a response is required by the end of September.

The DfE is seeking views on the approach they are taking to completing their

reforms to the national funding formula (NFF) and how they most effectively transition away from local formulae to all schools' funding allocations being determined directly by the NFF. He felt it important to note that Shropshire's local formula already aligns to and mirrors the NFF and so the impact of the further transition will be marginal.

The chair pointed out that the course taken by Shropshire had been in consultation with all of the schools. If there was to be any change, then schools would need to be consulted again.

Mark Rogers recognised that it may be preferable for other LAs to try to maintain control of the formula. However, Shropshire has benefitted by sticking with the NFF, particularly as the schools in Shropshire are so diverse in character and size.

The chair surmised that there is a really strong case for sticking with the NFF and it was agreed that the draft response will be submitted. (Phil Wilson agreed to share the Coventry response for information.)

PW

7. Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring 2022-23

Stephen Waters presented his paper.

Early Years Block - the final Early Years DSG allocation for 2020-21 is published later in the year.

The outturn position for the Early Years Block is still forecast to be at the provisional budgeted level of £17.028m.

High Needs Block - DSG allocation has increased by £3.751m from £28.016m in 2020-21 to £31.767m in 2021-22. In-year surplus forecast of £0.512m.

Given that £0.876m of high needs funding represents a one-off transfer of funding from the Schools Block as approved by Schools Forum, this indicates that the High Needs Block DSG allocation to Shropshire alone is insufficient to meet needs.

The main variances were summarised.

Andrew Smith had a concern that one statement in the report referred to 'reducing expensive cost of specialist placements' and needed to be put into context as not all specialist places are very expensive. Karen Bradshaw agreed that correct specialist provision needed to be found whilst reducing expenditure from the high needs block. She thought the statement to be factually correct but it does not suggest that specialist provision is too expensive and won't be paid for.

The chair stressed that Schools Forum would not want to denigrate any providers.

Neville Ward provided some further detail explaining that because of the way early years funding is being calculated, the LA has not yet received the 2020-2021 final budget. By then, the LA will have already spent two terms worth of 2021/22 in the dark. So, there will be considerable changes.

Marilyn Hunt was pleased to receive the good news about the reducing deficit.

She asked if the DfE had called in the plan and was advised that they had not. Stephen Waters advised that the plan will need to be refreshed. Mark Rogers made a minor point around the cost of maternity and the birth rate during the pandemic. It was agreed that the LA would analyse this as usual.

SAW

Karen Bradshaw felt that it was positive that there is some headroom and that it may be possible to consider alternative use of budget for support services.

8. Communications

It was confirmed that work continues through f40 and MPs.

The chair thanked Karen Bradshaw for her work and support as this is her last Schools Forum meeting.

9. Future meeting dates:

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 9.30 am