

## **Schools Forum Task & Finish Group**

### **Notes of key points raised at the meeting held on 13 January 2016**

#### **1. In attendance**

Bill Dowell (Chair of Schools Forum) [BD], Mark Rogers (Headteacher, Oxon CE Primary) [MR], Phil Adams (Headteacher, Corbet School Technology College) [PA], Kay Redknapp (Head of Service, TMBSS) [KR], Sandra Holloway (School Business Manager, Meole Brace CE Primary) [SH], Alan Parkhurst (Headteacher, Crowmoor Primary) [AP], John Hitchings (Vice Chair of Schools Forum) [JH].

Local authority officers:

Karen Bradshaw [KB], Tina Russell [TR], Gwyneth Evans [GE], Stephen Waters [SW] and Phil Wilson [PW].

#### **2. Apologies**

Phil Poulton (Headteacher, Ludlow CE School), Yvette McDaniel (Headteacher, Prees CE Primary), Nick Bardsley (Deputy Portfolio Folder, Children's Services) and Pete Johnstone (Headteacher, Belvidere School).

Bill Dowell, as chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting

#### **3. Dedicated Schools Grant Settlement 2016-17**

GE provided a brief overview of Shropshire's DSG settlement for 2016-17. Overall Shropshire's DSG has increased by £200k from 2015-16. The key points to note are that pupil numbers in Shropshire have reduced by 65 between October 2014 census and October 2015 census resulting in a reduction to the School Block funding of £285k. The High Needs Block has increased by £488k, mainly due to an additional £478k High Needs top-up allocation made available to Shropshire as part of an additional £92.5m made available nationally.

GE also explained that the local authority had received the school dataset information for 2016-17. There are, for some schools, significant variations in the IDACI and free school meal (FSM) pupil data. Shropshire's October 2015 IDACI data has resulted in a 10% reduction to the funding allocated to schools on this formula factor. As Shropshire's 2015-16 local funding formula only allocated £220k on the IDACI factor in total across all Shropshire primary schools, the variations in data do not cause particularly significant variations in funding on an individual school by school basis.

The FSM pupil data has also reduced by around 10% overall, and as the total allocated on this factor in 2015-16 was £9.3m, the impact on many individual schools is significant. The resulting £985k reduction to the funding allocated to individual schools through the FSM factor will be recycled through the AWPUP factor across all Shropshire schools giving

each school an additional £28 per pupil. The Task & Finish Group supported this approach.

#### **4. Central Retained Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Funding 2016-17**

PW referred the group back to the last Forum meeting and the projected underspend of an estimated £1.0 million in the High Needs budget within the centrally retained DSG in 2015-16. He reported that there are reported pressures on pre- and post-16 place funding in 2016-17 of an estimated £888k. Further detailed analysis will be undertaken with SEN officers to assess and understand these indicative projections and the measures being taken to keep the costs in check. If the projections are realised then the majority of the one-off carry forward of £1.0 million from 2015-16 will be required to meet these additional costs.

PW then went on to look at the overall High Needs budget within the centrally retained DSG for 2016-17. As GE had reported in the previous agenda item, Shropshire has been allocated £478k High Needs top up allocation as part of an additional £92.5m made available nationally. PW also reported that there is scope for reducing the contingency budget for top ups – currently £850k – as this was based on historic and conservative estimates by SEN officers. Combined with the additional allocation of £478k, this adds up to £1.0 million in 2016-17 from the High Needs budget in the centrally retained DSG in 2016-17.

PW advised that there was a proposal that officers wanted to put before the group about a possible use of the £1.0 million, relating to Early Help.

TR provided the group with some background to the areas covered by Early Help, which include:

- targeted youth support
- Autism West Midlands commissioned contract
- Action for Children – shortbreaks for children with disabilities and SEN
- Lifelines – dedicated bereavement counselling
- Young carers – peer support and social activities
- the Solihull Approach parenting programme/family support
- Enhance commissioned programme
- Compass – multi-agency ‘front door’ regarding concerns for the welfare or protection of children and young people.

JH noted the worthiness of this programme of support to children and young people. He enquired where the current funding for these activities was coming from. TR advised that it comes from a variety of sources: local authority base budget, CCG, public health, Troubled Families funding and DSG. The challenge is sustaining the breadth and scope of the provision while faced with public expenditure constraints. KB reported that, in a recent peer review, Shropshire’s Early Help provision was commended, compares very favourably with other local authorities and is starting to make a difference.

In overall financial terms the provision is costing an estimated £6.0 million per annum, of which a significant proportion is the local authority budget.

AP stated that he was expecting that there would be more than one proposal being put forward. He reported that the message from headteachers, via CPG, was that extra capacity is required in schools to support children with High Needs. Detailed facts and figures would need to be provided, for example on the number of young people supported by Early Help.

BD stated that the purpose of this meeting was to initiate discussions and to begin unpacking the issues.

KR, as head of TMBSS, was keen to be more engaged with Early Help. She would welcome being more involved with the agencies than she is at present. Her sense was that things were being 'done to' schools and that it was not as linked up as it needed to be. KB indicated that schools were represented on the Schools Safeguarding Group and the Early Help Stakeholders' Group, and that the local authority were keen to engage schools.

MR felt that there was a need for greater clarity on the funding streams that make up the Council's funding for Early Help.

PA stated that there needs to be a clear message to local politicians that they need to do more to challenge Central Government re the cuts to such provision. He suggested that perhaps they need to see some of the services fail in order to better understand the consequences of continued cuts in provision.

Bill asked Karen to facilitate a meeting with the lead members in the Council's new Administration, including the new portfolio holder, to discuss the pressures being faced by schools.

**Action:** KB to arrange for chair and vice chair of Schools Forum to meet with senior members.

MR agreed that there is a case for the Early Help proposal. However, there is an alternative for additional support for addressing the challenges being faced by schools in dealing with the most 'difficult' children. He was suggesting, via the £1.0 million freed up in 2016-17, supporting both the ongoing sustainability of Early Help while putting additional funding into mainstream top up funding, for example some or all of the additional £478k.

AP suggested that CPG would not be able to support a single proposal.

PW advised that the notes of this meeting will be shared with the wider Schools Forum at their meeting on 21 January. A subsequent report will be presented to the Forum meeting on 17 March, following a further meeting of the Task & Finish Group in February at which the group will

receive and consider the detailed information they require, including further options, in order to take an informed view on the way forward.

**Action:** PW to arrange a further meeting of the group in February.

**5. Government Education White Paper and National Fair Funding Formula**

PW advised that there is no further detail yet on the Government's proposed consultation on a national fair funding formula. A paper produced by f40 last summer on a proposed formula was circulated to the group for information.

An Education White Paper is expected some time in the spring.

As and when the Government publishes information on their proposals, dates for further meetings of the Task & Finish Group will be diaried.

**6. Any Other Business**

As there was no further business BD closed the meeting, thanking all attendees for their time and helpful contribution to the discussions.