

Schools Forum

Date: 17 March 2016

Time: 8.30 am

Venue: STDC, Monkmoor,
Shrewsbury

Item/Paper

A

Public

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 21 JANUARY 2016

Present

School Forum Members

Bill Dowell (Chair)
 Phil Adams – Academy Headteacher
 Michael Barratt – Secondary Academy
 Mark Blackstock Secondary Academy
 Richard Bray – Secondary Academy
 David Chantrey – Primary Governor
 Christine Harding – Early Years and Childcare
 Christine Hargest – Association of Secretaries
 John Hitchings – SSGC
 Sabrina Hobbs – Special/Academy Headteacher
 Sandra Holloway – Primary Governor
 Jo Humphreys – Primary Governor
 Martin Jones – Primary Governor
 Alan Parkhurst – Primary Headteacher
 Geoff Renwick – Secondary Academy
 Mark Rogers – Primary Headteacher
 Phillip Sell – Diocese Representative
 Ruth Thomas – Post 16

Members

Cllr David Minnery
 Cllr Nick Bardsley

Officers

Phil Wilson
 Gwyneth Evans
 Rob Carlyle
 Neville Ward
 Stephen Waters
 Gareth Proffitt
 Helen Woodbridge (minutes)

Observers/Visitors

Roger Evans

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Hannah Fraser (observer), Pete Johnstone, Yvette McDaniel, Phil Poulton, Kay Redknapp, Joy Tetsill and Karen Bradshaw. A subsequent apology was received from Colin Case.
 Cllr David Minnery (the new portfolio holder), Michael Barratt and Sabrina Hobbs were all welcomed to their first meeting. Schools Forum colleagues introduced themselves.
 The Chair advised that he will write to thank Ann Hartley (the previous portfolio holder) on behalf of Schools Forum.

ACTION

Chair

2. Minutes and Matters Arising (Paper A)

PS made a slight amendment on page 2 of the minutes which was agreed (some schools (not LAs) buy insurance).
 PW advised that re the Trades Union Duties funding he had contacted HR, had spoken with CHarg and attended an Association Secretaries meeting. He confirmed that he is working to ensure clarity around the use of the funding. The outcomes of his investigations will go to the Task & Finish Group. One of the issues is re academies buying in. HR had advised that they had written to all academies on this subject outlining the options re TU and HR support. (PA suggested that this hadn't been received). GR was keen to have this issue sorted and with a clear picture of

how the budget is being spent.

CHarg suggested recirculating a paper she had presented to Schools Forum as the position hasn't really changed. She added that work with academies continues as TUs cannot let members down.

CHarg

NW clarified the previous confusion re teacher led provision in EY when the provision is led by a school. In an LA maintained nursery there has to be a qualified early years teacher. If the provision is through a school's extended schools powers it does not need to be teacher led (although it is an Ofsted expectation for a teacher within the school providing oversight).

NW advised that more information is awaited from the DfE before an Early Years Block Task & Finish Group is established.

PW confirmed that the Schools Funding Task & Finish Group is up and running.

3. **Schools' Budget 2016-17 and October 2015 Dataset update**

GE went through the information paper. The key message is that the funding was confirmed largely as expected.

The Chair asked who provides information re residency (in the high needs block) – GE advised that there is no detail provided other than the reduction to funding within the DSG. GE agreed to ask DfE for the detail behind the Post 16 and NMSS adjustment to reflect a change from residency to location basis of funding.

GE

GE advised that within the schools dataset received from the EFA there is a significant NOR variation for several schools. There are also significant changes in IDACI data as updated from 2010 and there does not seem to be a pattern to the FSM reduction.

IDACI turbulence is at a manageable level in Shropshire (which is not the case in other LAs). FSM reduction is a general trend in the West Midlands. This is more of an issue for Shropshire than the reduction in IDACI data because more funding is allocated through the formula on FSM. It was confirmed that the Schools Funding Task and Finish Group had supported the approach taken to deal with the FSM reduction.

The Chair thanked GE for a clear report.

JHi asked when schools would receive budget details - GE is aiming for the end of January.

GE was asked if the overall drop of 65 pupils is indicative of a slowing down of the declining NOR trend. She commented that the situation is complex – NOR still falling but further analysis is required – the Task & Finish Group will consider in detail. There are still significant reductions in many areas and for many schools.

Chair requested the update by geographical area as this is important.

NB spoke of the continued need for governing bodies to be vigilant.

PW advised that there had been workshops for 15 financially vulnerable schools (based on falling rolls), looking at their financial data and sharing with them a refined budget planning tool.

MJ suggested that there is even a major difference re numbers within a locality.

PW thought that there is a need to talk to schools within a locality and this is already happening.

GE advised that the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) has gone up for those schools who have lost FSM funding so there are some new MFG schools including for the first time, secondary schools. The cost of MFG in 2016-17 is almost twice the cost of MFG in 2015-16.

It was confirmed that to date there had been no response from the DfE re the disapplication request – it should arrive today.

RT asked about the mapping of high needs? PW advised that this should be covered later on the agenda and more work will be required as the SEND numbers are increasing.

SH added that it needed not to be just numbers but severity of need too.

DCh asked about the top up funding of £478k and asked if we would have had a reduction if that hadn't been the case.
GE advised that each year an amount of top up funding is received (it was £200k last year) but that it is captured in the budget base for the next year.
PW forecasted a predicted £5m loss in DSG if numbers drop as predicted.
DCh confirmed that planning ahead is difficult for schools.
PW advised that RC will begin to work on updating the planning tool when his budget setting work is completed. It was confirmed that it is a useful tool – it helps academy headteachers but there are other changes that have an effect.
PW spoke of a new government efficiency tool which the LA will consider.
MR and WJH were surprised at trend re FSM – the disproportionate impact is an issue.
PA advised that anecdotally FSM are more difficult to get.

4. Shropshire Schools Forum Constitution

PW went through the paper. Term of office end dates were flagged as an issue.
WJH and JHi agreed to consider the process for the appointment of governor representatives and how to attempt to stagger term end dates. They will write to governors and hold an election if necessary.
JHi reminded colleagues that the 19 school members are critical as they have a vote on key funding issues.
The Chair spoke of the desirability of a mix of continuity and freshness.
PA suggested that the profile (eg MATs) will change so will need to respond.
SH asked about teaching school representation.
PW advised that this is not in the constitution but that MB is from a teaching school.
MB wondered if a national fair funding formula and movement towards academisation may mean that representation becomes very different.
PW advised that he is anticipating new Schools Forum regulations and in future they could be EFA led.

WJH/JHi

5. Schools Forum Schools Block Task and Finish Group

PW advised that the group had met last week – it had been a good and useful meeting but issues were flagged up. Officers had been given work to undertake particularly re Early Help. One particular issue re a year end underspend/high needs block/centrally retained DSG was discussed.
The group will continue to report back to Schools Forum following the meetings.
The Chair advised of the need for preparatory work as these are complicated issues for officers who are already under pressure.
RT advised that she would like to join the group and it was agreed that both she and SH will join due to the complexities around high needs.
MR thought that the extra money coming in and reductions in other funding streams need to be fully considered. There may be implications of decisions on areas that are not fully understood so specialist help is vital and a Senior SEN officer should also attend.
The Chair spoke of the need for accurate forecasting.
SH concurred, stressing that forecasting is essential. Creative solutions are needed and collaborative ways of working together.
JHi reminded colleagues that Task & Finish Groups are there to prepare the way and not to make decisions.
PA advised that the SEN underspend is to be considered by the group.
DM spoke of the change in the administration at the LA. He reassured colleagues that new administration doesn't share all of the approach of previous administration. However there is tremendous financial pressure. Up to now the savings have not had too much impact but this cannot continue. Representations have been made to the PM. Shropshire MPs met with the administration last Friday re inadequacy of

HW

government intentions. DM undertook to support colleagues.

The Chair explained that Schools Forum did have some common policy with the previous administration which hopefully can continue.

6. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Monitoring

Stephen Waters presented the information paper.

JHi was concerned about the underspends and asked if there is any indication that the budgets will be spent by end of financial year (adding however, a need to keep some flexibility within the budget).

PW advised that the projected outturn is of a similar degree but that the Task & Finish Group will consider.

PW highlighted the need to change the title of the reports as it is now largely not centrally retained. GE added the need to change so that it reflects the DSG report. MR was worried about the expectations of one Task & Finish Group (which seems to have merged from two groups) but understood the advantages of having one group. He asked when funding can be recycled.

GE advised that in 2014-15 half of the underspend was allocated to schools. This time should know the position in April and can decide allocation to high need areas at any point in the year. It would not be able to be put into AWPU until 2017-18. The high needs block budget is not submitted until end of March but then not set in stone. The Chair suggested that a small group needs to consider the work of the Task & Finish Group – there is significant work to be done before the next Task and Finish Group meeting.

SH thought that provision consideration is key and there should be a multi-agency approach.

MB asked to whom Schools Forum is accountable and it was confirmed as the EFA. He expressed concern that we do not know enough about national funding and that the landscape over next year will change. There are LA cuts and school cooperation. Strategic thinking is needed to work out structure as we don't want to be dictated to. SH agreed re the MAT drive and forcing collaboration. However, she felt that in Shropshire there is no need to be forced.

The Chair welcomed new contributions which were 'preaching to the converted' but sharpened some thinking.

NB suggested that there will always be some schools/governing bodies who are not on the same wavelength and that schools benefit hugely from working together. The Chair summed up by saying that the modelling tools are useful because of the data behind them. The data re special needs is not known so there is a need to work on this before further work is undertaken.

SH spoke of multi-agency approaches. High needs/SEN also social care and medical needs. In terms of sustainability there shouldn't be lots of resource being put into school age children and just delaying the inevitable. It would be a waste of money if there are no clear outcomes. She thought there is a need to involve other commissioners as SEND children need a different approach.

RT added EHCPs into the mix. Outcomes need to be written to enable opportunity post 25 and the biggest challenge is around social care and health.

AP stressed that this is not the role of Schools Forum which is there to allocate funding dedicated to schools.

The Chair thought it valuable to get others to give a view as to how their budgets can work with schools' funding.

DM thought that AP was correct but that someone else's funding could support schools and he would be talking to Rod Thompson on this subject.

AP was worried that Schools Forum was being asked to give £1m to Social Services. All are supportive of children with needs but need further information before that decision can be sanctioned.

RE spoke of the Shropshire Council children's services budget for next year (paper

on Friday) and a focus group for under 16s/18s. Schools Forum may need to respond as there will be some significant cuts to Council support for vulnerable children (outside schools).

7. Communications

The Chair suggested really careful thinking through of the work of the Task & Finish Group with a focus on high needs and to ensure decisions re underspend are brought to the table.

Members/MP discussions are ongoing.

GP suggested that some case studies could be planned for this year.

NB agreed that this would be good to stress the positives.

8. Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 17 March 2016.

The meeting closed at 10.35 am

Future meetings: 9 June 2016

DRAFT