

SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2014

**In the Shrewsbury Training and Development Centre, Racecourse Crescent,
Monkmoor, Shrewsbury, SY2 5BP**

8.30 - 10.35 am

Responsible Officer: Philip Wilson
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Present

School Forum Members

Bill Dowell (Chair), Phil Adams, Austin Atkinson, Cllr Nick Bardsley, Hilary Burke, Chris Davies, Chris Endacott, Sheila Halsall, Christine Harding, Christine Hargest, Ann Hartley, Sandra Holloway, Peter Ingham, Pete Johnstone, Sally Lill, Phil Loveday, Kay Miller, Ian Nurser, David Ravenscroft, Mark Rogers and James Sparkes

Members

Councillor Nick Bardsley, Councillor Ann Hartley

Officers

Karen Bradshaw, Phil Wilson, Gwyneth Evans, Rob Carlyle, Gareth Proffitt, Deborah Fern, Helen Woodbridge (minutes)

Observers/Visitors

Cllr Hannah Fraser, Alan Penton (Item 6), Peter Davis (Item 6)

1 Apologies

Apologies had been received from Jo Humphreys, Yvette McDaniel and Neville Ward.

2 Minutes and Matters Arising

There were no matters arising that were not already on the agenda.

The Chair advised that the Post 16 funding levels had been published and that it was not particularly good news. Janine Vernon had attended a School Sustainability

Task & Finish Group meeting and had confirmed that funding is still a concern. The Chair confirmed that Schools Forum will continue to track the Post 16 funding.

3 **Lobbying**

Ann Hartley advised that she had met with the local MPs and had raised Schools Forum's issues. One MP sent an immediate email to Michael Gove regarding progress on the national funding formula – however, he had one back confirming there was no news. (However, as we know, there was an announcement one week later.) The meeting had discussed the difficulty in maintaining standards in a climate of reducing funding and NORs. A Shropshire Council Administration briefing had also been attended.

The Chair advised that although it has been confirmed that consultation is taking place re extra funding in 2015-16 there are still surplus places and Shropshire's problems have not been solved. Phil Adams added that there will be extra pension costs for schools and for his school this will cost £35,000.

The Chair advised that local colleges are engaging with MPs on Post 16 issues and suggested that individual schools need to do so too.

Ann Hartley advised that the news re more funding is positive and that f40 have done a good job.

Mark Rogers thought it was useful that David Laws quoted a Shropshire school when talking nationally which is an indication that local lobbying had played a part.

Karen Bradshaw added that there had also been conversations through regional Ofsted connections.

4 **Fairer Schools Funding in 2015 - 16 (Gwyneth Evans)**

Gwyneth Evans reminded colleagues that the news re extra funding is not definite – it is the start of a consultation process and won't be confirmed until later in the year. It is another stage in the move towards a national funding formula. When the funding comes in to the LA it will be redistributed in consultation with Schools Forum. f40 will continue to scrutinise minimum funding levels as some of the f40 group - about 18 - have not gained anything.

Phil Adams reminded colleagues that there is still a job to do for the sustainability group as the schools system in Shropshire is unsustainable.

Sally Lill suggested that parents and the wider community would need a more balanced view of the extra funding. The Chair spoke of the important communication needs re good news but tempered by the challenges.

Chris Endacott advised that losing 500 pupils as forecast over the next few years would reduce the amount of additional funding Shropshire will receive.

Gwyneth Evans warned that schools protected by MFG may not see any increase in funding at first as this could be offset by the MFG.

Mark Rogers suggested that it will take some time for officers/Schools Forum to understand all of the ramifications of the changes. There will need to be a period of readjustment for this to happen.

Chris Davies had seen no mention of special schools in the news re extra funding and has contacted David Laws and his MP about this. He would like Schools Forum to reconsider the funding for complex needs.

Mark Rogers asked about a response to the consultation and it was agreed that a Task & Finish Group meeting would be arranged to complete this prior to the submission date of 30 April 2014. Ideally all schools should respond and Gwyneth Evans agreed to send a paper out to all schools.

5 Task and Finish Group on School Sustainability

The Chair thanked Phil Wilson, Gwyneth Evans and Rob Carlyle for the work they had put into the modelling which had proved that sustainability is not always directly related to the size of schools.

It had been the group's intention to send the school budget modelling tool out to schools and academies, and this was discussed in the light of the recent funding announcement. It was agreed that the information around predicted NOR could still be sent.

Schools Forum agreed again that it is important that Parish Councils and the community are made more aware of the demographic and funding position of Shropshire.

Peter Ingham felt it important that the budget information still goes out to schools – the mechanisms are there, just the updated figures are required. He felt that Schools Forum has to show progress otherwise its credibility will diminish.

Chris Davies said that it was unfortunate that the funding announcement came just as the modelling was ready to be sent out. Schools will need clarity about the implications of the new funding eg effect of MFG but we wouldn't want to dampen the good news.

Mark Rogers felt that the demography information is the important message. He thought that the revised funding should come to the next Schools Forum meeting before it is sent out to schools.

Sally Lill knew that headteachers are working on this now (eg she is meeting her cluster next week) using their own predictions and would like any information asap. The Chair advised that Anne Gribbin, Head of Education Improvement and Efficiency, could advise the group on the impact of collaborations/ federations of educational outcomes.

James Sparkes felt that it would be sensible to send out updated finances with a reality check (maybe deferred slightly to allow remodelling).
Gwyneth Evans advised that the extra funding is only a proposal at this stage and that Schools Forum will need to agree how it is distributed when it is agreed.
Phil Adams suggested modelling on AWPU and adding a caveat.
Chris Endacott felt that it is important to get the modelling tool out to get schools used to it. He added that the NOR issue need to be more widely publicised as it means if Shropshire loses 500 children over the new few years it will cost £2.5 million.

Peter Ingham said that mechanisms will not change and comparisons will be useful. How schools are managed is what makes the difference.
Pete Johnstone felt that he knows there is more money but needs realistic figures. He advised that he would be prepared to wait a few months for a more accurate and updated planning tool.

The Chair advised that 2014-15 position won't change and felt that the tool was needed asap.

Mark Rogers cautioned that the financial model will be flawed.
Chris Davies suggested sending out for 2014-15 and delaying for 2015-16. He also suggested contacting Parish Councils to advise them of effect that not allowing developments is having.

Phil Adams thought it may depend on how the formula goes and may encourage more schools to engage with the decisions.

Pete Johnstone advised that at the Task & Finish Group meeting there had been evidence that even if house building increases the number of homes the pupil population remains the same. New business is what is needed to increase the pupil population.

It was suggested that the discussion needed to be replicated with headteachers and governors – possibly at a Lord Hill Hotel event.

Gwyneth Evans suggested that the decisions re 2015-16 need to be taken as early as they can be.

Karen Bradshaw suggested that the Task & Finish Group arrange an earlier meeting and bring recommendations re formularising the new funding to the next Schools Forum meeting – it could be modelled on the same basis as now with the necessary caveats/health warnings.

Mark Rogers was still worried about the major effect of different decisions eg the lump sum. He felt that the formula group needed to be reconstituted.

Ian Nurser advised that headteachers are planning their budgets. There needs to be a statement from Schools Forum tempering the news eg re MFG, and the effects of pay rises/pension costs.

Schools Forum agreed on this.

The Chair suggested that it would be autumn term before indicative decisions are made re 2015-16.

6 **Joint Use Leisure Centres and Swimming Pools Funding Arrangements (Phil Wilson)**

Alan Penton and Pete Davis attended for this item. The Joint Use Task and Finish Group were thanked for the work they had put in. Phil Wilson went through the paper in detail. The decision is the LA's responsibility but this will be taken in consultation with Schools Forum. An informal Cabinet meeting considered this paper last week and had agreed with the recommendation. Minutes of the Joint Use Task & Finish Group meetings have been shared and colleagues were reminded of the confidentiality of this information.

Chris Endacott asked if the group have ascertained the commercial rate to charge to cover costs if all schools paid to access swimming facilities. He believed this would help establish their viability. Phil Wilson advised that this could be done over time and the phased delegation option will enable the position for each facility to be annually reviewed. If schools begin to be charged their usage may reduce.

Chris Davies added that as there is a statutory requirement to provide swimming it may be worth looking at what is happening across the county and then consider a blanket per pupil/per hour cost.

Phil Loveday advised that his governors had been working with Pete Davies on joint use and he agreed that fairness is important. He stressed that consideration needs to be given to the age and relative condition of the facilities. All facilities with a swimming pool will need extra funding to balance the books.

James Sparkes registered concern re financial liabilities that schools are taking on. There needs to be a realistic review of actual costs and liabilities.

Phil Adams was concerned that some schools have sports facilities but don't receive any funding. His view is that council tax should increase as all local people should pay for the swimming pools.

Ian Nurser advised that as money for schools swimming is included in budgets schools need to pay for swimming otherwise there is cross subsidisation.

Mark Rogers was pleased that the papers had gone a long way towards unpicking the finances. However he was concerned that Cabinet had already made their decision. Ann Hartley was able to confirm that this had only been considered informally by Cabinet.

Chris Endacott stressed that paragraph 5.4 is the key. He recommended that an addition be made to the recommendation re phased delegation – all schools paying for swimming on an equitable basis.

Schools Forum agreed with the recommendation to move over four years from 2015-16 towards the full delegation of the funding for joint use leisure centres and swimming pools, recognising that in a minority of cases there may be a need for continued targeted funding to protect access to swimming facilities for a number of primary schools (subject to annual review).
(For 15, Abstentions 5, Against 0)

7 Universal Infant Free School Meals (Phil Wilson)

Phil Wilson talked through the paper.

Kay Miller asked what happens about schools who are providing/receiving school meal services to/from other schools. Phil Wilson advised that schools in these circumstances need to be in discussion with each other and to work together.

Mark Rogers commented that the paper is an excellent piece of work.
Ian Nurser felt that the proposed distribution was as fair as it could be.
Schools Forum endorsed the proposals for the distribution of capital funding.

8 Communications

It was confirmed that there is much to do.

9 National Funding Formula Update

There was no update.

10 Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 19 June 2014. (Christine Hargest gave her apologies for this meeting)

Schools Forum said farewell to Shelia Halsall and Chris Endacott and they were thanked for their significant input to the work of Forum.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: