

Schools Forum

Date: 17 September 2015

Time: 8.30 am

Venue: STDC, Monkmoor,
Shrewsbury

Item/Paper

A

Public

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 18 JUNE 2015

Present

School Forum Members

Bill Dowell (Chair)
Phil Adams – Academy Headteacher
Austin Atkinson – Diocese Representative
Mark Blackstock – Secondary Governor
Richard Bray – Secondary Governor
Colin Case – Primary Governor
David Chantrey – Primary Governor
Chris Davies – Special/Academy Headteacher
Christine Harding – Early Years and Childcare
Christine Hargest – Association of Secretaries
John Hitchings – SSGC
Sandra Holloway – Primary Governor
Jo Humphreys – Primary Governor
Peter Ingham – Secondary Governor
Pete Johnstone – Secondary Headteacher
Yvette McDaniel – Primary Headteacher
Geoff Pettengell – Academy Headteacher
Phil Poulton – Secondary Headteacher
Mark Rogers – Primary Headteacher
Joy Tetsill – Secondary Governor
Ruth Thomas – Post 16

Members

Cllr Ann Hartley
Cllr Nick Bardsley

Officers

Karen Bradshaw
Phil Wilson
Gwyneth Evans
Rob Carlyle
Neville Ward
Helen Woodbridge (Minutes)

Observers/Visitors

Roger Evans

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Hilary Burke, Deborah Fern, Martin Jones, Alan Parkhurst, Gareth Proffitt, Kay Redknapp, Philip Sell. Subsequent apologies were received from Sally Lill.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising (Paper A)

Phil Wilson confirmed that a letter had been sent to the 18 schools affected by the joint use funding issue advising them of the revised tapering.
The Chair advised that although the Sustainability Task and Finish Group had not yet met, officers and members had discussed the issues.
Phil Wilson advised that the issue re the Universal Infant Free School Meals capital grant raised by Sally Lill had been followed up.
The Chair/Phil Wilson provided an update on the membership of School Forum.
Mark Blackstock was welcomed to his first meeting as a member. Alan Parkhurst has been appointed as a primary headteacher member but has sent his apologies for this meeting. There are currently two vacancies – one for an academy representative (which is being pursued by Geoff Pettengell) and the other for a

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maintained primary headteacher representative (which is being pursued through the Central Policy Group).

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3. School Balances as at 31 March 2015

Gwyneth Evans distributed a confidential appendix to the paper on maintained school balances (which was collected in at the end of the item). She went through the papers in detail.

Peter Ingham asked where a deficit would show up when a school left the maintained sector. Gwyneth Evans advised that this would be seen within the DSG budget.

Phil Adams was pleased that the secondary schools which had deficit budgets were all rated as good by Ofsted so there should be no danger of them being forced to academise. However, Geoff Pettengell mentioned 'coasting schools' and the current lack of a definition. Depending on the definition some schools may become vulnerable.

Gwyneth Evans confirmed all maintained schools balances would be considered during the risk assessment process.

Chris Davies spoke of the need to be aware that standalone academies will no longer be approved and all future academies will be part of a chain.

The Chair was confident that Schools Forum has a good grasp of the risk factors.

Overall total Shropshire maintained school balances have reduced by £1.2 million.

The LA is working closely with any schools with a deficit budget although the reduction in deficit budgets aimed for has not yet been achieved.

Phil Adams was concerned that the deficit situation for a particular large secondary school did not seem to be improving. Gwyneth Evans was able to assure Schools Forum that 2015/16 is the key year for that school and that a new business manager is in place. Governors are all aware of the need to reduce the deficit and the headteacher and school business manager are focussed. Richard Bray confirmed that the school is working hard to reduce the deficit. The deficit recovery plan agreed with the school demonstrates full pay back in 2016-17.

The Chair confirmed the need for the LA to continue to intervene powerfully and quickly to ensure the situation experienced (when a sponsored academy with a large deficit converted) is not repeated. Schools Forum supported this.

Jo Humphreys advised that because of early LA intervention at her school, the situation had been addressed quickly but warned that governors need to be prepared to make hard decisions.

John Hitchings felt that big strides are being made in this difficult area and requested regular feedback to Schools Forum. The Chair confirmed that this would happen and was pleased that Gwyneth Evans and other officers were being so active.

Phil Poulton was concerned about the falling NOR – when 165 pupils are leaving and only 125 coming in, it is hard to adjust early enough. He had however found the budget modelling tool to be very useful.

Phil Adams raised the primary/secondary split and questioned the balance as primary is in surplus and secondary is in deficit. Chris Davies thought that with the National Fair Funding formula approaching there would be little point in addressing this, and added that the effect of new money and new costs will be interesting.

The Chair warned of a medium term post 16 issue. A Shropshire Learning Network sustainability paper had painted a gloomy picture with massive changes for schools with sixth forms.

Gwyneth Evans advised that moving forward, more awareness raising re deficit budgets will take place through Schools Forum, CPG, Headteachers Briefings and governors meetings. Officers had discussed how support to schools can be provided eg the provision of sound NOR data for five years, inviting schools in to work on future financial planning and an annual Lord Hill event.

Karen Bradshaw suggested using the Lord Hill event to start the process and then

invite specific schools in. Schools Forum agreed that a Lord Hill event should be arranged followed by individual school follow up meetings. It was suggested that financial case studies re clusters could be shared.

The Chair suggested that specific schools should be invited first but if they don't respond, required to come to financial planning meetings.

Phil Poulton was concerned at a Lord Hill event for maintained schools when decisions may be made based on one third of the secondary schools. There are issues with academies receiving financial information about maintained schools when the arrangement is not reciprocal.

The Chair shared concerns re secondary and was unsure how much the Regional Schools Commissioner knew about Shropshire. More engagement is needed as the divided pattern of status is not helpful.

Roger Evans reported that he had visited a London school where the decrease in the number of 16-18 years olds had been highlighted. He suspected that Schools Forum, would need to address a similar issue in Shropshire.

The Chair advised that Janine Vernon and Graham Moore were producing a paper on this for Ann Hartley. The funding of post 16 is not Schools Forum's responsibility but the impact it may have is.

Phil Adams asked about academy deficits if they were to become sponsored. Karen Bradshaw suggested that this would be an EFA problem and Geoff Pettengell confirmed that it would not impact on Shropshire. However Karen Bradshaw pointed out that ultimately there is an impact on the national budget.

Gwyneth Evans advised of a collaboration modelling tool which is also available although not on general release yet.

The Chair felt that demography is the key for school sustainability followed by post 16 sustainability. He felt that Nick Bardsley should be included in the Lord Hill event.

Mark Rogers thought that being able to see new houses may cause issues.

Phil Wilson advised that place planning is being worked on. There are 16 areas. 4-5 have growth in numbers with the rest declining.

Rob Carlyle clarified that the budget modelling tool enables varying NOR to be used.

Gwyneth Evans added that the possible effects of new housing could be added in.

However, the LA projection does not include any new numbers from the housing.

Nick Bardsley felt that it would be helpful if there was publicity re falling NOR before Christmas. The position has become clearer as indications are that DSG is not increasing as hoped. So the decline in some areas will be steep. The messages need to be repeated. Councillors only know what they are told by schools and some areas engage and others don't.

Joy Tetsill suggested that Parish and Town Councils need to know that they are damaging their local schools when they refuse housing.

The Chair spoke of the need for school closures in the interest of all Shropshire children.

Colin Case asked if there could be publication of what new housing may produce in terms of numbers/ages of children.

Phil Wilson advised that the yield would differ. Children would largely be redistributed within Shropshire – this will be included with the place planning.

The recommendation (that Schools Forum should support the LA in raising awareness in Shropshire maintained schools of the protocol for schools planning and managing a deficit budget) was agreed.

Karen Bradshaw advised that a tightened protocol which would provide more clarity for schools would be brought to Schools Forum in September.

Yvette McDaniel asked about financial notice.

Karen Bradshaw advised that it moves from an informal position.

Gwyneth Evans added that it is a formal laying out of expectation and could lead to withdrawal of delegation.

Peter Ingham felt this was a prudent step in the light of diminishing resources.

He asked if there was any indication of the continuation of the extra funding (£10 million).

Gwyneth Evans and Rob Carlyle confirmed that it is in the manifesto – confirmed as in the baseline.

Phil Adams cautioned that there may be changes in the July budget speech.

Colin Case confirmed that Shropshire is still one of the 69 worst funded LAs.

4. Control of Surplus Balances

Gwyneth Evans went through a confidential paper on the control of surplus balances. The paper was collected in at the end of the item. No surplus balances were clawed back from Shropshire maintained schools at the end of 2014-15.

5. Updated Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2015-16 and Final Early Years Block 2014-15 Allocation

Gwyneth Evans presented the paper.

Mark Rogers asked about a timeline for 2016/17. Gwyneth Evans advised that there has been no indication of any further school funding reforms for 2016-17 at this stage – she is expecting more news in July.

Jo Humphreys asked about capital funding for the extended early years provision. Neville Ward confirmed that this will be an issue for Schools Forum. It starts from September 2017 (and Shropshire is not piloting). Further detail is awaited. There are implications for the provision of places so place planning will include early years. There are revenue issues as the rate paid is less than parents are charged (which is a national issue).

Christine Harding advised that nurseries receive less in Shropshire and that some provision is becoming unsustainable.

Chris Davies confirmed that this mirrors the school position.

The Chair asked Neville Ward to keep Schools Forum up to date on this issue.

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6. Schools Financial Value Standard

Gwyneth Evans went through her paper. She confirmed that only 67% of schools had completed the SFVS which is disappointing but better than last year. Schools have been reminded by email twice and it has been an item on governing body agendas. Internal audit have been advised.

Nick Bardsley asked if there was any correlation to schools with a deficit. It was confirmed that there was some.

Pete Johnstone confirmed that the return is not onerous to complete.

David Chantrey enquired if schools were asked why they had not completed it and Gwyneth Evans advised that a variety of reasons were provided.

Jo Humphreys wondered if it made a difference when schools used the clerking service. Mark Rogers suggested that non completion was an indication of poor governance and should be reported to Governor Services.

It was agreed that Schools Forum would write to schools that had not submitted a return.

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7. Dedicated School Grant (DSG) Outturn 2014-15

Phil Wilson presented the report and confirmed that the position is hard to predict as there are so many variables. He explained the costs for SEND pupils and confirmed that more of these pupils are being retained in Shropshire.

8. Communications

The Chair confirmed that the F40 group continue to be extremely active.

Nick Bardsley advised that the Scrutiny Committee is to meet on 15 July and school sustainability is an agenda item. Issues are to be revisited and there will be further

publicity using the local press. He reminded colleagues of a recent article in the Star from Daniel Kawczynski.

Ann Hartley advised that dates for monthly meetings between members and MPs have been diaried. She added that Cecilia Motley takes a lead on rural affairs, is working hard to raise awareness of rural/sparsity issues and that the local government conference in Harrogate will be attended in July. She advised of a peer review which is being carried out next week involving David Simmonds who is Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board – she hopes to be able to continue to communicate with him in the future.

The Chair had received a letter from Chris Davies advising him that he will be taking early retirement from August 2015 and therefore will no longer be a member of Schools Forum. The Chair thanked Chris for his enormous contribution to Schools Forum over many years including attendance at a wide range of task and finish groups. His work which has been focussed on the young people of Shropshire has been very much appreciated.

9. Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 17 September 2015.

The meeting closed at 10.30 am

Future meetings: 22 October 2015, 26 November 2015, 21 January 2016, 24 March 2016, 9 June 2016