



Schools Forum

Date: 21 June 2018

Time: 8.30 am

Venue: STDC, Monkmoor,
Shrewsbury

Item/Paper

A

Public

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 22 MARCH 2018

Present

School Forum Members

Bill Dowell (Chair)
Phil Adams – Academy Headteacher
John Hitchings – SSGC
Sabrina Hobbs – Academy Headteacher
Sandra Holloway – Primary Governor
Shelly Hurdley – Early Years Representative
Samantha John – Academy Representative
Pete Johnstone – Secondary Headteacher
Alan Parkhurst – Primary Headteacher
Mark Rogers – Primary Headteacher
Charles Thomas (NEU) – representing Jean Evanson
Guy Verling – Primary Headteacher

Members

Cllr Nick Bardsley

Officers

Phil Wilson
Julia Dean
Gwyneth Evans
Chris Mathews
Stephen Waters
Helen Woodbridge (Minutes)

Observers

David Vasmer
Robin Wilson

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Michael Barratt, John Eglin, Jean Evanson, Maggie Furmanek, Marilyn Hunt, Geoff Pettengell, Geoff Renwick, Michael Revell, Philip Sell, Clare Aspinall, Roger Evans, Karen Bradshaw, Neville Ward and Jo Jones.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising (Paper A)

It was agreed that Schools Forum membership is to be added as an agenda item for the next secondary headteachers' briefing.

3. High Needs Benchmarking

Phil Wilson went through the report and appendices. He reported that officers and school representatives supported a simplified version of the funding mechanism with two bands instead of four which would enable more effective multi-year budget planning. Robin Wilson explained that special school budgets are very different with numbers on roll not known in advance. Commissioned places are known but actual places are not. Top ups across four bands are difficult - in reality the school is receiving lower band funding rather than the average which is worked on to predict numbers and banding. A shift to bands A and B is skewing to a lower level of funding meaning that Woodlands is significantly less well off than similar schools in the West Midlands. Sabrina Hobbs was pleased with general outcomes of report and agreed that a flatter simplified structure in terms of banding would be good to explore. She added that admissions timelines can add to the fluctuation of the budget and wondered if information coming from the LA/other providers could be developed to improve budget planning. Phil Wilson confirmed that the structure being considered for Woodlands is one general band and another to enable targeting of top up funding at a higher level in a minority of circumstances.

John Hitchings advised that although he has long service as a governor, he finds it

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difficult to understand Severndale's finances which can change significantly year on year. He suggested that the system needs to be as simple as possible to enable accountability, predictability and good value for money.

It was established that there are other pressures on high needs funding eg rising exclusions. Also, there is a need to enable the reduction of out of county placements and to move some MLD pupils to mainstream schools.

Julia Dean advised that the high needs strategic review has established that more hubs are to be developed. The first hubs are to be in place from September 2018. Further funding from the government is available to look at alternative provision and free school specialist provision. She requested representation from Schools Forum to feed in to developments from a financial perspective.

The chair summarised that officers will continue to work with the two special schools and in parallel will work with Julia Dean and Jonathan Wilding re developments around hubs and alternative provision. It was felt that the biggest impact will be on mainstream schools.

Chris Mathews confirmed that Schools Forum would consider the findings, officers will draw up the policy, CPG will be consulted and it will go to members for approval.

Mark Rogers spoke of the tensions between primary and secondary finances and the need to reflect on benchmarking with other statistical neighbour areas. He expressed a concern that the simplification of banding may lead to a loss of flexibility.

Phil Adams pointed out that if mainstream schools are meeting more of the lower level needs it would mean that specialist schools receive more higher needs students.

Julia Dean advised that the review has found that Shropshire has less children in special and more in mainstream schools than local and statistical neighbours.

Robin Wilson added that a panel always considers placements.

Pete Johnstone asked about a potential free school as he recognised the need.

Julia Dean advised that it would be to address geographical need in the south and confirmed that high needs funding would follow the children.

Stephen Waters added that this would enable in county placement of children who are currently placed out of county.

Phil Wilson spoke of the need for business appraisal as the funding pot won't grow.

Julia Dean suggested that there would be savings on transport.

The chair asked about the timescale for the strategy and it was confirmed that it is to go to Cabinet and will be put onto the work plan asap.

The chair suggested moving the June meeting back to 21 June to enable further discussion on this and this was agreed.

4. **Secondary School Deficit - Confidential item**

He explained the legacy deficit of £425k and reminded Schools Forum members that a group has met twice to discuss options.

The meeting on 25 September 2017 provided background information and the meeting on 2 January 2018 included school and councillor representatives. He advised that there is no option to get approval from SoS (as Schools Forum did for a previous deficit).

Ways of addressing the deficit were suggested and a range of options explored.

ESFA rules mean that there is no provision for all schools to contribute to a deficit balance. The LA could use its de-delegated contingency but this would affect mainstream schools only so is not an acceptable option.

Possibilities include:

- Using the income from a one off source at the school.
- SEND provision/hubs defrayment of some building costs.
- Disposal of parcel of land – issue is that capital receipt may not stay in education and would need mechanism to use capital receipt for revenue purposes. Also precedent issues.

Another meeting of the group is to be arranged early in the summer term.

It was recognised that the school is well managed – it is a good and improving school

with outstanding leadership and management including governance. Both the chair and vice chair confirmed that they are unwilling to bring to Schools Forum any proposal to write this debt off through dedelegation. Schools Forum were in agreement with this.

John Hitchings asked what would happen if nothing is done. It was thought that it may be possible for the school to repay over 20 years, however, there is always the danger that if the school becomes a sponsored academy, the deficit will come back to the LA. It is also a barrier to academisation.

Phil Adams pointed out that the school could be faced with closure if a sponsor could not be found.

Mark Rogers identified the unfairness in the system as some academy trusts are being bailed out at a cost of up to £70 million.

The chair felt that Schools Forum has a good understanding of the issues (which are difficult to solve) and will continue to work on it. The school both recognises the support and understands the complexities.

5. Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring

Stephen Waters went through his report.

Julia Dean spoke of ongoing work with partners eg health re commissioning to enable children to be placed more locally.

The uptake of SEN nursery placements 30 hours are hard to predict but should become clearer over time.

Sabrina Hobbs recognised that placement in independent specialist provision is not only an education decision. However, cuts to health and social care are contributing to the need for this type of placement.

6. Communications

The chair stressed the need for the lead member to keep raising the issues with MPs.

Nick Bardsley reported his frustration as at the last meeting with MPs they didn't get to his report. He has requested to be top of the agenda in April.

Chris Mathews and Nick Bardsley had talked to the RSC about a specific school deficit issue but felt they did not understand.

Sabrina Hobbs expressed concern that schools are having to take on more without any extra funding.

Charles Thomas advised of the NEU action day on 21 April where these issues will be raised.

Gwyneth Evans advised that she will be attending f40 conference in London on Monday. They are joining up with Worth Less campaign.

The meeting closed at 10.15 am.

Future meetings (please diary):

21 June 2018	8.30 am	STDC, Monkmoor
13 September 2018	8.30 am	STDC, Monkmoor
8 November 2018	8.30 am	STDC, Monkmoor
6 December 2018	8.30 am	STDC, Monkmoor
17 January 2019	8.30 am	STDC, Monkmoor
31 January 2019 (provision)	8.30 am	STDC, Monkmoor
21 March 2019	8.30 am	STDC, Monkmoor
6 June 2019	8.30 am	STDC, Monkmoor