

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2019

Present

School Forum Members

Bill Dowell (Chair)
Mark Cooper – Secondary Headteacher
Sabrina Hobbs – Special Academy Headteacher
John Hitchings – Academy Governor
Sam John, Academy of Hereford Diocese
Stephen Matthews – Primary Governor (and headteacher)
Alan Parkhurst – Primary Headteacher
John Parr – Academy Headteacher
Michael Revell – Primary Governor
Mark Rogers – Primary Headteacher
Andrew Smith – 16 -19 Representative
Charles Thomas – Professional Association Rep
Guy Verling – Primary Headteacher

Members

Cllr Nick Bardsley

Officers

Karen Bradshaw
Phil Wilson
Julia Dean
Gwyneth Evans
Stephen Waters
Jo Jones
Helen Woodbridge (Minutes)

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Alan Doust, Sandra Holloway, Marylin Hunt, Sian Lines, Kerry Lynch, David O'Toole, Ed Potter and Neville Ward.
Late apologies were received from Shelly Hurdley

2. Election of Chair (Karen Bradshaw)

Karen Bradshaw welcomed colleagues to the meeting.
One nomination had been received for chair – Bill Dowell.
Schools Forum unanimously elected Bill Dowell as the chair for a further 12 month period.
One nomination had been received for vice chair – John Hitchings.
Schools Forum unanimously elected John Hitchings as the vice chair for a further 12 month period.

3. Minutes and Matters Arising (Paper A)

Marilyn Hunt had submitted a suggested amendment to some wording at Point 4 – this was amended to read “many small schools might be unable to pay”.

Karen Bradshaw advised that detailed discussions around High Needs had taken place and she confirmed the need for the LA to work with schools to find a solution, adding that work is ongoing through the High Needs Task & Finish Group.
Phil Wilson reminded colleagues of the survey of schools re alternate provision which had taken place at the end of the summer term - the results are being collated for consideration at the first High Needs Task and Finish Group meeting later in September.
There will be a further meeting in October and the aspiration is to consult with schools on options.

ACTION

HW

The Schools Funding Meeting (Lord Hill meeting) has been scheduled for 14 November and will be at the Shrewsbury Town Football Ground as the Lord Hill Hotel is due to close. At this meeting, alternate provision will be considered as the consultation will be underway by then.

The chair and vice chair were appreciative of the meeting with Karen Bradshaw and officers following the last Schools Forum meeting.

4. Information from Spending Round Announcement

Phil Wilson presented his paper which was as up to date as possible (which had led to the delay in publication). He was pleased that f40 are cautiously optimistic and that the the Institute of Fiscal Studies' belief is that this will have made good the loss of funding to schools over the last 10 years. Colleagues in Early Years however, do not believe that the additional funding in their area will be sufficient.

Sabrina Hobbs mentioned other costs - NQTs being paid at £30k, support staff increases in pay/pensions. She advised that the march intended for 27 September has been postponed.

Mark Rogers suggested that this is good news overall and he was pleased that Schools Forum had already taken the decision to match the National Funding Formula in Shropshire. He raised some operational concerns, particularly around Business World and confusing advice/misunderstanding re pay grants (pay and pensions). Budget decisions need to be taken in the Autumn term and information is needed to support this. Business World is utter chaos and there is a risk that schools make redundancies/cuts that are not required.

Karen Bradshaw advised that Neil Felton will be working through headteacher forums to understand issues. She asked schools to advise Phil Wilson of Business World issues and suggested that Neil Felton is asked to talk to Mark Rogers.

Mark Cooper added that Business World is horrific for secondary.

Charles Thomas reported that Unions are pleased with the planned financial increase but cautioned that this only puts the levels back to those of 2010.

PW

5. Financial Transparency of Maintained Schools and Academy Trusts Consultation

Gwyneth Evans went through her paper.

She advised that a consultation has been launched and the draft consultation response was considered by Schools Forum.

Gwyneth Evans had been surprised to learn that half of the schools that did not return the SFVS to their LA are from Shropshire.

John Hitchings felt that the wording used to schools regarding the SFVS return needs to be stronger.

Sam John advised that during her trust's audit, when one school failed in an action it was the trust that was named.

The chair was disappointed as he had written to those schools that have not responded.

Michael Revell suggested that the LA could name any schools that don't respond.

Mark Rogers suggested that non-return could be due to confusion because of changes of governors etc.

Schools Forum recognised that the bar needs to be raised. The LA could call in schools but this should not be necessary.

Gwyneth Evans advised that individual schools can respond to the consultation.

Mark Rogers challenged the assumption that it is maintained schools that are in more financial difficulty. The chair and other colleagues agreed, particularly in the light of financial issues for a local Academy Trust. It was suggested that this is being used as a divisive tool - the academies agenda is being pushed through and squeezing LA support.

Sam John advised that she had found audit useful – it can be positive and can lead to savings.

Phil Wilson alluded to another consultation which is out about a proposed extension to

the Risk Protection Arrangement (aligning maintained schools to the academy practice). Mark Cooper suggested that as his schools buys into premium monitoring with a finance officer, a three yearly audit is sufficient.

6. Schools Resource Management Advisor (SRMA) Support

Gwyneth Evans presented the paper which was for information only. She had been surprised that the SRMA had only dealt with academies before. Alan Parkhurst had been disappointed that the SRMA did not understand the difference about accounting processes and cuts already made by the school were not reflected in his report. However, the SRMA could not believe how poorly Shropshire schools are funded. He had apologised because he could not find any savings although in academies he had normally been able to identify considerable savings. Sam John had also received a visit and had been concerned when a sales pitch was made following the ability of current auditors being questioned. Gwyneth Evans added that at Community College the SRMA had suggested cuts to teaching staff but could not grasp the necessity to run four form entry. John Parr reported similar concerns when the SRMA visited his school. Gwyneth Evans confirmed that she has provided verbal feedback and will provide more formal feedback – she was encouraged that academies have felt the same.

GE

7. Final Dedicated Schools Grant 2018-19

Gwyneth Evans presented the paper which was for information only.

8. Updated Dedicated Schools Grant 2019-20

Gwyneth Evans presented the paper which was for information only.

9. Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring 2019-20

Stephen Waters presented the paper which was for information only. Julia Dean spoke about actions being taken to ensure that the deficit situation does not get worse. She advised that three pupils had been moved from independent provision costing £90k per year per place. They are now being educated differently – two are in Kettlemere at £18k per pupil. She was pleased that Shropshire's own provision is providing good outcomes and hoped that the new free school will hopefully reduce the use of independent specialist places. Sabrina Hobbs thought it worth noting extra money is also going into Social Care. Karen Bradshaw advised that there is no knowledge of where it is going yet – it could be into adult. Mark Rogers was pleased that high needs can make much more savings than schools can by moving from independent provision to LA provision. This direction of travel (hubs) is welcome. The chair stressed that the key is quality of provision. Andrew Smith reminded colleagues that the independent sector has a place to play and the chair agreed that there is a balance to be struck. Mark Cooper requested a three-year strategy for hub provision and was directed to the local offer on the website. Julia Dean spoke of the requirement for more hubs, especially at secondary. Karen Bradshaw identified the need for creativity to be able to do things differently. John Hitchings, chair of the High Needs Task and Finish Group, suggested that the group will set out proposed actions/timescales at their next meeting.

10. Communications

Nick Bardsley was pleased about the good news but added that there are details as yet unknown.

Phil Wilson advised that the media are pressing for details but nothing is being released until there has been more work with schools.

11. Future meeting dates:

7 November 2019

5 December 2019

16 January 2020

30 January 2020

19 March 2020

The meeting closed at 10.20 am.

DRAFT