

SCHOOLS FORUM
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 June 2020

Present:

Chair and Vice Chair	
John Draper	Head Teacher, Swaythling Primary School
Harry Kutty	Head Teacher, Cantell School
Primary School Representatives	
Amanda Talbot-Jones	Head Teacher, St Deny's Primary School
Peter Howard	Head Teacher, Fairisle Junior School
Primary Governor	
Richard Harris	Governor, Moorlands Primary School
Secondary School Representatives	
Harry Kutty	Head Teacher, Cantell School
Special Schools Representatives	
Maria Smyth	Head Teacher, Vermont School
Academy Representatives	
Sean Preston	Chief Financial Officer, Hamwic Trust
James Rouse	Head Teacher, St Anne's Catholic School
Nursery Representatives	
Anne Downie	Team Manager – StartPoint Sholing
SCC Officers	
Tammy Marks	Service Manager – Special Educational Needs and Disability, Children and Families
Nick Persson	Finance Business Partner for Education
Clodagh Freeston	Service Manager – Education Strategy, Planning and Improvement
Cllr Lisa Mitchell	SCC - Councillor Portswood Ward
Áine Rand	Meeting Support (minutes)
Martin Ball	Meeting Support (minutes)

1. **APOLOGIES AND CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP (IF ANY)**

Apologies were noted as follows:

Anna Wright	Paint Pots Nursery
Cllr Paffey	Councillor, Cabinet Minister Aspiration, School and Lifelong learning
James Henderson	Woodlands Community College

Mark Sheehan	Mansbridge Primary School
Rob Sanders	Diocesan Rep., Diocese of Winchester & Portsmouth
Colin Grant	Governor, The Cedar School
Derek Wiles	Service Lead, Education
Phil Humphries	Governor, Oasis Academies

Welcome James Rouse who has replaced Lyn Bourne as an Academy Representative.

DW sent his apologies as he is involved in the recruitment of the new director of Children replacing Hillary Brooks.

2. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes were noted as an accurate reflection of the previous meeting.

Action review from the previous meeting

DW stated that SCC will look at the size of loans schools can apply for and review the £200K threshold before it is taken to the Schools Forum for approval. *This will be looked at this in the new financial year. Ongoing*

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the Localism Act 2011, and the Council's Code of Conduct, Members to disclose any personal or pecuniary interests in any matter included on the agenda for this meeting.

NOTE: Members are reminded that, where applicable, they must complete the appropriate form recording details of any such interests and hand it to the Meeting Support Officer.

4. **LA UPDATE ON DFE/EFA FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Covid 19: Financial support for schools:

NP referred to the paper and reported on the update of additional expenditure incurred by the mainstream schools due to Covid 19. The DFE published guidance notes earlier in the year to fund certain additional costs such as increased premises and the cost of providing free school meals. Although the claim form was available in June, it still has yet to arrive at SCC. On its arrival the form will be distributed to the schools to claim their expenditure and contact NP should the schools require support with the completion of the form. The claim will differ depending on the size of the school.

High Needs funding rationale is to pay on previous patterns of placements and commissioning. The DFE guidance also includes information regarding the summer top-ups that will continue and the spring term claims will be adjusted accordingly. There is no cut in the distribution of high needs or early needs funding.

School Trips refunds: A large number of trips that were paid for by parents have been cancelled due to Covid 19. Guidance was issued to the schools on 15th May 2020. NP noted that a lot of cancellation refunds have been made, they are still working with the schools regarding the refunds and this is an ongoing task.

Budget Tool: NP noted that the finance team have distributed a new useful Grants and EHC budgeting tool to the schools Business Managers on Friday 12th June 2020. This will help create accurate budgeting statements and has been well received.

Regarding the Covid 19 funding SP advised that the ESFA had recently released further guidance that is now available for everyone to see. It does not state how claims can be made although it has narrowed down which schools can claim. SP requested that further advice was provided from SCC identifying which schools can make a claim.

MS requested clarity on the amount of money the special schools can claim, such as mainstream schools can claim up to £50K. NP noted that amount is based on the number of pupils in the school for example, 250 pupils will be entitled up to £25K, up to 500 is £30K, up to 1000 is £50K and above 1,000 is capped at £75K. SP noted that it is £50K for special schools irrespective of the number of pupils. There is new guidance published today although it is exceptionally vague. NP will look into this guidance.

ACTION: NP to send out the claim forms and supporting information to the schools when it is available.

5. UPDATE ON SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPANSION

CF reported that in relation to the secondary sector that there is a deficit of school places forecasted for 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 and the current years 5, 4 and 3. Even with St Mark's School coming on line in September 2022 the LA still have a deficit of school places. It was suggest to set up a working group to focus on the strategy to move forward. The LA are already using the capacity available in secondary schools.

In **2020-2021** there is a deficit of places of 80 places learners. This takes into consideration that Chamberlayne College of the Arts and Woodlands Community School are taking an additional 60 learners, Oasis Academy Lordshill and Oasis Academy Mayfield are taking an additional 15 learners and Cantell School are taking an additional 20 learners. Although, these additional places have been secured there is still a deficit going forward. They are looking at various ideas to utilise more space in those schools however it is proving difficult to add more learners. In theory there maybe capacity to use some space in the primary sector as a satellite to support the secondary schools.

In **2021-2022** the deficit looks similar to 2020-2021.

In **2022-2023** there is a deficit of places for 50 learners.

CF advised that the LA will continue to report back to the primary and secondary heads and Schools Forum and noted that with additional learners there will be additional funding.

SP suggested to discuss this with Hampshire and Portsmouth to see if they have any capacity to take the surplus learners to take pressure off Southampton LA. CF thought there would be a push back from Hampshire as they do not have places.

CF advised that the forecasting model for participation rate of year 6 moving to year 7 varies year on year.

HK requested an update on the development of Chamberlayne College of the Arts refurbishments as they may be pivotal in this. He noted that there have been issues between the prospective academy chain and the LA. CF reiterated that they have agreed to take additional students for 2020-2021. SP noted that DW is involved in looking at how to best support the buildings discussions and noted that the head teacher in the school is doing a phenomenal job.

JR asked if there was a possibly of accessing either St Mary's School or post 16 colleges to help with the deficit. CF noted there could be feasibly issues around moving learners from one venue to another across the city. Although if the secondary heads felt it was appropriate then it

could be a workable option. HK advised that it is important to ensure that the spaces currently available are filled and the identified learners go to those schools. He noted they are dealing with a lot of appeals at present.

6. **UPDATE ON SCHOOLS CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

TM reported that she and CF have attended meetings where the capital asset team reviewed the times lines around the Educational Capital Program and prioritising them. They RAG rated where slippage could be afforded on the capital programme. Although the specifics of the outcome of this meeting may not yet have been shared with Schools Forum.

From an education services perspective they were asked to advise on and prioritise the areas of need. The conversations around the planned development included where they cannot afford slippage; such as the development at St Mark's School and the reconfiguration for the special schools even though it is still years away.

TM advised that nothing is falling by the way side at present. It was noted that the impact of Covid 19 and a possible second spike is a continued risk.

7. **SCHOOLS OUTURN STATEMENT**

NP reported that the schools outturn statement for 2019-2020 provided in the paper shows maintained schools only and does not include the Academies. The movement in balances shows an overall reduction of £678K from the previous academic year.

- Primary schools balances are reduced by £727K
- Secondary schools balances are increased by £156K
- Special schools balances are reduced by £107K

NP confirmed that the finance team are retaining a schools support person to continue working with the schools in 2020-2020 to support with the deficit recovery plans.

NP advised that regarding the deficit policy the LA are sending out notices of concerns to schools. It was confirmed that three schools have been identified at present and another school is under review. Schools with the highest balances are also a focus. The LA are determining the cause of deficits although, this is aimed at the schools who are not managing their finances very well and need to improve. However, each school is being looked at independently and if they have been faced with circumstances beyond their control it may not be appropriate to send out a notice.

JD asked about progress with the excess surplus policy to see if it can be implemented to help schools in deficit. NP noted that the LA will be reclaiming these surpluses, and the plans for the surplus will be discussed with Schools Forum and with DW. JD questioned if the LA has the legislative power to make that happen. NP advised that there would be clear guidance given, to follow the process and a consultation would follow. HK noted that there was a need to not just look at one single year but to take into account the growing surpluses year on year. NP advised that when a school presents a surplus the LA question it and look into the reasons why the surplus has become so large. It was noted that each case has different reasons.

RH referred to the slight overspend at Moorlands School and noted the untimely passing of Karen Potter who they all miss. JD wished to record the condolences of Schools Forum to family, friends and colleagues.

With reference to the plans for the excess surplus policy, NP advised that it is taking longer, there will be something although all targets and deadlines have been put back due to Covid 19.

MS suggested looking at the correlation of mainstream schools and the percentage of high needs students. NP confirmed that one of the key factors are those with high number of ECHP's contributing to the deficit. TM noted that it is not necessarily the number of EHCP but

how the resources are being used. Those in deficit are working on a very tight 1:1 LSA currency model. There are often conversations with schools regarding the funding following child that meet the needs of the plans. It was suggested that there was support for the head teachers to move away from the old model and meet the needs of the children. It was noted that some parents use the EHCP's to hold the schools to account. TM advised they cannot hold the schools to account. There are plans to move away from the use of 1:1 hours. Schools will receive a certain amount of money to ensure the delivery of the provision in the plan. It was noted that recently the quality of the EHCP's have improved significantly and within the next academic year the LA are looking into moving it to a banded system.

SP reported that it is not just EHCP's that cause financial pressure, it is also the children in infant school with significant needs without EHCP's entering the schools. SP was pleased to hear the LA recognise that. TM advised that there is a need to look at the proactive support that was taken out of early years needs in terms of what schools are receiving. To be mindful of and support the progress in the early years and the level of complexity of needs. To identify what can be done proactively rather than going for a reactive EHCP.

8. **DSG OVERSPEND UPDATE**

JD noted that he was concerned that this could be a complex matter, with a danger of becoming a circular conversation and suggested that Schools Forum commission a working party to look at this issue. TM advised that the LA are proactively managing the budget. There are significantly more children with high needs and EHCP's and there is an additional cost of independent places. JD confirmed that Schools Forum acknowledge and value the transparency with the LA and is keen to find a way of working to a tightly defined remit.

NP referred to the paper and reported that the cumulative DSG overspend at the end of 2019-2020 is £7.2M that includes the High Needs pressure brought forward of £1.4M. Southampton LA and LA's nationally have seen an increasing demand for High Needs support with higher levels of complex cases presenting. The DGS variance is 3.98% with a three year recovery plan that NP, TM and DW are working on. The 1% recovery outlined in the DFE guidance due at the end of June 2020 has been deferred until later in the year. Some of this recovery will be helped by the 17% increase in the High Needs allocation for 2020-2021 equating to £5M.

TM advised that they were taking a deep dive to look into all High Needs and recommended a 0.5% block transfer from the schools to High Needs in the next academic year. There would be a robust understanding of the LA's position and what actions are in place to mitigate in future. JD acknowledged that there may well be a case for a block transfer to High Needs and suggested that the working group had representatives from the primary sector, secondary sector and SCC. With an aim to have clear recommendations during the autumn term and to ensure that any potentially transferred money would be well spent and accounted for.

SP accepted that the High Needs pressures are a national problem although was concerned that there has been an unexpected increase to £7.2M and as a result the deficit will increase in the next academic year. SP requested that the schools were sent some meaningful financial information very soon as this figure could continue to increase. In response to the £6M increase TM advised that there has been a progressive increase in the number of children with needs. In previous years LA were able to put forward money towards reducing the deficit however, the LA have now run out of funds. Whilst the spend is big, there has been an increase in the number of learners in maintained schools and Academy schools, if this had not been the case, the position could have been significantly worse. The increase in deficit is in proportion to the increase in children. TM advised that government reported that Southampton LA needs £5 million for special needs and this incurred an overdraft. Schools Forum is aware that it has been needed for a period of time. JD noted that the discussion highlights the rationale for the working group and suggested devising a good set of questions for the meeting.

RH requested support from Cllr M as this is an issue for all Local Authorities of all political persuasions and it needs to be addressed on a national political front. This is a situation that goes on year on year and needs to be dealt with politically.

Cllr M assured that she will take it back and talk to Cllr Paffey and they will write to local government association.

SP advised that the special needs schools have not seen an increase in funding per pupil for a number of years unlike mainstream schools. The LA have been working really hard to ensure provision of out of area placements are coming back into the area. However, the special schools need to be financed properly to support this. SP acknowledged that it is a national issue, there is a need to look forward and try to do something as the government are not putting in money where it is required.

Task and finish working group

- Maria Smyth
- Sean Preston
- Tammy Marks
- Nick Persson
- **ACTION:** Amanda Talbot Jones to find a representative from the primary schools- nominations to JD by 10th July
- **ACTION:** Harry Kutty to find a representative from the secondary schools- nominations to JD by 10th July

9. NURSERY EDUCATION FUNDING PROPOSAL

AD referred to her paper and highlighted that the national rate was increased for the first time in April 2020 by only 1.8%. This is a concern as the costs have increased since 2017 and they have had to be supplemented. In the intervening 3 years providers have seen costs of utilities, wages, food and business rates hugely increase, they have also had to provide workplace pensions. Providers, including childminders, nurseries and preschools, supplement the NEF with parental fees for extra hours, as they are unable to charge parents top-up fees other than for items such as food for any of their funded hours.

Between 23rd March 2020 and 31st May 2020 due to the Covid 19 lockdown the early year providers were only offering places to children of critical workers and vulnerable children. Therefore, their income from parental fees reduced dramatically. The DFE assured Southampton LA that the NEF for 2020-2021 would continue to be paid as expected, however the NEF have had to make exceptional payments to providers who remained open. Although only half the providers remained open.

Since 1st June 2020 the DFE have given the LA the ability to redistribute funding to ensure sufficient places. The NEF are funding providers who are offering a service regardless of their attendance although they are not generally funding settings that have remained closed. With an aim to redistribute funding and ensure that children are not doubly funded.

There is a concern what the early year's settings lose a high proportion of their children due to starting school and they rely on the autumn term starts. Due to the impact of Covid 19 not all parents may register their children. NEF propose they are funded for the same number of children as last autumn term with an uplift to recognise the increase in funding rates. This has no financial implications for the LA.

Over the last 3 months child minders have resigned and three settings will close this term. Providers are struggling to remain financially viable. Nationally it is anticipated that between 20% and 25% of settings will close, this impacts on the economy and the life chances of the children.

ATJ questioned if there was mileage in costing in 2 year olds, who are not classed as vulnerable unless they are open to social care or have additional needs. The government stated that the fixed funding rate for 2 year olds has gone up slightly. The concern is that the number of eligible 2 year olds will increase as their parents situation gets worse.

JD acknowledged that it is a desperate situation and had no idea of difficulties in the free school sector and the knock on effect. JD advised that he had also received an email regarding early years and would forward it on to the Schools Forum and asked that the email was read as it is very powerful.

ATJ asked if there might be a working group going forward as years of research shows that early intervention helps. The DFE stated that 95% was to be passed to providers so there is little else that can be done. This is a national issue rather than a local issue. When Southampton LA saw the funding go down 3 years ago it impacted on the early years.

JD thanked AD for her report and hoped they would find a way to thrive.

ACTION: JD to forward Anne Wright, Paint Pot's Nursery email to Schools Forum

10. **AOB**

- Schools Forum meeting dates for **next academic year 2020 / 21**
 - Wednesday 23rd September 2020
 - Wednesday 25th November 2020
 - Wednesday 20th January 2021
 - Wednesday 24th March 2021
 - Wednesday 23rd June 2021

JD thanked the attendees for participating and noted that these are important issues and it is was good to catch up; although attention is elsewhere at the moment, these issues have not gone away. We are now planning for the world that follows the world we are in at the moment.

Next Meeting:

Wednesday 23rd September 2020
3:50pm for 4:00pm start
Virtual Meeting/Venue: TEAMS