

Minutes of the Schools Forum

**17 June 2019 at 2.30pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Members Present: P Jones (Chair), P Shone (Vice Chair),
M Arnull, J Bailey D Irish, L Gillam, Z
Padda, B Patel, A Reyes – Dinoo, J
Smallman, and N Toplass.**

Officers Present: C Ward, J Gill, R Kerr, S Lilley.

**Apologies: D Barton, K Bickley, A Burns, D Holden,
G Linford, R Kentish, C Walsh.**

20/19 **Agenda Item 1 – Apologies**

As above

21/19 **Agenda Item 2 – Declaration of Interest**

None

22/19 **Agenda Item 3 – Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Resolved that the minutes for the forum held on the 11th March 2019 be confirmed as agreed subject to the L Gillam being added to attendance and J Smallman being removed from the attendance.

23/19 **Agenda Item 4 - Schools Forum Members Attendance**

Members of the Schools forum noted the contents of the attendance from the meetings held between June 2018 and March 2019.

Minute No 11/19 Working Group – proposals for graduated change in ration, C Ward confirmed that a group had been

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established and had held meetings, a progress report would be brought to a future meeting of Schools Forum.

24/19 Agenda Item 5 - Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair

Nominations for a Chair and Vice Chair for the next academic year were received.

From September 2019 the Chair and Vice Chair of the Schools Forum would be:

Chair – Dave Irish;
Vice Chair – Neil Toplass.

25/19 Agenda Item 6 – School Balances 2018/19 and Budget Plans 2019/20

The Schools forum received a report in respect of the balances held by schools at the end of 2018-19 and the projected balances for 2019-20.

Two schools were closing with a deficit budget share, Rounds Green and Sacred Heart and there was one school, Tameside Primary that had converted to an academy during 2018/19.

A licensed deficit agreement was being finalised with Rounds Green to ensure they return to a surplus balance within three years. Sacred Heart had been able to set a balanced budget for 2019/20 and therefore do not need a licensed deficit.

Projected balances for 2019-20 had been received from schools and these were shown in the table at appendix 1.

R Kerr highlighted the following:

- 24 primary schools were projecting to hold balances above 10% at the end of 2018-19;
- 10 primary schools were projecting to hold balances below 1% at the end of 2018 - 19;
- 3 schools were projecting a deficit balance at the end of 2019-20, Rounds Green Primary, Stuart Bathurst High and

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Shenstone Special school. The authority would be working with these schools to agree a licensed deficit plan and the financial position of the schools going forward will be regularly reviewed;

- no secondary schools were projecting to hold balances above 8%;
- 4 secondary schools were projecting to hold balances below 1% at the end of 2018 -2019.
- 1 special school was projecting to hold a balance above 10% and 1 special school was projecting to hold a balance below 1%.

M Arnall remarked that Schools Forum had previously been informed that Rounds Green Primary had been financially improving.

C Ward confirmed that the deficit had been growing over the past 2 – 3 years however there had been restructures and there would be support for the school going forward. The school had been in special measures however it has now improved and is now rated required improvement with good leadership. Plans would be put in place to ensure that Rounds Green Primary progress in the right direction.

N Toplass asked for confirmation that Westminster's Schools figures in respect of the Budget plans 2019–20 were a deficit as it was not printed in red. R Kerr confirmed that this was a deficit figure.

The Chair reminded colleagues that when viewing school carry forward figures School Forum members should be aware that there will be context behind the numbers. C Ward confirmed that overall figures included capital monies and school income from other sources.

Resolved that Schools Forum noted the contents of the report.

26/19

Agenda Item 7 – High Needs Block Outturn 2018/19

The initial High Needs Block Grant for 2018-19 was £37.609m. the DfE had allocated an additional £1.703m over two years however it was presumed that this additional funding would not be granted further.

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The balance brought forward as at 1st April 2018 was nil as the deficit from 2017-18 was fully funded as reported to Schools Forum in June 2018.

The in-year surplus at 31st March 2019 was £58,981 and £31,000 would be transferred from the early years grant to fund early year's post, therefore the balance carried forward equated to £89,981.

The main variances were highlighted within the report.

Table 2 within the report showed the breakdown of other SEN funding of £1.408m and the reductions agreed by the forum in September 2017 had been applied to the budgets.

The Focus Provisions average occupancy in 2018-19 was approximately 88%. Under occupancy was 12% at the beginning of the financial year, increased to 15% in September and out turned at 10% in March. There were still EHCP's to be finalised for which places had been reserved.

C Ward reported that the overspend on Alternative Provision was due to a number of factors. In the first instance the amount allocated to the budget line was inadequate and needed increasing this financial year to meet place pressures. The increase in places this year came through referrals from a number of routes:-

- Behaviour and attendance panel.
- Hard to place panels.
- Y10 and Y11 pupils entering the borough.
- The STEPS Centre for INAs.
- Direct referrals from schools.
- Where managed moves had broken down.

A new system would be put in place from September to ensure that all pupils placements go through one panel and improve the ability to monitor ongoing costs efficiently. This panel could then report termly to Schools Forum on the cost and numbers of placements from schools.

Resolved that a report in respect High Needs Block Special Provision be produced at the end of each term and brought to Schools Forum.

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Agenda Item 8 – High Needs Block Budget 2019/20

Schools Forum was informed that the current High Needs Block Grant for 2019-20 as £40.698m an increase of £2.229m on the previous year. The increase included £1.702 additional grant announced in 2018-19 to be split over two years.

The January 2019 Alternative Provision census showed a large increase in pupil population following extensive work to make sure that any pupil in an Alternative Provision were recorded correctly on the data base.

It was assumed that most expenditure lines would outturn at the anticipated budget, however the expenditure on the Alternative Provision line was forecast to overspend making a possible overall deficit of approximately £0.500m.

C Ward confirmed that there would be a separate review of SEN and Alternative Provision to ensure a correct balance was established. Plans for two new special schools to be established in the borough had commenced, one primary and one secondary.

Resolved that a regular report in respect of Special Educational Needs High Needs Block Grant be brought to future meetings of Schools Forum.

28/19

Agenda Item 9 - Early Years Block Outturn 2018/19

The Early years Block allocation for 2018/19 was £23.540m. the actual grant allocation income received was £23.441m due to an early adjustment and the net effect was £0.099m.

The expenditure incurred during 2018/19 regarding the use of the Early Years Block was shown in table 1 of the report.

The DfE would adjust the 2019/20 allocation based on the January 2019 census figures and notify the authority of the adjustment around July.

R Kerr explained that only £23,000 of the disability access fund allocation had been spent as providers and carers had not applied for funding.

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Resolved that regular reports in respect of Early years Block be brought to future meetings of Schools Forum.

29/19 Agenda Item 10 - Central School Services Outturn 2018/19

Schools Forum received a report detailing the actual expenditure incurred during 2018/19 in respect to the use of the Central School Services Block and de-delegated budgets.

Total budget was £1.9m and actual Expenditure £1.8m leaving a variance just under £1m.

The academies adjustment for 2018/19 was £150k giving total funding available £2.419m.

There had been a slight underspend in respect of de-delegated budgets.

Resolved that Schools Forum noted the report.

30/19 Agenda Item 11 – Review of Early Closedown 2018/19

R Kerr advised that schools had submitted their returns as soon as they were completed, as requested, in order to assist the authority with the 2018/19 closedown. Schools Forum was advised that this helped the authority meet the closedown deadline and she thanked all the schools for their support.

31/19 Agenda Item 12 – Schools in Financial Difficulties - Application

Schools Forum was advised that an application had been received from Rounds Green Primary School for funding towards their deficit position.

The school had met the initial criteria to be considered for funding and a sub-committee needed to be established to review and consider the application.

Members were sought for the sub-committee and the following appointments were agreed:

- L Gillam – primary representative;
- P Jones – primary representative;

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- M Arnull – secondary representative;
- P Shone – secondary representative.

Resolved the recommendation from the sub-committee to consider the application for funding be brought back to the next meeting of School Forum for consideration.

32/19 **Agenda Item 13 - DfE consultation and updates**

Schools Forum received a report to inform members in respect of the DfE current consultations.

It is recommended that all schools participate in DfE budget consultations and take advantage of DfE support to seek best value from the resources available.

The document access was via the government website and evidence can be entered on line.

A link to the documents would be forwarded to schools.

33/19 **Agenda Item 14 – Fair Funding updates**

Schools Forum agreed to defer this item to a future meeting.

Resolved that the matter be deferred to a future meeting of Schools Forum.

34/19 **Agenda Item 15 – A O B**

C Ward thanked Phil Jones, on behalf of Schools Forum for the important contributions he had made to the Schools Forum over the years and for Chairing the Forum for the last four years.

(Meeting ended at 3.29pm)

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