

SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Schools Forum held on Wednesday, 2 December 2020 at 4.30 pm as a virtual meeting

Present

Jackie Collins	Head Teacher	Primary Phase
David Jeapes	Head Teacher	Secondary Phase
Dave Jones	Head Teacher	Primary Phase
Jason Crouch	Governor	Secondary Phase
Share D'all	Governor	Primary Phase
Sharon Burt	Academies	Special Schools
Jo Cooper	Academies	Primary Phase
Nys Hardingham	Academies	Secondary Phase
Steve Labeledz	Academies	Secondary Phase
Sean Preston	Academies	Primary Phase
Nathan Waites	Academies	Secondary Phase
Simon Barrable	Representative	16 - 19 Education
Kara Jewell	Representative	Early years
Terry Norton	Councillor	Conservative Party
Lynne Stagg	Councillor	Liberal Democrat Party
Judith Smyth	Councillor	Labour Party
Claire Udy	Councillor	Progressive Portsmouth People Group

67. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

68. Declarations of Interest

Alison Egerton, Group Accountant informed the forum that there was one outstanding declaration of interest form for Simon Barrable although he had only just received this.

69. Membership Changes

The Chair advised that Steve Labeledz was retiring from Salterns Academy Trust at Christmas so would be stepping down from the Forum as a long

serving member. Steve confirmed he had been on the Forum for 14 continuous years and a previous four years before that. The Chair said he would be greatly missed and thanked him for everything he had done for the Forum. This was endorsed by officers and fellow Forum members.

Alison Egerton reported that Matthew Mcloughlin-Parker would be leaving the Forum as Harbour School would be converting to an academy on 1 January 2021. She thanked him for his input into the Forum.

Alison also wished to thank Simon Barrable for agreeing to stand again as the Post 16 representative for the city.

There were currently five vacancies on Schools Forum; three secondary academy representatives and two primary academy representatives. Alison explained that academy representatives do not have to be head teachers and the role could be undertaken by anyone in the trust. She had asked Mike Stoneman and Alison Jeffery if they could raise this at the next meeting with the multi academy trusts in the hope of gaining some more volunteers.

70. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 September 2020 and matters arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 September 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

In terms of matters arising there was one outstanding matter relating to the COVID-19 grant. At the last meeting Alison had explained they had a meeting coming up with the Department for Education along with other finance officers across the south east. Unfortunately the meeting had been the same day as the spending review, therefore they were not able to confirm anything at that meeting to say if there were any additional grants for schools. However on Friday 27 November there was a press release stating that there would be some funding with regards to staff absences. The guidance has not yet been published but the press release said there could be some additional funding where there have been large numbers of absences in schools. This would be where schools have used up any reserves down to about 4% of their annual income and the absence rates were above 20% on a short term basis and/or 10% on a long term basis.

As soon as officers receive any further guidance they will pass this onto schools. The Chair said this was good to hear.

71. Dedicated Schools Grant 2020-21 Quarter 2 Budget Monitoring

The report was presented by Alison Egerton, Group Accountant.

In response to questions the following matters were clarified:

Officers noticed that over the summer term there had been increased activity with the mainstream schools Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) at the beginning and middle of the term but then the numbers decreased due to

the national lockdown. It was anticipated that this may pick up over the course of the academic year but because of the timescales for setting up an EHCP Alison did not think financially this would be seen until the 2021/22 financial year. If there is an underspend in this financial year this will be carried forward to the next academic year and could support any pressures in next financial year.

In terms of the out of city placements there may not have been as much movement between providers or with children being placed in provision over the course of the summer term. In particular the authority has seen a reduction in the number of children placed in the child and adolescent mental health service.

Julia Katherine added that normally for a request for an EHC needs assessment, schools are required to produce two terms worth of evidence. Over the summer term a number of children were not in school due to the Covid19 pandemic restrictions so schools were not able to collect that evidence. Similarly, schools may not have been able to collect evidence in order to make requests for changes of placement via the EHCP annual review process.

Julia said in terms of timescales Portsmouth City Council is still issuing 100% of EHC needs assessments within the statutory timescales and so there are rarely delays in assessments being completed. Feedback from Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) Network this term is that the authority may see an increase in requests for EHC needs assessments as schools are working through a 'backlog'.

RESOLVED that the Schools Forum notes the forecast year-end budget position for the Dedicated Schools Grant as at 30 September 2020, together with the associated explanations contained within this report.

72. Early Years Providers Covid-19 Additional Grant 2020-21

The report was introduced by Mindy Butler, Quality and Sufficiency Coordinator.

In response to questions the following matters were clarified:

The grant is a one off payment to each type of provider regardless of their size.

Alison Egerton clarified that the regulations require that the authority cannot differentiate payments between providers.

There have been three early years' settings who have closed by the end of the summer who had previously had sufficiency problems and one more provider may possibly have to close in April unless their numbers increase. She added that for all settings that have closed there have been bigger providers that want to open other settings so there is a lot of interest currently in opening settings. Mindy would be writing the sufficiency report again in

March and officers will be keeping a close eye on the early years sector. Mindy is in contact with all providers on a regular basis who are coming to the council for business support.

Mindy explained that the business support from Hempsalls focussed on business remodelling for early years. This included looking at how they can change hours, taking more funding and being more creative on how they operate. Some of the settings are doing this and this will be monitored.

Kara Jewell said it was not fair to say that there are other settings that will take the place of existing providers. She added that there are some outstanding providers with years of educational experience who are at risk of closure and she was concerned that this expertise would be lost in early years. Mindy said she completely agreed and if they could have kept the settings open that closed they would have done. The authority is trying really hard with the extra business support so if the worst happens then there would be options available to help working parents. Kara said that there have been settings not eligible for any financial support throughout the pandemic. This is a small grant for providers who are really struggling.

The Chair said it would be good to have a follow up report at a future meeting and would be interested on how settings are embracing the new world post Covid.

RESOLVED the Schools Forum:

- (1) Endorsed the grant values as set out in section 4.3 to be paid in the autumn term 2020.**
- (2) Noted that a further review of the Dedicated Schools Grant Early Years block funding and expenditure will be undertaken in quarter four of the 2020-21 financial year, in relation to a potential further grant payment in the spring term 2021 as set out in section 8.2.**

73. School Funding Arrangements 2021-22

The report was introduced by Angela Mann, Finance Manager and Alison Egerton, Group Accountant.

In response to questions officers clarified the following:

Alison Egerton explained that due to the timescales involved it would not be possible to involve Schools Forum members further in the funding process this year. The authority does not receive the funding until the last week of the school term. This information needs to go through the Department for Education Financial model to understand the affordability and then will come back to the Schools Forum on 13 January for endorsement. The authority has a statutory duty to notify the Department for Education of the budget by 21 January 2021.

The current growth fund does require some of the carry forward for future years. When officers get the funding allocation there is potential for the growth funding element to be higher than predicted due to the way that the funding allocations to authorities works. If that is the case the authority can put funding back into the individual schools budget and maximise the use of the MFG.

The Chair noted the disappointing response to the consultation. Mike Stoneman said that the Council did have dedicated briefings last year and could do so again in the future to encourage a better response to the consultation. The Chair felt this was a good idea and asked Angela and Alison to consider this for future consultations.

Forum members suggested that if the full NFF stipulated by the DfE is not affordable, the authority needs to look at can we make it affordable by diverting some growth funding. So essentially not looking at options but affordability around ensuring schools receive as much of the NFF as possible. Angela added that they would as the minimum funding guarantee adds to that to ensure that schools get at least a 0.5% increase for the pupils they have got. The DfE guidance is that the NFF should be a minimum of plus 0.5% and up to 2% which is the guidance that officers are working towards. The Chair asked Angela to double check this.

It was agreed that officers consider how to involve a small group of the Schools Forum members to work with the finance team to explore options for schools funding for next year and come back to the February meeting with a plan. It was noted that if there is to be a group working with officers next time that volunteers need to be asked early enough to make it workable.

RESOLVED Schools Forum:

(1) Noted the Department for Education's proposed changes to High Needs Block revenue funding arrangements for 2021-22 as set out in this report.

(2) Endorsed the funding arrangements for Maintained and Academy Special Schools and Independent Special Schools in relation to the Teachers Pay Grant, Teachers Pension Employer Contribution Grant and the Supplementary Grants from April 2021, as set out in Table 1.

(3) Noted the responses from schools with regards to the:

- **briefing regarding the proposed changes to the school funding arrangements and the mainstream Education Health and Care Plan banding**
- **consultation regarding the proposed carry forward of the Growth Fund balances for the same use in future years.**

As set out in section 6 and Appendix 2.

(4) Endorsed the proposed carry forward of Growth Fund balances for the same use in future years as set out in Section 6.

(5) Endorsed the proposed hourly rates to Early Years providers for 2021-22 as set out in section 7 and Table 4.

The meeting concluded at 5.30 pm.

David Jeapes
Chair