

Schools Forum Meeting

**Held on Thursday 29th November 2018
At Bedford High School**

Minutes

Members Present:

A.Hardy (Chair), L. Loftus, E. Ellis, F.Quinlivan, V. Birchall, G. Hayes, T. Cunningham, H. Phillips, A. McGlown, A. Birchall, A. Isherwood, M.Atkins, K.Ward

Observers: M. Wilkinson, A. Grice, Cllr J Bullen, J.Buckley, K.Winnard

In Attendance: A. Lindsay (Assistant Director) C. Pealing (Service Manager) J. McDonald (Strategic Finance Manager), L.Morgan (Service Manager), M. Larkin (Clerk)

Welcome and Introductions took place

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mrs J Hewitt, Mrs R Lewis, and Mr T Warren

It was noted Nicola Amber had withdrawn from the group as Early Years PVI Representative

2. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION UNDER AOB

There were no items presented for inclusion under AOB

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was agreed: That the minutes of the meeting held on 10th May 2018 be approved as a true and correct record.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. HIGH NEEDS FINANCIAL POSITION 2018/19

A report had been circulated from the LA prior to the meeting Mr McDonald highlighted:

- There was a £1.3m projected overspend for 2018/19
- The demands and pressures within the LA were outlined as previously presented

- If agreement was not made by the Schools Forum the LA would apply for disapplication to the Secretary of State
- It had been agreed at the previous meeting to look at the suggested proposals

Details of the SEND Transformation Financial Plan and Timelines had been included with the report:

- The growth in referrals and funded plans was not financially sustainable
- It was acknowledged Special Schools were also struggling with budgets
- Resourced provision concerns had been raised at the previous meeting
- A task and finish group had been created to look at resourced provision and outreach
- One of the planned engagement centres had opened, this had been funded from within the LA
- For Post 16 there was planned use of supported internships, apprenticeships and more efficient processes
- Options to remodel support services were being considered to improve effectiveness
- The introduction of charging for pupils accessing alternative provision would not offset against balances

The following significant risks had been identified:

- Increase in demand for EHC plans and the unit cost
- Increase in demand for special school places
- Increase in demand and unit costs for external placements
- Delays in timing affect savings delivery
- Redundancy and Capital Costs
- Increase in complaints to Ofsted
- Legal Challenges
- National Funding Formula
- Implications for demand in reducing central services

Appendix 2 of the report had been based on a £0.5m top slice and Appendix 3 on a £1m top slice.

Ms Peeling stated the SEND transformation proposals would be looked at under both scenarios but asked Forum Members to acknowledge the rate of spending was not slowing down.

A representative asked it be recorded the report stated there was no evidence of impact from outreach, colleagues had submitted evidence of outreach impact. Concern was raised in regard of the need to keep capacity in mainstream schools to support the increasing number of special needs pupils in mainstream schools and by

reducing resources in mainstream schools there could be a further increase in the need for alternative provision places.

Questions were raised regarding the number of out of borough places and it was acknowledged although some pupils with very complex needs did need out of borough support there was no evidence to support any review of this provision.

Ms Pealing reported the LA were aiming to provide funding at the earliest opportunity in order to support pupils being able to remain in mainstream schools. Consideration for the expansion of Willow Grove to provide support for more complex needs was being given in order to avoid possible future out of borough placements. Ms Pealing explained bringing children back in to LA provision from out of borough placement was extremely difficult when children are settled and would lead to a tribunal dispute that we were unlikely to win.

It was acknowledged some schools within the LA were beginning to provide resource bases within their own schools. It was highlighted the cohort of pupils moving from primary to secondary in the next academic year was significantly higher than in previous years and there would be a potential shortage of three classes within one special school.

Mr Lindsay informed members this was a national issue and a number of other Local Authorities were facing similar issues.

A member stated there was a recognition to support the LA, and acknowledged the figures requested were similar to requests being made in other LA's, the key messages being received from colleagues was a need to see the resourced provision already existing in the borough to be used more productively. Other members demonstrated support for this view. Questions were raised with regard to an estimation of when the need to request for additional top slicing to stop.

Ms Pealing acknowledged issues were becoming more apparent earlier and demand has risen significantly, the need to request more funding could not have been foreseen. Consideration would be given to a 3 to 4 year plan to reconfigure support services and build capacity within Special Schools.

Questions were raised with regard to health contributions, Ms Pealing responded this issue was still being addressed with health colleagues, and she raised some concern that EHCP applications were being completed with a focus on education needs as opposed to health needs which could encourage further health contributions. It was acknowledged consultants were often pushing parents to apply for an EHCP through school.

Ms Pealing added 'funding without a plan' was being investigated as not all children would require an EHCP if family support was in place earlier. She stated a task and finish group had been set up for inclusion.

Members questioned that it was LA colleagues that complete EHCP applications not schools.

Mr McDonald informed members that in respect of health contributions the CCG are short on their savings target and provided examples of other LA's requests for top slicing.

The following suggestions were discussed:

- To consider a sliding rate for schools, the majority of school representatives felt this would be unfair
- A third option to commit to a £1m top slice over a two year period.
- HT's would be more willing to support requests if a radical review took place and changes were made to enable impact to be evidenced

The Chair accepted a proposal for the £1m top slice, a vote was taken:

For = 3

Against = 7

A further proposal for £0.75m top slice, a vote was taken:

For = 6

Against = 4

The Chair asked the LA representatives to consider this option, the LA representatives withdrew from the meeting to discuss.

Cllr Bullen spoke on behalf of the LA and stated that although no assurances could be given of future finances and possible pressures, the LA would accept the £0.75m option. It was acknowledged schools had a fair understanding of the pressures and the struggle to meet the needs of children and young people and the LA were grateful to the Forum for the decisions agreed.

It was agreed: a £0.75m would be top sliced from school budgets to the high needs block

Mr McDonald informed members the data will be refreshed and circulated.

Further information about the 'task and finish' group was requested so that forum members could be part of the work and decisions for the future and it was agreed Ms Peeling would provide information to the Clerk for circulation to Forum members.

The Chair thanked all members of the Forum for their input.

5. Schools Formula 2019/20

It was reported draft proposals would be available within the next few weeks to be discussed at the next meeting, Thursday 17th January 2019.

6. AOB

The Chair expressed thanks to Mr Lindsay and wished him well for his retirement.

9. Future Meetings: (all meetings to commence at 1.30 p.m.)

17th January 2019 - at Bedford High School

22 March 2019 - at Bedford High School

10th May 2019 – at Hawkley Hall High School

21st June 2019 - at Bedford High School