

Schools Forum Meeting
Held on Thursday 7th March 2019
At Bedford High School

Minutes

Members Present:

A.Hardy (Chair), E. Ellis, , V. Birchall, G. Hayes, T. Cunningham, H.Phillips , A. McGlown, A. Isherwood, R.Lewis, JA.Hewitt, M.Atkins

Observers: M. Wilkinson, A. Grice, Cllr J Bullen,

In Attendance: C. Pealing (Interim Assistant Director for Education) J. McDonald (Strategic Finance Manager), A.Meehan (Principal Auditor), M. Larkin (Clerk)

The Chair welcomed Mr Meehan – Principal Auditor for Schools to the meeting, and congratulated him on his recent appointment as Group Finance Manager for Schools

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:

T.Warren, K.Ward, L.Loftus, K.Winnard, L.Morgan, A.Birchall, F.Quinlivan

2. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION UNDER AOB

- Letter to parents re national school funding

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was agreed: That the minutes of the meeting held on 17th January 2019 be approved as a true and correct record.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. HIGH NEEDS UPDATE FOR 2018-19 AND 2019-20

A summary report for the High Needs DSG budget for 2019/20 had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Mr McDonald highlighted:

- The budget had been finalised following the submission of intake numbers for Special Schools
- The revised projected outturn for 2018/19 showed a £1.1m deficit as reported at the previous meeting
- Projections for 2019/20 included the growth formula, the additional £10,000 from the Government and additional savings, these projections were based on

the same pupil numbers for 2018/19 and potentially showed a balanced budget of £0

- The report provided the rise in the number of special school places for April to September 2018 and April to September 2019
- It was acknowledged some schools were already at capacity, therefore the number of Independent schools placements had also increased from Spring 2018 to Spring 2019
- It was anticipated this growth would continue with the increasing number of EHCP's, no estimated increases for 2019/20 had been included in these projections. It was noted this was a national pressure.

Ms Pealing added:

- Task and finish groups for inclusion had carried out some work and their initial recommendations would be presented towards the end of March
- To broaden the representation primary leads had been involved in the steering group who will hear the recommendations and decide on the next steps to be taken, it was anticipated there would be a plan in place before the end of the summer term

With this in mind suggestions were made to consider moving the last summer term meeting of the Forum to ensure sufficient time was provided for information to be presented to Forum.

It was agreed: the date for the last summer term Schools Forum meeting would be moved to Wednesday 26th June 2019.

Action: Clerk to inform absent members of the change of date and contact the venue re availability for 26th June.

A member of the Forum shared their experience of a fair access panel hearing and highlighted the need for funding for schools to support pupils and prevent them from returning to alternative provision.

5. THEMATIC AUDIT REVIEWS FOR 2017/18

A report detailing the enhancements made to the School's Internal Audit coverage through the introduction of Thematic Audit reviews had been circulated prior to the meeting. Mr Meehan highlighted:

- Current internal audit reviews took place on a cyclical basis, once every 4 to 5 years
- Recently Thematic Audit reviews had been introduced to enhance coverage
- On an annual basis topical or high risk areas would be selected for the Thematic Review audit
- A small sample of schools would be selected for inclusion in the thematic programme each year

- Schools would be asked to complete a questionnaire and supply evidence, or the theme would be examined as part of the routine audit visit
- Each school would be provided with a report of the findings and recommendations
- Key areas identified as learning and best practice would be circulated to all schools within a summary briefing note
- During 2017/18, themes examined were school Voluntary Fund and Asset Control. Reports from these findings had been circulated with this report for consideration from the Forum, they had not yet be circulated widely
- A thematic review of General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) compliance had commenced. An internal control questionnaire had been circulated to 6 schools (4 primaries, 1 secondary and 1 Special), the completed questionnaires were being reviewed and findings collated
- It was proposed there would be two thematic reviews per year, in addition to the GDPR review, this year focus would be placed upon Cash Handling and Income Collection
- Similar issues had been identified in relation to the school Voluntary Fund and Asset Control reviews

Forum members suggested a breakdown of the phases which were examined would be useful within the reports. Positive comments were shared regarding the one page report, including risks, findings and recommendations.

A question was raised regarding any follow up visits, these had not been planned however it was suggested a hyperlink be included to provide access for Headteacher's, Chairs of Governing Boards and School Business Managers.

It was agreed: Schools Forum noted the contents of the reports

6. MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

The Chair had advised all attendees at the start of the meeting that all attendees were welcome to join in with discussions.

It was noted Mr Max Atkins was the appointed Trade Union Representative

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A template letter had been shared with Forum Members for circulation from schools on Friday 8th March, regarding the current issued relating to school funding.

It was agreed: Members discussed and agreed they would support the distribution of this letter and agreed the contents could be amended by HT's.

8. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

16th May at Bedford High School

26th June at Hawkley Hall High School

There being no further business to discuss the meeting closed at 2pm