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| **Schools’ Forum Meeting**  **10 June 2021** |

**Attendees:**

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| **Members**  Carole Bradley (CB) (Primary - Large <50%)  Julie Deville (Primary Academy >25%<50% FSM)  Emma Espley (EE) (Secondary)  Mary Frain (Primary – VA Large)  Tracey Gibson (TG) (Secondary)  Martyn Gordon (MG) (Horizon School )  Lisa Grieg (LG) (Academy – Special)  Mandy Hall (MH) (Primary Academy >25% FSM)  Jo Heaton (JH) (Diocese – C of E)  Andrew Jordan (AJ) (Secondary Academies >50% FSM)  Sue Sharpe (SS) (Primary - Large Deprived)  Chris Simmons (CS) (Academy Governors)  Mark Tilling (MT) (Secondary)  David Turner (DT) (Primary – Small)  Lee Walker (LW) (Primary Academy >50% FSM)  Zoe Westley (ZW) (Special)  Rachel Williams (RW) (Diocese – RC)  Jo Wilson (JW) (VA Large) | **Local Authority Officers**  Amanda Whitehead (AW) (Assistant Director Education)  Danielle Swainston (DS)  (Assistant Director Joint Commissioning)  Jacqui Braithwaite (JB) (Integrated Services for Learning Manager)  Sandra Shears (SSh) (Children’s Finance)  Jo Stubbs (JS) (Administrator) |

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| **Agenda Item** | | **Action** |
| **1** | **Apologies -**  Apologies were submitted by the following:  Lynne Chambers (Primary >25% <50% FSM) (Julie Deville substituting)  Stephen Hammond (Academy – Secondary)  Mark Hughes (16-19 Sector)  Neil Nottingham (Primary Academy >50% FSM)  Linda Richardson (PVI)  Rachel Williams (Diocese – RC) (Mary Frain substituting) |  |
| **2** | **Minutes of the Last Meeting – 25 March 2021**  Minutes approved.  A request had previously been made for further information on the balance in the SEMH capital pot for a future Head teachers meeting. SSh gave a brief verbal update explaining how the balance had materialised and that it could be used for revenue funding. SSh agreed to send a written update to SS  CB queried whether school clinics were still taking place. DS confirmed that they were. She would cover the details as part of her update on the High Needs Block Medium Term Financial Strategy. She urged anyone with urgent needs to contact her directly.  The Chair confirmed that the task and finish group for Early Years funding referred to under AOB had met since the meeting with a future meeting scheduled.  **Outstanding Actions Log**  High Needs Task and Finish Group – CB was due to meet with AW and John Hardy next week so would hopefully be able to provide an update to the Forum soon.  Salary disclosure – no change on the position  SEMH – This was covered under the minutes.  The Chair suggested that a record be kept of any recommendations forwarded to Children’s Services Committee from the Forum. This would enable feedback from the Committee as to why they had accepted or rejected said recommendations. Members supported this and also suggested that Forum meetings be scheduled to enable the availability of minutes prior to Committee meetings. It was also suggested that the Chair of the Forum be invited to Committee meetings which included Forum recommendations to enable them to give feedback on behalf of the Forum. SSh advised that this information was already included on existing reports however the Chair could also be invited to attend to feedback should the Forum wish it. She noted that a number of Forum members were also co-opted onto Children’s Services Committee and were therefore able to give their feedback should they wish. However it was felt that as they may not always be members of both Forum and Committee it would be preferable that the Chair attend. The Chair asked that the Chair of Children’s Services Committee be made aware. She also requested that SSh discuss the timetabling of meetings from September onwards with the Forum Chair. |  |
| **3** | **Horizon School and Alternative Provision 2020/21 Final Outturn**  SSh gave an update on the final outturn position for the Horizon School and Alternative Provision services. Schools Forum had previously agreed to fund an annual cost baseline of £0.750 million from the High Needs Block for the Horizon School for 2019/20 and 2020/21. For 2020/21 the net contribution was a net £0.675 million. The final outturn for the Horizon School was an underspend of £0.090 million, exceeding the estimated outturn projection of £0.072 million underspend. This underspend had been returned to the High Needs Block. The final outturn for Alternative Provision was an overspend of £0.035 million, also lower than had been estimated. This overspend related mainly to clawback income of funding for permanently excluded pupils which had been overspent due to a significant number of pupils being managed in the Horizon School or through alternative provision during the latest financial year.  Members were confused with the table in the report which indicated that grant funding which had not come from the High Needs Block had been underspent and therefore felt that it should have been retained by the Horizon School and not returned to the HNB.. SSh advised that this grant funding had already been spent in 2020/21 as required under the funding rules.  Members noted the underspend for the Horizon school. SSh acknowledged this but indicated that the vast majority of this came from ‘other income’ and would not be sustainable for the following years. MT advised that the clawback overspend would be corrected in future years when the young people involved moved out of the system. MG advised that the number of permanently excluded children had moved from a previous high of 36 to the current number of 3. From September they expected to have 12 permanently excluded children in the authority. The Horizon School had made 2 outreach places available for each Secondary school which would hopefully help avoid permanent exclusions.  Members requested more information on the outreach availability for primary schools. MT confirmed this was being rolled out but would primarily involve Y6 children requiring transition support for the move to secondary school. He invited any primary schools to discuss the situation with their allocated secondary school  **Decision**  That the report be noted. |  |
| **4** | **High Needs Block Final Outturn 2020/21** |  |
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|  | DS confirmed a final outturn underspend of £0.847 million, exceeding the best case projection of £0.385 million. Details of the reasons for this underspend were given however it was felt that the main reason was the national coronavirus situation and the fact that many children who would otherwise have been identified as requiring funding had not been in school for much of the year. In future years this underspend might be needed to help fund any unmet needs resulting from this unusual year. The underspend was particularly unusual as a number of nearby authorities had overspent on their High Needs Block.  Members referred to the transfer of £0.329million from schools included within this underspend and queried whether this could be returned to the schools. The Chair asked if a disapplication request would need to be made to the Secretary of State. SSh confirmed this was not required. SSh suggested that until the MTFS review was finalised that no decision should be made on this funding.  **Decision**  That the report be noted. |  |
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| **5** | **Proposal to increase capacity for SEND Education Provision** |  |
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|  | DS presented a consultation report on proposals to prudentially borrow £1.550 million to increase capacity for Special Educational Needs and/or disabilities (SEND) Education Provision at Catcote Academy. The annual cost of borrowing would be me from the High Needs Block. Since 2017 the number of children with SEND had increased from 2.8% to 3.3% in 2020. There had also been a 5% increase (to 12.1%) in the number of children with SEN support plans. Locally the number of children needing support had increased from 434 in 2017 to 725 in 2021.  The main Catcote Academy building had been using a temporary demountable building for teaching purposes for 15 years, currently utilised by 48 children. There were no specialist spaces such as those for ICT, art and gym provision available as all were being used as regular teaching areas. A further 22 children with moderate learning difficulties were due to by taught at the CECA and CETL buildings under an interim arrangement from September 2021. An additional Looked After Child had also been identified as having highly complex needs and requiring specialist provision. Should Catcote not have the necessary capacity this child would need to be placed out of area in a residential provision. Therefore it was felt that additional funding was needed in order to meet the needs of these children.  The cost of the proposed project was £2.750 million. Grant funding through Basic Need (£0.499 million) and SEND (£0.701 million) had been identified leaving a shortfall of £1.550 million. It was proposed to fund this through prudential borrowing. The annual cost of repayment would be £0.078 million over 25 years, to be funded through repayment from the High Needs Block. This would provide an ultimate saving to the High Needs Block of between £0.343 million and £0.783 million). A report on this proposal was due to be considered by Children’s Services Committee on 23rd June 2021. The views of the Forum would be included within this report. Final approval would be made by Council following referral to Finance and Policy Committee.  JHe acknowledged that timescales were an issue but felt that 3 working days was insufficient time to allow for a full consultation process. CS referred to his time as Chair of Children’s Services Committee a number of years ago and noted that the demountables had been unsuitable then. He expressed his wholehearted support for the funding proposals saying the children involved deserved better.  MT supported the proposal but queried whether other funding avenues had been explored and whether the use of other sites such as CETL had been explored. He also queried what would happen to the cost of the loan if the High Needs Block was overspent. DS advised that use of sites such as the CETL was currently not an option as they were still needed as Council accommodation. This was a future possibility but not in time to meet the needs of the current Catcote cohort. The funding would be attached to the High Needs Block and would need to be paid back with or without an overspend as would be the case if these children were placed out of authority.  TG queried what impact the additional 22 children would have on the CECA building plan given the covenant on the building. DS indicated that this usage was temporary and minimal. SSh confirmed that prudential borrowing through the HNB had been approved in principal by the ESFA but it would need to be approved by Council. If approval was granted the work could be completed by Easter 2022 meaning the temporary arrangements would be in place for 2 terms.  The Chair indicated her support for the proposal but felt the High Needs Block review was needed. DS acknowledged the timing wasn’t the best but there were no other options in terms of the childrens’ needs. There had been no way to plan for this in advance as the needs of the children had only just become apparent.  JD endorsed the proposal and the effort to be proactive. She queried whether other funding streams for Academies had been maximised and asked whether any funding bids had been submitted previously with professional input. LG confirmed that external advisors were employed to help with their grant funding while DS commented that the Department for Education had made it clear that local authorities were responsible for special needs support through High Needs Block capital allocation. Officers had explored every option and would explore all options to repay these monies early.  CB expressed her support on behalf of all her representative schools. However she was concerned at the lack of forward planning through early years.  JHe questioned why the ESFA had already been consulted on this matter. SSh advised that the question had been asked in principle prior to commencement of the consultation process. This did not mean the proposal was a ‘done deal’.  The Chair noted Forum members frustration at the reactive nature of this proposal. DS acknowledged this. Primary schools were being asked to provide information on any possible future needs going forward in order to avoid this happening again. She noted that Catcote Academy had enough capacity for Years 3-5.  ZW commented that the proposal was about investing now for the future. If this borrowing was not approved the pressure on the High Needs Block would be massive and provision would need to be sought out of town. It was unfair that children with significant needs did not have a building suitable for their needs and this was not a lot of money out of a huge budget.  CB queried how this borrowing would be viewed externally given the current underspend. DS advised that the Department for Education were aware of the situation and had not indicated that this would affect future funding.  CS accepted the Forum misgivings around timescales but felt this should not give the impression that members were not fully supportive of the funding proposal. He urged the Chair and officers to express strong support for this to Children’s Services Committee. JHe reiterated this, saying all member wholeheartedly agreed with the proposals and the need to help the children involved.  DS queried whether members wished for their comments to be included within a report to Committee or as an extract from the minutes. The Chair asked that the minutes be forwarded to Committee members in advance of their decision. She also confirmed that she would be happy to attend the meeting to provide feedback from the Forum.  **Decision**   1. That the report be noted 2. That the wholehearted support of the Forum for the proposal be put forward to the Children’s Services Committee 3. That the minutes of the minutes be forwarded to members of the Children’s Services Committee prior to the meeting on 23rd June 4. That the Forum Chair be invited to attend the Children’s Services Committee meeting on 23rd June |  |
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| **6** | **High Needs Block Medium Term Financial Strategy Update – Presentation** |  |
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|  | DS gave details of the initial work carried out as part of the review including a review of IPS funding, banding of Horizon School pupils and a review of those accessing home and hospital and plotting pathways. She noted that the system was congested and needs should be identified as soon as possible. A number of questions were included for members’ consideration including whether schools should be asked to complete a survey on the issues raised, whether IPS funding and its allocation should be reviewed and whether the banding document was fit for purpose.  Members indicated they would be happy to complete a survey. A number of options to tie this review into other groups and updates was also suggested. DS confirmed that she would continue to bring updates and options for different elements to the Forum.  **Zoe Westley left the meeting**  **Decision**  That the update be noted |  |
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| **7** | **Any Other Business** |  |
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|  | The Chair reminded members that the position would become vacant at the end of the academic year. Under current rules the position would revert to a secondary school representative. TG highlighted the reduced number of secondary heads in comparison to primary. The Chair asked that this item be added to the agenda for the next meeting.  JHe asked that in future minutes of the Sub-Capital Group be shared with the Forum. The Chair asked that this be actioned. MT acknowledged this.  **Danielle Swainston left the meeting** |  |
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| **8** | **Date and Time of next Forum meeting** |  |
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|  | Friday 9th July at 10.00am |  |
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|  | The meeting concluded at 12 noon |  |

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| **Meeting** | **Description** | **Owner** |
| **21/06/19** | High Needs Task and Finish Group – document and implement a whole system approach to an inclusive ethos across the full school estate – to lead initially via the Head Teacher Group and then through the Children’s Strategy Partnership | John Hardy |
| **24/09/20** | Provide standard form of words for new salary disclosure (Financial Transparency for Schools) | Jane Watt |