

## **SCHOOLS FORUM**

### **Minutes of Meeting held on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2020 Microsoft Teams**

#### **PRESENT:**

Sarah Lovell (Chair)	Finance Director, Cabot Learning Federation
Dave Baker (Vice Chair)	CEO, Olympus Academy Trust
Nicky Edwards	Natural Choice Nurseries
Kim Garland	Headteacher, Brimsham Green
Clare Haughton	Paige Park Pre-School
Pippa Osborne	Headteacher Christ Church Junior School
Diane Owen	Chair, King's Oak Academy
Stuart Evans	South Gloucestershire and Stroud College
Richard Aquilina	Governor - Bailey's Court
Macolm Strange	Diocese Rep
Will Roberts	CEO – Castle School Education Trust (CSET)
Steve Moir	Headteacher Bradley Stoke
David Jenkins	Governor – Crossways Schools
Susie Weaver	Executive Headteacher CLF
Bernice Webber	Headteacher, Old Sodbury CE Primary
Carl Lander	Hanham Primary Federation (HPF)
Mark Freeman	St Michael's CE VC Primary
Louise Leader	Headteacher Pathways Learning Centre

#### **Officers:**

Mustafa Salih, Head of Financial Management and Business Support  
Stuart Thomas, SEND Financial Planning Lead  
Hilary Smith, Head of Education, Learning and Skills  
Andrew Best – School Improvement Lead  
Hanna Bottomley – ESFA representative  
Erica Williams - South Gloucestershire Councillor (Education Lead)

#### **1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Attendees were welcomed by the Chair.

#### **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Linda Porter, Keith Lawrence

### 3. EVACUATION PROCESS

n/a

### 4. ANY OTHER ITEMS THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT

None.

### 5. REVIEW OF ACTIONS (Sarah Lovell)

Reference made to actions table from agenda

#### **Completed Actions:**

- Early Years working group – fortnightly over COVID period starting 18/5/20.
- DfE/EFSA feedback.

#### **Action Carried Forward:**

- Audit report from Academies sharing similar feedback as maintained schools - Dave Baker
- Q4, Full year report for July forum- Caroline Warren
- Impact report from Contingency fund given to Schools in Financial Difficulty – Mustafa Salih

### 6. REVIEW OF MARCH PAPERS (Sarah Lovell)

Some items have been carried forward from March's papers, some questions have been raised.

**Richard Aquilina (RA)** - Will the LA be allowing some flexibility in submission of budget? Ordinarily 31 May should give sufficient time but I know of schools who have been unable to prepare their budget due to loss of access to the LA Financial system. This was as a result of IT changes and delays from South Glos IT to reinstate access until first week of May. Also schools may find it difficult to arrange a full governor body meeting and/or gain quorum to approve giving the current COVID-19 climate (*submitted question prior to forum meeting*).

**Mustafa Salih (MS)** – Extension on schools budget, schools should try and meet the end of May deadline but some individual schools could have an extension, they will be looked at on a case-case basis by the council.

## 7. Schools in Financial Difficulty (SIFD) (Mustafa)

**MS** – Proposal sent out in March, showing various aspects of support for Schools in Financial Difficulty (SIFD). Outturn report requested for the current contingency fund and will be provided at the next forum meeting. This will include who is accessing the fund, what has been spent and what has been the impact.

**Dave Baker (DB)** - Academies prospective; Process and timeline, of July and January dates was workable. The template was appropriate. Requested the letter be updated to refer to the relevant sign off by the MATs financial governance committee or Board of Trustees (whichever was appropriate for the MAT)

**Sarah Lovell (SL)** – Will the contingency fund be split in two equal ways for the separate dates?

**MS** – This will be looked at when a detail report is brought back to the Forum.

**Action – Outturn and updated scope to be provided at next forum meeting.**

## 8. SMALL SCHOOL STRATEGY 2020 (Andrew Best)

Purpose of the report is to consult with the schools forum on the strategy prior to taking it to Cabinet.

**Diane Owen (DO)** - In the policy there are references in a number of places to schools with a PAN of 15. Should this not read "a PAN of 15 or less"? (Submitted question prior to forum meeting).

**AB** – Noted. This will be amended in the document.

**AB** - We wanted something that pulls key items together and looks at a consistent approach for our smaller schools. It is a structured and systematic approach on the recruitment and the longer term sustainability of our schools. We have looked at places, communities and models both nationally and locally in terms of developing this strategy in moving our small schools forward.

**Erica Willimas (EW)** – Staff recruitment is an issue in our rural communities.

**AB** – We have seen more successful recruitment when schools have joined federations/academies. The aim is to explore how solutions can be found locally and be proactive rather than reactive in our approach.

**DB** – Are small schools aware of this strategy?

**AB** – We are engaging regularly, and the strategy should not come as a surprise. We are having more constructive conversations with them currently and is something that our rural schools need. We have had some positive conversations with some small schools to date.

**DO** – It would be good to see some presentations to show governor's of schools.

**AB** – We have been working with Governor services to share the wider view. Yes, we have undertaken some training, this has worked with smaller groups of schools.

General response from forum – positive that there is a strategy in place.

**AB** – Thanks for feedback, comments have been useful.

## **9. High Needs Working Group HNWG (Susie Weaver)**

### **Verbal update**

Reference was made to the HNWG meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> May which included:

- The TOR was shown to the group and some more amendments are needed before they are presented to schools forum in July.
- There is a commitment to carry on with the group until 2021.
- Meetings will be on a quarterly basis.
- It was agreed that the HNWG would hear from the officers who are leading some of the work – naming and identifying people to report back and provide impact/analysis.
- The group should also be a sounding board feeding into these strategies.
- Agreed a template, rather than just a verbal update and a dashboard data to come to HNWG and to the Schools Forum on a regular basis.
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The following items were discussed:

- Cluster Fund – feedback from Hilary Smith
- OFSTED inspection – feedback from Hilary Smith

### **Action –HNWG TOR returned to July Forum**

## **10. SEND Cluster (revisit from March's paper- Hilary Smith)**

Purpose is to update Forum on the current position.

It's important that school leaders participate in the Cluster Pilot and that it really has an impact on the key areas of reducing exclusions and the number of education and health care plans (EHCPs). As school leaders please encourage all schools participate in the cluster pilot. Full 5 Clusters are in place but we do need full participation.

This strategy was shared with OFSTED, who were surprised that it was still in pilot having looked at the positive data and were keen to see it move forward.

**PO** – Keeping the buy in, is there any scope for offering CPD for staff whilst they are at home?

**HS** – Completely supportive of this, looking at some of the cluster funding in helping some of the children affected by COVID19. Yes, there is a huge workforce development programme/CPD that we could have in place.

**DO**- It would be helpful for updates to include some headline information on how monies are being spent. Since the Forum agreed the £1 million funding and have continued to support this, we should have some information on how this money is being spent. This need not be highly detailed but headline data so that we can have a sense of how money is allocated and therefore in the longer term develop an understanding of outcomes versus spend. This would allow for a more objective viewpoint. *(Question submitted prior to the meeting).*

**HS** –Total amount of funding spent was less than £441,000 last year on the Cluster Fund. Yes, will provide a detail analysis of how this was spent so we can see which monies have made the biggest impact.

**DO** – It is important that we are seeing the detail of the financial spend. Support the transparency and that we will see the detail of spend in a future forum meeting.

**Action: Financial detail of Cluster spend and impact report– Hilary Smith**

## **11. Education, Learning and Skills Department Structure – Hilary Smith**

Purpose - to provide forum with some detail of the new structure.

**SEND Strategic Lead post** -Previously there have been two leads for SEN and there will be now be one post. There needs to be collective responsibility for SEN across ELS from early years all the way through to adulthood. We are doing this and the results were noticeable when we had our recent SEND inspection.

**Planning and Partnership Officer post** – Reporting to head of inclusion and the SEND lead. Key role in working with the Clusters.

**Research and Data Officer** – Would look at the real data analysis we need so that we can see that what we are doing is making a difference.

**Fair Access Officer** – Responsible for ensuring that we deliver the fair access protocol in a fair way in making sure that all schools are playing their part. The LA will also be using their powers more forcefully in making sure that children are being placed in an effective, timely manner.

**Capital Projects Officer** – Support for Tanya Smith, will look more at what we need to do with our capital spend on SEN.

**HS** would like people to be involved in the recruitment of these posts. Forum members agreed to support HS.

**Karl Lander (KL)** -Strategic Research Support Officer role appears excessive. Officers making policy ought to understand their own data and research. At present with schools losing so much income we need to reduce central costs.

**HS** – Disagree. We need capacity to help with the analysis that's needed, OFSTED highlighted this as a key issue.

Confirmation that Tanya Smith is staying in post was shared with the forum.

**SL**- Questioned the timescale for these new posts.

**HS** –The ambition will be that people will be in post for September for the new academic year.

## **12. SCHOOLS BUDGET RESPONSE 2020/21 AND COVID19 ISSUES - Mustafa**

**MS** – We have put in place a mechanism for capturing maintained school based COVID costs that are additional and exceptional via the finance system. This is an opportunity to have feedback on these areas.

**MF** - Do we have any idea if the government will fulfil its pledge to increase the minimum to £4,000 in 2021-22?

**MS** – Yes, I believe so, this will be the case. But will be pending government announcements

**MF** – This would be good to flag up to other schools for schools budget planning.

**PO** – We are regularly told that the high cost of private placements are pushing our High Needs block into further deficit, what can we do about this?

**MS** – Highly unlikely that we will save money on this during the school closure period, we have also been incurred additional costs.

**MS** – There has been no clarification on how we will recover our costs of COVID from government.

**Carl Lander (CL)** – Is there a list of potential spends that can be put to COVID costs?

**MS** – DfE has given examples

**Caroline Warren** – Examples are on the.gov website that the DfE will cover as well as limits which should have gone out on a newsletter – very limited how schools can claim.

**CL** – A list with what is acceptable would be useful.

**SL** – Referred to the DfE list – additional site cost for keeping open during the holidays, additional cleaning and food vouchers.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-schools/school-funding-exceptional-costs-associated-with-coronavirus-covid-19-for-the-period-march-to-july-2020>

**KG** (referring back to PO's comments) - If the OLA placements are residential, and the costs include residential/boarder provision, there is an argument this element could be recouped - this follows the model that independent boarding schools are adopting (teaching fees will be charged, but boarding fees being dropped.) These independent settings are furloughing catering staff, for example.

**MS** – We are capturing additional costs in the independent sector – we are trying to recover these costs where we can

**RA** – Additional costs should also include supporting pupils to catch up to their expected level of development.

**DB** – This will be for everybody in the country, this issue has been raised and assessments hopefully will be altered accordingly for next year's pupils.

**Erica Willimas thanked all members of the forum for their efforts in helping supporting key worker children, vulnerable children over this period.**

**Nicky Edwards voiced her concern over the difficulty and complexity in trying to operate early year's provision during the COVID period. This was in part due to the different settings receiving a small or medium size % contribution in government funding but the remaining coming from customers.**

**MS** – Will look at these in the fortnightly meetings and will bring a report back to Forum.

**HS** – Is feeding back the issues of Early Years with the RSC on a regular basis.

**EW** – Will take this concern forward with Cabinet members.

**DB** – Will also voice this concern in his regular RSC office meetings.

**DO** - Can we agree that forum make a statement that Hilary can take to her meetings of their real concern about the challenge for EY?

**SL** suggested that it is highlighted in the minutes that the forum is specifically concerned about the financial issues facing the early year's sector and that we request our concern is shared with appropriate government bodies as officers see fit. This was agreed by all the forum members

### **13. SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>9<sup>th</sup> July 2020 @ 4.30</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Microsoft Teams</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Outturn report Q4 full year.</b></li><li>• <b>Contingency Fund update (SIFD)</b></li><li>• <b>HNWG update</b></li><li>• <b>Report on Cluster Fund spending</b></li><li>• <b>Amendments to Scheme for Financing Schools</b></li></ul>

### **14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Future Forum dates were agreed.**