



# Minutes

Name of meeting	<b>SCHOOLS' FORUM</b>
Date and time	<b>Thursday, 15 July 2021</b>
Venue	<b>Webinar – Virtual Meeting</b>
Present	Beverley Gilbert – Brading CE Primary (Chair) Mike Hayward – Isle of Wight Education Federation Kevin McDermott – Christ the King College Steve Fairclough – Brighstone CE Primary Lisa Nicholson – Haylands Primary Caroline Sice – Lanesend Primary Academy Fidelma Washington – Isle of Wight College Julie Stewart – Medina House School Jackie Boxx – Island Learning Centre
Officers	Brian Pope – Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion Barry Downer - Senior Finance Business Partner Irina Rowan – Finance Business Partner Elizabeth Goodwin – Chief Internal Auditor, Portsmouth CC Karen Gibbs – Audit Manager, Portsmouth CC Nicola Blake – Virtual School Lead Rosie Lister – Virtual School Education Officer Bernadette Dawes – Inclusion Commissioning Manager  Cllr Debbie Andre – Lead Councillor for Children's Services and Education Diane Hiscock – Clerk
Apologies	Duncan Mills – Cornerstone Federation Sue Bowen – Church of England Diocese Sarah Hussey – Northwood Primary Academy

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1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION  
The chair welcomed members and introductions were made.
  2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST  
No declarations of interest received.
  3. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME  
No questions received
  4. MINUTES
    - 4.1 RESOLVED:  
That the minutes of the meeting held on [25 March 2021](#) be confirmed.
  5. MATTERS ARISING  
There were no matters arising

## 6. AUDIT TEAM REPORT [Paper C](#)

6.1 The aim of this report was to put in context arrangements and expectations for school audits, to introduce the Audit Team, give a summary of the programme and links to responsibilities and other services.

6.2 EG gave an overview of the Audit Team who work closely with the IOW Education Finance Team and schools.

6.3 Previously, audits were carried out by an in-house team, concentrating on themed reviews and covering the Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS). In 2019 the audit programme was moved to a partnership with Portsmouth CC, to provide a better service for all stakeholders. This current approach identifies schools for audit, using annual risk assessments, carried out by experienced officers and led by local intelligence and knowledge.

6.4 Audits are part of the required financial process and assist with sharing good practice, as well as identifying areas for development. They enable the Chief Finance Officer to submit S151 Financial returns to the DfE.

Audits also provide assurance to Governing Boards, who are required to submit annual SFVS returns to the LA.

6.5 In the most recent audit of collective schools' SFVS submissions, 21 responses submitted by 8 schools were checked for compliance.

- 3 responses were not supported by documentary evidence
- 1 school had no evidence of Terms of Reference (only a 2016 Scheme of Delegation)
- 2 schools were not meeting the required 6 times per year and the GB did not receive clear monitoring reports

Feedback from schools shows appreciation that the SFVS is checked.

6.6 SFVS requires school managers and governors to work together on completion. Submission is a GB responsibility and should accurately reflect the school risk control environment.

6.7 The Internal Audit Programme is based on the [SFVS Best Practice Document](#) (previously circulated to Forum members in March 2020) and 11 control headers, as shown in Paper C (slide 6).

6.8 The process is scheduled in advance, to allow schools time to prepare. During lockdown, visits have been carried out remotely. A collaborative approach is used and findings are shared and discussed with the Finance Team. An exit meeting is held with the headteacher, finance lead and chair of governors, followed by a final report. The programme allows for wide coverage and enables sharing best practice across schools – i.e. agreement to share a 'Continuity During Lockdown' plan with another school.

6.9 Other services on offer include –

- Advice within the remit of the team – risk management and control
- Sharing best practice
- Grant verification
- Investigation (fraud/theft)

The team welcome contact from schools who may need support and aim to build on knowledge and experience to increase level of coverage across schools.

## 7. VIRTUAL SCHOOL REPORT [Paper B](#)

- 7.1 The Virtual School Headteacher is responsible for developing a clear policy for the distribution of the Pupil Premium Plus (PPP), for Looked After Children (LAC). The majority of the funding is passported to schools for Personal Education Plans (PEPs). £745 per child is retained centrally for operation of the Virtual School. The Virtual Headteacher has overall responsibility for scrutiny of the use of PPP and delivery of PEPs.
- 7.2 Allocations of PPP are made to IW schools on a termly basis, whereas some LAs withhold funding until PEPs are in place.
- 7.3 The team comprises 1 Executive Virtual Headteacher, 1 Full-Time Education Officer and 1 Part-Time Education Officer (responsible for Previously Looked After Children - PLAC). Their purpose is to support and improve education outcomes for children, as if they were in a single school.
- 7.4 The Virtual School team works in close partnership with the Early Years and Post-16 teams, Hampshire and IW Educational Psychologists (HIWEP), Resilience Around the Family Team (RAFT), the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities team (SEND) and more recently, the Children's Service Volunteers Programme. They also work with Ethnic Minorities and Traveller Achievement Service (EMATS) and provide specialist oversight to support transition to mainstream schools.
- 7.5 High quality training is provided for Designated Teachers as well as Continuing Professional Development (CPD) workshops, including topics on corporate parenting visits, quality of PEPs and use of PPP. The Attachment and Trauma Aware Schools and Settings Programme (ATAS) is ongoing with external evaluation of the first cohort.
- 7.6 Of the 15 school requests for 'Covid-19 Additionality Funding' received – 14 met the required criteria and 1 school was provided with advice.
- 7.7 GCSE outcomes at 2020 were teacher-assessed and showed improvement. Attendance is monitored through Welfare Call and ongoing support in partnership with schools and social care resulted in 92% attendance in May 2021.
- 7.8 **Q** – Members were interested to hear more about collaboration with the Children's Services Volunteer Programme.

The programme was established in 2020 – volunteers were recruited to work with children in education. Schools were asked to submit requests for a volunteer – 9 requests were received and 8 volunteers were matched to support children within a close locality, through a personalised approach. Children are supported on trips, with homework and in the classroom – the aim is to build a sustainable relationship.

It was felt that the programme would be beneficial for children post-LAC.

### RESOLVED:

THAT the contents of the Pupil Premium for Looked After Children/Virtual School Report be noted.

## 8. 2020/21 SCHOOLS BUDGET OUTTURN & DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) RECOVERY REQUIREMENTS [Paper D](#)

- 8.1 A final deficit of £1.8m at 31 March 2021, was reported. This is 2% of the overall budget, but marginally improved from the position reported from January 2021.

## 8.2 EARLY YEARS

A £29,000 overspend was due to interim Covid arrangements in relation to the free early years' entitlement. A further reduction of £70,000 in funding for the spring term is estimated and final allocation will shortly be confirmed.

## 8.3 SCHOOLS BLOCK

No schools were eligible for growth funding in the year 2020/21, resulting in an underspend of £92,000.

8.4 An underspend of £12,000 was noted in de-delegated funding for Trade Union Facilities Time – due to vacant periods during the pandemic. For 2021/22 vacant periods will be reported on termly returns submitted to the LA and leftover funding will be re-distributed.

8.5 The closure of All Saints CE Primary School resulted in remaining funding being distributed to schools receiving pupils. The outstanding school deficit was transferred to the LA budget.

## 8.6 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK

The High Needs Block was overspent by £1.87m, which was 12% of the overall high needs budget. Historic pressures continue.

8.7 An increase from 62 - 74 places required in Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMSS) incurred an £82,000 overspend. Most of these are placed on the island.

8.8 12 additional places at St George's Special School incurred £70,000 pressure and required an increase of £200,000 top-up funding, as cases are becoming more complex. An audit of the banding system brought an annual saving of £7,000.

8.9 Top-up funding in mainstream schools was overspent by £211,000, as Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) have increased by approximately 11% in the last 3 years.

8.10 Personal budgets are an ongoing risk area and overspent by £119,000. However, there has been a slight decrease in recent spending.

## 8.11 CENTRAL SERVICES BLOCK

A slight increase in Non-SEN independent placements led to an overspend of £16,000.

## 8.12 OTHER GRANTS

Other DfE grants, including Covid funding are passported directly to schools.

## 8.13 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT

The 2020/21 deficit of £1.811m added to the brought forward deficit of £2.488m brings the total deficit to £4.299m. DSG funding is ringfenced and BD brought members' attention the requirement for officers to enter into open dialogue and meet with DfE when asked.

8.14 Most LAs found the DfE template for managing deficits difficult – but have followed the themes to inform planning for recovery. [Paper D](#) – Appendix C shows the data used on historic high needs spending to indicate future expected pressures.

8.15 Para 33 gives an overview of next steps towards planned recovery. Officers will continue to report back to Schools' Forum through monitoring reports.

8.16 Q – Agreed that funding allocated to LAs is not sufficient to meet requirements and continuing pressures within the High Needs Block. This is a national issue and the IOW is in a median position compared to other LAs. National campaigns for increased funding are ongoing and regularly raised with ministers. Results of the

[McArdle Review](#) of provision for SEND children were due for publication before the end of the 2021 summer term, but are not yet available.

It was confirmed that regulations do not allow DSG deficit to be paid from LA budget.

Q – Members asked if de-delegated funding for Trade Union Facilities Time should be reviewed due to the underspend. It was confirmed that a reduction in allocation may lead to deficit. This is part of the de-delegation for maintained schools, agreed in the budget setting process, ahead of each financial year.

Q – Confirmed that there is no indication from the Admissions Team that any school will be eligible for growth funding in 2021/22.

**RESOLVED:**

THAT the 2020/21 final outturn position, and the initial and planned progress on deficit management be noted.

9. **2020/21 SCHOOL BALANCES (MAINTAINED SCHOOLS)** [Paper E](#)

BD gave an overview of maintained school balances for 2020/21. Despite the difficulties of the last year and tight deadlines over the Easter break, all schools managed to submit their returns on time.

9.1 2019/20 was the first year showing a net deficit in IOW school balances.

Substantial work on improvement over 2020/21 resulted in a surplus of £2.001m. The number of schools in deficit has reduced from 13 to 7 – total schools reduced from 42 to 41 due to closure of All Saints CE Primary.

9.2 All deficits were planned – although 1 school came out of deficit earlier than expected and 1 school's deficit has extended into the current year. Only 4 schools had in-year deficits.

9.3 BD re-iterated the purpose of SFVS to give reasonable reassurance of financial/risk control.

9.4 All schools submitted their 3-year budget plan by 31 May 2021. All schools face ongoing budget pressures due to growth in high needs, surplus places and possible re-structures.

9.5 2 schools are expected to come out of deficit in the current year and no new deficits are forecast. Years 2 and 3 in budget plans tend to give a pessimistic view, although schools are taking action now to avoid deficit.

9.6 BD reminded members of the requirement of the IW Scheme for Financing Schools – para 14.

9.7 Schools are risk-assessed and rag-rated. A range of LA interventions (para 16) are recommended through ongoing communication and monitoring.

9.8 Education Finance Officers are informed and provide support through attendance at School Business Manager meetings, and Headteacher and Governor network groups. The School Reorganisation Panel considers and provides challenge for proposed school re-structures. DfE benchmarking information is used to support monitoring. Officers also liaise with other education departments.

9.9 **DFE ACTION PLANNING & INCREASED TRANSPARENCY**

The IW Scheme for Financing Schools was updated in line with the DfE objective for better transparency around school budgets. Schools with a deficit greater than 5% of their budget must submit a recovery plan to the LA. 5 of the 7 schools currently in deficit will need to re-visit action plans with the LA.

All schools are advised to use the DfE Consistent Financial Reporting system (CFR) to demonstrate comparable data across the island. Appendix C shows a break-down of all school balances.

**RESOLVED:**

THAT the school balances position for the Isle of Wight local authority maintained schools be noted.

10. **2021/22 BUDGET MONITORING** [Paper F](#)

The report showed an early budget position at 31 May 2021. At this point an overspend of £1.602m is anticipated, but subject to change as the year progresses. This is 1.7% of the budget and includes the £1.494m budget shortfall in high needs, previously identified.

10.1 **EARLY YEARS**

There are no variances currently expected, subject to confirmation of funding expected for the spring term. Due to Covid, funding is now based on termly census returns, which seems will be more beneficial if confirmed for the future.

10.2 **SCHOOLS BLOCK**

No variances are projected in relation to school budget shares. No schools are expected to be eligible for growth funding, which will be an anticipated underspend of £63,000.

10.3 **HIGH NEEDS BLOCK**

A £1.665m overspend, 9.6% of the budget, is forecast due to ongoing pressures. Work is underway planning strategies to make savings against the £1.494m budget gap noted in the meeting on [14 January 21](#) (item 7.8) and will be included in the deficit management plan.

10.4 Other factors to be considered are –

- Increase in INMSS placements (mostly on-island) - £134,000 overspend
- No pressure expected following expansion of St George's School
- A continued increase in EHCPs in mainstream schools would result in a further overspend
- Requests for discretionary top-up funding increased and were overspent by £183,000 in 2020/21 and is likely to lead to a further deficit
- Personal Education Plans (PEPs) have increased considerably in recent years, but seem to have levelled off for the time being. Most of this budget is for children Educated Other Than At School (EOTAS).
- EY SEN – £21,000 overspend anticipated as children return to or join settings with more complex needs.
- £21,000 expected overspend – supply teacher costs for children in Elective Home Education (EHE).

10.5 A proposal is under discussion between IWC and NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) for a 3-way split regarding funding arrangements for children eligible for support through health needs. An impact of £250,000 is anticipated.

10.6 **CENTRAL SERVICES BLOCK**

No variances expected, although non-SEN placements may change.

## 10.7 OTHER GRANTS

Most of this funding is directly passed on to schools.

- PE and Sports Premium will continue
- Pupil Premium – impact of DfE changes from using January 2021 census data to October 2020 census data, likely to result in a £309,000 funding loss.

**Q** – There has been an increase in EOTAS children during the pandemic, with no clear view on how the situation will develop. Work is ongoing to support children in returning to school. The IOW is broadly in line with other LAs – this is a national issue.

The resulting impact is less funding to distribute between schools.

Strong relations with NHS assists IW ability to identify and support children who are not in school.

There is no definition of suitability of education for EHE children. A judicial review on expectations for English and Maths is expected and may lead to changes in LA practice.

Members briefly discussed the possible loss in Pupil Premium funding for further clarification.

### RESOLVED:

THAT the May 2021 forecast 2021/22 position be noted.

## 11. HIGH NEEDS STRATEGY UPDATE [Paper H](#)

As noted in item 8.16, the outcome [McArdle Review](#) of provision for children with SEND has not yet been published.

### **Action – to be reported at a later date**

11.1 The IOW deficit of £1.8m (2%) is significantly lower in comparison to some other LAs. The IOW per-pupil funding is in line with other LAs nationally.

5.0% (increased from 4.6%) of IOW children have EHCPs, in comparison to 3.7% (increased from 3.3%) nationally and has continued to follow the national trend.

11.2 In context – the £134m deficit reported in 2018/19 is likely to increase to £1.3b by 2022/23. A recent survey carried out by the F40 Group of LAs, who campaign for better funding, received 77 responses and showed that IOW funding is broadly in the middle. SEN numbers are higher, but good housekeeping has kept the deficit lower than that of other LAs. Those with the highest deficits are under DfE scrutiny.

11.3 Strategies for recovery include –

- Making a case to DfE for sufficient funding.
- SEN support guidance for schools.
- Sufficiency Strategy – increased places at Brading Primary School, Medina College and St Georges Special School.
- Post 16 – as numbers of EHCPs rise – workability plans – leading to a good job after education.
- Banding/funding top up increased.
- Review bandings – special provision to best meet the needs of the child/student
- Smarter commissioning – reduce costs of INMSS placements – delay due to Covid – slight increase since Sept 2020.

Q – Additional capital funding received was used toward expansion of St Georges School – 12 places – opening 6<sup>th</sup> form provision at the Clatterford site.

12. IWC & HCC PARTNERSHIP INVESTMENT [Paper G](#)

Members were given a progress update regarding the £25,000 investment from the high needs budget to Hampshire CC in a partnership arrangement to achieve cost savings. Strategic support enabled release of IOW Officers' time to carry out operational duties and work on cost-avoidance.

- 12.1 HCC has worked closely with SEN and Finance teams to support preparation for Ofsted, data, placements and Covid displacement. An overall cost avoidance of £220,000 has been achieved since 2019.
- 12.2 Continued support includes Ofsted follow-up/action plan, INMSS placements, strategic work with SEND board and work towards a sufficiency strategy.
- 12.3 This has led to a close working relationship between IOW and HCC, more effective SEND provision, including joint commissioning of Occupational Therapy support for more young people.
- 12.4 Further savings are being achieved through releasing IOW Officers to work on -
- Introduction of a mini-tender system for commissioning new providers
  - Moving placements from the mainland to IOW
  - Improved support for the Island Learning Centre
- 12.5 Members discussed how the need for school support has increased in recent years – but has not been met by the budget.

It was confirmed that INMSS places on the island are at St Catherine's School. Discussions are ongoing to negotiate fees for the next year.

It was noted that the pressure on specialist primary places is still increasing significantly. Primary provision needs to meet the needs of an increasing number of 2–11 children with complex needs.

Proposals for additional places through nursery provision at Hunnyhill Primary, are awaiting Cabinet approval and will be followed by formal consultation.

A full sufficiency analysis will be submitted to DfE in approximately 6 months.

13. Members were informed that Kate Symes has been appointed as SEND Service Manager for 0 – 25. The main service aim is to re-build relationships and work with parents where anxiety and concern has escalated during the pandemic. The team will work closely with colleagues in School Improvement and schools to encourage a refreshed and optimistic new start.

The IW SEN Team were most efficient and effective in 100% completion of the transfer across to the EHCP system in the required time, against 55% across other LAs.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 11 November 2021, from 8.30am

Meeting arrangements to be confirmed

[Consultation on the National Funding Formula will be through the Headteacher Forum in September 2021.](#)

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS All at 8.30am

20 January 2022 (*This date could be subject to change, depending on the date for submission of funding formula to DfE*)

24 March 2022