

**SCHOOLS FORUM  
8 DECEMBER 2011  
4.30 - 6.00 PM**



**Present:**

George Clement, Union Representative (Chairman)  
Mike Beadsley, Secondary School Governors  
Trisha Donkin, Primary School Representative  
Brian Fries, Secondary School Governor  
Ed Glasson, Primary School Governor  
Louise Lovegrove, Primary School Representative  
John McNab, Secondary School Governor  
Kelvin Menon, Primary School Governor  
Joanna Quinn, Primary School Representative  
Tony Reading, Primary School Governor  
Paul Salter, Secondary School Representative  
Trudi Sammons, Primary School Representative  
Anne Shillcock, Special Education Representative  
John Throssell, Primary School Governor (Vice-Chairman)  
Kathy Winrow, Secondary School Representative

**Apologies for absence were received from:**

Maureen Beadsley, Secondary School Governor  
Andrew Fletcher, Secondary School Representative  
Gill Harbut, Primary School Representative

**12. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members**

The Forum noted that Mike Beadsley was substituting for Maureen Beadsley.

**13. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**14. Minutes and Matters Arising**

**RESOLVED** that, subject to the addition of Tony Reading to the list of those present, the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2011 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Arising on the minutes, the Forum noted:

- That the names of the people appointed to fill the vacancies for primary and secondary heads representatives would be reported to the next meeting; and,
- The date of the meeting originally scheduled for 8 March 2012 had been changed to 15 March 2012 but this would be checked to ensure there was no clash with primary and secondary heads' conferences.

15. **Membership of the Schools Forum**

The Forum received a report advising it that, in accordance with its constitution, Kelvin Menon had been re-appointed to the Forum as a primary school governor representative until 31 August 2012, as insufficient nominations had been received to fill the three vacancies which had needed to be filled.

The appointment had been made by the Executive Member for Education in consultation with the Director of Children, Young People & Learning and Chairman of the Forum.

16. **Role of Executive Member for Education on Schools Forum**

The Forum discussed a report seeking an amendment to its constitution formalising the role of the Executive Member for Education. As an executive member of the Council could not be appointed as a member of the Forum, it was proposed that the Executive Member should be formally nominated as an "observer" at panel meetings. This would enable them to speak and respond to queries which might arise on any issues being considered by the Forum. Whilst the regulations did not permit the executive member to be a member of the Forum, the Department for Education had advised that it was good practice for them to be able to attend and speak at the meetings.

**RESOLVED** that the constitution of the Bracknell Forest Schools Forum be amended to add the Council's Executive Member for Education as an "observer" at 2.6.

17. **School Meals Specification**

The Forum considered a report seeking its views on the proposed specification for the school meals contract which was to be re-tendered as the existing contract was due to end on 31 July 2012.

In response to questions, the Forum was advised that:

- The use of RPI rather than CPI was considered to better reflect the true cost of the service.
- The introduction of an online payment system would be in addition to existing methods thereby enabling those who still wished to pay by cash to do so.

**RESOLVED** that the proposed specification for the school meals contract from August 2012 be endorsed.

18. **School Building Cleaning**

The Forum received a report advising it that the Council had awarded its new corporate cleaning contract to the existing provider KGB Cleaning following a tendering exercise. The contract also covered school sites which wished to buy into it. Six schools had chosen to join the ten which had previously obtained their cleaning service through the existing contract. Other schools could join at any time if they wished.

In response to questions, the Forum was assured that KGB had a good track record and that any staff being transferred would do so under TUPE regulations.

**NOTED**

## 19. **Priority School Building Programme**

The Forum considered a report which was seeking its views about future participation by Bracknell Forest in the new DfE Priority School Building Programme. The new Programme followed in the wake of the cancelled Building Schools for the Future and Primary Capital Programmes, and was intended to address those schools in the worst condition. Ministers might also take into account pressing cases of basic need for the creation of new school places. To be eligible to participate, the Council would be required to demonstrate that:

- Identified need for condition works would be in excess of 30% of the notional cost of rebuilding the whole school.
- The School had not received major investment to more than 50% of the existing buildings in the last 15 years.
- There was sufficient long term pupil demand.
- There was certainty that the LA or school held title to all the land.
- The proposed development was either wholly new build or the refurbishment element was less than 30% of the gross internal floor area.
- There was a commitment to continued testing for 'Value for Money' throughout the approval process. It was stated that schools would be removed from the programme if this was not proven to be the case.

All schools selected were required to provide a signed statement from the Headteacher, governing body and local authority (for maintained schools) that they accepted the terms & conditions

The Council had responsibility for collating and submitting applications for all the schools in the borough. The whole school estate had been evaluated against the eligibility criteria. Whilst there were no schools that matched all of the criteria, the Council had identified the following schools which constituted the closest match and had submitted bids on a no obligation basis to meet the October deadline:

- Kennel Lane Special School, which was subject of a masterplan under Building Schools for the Future for a phased rebuild on the existing site.
- The Brakenhale secondary school, which was also subject of a masterplan under Building Schools for the Future for a phased rebuild on the existing site.
- Holly Spring Infant & Junior Schools which were subject of expansion by one form of entry under the Primary Capital Programme.
- Meadow Vale Primary School which was subject of expansion by one form of entry under the Primary Capital Programme.

The Council had also identified a future requirement for a new secondary school to be built in North Bracknell, subject to the approval of future housing development.

There was considerable concern amongst members of the Forum about the possible use of PFI as it had been shown to be an expensive method of delivery in the longer term both in schools and the NHS, where the long term repayments had caused significant financial difficulties.

The Forum was advised that the officers were conscious of the concerns and stressed that the bid had been submitted on a no obligation basis as there was a need to get more information about how the programme would work as full details were not yet available. Moreover, officers believed that not only would the emphasis be on new build rather than rebuilding existing schools, but the existing four Bracknell Forest schools did not meet the criteria. It was therefore likely that the bid in respect of a new secondary school at North Bracknell was the only one with a chance of success. As the Council needed to look at all funding options, it was prudent to submit the bid, albeit that the concerns raised by members would be taken into account in due course when considering the risks of a PFI scheme.

Further concerns were raised about the funding of any PFI scheme as the revenue costs were likely to have to be met from the existing schools' and Council budgets and therefore impact on all the borough's schools.

**RESOLVED** that the Council be asked to note the concerns being raised by the Forum about the use of the PFI approach to the delivery of either a new school or existing building improvements based on the record of longer term financial difficulties created by applying the PFI approach both within schools and the health service.

## 20. **The Schools Budget: 2011-12 Budget Monitoring and other Financial Matters**

The Forum considered a report updating it on the latest budget position and seeking its views on:

- The 2011-12 forecast budget monitoring position for the Schools Budget as at the end of October;
- The current budget monitoring forecast that indicated £0.9m of funding was available to invest in the current financial year, on a one-off basis;
- The revised criteria proposed to be used to fund schools experiencing significant in-year growth in pupil numbers;
- Changes made by the Department for Education to the initial per pupil funding rates for the Pupil Premium.

In response to questions posed, the Forum was advised that:

- The likely underspend was ring-fenced for education related expenditure and would not be clawed back.
- The officers would look into the implications of the Equalities Act for SEN provision.
- The expectation that proposals would be brought to the February meeting of the Forum for investment in SEN resource units was in response to work of the SEN sub-group, which had head teacher representation, and was reviewing out of borough school placements and local special educational needs provision.
- The underspend could be made available to address maintenance requirements.

- The had been an increase in the number of secondary pupils registering for free school meals but a decrease in the number of registered primary school pupils.
- Whilst some schools chose to use the pupil premium to contribute to the cost of free school meals, it could be spent on whatever an individual school chose.

The Forum noted the budget variances being forecast on the 2011-12 Schools Budget that in total aggregated to a net under spending of £1.3m . With a forecast year end underspend, there was approximately £0.9m of funding available for one-off investments in the current financial year. Proposals for its use were to be brought to the February meeting of the Forum. The Forum also noted that schools in Bracknell Forest would receive an additional £0.071m of Pupil Premium Grant as a result of the DfE increasing the basic per pupil funding amount from £430 to £488.

**RESOLVED** that the criteria at Annex A of the Director of Children, Young People & Learning's report to fund schools experiencing significant in-year growth in pupil numbers be adopted.

## 21. **Preparations for the 2012-13 Schools Budget**

The Forum considered a report on progress towards setting the 2012-13 Schools Budget, and in particular:

- Seeking agreement to a budget strategy to enable effective budget planning;
- Reviewing the questions posed and responses received to the financial consultations with schools;
- The current evaluation of the financial outlook for the 2012-13 budget;
- The current position regarding the Council's Job Evaluation exercise.

In response to a question about the reference in the draft 2012-13 budget proposals from the Council about the potential for additional costs to fall on the Schools Budget, the Forum was advised that full details of these proposals would be presented in the new year once the Council's Executive had agreed its budget proposals on 13 December. At this stage, the £3m total pressures detailed in table 1 of the Forum's report was considered accurate.

Reference was also made to the ongoing work on job evaluation. The Forum noted that the Council would not be in a position to implement a new scheme in 2012/13.

The Forum was advised that detailed budget proposals for the Schools Budget would be presented to the Forum for consideration in the new year. The Forum would be asked to comment on the Council's general budget proposals for 2012-13 at the same time.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1 The Budget Strategy at Annex 1 be approved as the guiding document in developing the 2012-13 Schools Budget;

- 2 The key outcomes from the financial consultations with schools should be incorporated into the initial proposals for the 2012-13 Schools Budget that was to be presented to the Schools Forum in February;
- 3 The latest information in respect of the budget for 2012-13 indicating a potential shortfall in funding of £1.844m be noted;
- 4 The Director of Children, Young People and Learning authorise the issuing of indicative 2012-13 budgets to schools, based on the proposals set out in this report;
- 5 The latest position on the Council's Job Evaluation exercise be noted.

**22. Exclusion of Public and Press (S100A)**

**RESOLVED** that pursuant to section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, members of the public and press be excluded from the meeting for consideration of item 12 which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information under category 1 of Schedule 12A of that Act:

- (3) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority).

**23. Off Site and Adventurous Activities Service**

The Forum considered a report on proposed changes to the Off-Site and Adventurous Activities Services for schools.

The Forum was reminded that the Offsite & Hazardous Activities Service ensured that arrangements for school visits were suitable and sufficient to ensure the safety and well being of the children, young people and adults who participated in them. Schools were responsible for the duty of care of the pupils in their charge, and for ensuring that arrangements for school visits were suitable and sufficient. For maintained schools the Council had the legal responsibility as the employer, and had a shared interest in ensuring this duty of care across all schools in the Borough. The Council also provided the travel insurance for school visits.

A review of the service had been undertaken, including input from internal audit. The Forum was advised that:

- The new service was to be re-branded as the Offsite and Adventurous Activities Service in line with common practice in other authorities.
- The paper/fax/MSWorks database system was to be replaced by a modern on-line system,
- The manual of guidance was to be updated to make it simpler to use, and posted on the online system in electronic form.
- Travel insurance would no longer need to be put in place on a trip by trip basis as it had been replaced with a single blanket insurance policy that covered all visits undertaken by all schools that bought into the Council's SLA for insurance.

The proposed revisions were to be rolled out during the 2012 Spring Term, including training on and go-live of the online system. A new SLA to schools was to be put in place from April 2012.

In response to questions, the Forum was advised that there would be three charges to schools:

- 1 Insurance – on a pro rata basis according to the number of visits and pupils.
- 2 Consultants – on a pro rata basis according to visits.
- 3 Management Cost – on a pro rata basis.

In effect, the more visits a school undertook, the more they would pay but the unit cost would fall if they made more visits.

In addition, the Forum was advised that the insurance provided did cover international travel, including ski trips.

Tony Reading advised the Forum that he had been trained by Brian Mallett and had found him to be effective and efficient.

The Forum was invited to forward any further comments to Chris Taylor.

#### **NOTED**

#### **24. Dates of Future Meetings**

The Forum noted that its next meeting was scheduled to be held at 4.30pm on Thursday 9 February 2012 in the Council Chamber at Easthampstead House.