

**SCHOOLS FORUM
16 OCTOBER 2014
4.30 - 5.25 PM**



Present:

Schools Members

Sue Barber, Primary School Governor
Ed Essery, Secondary School Governor
David Matika, Primary School Governor
Tony Reading, Primary School Governor
David Stacey, Primary School Governor
John Throssell, Primary School Governor (Vice-Chairman)

Non-Schools Members:

George Clement, Union Representative (Chairman)

Observer:

Councillor Dr Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning

Apologies for absence were received from:

Brian Fries, Secondary School Governor
Martin Gocke, Pupil Referral Unit Representative
Keith Grainger, Secondary Head Teachers Representative
John McNab, Secondary School Governor
Trudi Sammons, Primary School Representative
Robin Sharples, Oxford Diocese (Church of England)
Anne Shillcock, Special Education Representative

1. **Election of Chairman**

RESOLVED that George Clement be elected Chairman of the Schools Forum for the academic year 2014/15.

GEORGE CLEMENT IN THE CHAIR

2. **Appointment of Vice-Chairman**

RESOLVED that John Throssell be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Schools Forum for the academic year 2014/15.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

4. **Minutes and Matters Arising**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2014 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The Forum were advised of a new member of the Schools Forum. David Matika was a governor at Harmans Water Primary School and had expressed an interest in becoming a member of the Forum. As there was a Primary Governor Representative vacancy on the Forum but nominations had already been sought for the 2014/15 term of office, the Director of Children, Young People and Learning nominated Mr Matika to fill the vacancy for one year until 31 August 2015. The Chairman welcomed Mr Matika to the Forum.

5. **Internal Audit Report of School Funding**

The Forum received a report on the Internal Audit of School Funding. School funding arrangements were reviewed in Quarter 1 as part of the Annual Internal Audit Plan 2014/15 approved by the Governance and Audit Committee on 1 April 2014.

The overall conclusion on the audit was significant assurance, meaning that a sound system of internal controls was in place to meet the system objectives for school funding and testing performed indicated that controls tested were consistently complied with. This was the highest level of assurance given, with no recommendations for improvement. Around 4% of reports received this assurance level.

The Forum noted the significant assurance opinion given on the internal audit review of school funding, and congratulated the officers involved.

6. **The Schools Budget - 2014-15 Budget Monitoring**

The Forum were updated on the 2014-15 forecast budget monitoring position for the Schools Budget, to be aware of key issues and management actions being taken.

The first section of the report confirmed the current budget allocation, which included a number of allocations from earmarked reserves that had previously been agreed by the Forum. It also confirmed one new change; a further adjustment to the Early Years Block Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) by the Department for Education (DfE) that increased income by £0.098m which would be used to finance increased numbers of children taking up early years education and childcare.

The second section of the report provided an update on forecast expenditure compared to budget. The July Forum meeting was informed of a forecast over spending of £0.333m which had now increased to £0.762m. Whilst further savings had been identified, spending on high needs pupils had again increased and was forecast to over spend by £1.093m. The reasons for the overspend were mainly attributable to a £0.282m reduction in funding from the DfE and an additional 22 students staying on at a cost of £0.949m.

In response to a question relating to whether the over spend should have been predicted earlier, it was confirmed that the increase mainly related to post-16 pupils and this only became a Local Authority funding responsibility in August 2013. A costing model had been developed, and this was being refined but the educational choices of students were sometimes difficult to predict.

The final section of the report set out the anticipated impact from the over spending in 2015-16. All of the £0.691m accumulated reserves were likely to be required to finance the 2014-15 over spend but there was an underlying cost increase that was expected to be at least £1m. It would not be possible to finance this from the High Needs DSG Block income and therefore it was likely that at least £1m of the £1.5m additional funding to be received through the *Fairer Funding for Schools* initiative

would need to be used for high needs pupils rather than being included in delegated school budgets.

The long term strategy for cost reduction remained to develop additional places within the Borough. The Forum had previously been advised that a 56 place Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit would be opened on a phased basis in Eastern Road from September 2015. It was also confirmed that the proposed Education Village development at Blue Mountain would also include specific new provision for high needs pupils.

The Forum **NOTED**:

- i. the budget virements processed to date (paragraphs 5.2 to 5.4);
- ii. the budget variances being forecast on the 2014-15 Schools Budget that in total aggregate to a net over spending of £0.762m, (paragraph 5.10);
- iii. that insufficient accumulated balances were available to cover the estimated over spending and that a deficit of £0.071m was forecast to be carried forward into 2015-16 and would need to be financed from new year grant income (paragraph 5.10);
- iv. the likelihood that at least £1m of the £1.5m additional funds from the *Fairer Funding for Schools in 2015-16* initiative would need to be used to finance increased costs supporting High Needs pupils rather than going into delegated school budgets (paragraph 5.16).

7. **Outcomes from the September Financial Consultation with Schools**

The Forum received a report summarising the results of the September Financial Consultation exercise with governing bodies and other interested parties. It reported on schools' views regarding the questions raised and was intended to assist the Schools Forum in making recommendations in respect of the funding framework to be in place for 2015-16. The consultation this year did not have a large number of questions and there had been a good response from schools, with a 78% response rate which gave Forum members a high level of assurance that the report presented the majority view of schools.

The Forum **NOTED**:

- i. The outcomes from the financial consultation with schools as summarised in Annex 2 and the specific comments from schools at confidential Annex 3;

The Forum was not quorate but a view was needed on the Outcomes from the September Financial Consultation with Schools in order for data to be returned to the Department for Education (DfE) by 31 October 2014 to monitor progress against the funding reforms, and for the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning to receive the Forum's recommendations on the criteria to be used to allocate funds to schools with a disproportionate number of High Needs pupils and the proposed changes set out in the boxes in paragraphs 5.19 to 5.21.

Those present at the Forum agreed that the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning be recommended to approve:

- ii. The Forum's recommended criteria to be used to allocate funds to schools with a disproportionate number of High Needs pupils (paragraph 2.2) to be Option A: No change;
- iii. The proposed changes set out in the boxes in paragraphs 5.19 to 5.21, subject to a change to 5.21 recommended by Forum members present, that the primary school fixed lump sum payment be increased to £160,000.

8. Exclusion of Public and Press

RESOLVED that pursuant to Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) Regulations 2012 and having regard to the public interest, members of the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of item 9 which involves the likely disclosure of exempt information under the following category of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:

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

9. Confidential Annex

10. Dates of Future Meetings

The Forum noted that the next meetings were scheduled at 4.30pm in the Council Chamber at Easthampstead House for:

Thursday 27 November 2014
Thursday 15 January 2015
Thursday 12 March 2015
Thursday 23 April 2015

If there was no business to discuss, meetings would be cancelled.

CHAIRMAN