

**SCHOOLS FORUM
15 JANUARY 2015
4.30 - 6.10 PM**



Present:

Schools Members

Sue Barber, Primary School Governor
Liz Cook, Secondary School Representative
Martin Gocke, Pupil Referral Unit Representative
Keith Grainger, Secondary Head Teachers Representative
Steve James, Secondary School Governor (Substitute)
David Matika, Primary School Governor
Tony Reading, Primary School Governor
Anne Shillcock, Special Education Representative
Debbie Smith, Secondary School Representative
David Stacey, Primary School Governor
Beverley Stevens, Academy School Representative
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

Also Present:

Bob Eley, Executive Headteacher, Brakenhale School
Andrew Young, Chair of Governors, Brakenhale School

Apologies for absence were received from:

Ed Essery, Secondary School Governor
Brian Fries, Secondary School Governor
John McNab, Secondary School Governor
Robin Sharples, Oxford Diocese (Church of England)

19. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

Steve James, Secondary School Governor, attended the meeting as a substitute for John McNab.

20. Declarations of Interest

Keith Grainger declared an interest in respect of Item 4 as the Headteacher of Garth Hill College.

21. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2014 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The Chairman welcomed new members to the Forum. Liz Cook from Easthampstead Park Community School and Debbie Smith from Sandhurst School were two new Secondary School Representatives, and Beverley Stevens, new Headteacher at Ranelagh, was the new Academy School Representative.

22. **Proposal for Additional Financial Support to The Brakenhale School**

The Forum received a report which presented a proposal for £0.252m of financial support over two years to fund the school improvement support plan for The Brakenhale Secondary School. This followed the 'in principle' agreement to relevant support made at the previous Forum meeting on 27 November 2014.

In response to Forum members' questions the following points were made:

- Mr Bob Elsey, Executive Headteacher at Brakenhale advised that he had 25 years experience of teaching in the Bracknell area and that Brakenhale needed a strategy for improvement over the next few years. Staff at the school were very committed to improving school performance, working long hours and looking at different strategies. There had been a department-led review and a consultant Ofsted inspector commissioned who was currently in the school for the week. The staff would be given areas for improvement to focus on and the consultant Ofsted inspector would return just before the Easter school holidays to evaluate progress. An Associate Headteacher was also now in place in advance of the permanent Headteacher appointment that was expected at September 2015.
- Mr Andrew Young, Chair of Governors at Brakenhale, commented that it had been difficult to recruit teachers with the right skills and experience and that a recruitment strategy had been put into place. Additionally, senior key teachers would benefit from the skills and experience of the maths and English consultants.
- Mr Elsey confirmed that he had been in contact with Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) in December 2014 and an HMI visit was expected at the school before half-term in February 2015 to assess progress to date.
- Mr Young advised that a review of governance at the school was being facilitated by an external trainer, and there would be investment in teacher training.

The actions to be undertaken had been carefully considered and there was a need to act without delay. The financial package established for Brakenhale would assist in solving the issues at the school, and there would be regular monitoring visits by the Local Authority and Ofsted.

Bob Elsey and Andrew Young were thanked for attending the meeting.

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 this 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.

Members of the public and press were allowed to re-enter the meeting room after debate regarding the report and confidential annex.

RESOLVED that the Forum:

- i. **AGREED** to fund the school improvement support plan from the budget to support schools in financial difficulty, aiding recovery from Requires Improvement (paragraph 5.12).

23. **Update on Cost Pressures being Experienced on Supporting High Needs Pupils and Proposals for the 2015-16 Budget**

The Forum received a report updating members on the current cost pressures being faced in respect of High Needs Pupils, the actions proposed to manage cost increases and which sought agreement that recommendations be made to the Executive in respect of budget changes to be made for 2015-16.

The Council had a new statutory duty to provide education for children and young people aged 0-25 years and to ensure that student needs were being met effectively. However, insufficient funds for this new duty had been allocated to local authorities by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and relevant budgets were therefore forecast to over spend by £1.557m in 2014-15, rising to £2.168m in 2015-16 and then £2.794m in 2017-18, if no actions were taken.

The main factor influencing the over spending related to higher numbers of post-16 students as a result of increasing entitlement to 25 years. The impact was also being felt in other local authorities with Buckinghamshire County Council proposing a legal challenge to the decision making process of the EFA.

In response to Forum members' questions, the following points were made:

- Discussions had been held with local authority partners who had advised that they were not duplicating the new provisions proposed by BFC through the development of SEN Units. In the first instance, the aim was for the high needs provision to be filled by Bracknell Forest residents but if there were vacancies, then young people outside of Bracknell would be considered.
- There was a tight timescale for 10 places to be available at Blue Mountain from September 2017 but a contractor would be engaged and it was on track at present.
- Five students had expressed an interest in the ASD Unit at Eastern Road who would otherwise have been placed out of the area at greater cost and disruption. The resource was not for young people whose needs could be met in a mainstream school, but for young people with high specialist needs.
- Martin Gocke suggested that some pupils at Kennel Lane School could have been placed in mainstream schools and queried whether mainstream schools could be facilitated to be able to meet higher needs. This suggestion would be considered further.
- It was a significant challenge to reduce cost pressures but officers were confident this could be done over time, if the identified improvement actions were put into place.
- Officers in the SEN Team were actively providing advice and support to the college in order for there to be appropriate SEN provision for post-16 pupils.
- The EFA were fully aware of the financial difficulties being experienced by local authorities but whether their funding formula would be changed was not known. Representations were being made that the current funding formula was putting a burden on local authorities.

RESOLVED that the Forum **NOTED**:

- i. The latest forecast over spending in 2014-15 for SEN related budgets at £1.557m, an increase of £0.464m compared to that expected in August (paragraphs 5.9 and 5.10);
- ii. The main factor contributing to the increased costs remains unchanged and relates to additional numbers of post 16 students (paragraph 5.9);
- iii. The Education Funding Agency has allocated insufficient funding to LAs to meet their new responsibilities and Buckinghamshire County Council is in the process of commencing a legal challenge (paragraphs 5.11 and 5.54);
- iv. The expected on-going trend indicates future cost increases on external SEN places from £5.966m in 2014-15 to £7.460m in 2017-18 if no action is taken (paragraph 5.23 and Annex 2);
- v. The funding strategy proposed to manage down future cost pressures (paragraphs 5.27 to 5.48);
- vi. That the DfE has commenced a review of High Needs Block DSG allocations and that future changes to funding may result (paragraph 5.55);

In response to the Council's budget proposals for 2015-16, **RESOLVED** that the Forum **RECOMMENDED** to the Executive:

- vii. That in order to achieve the significant cost reductions required on SEN budgets, £0.06m of new funding be provided by the Council to finance the additional staffing resources required in the SEN Team (paragraph 5.49);
- viii. That to ensure a net nil cost increase in Council spend, that the Schools Budget finances an additional £0.06m of educational fee costs in respect of Looked After Children (paragraph 5.50);

RESOLVED that the Forum **RECOMMENDED** that the Executive **AGREE** the following:

- ix. The release of the £0.490m of funds from the SEN Resource Units Reserve from January 2015 to finance start-up costs at Rise@Garth (paragraph 5.32);
- x. The medium term budget plan for Rise@Garth, subject to annual review (paragraph 5.33 and Annex 4).

24. **Proposals for the 2015-16 Schools Block Element of the Schools Budget**

The Forum received a report providing members with an update on school funding and which sought comments on proposals from the Council for the 2015-16 Schools Block element of the Schools Budget. The Forum was aware of the significant financial pressures on external placement costs for High Needs Pupils, which were now estimated at £2.168m for 2015-16.

This significant cost pressure could only reasonably be financed by using funding intended for schools. The consequence of this was that of the £2.824m additional resources in next year's Schools Block budget, only changes in pupil numbers and their characteristics would be fully funded with schools needing to absorb all other cost pressures.

Whilst 2015-16 was considered the most difficult Schools Budget the Council had to propose to date, it was also highlighted that significant cost pressures were already known to exist in future years, meaning further challenges lie ahead.

In response to the proposals, Secondary Headteacher Forum members expressed concern that financial pressures would be very challenging this year for schools in Bracknell and were concerned about the effect on levels of teaching and being able to respond to the challenges of Ofsted.

RESOLVED that the Forum **AGREED**:

- i. that up to £0.06m of specialist school improvement and management support costs can be charged to the budget to support schools in financial difficulty to reflect actual levels of support being provided (paragraph 5.40);
- ii. that the requirement to hold £0.51m in general reserves as a contingency provision against unforeseen cost increases is waived one year for the 2015-16 budget (paragraph 5.42);
- iii. that the arrangements in place for the administration of central government grants are appropriate (paragraph 5.46);
- iv. the budget amounts for each of the services centrally managed by the council and funded from the School Block DSG as set out in Annex 1 (paragraph 5.48);
- v. that any year end deficit on centrally managed budgets, currently estimated at £0.295m can be carried forward and funded from a future Schools Budget (paragraph 5.49);

In its role as the representative body of schools and other providers of education and childcare, the Forum **REQUESTED** that the Executive Member **AGREE** the following decisions for the 2015-16 Schools Budget:

- vi. the self-balancing budget adjustments set out in lines 3 and 4 of Table 2;
- vii. the £2.824m of additional resources are allocated to the budget areas set out in Table 2 as follows:
 - a. £0.929m into delegated school budgets including the release of £0.1m from the Job Evaluation Reserve to part finance the estimated cost of the Bracknell Forest Supplement (column 1);
 - b. a £0.098m deduction in centrally managed budgets (column 3);
 - c. £1.938m of Schools Block DSG in 2015-16 to support High Needs pupils (column 4)
- viii. that the budget for Schools Block DSG is reset to £65.276m and other Schools Block related grants reset to anticipated 2015-16 amounts (paragraphs 5.16 and 5.41);
- ix. that the DfE pro forma template of the 2015-16 BF Funding Formula for Schools as set out in Annex 5 be submitted for the 20 January deadline (paragraph 5.10).

RESOLVED that the Forum **NOTED**:

- x. the range of cost pressures that schools were likely to need to finance from within existing resources (paragraph 5.43);

- xi. the anticipated future cost pressures for which a financial provision would need to be made in the near future (paragraph 5.52);
- xii. that proposals in respect of the Early Years and High Needs Block elements of the Schools Block would be presented to the Forum in March when more information was available in respect of funding and likely costs (paragraph 5.59).

25. Local Authority Budget Proposals for 2015-16

The Forum received a report which summarised the current position on the Council's budget preparations for 2015/16 for both revenue and capital. The report was based on the indicative 2015/16 funding figures received in February 2014, and with the financing information subsequently released being very much in line the initial assumptions, no significant changes would be required as a result of this update.

The revenue budget continued to experience pressures which were due to reductions in funding from the government and demographic changes in the borough that needed to be balanced by savings and measured use of balances. For the Children, Young People and Learning Department, there was £0.140m of pressures, mainly in relation to supporting vulnerable children and £0.494m of savings proposed, most of which related to Children's Social Care where recent investments in staffing were now delivering savings on placement costs for looked after children.

For the capital programme, the Council would invest significant sums in Coral Reef, the town centre infra-structure and the Binfield Learning Village at Blue Mountain. For the Children, Young People and Learning Department, as in previous years, investment would be limited to the amount of DfE grants received for school places, which had been confirmed at £3.477m, and planned maintenance, the amount of which was outstanding, but expected to be in line with the £1.8m received in 2014-15. Initial plans indicated an overall funding gap of £2.2 million but schemes were under review to secure the required reductions.

In response to the recommendation to comment on the Executive's budget proposals the Forum requested that the Council's Strategy to fund revenue budgets for relevant education services up to the level of grant income be reviewed with a view to considering providing top up funding from the Council's own resources.

In response, the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning commented that the Council's budgets were also facing significant financial pressures and had for a number of years and that the Council had provided extra funding during the year for specific emerging issues as well as undertaking significant capital investment to deliver sufficient school places for which the council funds the cost of borrowing.

26. Dates of Future Meetings

The next meetings of the Schools Forum are scheduled at 4.30pm in the Council Chamber at Easthampstead House for:

Thursday 12 March 2015
Thursday 23 April 2015

Thursday 18 June 2015
Thursday 16 July 2015
Thursday 17 September 2015

Thursday 22 October 2015
Thursday 10 December 2015

Thursday 14 January 2016
Thursday 10 March 2016
Thursday 21 April 2016

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

CHAIRMAN