

**SCHOOLS FORUM**  
**13 JULY 2017**  
**4.30 PM**



**Present:**

**Schools' Members**

Brian Fries, Secondary School Governor  
Liz Cole, Primary School Representative  
Karen Davis, Primary Head Representative  
Trudi Sammons, Primary School Representative  
Grant Strudley, Primary Head Representative  
Debbie Smith, Secondary Head Representative  
Martin Gocke, Pupil Referral Unit Representative  
Anne Shillcock, Special Education Representative

**Academies' Members**

Beverley Stevens, Academy School Representative

**Non-Schools' Members:**

Michelle Tuddenham, PVI Provider Representative

**Observer:**

Councillor Dr Gareth Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People & Learning

**Also Present:**

**Apologies for absence were received from:**

Keith Grainger, Secondary Head Representative  
Dominic Asater, 14-19 Partnership Representative

**1. Election of Chairman**

As no Members of the Forum put themselves forward as Chairman, Debbie Smith agreed to take up the position of Chairman for this meeting only and it was agreed that the Nomination of Chairman would be taken forward to the next meeting of the Forum.

**2. Nomination of Vice-Chairman**

As there was no nominations for Vice Chairman it was agreed that the Nomination of Vice Chairman would be taken forward to the next meeting of the Forum.

**3. Declarations of Interest**

Declarations of Interest were received from Grant Strudley in respect to Item 9, Arrangements for Additional Financial Support to Schools and Councillor Dr Gareth Barnard as Governor of Garth Hill College.

#### 4. **Minutes and Matters Arising**

It was clarified that the rejection of the recommendation in item 51 Proposals for the 2017-18 High Needs Block had no implications.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes held on 9 March 2017 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

#### 5. **Council Response To Questions Previously Raised By The Schools Forum Regarding High Needs Block Funding**

Ian Dixon and Frank Glennon attended the Forum to present a more detailed response to questions that had been raised by the Forum in regards to historic decision making along with an update on the High Needs Block review.

As a result of the Members' questions, the following points were made:

- Research on the percentage modelling of SEN places at BLV had previously been undertaken. There is an agreement in place that there would be 40 places in an integrated unit. There is no requirement for a unit for pupils with sensory impairment as the numbers are low and the pupils are making progress in mainstream schooling.
- The national growth trend showed there was an increased number of pupils with ASD and it may be a challenge to place these pupils in integrated facilities as some schools / Academies may not be as keen to take these pupils.
- ASD could be met in mainstream schools however mixed with other issues e.g. SEMH this could be a challenge.
- The Government has indicated a possible reduction to the central budget around alternative provision.
- There had been inconsistent approaches to exclusions in Primary Schools, and it was noted by Primary Heads that they felt they had been very lenient with their approach. Seventeen schools had used fixed exclusions in the past year.
- The outreach model was being built up with an in-house training session held a few weeks ago.
- Strategic discussions were being held within the Council with the changing nature of SEN delivery on the agenda.
- All additional resources would be reviewed as part of the transformation programme with input from Head Teachers SEN strategy group and other agencies.
- All data in the action plan had been received directly from schools. There was currently no resource available to provide quality analysis of this data to map needs. A data team provision was being looked at as part of transformation.
- There are a range of services that schools receive support from. There are discussions amongst those services to effect a more joined up approach to supporting schools, especially in respect of auditing their practice and procedures in respect of SEN. This is important given that the majority of students on school's SEN registers will not have an EHCP and that the Code of Practice requires schools to keep a register of students receiving SEN Support and evidence how they are assessing, meeting and reviewing the needs of each student,
- The Council's services to schools can help schools at recording SEN and with their auditing practice. Work was currently happening in silos with a new joined up approach for auditing practice planned. This was especially needed

for SEN as there were over seven hundred children with plans in place with many not needing them.

- At the last Forum meeting, the Forum agreed that the High Needs Provision didn't meet the required needs. As a result an Action Plan until August 2018 had been created with all actions implemented and taken to the SEN Action group for review. Head Teachers were also putting plans in place to improve the strategy.
- It was requested that an update on the action plan be provided at each Forum meeting. It was suggested that the action plan be placed on the Agenda for the October 2017 Forum meeting and it would be decided at the October meeting whether it would be on the December 2017 Forum Agenda as there may not be much movement.
- Some actions on the plan were red as they are dependent on actions within the wider transformation plan being completed.
- The plan was largely based on the recommendations agreed in the High Needs Review and had been agreed by DMT. Although the wording had been adapted slightly, the headlines and actions were the same.

## 6. **BFC Proposals For Changes To Operational And Administrative Arrangements For Free Childcare Places**

The Forum received a report seeking agreement on proposals for changes to the operational and administrative arrangements for free childcare placements in Bracknell Forest.

Extended childcare provision was a new statutory duty with changes to the operational and administrative arrangements also coming into effect through revised statutory guidance which was set out within the report.

Currently School Childcare and PVI Childcare can operate under different arrangements. However DfE guidance now clearly states that there should be consistency for all providers and the report set out a number of changes considered necessary to be made.

In order to seek views from providers on the proposed new arrangements, a consultation was undertaken for which sixteen responses were received. The feedback had been positive although one provider did not support the compliance checking.

As a result of the Members' questions, the following points were made:

- PVIs would be written to in advance of a compliance check and told what paperwork would be needed to be made available to audit
- There was a £25 admin fee for late and incomplete claims as there was lots of work entailed if this occurred.
- It was commented that the report was a very interesting read and it was very useful to know how much paperwork was involved in the process.

**RESOLVED** that the Forum **AGREE** that taking account of the significant support from providers to the proposed Provider Agreement, that with effect from 1 September 2017, the revised agreement, as set out in Annex B is adopted.

## 7. **School Academy Conversion Process: Proposal To Recover Costs**

The Forum considered a report to whether schools undertaking the academy conversion process should be required to reimburse to the Council relevant costs which could be funded from the £25,000 grant that the DfE allocated to schools to meet their conversion costs. Local authorities do not receive any grant funding to complete an intensive process that involves the legal, HR, property and finance functions.

Based on information gathered from relevant officers, it had been calculated that the average cost for the Council to undertake a Primary conversion was £8k and an estimate for a larger and generally more complex Secondary conversion was £10k. However this could vary, most often depending on the site and whether there were property issues involved.

A consultation had been undertaken with schools between 14 – 30 June 2017, with 15 (45%) making a response which in general supported the proposals to update the Scheme for Financing Schools to allow the council to directly charge schools converting to an academy..

As part of the consultation, a letter from Edgbarrow School had been received and this was included at Annex 1 of the report, together with a draft response.

As a results of the Members' questions, the following points were made:

- Legal costs had been included as they are involved in the conversion process. In addition there were occasions when in-house provisions do not have capacity to support the conversion process and in these cases legal advice would have to be purchased externally.
- An average cost of service approach to charging was the preferred option as the Council didn't want to calculate costs and time recording for each individual conversion as this would be time consuming and impact on delivering services.
- Great Hollands conversion had probably cost twice the average cost amount due to complex property and legal issues.
- 45% response rate was considered good compared to other consultations.
- The wording in 5.11 was revised to: Costs incurred by the LA in completing the academy conversion process, at the average estimated amount, as reasonably assessed by the LA, subject to schools continuing to receive grant funding to assist the academy conversion process. In circumstances where costs are reasonably assessed to have exceeded the average cost by more than 50%, then the higher amount can be charged.
- The Council hadn't made representations to the DfE in relation to the Council's costs relating to the academy conversion process as it wasn't the Council's policy to comment back
- The Council was doing planning for possible conversions but work had been hindered due to Ofsted and the Council's Transformation Programme.
- New build academies were the Local Authority's responsibility to fund and would need relevant funding to pay for any cost of conversion charge levied..

**RESOLVED** that the Forum **NOTE** that in general, consultation responses from schools are supportive to the proposal from the council to recover from relevant schools reasonable costs associated with the academy conversion process.

**RESOLVED** that **MAINTAINED SCHOOL MEMBERS** on the Forum **AGREE**:

1. That relevant schools should be charged the average full cost to the council of undertaking the academy conversion process, currently estimated at £8,000 for primary schools and £10,000 for secondary schools.
2. That where costs on specific conversions are expected to exceed the average cost by 50%, then the full actual cost can be recovered.
3. That the Scheme for Financing Schools is updated accordingly, with the text in paragraph 5.11 subject to the amendment.

## 8. **Arrangements For Additional Financial Support To Schools**

The Forum received an Annual Report which sought agreement in respect of proposals for additional financial support to schools. In particular revisions to existing loan agreements and a new loan request.

The Forum noted that School Funding Regulations allowed for additional funding outside of the operational funding formula was to be provided to schools considered to be in financial difficulty.

Following the September 2016 Forum meeting where the Forum had been advised of the funding allocations for 2016/17, the Director of CYPL had agreed an allocation of £16k to Great Hollands Primary School following their Ofsted inspection in October 2016.

There were five schools with existing loan arrangements. Ascot Heath Junior School was the only school where a new loan had been proposed for 2017/18.

In light of advances approaching the maximum 40% of aggregate school surplus balances as permitted by the existing loan scheme, this restriction would be reviewed over the summer months and brought back to the Forum for discussion in the Autumn Term.

### **RESOLVED** that the Schools Forum **NOTE:**

1. The final expenditure for 2016-17 on additional financial support to schools, as set out in Annex B.
2. The previously agreed loans for the following schools are on target to be repaid in accordance with the agreed conditions:
  - i. Great Hollands;
  - ii. Sandhurst Secondary School;
  - iii. Brakenhale Secondary Academy School;
  - iv. Easthampstead Park Secondary School;

### **RESOLVED** that the **MAINTAINED SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES** on the Schools Forum **AGREE:**

1. That subject to the school governors confirming the loan schedule and compliance with the associated terms and conditions of the loan scheme:
  - i. Wildmoor Heath Primary School receives a further advance of £0.040m, for repayment by 31 March 2020 (paragraph 5.18);
  - ii. Birch Hill repayment schedule for the existing £0.030m loan is extended by 1 year to 31 March 2020 and that the repayment instalments amended to 3 equal annual repayments of £0.010m (paragraph 5.21);
  - iii. Ascot Heath Infant School is granted a new loan of £0.020m, for repayment by 31 March 2019 (paragraph 5.23).

## 9. **2016-17 Provisional Outturn On The Schools Budget**

The Forum received an annual report informing Members of the provisional outturn on the 2016/17 schools budget, including the allocation of balances and the use of earmark reserves.

The following key points were made:

- As part of the budget setting process in January 2016 the Forum had agreed to release £213k from the Schools Budget General Reserve to fully finance budget proposals.
- A number of self balancing budget adjustments had been made during the year to reflect the transfer of funds from the centrally managed budgets in line with the DFE Funding Regulations.
- There had been a £1m underspend in the Non maintained special schools and collages budget area of the High Needs Block, which was the most significant area of budget variation.
- A number of year end transfers had been processed in accordance with accounts closedown. The significant underspend opened up a number of opportunities.
- A summary of contributions to earmarked reserves from general balances in order to better manage future known pressures were listed at 5.17 of the report.

**RESOLVED** that the Schools Forum **NOTES:**

1. that the outturn expenditure for 2016-17, subject to audit, shows net income of £0.774m which represents an over spending of £0.609m before allocation of reserves and balances (paragraph 5.8);
2. that after transfers to and from earmarked reserves, the Schools Budget under spent by £1.019m (paragraph 5.9);
3. the main reasons for budget variances (paragraph 5.10);
4. as at 31 March 2017, the aggregate surplus on balances and Earmarked Reserves within the Schools Budget amounts to £4.767m (paragraph 5.11);
5. the previously agreed transfers to and from Earmarked Reserves (paragraph 5.12);
6. the transfers to and from balances and Earmarked Reserves processed as part of the accounts closedown process (paragraph 5.13);
7. as at 31 March 2017, the £1.779m surplus balance on the Schools Budget General Reserve (paragraph 5.14);

**RESOLVED** that the Schools Forum **AGREES:**

1. The new allocations proposed from the Schools Budget General Reserve (paragraph 5.17).

## 10. **2016-17 Balances Held By Maintained Schools**

The Forum received an annual report updating them on the level of balances held by maintained schools as at 31 March 2017. These were compared to the previous

financial year balances and the Forum would consider whether any significant surplus balances should be subject to claw – back and re invested within the overall School Budget.

The following key points were made:

- Aggregate surplus balances had decreased by 40% to £1.876m
- At 2.9% of total budget average balances are considered to be below an adequate level for sufficient working balances to cover unforeseen circumstances.
- Ten schools had had deficits, four of which had plans in place.
- Annex B set out the spending plans at schools with significant surplus balances. This information had been requested by the Forum.
- 5.13 of the report gave a summary of indented use of the significant surpluses.
- There was a significant shift on spend away from capital projects. Planned spend was now at 36% compared to 75% in 2016/17.

Grant Strudley, Primary School Representative, had requested that 2016/17 balances and school budget analysis be provided to the Forum. This had been included at 5.16 of the report.

As a results of the Members' questions, the following points were made:

- Pupil funding was a real concern of the Council with many smaller schools struggling. The Council were prepared to assist as best as they could through loans and help with schools individual medium term financial plans. The national funding formula had no input from Local Authorities and was outside of the Council's control.
- The Council had reviewed all schools in the Borough for possible dual site expansions, similar to Warfield as it was recognised as a cost effective option. It had been concluded that no other sites were suitable to expand in this way.

**RESOLVED** that the Schools Forum **NOTES**:

1. The key performance information on all school balances, as set out in paragraph 5.3, and in particular;
  - i. At £1.876m, aggregate surplus balances continue to decline, with an in year reduction of -£1.661m (-40.3%);
  - ii. Significant surplus school balances have reduced by £0.740m (63.4%), mainly as a result of 2 schools undertaking major building programmes;
  - iii. At 2.9%, average balances are considered to be below the level required for working balances to cover unforeseen circumstances and an increase risk exists of schools over spending their budgets. The loan scheme is ensuring that all schools retain sufficient funds.

**RESOLVED** that the Schools Forum **AGREES**:

2. That all of the significant surplus balances held by schools have been assigned for relevant purposes as set out in the approved scheme and should not be subject to claw back (paragraph 5.13).

11. **2016-17 Funding Allocations To Schools From Budgets Centrally Managed By The Local Authority**

The Forum received an annual report on the in-year allocation of funds to schools through School Specific Contingencies and other centrally managed budgets which were funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and in the first instance were managed by the Council.

The following key points were made:

- Jennett's Park was expected to be full in the next two years. The funding allocation was not consistent with how the Council funded other schools. As a result funding would be reduced to £40k in 2017/18 and to £25k the following year.
- The funding allocation to the Pines, which had expanded to two sites and had incurred additional costs such as caretaking, would be re calculated using the methodology set out within the report and funding contribution would be reduced to £15k which was a better fit.
- The Forum were responsible for making any changes to the funding policy each year.

**RESOLVED** that the Forum **NOTES** the following funding allocations to schools, made in accordance with approved policies;

1. £0.282m for significant in-year increases in pupil numbers (paragraph 5.8);
2. £0.066m for schools required to meet the Key Stage 1 Class Size regulations (paragraph 5.12);
3. £0.092m for new and expanding schools (paragraph 5.16);
4. £0.080m for schools with a disproportionate number of SEN pupils (paragraph 5.20);

**RESOLVED** that the Forum **AGREES:**

1. that the new and expanding schools funding allocation to Jennett's Park should be reduced to £40,000 in 2017-18 and that any additional funding in subsequent years would be calculated in accordance with the standard criteria for schools experiencing significant in-year increases in pupil numbers (paragraph 5.15);
2. additional funding allocations to The Pines Primary School for exceptional premises costs are calculated in accordance with the methodology set out in paragraphs 5.24 and 5.25;
3. an exceptional funding allocation of £23,727 for The Pines Primary School to 31 March 2017 (paragraph 5.27);
4. the existing policy text on funds used to distribute centrally managed funds to schools should continue unchanged (Annexes 1, 3, and 6 and paragraph 5.19).

## 12. **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next Forum was scheduled for the 14 September 2017.

**CHAIRMAN**