

**SCHOOLS FORUM
6 DECEMBER 2018
4.30 - 6.00 PM**



Present:

Schools' Members

Liz Cole, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Jane Coley, Academy School Representative (Headteacher)
Neil Davies, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Peter Floyd, Special School Representative (Governor)
Martin Gocke, Pupil Referral Unit Representative (Governor)
Keith Grainger, Secondary School Representative (Headteacher)
Stuart Matthews, Academy School Representative (Headteacher)
Leslie Semper, Academy School Representative (Headteacher)
Phil Sherwood, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Debbie Smith, Secondary School Representative (Headteacher)
Richard Stok, Primary School Representative (Governor)

Observer:

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

Apologies for absence were received from:

Roger Prew, Primary School Representative (Governor)
Dominic Asater, 16-19 Partnership Representative
Michelle Tuddenham, PVI Provider Representative

67. New Members

The Forum welcomed new members Stuart Matthews, Leslie Semper and Richard Stok to their first meeting.

68. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Dr Barnard declared an interest in agenda item no. 9 [Proposals for the 2019-20 Schools Block Element of the Schools Budget] where it referred to the proposed financial contribution to Warfield Primary School, since his wife was a Governor at the School. He agreed to take no part in the consideration of this matter.

69. Election of Chairman

RESOLVED that Martin Gocke be elected Chairman of the Forum, to serve until the start of the new academic year in September 2019.

70. Election of Vice-Chairman

No Vice-Chairman was elected and the Forum agreed to consider this only if and when the Chairman was absent for any future meeting.

71. **Minutes and Matters Arising**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 20 September 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Arising from minute 61 and the request for further consideration of Special Educational Needs (SEN) support and alternative provision, the Chairman and other members suggested this was still necessary notwithstanding the report submitted for consideration under minute 73 below relating to a pilot scheme for short term additional specialist support for SEN.

ACTION: Rachel Morgan

72. **Schools Forum - Constitution**

The Forum considered a report presenting an updated copy of the constitution and membership.

It was necessary to keep the constitution of the Forum under regular review, in line with good practice and the latest guidance from the DfE. The opportunity had been taken to incorporate in the updated constitution a summary of the respective roles of the Forum, the Council and the DfE as outlined in the Education and Funding Agency's recently published guidance.

It was also important to ensure reference to academies was up to date and that where further schools become academies, then the number of academy representatives would need to increase. Accordingly the constitution had been updated to provide for the schools members to reflect the number of pupils in academy schools and those maintained by the LA, with maintained school representatives also reflecting the proportion of pupils in primary and secondary schools. As a result, the schools membership now comprised four Academy representatives and nine Maintained Schools' representatives (6 primary and 3 secondary). This meant that there remained a vacancy for one Academy representative and one Secondary School (Governor) representative. In the Non-Schools' Membership there was an outstanding vacancy for a Diocese Representative.

Other amendments had been incorporated to clarify the nomination and election process to fill vacancies for Schools' Members on the Schools Forum. Also, provision had been made for the re-imbusement of reasonable expenses in connection with attendance at meetings, which would cover such things as, for instance, car parking fees incurred.

The Forum noted the updated constitution and membership.

73. **Improving Leadership and Governance Over Special Educational Needs Support and the High Needs Funding Block**

The Forum considered a report putting forward a proposal to pilot a mechanism for children/young people to have prompt access to short-term additional specialist support from the High Needs Block without having to wait to go through an Education Health Centre (EHC) plan statutory needs assessment to access Element 3 'top up funding'.

The report had been prepared in response to recommendations from the independent review of the High Needs Block, which amongst other things highlighted the lack of

headteacher confidence in the current allocation of funding. A survey of school leaders had evidenced the need to develop increased confidence in the local SEND funding system across the school sector. Improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND in Bracknell Forest compared unfavourably with neighbouring Berkshire Authorities and the national average.

The January 2018 school census showed that there were 2,348 (11.1%) pupils requiring SEN support with 446 (2.1%) in receipt of an EHC Plan or equivalent. Costs of 'top-up funding' for Bracknell Forest mainstream schools have been steadily increasing from £667k in 2014-15 to a forecast £971k in 2018-19 (+45%). Also there was concern that not all children and young people were receiving the right level of support. A series of panels and processes existed to oversee children and young people at different levels and with different needs but there remained too many that 'fell through the net' or were not signposted correctly.

The report proposed the setting up of a pilot scheme to operate through to the end of the academic year which would establish a multi-agency hub to provide prompt, short-term and specified additional resource/support to children and young people through the High Needs Block in the form of 'top-up funding'. The hub would work in partnership with schools to meet the needs of children/young people more promptly and effectively, provide access to specialists as required, preventing as far as possible the need for further escalation. It was proposed to select five schools to work with during the spring term and a further five during the summer term to carry out the pilot so that this alternative approach could be evaluated in terms of improved outcomes and value for money. It was proposed to bring in outside specialists to set up the pilot and to assist in building up a commissioning market, with the schools to be selected from among those currently assessed as underperforming.

The Forum welcomed the proposals to introduce a pilot scheme and recognised that, whilst there appeared much promise in the proposal, it was better to begin in a small way and build gradually, learning as the pilot progressed. It was the Council's intention, following a successful pilot, to roll out the scheme to all schools for the 2019-20 academic year. There was, however, a concern that selecting underperforming schools to participate in the pilot was not necessarily appropriate. The Forum considered it would be far better to select schools for the pilot from among those where there were the most children and young people with an unmet need.

ACTION: Jackie Ross to ensure selection of schools into the pilot project would be those with significant unmet pupil needs and not overall school performance as implied in the report.

After further discussion it was **RESOLVED**, that taking into account the comments of the Forum as to the selection of the schools to participate:

- 1) To AGREE the pilot mechanism for children/young people to have prompt access to short-term additional specialist support from the High Needs Block without having to wait to go through an Education Health Care Plan statutory needs assessment to access Element 3 'top up funding'
- 2) To AGREE in principle that any identifiable costs from the proposal are financed from the SEN Strategic Reserve.
- 3) To AGREE that the proposed project is reviewed before the end of the summer term to determine ongoing sustainability.

74. **2019-20 Funding Policy for New and Expanding Schools**

The Forum considered a report presenting the revised text for the Start-up and Diseconomy Funding Policy for New and Expanding Schools to be applied in 2019-20. This followed on from discussions at the June 2018 Forum meeting where proposed changes to the 2018-19 policy were agreed in principle.

Supporting new and expanding schools in the initial years after they opened, often with relatively low numbers of pupils as housing developments progressed, can require significant amounts of additional financial support over a number of years. It was important to ensure that a clear, fair and transparent funding policy was in place (and was regularly reviewed) that could be applied consistently to all new and expanding schools, placing the minimum financial burden on existing schools. Whilst the policy document set out associated funding rates, it was stressed that these were illustrative, with final values to be agreed each year through the budget setting process.

The new policy was attached as Annex 2 to the report and contained the following three key changes that had been envisaged by the Forum at its previous meeting:

- A new category for one-off pre-opening start-up costs to recognise synergies and other benefits that arise when a group of schools by the same provider are opening simultaneously. This was relevant to the second school being opened by the Kings Academy Group and was a cost reduction.
- An underlying principle of the diseconomy funding model was to link per pupil funding rates for new schools to the minimum rates that the DfE are setting into legislation through the School National Funding Formula (SNFF). The national rates will increase in 2019-20 from £3,300 to £3,500 for primary aged pupils and from £4,600 to £4,800 for secondary aged pupils. The model had been updated with these changes, the cost of which was reflected in the DfE funding settlement.
- A new post-opening revenue grant allocation of £250 per primary aged pupil and £500 per secondary aged pupil had been added. This recognised that new schools experienced initial high costs of stocking up with general resources which the day to day budget allocation did not cover (and replicates the funding allocations the DfE makes to new free schools).

Appendix 3 of the Funding Model set out the forecast revenue impact from new/expanding schools, based on the Council's updated medium term forecasts. These would of necessity be reviewed each year as part of the Council's budget setting process.

The Forum also received a summary outcome from the review of school place planning in Bracknell Forest (attached as Annex 4 to the report). The review had examined the reasons why forecasts had not been as accurate as hoped. In particular there had been a failure to react quickly enough to the falling birth rate and a reduced number of children being brought forward from new housing development over the last three years compared to what was expected from previous trends. The summary concluded by setting out some recommendations for changes in the approach of the Council to place planning and provision. It was acknowledged that a number of these would require further detailed consideration, including specific consultation with schools. More accurate forecasts would be a key factor in drawing up the next School Places Plan.

RESOLVED that the updated Start-up and Diseconomy Funding Policy for New and Expanding Schools as set out in Annex 2 be agreed.

75. **Proposals for the 2019-20 Schools Block Element of the Schools Budget**

The Forum considered a report on the matters that could now be dealt with in respect of the Schools Block and Central School Services Block elements of the Schools Budget in order for the timely preparation of the 2019-20 budget. Whilst the DfE had yet to provide the final data that must be used to calculate individual schools budgets, decisions on some key matters were sought in order for a final budget to be presented to the DfE by the statutory deadline of 21 January 2019. (The Forum meeting on 17 January 2019 would present a final opportunity to take decisions on next year's budget should there be any revisions to the budget setting data currently available).

A high level of responses (69%) to the financial consultation with schools showed a clear direction for the development of school budgets. There was strong support from primary schools to continue the move to a local funding formula that closely matches the School National Funding Formula (SNFF) and that the Minimum Funding Guarantee should be used to ensure that all schools receive at least a +0.5% increase in per pupil funding. For secondaries, the preference was to meet the core objectives of the SNFF, but also to maintain a degree of funding stability with 2018-19 budgets.

The following key points in relation to the budget settlement were noted:

- Per pupil funding was forecast to increase by 2.3%, equivalent to £1.529m.
- This figure was reduced to £1.005m after putting aside a share of the increase to part cover the impact of cost pressures not properly recognised by the DfE in the national funding settlement.
- Schools had agreed that a small number of services should continue to be provided directly by the Council, including those requested by the de-delegation route (100% support in the consultation).
- It had further been agreed that maintained schools should each continue to contribute £20 per pupil towards the cost to the Council of meeting education statutory and regulatory duties (85% support in the consultation).
- A breakdown of the estimated Schools Block Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to be paid to the Council was given. (It remained an estimated figure until the DfE published verified school census and other data – due mid-December).
- The total forecast DSG for 2019-20 was £69.949m, an increase of £2.454m over the current year.
- The final figures would need to be adjusted to take account of an updated number of pupils on roll as a late school return was received after the publication of the report indicating 22 fewer pupils..
- A budget pressure for increased pupil numbers had been included in the proposals.
- Also included was a budget pressure of £1.3m for meeting cost of new schools.
- The Council's Executive had agreed in principle that, in order to reduce the financial impact on schools a contribution of approximately £1m would be made from Council resources towards the cost of new schools, spread over the next four years, and this had been included in the Medium Term Funding Plan (Annex 3 to the report).

Members of the Forum remarked that the £1m being provided by the Council to support schools was very welcome. The Chairman commented that this was the first time that the Council had made a financial contribution to schools from its own resources for many years and the Executive Member concurred. In response to a

question the Executive Member informed the Forum that final confirmation of Council funding would come through the Council's budget setting process.

The report also made reference to a further pressure raised by Warfield Primary school, which had since 2016 operated on a split site. As a result of additional pupil numbers arising from new house building, a new school of 2 forms of entry had opened on a site 1.167 miles from the original school. The school had identified a number of additional costs incurred as a result of the site configuration, mainly around staffing eg. reception, lunchtime controllers, site staff, together with costs associated with a minibus to enable sharing of curriculum and sporting activities across both sites. After discussions with the school on the amount claimed, a contribution of £75k could be justified and had been included in the draft budget proposals for consideration by the Forum. The Forum expressed the view that this provision should be kept under review since there may be some element of one-off costs included and/or other economies which could reduce the additional costs incurred by the school. Since this was a potential for other such claims to arise in future, it was suggested that the officers report to a future meeting proposing criteria as how such requests could be dealt with in the future.

ACTION: Paul Clark

After questions to clarify a number of the details, it was **RESOLVED** that:

1. The outcomes from the financial consultation with schools, as summarised in the report, be noted.
2. In accordance with the majority views of schools as expressed through the responses to the financial consultation:
 - i) the allocation of additional funds to primary schools should be through Option 3, which aims for a close fit to the 2019-20 SNFF allocation for each school;
 - ii) the allocation of additional funds to secondary schools should be through Option 2, which follows the core principles of the 2019-20 SNFF allocation, but also maintains funding stability with 2018-19 budgets; and
 - iii) in line with the principles for allocating funds to schools included in both Options 2 and 3, the Minimum Funding Guarantee should be set at +0.5% with any associated costs, as in previous years, being met by applying a cap to the schools receiving the highest per pupil gains.
3. The budget changes for 2019-20, as set out in Table 3 in the report, be agreed, with particular consideration given to:
 - i) the medium term funding strategy for meeting the additional cost from the Growth Fund, as set out in paragraphs 6.26 to 6.31 of the report;
 - ii) the request for additional funding from Warfield Primary School to finance the additional cost of operating across two separate sites as set out in paragraphs 6.34 to 6.36 of the report; and
 - iii) further to ii) above, a report be prepared for the Forum proposing criteria for how such requests could be dealt with in a fair and consistent manner.
4. To meet the expected financing requirements of the medium term funding strategy arising from new schools, the funds in the New School Reserve be increased to £1m.

5. On-going central retention by the Council of Central School Services funding for the services and amounts be as set out in Annex 4.
6. In order to provide more accurate budget information, provisional 2019-20 individual school budgets should be released at the beginning of January 2019, rather than before the end of the autumn term.

Item for Maintained Primary School representatives only:

7. The continued de-delegation of budgets for the services requested by the Council be agreed.

Item for Maintained Secondary School representatives only:

8. The continued de-delegation of budgets for the services requested by the Council be agreed.

Item for all Maintained School representatives (includes Special and PRU) only:

9. A £20 per pupil contribution continue to be made by maintained schools towards the cost of delivering 'general' education related statutory and regulatory duties.

76. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Forum was to be held on 17 January 2019 commencing at 4.30pm (preceded by a briefing for members at 3.30pm).

CHAIRMAN