

**SCHOOLS FORUM
21 NOVEMBER 2019
4.35 - 6.10 PM**



Present:

Martin Gocke, Pupil Referral Unit Representative (Governor) (Chairman)

Schools' Members

Liz Cole, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Jane Coley, Academy School Representative (Headteacher)
Karen Davis, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Neil Davies, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Peter Floyd, Special School Representative (Governor)
Keith Grainger, Secondary School Representative (Headteacher)
Stuart Matthews, Academy School Representative (Headteacher) (Vice-Chairman)
Roger Prew, Primary School Representative (Governor)
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:

Brian Poxon, Secondary School Representative (Governor)

115. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

There were no Substitute Members.

116. Declarations of Interest

The Chairman read out the advice from Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) regarding meeting during the election period and noted that regular practice could continue as long as it did not relate to election canvassing or campaigning for a particular candidate or party.

Martin Gocke, Richard Stok and Peter Floyd declared an affected interest in respect of Item 6 (2020-21 Budget Preparations for the High Needs Block).

Stuart Matthews and Peter Floyd declared an affected interest in respect of Item 7 (2020-21 Budget Preparations for the Schools Block and Central Schools Services Block).

Councillor Barnard advised that he was a governor at Garth Hill College.

117. **Minutes and Matters Arising**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 19 September 2019 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Arising from minute 107 Cherry Hall advised that the draft general attendance guidance note was going through the process of being approved and would hopefully be ready for distribution to providers in January.

Also arising from minute 107 Paul Clark had prepared a proposal around the Growth Fund which was included on the agenda.

Also arising from minute 107 it was confirmed that the latest projections of forecast pupil numbers and available places would be presented in December.

Action: Chris Taylor

Arising from minute 108 (Flow of Funds to Schools and Spending Review 2020-23) Paul Clark had shared the PowerPoint slides with the members of the Forum.

Arising from minute 111 Paul Clark had clarified in the consultation document before distribution to schools that the council would only seek to transfer funds to the level of a forecast over spend, if there was one.

Arising also from minute 111 the outcomes from the HNB consultation and the Early Years Funding Formula (EYFF) consultation had been prepared to be reported in this meeting of the Forum.

Arising from minute 114 a column had been added to the attendance register to indicate carparking reimbursement requests.

118. **High Needs Block Sub Group**

The Forum received and noted the terms of reference and minutes of the meetings of the High Needs Block Sub Group on 12 September and 10 October 2019.

119. **Free Childcare Places**

The Forum considered a report which provided an update on the outcome of the consultation with early years providers on proposed changes to the payment arrangements of the free childcare entitlements.

The Chairman noted that several members could not access confidential Annex B prior to the meeting, and this would be investigated. They were viewed on the TV screen and considered during the meeting.

Action: Derek Morgan

Cherry Hall explained that there were a number of unexpected outcomes in the way the deprivation supplement of the local EYFF worked; specifically, the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) measure. Several providers were qualifying for the incorrect band of the deprivation supplement. A fairer and more equitable way of IDACI scoring has been developed.

To gather provider views on the proposed changes to the funding formula, a consultation with all providers registered to deliver the free entitlement was undertaken in October 2019. There was a response rate of only 17% (27 out of a total of 163 registered providers). The Forum reflected that such a low response rate was quite concerning and queried whether there had been any investigation into why providers did not respond. Cherry Hall explained that the team delivering the consultation regularly met with providers and impressed upon them the importance of taking part.

Over 80% of respondents supported the proposed changes to the calculation of the IDACI measure. The forecast payment profile was also consulted on and 59% of respondents wanted to keep the forecast payment at 60% of the total forecast funding for the term.

It has been confirmed that the additional £66 million in funding for early years for 2020-21 equated to 8p per hour increase in Bracknell Forest. Final figures would be reported to the Forum in the meeting in December.

Action: Cherry Hall

RESOLVED

1. to NOTE the majority of respondents to the consultation:
 - i. supported the proposed changes to the calculation of the IDACI element of the deprivation supplement (Annex A questions and paragraph 5.16);
 - ii. indicated that they wished to retain the percentage of funding paid in the forecast payment at the current level of 60% (Annex A and paragraph 5.17);
 - iii. indicated that any future increases in funding to providers should be applied to the base rate (Annex A and paragraph 5.18); and
 - iv. felt the current payment arrangements were suitable (Annex A and paragraph 5.18); and
2. to AGREE that taking account of the response from providers:
 - i. the calculation of the IDACI measure of the deprivation supplement is changed to an average score per child;
 - ii. the threshold scores for the IDACI measure are changed to account for the new calculation method;
 - iii. restrictions on childminders qualifying for the IDACI measure are removed; and
 - iv. to retain the percentage of funding paid in the forecast payment at the current rate of 60%.

120. 2020-21 Budget Preparations for the High Needs Block

The Forum considered a report which provided an update in respect of the current forecast for the 2020-21 High Needs Block (HNB) budget, including the outcomes from the recent consultation with schools to gather views on transferring up to 0.5% of the Schools Block (SB) income to the HNB budget.

Forecast for the 2020-21 HNB budget

Paul Clark explained that Bracknell Forest was in a position of financial pressure which had mainly arisen due to significant increases in the numbers of pupils requiring support, increases in complexity of need, and annual increases in the cost of provision above the level of inflation. Bracknell Forest had a steeper increase than the national figure in the number of children receiving additional support through Education Health Care Plans. Furthermore, there was increasing use of more expensive placements outside Bracknell Forest.

The medium-term financial forecast was summarised in Table 1 of the report and showed an anticipated overspend of £2.408m for 2019-20 (£0.777m if offset against the forecast Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) reserve of £1.631m) with a cumulative overspend of £10.924m over three years.

Kashif Nawaz then highlighted the work that had been completed to date to develop a balanced medium-term budget with a focus on developing a range of quality services at reduced costs. This work had focused on the general themes of outcomes from the High Needs Block Sub Group and were highlighted in 6.18 and 6.19 of the report. It was confirmed there had been robust discussions prior to this meeting, identifying priorities and beginning to unpick where cost savings could be made, services developed and where historically we could have done better. It was acknowledged that there were longer-term challenges but there was a willingness to work with the recommendations. The Forum expressed a desire for flexibility to adapt the plan if things don't work.

The Forum questioned whether the recommendations were likely to lead to a significant reduction in cost. 6.18 outlined a far more robust and graduated approach and identified a range of resources available to commission in an efficient way. Table 3 of the report summarised the financial impact of the proposals and deducting cost reductions the deficit would be reduced by £7m to £3m which would be a significant reduction in the deficit.

Relating to 6.18.2 of the report, the Forum queried how the demand of Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) could be reduced. Kashif Nawaz explained that there had been an escalation in numbers of children going from SEN support to EHCPs. Research suggested that a broader graduated approach could reduce need of EHCP where needs could be met in mainstream schools. A systematic pragmatic approach was needed as opposed to decisions being made on an ad hoc basis. For example, several children with EHCPs in year 11 had been placed out of borough but transition planning meant they could be brought back to be educated within the borough.

Relating to 6.19.4 of the report (setting out new in-school SEND resource provisions), the Forum questioned how much money was covered in this and if the plans had been published. Kashif Nawaz advised that all schools had received details of the scheme and been invited to submit a bid with the individual project plans identifying the proposal which varied across the schools. Over the first two rounds of applications, four schools (Harmans Water Primary, Fox Hill Primary, Jennetts Park Primary and Brakenhale Academy), the Parent Carer Forum, and Community Learning were successful in bidding for funding for the DfE Special Provisions Capital Fund (SPCF), which would provide a total of up to 85 places. The third phase was expected to commence in the Spring term and guidance on how to apply would go out to all schools. £250,000 would be available.

Relating to 6.19.5 the Forum was advised that, whilst the DfE rejected the bid for funding for a new Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Special free School, the council was continuing with plans for a new in-house provision and had received interest from providers in other LAs to collaborate with the council on this.

The Forum queried whether there was additional finance to upscale SEN Hub in line with demand. Kashif Nawaz explained that the team was working with finance to maintain oversight of what was needed. The SEN HUB was funded by the HNB reserves and there were sufficient funds to cover the cost for a couple of years. The team was working to provide better analysis to demonstrate demand and it was expected that after that time the team would be in a good position to demonstrate

ongoing need. The Forum expressed a need for sufficient levels of staffing and expertise for a responsive service.

The Forum queried whether there could be further savings which hadn't yet been identified. Kashif Nawaz advised that there was potential for saving in post 16 if effective processes were in place. The Forum noted that transport savings, whilst not having a direct impact on the HNB budget as it did not come out of that budget, would help other local issues which in turn would have an impact on the HNB budget.

The Forum questioned whether any capital requirements had been considered. It was advised that the possibility of increasing capacity at College Hall, which had been raised previously, would be picked up as part of capital bids.

The Forum acknowledged that each of the strands of the strategy needed further work to be explored more fully and that many figures would change over the course of the on-going work.

Consultation with schools to transfer 0.5% to HNB budgets

A consultation was undertaken with schools to gather views on transferring up to 0.5% of SB funding to the HNB, which reflected the financial pressure outlined above. There was a 61% response rate and 74% of respondents were opposed to the proposed transfer. A key reason cited for opposing the transfer related to affordability and the financial pressures schools were facing.

The Forum was advised to consider the longer-term strategic need of having to balance the HNB budget in light of a forecast significant funding gap. It was also highlighted that the consultation document had been issued in advance of the announcement from the government on the School Budget Spending review which was now considered to deliver average increases in per pupil funding of 5.9% after taking account of the funding transfer. The next steps would be influenced by the views expressed and decisions taken by the Forum. If the Forum could not agree the proposed transfer, the Executive Member could consider an appeal to the Secretary of State.

The Forum questioned whether this was the main proposal to reduce the £3m gap. Paul Clark advised that this was the case.

The Forum were reluctant to vote against the consensus of the consultation. The Forum also expressed that it was difficult to agree to something which did not appear to be concrete. However, Paul Clark explained that the proposal had been brought at this time as the transfer would need to be made by 28 November 2019 as set by the DfE.

RESOLVED to AGREE:

1. the developments to future service delivery (paragraph 6.19 and Annex 5); and
2. that further work is undertaken to identify additional projects to work towards a balanced medium-term financial plan.

The Forum did not agree the proposal of a 0.5% funding transfer from the 2020-21 SB to the HNB budget, estimated at £0.375m. The Forum accepted to take the consequences of this. Councillor Barnard confirmed that he would not sanction an appeal to the Secretary of State on the basis that he believed the responsibility and ability to come up with a solution rested with the Forum.

The Forum expressed thanks to the people involved in producing the report and the recommendations.

121. **2020-21 Budget Preparations for the Schools Block and Central Schools Services Block**

The Forum considered a report which provided an update on the matters that could be dealt with in respect of the SB and Central School Services Block (CSSB) elements of the Schools Budget for the timely preparation of the 2020-21 budget. The Forum was advised that the report had been written with the assumption that the proposal of a 0.5% funding transfer from the 2020-21 SB to the HNB budget would be approved.

Table 4 of the report summarised the initial budget proposals for 2020-21 and an updated funding plan for the key budget issue of diseconomy costs as new schools was summarised in Table 3 of the report.

Relating to the proposed financing and associated budget for the Growth Fund as set out in Table 3, the Forum questioned whether we were statutorily tied to this. The Forum acknowledged that it had previously been agreed by the Forum, but this was not without dissent. It was suggested to bring back the calculation and supporting documents to take a fresh look at it, so long as the Forum would be able to vote on changes. Paul Clark agreed to check the legal status and report back to the Forum in December.

Action: Paul Clark

The proposed amendment to the new school funding policy reflected the thinking that it would be more appropriate for schools to move across to the Bracknell Forest funding formula once they had opened all their pre-16-year-old year groups rather than meet capacity thresholds. The Forum questioned whether that would create a problem with Kings Academy which was not expected to be fully open for several years. Paul Clark advised that it had always been the case that they would stay on the previous formula until pupil numbers were at a relatively high level.

Relating to the criteria for in-year budget allocations to schools experiencing significant growth in pupil numbers, the Forum queried whether the full threshold needed to be met to receive the funding. Paul Clark advised this was the case and was based on the assumption that schools could absorb a certain number of extra pupils without a cost increase but 25 additional pupils (in three and above Form and Entry (FE) schools) would get to the level of needing an extra teacher.

The Forum questioned whether King's Academy's commitment to SEN support has been clarified. Rachel Morgan advised that conversations were being had to explore the plan of opening a primary ASC unit. King's Academy were aware that this was a concern of the Forum. The Forum felt that it was appropriate to scrutinise this.

RESOLVED

1. to NOTE:

- i. the latest update on the School and Education Spending review and the impact anticipated for BF at this time;
- ii. the known options used by other LAs for funding the additional costs arising from new schools, as summarised in Table 2;
- iii. the 6.9% increase in per pupil funding, which after meeting the cost of new pressures, schools will on average receive a 5.9% increase; and

- iv. that the Minimum Per Pupil Funding values expected by the DfE of £3,750 for primary aged pupils and £5,000 for secondary can be fully financed; and
2. to AGREE:
- i. the budget changes for 2020-21, as summarised in Table 4, with particular consideration given to:
 - a. the revised medium-term funding strategy for meeting the additional cost arising from the Growth Fund (Annex 3);
 - b. the elements of the 2020-21 Growth Fund (Table 3);
 - c. the impact of changes in funding to the CSSB; and
 - d. that the Minimum Funding Guarantee is set at the maximum amount of +1.84%;
 - ii. the updated text for the Funding Policy for New and Expanded Schools (Annex 1);
 - iii. on-going central retention by the Council of Central School Services funding for the areas and amounts set out in Annex 4;
 - iv. the updated criteria for allocating funds to schools experiencing significant in-year increases in pupil numbers be implemented from the October 2019 census (Annex 5); and
 - v. that options be developed for the December meeting to consider whether amendments should be made to the distribution of funds to schools in order for 1 FE schools to receive increases close to the overall average increase in per pupil funding.

The pressure to support pupils with high needs was removed as a consideration for the budget changes for 2020-21.

122. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Forum was due to be held on Monday 16 December 2019 commencing at 4:30pm (preceded by a briefing for members at 3:30pm). This had been changed to avoid a clash with the General Election on 12 December 2019.

The Forum queried why the date had been changed due to the General Election considering the ESFA guidance that regular practice could continue during this period. Councillor Barnard clarified that it was changed for practical as opposed to political reasons due to the impact on the council and democratic services. However, the Forum challenged this decision as it was felt that the impact on members had not been considered.

Action: Derek Morgan

The Forum requested that the venue be changed to the Council Chamber going forward.

Action: Joanna Gibbons

CHAIRMAN