

**SCHOOLS FORUM
16 JANUARY 2020
4.35 - 5.35 PM**



Present:

Liz Cole, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Neil Davies, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Peter Floyd, Special School Representative (Governor)
Martin Gocke, Pupil Referral Unit Representative (Governor) (Chairman)
Keith Grainger, Secondary School Representative (Headteacher)
Phil Sherwood, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Debbie Smith, Secondary School Representative (Headteacher)

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

Apologies for absence were received from:

Karen Davis, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Stuart Matthews, Academy School Representative (Headteacher)
Brian Poxon, Secondary School Representative (Governor)
Roger Prew, Primary School Representative (Governor)
Richard Stok, Primary School Representative (Governor)
Michelle Tuddenham, PVI Provider Representative

131. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

There were no Substitute Members.

132. Declarations of Interest

Peter Floyd, Martin Gocke and Keith Grainger declared an affected interest in respect of Item 5 (2020/21 Budget Proposals for the High Needs Block).

Neil Davies and Debbie Smith declared an affected interest in respect of Item 7 (2020/21 Proposals for the Local Authority Budget).

133. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 16 December 2019 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Arising from minute 128, Rachel Morgan updated that Chris Taylor had identified 15 schools with at least 10% surplus places at some point in the next 5 years which he would be contacting and offering to work with. Chris Taylor had worked with four of those schools already. The Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) Finance team would provide the schools with a high-level summary of their potential income over the period.

Also arising from minute 128, Rachel Morgan updated that the place planning strategy was due to be presented to the Executive on 28 January 2020 and, if approved, a detailed action plan would be shared.

Also arising from minute 128, Rachel Morgan advised that a list of schools most affected by the predicted period of financial turbulence would be presented in the next meeting of the Forum.

Action: Chris Taylor

Also arising from minute 128, Rachel Morgan explained that a meeting with primary schools in the north of the Borough had been considered but that most schools appeared to prefer an individual response. It was suggested that they would carry on liaising with schools on an individual basis but would report on collective issues as the Heads' Briefing.

Arising from minute 129, Paul Clark advised that a questionnaire had been circulated to other local authorities to establish a benchmark for the test of reasonableness in relation to allocation of funding and would report on any findings in the next meeting of the Forum.

Action: Paul Clark

134. High Needs Block Sub Group - Minutes from 5 December 2019

The Forum received and considered the minutes of the High Needs Block Sub Group held on 5 December 2019.

135. 2020/21 Budget Proposals for the High Needs Block

The Forum considered a report which sought comments on the detailed budget proposals for the High Needs Block (HNB) element of the Schools Budget presented by the Council. There were also a small number of decisions for the Forum to take in line with the statutory funding framework.

Kashif Nawaz summarised the developments as set out in paragraph 6.3 of the report and highlighted the new in-school special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provisions. Kashif Nawaz explained that the SEND commissioning plan was to work with the HNB Sub Group to develop an action plan alongside key stakeholders. Kashif Nawaz was confident that the action plan would help relieve pressures although more work was needed to get to a balanced budget.

In relation to paragraph 6.3.3 of the report, the Peter Floyd, Special School Representative, clarified that Kennel Lane School (KLS) had 196 children on roll with two more in transition.

The Forum discussed the new in-school SEN provisions as headteacher representatives had little knowledge of their objectives. Taking the first project on the schedule, Harmanswater in-school SEN provision, it was queried whether this was designed to reduce Education Health Care Plans (EHCP). Kashif Nawaz confirmed that it was trying to reduce the demand of EHCPs. The Forum then questioned how this could be measured in terms of seeing whether the money spent has reduced pressures. Kashif Nawaz explained that the projects could not be looked at in isolation but instead should be looked at as a whole. However, this project was specifically aiming to reduce the use of Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) as a primary need, as SEMH in certain cases could be better met within mainstream provision albeit with additional support. The SEND Commissioning Strategy would be reviewed after two years and it was expected that any impact would be seen at that point.

The Forum enquired whether the details of the projects would be available to the public. Kashif Nawaz advised that it was published on the SEND Local Offer: https://bracknellforest.fsd.org.uk/kb5/bracknell/directory/family.page?familychannel=6_10_6

The Forum queried how schools were chosen for these projects. Kashif Nawaz explained that all schools were invited to bid, and applications were presented to the Council's Departmental Managers Team (DMT) to make a decision against the criteria. In the first year there were a significant number of applications and four schools met the criteria. In the second year only two made a bid and were both successful. Bids were now open for the third year. Paul Clark clarified that the projects outlined in the report were not the only projects approved as the ones funded from a different budget were outside the scope of this report.

The Forum asked what outcomes were expected. Kashif Nawaz advised that the strategy was aiming to adopt a whole system approach. Schools would be encouraged to tap into the Early Help resources. The expectation was that development would happen alongside provision via a range of Panels and Hubs.

The Forum queried whether progress of the new in-school SEND provisions could be shared with the Forum in the same way as the Intervention Hub. Kashif Nawaz advised that would form part of the action plan and would be reported to the HNB Sub Group.

Paul Clark then provided an update on the financial impact from the ongoing review of the programme as set out in paragraph 6.4 of the report. There had been an increase in costs in the current year which would continue into 2020-21, mostly attributed to taking on additional pupils in KLS. A positive was that it had now been confirmed that business rates cost increases expected on new and expanded schools could only be back dated to 2017, meaning that approximately £0.700m of expected costs would not materialise and the related provision could be released and applied to part finance the forecast over spend on the HNB.

Paul Clark advised that DSG income was still an estimated amount as the Council was awaiting confirmation from the DfE which wasn't expected until March or April 2020.

Paul Clark explained that the overall deficit forecast for March 2023 had widened by a further £1.698m to £4.761m. Annex 4 of the report showed how it was proposed to profile next year's budget into specific services, but the Forum was reminded that the figures were only estimates and could change such as if a child ended up going to a different type of provision.

Paul Clark highlighted that the Council planned to continue working in partnership with the HNB Sub Group to develop further service improvements and savings to remove the £1.5m underlying funding gap. The Forum expressed that it seemed a huge responsibility and potentially unachievable to address this as there was not enough money in the system.

The Forum asked Councillor Barnard to comment on how much pressure could be put to the DfE to draw attention to the local problem. Councillor Barnard explained that there was a general recognition nationally that SEND budgets were under pressure. Councillor Barnard would caution being careful and advised that the Forum would need to ensure it had got "all its ducks in a row" before raising specific points. Councillor Barnard would therefore advise an approach whereby the work of the Sub

Group was highlighted and then evidence that there was a shortfall of funding the proposed programme for change. Councillor Barnard expressed willingness to construct a letter to that effect.

The Forum asked Councillor Barnard whether he was lending the Council's voice to the national overview. Councillor Barnard replied that he intended to directly engage with the Director, Kashif Nawaz and the MP to make that point very clearly.

The Forum discussed how the above points would affect the proposed agreement "that there are appropriate arrangements in place for the education of pupils with SEN". Councillor Barnard expressed that the Council and the Forum is doing what it can do but acknowledges that there was a need to be more efficient with resources.

RESOLVED, after considering the HNB budget proposals from the council to AGREE that:

1. the Executive Member:
 - i. sets the total initial Dedicated Schools Grant funded budget at £17.008m; it incorporates the changes set out in the supporting information and relevant budgets are therefore updated to those summarised in Annex 4 of the report;
 - ii. notes the £1.777 budget gap that will need to be managed through a further change programme with the HNB sub-group; and
 - iii. approves a Minimum Funding Guarantee for Kennel Lane Special school of plus 1.84%, the same amount as for mainstream schools (paragraph 6.10); and
2. there are appropriate financial arrangements in place for:
 - i. arrangements for pupils with special educational needs, in particular the places to be commissioned by the local authority and schools and the arrangements for paying top-up funding; and
 - ii. arrangements for use of pupil referral units and the education of children otherwise than at school, in particular the places to be commissioned by the local authority and schools and the arrangements for paying top-up funding.

Forum noted that work needed to continue to ensure appropriate educational provision for students with special educational needs through the work of the HNB sub-group.

136. **2020-21 Budget Proposals for the Schools Block and Central School Services Block Elements of the Schools Budget**

The Forum considered a report which presented final proposals from the Council for the 2020-21 Schools Block and Central Schools Services Block elements of the Schools Budget. These proposals have built on previous decisions of the Forum together with the release by the Department for Education (DfE) of the key data that must be used to calculate school budgets.

Paul Clark highlighted that the recommendations for the proposals to be presented to the Executive Member needed to be resolved at this meeting as they were required ahead of the 21 January deadline for submitting to the DfE the actual Funding Formula for Schools to be used in 2020-21.

Paul Clark explained that the most notable change since the last report related to the additional educational needs (AEN) data. Primary schools had a general reduction in AEN measures whereas secondary schools had a general increase in AEN measures. There was very little change in the overall amount of resources available to schools although the change in AEN measures resulted in a different distribution.

RESOLVED

1. in its role as the representative body of schools and other providers of education and childcare, the Forum REQUESTS that the Executive Member AGREES the following for the 2020-21 Schools Budget:
 - a. that in accordance with Table 1 of the report, the budgeted amount of Dedicated Schools Block Grant be set at:
 - i. £74.850m for the Schools Block; and
 - ii. £1.084m for the Central School Services Block;
 - b. that the council contributes £0.253m funding to diseconomy costs at new schools;
 - c. the decisions previously agreed by the Forum, as summarised in paragraph 6.7 of the report;
 - d. that the factors in the BF Funding Formula for Schools and their relative values are set at the maximum affordable level of 99.8% of the values used by the DfE (Annex 5 of the report);
 - e. that other Schools Block related grants be reset to the amounts anticipated in 2020-21; and
 - f. that the resulting DfE pro forma template of the 2020-21 BF Funding Formula for Schools, as set out in Annex 6 be submitted by the 21 January deadline; and
2. as decision maker:
 - a. that the arrangements in place for the administration of central government grants are appropriate; and
 - b. the financing and budgets for the Growth Fund are as set in Annex 1 of the report.

Councillor Barnard confirmed that he agreed with the Forum's request to the Executive Member outlined above.

137. **2020/21 Proposals for the Local Authority Budget**

The Forum considered a report which presented for comment a summary of the Council's budget proposals for 2020/21 with a particular focus on the impact expected on the People Directorate, as agreed by the Executive on 17 December 2019. Comments received would be submitted to the Executive on 11 February 2020 alongside any impact from the announcement of the Finance Settlement. This would allow the Executive to determine its final budget package and recommend the appropriate Council Tax level to Council, which was due to formally approve the 2020/21 budget and Council Tax on 26 February 2020.

Revenue Budget

Paul Clark explained that there were five main streams of the revenue budget: the commitment budget, new spending requirements, available cost reductions, inflation provision and income. Table 4 of the report outlined a summary of proposals and predicted a total expenditure of £81.787m in 2020/21. It was estimated that the Council could anticipate income of up to -£79.210m, leaving a potential shortfall of approximately £2.577m. The Council would decide on how to manage the shortfall in February 2020 in the light of the financial settlement and results of this consultation and could choose to adopt any or all of the following approaches to bridge the remaining gap: an increase in Council Tax, an appropriate contribution from the Council's revenue reserves, and identifying further expenditure reductions.

The Forum expressed that it was difficult to comment on the budget without all the detail and asked Rachel Morgan if there were any pressures affecting schools. Rachel Morgan explained that the biggest issue for Education and Learning was incorporating the Education Centre with the Open Learning Centre. However, schools

would not be directly affected by most of the reviews. Councillor Barnard added that the Council was continuing to support Childrens Centres, youth work and Early Help.

The Forum queried the implications of transformation pressure on the revenue budget (as per Annex B of the report). Paul Clark explained that this related to the Children's Services Transformation programme which was part of the plan to reduce the council's budget gap and had identified initiatives around the cost of social care placements. However, the plans were not fully achievable within the timescale needed so this was now reversed out of the budget with more work now underway to progress and to bring forward new proposals to 2021-22. Paul Clark confirmed that most of the pressures arise from Childrens Social Care and that there were huge pressures from new young people being placed in the Borough.

Capital Programme

Paul Clark advised that the proposed capital programme for 2020/21 was mostly focused on maintenance of assets and a number of school improvement projects. Paul Clark explained the proposals as set out in Annex D of the report.

The Forum commented that the report included a mixture of descriptions written by officers and bids written by Headteachers, leading to stylistic differences. Paul Clark explained that the report was already in the public domain so couldn't be changed but this would be addressed going forward. Paul Clark apologised for any inaccuracies.

Action: Chris Taylor

The Forum noted that the reference to "Sandhurst School Nursery" (page 74 of the report) was incorrect and it should have read "Sandhurst Nursery" as the nursery was not part of Sandhurst School.

The Forum was concerned as to the financial position if the money from the capital receipts did not come forward.

The Forum commented that the school improvement proposals had not been discussed or agreed with the relevant Headteachers (specifically noted by Sandy Lane School). Paul Clark advised that this was subject to further discussions.

RESOLVED that the Forum had commented, as outlined above, on the 2020/21 budget proposals of the Executive for the People Directorate in respect of:

- i. the revenue budget (Annexes A to C of the report); and
- ii. the capital programme (Annex D of the report).

138. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The next meeting of the Forum was due to be held on Thursday 19 March 2020 commencing at 4:30pm. However, it came to light that this date clashed with the Headteacher Conference which would affect member attendance; therefore, the meeting on 19 March 2020 was cancelled. At the request of the Chairman, the need for a March meeting would be considered nearer the time and, if a meeting were to be required, an alternative date would be proposed.

Action: Paul Clark / Martin Gocke

CHAIRMAN