

**SCHOOLS FORUM
14 JANUARY 2021
4.30 - 6.00 PM**



Present:

Martin Gocke, Pupil Referral Unit Representative (Governor) (Chairman)
Stuart Matthews, Academy School Representative (Headteacher) (Vice-Chairman)
Sue Butler, Early Years PVI Provider
Liz Cole, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Jane Coley, Academy School Representative (Headteacher)
Karen Davis, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Peter Floyd, Special School Representative (Governor)
Jo Lagares, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Roger Prew, Primary School Representative (Governor)
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)

167. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

There were no apologies for absence.

The Chair welcomed Jo Lagares to the Forum who was replacing Neil Davies.

The Chair highlighted that Leslie Semper, an Academy representative, did not seem to have attended any meetings. Liz Cole offered to ask Leslie whether she still wanted to be a member of the Forum. It was felt that the Forum would need another Academy representative if Leslie was no longer available, in which case Paul Clark would follow-up.

Action: Liz Cole and Paul Clark

Paul Clark had been in contact with Liz Savage who was a Headteacher from another Academy who had expressed an interest in joining the Forum.

168. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

169. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Forum on 10 December 2020 be approved as a correct record.

There were no matters arising.

170. School Places Plan and Capital Strategy 2021-25

The Forum considered a report which sought approval of the School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy 2021-25. If approved, this would go before the Executive in February 2021 to be signed off.

Chris Taylor explained that, in the past, forecasts had been less than accurate, but since the new forecasting system had been introduced in 2019, it had proved to be 98% accurate for the 2020 intake. Chris Taylor hoped that would mean it continued to be accurate going forward.

Chris Taylor highlighted that there had been an expected decrease in early years and primary pupil numbers, which was a continuation of the trend from last year. Secondary and post-16 pupil numbers were both expected to increase. This was linked to the previous rise in primary numbers 5-8 years ago which was currently working its way up through secondary schools. An overall increase in SEN pupil numbers was forecast.

Graph One (paragraph 3.2 of the School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy 2021-25) showed the trend of the local population, plotting both the NHS Births data and the Office of National Statistics (ONS) Population Predictions. Taken together, the figures suggested a decrease in the numbers of 5-year olds in Bracknell Forest over the next five years.

Graph Two (paragraph 3.3 of the School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy 2021-25) showed a spike in 2019/20 of housing completions in Bracknell Forest. The spike was linked to housing development which had been expected in earlier years and finally come to fruition. It was not anticipated that this spike in housing would result in a spike in the school population as 85% of families moving within the Borough did not move their children from their original school. It was expected that the peak of demand from the new housing may be reached up to 5-7 years after the commencement of the housing development.

Graph Fourteen (paragraph 8.1 of the School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy 2021-25) showed the forecasts of primary pupil numbers Borough-wide over the next 5 years. In September 2020 there had been a surplus of 11% and, if no action had been taken, this was expected to rise to 20% by 2025. The strategy to reduce the surplus of places was detailed in paragraphs 8.5-8.13 of the School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy 2021-25.

Graph Twenty-Two (paragraph 9.1 of the School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy 2021-25) showed the forecast secondary pupil numbers based on the intake year 7 for 2020-25. Overall, there was a surplus of 9% in 2020 and this was due to rise to a surplus of 11% by 2025.

The Forum queried the likelihood of the forecasts matching the actual numbers. Chris Taylor replied that the system was changed in 2019 so he had only been able to measure accuracy from the September 2020 intake. Chris Taylor could not guarantee that it would remain 98% reliable going forward, but the downward trend of population and birth data seemed to affirm the projections.

The Forum highlighted that the new Local Plan was scheduled to be published in the next month or so and asked Chris Taylor whether he had seen that, and whether there were any significant implications on school place planning. Chris replied that the Council was joined up on this and that the borough's planners had included him in discussing the education implications of the projected new housing. Chris Taylor had

done some calculations on what impact it may have on pupil yields. It was possible to estimate how many children arise from a house of a certain size and broadly estimate how many houses might be built on a given site area when housing was likely to be built based on previous data. It was however more difficult to estimate when new housing would come forward on land which was not yet designated for housing. Taking the worst-case scenario of maximum yield, Chris Taylor believed there was sufficient capacity in the school estate, especially for secondary pupils. However, due to the more limited mobility of primary-aged children, there was possibly a need to build more primary schools, depending when and where the new housing came forward.

The Forum asked whether there were any calculations about moving into the Borough and not just moving within the Borough. Chris Taylor replied that paragraphs 3.13-3.15 of the School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy 2021-25 set out the key issues in cross-border movement. The difficulties arose from primary schools being in the designated areas of different boroughs, meaning there was lots of potential for cross-border movement. The data for the last two years suggested a decrease in the numbers going to cross-border primary schools but an increase in those going to cross-border secondary schools.

The Forum asked whether the increase in housing production was likely to lead to more families coming into the Borough. Chris Taylor responded that he had not looked at that specific issue, but he felt that the scope may be higher for developments closer to the Borough boundaries.

Regarding the impact on individual school budgets, the Forum asked whether there was any plan to work with individual schools or to report to the Forum the impact on individual schools. Chris Taylor replied that, last year, Paul Clark helped him to take the forecast numbers and create "What If" budgets for each school. Paul Clark confirmed that it was the intention to provide medium term pupil forecasts and high-level budget income projections for all schools every year. The Forum expressed that it would also be useful to receive a report showing the overall pressures, particularly on the primary sector.

Action: Chris Taylor and Paul Clark

Councillor Barnard expressed that he had a high degree of confidence in the accuracy of the forecasts. The Woodhurst Park development had been expected to affect the yield in Warfield, but this did not materialise as parents chose to keep their children at the schools they were already at. This shows credibility in what Chris Taylor had reported.

The Chair asked Cherry Hall and Chris Taylor to comment on the Early Years figures in section 7 of the School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy 2021-25. Cherry Hall had been asked to be clearer on the Published Admission Numbers (PAN) for early years but explained that early years did not calculate a PAN. This was because providers adapted their capacity based on space requirements which were dependent on the age of the children attending. Cherry Hall's team had done a lot of work to make more predictions, but this was challenging. However, with the available birth data they were getting better data. Chris Taylor added that, although there were significant differences in the way pupil places were measured, and the base data on which they were formulated was the same. Cherry Hall explained that they were also beginning to look at migration as well. What they did not know yet was how many of our children were going to providers outside the Borough. Cherry Hall was looking at how to work with our closest neighbours to gather data on that.

The Chair asked when the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment was due to be presented to the Forum. Cherry Hall explained that she was working on it and would present it to the Forum when it was ready. Paul Clark added that, although it was usually brought to the Forum in March, it did not have to be in March.

The Chair stated that the report was useful and generated a lot of confidence.

RESOLVED to APPROVE the School Places Plan and School Capacity Strategy 2021-25 in Appendix A of the report.

171. Update on the 2021-22 High Need Block Budget

The Forum considered a report which updated on the development of the 2021-22 High Needs Block (HNB) element of the Schools Budget.

Kashif Nawaz advised that steps were being taken as part of the Council's transformation project to address the pressures on the HNB Budget. Updates were included in section 6 of the report and Kashif Nawaz noted that progress had only been made possible due to the collaboration with schools and partners. Further updates would be shared at the next meeting of the HNB sub-group.

In relation to controlling the number of Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs), Kashif Nawaz was producing information that would be shared with the Forum in the next couple of weeks.

Action: Kashif Nawaz

Progress was continuing in developing provision and two Service Level Agreements had already been signed off for the Special Resource Provisions (SRPs). The project transformation group was going to keep oversight of that, and data and evidence was being produced parallel to the work being done.

The Chair asked Paul Clark to comment on the financial forecasts, as the Forum had been asked to note that the position had worsened. Paul Clark explained that he had been continually updating the forecast figures. The annual overspend had gone up and was close to a £5m. The assumptions going forward had been amended and all the savings expected from the last work plan had been moved forward. Progress had been adversely impacted by Covid-19. Paul Clark was expecting to present more detailed proposals in March.

The Forum asked for an update on the 15 pupils that had not been placed in schools and queried whether that situation was likely to arise again next September or whether steps had been taken to avoid that happening again. Rachel Morgan advised that the Council had been working closely with four families to place those children. There had been an increase in the cost to place those children as specialist provision was required. Rachel Morgan explained that it was a rare situation which she was hoping would not recur, but other local authorities (LAs) noted the same this year. The issues arose due to Covid-19 and specialist providers not accepting new admissions. The Council was conducting a feasibility study of the Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Hub. The aim was to gather data and analysis to make a case to create a new provision in the Borough which, if approved, was hoped to reduce pressures.

The Forum expressed that it had noted on several occasions that the only way to alleviate the HNB budget pressures would be to make radical changes and have more provision within the Borough. The Forum felt it had not seen evidence of

anything radical and asked whether there was a plan to bring forward any plans to start to address that issue. Kashif Nawaz replied that the plan was set out within the Commissioning Plan and additional resources had been allocated to deliver change within the transformation project. More details were due to be shared at the next meeting of the sub-group. Kashif Nawaz felt that, although pressures were expected to continue to grow, the priorities set out in the plan were the right ones.

The Forum noted that the increase in the deficit had been attributed to the impact of Covid-19, but it was unclear how that would impact the whole of HNB funding. Rachel Morgan clarified that the biggest issue was specialist provision refusing to take on new admissions due to Covid-19. There was also an impact in the way the Council worked with its partners from Health, and there was an increase in what providers could charge. The Commissioning team was working on that issue.

Paul Clark added that the huge financial challenges were recognised but that making the required significant financial improvement would not be achieved in the short term and that change would occur over the medium- to long-term. Even opening more resources in the Borough was not expected to lead to any significant savings on the budget straight away.

The Chair highlighted that this was not an issue which was exclusive to this Council as all LAs had issues with their HNB budget. The Chair felt we could be reasonably confident that we would be allowed to work towards our own plan rather than having measures enforced on us by the DfE. Rachel Morgan added that there was talk of a national review of SEND.

RESOLVED to NOTE:

1. the on-going progress against the actions contained within the SEND Commissioning Plan;
2. the current update on the HNB Budget and its medium-term financial plan which projected a £14.952m deficit at 31 March 2023; and
3. the expectation that budget proposals would be presented to the next meeting of the Forum.

172. Final Proposals for the 2021-22 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 2021-22 Schools Block (SB) and Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) elements of the Schools Budget. This was based on previous decisions agreed by the Forum along with the recently received data from the October 2020 Schools Census released by the DfE. The final decision would be taken by the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning, but the Executive Member would draw on the recommendations made by the Forum.

Paul Clark highlighted that there had been quite a lot of movement in the additional educational needs (AEN) measures as detailed on page 67 of the report. Many measures had come down, indicating that the requirements of schools for funding were lower than they were last year. Working that through the formula, primary schools would receive £0.341m less than they did this time last year, whereas secondary schools would receive £0.055m more.

Paul Clark reminded the Forum that, any funding reductions arising from data changes for schools funded at the Minimum Per Pupil Funding Level (MPPFL) had to be offset by a larger top up payment to reach the MPPFL. When that factor was introduced into the calculations there was another £0.174m added to the Schools

Budget. As a result of the updated data there was a £0.185m reduction in funds allocated to individual schools.

The impact of AEN data changes had had a much bigger impact on the amount of Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) now being triggered than was expected. The Forum had been asked to agree previously that the cost would be financed by schools receiving above average increases in per pupil funding, which would be six schools. It was now recommended that the Forum agreed Option 1, whereby all schools with funding increases above 2% would contribute to the cost of increasing budgets for schools experiencing below 2% increases, which would be 11 schools.

The Forum asked what was happening to schools below the National Funding Formula (NFF) – were they now up to that level, or were they still gaining an additional sum to move towards that figure over time. Paul Clark replied that there were two different calculations. The MPFFL was the minimum amount of budget that could be set in 2021-22, irrespective of what their budget was in the current year. That was the one which was costing the most amount of money and we had no discretion over that as it was set by the Government. The MFG related to the 2% increase and only equated to £28,000 in context. The change in the recommendation related to the MFG.

The Forum noted that schools had been consulted on funding and the MFG and asked whether schools would be consulted this time. Paul Clark replied that, ideally, they would do that, but there was no time as the budget had to be set on 21 January 2021. Unfortunately, Paul Clark was not anticipating this change. However, the Forum was the representative body which had been selected to make decisions on behalf of the schools.

The Forum commented that the impact on schools of Option 1 was probably fairer, and the money involved lower, so Option 1 appeared to be the “least bad” option.

Paul Clark explained that the SB budget was facing a funding shortfall of £0.227m. The good news was that the DfE had agreed that the Council could continue to add money from Council reserves to part-fund the additional costs. This would cover the SB funding shortfall.

By adding the extra funding from the council, 2021-22 would be the first year school budgets would be set at 100% of NFF values.

Regarding the Early Years Block Budget, the DfE had published guidance on 17 December 2020 which set out their intention to follow the normal approach in setting LA funding allocations in 2021-22, using actual participation rates. However, given the more recent lockdown, there was a concern that take-up numbers would be much lower than expected, which when numbers increased as could be expected, there would be a budget overspend and the income would be based on lower January participation rates. Therefore, final budget proposals for the Early Years budget would be presented to the Forum in March 2021 following more information from the DfE and better insight on the January 2021 take-up. Cherry Hall then updated the Forum based on government information just released on the morning of the meeting. The guidance confirmed children that could be funded during the spring term. This information had been circulated to all funded Early Years providers.

The Forum expressed thanks to Cherry Hall and Paul Clark for the updates.

RESOLVED

1. in its role as the representative body of schools and other providers of education and childcare, the Forum requested that the Executive Member AGREES the following for the 2021-22 Schools Budget:
 - i. the changes to budgets as set out in Table 3 of the report, in particular:
 - a. that the Schools Block DSG be set at £81.769m (line 3);
 - b. that the Central School Services Block be set at £0.912m (line 3); and
 - c. that the changes to other budgets aggregate to £6.721m (lines 8-19); and
 - ii. that the factors used in the BF Funding Formula for Schools and their relative values are the same as those used by the DfE for BF in the NFF (Annex 4 of the report);
 - iii. that the £0.227m funding shortfall arising from using NFF rates in the BF Funding Formula, will be met from Council Reserves, if permitted by the secretary of state;
 - iv. that the cost of the MFG should be financed by all schools above the 2% increase, not just those above the average increase;
 - v. that other Schools Block related grants be reset to the amounts anticipated in 2021-22 (paragraph 6.39 of the report); and
 - vi. that the resulting DfE pro forma template of the 2021-22 BF Funding Formula for Schools, as set out in Annex 5 be submitted by the 21 January deadline; and
2. as decision maker, to AGREE:
 - i. that the arrangements in place for the administration of central government grants are appropriate;
 - ii. the financing and budgets for the Growth Fund are as set out in Annex 1 of the report; and
 - iii. the budgets to be centrally managed by the council on behalf of schools, as set out in Annex 2 of the report; and
3. to NOTE that due to uncertainty on national funding arrangements for the free entitlement to early years childcare and education, that final budget proposals will now be presented to the Schools Forum in March.

173. **Consultation on 2021-22 Budget Proposals from the Council**

The Forum considered a report which presented for comment a summary of the Council's budget proposals for 2021/22 with a particular focus on the impact expected on the People Directorate, as agreed by the Executive on 15 December 2020.

Paul Clark explained that there were four key elements of the Revenue Budget: the Commitment Budget which detailed financial implications from previous decisions, Government grants and other income, service pressures and developments, and service economies.

In preparing the 2021/22 draft budget proposals, service pressures and developments for each directorate were considered. The overall proposals were based on the worst-case scenario and resulted in a potential funding gap of £6.242m.

The suggested approaches to bridge the gap were the same as usual (including an increase in Council Tax and drawing money from the Council's reserves). For this year, there was also the use of additional COVID-related Government grants.

Regarding the Capital budget, Paul Clark explained that the Council was looking at a £12.032m capital programme. The Council did not have enough funds to fully finance the project so the Council would have to borrow some money.

The Chair noted that the Forum had not previously received information about the Holly Spring FUSION project outlined in the People Directorate 2021/22 Capital Programme Bids (Annexe D of the report). The Chair questioned why that project had been put forward without having consideration alongside other projects previously mentioned at meetings of the sub-group. Rachel Morgan explained that it was an Early Help project, but Rachel was happy to bring details of that.

Action: Rachel Morgan

The Chair highlighted that the description of the proposed new SEMH facility specifically mentioned refugee children and queried why that was. Rachel Morgan clarified that, a few years ago, we had several refugee children and it was found that a lot of them had experienced significant trauma which led to the need for SEMH support.

The Forum was asked to comment on the 2021/22 budget proposals of the Executive for the People Directorate in respect of the revenue budget (Annexes A to C of the report) and the capital programme (Annexe D of the report). The Forum did not have any comments.

Councillor Barnard noted that the HNB work was a critical part of the overall work and thanked everyone who supported on the sub-group.

174. Dates of Future Meetings

The next meeting of the Forum would be held at 4.30pm on 11 March 2021.

CHAIRMAN