

**SCHOOLS FORUM  
22 OCTOBER 2009  
4.30 - 5.30 PM**



**Present:**

George Clement (Chairman)  
John Throssell, Primary Governor  
Ed Glasson, Primary Governor  
Brian Francis, Primary Governor  
Kelvin Menon, Primary Governor  
Tony Reading, Primary Governor  
Anne Shillcock, Special Education Governor  
Keith Grainger, Secondary School Representative  
Maureen Beadsley, Secondary Governor  
Brian Fries, Secondary Governor  
Steve Lambert, Learning and Skills Council

**Also Present:**

Paul Clark, Head of Finance, Performance and Resources  
David Watkins, Chief Officer, Performance and Resources  
Graham Symonds, Extended Services Co-ordinator  
Liz Sanneh, Democratic Services

**Apologies for absence were received from:**

Gordon Cunningham  
Robert Elsey  
Joanna Quinn  
Kate Sillett  
Martin Gocke

**1. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. Minutes and Matters Arising**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**3. Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed three new school governors to the meeting, and asked them to introduce themselves to the Forum. The rest of the members of the Forum then introduced themselves.

#### 4. **Election of Governors**

A report on the results of the ballot to find new members for the Forum had been circulated and was introduced. Three of the four new members were present: Brian Fries, Secondary School Governor, and Kelvin Menon and Tony Reading, Primary School Governors. These had been appointed to the Forum for a period of four years, together with Orrie Dempsey, Secondary School Governor, who was not present at the meeting.

#### 5. **Extended Services Budgets**

Graham Symonds, Extended Services Co-ordinator, Children, Young People and Learning, introduced the report, which had been circulated, and asked for the Forum's consideration of the recommendations.

Mr Symonds explained that the funding for Extended Services was grant-based and ran on a three year cycle, which would end in March 2011. He drew the Forum members' attention to the summary table under 5.1 of the report, explaining that there would be insufficient funds in the Area-Based Grant for 2010/11 for the delivery of extended services. He suggested that there was an option to pare down the level of activity but continue to fund with the balance coming from Standard Funds, which would increase over the three-year period.

With regard to Family Support Advisers, Mr Symonds told the meeting that these workers provided excellent additional support, giving children a better chance to benefit from learning. These were part-funded by schools, and most schools in Bracknell Forest have FSAs. He asked that the Forum consider funding the salary contributions and support of FSAs for 2009-10 and 2010-11 from the Standards Fund, and in 2010-11 also to pay from this fund for the co-ordinator time supporting FSAs.

Mr Symonds reminded the Forum that at a previous meeting they had agreed an approach for piloting the DCSF "Disadvantage Subsidy". In Bracknell Forest this was known as the Activity Bursary and it offered to children from economically disadvantaged families, in full-time education, a subsidy so that they could attend leisure and recreational activities that would otherwise be denied them. The intention of the pilot was to increase self-esteem and confidence amongst this group, resulting in improvements in attainment, attendance and behaviour. The funding for the pilot scheme had come from a separate grant from the Standard Fund, and this was being spent in schools in the area south of the town centre, and the pilot scheme was being monitored. Mr Symonds asked that the Forum support the recommendation to increase provision and funding for school/cluster administration of the Activity Bursary and extended services already established, and in 2010-11 to provide for co-ordinator time supporting school/cluster work to be funded through the Standards Fund.

The Chairman thanked Mr Symonds for his report, and invited questions. Points raised included:

- Concern that the Area Steering Group funding would be reduced, although ASG responsibilities would be increasing in the next year. ASGs would need to bid for funding in future, and this would be a challenge and require additional staff time to achieve. Mr Symonds agreed that it would have been better to have funding maintained to 2011.

- Turnover of Family Support Advisers was quite high; this was seen as a healthy sign that staff were enjoying the work, were empowered and well supported, and the turnover was largely caused by advisers moving between schools.
- Tony Reading suggested that for future reports it would be helpful to have in the summary table an expression of amounts in the summary table as percentages of the overall grant.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Forum agreed:

- i. That the increased Standards Fund allocation in 2010-2011 should fund part-year staffing, operational costs and overheads costs;
- ii. In 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 to fund the salary contributions and support of FSAs through the Standards Fund and in 2010-2011 that co-ordinator time supporting FSAs also be funded through this route.

In 2009-10 and 2010-11 to

- iii. increase in schools the provision for, and funding of, school/cluster administration of the Activity Bursary and extended services already established;
- iv. provide for some centralised administration of the Activity Bursary to work with school colleagues to achieve economies of scale when working with leisure and recreational providers;
- v. In 2010-11 to provide for co-ordinator time supporting school/cluster work to also be funded through the Standards Fund;

[Graham Symonds left the meeting]

## 6. **The Schools Budget: 2009-10 monitoring and 2010-11 preparations**

Paul Clark, Head of Finance, Performance and Resources, presented the Schools Budget, which had been circulated. He updated members of the Forum on the current position of the 2009-10 Schools Budget, and asked them to note a small number of budget changes agreed by the Executive Member which had resulted in additional allocations, as shown in Annex A.

In terms of monitoring the current years' budget, although the forecast showed a surplus, it was difficult at this stage of the school year to allocate any of this surplus as it was too early to see trends developing. There was still potential for growth in high cost, volatile Special Educational Need spending, with high cost placements and associated support costs.

There had been a reduction of £94,000 in government grant income for schools, and this was due to an over estimate of the number of children in full-time early years education, and an over estimate of numbers of children in non-maintained schools.

Mr Clark then moved to the 2010-11 Budget; this was the last year of a three year cycle. He asked the Forum to agree a short consultation to be undertaken with schools for information on pressures for next year. Once collated, the information would be used in a second consultation to prioritise pressures to aid decision-making should there be insufficient funds to meet all anticipated cost increases. A further

consultation was recommended which would allow the Acting Director of Children, Young People and Learning to undertake a consultation on financial matters in two areas, should this be required. The first area would be funding for additional education needs, to find a new method of allocating funds following the abandonment of Key Stage 3 tests on which allocation was previously based. The second area would be allocation of deprivation funding: a significant reduction in free school meals claims, on which previous years' deprivation funding had been based, required further analysis to produce options for allocating funds in 2010-11. This would enable indicative budgets for 2010-11 to be given to schools before the end of the year.

The Chairman thanked Mr Clark for his report, and invited questions. Discussion followed which covered:

- The possible overspend on SEN – Mr Clark explained that the budget had been set a year ago, and some children went to different establishments with varying costs than those anticipated in the budget.
- Free School Meals – the Forum members made various suggestions of why the take-up of Free School Meals had dropped over the past two years. Mr Clark indicated that he did not have access to individual schools data to see if paid meal numbers had also fallen in secondary schools as all schools operate their own contracts, so it was difficult to discover why there had been a drop. In response to a question about funding schools for deprivation using FSM data instead of the Index of Multiple Deprivation, Mr Clark told the meeting that the IMD was now out of date as it had last been published in 2004, and that the Forum had undertaken a significant review of measures of deprivation in 2007 and concluded that FSM was the most appropriate measure for Bracknell Forest.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Forum

- i. Noted the final 2009-10 Schools Budget as agreed by the Executive Member;
- ii. Agreed that the forecast underspend for the 2009-10 Schools Budget, currently estimated at £0.128m should remain unallocated pending review at the end of the autumn term;
- iii. Agreed that the Acting Director of Children, Young People and Learning be authorised to distribute:
  - a. A consultation paper to schools seeking views of potential budget pressures for 2010-11 and their relative importance;
  - b. A consultation paper to schools on financial matters, should this be required;
  - c. Indicative 2010-11 budgets to schools, up to the level of available resources, should there be insufficient time for the Forum to consider relevant information.

7. **Education and Children's Services Financial Benchmarking: 2009-10 original budget data**

This information item, which had been circulated, was introduced by Paul Clark. Mr Clark told the members that the information given was provided each year to the Forum, based on national bench-marking data. The tables which had also been

circulated made comparisons with Bracknell Forest's closest statistical neighbours. The information given on these spreadsheets was open to interpretation as it was gleaned from forms filled in by the Local Authorities involved. Members should be aware that all government funding received for schools was spent on the Schools Budget with no diversions to other areas.. Therefore, any difference between spend in Bracknell Forest on a particular service areas and our neighbours reflected different priorities in spending, as agreed each year by the Forum.

The Chairman thanked Mr Clark for the report, and invited questions.

Tony Reading asked about the higher spend on Bracknell Forest schools in financial difficulty compared to our statistical neighbours. Paul Clark told the meeting that the Bracknell Forest allocation was made in agreement with the Schools Forum for two schools which were in financial difficulties. This reflected changes schools could go through – a drop in pupil numbers could lead to a deficit and a request for additional support. Keith Grainger remarked that he saw it as a positive that Bracknell Forest had it in the budget to provide support. Many LAs he knew of did not have this support in their budgets, and Mr Clark told the meeting that if Bracknell Forest did not allow in the budget for this, schools would have to manage the difficulties themselves.

**8. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

**9. Date of Future Meetings**

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 10 December. If there is insufficient business, the Forum members will be notified.

**CHAIRMAN**