

**SCHOOLS FORUM
28 JANUARY 2010
4.30 - 6.00 PM**



Present:

Mr George Clement, Voice
Mrs Maureen Beadsley, Secondary School Governors
Brian William Francis, Bracknell Forest Schools
Brian Fries, Secondary School Governors
Ed L Glasson, Bracknell Forest Schools
Keith Grainger, Garth Hill Secondary School
Joanna Quinn, Wooden Hill Primary School
Tony Reading, Primary School Governors
Mrs Anne Shillcock, Special Education Governor
John Throssell, Bracknell Forest Schools

In Attendance:

Martin Gocke, Acting Director, Children, Young People and Learning
Bob Welch, Chief Advisor - Learning and Achievement
David Watkins, Chief Officer, Performance and Resources
Paul Young, Head of Finance, Performance and Resources

Apologies for absence were received from:

Gordon Cunningham
Orrie Dempsey
Robert Elsey
Steve Lambert

10. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

Apologies were received from Gordon Cunningham, Steve Lambert, Bob Elsey and Orrie Dempsey.

11. Declarations of Interest

Gordon Anderson declared an interest as he was a member of the temporary Governing Body at Jennett's Park School. He agreed not to enter into discussion on the item concerning the Schools Budget proposals.

12. Minutes and Matters Arising

Gordon Anderson pointed out that his name had not been listed under apologies for the meeting on 22 October. With this amendment, it was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

13. **Broadband and internet services for schools**

Bob Welch, Chief Advisor - Learning and Achievement, introduced the report on Broadband and Internet services for schools. He told the Forum that the internet was used in schools for teaching, learning and communication. The contract for provision of these services would end this year, and the Council was looking to improve provision to Primary schools at a speed of 10 mbs, and to Secondary schools at a speed of 100 mbs, and these improvements were based on increasing use in schools. The current centrally organised and managed contract had delivered a good service and no schools had indicated that they wish not to be included in the new arrangements.

The Council had invited firms to tender for the contract, and four providers had been shortlisted. There was a Service Level Agreement between all schools and the LA for the provision of a broadband internet service. The funding for this provision came from the schools revenue budgets and a DCSF IT grant; it was hoped that the improvements could be met for a similar cost but with an improved service. Some technical improvements would be made, and there was likely to be a need for some digging to put in cables for some primary schools which currently had a copper wire connection. The contract out to tender was for providing cabling into the school sites. The improved service would be faster, more robust, heavily filtered, and with an escalation system if things went wrong.

A further paper will be prepared for the Schools Forum with details of the outcome of the procurement exercise, the levels of service provision, costs to schools and other relevant matters.

The Forum **RESOLVED**

- (i) to agree the arrangements for the procurement of the broadband and internet contract for schools;
- (ii) that the 2010-11 Harnessing Technology Grant be retained by the LA to the value sufficient to fund the associated capital works arising from the new contract.

14. **Bracknell Forest Council Proposals for the Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF)**

The Head of Finance, Performance and Resources introduced the Council's proposals for the Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF). The circulated papers gave the background to the initial proposals and the changes now being suggested, with a presentation at the meeting outlining the key issues. Information papers have previously been presented to the Forum, and it was now proposed that the early years funding formula would have a single hourly base rate, which would aid financial planning, and include top-ups where providers met the qualifying criteria for deprivation (a mandatory requirement), quality (as measured through staff qualifications), and increased flexibility of provision.

The Forum heard that there had been good engagement with providers, and following the consultation, analysis of the results had been undertaken, and some improvements had been identified that should be built into the Formula. All of the proposals in the report were supported by the Provider Representative Group.

Mrs Shillcock commended the staff for their excellent work, and was informed, in response to her question about whether there would be any transitional funding, that the Council would protect those who would be losing the most by phasing the changes over three years. There would also be a sustainability fund to act as a safety net, and there had been recognition from the providers that this was the best overall scheme available. In response to a question about the qualification issue, Karen Frost, Early Years Manager, told the Forum that those who wanted to improve their qualifications could attend courses as there were currently 100% bursaries available for training needs.

The Forum **RESOLVED**

- (a) That the responses to the consultation proposals on the Bracknell Forest Council Early Years Single Funding Formula at Annexes A and B be NOTED together with the summary of outcomes and key comments at paragraphs 5.9 to 5.27;
- (b) That the Bracknell Forest Council Early Years Single Funding Formula should be as set out in the consultation document, amended for the changes detailed in paragraphs 5.31 to 5.38;
- (c) That the proposals for the other finance related matters that were supported through the responses to the consultation as set out in paragraph 5.8 be AGREED;
- (d) That the financial implications envisaged, based on 2008-09 data as set out in paragraphs 5.39 to 5.42 be included in the proposals for the 2010-11 Schools Budget;
- (e) That an application be made to the DCSF for the Early Years Single Funding Formula to be implemented in April 2010 through the Pathfinder route (paragraph 5.47).

15. 2010-11 Schools Budget Proposals and other financial items

The Head of Finance, Performance and Resources introduced the report on the Schools Budget proposals, which had been circulated. He told the meeting that the Forum was asked to review and comment on the preliminary budget proposals from the Council, and to identify any further work which needed to be done before final decisions would be taken on the budget at the February meeting..

The Schools budget was funded by government grant, who set the amount of funding to be received by the Council, was ring-fenced, and clearly defined. It was published in three year periods, and for 2010-11, it was proposed that the funding would rise by 4.6% per pupil. Priorities were set by national government but each LA can determine to where resources are allocated.

An estimate of the increase in funds had been undertaken, and this would be adjusted when more up to date data is available in February. To allow for the management of potential budget risks, £0.240m had been set aside and would not be allocated for spending. To help plan spending priorities, the Forum had agreed a budget strategy, and this had been used by the Council in formulating the proposals. This had been aligned to the majority wishes of schools, as set out in responses to the Financial Consultation that were undertaken in November as part of the budget planning process. This allowed schools to receive indicative budgets last year to help with their initial budget setting processes.

At this stage of building the budget, the preliminary proposals allow for all unavoidable pressures, the new developments identified by schools and £0.080m of new funding to be added for administrative pressures as requested at the December Headteachers meeting. After these allocations, there remained £0.175m of funding outstanding that was also allocated to schools.

The Forum agreed that the proposals being made by the Council were supported and that no more work was required before final decisions would be taken in February.

In response to questions from Forum members, it was reported that the estimated number of pupils for 2010-11 would be around 14,500, but precise numbers could not yet be confirmed and therefore the estimated income to the Schools Budget had been reduced by 55 pupils as a contingency for error or unexpected cost increases. On the question regarding whether meals provided under the Caterhouse contract had increased over the last year, this data was now available and over the year indicated a 17% increase in meals provided. On this basis, it is appropriate to retain the £0.020m saving proposed on this item in line 1 of Table 4.

The final question asked if, in view of the recession, provision had been made for the financial impact arising from the probable increase in free school meals provision and it was confirmed that a provisional £0.060m had been set aside for this purpose.

The Chairman asked Forum members to support the Council in the proposed recommendations, and it was unanimously **RESOLVED**

- (i) That the estimated increase in income of £2.895m as set out in Line 13 of Table 2 (paragraph 5.19) be NOTED.
- (ii) That by applying the agreed budget objectives to the estimated level of available resources, that funding for the following budget proposals be SUPPORTED:
 - a) the unavoidable budget pressures estimated at £2.053m as set out in Table 3 (paragraph 5.23);
 - b) the economies and new budget developments estimated at £0.841m as set out in Table 4 (paragraph 5.29);
 - c) the £0.036m budget pressure relating to the Education Health Partnership and families facing domestic abuse at line 9 of Table 4 be classified as a Combined Services Budget (paragraph 5.32);
 - d) the inflation allowances set out in Annex F, the cost of which is included in the pressures and developments listed in Tables 3 and 4;
- (iii) That the annual uplift in payment to Early Years providers be set at the average increase in per pupil funding received by schools through the Funding Formula, currently estimated at 3.3% (paragraph 5.33).
- (iv) That to set the proposed budget, it was NOTED that the Council was likely to seek permission to exceed the central expenditure limit (paragraph 5.53).
- (v) That the following changes to school funding arrangements be AGREED:
 - a) Funding allocated to secondary schools based on test results moves over time to use 5 years of Key Stage 2 data (paragraph 5.45);

- b) Funding allocated to secondary schools based on pupil eligibility to a free school meal continue to be based on January 2008 data, pending review from the 2010 census which may indicate a further amendment (paragraph 5.47);
- (vi) That funding adjustments be made to the Kennel Lane Special School budget at the point of any changes in Band 5 pupils occur, rather than adjusting only from the termly census returns (paragraph 5.49);
- (vii) That the Minimum Funding Guarantee payment to Brakenhale, currently estimated at £0.171m, be phased out in equal amounts over the next three years, with the savings re-distributed within the Schools Budget (paragraph 5.52).
- (viii) That the arrangements in place for the following are AGREED as appropriate (paragraph 5.59):
 - a. provisions for statemented pupils.
 - b. pupil referral units and other education out of school.
 - c. arrangements for insurance.
 - d. administrative arrangements for the allocation of central government grants.
 - e. arrangements for free school meals.
- (ix) That the extent to which the Forum be expected to be requested to exercise its statutory powers be NOTED (paragraph 5.61).
- (x) In order that final budgets reflect the most up to date data, it was NOTED that there would be a need to revisit any preliminary budget decisions agreed now in February (paragraph 5.68).
- (xi) Any further work required by the Forum in respect of the 2010-11 budget be AGREED now (paragraph 5.68).
- (xii) The Forum should note the potential budget pressures that could arise in 2011-12 (paragraphs 5.62 to 5.66).

16. **Local Authority Budget Proposals for 2010-11**

The Chief Officer: Performance and Resources introduced the report, which had been circulated and was divided between proposals relating to revenue and those relating to capital.

Regarding the revenue budget, the Forum was asked to note that with the economic downturn, the Council's revenue had suffered with less income from leisure and car parking, and lower interest on Bracknell Forest Council's investments and that in order for the Council to balance its budget, £3.2m of economies are required. Annex A listed the department commitments, and Annex B gave proposed developments and economies in the department.

The capital budget set out Council-funded items for the department, which amounted to £1.065m, with individual scheme proposals set out in Annex C. In addition, a significant amount was being received by the department through capital grants, which were ring-fenced for specific purposes, and these were outlined in the accompanying report.

In response to questions, the Chief Officer explained that although there was Section 106 money available, it was not yet clear where this would be spent; it might be earmarked for an area, but not yet designated to particular projects within that area, and although some of this might come to education, the infrastructure projects would also need funding. He also explained that if the money earmarked for Kennel Lane School was not used by the end of the period, it would be reallocated. He also reminded the Forum that figures in the report were indicative figures, and with regard to proposals around schools capital work, would need to be confirmed and planning permission sought.

The Forum **RESOLVED** that it had no comments on the 2010/11 budget proposals of the Executive in respect of the Children, Young People and Learning Department for:

- i. The revenue budget (Annex B), and
- ii. The capital programme (Annex C) be passed on to the Executive member.

17. **Any Other Business**

Ed Glasson asked about the level of exclusions within Bracknell Forest schools, and how they compared with other education authorities. The Head of Finance, Performance and Resources told the Forum that this information was not readily available, but he would add the information to the minutes of the meeting for circulation. Mr Glasson asked that it be added as an agenda item to a future meeting for discussion about numbers and the costs of setting up an exclusion unit.

18. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The Head of Finance, Performance and Resources reminded the Forum that the next meeting would take place on 25 February 2010, and at that meeting the members would be asked to make decisions to go to the Executive Member and that these would be based on the proposals outlined in this report.