

**SCHOOLS FORUM
12 MARCH 2015
4.30 - 5.10 PM**



Present:

Schools Members

Liz Cook, Secondary Head Representative
Ed Essery, Secondary School Governor
Brian Fries, Secondary School Governor
Martin Gocke, Pupil Referral Unit Representative
John McNab, Secondary School Governor
Debbie Smith, Secondary Head Representative
David Stacey, Primary School Governor
Beverley Stevens, Academy School Representative
John Throssell, Primary School Governor (Vice-Chairman)

Non-Schools Members:

George Clement, Union Representative (Chairman)

Apologies for absence were received from:

Sue Barber, Primary School Governor
Liz Cole, Primary School Representative
Keith Grainger, Secondary Head Representative
David Matika, Primary School Governor
Tony Reading, Primary School Governor
Trudi Sammons, Primary School Representative
Anne Shillcock, Special Education Representative

27. Declarations of Interest

Brian Fries declared an interest in respect of Item 5 as a governor of Easthampstead Park School.

28. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2015 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

- In relation to Item 23: 'Martin Gocke suggested that some pupils at Kennel Lane School could have been placed in mainstream schools and queried whether mainstream schools could be facilitated to be able to meet higher needs. This suggestion would be considered further' would be changed to 'Martin Gocke asked whether it would be more appropriate for Kennel Lane Special School to admit a higher proportion of children with the most severe needs with fewer admissions of pupils with relatively low needs. This suggestion would be considered further by the Council'.

Matters Arising

There was an update relating to the 2015-16 Local Authority budget proposals reported to the last meeting relating to the capital programme. In February, the Department for Education (DfE) announced updated capital allocations to local authorities for the three year period 2015-2018. This confirmed £30.2m to the Council as follows:

- Funding for school places via the Basic Needs Grant of £6.47m in 2015/16, £10.03m in 2016-17 and £7.12m in 2017-18. This showed an increase in previously announced allocations for 2015-16 and 2016-17 of £9.4m. The 2017-18 allocation was a new allocation with the Local Authority previously planning for £3m.
- Planned Maintenance for improving school buildings would be £2.106m. This was an increase of £0.279m on the amount received in 2014-15. Local authorities had been informed that they could expect similar levels of funding for maintenance each year through to 2017-18.
- A new school kitchen grant of £0.32m. This related to providing a kitchen at Fox Hill Primary and Wildmoor Heath Primary and would mean that all mainstream schools had their own kitchen and would not require food to be transported in.
- The two secondary schools with the worst overall condition rating, Brakenhale and Edgbarrow, would be subject to improvement through the Priority Schools Building Programme 2. Precise works to be undertaken had yet to be confirmed by the DfE and would follow from site visits to each school later this year. These works were likely to be undertaken by the DfE directly and were not expected to result in a grant allocation for the Local Authority to complete the improvements.

In light of the additional funding allocations, the Local Authority was reviewing plans for school expansions and would present an update report on proposals to the Forum at the end of the summer. Overall this was good news with regard to funding allocations and this helped with capital requirements.

29. Proposals for the 2015-16 Early Years and High Needs Block Elements of the Schools Budget

The Forum considered a report which sought comments from members on proposals from the Council for the 2015-16 Early Years and High Needs Block elements of the Schools Budget. There were a small number of decisions for the Forum to consider in line with the statutory funding framework.

As previously reported, there was much pressure in the area of high needs and with the DfE still to confirm the exact level of funding, this made for a difficult budget setting exercise. Nevertheless, proposals were presented that were very much in accordance with the outline proposals presented to the Forum in January, together with details of where net savings of £0.2m would be made on the range of support services available to high needs pupils that was needed to fund cost increases on pupil placements. A high needs budget of £13.829m was proposed.

In respect of the Early Years budget, again the precise amount of funding had yet to be confirmed by the DfE as allocations were based on a mix of January 2015 and January 2016 take up of the free entitlement to early years childcare and education. However, based on local authority estimates of take up, plus new income from the Early Years Pupil Premium, a budget of £5.183m was proposed. Within this, there

were a number of proposals to reset budgets based on current demand and the most important priorities in 2015-16.

The Forum **AGREED** that:

1. The Executive Member make the following decisions:

For the Early Years Block funded budgets:

- i. That funding rates for the free entitlement to early years education and childcare for 2, 3 and 4 year olds remain unchanged from those paid in the 2014-15 financial year (paragraph 5.14);
- ii. The total initial budget is set at £5.183m, it incorporates the changes set out in the supporting information, and relevant budgets are therefore updated to those set out in Annex 2.

For the High Needs Block funded budgets:

- iii. The total initial budget is set at £13.829m, it incorporates the changes set out in the supporting information, and relevant budgets are therefore updated to those set out in Annex 4.
2. In its role of statutory decision maker, that there are appropriate arrangements in place for:
 - i. Early years provision (paragraph 5.15);
 - ii. The education of pupils with SEN (paragraph 5.36), and
 - iii. The use of pupil referral units and the education of children otherwise than at school (paragraph 5.36).

30. Update to the Scheme for Financing Schools

The Forum received a report which sought members' agreement to proposals to update the Scheme for Financing Schools in respect of the control on surplus school balances and the deadline to submit budget plans to the authority. The scheme was a legally binding document and there was further information on proposals to re-word the scheme at 5.8 of the report.

The Maintained School Representatives of the Forum **AGREED** revisions to the Scheme for Financing schools, to be effective from 1 April 2015, in respect of:

- i. The control on surplus school balances, as set out in Annex 1; and
- ii. Subject to less than 10% of schools rejecting the proposed change, the deadline to submit budget plans to the authority, as set out in Annex 2.

31. 2014-15 Funding Allocations to Schools From Budgets Centrally Managed by the LA and Other Related Matters

The Forum received a report which presented information to members on the in-year allocation of funds to schools through School Specific Contingencies and other centrally managed budgets that are funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and in the first instance centrally managed by the council. Additionally, a request for a funding allocation to Warfield CE Primary School in 2015-16 was made to support the Council's school places expansion programme. All allocations to schools were in accordance with policies previously approved by the Schools Forum.

One claim for exceptional funding was received during 2014-15 relating to site costs associated with the expansion of the Pines Primary School where the Primary Professional Centre had been returned to school use to accommodate current and future increases in pupil numbers. The school was occupying the refurbished accommodation on a phased basis, meaning premises related costs were currently being incurred for a building that was significantly larger than required.

The Forum:

NOTED the following funding allocations to schools, made in accordance with approved policies, in respect of;

- i. significant in-year increases in pupil numbers (paragraph 5.15);
- ii. schools required to meet the Key Stage 1 Class Size regulations (paragraph 5.19);
- iii. new and expanding schools (paragraph 5.20);
- iv. those with a disproportionate number of SEN pupils (paragraph 5.23);
- v. support to schools in financial difficulties (paragraphs 5.29 to 5.32).

AGREED:

- vi. an initial exceptional funding allocation of up to £15,000 for The Pines Primary School (paragraph 5.8);
- vii. that a similar approach to funding the Pines Primary School is taken in future years, until the refurbished accommodation is fully occupied (paragraph 5.7);
- viii. that no changes need to be made to the existing criteria used to distribute centrally managed funds to schools (paragraph 5.33);
- ix. that £12,000 is allocated to Warfield Primary CE School in 2015-16 to support the planning and preparation work required for the school to expand by 1 FE for September 2016 (paragraph 5.37).

32. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The next meetings of the Schools Forum are scheduled at 4.30pm in the Council Chamber at Easthampstead House for:

Thursday 23 April 2015
Thursday 18 June 2015
Thursday 16 July 2015

Thursday 17 September 2015
Thursday 22 October 2015
Thursday 10 December 2015

Thursday 14 January 2016
Thursday 10 March 2016
Thursday 21 April 2016

If there was no business to discuss, meetings would be cancelled. It was likely that the April and June meetings of the Forum would be cancelled but the July meeting was likely to take place. Forum members would be notified.

CHAIRMAN