

**SCHOOLS FORUM
14 JANUARY 2016
4.30 PM**



Present:

Schools Members

Liz Cook, Secondary Head Representative
Karen Davis, Primary Head Representative
Keith Grainger, Secondary Head Representative
John McNab, Secondary School Governor
Trudi Sammons, Primary School Representative
Anne Shillcock, Special Education Representative
Debbie Smith, Secondary Head Representative
David Stacey, Primary School Governor
Beverley Stevens, Academy School Representative
Grant Strudley, Primary Head Representative
John Throssell, Primary School Governor (Vice-Chairman)

Non-Schools Members:

George Clement, Union Representative (Chairman)

Apologies for absence were received from:

Brian Fries, Secondary School Governor
Martin Gocke, Pupil Referral Unit Representative

10. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

11. Minutes and Matters Arising

It was noted that the Terms of Reference for the SEN Panel and the admissions criteria for Rise@GHC were under review and would be re-issued in due course.

A consultation had taken place before Christmas in respect of two changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools in respect of school permission to borrow money and the register of business interests. It was noted that all 18 schools that responded had approved the changes.

The forum noted that the expected long term funding policy for new and expanding schools had been deferred due to uncertainty around the precise timing of when the schools would be required and the outcomes of the National Funding Formula for Schools that the DfE intend to introduce from April 2017. As a consequence, the Council is proposing a funding solution for one year only.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2015 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

12. **Schools Forum: Operational and good practice guidance**

The Forum **COMMENTED** on the responses from the Council to the self-assessment toolkit returns with the focus on the areas where less than 50% of respondents agreed that best practice was being met:

- The dedicated website link for the Schools Forum was considered to be difficult to find from the BFC public website homepage and this would be addressed through the current re-design of the BF public website which is in progress.
- It was not clear to observers of the Forum who the attendees were or what body they represented. In response to this, it was noted that name plates had now been introduced but would be amended to include the body being represented.
- An induction pack or training programme was not consistently available to new members. In response to this, it was noted that a new induction pack covering key responsibilities and duties was being developed for new members and would be completed before the next meeting of the forum.
- With respect to whether members actively canvassed views and objectively represented their peer group at the Forum, the responses indicated that Head teachers felt this was being met. However, governors responded this was either not being met or didn't know if it was being met. The Forum agreed this was an area of improvement and discussed setting up an e-mail group to include all school governors and a governors forum.

13. **Local Authority Budget Proposals for 2016/17**

As part of the council's consultation process, the Forum was presented with a report on the local authority budget proposals for 2016/17 which was based on the expected outcomes from the Local Government Financial Settlement. David Watkins, Chief Officer, Children, Young People and Learning (CYPL) advised members that the report set out the overall financial arrangements and proposals for next year and that comments were sought in particular on the proposed changes for CYPL in respect of the revenue budget and capital programme. The report set out the difficult financial situation facing the council over the medium term with a balanced budget only being possible by making savings of £3.7m with Members yet to decide how the remaining £6m budget gap would be financed either from using reserves, further expenditure reductions, an increase in Council Tax or a mixture of the three options.

Cllr Barnard then provided the Forum with an update on the Council's budget position following the publication of the provisional Local Government Financial Settlement, which was announced after the commencement of the council's consultation process. This confirmed that there would be a much larger reduction in grant allocations to local authorities than previously stated. Furthermore, the settlement included assumptions about how the local authority would increase income from its current level through using the new 2% Adult Social Care Council Tax levy and that additional Council Tax would be due from 950 new house builds in the Borough over the next year when recent experience has shown that a more realistic figure is 350.

In essence, the Council had to find further savings of £2.4m for the year 2016/17 and this would impact on aspects of both revenue and capital budgets managed by CYPL. Officers were currently working through proposals and savings could lead to a

reduction in front-facing work together with a re-phasing of a number of planned projects on the capital programme.

With respect to any impact on front line services within CYPL as a result of necessary savings, Cllr Barnard advised that specialist services that provided help to those with additional support needs and those who were vulnerable or at risk would be protected. More universal services would be reviewed to identify if alternative delivery mechanisms could be implemented via involvement from voluntary organisations or the Town Council. Whilst it was accepted that savings had to be made there was a commitment to provide services to the young people in the Borough that most needed it and that the mental health and wellbeing work already underway would remain a priority. Cllr Barnard advised members that the work to effect the changes that were needed had begun in relation to consultations and employees at risk and that those affected would be contacted within the next week. Cllr Barnard clarified that whilst this meant some posts would be deleted this included existing vacancies that had not been filled. However, no action would be taken until the final budget proposal was made to the Executive on 9 February 2016.

In respect of the savings proposed for CYPL detailed in the published report, Anne Shillcock expressed concern about the potential impact a revised management structure for Children's Centres would have on the delivery of the service. Cllr Barnard said there would be close scrutiny on the Children's Centres and that the change in management structure may mean that outreach and support services would be provided across all four Centres but a commitment would be made to have a presence on all four sites. Cllr Barnard agreed to provide a report on the new management structure to review the impact of the cutbacks once relevant data was available to evaluate the impact and said he would also ask the Scrutiny Panel to look at the effect of the changes.

The Forum also discussed the Schools Music Festival. This event took place every two years and enabled pupils from the Council's Primary schools to participate in a large scale production which linked music, dance and art. Cllr Barnard said the event had a very positive impact across the schools that took part and the cost would remain in the proposed budget. Discussion took place with regard to an alternative funding stream for the event and Wellington College was proposed as a potential source of sponsorship.

In respect of the CYPL proposed capital programme, it was noted by members that a commitment was being made to large scale projects in relation to new and expanding schools whilst some existing services were struggling to be maintained and a number of staff may be at risk of redundancy. David Watkins advised members that the revenue budget and capital programme were entirely separate and that legally, capital money could not be used to support revenue funding.

The Forum was advised that the proposed budget for the capital programme was indicative and subject to change, particularly in respect of phasing of projects and would need to reflect the latest actual market forces relating to the need for new schools that would follow the building programme determined by developers. In relation to new and expanding schools, Liz Cook commented that there was a need to ensure house builders worked on time as their output was interlinked with the schools building programme in terms of meeting future need. The forum was advised that the Council was already in talks with developers on this issue.

Cllr Barnard said the proposed capital programme was the first to be predicated on borrowing but that robust work was being undertaken to ensure that as little as

possible is borrowed to reduce the impact on revenue and to focus on maximum service delivery at the lowest possible cost.

The Forum was advised that the proposed revenue budget for 2016/17 that formed part of the current consultation process would not change unless there were concrete reasons not to proceed and feasible alternative suggestions for savings were made.

Anne Shillcock proposed that members of the Executive were made aware of the concerns of Forum members on the proposed cuts to CYPL services in respect of their long term impact on young people and the potential for future cost increases. All members of the Forum endorsed Anne's proposals.

14. **Proposals for the 2016/17 Schools Block Element of the Schools Budget**

The Forum was presented with a report updating on school funding and to seek comments on proposals from the Council for the 2016-17 Schools Block element of the Schools Budget. Recommendations agreed from this report would form the basis of proposals to be presented to the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning. Thereafter, there was a tight timetable to record the views of the Forum on the report proposals with 21 January 2016 being the deadline for the submission of the actual Funding Formula for Schools to the Department for Education (DfE).

Paul Clark, Head of Departmental Finance, Children Young People and Learning said the current financial climate continues to create difficulties in setting a balanced Schools Budget. This related to the tight financial settlement from the DfE that does not include funding for £2.7m of known cost pressures – equivalent to 3.3% of current spending - and the emerging long term pressure arising from new / expanding schools. To finance the budget changes considered necessary, the Council was proposing a one off draw down of £0.213m from the general balances of the Schools Budget meaning reductions to school budgets were not proposed.

Questions and comments from forum members were received in respect of:

- Was there any information on how the government intended to reduce the local authority role in running schools and remove a number of statutory duties to which officers confirmed that details were outstanding.
- Wasn't it inevitable that school budgets would have to be cut in the future to pay for the diseconomy funding that expanding / new schools would required? Officers commented that the main factor to influence this would be the outcomes of the proposed National Funding Formula for Schools. With the BFC funding rate the 17th lowest out of 151 LAs, it is considered more likely to benefit from this review than to be penalised.
- Would there be issues around providers having insufficient capacity to deliver the required places to meet the anticipated increase from doubling the free entitlement from 15 to 30 hours? Officers commented that plans were in place to meet future need including talks with those nursery providers who share premises with other community service providers.
- The investment of additional resources to increase the average hourly rate childcare providers receive was welcome as existing rates are considered low.
- With a recent report indicating a 20% reduction in SEN pupils, this may offset the additional costs anticipated moving forward from the increase in post-16 SEN numbers as a result of LA responsibilities being extended from age 19 to 25.

The Forum **AGREED** the following recommendations made in the report:

- That the administration arrangements in place in respect of the allocation of central government grants were appropriate and would remain unchanged.
- The budget amounts for each of the services centrally managed by the Council and funded from the School Block DSG.
- That the budget for Schools Block DSG is reset to £66.522m which was an increase of £1.246m to the current budget of £65.276 and that other Schools Block related grants be reset to anticipated 2016-17 amounts.
- To maintain appropriate funding allocations for the most vulnerable pupils, budget allocations to schools in respect of deprivation and low prior attainment should remain at 3.9% and 3.3% respectively of total funding.
- The funding allocations to be paid to new / expanding schools.
- The net £1.459m of budget adjustments were allocated to the budget areas set out in the report as follows:
 - £1.378m into delegated school budgets
 - £0.081m into centrally managed budgets
- The £0.213m shortfall in funding to be financed by a one-off allocation from the year end surplus of £0.609m from the Schools Budget.
- That the requirement to hold £0.51m in general reserves as a contingency provision against unforeseen cost increases was waived again for the 2016-17 budget.
- That the DfE pro forma template of the 2016/17 BF Funding Formula for Schools as set out in Annex 6 of the report be submitted for the 21 January deadline.

The report requested that the Forum **NOTED** the following items:

- That proposals in respect of the Early Years and High Needs Block elements of the Schools Block would be presented for consideration to the Forum at its 10 March meeting when more information would be available in respect of funding and likely spending requirements.
- That a significant budget pressure on the new / expanded schools programme was anticipated that may require future reductions to school budgets.
- The general balances on the Schools Budget were £0.114m below the minimum required level, which would need to be addressed in future budgets.
- The education related outcomes from the Government Spending Review 2015.
- The cost pressures that schools were likely to need to finance from within existing resources, estimated at around 3.3% of current spending levels.

Primary School Representatives **AGREED**:

- To the continued de-delegation of budgets for the services permitted by the DfE.

Secondary School Representatives **AGREED**:

To the continued de-delegation of budgets for the services permitted by the DfE for 2016/17 with a review to be undertaken with secondary schools to determine their longer term requirements on these services.

15. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The next meetings of the Schools Forum were scheduled to take place at 4.30pm in the Council Chamber at Easthampstead House on:

Thursday 10 March 2016

Thursday 21 April 2016

Thursday 16 June 2016

If there was no business to discuss, meetings would be cancelled.

CHAIRMAN