

**SCHOOLS FORUM
13 JANUARY 2022
4.30 - 6.00 PM**



Present:

Martin Gocke, Pupil Referral Unit Representative (Governor) (Chair)
Stuart Matthews, Academy School Representative (Headteacher) (Vice-Chairman)
Sue Butler, Early Years PVI Provider
Liz Cole, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Keith Grainger, Secondary School Representative (Headteacher)
Jo Lagares, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Roger Prew, Primary School Representative (Governor)
Phil Sherwood, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Debbie Smith, Secondary School Representative (Headteacher)
Grant Strudley, Academy School Representative

Observer:

Councillor Dr Gareth Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People & Learning
(Observer)

Apologies for absence were received from:

Jenny Baker, Special School Representative
Karen Davis, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Elizabeth Savage, Academy School Representative (Headteacher)
Richard Stok, Primary School Representative (Governor)

216. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

The Chair highlighted that Debbie Smith had indicated this would be her last Forum meeting as a Secondary School Representative as Sandhurst Secondary School would have converted to an Academy by the time of the next meeting. The Chair thanked Debbie for her contributions to the Forum. Paul Clark added that he was due to review the structure of the Forum and would bring some proposals to the meeting in March relating to the Membership Structure as well as plans to fill vacant posts before September. The Chair expressed that Debbie would be welcome to stay as a member of the Forum. Debbie Smith advised she would consider that but would like to open it up to other academy colleagues.

217. Declarations of Interest

Keith Grainger declared an affected interest regarding Item 6 (2022-23 Proposals for the Local Authority Budget) in relation to the capital programme associated with Garth Hill College.

Councillor Barnard also declared an affected interest regarding Item 6 as a governor of Garth Hill College and Item 5 as a governor of Warfield Primary School and

advised that the Leader of the Council Paul Bettison would take forward any decisions relating to that item if applicable.

218. **Minutes and Matters Arising**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Forum on 9 December 2021 be approved as a correct record.

Arising from minute 212, Paul Clark had not had an update from Chris Taylor in relation to correcting and reissuing the information that had been shared with the Headteachers regarding the Local Plan. Cheryl Eyre added that Chris Taylor was aware of this and would ensure that correct information was included in the strategic document presented to the Forum in March.

Action: Chris Taylor

The Chair asked if the Special Educational Needs (SEN) sufficiency document had been created. Paul Clark confirmed it had and that it would be presented to the Forum in March as part of the Capital Strategy and the School Places Plan.

The Chair expressed his surprise that there was to be no update on the High Needs Block (HNB) at this meeting as the Forum had asked for regular updates and nothing had been presented for a short while. The Chair was further disappointed that there was no item on HNB funding for 2022/23 on this agenda as reports had been received on the Early Years Block Element of the Schools Budget (Item 4), the Schools Block and Central School Services Block Elements of the Schools Budget (Item 5), and the Local Authority Budget (Item 6). This left the HNB funding update for the meeting in March, and the Forum had previously expressed concern about that as it presented the Forum with a "fait accompli". Debbie Smith seconded that view.

The Chair requested an update on the banding matrix. Cheryl Eyre advised that Jenny Baker had presented the descriptors to the subgroup and then a demonstration had been presented to the SEN Service. Descriptors were being looked at by Mandy Wimbush and Veronica McDonald (Learning Support and ASD teachers) and that piece of work was ongoing. Once completed, the descriptors would be handed to Paul Clark to work on modelling the finance for each band and this would then go back to the subgroup. Cheryl Eyre had proposed that the banding matrix be incorporated into each individual Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) review to ensure that the agreed banding matrix would be appropriate for each individual child, as opposed to transferring all the children at once to the new bands. This was due to commence in March / April 2022 and the Headteachers had been fully updated on this.

The Chair asked for an update on the six project workstreams to address the HNB deficit budget that had been presented to the Forum at the meeting in November 2021. Regarding the governance framework and process, Cheryl Eyre explained that two project managers were working on that; putting details on the database, testing the system, and proofing the system to highlight any gaps. That piece of work was on track to finish by the end of March 2022 and the system would be ready to use at the beginning of April 2022. Training would be required for schools. The second workstream was around building relationships and the SEN service had been having regular meetings with Headteachers and SENCOs to ensure all schools were informed of developments. The third workstream related to service and process reviews and Cheryl Eyre updated that the SEN restructure had been signed off by the Chief Executive. The next stage was to commence the HR consultation process with

unions and staff. Once this process had finished, the plans would then be shared with all stake holders and the recruitment drive would commence. The Chair asked whether that meant recruitment would no longer start this month. Cheryl Eyre confirmed that there was some delay in sign-off, partly due to the Ofsted SEND inspection. However, this work would now move at pace. Cheryl Eyre had started to engage some of the high-quality agency workers in discussions about becoming employed by the Council. In the previous structure, roles and responsibilities were not captured clearly and the salaries were not aligned to market rates. This had been rectified. The Council had now started a restructure of the wider Children's Support Services within which the SEN team sat. One gap that has been identified was the pathway to adulthood provision for post-16 and this needed improving. The backlog of incomplete EHCPs was due to be resolved by the end of January and by February it was expected that the team would be hitting timescales; the service had done a lot of work to get to this position. The fourth workstream concerned data and Chris Taylor had been developing the SEN sufficiency tool. The fifth workstream related to developing the market for SEND / Alternative Provision (AP) and support. All schools with Specially Resourced Provisions (SRP) had received their Service Level Agreements (SLA). A clear process had been established and every school would be given a pack on SRPs and the panel process. Drop-in sessions and training would be made available to ensure clarity. The sixth workstream was around commissioning and all providers had been quality assured apart from two which had not yet completed the paperwork; children would not be placed with those providers until they had been quality assured.

219. **2022-23 Proposals for the Early Years Block Element of the Schools Budget**

The Forum considered a report which sought agreement to proposals for the 2022-23 Early Years budgets, including the values to be attributed to the Bracknell Forest Council Early Years Funding Formula (EYFF).

Cherry Hall explained that the formula had already been considered by the Forum during the meeting in December but at that stage the monetary values had not been available. DfE had subsequently confirmed that Bracknell Forest Council would see an increase in funding of £0.17 per hour for 3- and 4-year-olds and £0.21 for eligible 2-year-olds. The early years pupil premium (EYPP) was due to increase by £0.07 per hour and the funding rate for the disability access fund (DAF) would increase by £185 per year.

The calculations had been more challenging due to the pandemic which had disrupted participation rates. The outcome was that a weighted average had been used instead of the usual proxy measures.

There was a need to use a share of the increase in the hourly rate to support other parts of the formula such as the deprivation and quality supplements so that they had the right proportion of funds. Therefore, the proposal was that the hourly base rate would increase by £0.15 for 3- and 4-year-olds and by £0.19 for eligible 2-year-olds. The impact of this meant that one provider would see a reduced income of up to 2% whereas all over providers would see an increased income. Cherry Hall explained that this provider was likely to be a childminder and that some childminders could potentially only have one child that was funded over the course of a financial year.

The DfE had confirmed that schools would be allocated additional funding from the Schools Supplementary Grant to cover the increase in employer National Insurance contributions and wider costs. However, private and voluntary sector (PVI) providers would not be eligible to receive this funding and Cherry Hall had raised this apparent funding inequality with the DfE and was awaiting a response.

Sue Butler expressed her frustration that there was an uneven playing field between the maintained sector and the PVI sector. The PVI sector has gone through the same challenges as schools and colleges but with far fewer resources and no support with staff costs. The EY Single Funding Formula had been brought in to give equality but funding for the PVI sector remained inadequate and unfair. Sue Butler feared that, if the sector were to remain underfunded, in 5 years' time there would be no PVI sector.

Councillor Barnard expressed that he understood what Sue Butler was saying on behalf of the PVI sector and that he was willing to present any evidence to the DfE to support the need for more financial support. The Forum was sometimes asked to make comments on childcare sufficiency and Councillor Barnard felt it was important for the DfE to understand the impact on the PVI sector. Sue Butler added that the Government had not taken into account the increased cost of providing the hours. Businesses in the PVI sector were unable to pay the salaries that would attract qualified personnel as, once they were qualified, they transferred to the maintained sector where salaries were higher. Cherry Hall added that, apart from two new provisions which had not yet been graded by Ofsted, 100% of provisions within the PVI sector in Bracknell Forest received a grading of good or outstanding in recent inspections. Councillor Barnard invited Sue Butler to email him directly.

Action: Cherry Hall

RESOLVED after consideration of the Early Years Budget proposal from the council
1 to AGREE that for the 2022-23 financial year the LEADER OF THE COUNCIL sets

- i. the Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant income budget at £7.98m (Table 4 of the report);
- ii. the funding rates in the Early Years Funding Formula are as set out in Table 5 of the report; and
- iii. the proposed budgets as set out in Annex 1 of the report; and

2 that the Forum NOTES with concern the lack of the dedicated grant to compensate cost increases for PVI providers that schools will receive and asks the Executive Member for Children, Young People & Learning to make representations to the DfE about addressing this omission in relation to a vital sector accordingly.

220. **2022-23 Proposals for the 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 2022-23 Schools Block (SB) and Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) elements of the Schools Budget.

Paul Clark explained that the report repeated the decisions that the Forum had previously made and brought it all together in one document along with some new information: namely, the confirmed implications from the October 2021 census update. There had been a big increase in the Additional Educational Needs (AEN) factors such as free school meals. Overall, the impact of that increase and all other proposals would be a budget gap of £0.510m if the Council adopted all proposals. This was higher than the usually anticipated budget gap of between £0.2m and £0.3m. Whilst there was additional pressure from AEN, the funding that the Council received would still be based on the AEN eligibilities from October 2020 whereas the

Council had a responsibility to fund schools based on the AEN eligibilities on the October 2021 census.

In order to balance the forecast shortfall on the SB, the Council was proposing to finance the normal funding gap from reserves, with the additional AEN pressures from scaling the NFF rates as follows:

1. to draw down up to £0.182m from the reserves created by the Council to help finance the additional costs of new and expanding schools;
2. to draw down to £0.174m from the unallocated Schools Budget Reserve to support the additional costs of new and expanding schools; and
3. to fund schools at 99.75% of the NFF, with all factors scaled by the same percentage, equivalent to £0.154m.

It was also reported that a new school supplementary grant had been allocated by the DfE to help cover the health and social care levy and other increases in costs. An initial calculation indicated schools would get an average increase in per pupil funding of 3% which was more than the core DfE settlement. Therefore, taken together, on average schools would receive a 5.7% increase in per pupil funding. Costs would also increase next year but at this stage it was difficult to assess that with any accuracy. However, initial assumptions indicated there was sufficient funding to cover those costs.

The Forum expressed concern about rising costs and the uncertainties ahead and asked whether there was any opportunity to look at this again if further information became available. Paul Clark replied that nothing would change in terms of income to be received from the DfE; all that would change were the cost pressures which would be different school by school and each school would have to make decisions about how to spend the money it had available.

RESOLVED

1. in its role as the representative body of schools and other providers of education and childcare, the Forum requests that the Leader of the Council AGREES the following for the 2022-23 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 £84.434m (line 3);
 - b. that the Central School Services Block be set at £0.867m (line 3); and
 - c. the changes to all other budgets that amount to £2.903m (line 18);
 - ii. that the £0.510m resultant funding shortfall will be met from:
 - a. Council Reserves, to the value of £0.182m;
 - b. Schools Budget DSG Reserves, to the value of £0.174m; and
 - c. scaled NFF rates, to the value of £0.154m;
 - iii. that the factors used in the BF Funding Formula for Schools are the same as those used by the DfE for BF in the NFF (Annex 4 of the report);
 - iv. that the units of resource used in the BF Funding Formula for Schools be set at 99.75% of the values used by the DfE in the NFF;
 - v. that the cost of the MFG should be financed by all schools above the average increase in per pupil funding;
 - vi. that the resulting DfE pro forma template of the 2022-23 BF Funding Formula for Schools, as set out in Annex 5 be submitted by the 21 January deadline; and
 - vii. that other Schools Block related grants, including the new Schools Supplementary Grant, be set to the amounts anticipated in 2022-23; 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, are as set out in Annex 2 of the report.

221. **2022-23 Proposals for the Local Authority Budget**

The Forum considered a report which presented for comment a summary of the Council's draft budget proposals for 2022/23 as agreed by the Executive on 14 December 2021, with a particular focus on the impact expected on the People Directorate.

Paul Clark explained that the proposals were published prior to confirmation of the Local Government Financial Settlement so were based on assumptions regarding government funding informed by the 2021 Spending Review. There was an estimated £3m funding gap on the revenue budget, and the report detailed the proposals as to how that would be covered. The second part of the report looked at the capital proposals.

The Chair noted the continued financial support towards the cost of new school places. However, the Chair and other members of the Forum were more concerned about the £20m cumulative HNB deficit and the potential payback period starting in April 2023. Paul Clark explained that it was a national issue and the Government had put in place a three-year period for Local Authorities (LAs) to work towards balancing their budgets and then there would be a further decision around any accumulated deficit. That part had not yet been addressed by the Government and it was unclear what the position would be, but it should be assumed that debt liability would transfer to councils. Councillor Barnard added that there would be a lot of LAs in financial difficulty so there would be a need for the Government to step in.

The Chair felt that the Council was a long way away from a balanced budget. Councillor Barnard expressed that he had genuine confidence that there would be significant changes with the new commissioning strategy. Cheryl Eyre added that the HNB project group had identified the areas of work that were needed to bring the deficit down and there was clarity around where the issues were. Cheryl Eyre was confident that the HNB would be in a far better position within two to three years, as the change programme would take time to have a significant financial benefit. Cheryl Eyre appreciated the support of colleagues in the Schools Forum.

Keith Grainger requested a meeting to get an update on the Garth Hill College capital project as, whilst he appreciated it was a draft proposal, the most recent conversations he had had did not reflect what was set out in the report. Cheryl Eyre confirmed Chris Taylor would set up a meeting with Keith Grainger.

Action: Chris Taylor

Paul Clark explained that the proposals reflected the position at November and there may now be more up to date information. Keith Grainger highlighted that the report was in the public domain and that people could draw the wrong conclusions from it. The Chair added it needed to be corrected before being presented to Council. Councillor Barnard was confident that would happen.

The Forum noted that the Revenue reserves looked very healthy and whilst that suggested prudent management, it seemed to be a large reserve. Councillor Barnard responded that the aim over the 12 months was to set a budget that would balance,

and the reserves provide the ability in year to respond to service pressures as they arose.

The Forum commented that paragraph 5.26 of the report talked about new schools and asked whether any new schools were being opened at this time. Councillor Barnard replied that this may refer to some classes that the Council cannot stop opening, and Paul Clark confirmed that no new schools would be opening.

The Chair noted that the Forum was being requested to comment on the 2022.23 budget proposals of the Executive for the People Directorate in respect of the revenue budget and the capital programme. The Chair asked how to submit those comments. Paul Clark would pass on any comments for inclusion in final proposals. The Forum noted with continuing concern the projected HNB £20m cumulative deficit at the end of the 2022/23 financial year and Bracknell Forest Council's ability to manage any potential payback from April 2023.

Action: Paul Clark

222. Dates of Future Meetings

The next meeting of the Forum would be held at 4.30pm on Thursday 10 March 2022.

CHAIRMAN