

SCHOOLS FORUM
23 JUNE 2022
4.30 - 6.00 PM



Present:

Stuart Matthews, Academy School Representative (Vice-Chairman)
Jenny Baker, Special School Representative
Liz Cole, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Karen Davis, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Nick Gibson, Secondary School Representative (Governor)
Tim Griffith, Academy School Representative
Roger Prew, Primary School Representative (Governor)
Elizabeth Savage, Academy School Representative
Phil Sherwood, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Debbie Smith, Academy School Representative
Richard Stok, Primary School Representative (Governor)
Grant Strudley, Academy School Representative

Observer:

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

Apologies for absence were received from:

Sue Butler, Early Years PVI Provider
Keith Grainger, Secondary School Representative (Headteacher)

234. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

The Forum noted the following new members:

Nick Gibson as a Secondary School Representative (Governor);
Tim Griffith as an Academy School Representative; and
Debbie Smith as an Academy School Representative.

The Chair noted that this was the last meeting for Liz Cole, Phil Sherwood and Richard Stok and thanked them for their service and valuable input to the Forum. This left the Forum with five vacancies for the September meeting and Paul Clark was liaising with relevant parties.

235. Martin Gocke

Martin Gocke sadly passed away on 24 April 2022. Martin had been Chair since December 2018, having been a member of the Forum since 2012 and a long serving education officer prior to leaving the Council. Stuart Matthews, Jenny Baker, Paul Clark, Cheryl Eyre, and Councillor Barnard each made tributes to Martin and the following points were noted:

- Martin has contributed enormously to the lives of the children and young people of Bracknell Forest through all his work within the local authority,

Kennel Lane School, College Hall, Youthline, and as Chair of the Schools Forum.

- Martin originally worked at Berkshire County Council and then Bracknell Forest Council when it became a unitary authority in 1998; at that point, he was one of the assistant directors for education. By the time he retired in 2010, he was the acting Director of Children's Services, so he had responsibility for all children at that time.
- During his time working for the local authority, he looked after the key areas of SEN and education psychology but was also involved in many other services, including setting up the Early Years' service and the Children's Centres, managing the home-school transport service, admissions, education welfare and student finance (which became student loans).
- Martin also chaired the Management Committee at College Hall Pupil Referral Unit which has been consistently graded 'good' in Ofsted inspections, which was noted to be a rare accomplishment.
- Martin was honourable, supportive, and a great advocate for vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people across the Borough.
- Colleagues commented on Martin's assertiveness, charisma, dedication, enthusiasm, integrity, professionalism, respectfulness, and his ability to be balanced and considered. He was described as "the exemplary Chair of the Schools Forum", holding the Council to account on SEND and a range of other issues in a way that was backed by the information and his drive and passion to support children and young people.
- Martin had a presence which was impossible to ignore. He was always the perfect gentleman, his deep knowledge, consideration, and care were testament to a life well lived.
- Martin always had a calmness and assuredness that helped people settle down and helped him get the best out of people he worked with. He took a genuine interest in people and often asked colleagues about their family. Martin never lost sight of the individual.
- Martin's legacy to the Schools Forum was that he led the Forum to become one that thinks and acts in the interests of the children and young people. The Forum expressed a commitment to try and uphold the passion he had to do the best for everybody that he could.

It was agreed to collate the tributes for Martin's widow, Christine.

Action: Stuart Matthews

236. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest. However, the Chair requested members of the Forum to use their discretion to declare any interests if they became evident during discussions later in the meeting, particularly around Item 9 (2021-22 Balances held by Maintained Schools).

237. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Forum on 29 March 2022 be approved as a correct record.

Arising from minute 232, Martin Gocke had discussed with Paul Clark whether an extra meeting of the Forum was necessary to contribute to the School Places Plan and Capacity Strategy, but they concluded that an extra meeting was not necessary. The report was due to be presented to the Executive in July. Cheryl Eyre updated

that the Council has made rapid progress in identifying potential SEND developments. The main part of the Capital Strategy still to be completed was incorporating the final comments from the headteachers but this was on track.

Arising from the meeting held on 10 March 2022, there was an action for the Schools Forum to suggest a roadmap as to what updates it needed prior to January regarding the budget. Stuart Matthews has had conversations with Paul Clark and, as long as information is available from central Government, the Council would provide an outline report by December at the latest so that the Forum could be clear as to what the issues were. That would be overlayed with the Council's own plans and financial situation. Councillor Barnard expressed that it was better to make assumptions about what the Council expected from the Government and then tweak the budget as information is confirmed rather than delay presenting the information.

238. SEND Written Statement of Action

Cheryl Eyre briefed the Forum on the completion and submission of the SEND Written Statement of Action (WSOA). The WSOA was submitted to Ofsted on 7 June 2022 and a response was expected on 21 June, but no response had been received yet. Once the document has been deemed fit for purpose, it would be uploaded on the public Bracknell Forest Council website and could not then be amended. The Council would be expected to deliver against it and would be held to account by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The DfE and CQC were due to monitor progress for a period of 18 months, and it was expected that most actions would be delivered within those 18 months. Some capital projects would be delivered within a 3–5-year period, for example, if there were plans to build a new special school; however, the plans would be made within the 18-month monitoring period and regular progress reports would be made. The final WSOA would be submitted to the Forum when it is approved.

ACTION: Cheryl Eyre

Cheryl Eyre updated that the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) department was still working on the project workstreams and had started identifying what actions could progress to business as usual and what extra resources were needed to facilitate other actions, including co-production with all stakeholders. The work was moving at pace and the Forum would be kept updated. The department was two thirds the way through reviewing the Specially Resourced Provisions (SRPs). The department was also looking at arrangements to expand special school places and a working group has been established to look at the Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) hub. The department has been working with schools and identifying land which could be built on, looking at current and expected Government funding so that opportunities would not be missed. A Capital Board was due to be set up in September to assist with this and representatives from all sectors would be needed to join the Board.

239. SEND Update

The Forum considered a report providing an update on SEND developments and consideration of the implications of the SEND Green Paper proposals for the High Needs Block (HNB) and to identify where it aligns with the long-term proposals of the Capital Place Planning and SEND Strategy. Comments were being sought to provide input to the consultation document and therefore ensure that Schools Forum views were captured.

Cheryl Eyre highlighted that many of the Council's proposals aligned with the SEND Green Paper proposals. This empowered and supported the department with a mandate to continue with the actions set out in the WSOA, as long as the Forum was also in agreement.

The Forum asked what the impact would be on families and what they would see in terms of improvement in quality of education. Cheryl Eyre replied that they would see a digitised system – Capital One would hold all the EHCPs and parents and teachers would have access to the EHCPs of the children in their care with the ability to monitor and input into the system. Parents frequently asked for updates, and, with the new system, they would be able to go into the portal themselves. The Council was also increasing the number of local SEND places and there would be more places by the end of the year. A SEND behaviour support team and extra specialist teachers have been recruited, developing a greater resource to schools and assisting with earlier intervention. Top-up funding would be available whether children have an EHCP or not and this should result in quicker intervention. The panels and processes have been reconstituted with parents and schools being notified of outcomes the day after panel. The communication strategy has been developed to ensure that parents are kept updated with phone calls rather than just emails. There was a longer-term aim for more local provision and better quality.

The Forum queried whether the Council was able to fund those improvements to the required standard given the financial pressures. Cheryl Eyre explained that there was no extra cost for the behaviour team or SEND team. There were plans to create two additional roles which may result in some slight increase in costs but that would be a discussion for the Council. The department was also aiming to create a post-16 role. Going forward, providing SRPs and local places would be significantly cheaper than having out of Borough placements so this would lead to an eventual saving. There were different funding streams for SEND capital builds and the Council was committed to using any funds available to invest. Any additional capital funding request would be made to the Government and would not come out of the HNB.

The Forum asked the following questions to be answered at the next meeting:

- How many children are currently placed in primary SRPs?
- How many children were expected to be placed in primary SRPs in September 2022?
- What proportion of those children are attending the same school that they attended prior to the establishment of the SRP? I.e., what proportion of children effectively moved from being mainstream but supported within a mainstream setting and then became supported by an SRP but actually never moved school?
- What have the costs been, both capital and revenue, for primary SRPs since their establishment?
- What is the SEND team doing to direct parents to SRPs?
- How many children are currently in mainstream schools awaiting placement either in a unit or in a specialist provision?

Action: Cheryl Eyre / Paul Clark

The Forum expressed concern about how children can be placed in an SRP if their school does not have one. There did not seem to be a clear system which was easy for parents and schools to understand.

Cheryl Eyre explained that, because the local authority commissioned these places, admissions needed to come into the local authority whether they were from within the

Borough or out of the Borough. If places at SRPs were available and could meet the needs of the child, other local authorities could apply for places there as well. Only children with EHCPs could be placed in SRPs with the exception of one which had been set up for children with SEMH, with this SRP currently subject to review. Cheryl agreed that work needed to be done to educate parents. During the EHCP annual reviews, the SEND team looked at whether an SRP would meet their needs rather than escalating to another placement, but this required discussion with the SRP to see if they felt they could meet the child's needs. Stuart Matthews asked Cheryl to ask the Chair of the SRP subgroup to provide an update for the next meeting of the Forum.

Action: Cheryl Eyre

The Forum noted that pupils would not be moved until they were at suitable transition points and asked whether that meant the places potentially would not be filled or that places would be filled by out of Borough pupils before pupils from our Borough were ready to transition. Cheryl Eyre replied that there was always that risk and that the department needed to mitigate that risk by having good planning, knowing the data, and having effective processes which were always looking ahead. The Forum asked if the department had a set number of children that were expected to transition. Cheryl Eyre confirmed that there was, and that the department should know who those pupils are.

Jenny Baker shared that members of the SRP subgroup who were present at the last meeting felt that there were some robust plans regarding SRPs and felt more confident about their use. This was confirmed by Stuart Matthews who also attended the SRP subgroup.

RESOLVED

1. to NOTE
 - i. the capital build and provision of places;
 - ii. the focus on early intervention and inclusive practice in mainstream settings;
 - iii. the improved systems; and
 - iv. the development of Alternative Provision plans and a refocus on reintegrating children and young people back into mainstream provision; and
2. considering the consultation document, to AGREE to respond individually to the local authority collective response which will be organised centrally and a collaborative response from all stakeholders drafted and submitted to the DfE for the closing date 22 July 2022.

240. 2021-22 Provisional Outturn on the Schools Budget

The Forum considered a report which sought to inform members of the Schools Forum of the provisional outturn on the 2021-22 Schools Budget, including the allocation of balances and use of Earmarked Reserves. These funds were ring-fenced for the support of schools and pupils.

Paul Clark explained that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) overspent by £6.595m last year which was an increase from the £4.402m overspend the previous year. The biggest element of the overspend was the HNB which overspent by £7.143m. This was a large overspend, but there were many local authorities in a similar position.

The DfE was committed to underwriting the HNB and DSG deficits for 3 years ending March 2023, but there was uncertainty as to what the expectations would be on local authorities after that date, although the DfE have said that local authorities should plan to cover DSG deficits from their available reserves from 2023-24 onwards. The

actual deficit on the Schools Budget amounted to £9.34m once the earmarked surplus balances held by schools of £2.905m are excluded.

RESOLVED

1. to NOTE
 - i. that the outturn expenditure for 2021-22, subject to audit, showed an overspending of £6.595m (paragraph 6.6 of the report);
 - ii. the main reasons for budget variances (paragraph 6.8 of the report); and
 - iii. the cumulative £6.435m deficit balance held in the Schools Budget Dedicated Schools Grant Reserve, responsibility for which currently rests with the Department for Education (paragraph 6.10 of the report); and
2. to AGREE the proposed transfers to and from Earmarked Reserves (paragraph 6.11 of the report).

241. 2021-22 Funding Allocations to Mainstream Schools from Budgets Centrally Managed by the Council

The Forum considered a report presenting information on the in-year allocation of funds to mainstream schools through School Specific Contingencies and other budgets that were funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and in the first instance centrally managed by the council. It also presented the opportunity to amend existing funding policies. These funds related only to mainstream schools.

Paul Clark explained that there was an allocation of £0.423m to schools meeting the qualifying criteria in 2021-22 and this was an underspend of £0.188m. It has been agreed by the Schools Forum for these funds to be held as a targeted way to fund unpredictable additional costs that a small number of schools face in a way that the simplified national funding would not have the required sensitivity to do.

Paul Clark highlighted that the Executive Director had delegated powers to allocate funds to schools who had entered, or were at risk of entering, an Ofsted category of concern. This was subject to a cap of £0.030m per school which had never been exceeded before. However, during the course of last year the Standards Monitoring Board considered it necessary for an allocation of £59,078 to be made to St Michael's Easthampstead which was mostly to cover the placement of a new headteacher during the long-term absence of the substantive headteacher, meaning that the school had been effectively paying for two headteachers.

RESOLVED

1. to NOTE the following funding allocations to schools, made in accordance with approved policies:
 - i. £0.081m for significant in-year increases in pupils (paragraph 6.9 of the report);
 - ii. £0.101m for schools required to meet the Key Stage 1 Class Size regulations (paragraph 6.12 of the report);
 - iii. £0.015m for new and expanding schools (paragraph 6.16 of the report);
 - iv. £0.031m for schools with a disproportionate number of SEN pupils (paragraph 6.20 of the report); and
 - v. £0.185m for schools in financial difficulty (paragraph 6.26 of the report); and
2. to AGREE
 - i. £0.008m funding allocation to schools from the general schools' contingency (paragraph 6.28 of the report).

- ii. the £59,078 aggregate funding allocation to St Michael's Easthamstead Primary School as detailed in Annex 7 of the report, which exceeded the delegation limits awarded to the Executive Director; and
- iii. minor changes to text to improve clarity of policy and the updating of funding rates where relevant (paragraph 6.30 of the report).

242. **2021-22 Balances held by Maintained Schools**

The Forum considered a report updating members of the Schools Forum on the level of balances held by maintained schools as at 31 March 2022, how these compared to the previous financial year, and to consider whether any significant surplus balances should be subject to claw-back and re-invested within the overall Schools Budget. Balances held by academy schools were not part of the council's accounts and were therefore excluded from this report. With Sandhurst Secondary School converting to an academy during the financial year, relevant funds have been excluded from this report to ensure an appropriate comparison can be made to the previous financial year.

Paul Clark highlighted that the DfE were doing more financial monitoring and were seeking action plans for schools with deficits in excess of 7% of their annual income. There were three schools meeting that criteria based on the 2021 accounts and the Council was working with those schools to produce the required information by the end of term.

2021-22 had shown good financial performance in terms of movement in surplus budgets which had increased by £0.517m to £2.906m. This equated to 4.9% of annual income which would provide some resilience to school budgets. Deficits had been reducing as per previous years. All the significant surplus budgets had been certified and signed off by the headteachers as being held for appropriate purposes. Capital balances equated to £354,027 which was a reduction of £111,000. This was due to a number of schools doing some large projects. Overall, school balances had significantly improved over the last 3 years.

RESOLVED

1. to NOTE

- i. the key performance information on school balances, as set out in paragraph 6.3 of the report, and in particular:
 - a. aggregate surplus balances have increased by £0.517mm to £2.905m (+22%);
 - b. the value of surplus balances has increased by £0.452m to £3.423m;
 - c. the value of deficit balances has reduced by £0.065m to £0.517m which continues to require careful monitoring;
 - d. significant surplus school balances have increased by £0.139m to £0.590m (31%);
 - e. at 4.9%, average balances are considered to be above the minimum level required for working balances to safely cover unforeseen circumstances; and
 - f. the three-year average change shows net balances in:
 - primary schools have improved by £0.889m to a £2.450m surplus (+57%);
 - secondary schools have improved by £0.405m to £0.698m surplus (+157%); and
 - specialist providers have deteriorated by £0.074m to £0.273m surplus (-21%); and

- ii. the requirement to complete an Action Plan for the Department for Education in respect of schools with deficits in excess of 7% of income, based on 2020-21 accounts (paragraph 6.20 of the report); and
- 2. to AGREE that the entire significant surplus balances held by schools has been assigned for relevant purposes as set out in the approved scheme and should not be subject to claw back (paragraph 6.13 of the report).

243. Dates of Future Meetings

The next meeting of the Forum would be held at 4.30pm on Thursday 15 September 2022.

The Forum would be invited to elect a new Chair at the next meeting and any expressions of interest by members should be made to Paul Clark.

CHAIRMAN