

**SCHOOLS FORUM
8 DECEMBER 2022
4.30 - 5.20 PM**



Present:

Stuart Matthews, Academy School Representative (Chair)
Elizabeth Savage, Academy School Representative (Vice-Chair)
Jenny Baker, Special School Representative
Sue Butler, Early Years PVI Provider
Karen Davis, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Juanita Dunlop, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Keith Grainger, Secondary School Representative (Headteacher)
Tim Griffith, Academy School Representative
Roger Prew, 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:

Stuart Bevan, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Debbie Smith, Academy School Representative

262. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

The Forum noted that Paul Tatum had taken over as the Trade Union representative. Paul Clark agreed to follow up on Paul Tatum's availability to join future meetings.

Action: Paul Clark

The Forum was informed that Angela Fright, the Schools Funding Officer for Bracknell Forest Council, had reduced her hours. Nicola Fletcher had been appointed to share that role and Nicola may join future meetings.

The Forum was advised that this was Karen Davis' last meeting and noted its thanks for Karen's nine years of service.

263. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

264. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Forum on 17 November 2022 be approved as a correct record.

Arising from minute 260, Keith Grainger confirmed his approval of the proposed action to AGREE the continued de-delegation in secondary schools of budgets for the

services requested by the council. It was noted that, although it was rare for decision items to be isolated to one member of the Forum, officers may need to consider contingency plans for when members were not available for voting.

Also arising from minute 260, the Forum would be updated on the Specialist Resource Provision (SRP) review under Item 4.

Also arising from minute 260, the documents relating to the restructuring of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services had been shared with members of the Forum.

Also arising from minute 260, Cheryl Eyre had collated the information regarding the distribution of funds for Ukrainian children placed in schools in the Borough. This has been passed to Councillor Barnard and he was in the process of reviewing that. Cheryl will follow up with Councillor Barnard.

Action: Cheryl Eyre

265. **Specialist Resource Provision (SRP) Review Update**

The Forum considered a report which provided an update on the activity on two key areas of development. Firstly, the implementation of recommendations following the review of the boroughs SRP provision. Secondly to provide an update on the implementation of a proposed new banding tool.

Nathan Jones shared that a lot was being done to review the Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) provision at Meadowvale which appeared to be an underutilised resource. Work was ongoing to understand what was happening. There was a need to utilise the provision more effectively to justify the level of funding going forward.

The Service Level Agreement (SLA) has been updated and sent out to all schools hosting SRPs. Some minor changes had been suggested but overall there was a favourable response from Headteachers and leads. The 50% requirement to access mainstream curriculum and the doubling of numbers due to 50% occupancy had been removed from the updated SLA.

A desktop exercise had been completed to define the individual schools' SRP offer. This had been used to develop a consistent approach to provide information which would be published on the Local Offer. The department had also been developing a policy around admissions into SRPs and special schools setting out all the providers, the admission routes, and what needs were being catered for.

An extensive list of SRP training needs had been collected and was in the process of being collated. There was some parity in responses and training would be rolled out to all SRPs. There had also been some localised training on finance and Nathan felt that there was a good level of understanding now. Further training would be offered in advance of any roll out of a new banding tool.

Birch Hill and Owlsmoor had asked about additional capacity within their settings, and given the pressure on Kennel Lane, Nathan felt it was beneficial to explore that.

Three secondary schools had submitted expressions of interest in hosting an SRP. Nathan had arranged and undertaken site visits and would be working with the Headteachers. Nathan had also had an initial meeting with the Headteacher at

King's Academy Binfield to look at how to bring the 40 SRP places online. Some capital investment may be required to ensure that the spaces were fit for purpose.

Nathan highlighted that he was in early discussions with Sandhurst School to develop a secondary transitional option for children moving out of Owlsmoor given the complexity of that cohort and the pressure on special school places.

The Forum asked what the council had learned from opening the SRPs and what would be done to ensure that everything was in place when opening future SRPs. Nathan replied that there was a need to spend more time at the start of the process to get things right, rather than trying to fix issues retrospectively. Nathan had been running a formal procurement process for the current phase of establishing secondary SRPs.

The Forum queried how many pupils were unplaced. Neil Hoskinson advised that he was not aware of any unplaced pupils. However, there were some parents who were electing to have their children educated at home, and some instances where special schools were saying that pupils were too complex resulting in those pupils staying in mainstream education. Cheryl Eyre added that the SEN case officers had started their review of pupils with an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) who were due to transition in September 2023, to ensure that they had an identified provision.

The Forum noted that a peripatetic model may be beneficial; for example, having Speech & Language Therapy (SLT) provision which could move between schools.

The Forum enquired whether the council was confident about the quality and number of places available for September 2023. Nathan replied that he was not confident that all secondary SRP places would be generated by September as the level of build required may be substantial.

Nathan updated that an event had been held regarding the potential new banding tool and there was a good turnout of Headteachers and Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) from across the Borough. The potential new banding tool had been demonstrated, and attendees had provided valuable feedback.

266. Initial Proposals for the 2023-24 Early Years Budget and Funding Formula

The Forum considered a report which sought agreement on the principles for allocating any increase in funding to the elements of the Early Years Block Budget.

Cherry Hall explained that this report was focussed on the overarching principles and that another report would be presented in January 2023 with indicative amounts, subject to government funding announcements.

Cherry highlighted that taking account of the views from the Early Years Forum, no changes were proposed to the method of funding distribution to providers through the Early Years Funding Formula for 2023-24. If the council were to receive an increase in funding, any additional money would go into the base rates, meaning that all providers would receive the same increase in hourly funding rates.

RESOLVED

1. to AGREE in accordance with the views of the Early Years Forum:
 - i. that no changes are made to the Early Years Funding Formula for 2023-24;
 - ii. that there are appropriate arrangements in place for administration of the early years free entitlements; and

- iii. that final budget proposals are developed in accordance with the principles set out in paragraph 5.6 of the report; and
- 2. to NOTE the final 2023-24 Early Years Block Budget proposals and funding rates to be allocated to the Early Years Funding Formula will be presented to the Forum for comment in January.

267. **2023-24 Budget Proposals for the Schools Budget: Schools and Central School Services Block Elements**

The Forum considered a report which sought to ensure that final 2023-24 budget decisions could be made at the January Forum meeting in order to meet the 20 January 2023 statutory deadline. Therefore, updated proposals for the Schools Block (SB) and Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) elements of the Schools Budget were presented for consideration with a small number of decisions to be made.

The council was waiting for the Department for Education (DfE) to release the verified October 2022 census to enable the calculation of final budget. Therefore, changes were likely to this update which was based on BF data on pupil numbers but no update on current pupil profiles e.g. deprivation measures. From the data currently available, BF has seen a larger increase in pupil numbers this year than in the recent past and this would generate extra income from the DfE settlement.

Taking account of the new data, the proposals contained in the report indicated that to fully implement the factor values used by the DfE in the National Funding Formula (NFF) there would be a funding surplus of £0.046m, with schools on average receiving a 2.0% increase in per pupil funding. Adding the circa 3.5% expected from the autumn statement meant on average, schools would receive around a 5.5% increase in per pupil funding.

Options were being considered for use of a surplus if this remained in the final budget proposals.

Despite the funding increases, it appeared that these would be below the expected increase in costs that schools would face with an initial estimate indicating a funding gap of between 0.5% and 1.5%.

Following publication of this report, the DfE had announced a funding update for schools. This confirmed additional capital funding for schools of £500m, which would be paid at £0.010m per school plus £20 per weighted pupil.

There had also been clarification of the additional £2billion announced in the autumn statement: £400m to be allocated to LAs for high needs funding, and the remaining £1.6billion would be allocated as a new grant which BF estimated would add around 3.5% to per pupil funding allocations. There were no formal details of that grant but the informal information from the DfE was that it would be similar to the school supplementary grant being paid this year. The council had included the additional 3.5% funding from the autumn statement into this report.

The Forum recognised that the council had presented as much information as it could in advance with the information available.

Paul Clark highlighted that the department was recommending a change to the funding policy for significant in-year growth as some schools were expected to move from the new school funding formula to the main BF Funding Formula. In recognition of the impact of those potential transitions, the policy had been reviewed to ensure

that all schools were treated fairly and that the basis of the policy was to meet the actual costs arising at schools and not necessarily just crossing a funding threshold.

The Forum noted that the projections showed fewer spare places in reception than anticipated and asked whether schools which had previously gone from 2 FE to 1 FE should revert to 2 FE, as opposed to other 1 FE schools expanding. Paul Clark replied that he was not foreseeing an immediate pressure and was not aware of anything that needed to happen now. However, the situation would be monitored and there was usually a window of opportunity to make any changes needed.

RESOLVED

1. to AGREE that subject to any late changes proposed to the Forum in January, the 2023-24 budget is set in accordance with the supporting information, as summarised in Table 1 of the report, and in particular:
 - i. that the Growth Fund including appropriate elements is set at the amount reported in Annex 2 of the report; and
 - ii. that the elements of the CSSB and relevant budget amounts were as detailed in Annex 3 of the report; and
2. to AGREE the proposed amendment to the funding policy for significant in-year growth (Annex 1 of the report); and
3. to NOTE the options available to balancing the Schools Budget in advance of a decision in January (paragraph 6.36 of the report).

Item for Maintained Primary School representatives only

RESOLVED to AGREE that the per pupil deduction amounts for existing de-delegated services be increased by 5.0%, the average increase in per pupil funding expected to be received by schools (paragraph 6.26 of the report).

Item for Maintained Secondary School representatives only

RESOLVED to AGREE that the per pupil deduction amounts for existing de-delegated services be increased by 5.0%, the average increase in per pupil funding expected to be received by schools (paragraph 6.26 of the report).

268. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The next meeting of the Forum would be held at 4.30pm on Thursday 12 January 2023.

CHAIRMAN