

**SCHOOLS FORUM
16 NOVEMBER 2023
4.32 - 5.32 PM**



Present:

Stuart Matthews, Academy School Representative (Chair)

Sue Butler, Early Years PVI Provider
Stuart Bevan, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Caroline Johnson, Primary School Representative
Juanita Dunlop, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Trudi Sammons, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Keith Grainger, Secondary School Representative (Headteacher)
Tim Griffith, Academy School Representative
Grant Strudley, Academy School Representative
Gareth Croxon, Academy School Representative (Headteacher)
Katie Moore, Academy School Representative
Paul Tatum, Trades Union Representative

Observer:

Councillor Roy Bailey, Executive Member for Children, Young People & Learning (Observer)

Apologies for absence were received from:

Elizabeth Savage, Academy School Representative

10. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Forum on 14 September 2023 be approved as a correct record.

Arising from the minutes, the following points were noted:

- An update on College Hall would be covered in Agenda item 4.
- Grainne and Cllr Bailey's had drafted a letter for the Government outlining the Forum's over funding for the High Needs budget. The letter needed to be reviewed before it was sent.
- The graphs requested by the Forum to illustrate the scenarios of 95% funding, and for if the 9% increase in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) had been granted instead of 3%, would be covered in item 6 off the agenda.

11. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

12. College Hall Update

Zoe Livingstone and Chris Kiernan provide an update to Schools Forum on developments at College Hall, following the last report submitted on the 22 June.

Following the inspection in July 2023, College Hall had been judged to be inadequate. As a result, the local authority in partnership with the school has produced a statement of action in order to directly address the key areas of development that had been identified in the report. Those areas included:

- Ensuring Safeguarding is effective – Although there had been some improvements on Safeguarding prior to the inspection, outstanding matters remained.
- A clear plan for the school vision and admission arrangements.
- Improving the assessment and teaching of reading.
- Improving the curriculum.
- Developing a more cohesive enrichment programme.
- Improving attendance.

The Ofsted report had noted that the management committee had already started making effective decisions for the school, therefore it was felt they still had the capacity to carry out the necessary improvements. Unexpectedly the interim headteacher had resigned from College Hall in July. A new full-time interim headteacher was found and has been in post since the summer holidays. Since the inspection in July certain improvements had already been secured at College Hall including:

- An external consultant had been appointed for 3 days a week, to support with the development of teaching, the curriculum and assessment.
- All senior leaders have now been assigned clearly defined roles.
- A revised admission policy.
- Changes to the school timetable to maximise learning.
- Changes to the curriculum to include a greater offer of practical subjects.
- There is a new multi-sensory space at College Hall.
- A new behaviour policy which has seen reductions in suspensions, improvements to attendance.
- Significant improvements to the systems monitoring attendance.
- Significant improvements to the physical environment at College Hall.

As a school of concern, College Hall has been subject to an academisation order due to DfE statutory guidelines. The selection of an appropriate sponsor is delegated to a regional director. However, the regional director officials have been working closely with the local authority and the management committee.

In response to questions the following point was noted:

- The clarity and stability of the new headteacher being in post had created a better working environment which seemed to be having a positive effect on staff's wellbeing.

13. **The Schools Budget Monitoring 2023-24**

Paul Clark provided the forum with update on the 2023-24 forecast budget monitoring position for the Schools Budget. The budget had been updated to reflect updates in the levels (DSG) funding as well as new grants that had been allocated in relation to the early years supplementary grant and the teachers additional pay grant. In the original forecasts an overspend of £7.116M had been projected on the Higher Needs

Block (HNB). An updated forecast however was now putting the overspend at £8.54M for the HNB. This was caused by 3 factors:

- The rate of increase in Education Healthcare plans (EHCP) was approximately 20% higher than expected causing a further £0.5M overspend.
- Price increases had been significantly above what was expected, leading to a further £0.6M overspend.
- There is a forecast overspend of approximately £0.2M at College Hall.

Taking account of these updates, a £24.131m cumulative deficit was being forecast on the DSG funded Schools Budget for 31 March 2024.

A small underspend of £0.1M was being forecast on capital investment, largely due to underspendings on a small number of school specific projects.

In response to questions the following points were noted:

- There is limited work that can be done in the short term to reduce the increasing financial burden, but in the medium term there is more of an opportunity to reduce costs such as; negotiating with providers on prices and costs and increasing capacity to keep more children in Bracknell Forest schools.
- There was a feeling amongst Forum members that the difficult financial position was not due to the fault of Bracknell Forest or Bracknell Forest schools, but due to factors largely outside their hands.
- The Forum were informed Cllr Temperton, Leader of Bracknell Forest Council had written to James Sunderland MP, to explain the issues Bracknell Forest had experienced with the DfE, around the funding formula and to lobby for additional funds

RESOLVED That the Schools Forum NOTES:

- the budget variances being forecast on the Schools Budget that total to an aggregate net forecast over spending before Emerging Issues of £8.117m (paragraph 6.14);
- that including Emerging Issues, the forecast over-spending increases to £8.654m (paragraph 6.14);
- that the year-end balance held in the Dedicated Schools Grant Adjustment Account is forecast at a deficit of £24.131m deficit and that the cost to Bracknell Forest Council of servicing this level of “debt” in 2024/25 will be around £1.2m per year (paragraph 6.15);
- the expectation that the liability to fund balances held in the Dedicated Schools Grant Adjustment Account will transfer to LAs from April 2026 (paragraphs 6.20 to 6.21)
- progress to date on the Education Capital Programme, as summarised at Annex 2.

The Forum did however note the update with concern as it was felt the insufficient funding provided by the government would have consequences in schools which would ultimately fall back on students.

14. **Update on 2024-25 School Budgets including outcomes from the October 2023 Financial Consultation with Schools**

Paul Clark provided an update to the Schools Forum on 2024-25 funding matters.

In October an update was given from the DfE on the 2024/25 financial settlement. In general, the DfE was offering reduced levels of funding available for school in comparison to what it had originally announced in July 2023. For the 2024/25 financial year there was to be on average an 0.8% reduction in funding per pupil in England in comparison to their original announcement. Furthermore, there was to be £93.318 million made available for the Bracknell Forest Schools Block DSG, £0.9M less than the originally announced £94.218M.

At the previous meeting of the Schools Forum there had been a request for modelling on what the DSG income in the HNB for Bracknell Forest be if it was factored on a 9% increase, which is what Bracknell Forest has received for a number of years. On reviewing the data, an alternative approach was presented which showed what the increase would have been if from 2018/19 Bracknell Forest's HNB DSG had increased at the same rate in which the number of pupils with an EHCP had increased. If it had done so, the grant would be £29.85M in 2022/23 instead of the just over £20M which was received.

The outcomes from the annual financial consultation with schools were also presented although no decisions were sought at this time as further budget proposals are likely to follow from the Safety Valve, all of which should be considered at the same time. Responses had been received from over half of schools. There were 6 main questions asked in this consultation all of which received support from a large majority of responders. The question were:

1. Should minimum increases in per pupil funding be set at the maximum permitted amount of +0.5%?
2. Should the cost of financing any impact from 1. be met from deductions to schools receiving the highest % increase?
3. Should de-delegation continue on permitted services?
4. Should maintained schools continue to contribute £20 per pupil to LA statutory education related costs?
5. Is the best way to calculate notional SEN through the actual number of pupils on SEN support or in receipt of an EHCP
6. Should individual school Notional SEN Funding amounts be calculated from the key proxy SEN funding factors in the NFF plus an element of core per pupil funding amounts?

In discussion the following points were noted by the forum:

- The Forum had huge concern over section 2.4 off the report, where the funding settlement had fallen from 2.7% to 1.7%, before any potential implications of the Safety Valve had been factored in. It was felt the only way the schools could manage this update to the funding formula would be real term cuts, due to staffing pay awards and inflation. The forum had extreme concern on the impact these cuts would have for children in the Borough.
- There was concern that this budget if implemented could cause a number of Strategic Risk Management Issues, due to the effect real term cuts would have on schools.
- Cllr Bailey confirmed their had yet to be a response from James Sunderland MP about the concerns over funding of Schools in Bracknell Forest.
- There was concern over the effects on smaller schools, and it was felt the impact on smaller schools should be considered in the budget.
- The need to raise awareness with parents about the Local authority's financial situation and its ability to support schools financially particularly SEN.

The forum noted the 2023/24 forecast budget monitoring position for the Schools Budget, however wanted to place on record their objection in the strongest terms to what would be a real-term cut and that those cuts would pose significant risks to the children in the Borough.

15. **Safety Valve Update**

Grainne Siggins and Duane Chappell gave an update on the Safety Valve Program. Bracknell Forest Council had sought to engage with as much openness and transparency as possible, seeking to engage with the concerns of head teachers within the borough wherever possible. The final submission deadline for the Safety Valve was to be the 12th January, but a credible plan needed to be put together by the 15th December.

Since the previous meeting 2 workshops had taken place with headteachers, in which the local authority sought to offer transparency on the spending on the HNB. Headteachers were asked to give feedback on their key priorities, as well as areas that they felt needed improvement or a different model of delivery. Furthermore, the same work had been done with the Parent/Carer forum who offered feedback on their key priorities. Another workshop was due to take place focusing on services that had been identified as not offering best value for money. Headteachers were asked to continue their engagement in this work so that the Bracknell Forest Schools budget could best be brought into a balanced position.

In workshops that had taken places so far, 4 areas had been identified as areas to look at:

- Early Intervention and demand management.
- Right Provision, Right Time
- Value for Money Services
- Effective Pathways and Transition to Independence

Work was being done to try and best manage provision so that local pupils would be able to go to local schools in their community and a headteacher had been seconded for 1 day a week to work on this.

The local authority recognised the wellbeing of teacher's had been highlighted as a significant issue and promised to work with schools as closely as possible and that the authority would be as creative as possible if a top slice did have to be implemented.

In response to questioning the following points were noted:

- It was confirmed that whilst the early years sector operated with a different block of funding, there would be engagement on any plans that could affect that sector. Several schools with nurseries had already been invited to previous workshops.

16. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The next meeting of the Schools Forum would take place on 13 December.

CHAIRMAN