

**SCHOOLS FORUM
19 NOVEMBER 2020
4.30 - 5.30 PM**



Present:

Martin Gocke, Pupil Referral Unit Representative (Governor) (Chairman)
Stuart Matthews, Academy School Representative (Headteacher) (Vice-Chairman)
Liz Cole, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Karen Davis, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Neil Davies, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Peter Floyd, Special School Representative (Governor)
Keith Grainger, Secondary School Representative (Headteacher)
Roger Prew, Primary School Representative (Governor)
Phil Sherwood, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Richard Stok, Primary School Representative (Governor)

Observer:

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

Apologies for absence were received from:

Jane Coley, Academy School Representative (Headteacher)

154. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

155. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Forum on 22 October 2020 be approved as a correct record.

Arising from the minutes, the following points were noted:

- The revised terms of reference had been circulated to the sub-group and it would be requested to approve the terms of reference at the 10 December meeting.
- It was noted that the three-year budget plan guidance would progress at the start of 2021 in collaboration with a small number of schools.
- The Coronavirus spend return template had been distributed to schools and academies and would continue each term.
- The pupil forecast model would come to the Schools Forum in January for budget planning purposes.

There were no other matters arising not covered by the agenda.

156. Arrangements for Free Early Education Entitlements during Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The Forum considered a report given on the arrangements for Free Early Education Entitlements funding during Coronavirus as well as the initial proposals for the 2021-2022 early years' block budget of the dedicated schools grant (DSG).

As part of the update, it was noted:

- That it had been tough for early years' settings and the sector had worked hard to meet the needs of children.
- Some children had been placed with a different provider and had been a part of support arrangements for children of key workers and the additional places had cost around £6,500.
- The summaries of attendance were included as part of the report to the Department for Education (DfE) and attendance figures would also be submitted every year.
- Regular contact between social workers and providers would be ongoing.
- Providers had in general been funded on the basis of attendance levels expected without the impact of coronavirus, so hadn't lost out financially and some had benefitted from the pandemic.
- Some training had been undertaken with providers around sustainability by the local authority and it was found to be valuable.
- It was not currently known what funding would be available for next year. It was hoped that indicative rates would be agreed by the end of December.

Following questions from the group it was confirmed:

- No group providers had gone out of business and none had received any grant funding.
- Two providers had had to close for two weeks due to confirmed Coronavirus cases.
- It was questioned whether there were any trends around people who were not choosing to send their children to an early years' setting and it was thought they were to do with Coronavirus concerns. In response, early years' childcare advertisements would be advertising the benefits to children by attending.
- It was noted that other parents' experiences of the coronavirus safety measures were important to increase confidence amongst parents.

The team was thanked for their efforts in this challenging time.

RESOLVED to NOTE:

1. The Department for Education's additional guidance to help local authorities in the summer term of 2020 for securing sufficient childcare places.
2. Changes to funding from the Department for Education to local authorities in the autumn term 2020.
3. Changes to funding from local authorities to early years' providers in the autumn term 2020
4. The impact of the changes in funding to local authorities and early years' providers on the 2021-21 Early Years' Block budget.

157. **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Deficit Management**

The Forum received an introduction to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Deficit Management.

As part of the presentation, it was noted:

- Where there was a deficit on the high needs block budget, then it needed to be funded from the dedicated schools grant

- Deficit management arrangements would be put in place by the DfE where a deficit existed or where there had been a significant in-year reduction in a surplus.
- Bracknell Forest Council had a significant reduction in surplus which was why it was expected to be closely monitored by the DfE
- The DfE had issued a deficit management tool for local authorities to complete that would capture the required information, through a mixture of narrative around the current and recent position of the DSG, with a focus on the HNB, actions to be taken, financial performance, SEND data and the ability to undertake benchmarking comparisons with other local authorities, including the closest statistical neighbours.
- Paul Clark would continue to bring updates to the Schools Forum for discussion although the presentation format (a 19-tab Excel spreadsheet – would present problems.
- The DfE had confirmed they would be working closely with the most concerning local authorities and there was a requirement for every authority to provide the completed template.
- It was noted that the Schools Forum and the subgroup would review the document and profile of Bracknell Forest and the plan going forward.

RESOLVED to NOTE that the ESFA DSG Deficit Management template is in the process of being populated for presentation at a future meeting.

Action: Paul Clark

158. **The Schools Budget - 2020-21 Budget Monitoring**

The Forum considered a report on the 2020-21 forecast budget monitoring position for the Schools Budget and progress to date on the Education Capital Programme. The key revenue budget priority reported was to develop a sustainable financial position over the medium to long term against the backdrop of a significant over spending on the High Needs Block which was the most significant factor contributing to the forecast accumulated deficit at year end of £4.776m.

For the capital programme for schools, this primarily included suitability works, including school amalgamations and planned works – most significantly roof repairs.

The Chair questioned what would happen to unexpected costs such as the roof failure at Sandhurst School. It was confirmed that fortunately the DfE had made a second funding allocation to local authorities to contribute towards maintenance. This would finance a significant proportion of the unexpected costs. Other areas of the programme for this and next year would be reviewed against the initial priorities. Whilst the roof was being repaired, temporary classrooms would be required, and these costs would have to come out of the Council's revenue budget.

Resolved to NOTE:

1. the budget variances being forecast on the Schools Budget that totalled an aggregate net forecast over spending of £2.958m;
2. that the unallocated balance on the Schools Budget Reserve was forecast at a £4.776m deficit;
3. progress to date on the Education Capital Programme.

159. **Outcomes from the October 2020 Financial Consultation with Schools**

An update was presented to the Forum regarding responses from the recent financial consultation. The consultation had sought views on how funds should be allocated to

schools and whether maintained schools would support on-going de-delegation of budgets. It also asked whether a financial contribution should still be made for statutory education related duties for which the council was responsible for meeting, but received no funding. An update was also given on the 2021-22 budget position for mainstream schools.

It was noted that following the consultation, there was a high amount of support received from maintained schools to agree the Council's proposals.

Following questions, it was noted:

- How far Bracknell Forest Schools were towards the national funding formula and it was confirmed that the 2020-21 budget was set at 99.8%.
- The Government had confirmed its commitment to the "hard" formula which would mean the DfE running all school budgets with limited involvement of local authorities. There were a number of anomalies which would need to be confirmed and nothing further could be confirmed at this time.
- It was confirmed that should schools funding change to the "hard" formula, that this would not have a major effect on schools' budgets.
- The new DfE Funding Regulations could limit the ability of the council to support the schools' budget with additional funding. It was noted that the change in the regulations would include a much more powerful ringfence which meant the authority could not contribute additional money without the Secretary of State's permission. The council currently supplemented schools' budgets by around £250k a year as part of a medium-term budget strategy which had been agreed by the Schools Forum and informal discussion with the DfE had indicated that gaining approval for continuation of this support was not certain.
- Forum Members expressed surprise that the government could consider taking a decision that would have the effect of reducing budget allocations to schools and passed the following motion:

"The Schools Forum strongly supports the representations that Bracknell Forest Council is making to the DfE to continue this mode of funding which has already provided benefit for the pupils in Bracknell Forest Schools"

RESOLVED to NOTE

1. the outcomes from the financial consultation with schools.
2. That the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning had AGREED that:
 1. The factors and their values in the BF Funding Formula should continue to be funded at the same value as the NFF, with each factor to be reduced by the same proportional value if there were insufficient funds.
 2. All schools should receive the maximum +2% increase in per pupil funding from the 2020-21 financial year, subject to affordability.
 3. Any cost associated with providing all schools with the agreed minimum percentage increase in per pupil funding from 2020-21 should be met by those schools receiving the largest increases in per pupil funding, typically those above the average percentage increase.

Item for Maintained Primary School representatives only:

RESOLVED to AGREE:

3. The continued de-delegation of budgets for the services requested by the council.

Item for Maintained Secondary School representatives only:

RESOLVED to AGREE:

4. that the continued de-delegation of budgets for the services requested by the council.

Item for all Maintained School representatives (including the Special and PRU) only

RESOLVED to AGREE:

5. that a £20 per pupil contribution continues to be made by maintained schools towards the cost of delivering 'general' education related statutory and regulatory duties.

For all Members RESOLVED to NOTE:

6. Changes made by the DfE to the DSG ringfence place at risk the option for the council to continue supporting the Schools Budget through use of General Reserves.

160. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The next meeting of the Forum would be held at 4.30pm on 10 December 2020.

CHAIRMAN