

**SCHOOLS FORUM
6 OCTOBER 2022
4.30 - 5.35 PM**



Present:

Jenny Baker, Special School Representative
Simon Cope, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Karen Davis, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Juanita Dunlop, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Nick Gibson, Secondary School Representative (Governor)
Keith Grainger, Secondary School Representative (Headteacher)
Tim Griffith, Academy School Representative
Stuart Matthews, Academy School Representative
Roger Prew, Primary School Representative (Governor)
Elizabeth Savage, Academy School Representative
Debbie Smith, 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)
Sue Butler, Early Years PVI Provider

244. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

The Forum noted that Greg Wilton had left and was therefore no longer a member of the Schools Forum as a Teacher Union Representative.

Simon Cope introduced himself as the new Headteacher of Owlsmoor Primary School. Stuart Bevan and Juanita Dunlop were also welcomed as new members of the Forum.

245. Election of Chair

There were no nominations for the election of Chair of the Schools Forum.

RESOLVED to DEFER the election of Chair to the next meeting of the Schools Forum to be held on Thursday 17 November 2022.

246. Appointment of Vice Chair

RESOLVED that Stuart Matthews be re-appointed Vice Chair of the Schools Forum.

Stuart Matthews in the Chair.

247. Declarations of Interest

Keith Grainger declared an affected interest regarding Item 6 (Specialist Resource Provision Review) in relation to Garth Hill College.

248. **Minutes and Matters Arising**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Forum on 23 June 2022 be approved as a correct record.

Arising from minute 234. Stuart Matthews and Paul Clark had collated the tributes for Martin Gocke's widow. Christine.

Arising from minute 238. the SEND Written Statement of Action (WSOA) had been sent to every school in the Borough and has been published on the Council website.

Arising from minute 239. Cheryl Eyre confirmed that the briefing paper for Item 6 (Specialist Resource Provision Review) included answers where available to all the questions raised at the last meeting.

Also arising from minute 239. the Chair of the Specialist Resource Provision (SRP) subgroup would provide an update under agenda Item 6.

249. **Specialist Resource Provision Review**

Jenny Baker updated on the work of the subgroup which was focused on SRPs and banding descriptors. Regarding SRPs. Nathan Jones had presented to secondary Headteachers and received their feedback. Liz Savage was supporting the banding descriptors project. There had been little progress in moving forward but this would be explored further at the next meeting of the subgroup. Members of the Schools Forum were invited to contact Jenny Baker if they wished to join the subgroup.

The Forum considered a report presenting the findings to date of the review of SRPs in Bracknell Forest and were invited to provide comments. Keith Grainger noted on page 14 of the report that "The Rise" was not the proper title of the provision. Furthermore. the provision was based in North Bracknell. not Crowthorne & Sandhurst. Nathan Jones agreed to amend that.

Action: Nathan Jones

Nathan Jones explained that most of the schools hosting SRPs were visited with the exception of one primary school which instead had a virtual meeting. The one secondary SRP would be visited during the autumn term. Parents and the Carer Forum were met on two occasions and briefed on developments. and discussions had been held with the Head of SEND. Head of Early Years and advisory teaching service.

Nathan highlighted the lack of understanding about SRPs including the funding mechanism. the requirement for 50% attendance in the mainstream classroom. the complexity of children that should be accessing the SRPs. and how to access SRPs.

Meadow Vale Primary School had decided to close the Rainbow (nursery) provision at the end of the 2021/22 academic year. The school had also voiced concerns around the utilisation of the Speech. Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) provision due to low uptake. and Nathan had recommended further work to understand the reasons why.

A working group had been set up to review all the above concerns as well as looking at the development of secondary provision. Nathan had recommended starting with 30 places over two providers.

The Forum queried whether there was sufficient knowledge of the needs of the children and how demand compared to the number of places offered. Nathan Jones explained that he was working with colleagues in Early Years to find a way to predict more accurately the number of children moving through the system. There was still capacity in primary SRPs.

The Forum enquired how the issue of parents not knowing how to access SRPs was going to be resolved. Nathan Jones replied that the department had developed an initial proforma which would be hosted on individual school websites and on the local offer. The team had also been working with the parent carer forum. The Forum requested an update to be provided at the next meeting of the Forum.

Action: Nathan Jones

The Forum asked whether all specialisms were covered by services within the Borough? Nathan Jones responded that there would always be a small group such as children with hearing or visual impairments which would need to be catered for outside the Borough. but the rest of the needs were covered in the Borough.

250. Delivering Better Value in SEND Programme and other related matters

The Forum considered a report informing the Schools Forum on the Delivering Better Value in SEND (DBV) programme which the Department for Education (DfE) had announced details of in June 2022. The programme was part of the DfE's support package to help local authorities (LAs) maintain effective SEND services while functioning sustainably. The report also included an update and draft timetable for the setting of the 2023-24 High Needs Block (HNB) budget.

Paul Clark explained that the aim of the programme was to support local authorities to improve delivery of SEND services whilst ensuring the services were sustainable.

Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) had been invited to join the first tranche of 20 authorities and the first phase had commenced involving a comprehensive diagnostic process. At the end of the first phase. the DfE would agree with each LA an allocation of funding to support critical elements of its action plan. There was £85m revenue funding available for DBV. Annex 1 of the report detailed the process. resourcing. and timeline.

The Forum asked whether there were risks to the timeline. Paul Clark replied that a significant amount of data was required and the process was expected to be beneficial. but there were always risks in gathering large amounts of data in restricted periods of time. However. the department had made good progress so far.

The Forum enquired whether it was good to be part of the first tranche. Paul Clark confirmed that there were positives. but that it was also the "guinea pig" group. Overall. the project was expected to be beneficial financially as well as getting a good data set and verification of the Council's roadmap.

Paul Clark updated on the government liability for financing Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits which was scheduled to end by March 2023. For BFC. the accumulated deficit was estimated at £18.2m and this was expected to place a significant financial risk which would have implications across the Council.

Regarding the initial HNB budget information for 2023-24, overall funding for the HNB was increasing by £570m, or 6.3%. BFC would receive the minimum 5% increase in funding. The paper outlined the updates which were planned to be brought to the Forum at all four meetings scheduled before the start of the financial year in April 2023.

251. 2022-23 Arrangements for Additional Financial Support to Schools

The Forum considered a report which sought agreement from the Schools Forum in respect of proposals for additional financial support to schools, in particular, approval of new or amended applications for licensed deficit arrangements. An update was also provided on the current position in respect of previously agreed financial support arrangements.

Paul Clark summarised that good progress had been made by schools in terms of reducing the aggregate level of licensed deficits which was expected to reduce to £0.495m as at 31 March 2023. Three schools had fully repaid their licensed deficits, with four remaining in place. There had been no new requests for licensed deficit agreements. There were two schools which did not have a full replacement schedule in place, and this equated to £0.150m of debt. The department was having regular meetings with those schools.

Easthampstead Park Community School was congratulated on fully repaying the licensed deficit following a significant period of financial difficulty.

RESOLVED

1. that subject to the school governors confirming the relevant financing schedule and compliance with the associated terms and conditions of the deficit scheme the Schools Forum AGREES:
 - a. the licensed deficit agreement with full repayment plan for Ascot Heath Primary School be amended to permit a deficit of up to £0.250m for 2022-23, £0.150m for 2023-24 and £0.075m for 2024-25 before returning to a surplus in 2025-26; and
 - b. that further work continues with schools that have yet to formulate a full repayment plan, with the following deficit limits agreed for 2022-23:
 - i. £0.100m for Winkfield St Mary's Primary; and
 - ii. £0.110m for Cranbourne; and
2. to NOTE that the following schools have fully repaid their licensed deficits:
 - i. Sandhurst Secondary;
 - ii. Harmanswater Primary; and
 - iii. Easthampstead Park Secondary.

252. 2023-24 Budget Preparations for the Schools Budget and other related matters

The Forum considered a report which provided an update to the Schools Forum from the information currently available in respect of the 2023-24 Schools Budget for mainstream schools together with other relevant finance related matters. Whilst the DfE had yet to provide the final data that must be used to calculate individual school budgets, information was emerging that allowed for updates to be provided on some key matters and some early decisions to be taken which would aid the finalisation of the budget which must be presented to the DfE by the statutory deadline of 20 January 2023.

Paul Clark advised that the DfE was mandating all LAs to move closer to the National Funding Formula (NFF) from 2023-24. BFC was already within 2.5% of the NFF so no new specific actions were required.

The new School Supplementary Grant which was received this year to cover the Health and Social Care Levy was due to be rolled into the schools NFF from 2023-24 and would no longer be paid separately.

Across England, the average increase in per pupil funding was expected to be 1.9% (the increase for BFC had been estimated at 2.0% for 2023-24). This was not expected to be sufficient to cover the rising costs, and there was no indication of any additional funding.

This year's financial consultation with schools had commenced, covering de-delegation, contribution by maintained schools to LA statutory duties, and rate of the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG). Responses to the consultation were expected to be reported at the next meeting of the Forum on 17 November 2022.

The Forum expressed significant concern at the national increase of only 1.9% which was expected to lead to severe cuts. Councillor Barnard confirmed that he would express this view on behalf of the Council.

RESOLVED

1. to AGREE

- 1.1 that subject to consideration of school responses to the annual financial consultation and general affordability, the approach to setting the 2023-24 budget should remain broadly the same as for 2022-23, and in particular:
 - i. that there should be no change to the current budget strategy of:
 - a. as far as possible, replicating the NFF;
 - b. setting minimum per pupil funding increases between financial years at the highest amount permitted by the DfE; and
 - c. meeting the diseconomy costs at new and expanding schools in a measured way from a combination of Schools Budget reserves and funding allocated for the relevant year from the DfE; and
 - ii. that a centrally managed Growth Fund should be maintained for in-year allocation to qualifying schools (Table 2 of the report);
 - iii. on-going central retention by the Council of the existing Central School Services Block items (Annex 2 of the report); and
 - iv. to prevent over funding, that the DfE be requested to approve that the council continues to disapply the requirement for minimum per pupil funding increases where schools are funded on the Start-up and Diseconomy funding policy for new and expanding schools; and
- 1.2 the proposed clarification to the Start-up and Diseconomy Funding Policy for New and expanding schools (Annex 1 of the report); and

2. to NOTE

- 2.1 the areas where schools are being asked to comment on through the annual financial consultation, to inform later decision making; and
- 2.2 the current estimated funding gaps at Table 3 of the report of:
 - i. £0.077m on the Schools Block; and
 - ii. £0.027m for the Central School Services Block.

253. Dates of Future Meetings

The next meeting of the Forum would be held at 4.30pm on Thursday 17 November 2022.