

**SCHOOLS FORUM
17 NOVEMBER 2022
4.30 PM**



Present:

Stuart Matthews, Academy School Representative (Vice-Chair)
Simon Cope, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Roger Prew, Primary School Representative (Governor)
Elizabeth Savage, Academy School Representative
Debbie Smith, Academy School Representative
Grant Strudley, Academy School Representative

Observer:

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

Apologies for absence were received from:

Jenny Baker, Special School Representative
Stuart Bevan, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Sue Butler, Early Years PVI Provider
Tim Griffith, Academy School Representative

254. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

255. Election of Chair

RESOLVED that Stuart Matthews be elected Chair of the Schools Forum.

STUART MATTHEWS IN THE CHAIR

Appointment of Vice Chair

RESOLVED that Liz Savage be appointed Vice Chair of the Schools Forum.

256. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

257. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Forum on 6 October 2022 be approved as a correct record.

Arising from minute 249, Nathan Jones had amended the details relating to the Garth Hill College Specialist Resource Provision (SRP).

Also arising from minute 249, Nathan Jones updated that he had been working to develop a consistent way to get parents to understand what the offer was regarding SRPs. Some SRPs already had good quality websites detailing their provision. Nathan had been working with all SRPs to establish an SRP page on the Local Offer providing information about all the SRPs and also detailing the admissions process.

258. **Schools Budget: 2022-23 Budget Monitoring**

The Forum considered a report which updated on the 2022-23 forecast budget monitoring position for the Schools' Budget, the key issues and management actions being taken and progress to date on the Education Capital Programme.

Paul Clark highlighted that the overall budget had been set in the context of a large deficit of £7.500m being forecast. However, from the information available at the end of September 2022, the forecast overspend on the Schools Budget had gone up to £7.671m. This followed a number of years of overspending and a £17.011m cumulative deficit was currently being forecast for 31 March 2023.

The Forum queried the underspend on SEN provisions and support services. Cheryl Eyre had provided a written response detailing the following budgets which made up the underspend:

- The sensory consortium – this included some small room hire costs for consortium staff, but the majority of the underspend was from the family psychotherapist post which has not been filled, accounting for £59,000 of the underspend
- Speech & Language Therapy (SALT) contract with NHS Berkshire costing £205,000 per year, plus room hire. There was a budget of £231,000 so this accounted for an underspend of £18,000
- Occupational Therapy (OT) contract with NHS Berkshire – no invoices had been paid for this financial year. This was due to cost £37,000 a year from a budget of £47,000
- Integrated therapies at The Rise – the budget was to increase the NHS contract when The Rise was set up; however, in the last two years the council had not been charged any additional money by NHS Berkshire having been told that the work was covered by the initial contract. The £22,000 budget has therefore remained unspent. In addition to this, the council also received income from other LAs based at The Rise and last year we received around £20,000, so the forecast for the year showed a £42,000 underspend.

The Forum highlighted that the underspend included therapeutic services and sought reassurance that the budget would not be reduced. Paul Clark explained that the council was not intending to remove those budgets but had experienced difficulty in recruiting to some of the posts, hence the underspendings. At the end of the financial year, all overspend and underspend across the HNB would be aggregated and carried forward to the following year. The budget proposals would set out the current budgets at a detailed service level and show if the proposals for 2023-24 referred to an increase or decrease, so there would be transparency about any proposed changes which the Forum would be asked to comment on.

The Forum asked for clarification on the £22.8m forecast debt and whether the council was still expected to manage the debt from 1 April 2023. Paul Clark replied that, the original position was that LAs would be expected to manage the cumulative debt from their own resources by April 2023. However, evidence had proved through financial reviews that it was unrealistic to expect LAs to finance their deficits at this stage and the information that had been informally shared so far with County Treasurers was that the requirement for LAs to take back the debt would be extended

so that liability would remain with the DfE, although there had been no announcements as to how long it would be extended. Regarding the day-to-day practical implication on the Schools' Budget, the council would have to manage any debt charges via its reserves so it would not have a direct impact on the Schools Budget. However, in terms of getting into a position to pay back the debt, that was a significant concern, and the council was not yet at a stage where it had developed a plan to balance the budget.

RESOLVED to NOTE:

1. the budget variances being forecast on the Schools' Budget that total to an aggregate net forecast over spending of £7.671m (paragraph 6.14 of the report);
2. that the year-end balance held in the Dedicated Schools Grant Adjustment Account is forecast at a deficit of £17.011m deficit (paragraph 6.14 of the report);
3. the possibility that liability to fund balances held in the Dedicated Schools Grant Adjustment Account would transfer to LAs from April 2023 (paragraphs 6.18 to 6.19 of the report); and
4. progress to date on the Education Capital Programme, as summarised at Annex 2 of the report.

The Forum also noted its deep concerns about how this would be managed going forward and the potential impact not only on SEN students but all students within the Borough.

259. Update on the 2023-24 High Needs Block Budget

The Forum considered a report which sought comments on the key budget proposals expected for the High Needs Block (HNB) element of the Schools' Budget.

The Forum queried whether the assumptions made in the report still held true following the Chancellor's announcements relating to the Autumn Statement. Paul Clark explained that the report did not present any figures but just set out the initial budget considerations. There was a need to wait for further details to be released.

Cheryl Eyre shared that there was a growing concern around the capacity of the Child Development Centre (CDC) Team. The Team had performed to a high standard but had had an increase in referrals of 50%. This had meant they were reaching the point where they were becoming incapable of meeting demand. Cheryl asked if the Forum would agree a business case to increase the team by 1.7 FTE and an increase in spend to implement the cost of the re-evaluated pay grades. The Forum expressed support in principle. Cheryl Eyre agreed to progress the business plan and highlighted that there would be a cost implication for the HNB. Councillor Barnard added that, if the council invested in the CDC to support them to continue to achieve good outcomes, the evidence suggested that the pathways the children may follow would result in less impact on the HNB further down the line.

The Forum asked whether there had been any analysis on the impact the on-going commitments and planned changes to service delivery would have on the budget and how it may bring down the overspend. Paul Clark replied that the intention was to update the figures following the Forum identifying which budget development proposals should be considered by the council.

The Forum requested that the council consider how co-working with neighbouring authorities and sharing staff could bring costs down. Cheryl Eyre explained that she would be meeting with peers from neighbouring authorities to discuss therapeutic services and whether there was potential to work together. Cheryl had also

consulted neighbouring authorities on other pieces of work and established good relationships with colleagues.

Action: Cheryl Eyre

RESOLVED

1. to AGREE that the budget development items set out at paragraph 6.9 of the report are included in the detailed budget proposals for 2023-2; and
2. to IDENTIFY the following proposal that should be considered by the Council:
 - i. closer working and planning with neighbouring local authorities.

260. Outcomes from the October 2022 Financial Consultation with Schools

The Forum considered a report which updated on the responses from the recent financial consultation from schools which sought views on the approach to setting a minimum increase in per pupil funding from 2022-23 and also whether maintained schools supported on-going de-delegation of budgets and making a financial contribution to statutory education related duties for which the council was responsible for meeting but received no funding.

RESOLVED

1. to NOTE the outcomes from the financial consultation with schools as summarised in the supporting information and Annex 1; and
2. that the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning (CYPL) is asked to AGREE that:
 - i. all schools should receive the maximum +0.5% increase in per pupil funding from the 2022-23 financial year. subject to affordability; and
 - ii. any cost associated with providing all schools with the agreed minimum percentage increase in per pupil funding from 2022-23 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 the continued de-delegation of budgets for the services requested by the council.

Item for Maintained Secondary School representatives only

As there was no maintained secondary school representative present. the question whether to AGREE the continued de-delegation of budgets for the services requested by the council would be deferred to the next meeting of the forum, when Keith Grainger would be asked to confirm his approval of the proposed action. **Action: Keith Grainger**

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

RESOLVED to AGREE 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.

AOB

Update on SRPs

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Nathan Jones updated that the Service Level Agreements had been sent to all relevant schools for consideration and sign-off. Nathan had started the review of the Meadow Vale SRP and had started working with health colleagues and the Parent Carer Forum. Nathan had also started to engage with all the SRP Headteachers to identify their training needs. Nathan had emailed secondary Headteachers to find out if they were interested in hosting an SRP. Regarding the banding tool, there was a plan to run 50% of the EHCP cohort through the new banding tool which Nathan and Paul would moderate and cross-reference against the current banding levels. Nathan would present a more detailed report to the Forum at the next meeting on 8 December.

Action: Nathan Jones

Restructuring of SEND services

Cheryl Eyre explained that the SEN statutory services had been restructured earlier in the year following a transformation project. However, the service as a whole area still needed review and, following feedback from schools, a number of models had been developed. A final model had been developed and was currently being consulted on. The proposed structure included additional capacity; there would be one Head of Service supported by an additional layer of strategic leads directly managing the different teams. Additional posts had or would be created to fill identified gaps, including a post-16 SEND officer, a participation officer to work with SEND families outside of schools, and a dedicated officer to strengthen the work around tribunals and ensure that learning was shared quickly following tribunals. The council had committed to significant additional investment in SEND services and the structure would be aligned to the Written Statement of Action (WSOA).

The Forum noted that responses to the consultation were needed by 1 December 2022, and this was not a long time to consider the plans. It was also noted that the documents had only been sent out to Headteachers and that there were members of the Forum who were not Headteachers who would therefore have even less time to respond. Cheryl agreed to send out the documents to the Forum.

Action: Cheryl Eyre

The Forum asked why some of the new posts were only for two years. Cheryl replied that national SEN reforms were expected in two years' time and there was a need to ensure that whatever we have got in place aligns with those reforms. We could not wait two years before putting in new posts, but there was a need to factor in a review period in case further changes were needed following the SEN reforms. Therefore, the new posts would be reviewed in 2024.

The Forum asked whether there was going to be any redundancy. Cheryl replied that there was potentially one post that would be deleted as it had been a combined post and would be split into two managers.

The Forum queried where the funding was coming from for the specialist English as an Additional Language (EAL) teacher. Cheryl replied that this was due to be funded by the Ukrainian refugee funding that was allocated directly to the council. However, the service had not been able to recruit someone with the right skills.

The Forum expressed that there was an unfair distribution of funds for Ukrainian children placed in schools in the Borough. as only those from the Homes for Ukrainian children scheme got the additional funding as opposed to those who

arrived on family Visas. Councillor Barnard and Cheryl Eyre agreed to take that forward.

Action: Councillor Barnard and Cheryl Eyre

Autumn Statement

Paul Clark highlighted the following from the Autumn Statement:

- There would be an extra £4.6bn in the core schools' budget in the next 2 years;
- There would be a 3.5% cash increase in the core school budget in 24/25 compared to previously published figures; and
- The Institute of Fiscal Studies commented that It restored 2010 levels of per pupil funding in real terms and provided an average cash increase for every pupil of more than £1,000 by 2024-25 compared to 2021-22.

Membership

A new trade union representative had joined the Forum and would be attending the next meeting. There were currently four vacancies: one primary governor, one secondary governor, one 16-19 provider, and one member from a pupil referral unit.

261. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The next meeting of the Forum would be held at 4.30pm on Thursday 8 December 2022.

CHAIRMAN