

SCHOOLS FORUM

TUESDAY, 12 DECEMBER 2017

PRESENT: Head Teacher Representatives: Richard Pilgrim (Chairman), Amanda Dean, Chris Tomes, Joolz Scarlett, Isabel Cooke, Mike Wallace and Martin Tinsley.

Governor Representatives: Hugh Boulter and Jo Haswell.

Officers: James Norris, Tracey Anne Nevitt and David Cook.

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

Resolved unanimously: that Richard Pilgrim be appointed as Chairman and Martin Tinsley as Vice-Chairman of the Schools Form.

It was noted that Nick Stevens had resigned from the Schools Forum.

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Alison Penny, Nick Stevens and Kevin McDaniel.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2017 were approved as a true and correct record.

FALLING ROLLS FUND

The Head of Finance (RBWM) Achieving for Children informed the Forum that on 8th March 2016 the Schools Forum agreed the implementation of the falling rolls funding. qualifying criteria. The criteria and funding parameters were shown within the report. The Forum were reminded that the funding was taken from the Dedicated Schools Grant and thus every school contributed.

The Forum were informed that the falling rolls funding was a short term solution to allow schools maintain teaching levels during the short term fall in pupil numbers.

In response to questions the Forum were informed that there was no dedicated budget line for the funding and it was called upon when required. In previous years there had been a budget surplus to call upon however this was no longer available. The funding was limited to a two to three year period after which pupil numbers would be expected to rise. If it was felt that the fall in pupil numbers was permanent the fund would not be used.

Concern was raised that the Forum were being asked to provide additional funding after they had recently agreed to fund work in the high needs block; it would have been better if both requests had been made together.

The Forum discussed the current situation with Churchmead Church of England (VA) Secondary School that had applied for falling rolls funding. It was noted that there had been two new free schools opening in Slough that were 1 mile from Churchmead. The Forum were

informed that applications had been received from both Churchmead and Altwood and the admissions team felt that their admission numbers would increase in the future.

The Forum felt that when there were free schools opening within three miles of an existing school the local authority should be aware and expect that there would be an impact on numbers and thus better planning should be in place. It was also noted that the request form funding would have a bigger impact on smaller schools. It would be helpful to have some modelling done to assess the impact on school funding.

It was recommended that when an application for funding was made it should be shown what the funding would be used for and details of the impact on the school due to falling numbers. It was noted that Churchmead had provided a detailed application that showed the savings they had introduced over the last 4 years and how first preference numbers had increased. Without the funding Churchmead could slip back into special measures.

The Chairman requested that if the item was brought back to the Forum's next meeting that the impact on schools funding be shown as well as information from the admissions team on future place planning.

It was agreed that the item be brought back to the next meeting.

SCHOOLS BUDGET MONITORING 2017/18

The Head of Finance (RBWM) Achieving for Children introduced the report that provided the Schools Forum with the projected financial position for 2017/18 with risks and opportunities, the projected reserve balance at 31 March 2018 and an understanding of the financial pressures.

The Forum were informed that there was a net in year deficit of £595,000 relating to the dedicated schools grant funded services mainly relating to the release of the underachievement of the High Needs Block savings plan. Since it was last reported there had been increased deficit of £112,000.

Section 3.4 of the report showed that the net overspend would be an additional pressure on the dedicated schools grant reserve which had a projected deficit of £1,223,000 for 31 March 2018. The Head of Finance (RBWM) Achieving for Children advised this should in fact be £1,347,000.

Table 1 provided a summary of the current financial position whilst table 2 highlighted the risks with associated commentary. If the risks were added to the projected deficit then the projected reserve balance at 31 March 2018 would increase to £2,017,000.

The Chairman mentioned that it was not a good position and that the high needs block savings had not yet been achieved, he asked how the Forum could get back to a balanced budget. The Forum were informed that the block transfer for the SEN working party had been approved and that there was Clinical Commissioning Group funding for the SEND transition to raise standards and performance. Both would help deal with out of borough placements.

The Chairman asked what would happen if there was a deficit when the new funding formula was introduced. The Forum were informed that there was no DFE guidance on this but officers could talk to Achieving for Children colleagues as they had bigger deficits.

The Chairman said that there was a need to be prudent but also a need to maintain quality.

The Forum were informed that note 2 in the report showed that the biggest risk of a further overspend was within the High Needs Block. Currently there was a risk of an under achievement of the savings plan. The SEN working party would review the savings plan.

With regards to the bad debt provision the Forum were informed that this was expected to be written off as it was unlikely that the loan would be repaid due to the academies deficit.

Resolved unanimously: that the report be noted.

The meeting, which began at 2.30 pm, finished at 3.40 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....