

SCHOOLS FORUM

5 MARCH 2013

Present: Mark Eynon (Chairman & Furze Platt Senior Governor), Sandy Brown (TASS), Gill Cocklin (South Ascot Primary Head Teacher), Isabel Cooke (White Waltham Head Teacher), Sarah Edwards (TASS), Kathleen Higgins (Secondary Academy Representative), Dan Jacoby (Governor Desborough), Gina Kendall (PVI Rep), Helen McHale (Maidenhead Nursery), Alison Penny (Woodlands Park Primary Head Teacher), Richard Pilgrim (Charters Head Teacher), Cynthia Pitteway (Knowl Hill Primary) and Nick Stevens (Wessex Primary Head Teacher)

Officers: Dominic Asater, Edmund Bradley, Michael Rosen, Angela Wellings and Simon Wright.

PART I

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Liz Clark, Clive Haines, Ania Hildrey, Phyllis James, Gill Labrum, and Gillian May

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received.

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2013 were agreed as a correct record.

The Chairman advised that he would be taking Item No. 7 – High Needs Provision first to allow officers to leave and attend another meeting after it had been considered.

HIGH NEEDS PROVISION

Dominic Asater gave the background to the report and outlined legislative changes and clarified that the high needs block funding was contained in the DSG. The breakdown of the accounts in to schools, early years and high needs blocks was explained.

The Chairman sought clarification of bullet point 1.2.1 in Table 1 which related to a deduction of £149k. It was advised that this was funding transferred from the high needs block into schools delegated budgets to enable schools to cover the first £6k of additional support costs from their delegated budget share. Dan Jacoby asked about the additional funding and it was confirmed that it was built in to the base budget. Nick Stevens advised that the £6k was additional to the other funding schools received. In response to Nick Stevens it was confirmed that figures of £7k to £9k quoted elsewhere was element three funding and was separate to this. Discussion ensued on the funding formula and the Chairman advised that this was done as per government guidance.

In respect of distributing additional funding for schools which believed their notional SEN budget, delegated through the formula, was insufficient to cover actual SEN needs in the school, it was noted that an annual allocation process was proposed at the end of October and the protocol was attached to the report. It was acknowledged that there could be issues with pupils transferring mid-year and the financial burden this could put on schools. A number of forum members expressed concern at schools having to carry the cost of students for up to a year until funding could be allocated. It was noted that this was only up to £6k of funding. The Chairman suggested that whilst the process suggested was understandable there needed to be a degree of flexibility for mid year transfers.

Michael Rosen emphasised that the funding to be allocated was relatively small but the suggested system would be constantly reviewed to see how it was operating. Kathleen Higgins suggested that the situation would be worse for some schools as those with stable pupil numbers would be able to predict financial need far easier than those with a higher turnover.

After further discussion there was a consensus that the possibility of two allocations a year should be investigated further and reviewed when necessary. Gill Cocklin highlighted the additional staffing costs associated with statemented children in schools. It was agreed that the matter be referred to the High Needs Group for more detailed discussion of the options.

In response to Dan Jacoby it was confirmed that a £150k contingency budget had been budgeted for in the high needs block. Dominic Asater confirmed that SEN funding was allocated to reflect anticipated need and applications would need to be rigorously costed.

Dominic Asater gave details regarding specialist schools, particularly Manor Green, and confirmed that funding was £10k a place with top up funding as required which the commissioning authority would pay. Work was continuing on determining top-up rates for Manor Green.

The Chairman sought further information regarding pupils attending the school from out of borough. Dominic Asater highlighted paragraph 12.3 in the report that highlighted the profile of needs at Manor Green and the subsequent adjustment of -£1,149k to reflect funding that would need to be recovered by the school for pupils from other areas. Attention was drawn to a potential £556k deficit shown in paragraph 12.5 if top-up rates were based on current band values.

The chairman questioned the assessment of pupil needs at the school as they appeared to have radically changed from previous years. Michael Rosen agreed that the ratios had to be properly assessed and the funding bands were dependant on support needs. It was suggested a number of factors such as a change in the school population and the level of support needs could influence the situation. It could be due to lower needs children being taught in mainstream schools.

Gill Cocklin asked if out of borough placements adhered to the published rates. Edmund Bradley clarified that this was for negotiation between the school and each local authority. Michael Rosen advised that this went back to old SEN rules and it was acknowledged that consistency across boundaries would be beneficial. Dan Jacoby sought clarification regarding the difference in the band rates between paragraphs 12.2 and 12.5. Dominic Asater advised that the rates in

paragraph 12.2 were before allocation of the £547k currently allocated through non-place factors. This funding had been allocated to the band rates in paragraph 12.5. In response to Nick Stevens it was agreed there was always a risk that pupils could go elsewhere if costs were too high. The Chairman reiterated the importance of verifying figures for Manor Green. Kathleen Higgins noted the yearly increases in out of borough placements. Michael Rosen acknowledged the concern and explained issues around the uncertainty of SEN tribunal decisions.

Further discussion ensued in respect of the numbers of out of borough placements, the physical size of the school and the various funding options. Angela Wellings highlighted that there were a number of specialist schools in neighbouring areas and local authorities would look to obtain the best deal possible. The Chairman suggested that the focus needed to be on RBWM need and more detailed information was needed.

Isabel Cooke asked if there were limits on how many children could be allocated in each need band. Michael Rosen indicated that a number of factors contributed but assessments could be reviewed. Dan Jacoby suggested a strategic review was required as RBWM was spending some £5m sending pupils out of the area. Michael Rosen advised that a revised strategy would be coming forward in June and banding of SEN would be based on individual need.

(Sarah Edwards left the meeting at this juncture)

The forum noted new arrangements for post 16 SEN from 1 August and that elements 1&2 would move to the EFA with element 3 being the responsibility of the LA. The DSG baseline funding had been adjusted accordingly. The financial impact to RBWM was around £500k in 2013/2014 shown in paragraph 17.4.2 and a letter had been sent to the EFA regarding issues associated with the changes. The main concern was about the level of DSG funding being used to 'subsidise' post 16 SEN, calculated to be over £2 million.

After further discussion the report was noted.

(Kathleen Higgins left the meeting at this juncture)

SCHOOLS BUDGET 2012/2013 PROJECTED OUTTURN - UPDATE

Edmund Bradley introduced the report and explained that the figures were essentially as previously reported although there was a slightly increased projected underspend of £1,063k which was £11k more.

Dan Jacoby referred to the recent distribution of £500k to schools and sought clarification of pupil numbers as there were 17,700 pupils in RBWM schools but the documents referred to 19,600 including some in private schools. It was clarified that the larger figure included early years provision and some of this was provided by private schools and was therefore part of the scheme. Gill Cocklin highlighted that there was always an underspend.

Dan Jacoby highlighted Table 3.3 in the report and suggested that the decision equated to overspending the DSG allocation in each of the next two financial years (2013-14 and 2014-15) by £500k but it was fortunate that the savings were able to cover the overspend. Edmund Bradley explained that surpluses from previous years were included and this could be maintained for another couple of

years but decisions would be needed on how to reduce expenditure from 2015 onwards. Dan Jacoby suggested that it would be preferable to address the situation during the next financial year and take a strategic approach to rectifying the position by limiting expenditure in 2014-15 to the DSG allocation. Isabel Cooke concurred and indicated that schools were not fully aware of the financial implications and this could be a problem in future years.

The Chairman suggested that the Forum had been cognisant of the risks when making decisions and it was fully acknowledged that the situation would need to be addressed in 2015/2016. The amount of money distributed to schools was relatively small. Nick Stevens advised that the recent distribution had been additional. In respect of clarity of the budget information for schools the chairman suggested that it could be made clear that the funding would not be ongoing in future years. Dan Jacoby reiterated concerns at propagating an overspend. Gill Cocklin suggested the budget process always produced winners and losers and needed careful management.

Cynthia Pitteway emphasised the importance of communication within clusters and the Forum had been supportive of using the underspend to support current pupils. The Chairman advised that school bursars had been made aware that the one-off in-year funding would not be repeated in future years and they needed to plan accordingly. Dominic Asater outlined the financial implications in finding funding from other budgets and the possibility of in year distribution would need to be clarified.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: To note that the estimated 2012-13 year end outturn projection for the central Schools Block Budget of £9.4 million, reported to Cabinet in February, is an underspend of £1,063k.

2013-14 DSG SETTLEMENT AND FINAL SCHOOLS BUDGET

Members of the Forum considered a report in respect of the final budget for the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2013/2014. Dominic Asater introduced the report and outlined that it reflected the position as reported in January. There were a couple of small amendments shown in paragraph 4.2 of the report. Edmund Bradley advised that information would need to be included in a Section 251 statement to be submitted to the DfE in March.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the report be noted.

EARLY YEARS SINGLE FUNDING FORMULA 2013-14 AND FUNDING DELIVERY OF FREE ENTITLEMENT TO TWO YEAR OLDS

Edmund Bradley introduced the report and explained that it considered financial rather than service issues relating to delivery of free entitlement.

Clarification was given that it covered the PVI sector. The Chairman suggested that there could be options to increase maintained provision. Edmund Bradley highlighted the targets for the borough in the coming years. It was further explained that the DfE had allocated funding to LAs for two year olds at the average rate of £5.09 per hour but the allocation for the borough, at £5.48 was higher as it attracted a regional adjustment.

The Chairman referred to the estimated 203 funded 2 year olds in 2013/2014 and it was acknowledged that this was unlikely to be reached. It was asked why £5.32 was being pursued as this was not competitive. Edmund Bradley emphasised the uncertainty of future funding and the need not to set a rate too high that would then be reduced in subsequent years. Budget options, including the ringfencing of any underspends on two year old funding, as proposed in the paper, was discussed.

The Chairman emphasised the need to achieve an increase in numbers and offer a competitive rate to establish providers. Alison Penny suggested that providers would welcome an initially higher figure as long as it was made clear that this would probably not continue in future years. There was a consensus that this option could be explored in more detail. Edmund Bradley acknowledged the view being put forward and suggested this would need to be taken back to Michael Rosen. It was noted that the rate suggested in the report was higher than other areas. Dominic Asater highlighted the problems in getting strategic guidance, geography and likely need which could have informed the report better. In response to Dan Jacoby it was agreed that a coherent growth strategy was needed.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That a decision be deferred and the matter be considered in more detail by a smaller group to formulate recommendations.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Edmund Bradley reported that another consultation had been received from the DfE reviewing the implementation and initial impact of the DfE's new school funding arrangements and details would be emailed to forum members, headteachers and school bursars. Responses needed to be submitted by 26 March 2013.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that dates for further meetings would be circulated to Forum members once they had been clarified with the Chairman.

MEETING

The meeting, which opened at 3.30pm, ended at 5.50pm.