

## SCHOOLS FORUM

TUESDAY, 5 JULY 2016

Present: Head Teacher Representatives: Isabel Cooke, Richard Pilgrim (Chairman), Heidi Swidenbank, Alison Penny, Nick Stevens (Vice-Chairman), Stuart Muir, Ania Hildrey, Mike Wallace and Chris Tomes.

Governor Representatives: Hugh Boulter and Jo Haswell.

Non- School Representatives: Gina Kendall.

Cllr D Wilson and Cllr Hill.

Officers: Alison Alexander, Kevin McDaniel, Edmund Bradley and David Cook.

### APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Martin Tinsley, Anne Entwistle and Helen McHale.

### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

### MINUTES

Resolved unanimously: that the minutes of the meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2016 be approved as a true and correct record and that the minutes of the meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016 be approved as a true and correct record subject to page 15 noting that Chris Tomes represents Churchmead and not Charters.

### GROWTH FUND 2016-17 TO 2018-19

The Chairman introduced the report that related to the proposed changes previously considered to the Growth Fund provision. The Forum were informed that under school finance regulations local authorities (LAs) could topslice the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in order to create a growth fund to support maintained and academy schools which are required to provide extra places in order to meet basic need. The growth fund was designed to support a school temporarily or permanently increasing their PAN on a planned basis to meet basic need before the census process caught up with the number of pupils in the school. This is typically seven months for maintained schools and a year for Academy schools.

After being in operation for a number of years, the Forum considered the Growth Fund and felt that the formula had been over-generous, leading to some schools appearing to gain unduly. The forum approved a revised formula that had been applied retrospectively. A mechanism was introduced to get funds back if the planned growth did not happen.

Following feedback from school and discussions with schools expanding from September 2016 it was agreed to bring the formula back to the Forum to agree the future growth fund methodology for three financial years starting 2016/17.

The Forum were being asked to agree a new formula as set out in section 4 of the report, or modify the current scheme set out in section 5, or to maintain the current arrangements.

The Chairman said that a three year limit on the growth fund was to help employ a teacher before funding caught up and that this three years was sufficient to pay for a five year expansion.

Hugh Boulter reported that schools had entered into an agreement with the LA for the expansion of pupil numbers and had committed finances to make this happen; the LA had changed the rules and schools would receive less funding than they had planned for.

Mike Wallace agreed that schools had made a commitment with the LA and had put resources in place based on that agreement, he questioned if all schools had been consulted when the changes were made. The Forum were informed that they had made the decision and that they represented their sectors on this body.

The Chairman reported that when the report was considered in October there was a table that clearly showed the implications of the proposed changes.

Nick Stevens reported that there seemed to have been a problem communicating the changes to schools.

Cllr Hill in his capacity as Ward Member and governor of Oldfield School reported that he felt aggrieved about how the funding had been applied. The school had expanded and was oversubscribed and this expansion had been agreed with the LA. He felt it was not fair for the LA to then change the rules that would put a pressure on the school budget. He could understand the change for future expansion but not retrospectively applying it to schools. He was asking the Forum to change its decision in respect to Oldfield or if the Forum would provide support to the school from its reserves as if there was no change the school would be facing a £100k pressure.

Cllr Wilson was also in attendance as a Ward Member who supported the excellent school. As Lead Member for Planning he mentioned that there was a planned housing expansion in Maidenhead that would put further pressures on schools and it was not right to hinder this outstanding school that had been asked to expand to help meet demand. Funding had been secured for the first three years expansion but the changes had removed funding for the final three years and thus would result in a funding shortfall; he felt this was not acceptable. The LA should continue to fund the additional places until the school was full. He directed the Forum to the comments made by the school on page 32 of the report and that parents and governors had attended this meeting to support the schools request.

The Chairman mentioned that there was an issue with schools expectations, the decision made by the Forum in October had been very clear. There was an issue that support one borough school could have a negative impact on other schools as the funding was taken from the DSG.

Isabel Cooke reiterated that all schools are in need of extra funding; especially those expanding. Other schools would welcome the £60k reserve and we needed to be mindful of all pupils in the system and not just one school.

Cllr Hill replied that Oldfield could be seen as a special case due to the increased development in Maidenhead and demographic growth in the area.

Mike Wallace reported that he did not agree with the change and that his school had been affected. The problem was that there had been poor communication with school being told different things.

Cllr Wilson mentioned that there was an increasing pressure on local schools and that he LA should be contacting the DFE saying that we have an issue with funding due to the population growth.

The Forum were informed that regulations required that the growth fund be formulated and to allow a special case would set a precedent for future use.

The Chairman asked what would the impact of the MFG and was informed that section 3.13, page 27, of the report showed the impact of the MFG.

Jo Hasweell reported that she was a new member of the Forum but it seems that schools were encouraged to expand with additional funding being provided to support this and questioned if the changes were communicated to school. The Forum were informed that the Forum decisions and reports were public and that scheme changes were sent to schools. The decision was communicated to school but not face to face.

Members of the public in attendance raised concern that the new formula was not fair on schools going through expansion and then getting less funding. They mentioned that Oldfield school had been given a commitment that funding would be provided throughout expansion. The Forum was informed that the funding was taken out of the DSG and if funding for expansion was increased this would result in the funding per pupil in all schools dropping.

Cllr Wilson informed that the borough had taken the decision to expand Oldfield and when this decision was made they were aware of the additional funding requirements and this should not have been cut. The Chairman replied that the Forum had made the decision that three years growth funding was sufficient to fund growth.

The Oldfield Business manager reported that over the past 11 years the school had balanced its books but since being asked to expand and move to a new site to aid expansion there had been an increase in costs such as business rates, utility bills and increased maintenance costs; no other expanding schools had these associated costs.

Ania Hildrey mentioned that she understood the concerns being raised by Oldfield as she had expanded her school on a new site and the concern of all schools where funding was an issue. However she did not feel that the Forum should be lobbied by individual schools the decision made for growth funding had been taken with the best interest of all school in mind. The Forum represented all sector but there were lessons to be learnt about communicating decisions.

Nick Stevens mentioned that we LA should lobby the DFE but whilst the Council continued to keep council tax at the same level whilst funding was reducing there was a reduced capacity to help schools.

**Resolved: that recommendation 2.1 (set out in section 4 of the report) be approved (10 for, 3 against and 1 abstention.)**

#### REQUEST FROM COX GREEN FOR GROWTH FUNDING IN 2016-17

Heidi Swindenbank requested that the Forum bring forward growth funding for Cox Green by one year. She informed that she was mindful of the previous discussion but it had been decided that Cox Green would expand in 2017, however after the LA decided to allow another secondary school to expand in 2016 Cox Green had to bring forward their expansion plans to prevent any negative impact on the school.

During the admission round the public were informed that the other school was expanding and thus pupils could apply to go to that school. It was requested that the Forum agree to bring forward the growth fund allocation for Cox Green from September 2017 to September 2016, to reflect the actual expansion taking place in 2016-17.

The Chairman asked if the Forum had the authority to make this decision and was informed that it had been brought to the Forum as there was an issue regarding fairness. When the press were told that Furze Platt Secondary School would be expanding in 2016 legal had advised that the expansion had to go ahead as there could be a number of successful school

appeals now that the expansion programme had been announced. Officers had been told that Cox Green was also expected to be over subscribed but on offer day they were below PAN and thus did not meet the expansion criteria.

Heidi Swindenbank reported that Cox Green was over PAN on decision day and the LA had said that both Furze Platt and Cox Green would expand.

**Resolved unanimously: to bring forward the growth fund allocation for Cox Green from September 2017 to September 2016.**

### 2015-16 SCHOOLS BUDGET OUTTURN, DSG RESERVE, & SCHOOL BALANCES

The Chairman introduced the report that detailed the final outturn position of the 2015-16 schools budget, the level of DSG reserve and the level of maintained school balances held at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016. The Chairman highlighted that the level of reserve had dropped and asked the Forum to consider if this was too low or at the right level.

It was noted that the report showed that Oldfield was holding £70k in reserves and questioned why some schools were holding back funds that could be used for children's education; it was mentioned that there used to be a claw back mechanism for un allocated funds. The Forum were informed that this mechanism was never implemented.

It was mentioned that some schools may be future proofing against the new national funding formula or building up reserves for capital projects. The Forum were informed that the LA did question when maintained school had built up reserves and if they wished the Forum could set up a mechanism for the re-distribution of funds.

The Chairman said that the level of reserves being held by schools could be a future agenda item.

**Resolved unanimously: that the Schools Forum note the report and approved the relative balances in the general and earmarked DSG reserves.**

### SEND FUNDING PROGRESS UPDATED

Item withdrawn.

### FUNDING REFORM 2017-18 AND BEYOND

The Forum were informed that there was still no indication when the stage 2 consultation would be undertaken.

Isabel Cooke asked for clarification on the early help intervention officers whose funding was agreed by the Forum; it was agreed an update would be provided.

The meeting, which began at 2.30 pm, finished at 4.40 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....