

SCHOOLS FORUM

WEDNESDAY, 18 JULY 2018

PRESENT: Richard Pilgrim (Chairman), Isabelle Cooke, Hugh Boulter, Mike Wallace, Martin Tinsley, Beata Felmer, Amanda Dean, Sarah Cottle, Joolz Scarlett, Chris Tomes and Frances Walsh.

Officers: Wendy Binmore, Kevin McDaniel and Tracey Anne Nevitt

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Jo Haswell, Amanda Hough, Alison Penny and James Norris.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2018 be approved.

Update on actions from previous minutes:

The Chairman asked if there were any changes to the position regarding the NFF. Kevin McDaniel, Director of Children's Services confirmed the paper had not yet been slated to go through so no changes had been made to the NFF status as yet. The Pay Review Body was going to make an award but, no one had an idea where the budget would come from yet.

- ❖ **Action** – to table the impact of high needs and deficit for October 2018 meeting.

Deficit and other Local Authorities

The chairman stated there was an action in the minutes to find out what other local authorities (LA's) were doing in relation to their deficits and how the Borough's students fared with the LA's debt compared with other students in other LA's and their debts. The Director of Children's Services responded the situation was reviewed with Ofsted. In the south east, there was 19 LA's with a level of overspend ranging up to 12-13%. The Royal Borough ranked at 4.5%. LA's with larger deficits were receiving attention from the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE gave money for the higher needs block, and schools with higher levels of high needs pupils were being put under greater financial pressure; those schools might see a shift in high needs funding.

The Director of Children's Services continued that the Borough were supporting the high needs area and continued to fight for further funding. He urged Members of the Forum to write to their MP as that was the kind of evidence that was needed. The Schools Forum could add another voice to the issue. Pressure was increasing on RBWM to get the current DSG deficit cleared.

The Chairman stated he would draft a letter on behalf of the Forum.

- ❖ **Action** – The Chairman to draft a letter on behalf of the Schools Forum and send it to the Department for Education and the local MP's.

SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF PAY AWARD 2019

Kevin McDaniel, Director of Children's Services introduced the paper and stated a chunk of the workforce were support staff and the report proposed to move towards paying the living wage by 2020. Changes would need to be made to peoples pay grades by 2019 and Appendix A, Page 15 of the agenda pack detailed that. He added that looking at how grades were spread out, Option One on the table in Appendix A was the recommended way of moving people across.

The Borough recommended option one as that put the least pressure on budgets. It favoured the lowest paid being moved first and then paying their increment to them. The proposals excluded Manor Green, Queen Anne and Clewer Green because they administered their own payroll but, they would still need to comply.

The Director of Children's Services stated a report would be taken to the Council's Employment Panel to approve the recommended approach which would include the Forum's views. HR would hold discussions with the Trade Unions on the recommended approach.

The Chairman stated academies set their own pay scales. The Director of Children's Services confirmed it was a challenge to get people to opt out of the national pay scale setting as the Borough set its own scales.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Schools Forum endorsed the preferred recommended option.

BUDGET MONITORING AND FORECAST 2018/19

Kevin McDaniel, Director of Children's Services explained to Members that Section three of the report contained the details of the budget for the year 2018/19, and that table two included risks and opportunities. There was £795k additional funding for Special Schools, along with a £7k deficit which was driven by meeting the needs of those with special needs. The Director of Children's Services expected to end the financial year with £2m deficit which excluded any positive balances held by schools.

The Director of Children's Services stated he had received a letter of comfort from the Department for Education (DfE) stating it would take up the debt from Desborough College and he looked forward to receiving the cheque.

Within the budget, there was no new service or provision for SEN but, the department was seeing new ways of doing things therefore, the finances would finish the year better than expected.

Table one showed a £2m deficit for the year end, Early Years had a surplus of £655k, and it appeared the grant allocation based on eligible pupils had all been taken up which created an underspend. The Director of Children's Services did not know if the

DfE would clawback the underspend from the Borough, he was still waiting to hear what next year's allocation would be.

Tracey Nevitt, Accountant for Achieving for Children (AfC) stated she had received confirmation that if not all of the 15 hours had not been taken up by parents with children in Early Years, that a proportion of the additional funding would be taken back by the DfE via the annual recalculation process

- ❖ **Action** – A term by term report to be produced on cost avoidance; savings made by not providing special places at non-maintained schools.

The Chairman said £203k there is an overspend on the high needs block in table three of the report. The Director of Children's Services confirmed there was no change in provision; the Borough spent £203k more on special schools and alternative provision. The department was still spending more than was available. He added any savings may need to stay within the individual blocks where the savings were made and there continued to be an overspend on high needs in future years. With regards to the work stream activity, the Borough should be in a position in October 2018 to state what was available in the budget. Item 5.4 of the report suggested to look at the entirety of the expenditure and what it provided. Martin Tinsley stated some funding went to Haybrook College in Slough, but there was an opportunity to keep alternative provision within the Borough. The Director of Children's Services responded RBWM was a very small Borough and he was comfortable that the Borough had some control over how its funding to other Boroughs to provide alternative provision was spent. The Borough did not have enough volume of students to run its own Pupil Referral Unit, so he was happy to continue using places like Haybrook as it was very nearby and was providing efficient services in both short term and longer term programmes.

The Director of Children's Services directed Members to the back page of the report where it showed £5m spending at Manor Green, he wanted Members to know how the Borough was spending the money and how it would continue to do things that were done in 2018. Joolz Scarlett stated she had developed a matrix which everyone should be able to see to show how spending was allocated and made it transparent. Members noted there were children with high needs in mainstream schools so they should have the same matrix. Martin Tinsley said they needed to make it clear that funding was available to all children as some ended up in special provision schools that should not be there. Joolz Scarlett responded they could keep children in mainstream schools if they had more funding. That was where the spend to save was as it would stop those children going out of Borough placements. Martin Tinsley stated the situation needed to be reviewed on a regular basis.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That The Forum noted the contents of the report including the reported variance, schedule of Risks & Opportunities and the projected deficit balance carried forward as at 31 March 2019.

SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP

The Chairman stated he could not see the Schools Forum not having a purpose which the final NFF was still a long way off, therefore, he wished to highlight a number of vacancies which were listed in table one of the report. The Director of Children's Services stated the Maintained PRU vacancy would be filled in 2019 and Graham Aldous, who had been nominated for the Academy Headteacher vacancy was no longer to take up the post, so that remained unfilled. The Chairman reminded

Members that the Forum needed the vacant positions to be filled so that it remained quorate. The Director of Children's Services said he was happy to take nominations. The Chairman responded he would like to hand the Chair over as he had been the Chairman for five years; however, he wished to remain a Member of the Schools Forum. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that whoever became the new Chairman had to be a school representative and could not be a Council Officer.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Schools Forum noted the contents of the paper and approved the nominations for new Members.

FINANCING FOR SCHOOLS CONSULTATION

The Chairman requested that the item be deferred to the next meeting of the Schools Forum, if the Forum was in agreement. The Director of Children's Services summarised the report and stated legislation prevented the Local Authority agreeing loans to schools unless they were agreed with the Secretary of State and there were very special circumstances. Deferring the item did not affect the making of any decision as the Borough could no longer agree to loan to a school without going through the Secretary of State. The Chairman asked if there was any appetite for looking at the role of the Schools Forum to alleviate the situation. The Chairman responded the Borough could choose to support schools for up to three years if there was a dip in pupil numbers via the falling rolls fund. It was possible to revisit the terms of that and there would need to be a wider decision around that.

The Chairman stated he had not looked at the criteria for a while, and in order to help struggling schools, they would need to make the dip shallower. The money would have to come out of everyone's budgets, so it would not be new money. He added this could be revisited and would need to come back for review.

- ❖ **Action** – For the Clerk of the Schools Forum to recirculate the report and add it to the next agenda.

WELLBEING SERVICE

The Director of Children's Services stated he met with the Wellbeing Service in January 2018 and looked at the evaluation of the service. The funding would run out in April 2019 for the service which was a very positive service so they needed to discuss options for future funding. Paragraph 5.3 of the report set out six possible ways the service could be funded but, the only viable option was to submit a request for funding from Health and Wellbeing colleagues. The Director of Children's Services added based on the schedule of High Needs Block areas identified for the Forum for review, providers would be asked to input into the High Needs Block budget setting for 2019/20. He said he would go to the Health and Wellbeing Board for funding towards the Wellbeing Service and he would provide a breakdown of the services the Borough wanted to offer. The Chairman stated the Schools Forum ought to be approaching Health and Wellbeing colleagues. Joolz Scarlett suggested providing evidence of the outcomes of the service so that colleagues knew what the funding was being spent on. The Director of Children's Services stated the funding should make up part of the High Needs offering as per what was agreed in January 2018.

Joolz Scarlett stated there was no mechanism in place for those without an Education and Healthcare Plan (EHCP) and it was a very expensive resource but, the service could be doing more. The Director of Children's Services stated there were lots of

good ideas out there and he would get the impact report on the Wellbeing Service recirculated to the Members of the Forum, Joolz Scarlett said she needed to see the data as it was a qualitative service. The Director of Children's Services agreed as qualitative evidence was just as important as the statistical data. Jools Scarlett explained there were trusted measures that could be put in place, there were some quite complex cases so they needed to look at more than just attendance. Mike Wallace asked for the numbers of children on role that met the criteria but were not enrolled at Manor Green. The Director of Children's Services stated he would have the figures available for the next meeting. Joolz Scarlett stated there were 263 students but, not all of them were from the Royal Borough. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that out of 900 children with an EHCP, approximately 500 were in mainstream education and approximately 400 were enrolled onto alternative provision.

The Director of Children's Services stated the next meeting of the Schools Forum, they would try to shape what went into the budget for April 2019.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Members of the Schools Forum agreed for the Director of Children's Services to approach Health partners to seek funding towards the Wellbeing Service and identify any other services and activities funded by the High Needs Block that could be reviewed and reduced to fund the Wellbeing Service on a permanent basis.

The meeting, which began at 2.00 pm, finished at 3.10 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....