

SCHOOLS FORUM

THURSDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2018

PRESENT: Amanda Dean, Hugh Boulter, Chris Tomes, Beata Felmer, Alison Penny, Amanda Hough and Frances Walsh.

Officers: Wendy Binmore, Alison Corssick, Kevin McDaniel, Tracey Anne Nevitt and James Norris

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Mike Wallace be appointed Chairman for this meeting. Martin Tinsley be appointed as Chairman and Chris Tomes be appointed as Vice-Chairman moving forward.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Isabel Cooke, Richard Pilgrim and Martin Tinsley.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2018 be approved.

Actions from previous minutes:

The Chairman to draft a letter on behalf of the Schools Forum and send it to the DfE and local MPs:

The leader of the Local Authority wrote to the Minister for Education and Richard Pilgrim added to it. Kevin McDaniel confirmed he would obtain a copy of the letter and circulate it to the Forum.

A term by term report to be produced on cost avoidance; savings made by not providing special places at non-maintained schools:

This action was covered by an agenda item in full.

Schools Forum Membership:

Mike Wallace, Acting Chairman stated the Forum still had vacancies for secondary school governors. Kevin McDaniel, Director of Children's Services confirmed the vacancy was for a maintained secondary school governor.

- ❖ **Action** – James Norris, Head of Finance (AfC) to recirculate the updated membership list of the Schools Forum to members.

DSG BUDGET MONITORING AND FORECAST SEPTEMBER 2018-19

James Norris, Head of Finance (AfC), stated the report was a good news item as the overall forecast position came down, but with caveats as it was only September so the position could yet change. He asked the Forum to note the report and explained the current reported projected in-year deficit was £365,000 which consisted of:

- High Needs top up funding £436,000
- Special School top up and place funding increase of £352,000
- Early Years 2017/18 unallocated PVI and maintained provider funding (£258,000)
- Contingency provision greater challenge resulting in reduced allocations (£97,000)
- Inclusion Fund first term lower take up (£45,000)
- Sensory Consortium Service (£20,000)
- Other minor variances net (£3,000).

The Head of Finance (AfC) stated the High Needs top up funding had not changed and the Early Years PVI released £258k funding from 2017/18. Contingency claims had not been approved so adjustments had been made. He added table one set out the variances. Chris Tomes asked if it was likely to continue. The Head of Finance (AfC) confirmed he did not think they would continue to see further reduction in the deficit. He and tried to be transparent and release information as soon as possible. As soon as he recognised any movements, he tried to bring it to the Schools Forum as soon as possible. The Head of Finance (AfC) said he did not think they would see the deficit get any lower.

In terms of the underspend, the Head of Finance (AfC) stated that take up was a lot lower by parents. Overfunding was at £700k so the government had clawed some of that funding back. It was a one-off amount and a revised projection had been provided for 2018/19. He added that table three showed future projections that were not part of the forecast. There were £303k further projections in the High Needs block so, £600k was put into the risk register. However there were other underspends so it was possible he could say that the deficit for October 2018 could be increased.

The Head of Finance (AfC) explained the net overspend would be an additional pressure on the dedicated schools grant reserve which was at 31 March 2018 was a deficit of £1,212,000; the revised projected deficit as at 31 March 2019 had increased to £1,577,000. The projected reserve balance as at 31 March 2019 of £1,577,000 excluded the Risk and Opportunities Register net balance of £303,000 overspend, therefore the projected reserve balance as at 31 March 2019 could increase to £1,880,000. He added the Borough had low levels of overspend in comparison to other Local Authorities.

The Director of Children's Services stated the Council's position was clear. The DfE was clear on the worst case scenario that the risk sat with local authority so, the Council was under pressure to reduce the deficit and had to demonstrate the Borough was trying to reduce the deficit. The moment, the reporting was ok but, it could become under pressure; the DfE had been very clear that local authorities had to be responsible for DSG budgets.

The Acting-Chairman said there were positives so hopefully, the Borough could carry on in that direction. The Director of Children's Services stated almost every local

authority had written to the DfE to request more money for their High Needs blocks. Some had received money but, it was from future years budgets so, technically it was a loan.

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

SEND WORKSTREAM UPDATE

Alison Crossick, Service Leader - Psychology, Wellbeing & School Support, stated she had taken the lead on the SEND Workstream at the end of July 2018. There were four areas of workstreams:

1. Inclusion Charter – hoping every schools would be given the Charter and ever SENCO had been sent it via email. It sat with the Council, Parent Partnerships and the NHS. It was a very basic thing that parents could point to and ask if their child was being included
2. SEND Strategy and data – being published in the Local Offer. It had been updated and made interactive.
3. Moving towards implementation of the Plan – where the Borough would continue with partnerships to continue to improve services for learning difficulties and disabilities. There was still a lot of work to be done. An Early Years Virtual Team was well established and well used by volunteers and independent organisations and nurses attached to schools. There was now an Early Years SENCO. The Psychology, Wellbeing & School Support said there was a joint agreed data set that had been agreed with health colleagues. The data for health still sat across Berkshire so she had to ask for data locally. An Accessibility of Information Content Officer was now in place and working with parents in partnership. Joolz Scarlett had been the lead in that group and an area they were looking at was an invest to save programme. A £416k one-off payment had been made to implement the programme and different proposals would be produced regarding sustainability.
4. BCF - £150k per annum for three years could cover three staff members. A SEND consultant had been in place since the end of the current term and was working on SENCO partnerships and training programmes on SEN. There was an area SENCO post currently vacant but, the Service Leader - Psychology, Wellbeing & School Support, was holding interviews for the post shortly for the successful candidate to start in January 2019.

The Service Leader - Psychology, Wellbeing & School Support explained that one area being looked at was the matrix and it would be the local authorities job to pull all the data together to produce a new matrix which would go out to consultation. It would become one document so that if a child stayed in mainstream education, the school would still get the funding as if the child had attended a special school.

There was an upward trend in tribunal hearings as there were companies working with parents to help them go through the tribunal process and a significant number of tribunals were relating to SEND. The Director of Children's Services said he had been receiving letters that looked like legal letters from parents saying if the Council did not deliver everything they wanted, they would take the Borough to tribunal.

The Director of Children's Services stated the Borough had identified a site for a special school to be built so it was a political opportunity to make a bid for funding. A local authority was able to put in bids for free schools if it covered local need. He added a bid would be submitted but, it would not be before 2023 before the Borough could act on it. The site had been identified in the Borough Local Plan in Windsor but, the school would not be just for children living in Windsor, but for children living across the Borough. Oxfordshire was doing the same and West Berks was submitting a bid for alternative provision so there was a chance the Borough would not be successful.

SCHOOL FUNDING 2019-20

James Norris, Head of Finance (AfC) explained the focus was on confirming the DSG budget for 2019/20 and looking at funding for the next financial year. It was looking like the NFF was heading for a soft implementation and so the Borough would be carrying on as it currently was for a couple of years. He added that in section four of the report the figures were provisional and subject to change. The Early Years block figures were due after January 2019 and he was asking the Forum to approve the level of funding for 2019/20; the appendix set out commitments for funding.

The Director of Children's Services said over the last three years, the Forum had discussed growth fund commitments. There was a suggestion that expansion would have a cost of £420k and the table in section 4.3 of the report showed the Schools Block funding for 2019/20. He added the Forum should expect to spend £427k on the Growth Fund. Tracey Anne Nevitt, Accountant (AfC) said she did not know the percentages of loss, and there could be a gain. The Director of Children's Services stated he would be surprised if the Borough lost money but, at that stage, there were gains and not losses; the contingency had not been used.

The Acting-Chairman asked what the plan would be if the Council made gains, could it be used for the deficit. The Accountant (AfC) stated new guidance was being released in December 2018 but, she had a feeling the government would like the Borough to continue using any underspend for the Growth Fund.

Falling Rolls Fund

The Director of Children's Services stated the money would come from the Schools Block. The Borough was seeing a fall in birth rates so it was seeing fairly flat numbers which meant there would be more variability in parent choices over schools. That would mean there would be an oversupply in areas such as Windsor in a few years' time. A paper was going to Cabinet which set out the forecast for the next four years. The Borough would need more spaces in Maidenhead for places in schools and the Borough would continue to expand schools and also continue with a 5% surplus model.

Consultation Options

The Head of Finance (AfC) stated £553K Growth Fund included with an increased focus on priorities of deprivation and inclusion. That would go out to consultation with the results brought back to the Forum in October 2018. The Accountant (AfC) said Braywood was increasing in size and adding classes but, that needed to be added to the funding. Business rates were allocated on a lag so the rates from last year had

only just been allocated to the Borough. But there had been an increase in business rates for 2018 so schools had been told what they were going to receive even though it was not possible to fund to NFF. The Director of Children's Services said one option was to get as close to NFF as possible or, the Borough could go with minimum volatility and minimum change; he asked the Forum for guidance. The Head of Finance (AfC) said the options were to keep rates the same for 2019/20 or, to pay more. The Director for Children's Services said some contingency had been released back so he felt there was no need to increase that.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Forum:

- i. Noted and commented on the contents of the report**
- ii. Noted and commented on the options for the soft formula and sought views on funding arrangements**
- iii. Approved the annual Schools Growth Fund allocations for 2019/20**
- iv. Discussed and agreed the potential inter block movement**
- v. Discussed the consultation options contained within the report and level of migration towards the NFF model in the soft formula years**
- vi. Agreed de-delegation rates for 2019/20.**

FINANCING FOR SCHOOLS CONSULTATION

James Norris, Head of Finance (AfC), stated the report set out how schools should be operated in the future. Paragraph 3.7 explained schools could no longer receive loans from the local authority to reduce a deficit. The Director of Children's Services said if the local authority gave a loan to a maintained school and then that school converted to an academy, central government would not take on that loan, and the loan would be left with the local authority to cover. If a school was in deficit, the local authority needed to work with the school to reduce the deficit with a payment plan.

the Head of Finance (AfC) stated the consultation feedback was fairly minimal generally focusing on the financial pressures faced by schools particularly in relation to increased costs for staffing and those pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans. The Director of Children's Services added that there was very little that the local authority could do to help schools with their deficits. If a schools roll fell below 70%, the local authority could step into help. In the case of Bisham Primary School, the roll fell to below 70% so the final solution for Bisham was to move some years out to different schools, which helped; given the local authority did not see any schools falling below 70%, there was no need for that mechanism.

The Head of Finance (AfC) directed Members to Appendix A which set out some observations made by schools and the response following the observations. Members also noted the table of changes on page 29 of the agenda pack. The Director of Children's Services said the local authority did not want to get in the way of schools being innovative when it came to managing their budgets.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Schools Forum noted the consultation feedback as set out in Appendix A and approved the updated Scheme for Financing Schools as set out in Appendix B.

The meeting, which began at 2.00 pm, finished at 3.15 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....