

SCHOOLS FORUM

THURSDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 2022

PRESENT: Martin Tinsley (Chairman), Isabel Cooke, Michael Wallace and Andrew Morrison

Also in attendance: Councillors John Baldwin, Amy Tisi and Maureen Hunt

Officers: James Norris, Laurence Ellis, Rebecca Askew, Clive Haines, Tracey Anne Nevitt and Sarah Ward

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Chris Tomes, Sarah Cottle, Joolz Scarlett, Francis Lee and John Fletcher.

It was also announced that John Fletcher was resigning from the Schools Forum; and Maggie Callaghan and Cathrin Thomas were no longer employed at their respective schools. It was also announced that Mike Wallace and the Chairman were to step down as members of Schools Forum after the meeting.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest received.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2022 be approved as a correct record.

WELLBEING SERVICE REPORT

Rebecca Askew, Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist, went through the Wellbeing Service Report.

On options arising from the report, Rebecca Askew stated that the recommended option was to continue grant funding, which would support the continuity of the service and help to address the demand for Wellbeing services. If no action was to take place, there would be a likelihood of cases needing to be signposted to CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), further increase in wait times for vulnerable children and young people, and increased generation of requests for SEMH (Social, Emotional and Mental Health), and Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCP).

Regarding key implications, Rebecca Askew stated that if the grant funding did not continue, there would be an increase in wait times for Early Help & CAMHS, a reduction in preventative and early intervention for mental health, and increased pressure on high needs block budget for SEMH needs. If grant funding continued, then officers would be able to continue delivering of preventative and early targeted intervention for mental health as well as Social Care requirements. If this was exceeded, the Wellbeing Service could extend out to other AfC services, such as Young Carers and children/young people who are ERSA (Emotionally Related School Avoidance) and EHE (Elective Home Education).

Rebecca Askew then explained that the potential impact of not continuing the grant funding would be a detrimental and disproportionate impact on particular groups. This was particularly

pertinent to service users and public groups with disabilities who were disproportionately represented as having a higher incidence of mental health and wellbeing needs.

Rebecca Askew then gave a summary of the background information of the report.

- Established in 2015, the Wellbeing Service sought to support children and young people and their families through mental health issues.
- Developments had been discussed within the Social Care resource panel to reduce the overall expenditure to external providers.
- The budgeted cost of the Wellbeing Service was £120,000 per annum, with a contribution of £15,000 per annum Social Care service.
- 172 young people were referred to the Wellbeing Service between September 2021 and August 2022, representing a decrease.
- 28 cases were not accepted by either the Wellbeing or Getting Help Team (GHT) for a variety of reasons. The highest category of cases not accepted (a total of 8 cases) were referred to the school's Mental Health Support Team (MHST).
- The majority of referrals came from 'white British' (69.2%), followed by 'white other' (15%), 'white Western European', 'Pakistani-British' and 'white and black Caribbean'.
- The most prevalent difficulty presented on referral was anxiety.

On the breakdown of ethnic background of residents who used the Wellbeing Service, Councillor Tisi asked if Rebecca Askew was aware of this breakdown relative to the Borough as a whole. Rebecca Askew replied that she had not looked into this; but stated that it was fairly typical in terms of predominant numbers often being 'white British' in terms of referrals through social care. She added that she could map across the ethnic breakdown across the Borough.

Following on from the question, the Chairman asked what the distribution of referrals between the Windsor, Maidenhead, Ascot and Datchet areas. Rebecca Askew stated that she received a high number of referrals from the Datchet area; but added that referrals changed year-on-year and was not a fixed pattern. She stated that the predominant areas were central Maidenhead and Wraysbury where a high number of referrals were received. Rebecca Askew then stated that in previous years, the Service had received higher numbers from Windsor schools, but this had reduced over the last year-and-a-half, partially caused by a mental health support team being established in the area.

Rebecca Askew continued with the summary.

- Results from the young person's pre and post SDQ's (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) indicate a reduction in overall stress and a significant reduction in emotional difficulties and the impact the difficulties were having.
- When parents were asked 'What was really good about your care?', the most common response were the 'skills/ qualities of the practitioners' and the 'helpfulness of practitioners'.
- When parents were asked to complete an evaluation of the Managing My Child's Anxiety Group online programme, 100% responded that they were either mostly satisfied or extremely satisfied with the course and would recommend the course to a friend.
- The results of Child Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT) illustrated that a majority of participants had shown an improvement across all areas measured.

The Chairman asked if there was any inclination on what demand was like at the moment, whether it was increasing year-on-year. Rebecca Askew replied that demand was huge and was increasing year-on-year.

(Councillor Tisi left the meeting at 15:52)

The Chairman then asked what the long-term savings would be in dealing with the issue presently by supporting the Wellbeing Service rather than later in light of school funding

declining. Rebecca Askew answered that this would include increased wait times to CAHMS as well as increase of referrals to external providers. Schools would also experience an increase in costs for mental health support, such as having to employ their own therapists. In addition, children's mental health needs would not improve. The Chairman then asked whether this would provide good value for money; to which Rebecca Askew confirmed.

Mike Wallace conveyed that if the Wellbeing Service was not supported presently, then the issues would continue to grow in the future.

The Chairman then asked what extra money would be needed in order to meet the needs of the Wellbeing Services. Rebecca Askew replied that it would be great to build the capacity of the Wellbeing Service to allow recruitment as well as cover when carers went on, for example, maternity leave, and expand the service.

James Norris, Head of Finance for Achieving for Children, suggested to work with Rebecca Askew to do some modelling on additional investment and where this was needed. Rebecca Askew welcomed the suggestion.

The Forum noted the report.

(Rebecca Askew left the meeting at 16:04)

BUDGET MONITORING AND FORECAST 2022/23

James Norris introduced the report which was to inform the Schools Forum with the projected financial position for 2022/23.

James Norris reported that the Indicative Settlement for the Royal Borough for the 2022/23 financial year (including Academy schools) was £141.1 million. This included the net retained funding of £72.4 million of which £36.6 million was allocated for the maintained schools delegated budgets and £35.8 million for the central schools budget, including Central School Services, Early Years and High Needs.

The projected net in-year overspend was £403,000, which added to the net deficit of £2 million. Therefore, the projected deficit for 2023 was £2.4 million, representing 1.7% of the total budget allocation 2022/23. While this was relatively low compared to other local authorities, James Norris stated that the objective continued to be reducing this deficit.

James Norris then explained that since the start of the financial year, the school balances had been reviewed. Based on this, it was learnt that the vast majority of schools were within the thresholds of 5-8% allowable balances to be held.

James Norris then reported that there was a new DfE programme, Delivering Better Value (DBV), which AfC (Achieving for Children) and RBWM were engaging in. The aim of the programme was to improve outcomes in children and young people with SENDs (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities).

Regarding the Deficit Management Plan, James Norris stated that this was beginning to have an impact on forecast positions. In addition, a supplementary grant of £900,000 was also received for the current financial year for the High Needs Block.

The Chairman asked how the financial issue with Windsor Schools would have an impact the overall budget for the Borough. James Norris replied that funding was based on formula rates which were put against the October Census numbers. This was then used to make the volume calculations. There was also an anticipated reduction in overall grant being received. Clive Haines, Deputy Director for Education, replied that the overall budget would be affected. He also stated a school planning placement report being sent to Cabinet in December 2022.

James Norris then moved onto permanent exclusions. The proposal was to change the permanent exclusion process from a calculation-based approach at the start of the academic year for all schools (both maintained and academies) to a more single consistent approach.

James Norris requested for the Schools Forum to agree to the new exclusion process.

Andrew Morrison asked if academies had not been giving AfC money. James Norris replied that pushback had been received, and this change was more tidying up the process; thus, making the process robust for officers.

Isabel Cooke and Mike Wallace agreed to the change.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED: To implement the new exclusion process for all schools in the Borough.

Councillor Baldwin asked if he could contact Clive Haines after the meeting to discuss a couple of points. Clive Haines agreed.

(Councillor Baldwin left the meeting at 16:16)

The Forum noted the update.

PROVISIONAL DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT & SCHOOLS FORMULA 2022/23

James Norris introduced the item by summarising the report. On the DSG (Dedicated Grant Funding) 2023/24, the final allocations for 2023/24 would be reflective of the October 2022 census. In addition, the EFSA deduction would not be known until March 2023.

Regarding the DSG Block Funding overview, some changes included the addition of the Supplementary Grant, increase in national funding rates and a continued expectation that RBWM schools would continue to transition to the national funding formula rates. The latest indication, according to James Norris, was by the year 2026/27 the expectation was that RBWM would be required to be at the full NFF.

The Chairman asked why the date had been pushed back again. James Norris stated he was uncertain though the Covid pandemic could be a factor.

On School Funding guarantees, James Norris explained that the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) was a per pupil protection guarantee for the schools; meanwhile the Minimum per Pupil Level funding (MPPL) was a protection guarantee for each pupil for the schools.

Regarding the Schools Formula and Consultation Proposals, a major change that was introduced for 2023/24 formula was the Sparsity factor which had to be added to the local formula. The proposal was to apply model one – implement 25% of the rate for Sparsity – and model 2 – a 50% implementation of the rate.

On the Notional Special Educational Needs (SEN), which guided schools of the expected funding for pupils with SENs, the RBWM SEN rate was historically around 7% of the overall budget, while the national average was 11%. The proposal was to move the RBWM formula closer to the national average.

Isabel Cooke asked which rate of Sparsity funding schools were receiving – 25% or 50% - in the current financial year (2022/23). James Norris replied that, as it was previously a non-compulsory factor, AfC had not included the Sparsity formula factor in the 2022/23 financial year; but in the 2023/24, the Sparsity factor would be compulsory. The rate was yet to be decided and was part of the consultation.

On budget consultation, which set out the proposed consultation timetable and questions, schools had been requested to provide responses to the consultation by early-December 2023. The consultation results would be presented in the next Schools Forum meeting in December 2022.

The Chairman asked if this only applied to maintained schools. James Norris replied that this applied to all schools (maintained and academy).

James Norris then reiterated the officer proposal around the consultation element, namely the notional SEN changing percentage calculations. The Forum agreed.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED: To implement officer's proposal of the notional SEN changing percentage calculations.

The Forum noted the report.

SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS 2022/23

James Norris introduced the item which was to provide a summary of changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools. This applied to maintained schools only. The recommendation to the Forum was to approve the Scheme for Financing Schools 2022

Mike Wallace, who represented a maintained school, approved the proposed changes.

The Forum noted the update.

The meeting, which began at 3.06 pm, finished at 4.38 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....