

SCHOOLS FORUM

Thursday 16 November 2023

Present (virtually): Chris Tomes (Vice-Chair in the Chair) (Churchmead), Isabel Cooke (White Waltham), Joolz Scarlett (Manor Green), Sarah Cottle (Maidenhead Nursery Federation), Andrew Morrison (Furze Platt Senior), Neil Dimbleby (Altwood), Eddie Neighbour (Pioneer Academy), Catherine Page (Oldfield Primary), Tim Fettes (Holy Trinity CE Primary) and Ben Bausor (Early Year PVI)

Officers (virtually): Laurence Ellis, Clive Haines, Louise Dutton, Sarah Ward, Tracey Anne Nevitt, Rebecca Askew, and Kelly Nash

Apologies for Absence

The Vice-Chair in the Chair, Chris Tomes (Churchmead – Headteacher), welcomed everyone to the meeting and Forum introduced themselves.

No apologies for absence were received.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest received.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13th July 2023 be approved as a correct record.

Finance Update 2023/24

Before starting her item, Louise Dutton, Head of Finance (AfC), explained the format of the Forum meetings to the new members: each presenting officer would go through the key areas of their report and outline what was required from the Forum based on recommendations and whether any decisions needed to be made, followed by an opportunity for questions and discussions.

Presenting the report, Louise Dutton directed the Forum's attention to Table 3 (page 10 in the report): the overall DSG (dedicated schools grant) Allocation for 2023-24 financial year. She explained the DSG was divided into 4 blocks:

- Schools Block – funding which went directly to schools to support their pupils.
- Central Schools Services Block – retained mostly by the Borough to deliver central services, such as admissions.
- High Needs Block – used to support pupils with EHCPs (Education Health and Care Plans) for maintained schools and pupils requiring provisional support at independent schools.
- Early Years Block – funded nursery placements for the universal offer and two-year old provision in maintained nurseries as well as private, voluntary and independent nurseries.

As Table 3 showcased, the gross allocation was £150.4 million while the net allocation was £75.7 million. This meant, Louise Dutton stated, that the DfE (Department for Education) allocated £150 million to the Borough while retaining an element of the funding which they would distribute directly to academies and free schools.

Louise Dutton then moved onto Table 4: Summarised Financial Position 2023/24 (page 11), illustrating the net budget and the net projected spending which the Borough had control over. With the net allocation of £75.7 million, the projected spending in the current quarter was predicted to be £75.8 million, an in-year overspend of £189,000. A deficit reserve balance of £1.1 million was brought forward from March 2023. Adding the £189,000 overspend to this, the projected deficit reserve balance was £1.29 million.

Louise Dutton requested for Forum members to note the financial position and the projected overspend.

The Chair asked for clarification on the financial figures in Table 4: Summarised Financial Position 2023/24, to which Louise Dutton acknowledged the errors and stated that she would correct.

ACTION: Louise Dutton to correct the financial figures in the report.

The Forum noted the report.

School Pupil Growth Funding

Tracey-Anne Nevitt, Business Finance Partner for Schools and Early Years (AfC), introduced the report which was to update the Forum on the latest changes to the operational guidance, the current Pupil Growth fund budget and schools in receipt of this, and to consult on proposed changes for the pupil growth funding going forward. She then summarised the contents of the report which concentrated on the basic need element for permanent growth and bulge classes.

There were some options for the Forum to consider:

- Three model options for both permanent growth and the first year of bulge class funding for 2024-25. The Local Authority (RBWM) recommended the AWPU (Age Weighted Pupil Unit) option (model 2).
- Three options for Bulge Class Protection from Year 2 onwards, ranging from one to four years of protection.
- Proposal for a new allocation funding numbers in excess of PAN (planned admissions number). This would allow growth funding to be allocated to schools to admit pupils in excess of the PAN when the places were made available at the request of the LA. This would be made available in 2024.

While understanding the issues which RBWM were experiencing, Isabel Cooke (White Waltham) commented that some secondary schools were not full, and that applying bulge classes to those school would lead to them from never becoming full.

After being requested by the Chair to go through the proposals, Tracey-Anne Nevitt elaborated the proposals for the Forum to decide on, starting with Proposal A – Permanent Expansion Growth Funding 2024-25 Options:

- Model 1: ESFA minimum funding.
- Model 2: AWPU (Primary rate 2023-24).
- Model 3: Lump sum and Main scale 6 teacher.

When asked by the Chair for confirmation that the Borough had reviewed the options and that Model 2 was the preferred option, Tracey Anne Nevitt stated that it was based on the funding which was currently received per child in the AWPU rate in the schools funding 2023-24.

The Chair asked the Forum if they would choose Model 2.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: To choose Model 2 (AWPU) for Permanent Expansion Growth Funding 2024-25.

Tracey Anne Nevitt then moved onto Proposal B – Bulge Class Protection Funding for Year 2 onwards:

- Option A – Gave a proportion of funding to the missing pupils for Year 2 to Year 5 (for four years).
- Option B – Gave three years' worth of funding from Year 2 onwards.
- Option C – Gave funding only to the 95% of the missing pupils in Year 2 only.

The Chair commented that Option A gave more protection overtime in contrast to Option C. He then asked if there had been any thought around what the implications against each of the three options were. Tracey-Anne Nevitt responded by directing attention to Table 6 which conveyed an example for a junior school if it had 12 missing pupils in terms of what they generated in funding for each of the years.

Sarah Cottle (Maidenhead Nursery Federation) opined that Option B was preferable for all schools as they acquired more funding. Jools Scarlett (Manor Green) wondered whether it would be better to have a longer-term guarantee. Based on this, the Vice-Chair proclaimed that Option B was proposed.

Isabel Cooke asked how much space was available throughout the Borough for primary and secondary schools, mindful that some schools were not full and that the decision was based on the cost of a bulge class and transport. Tracey Anne Nevitt responded that Table 2 (page 23) in the report included details of spare places in Maidenhead but added that she did not have the full details.

Referring to Table 2, Isabel Cooke then commented that there were minimal spaces in Maidenhead Town with six spaces in Year 4, one in Year 5 and one in Year 6. She expressed concern that Maidenhead Village schools would never get full if bulge classes were opened in Maidenhead Town. She stated that this could create a longer-term issue where it could no longer be viable to keep a village school running.

Following up from this, the Chair asked how this could be moved forward. Tracey-Anne Nevitt stated that Ben Wright, School Places Leader (AfC), had proposed Option C which were the numbers in excess of PAN as an alternative to a bulge class which he would consider in certain circumstances. This would fund a number of schools rather than one school and share the places amongst them; therefore, this would have less of an impact than a bulge class choosing one class that one school would have.

Joolz Scarlett asked for clarification on whether any of the schools which potentially had spaces for bulge classes were not keen on this. From this, she opined that the only viable option was Option C of increasing the PAN and funding.

Following up from Isabel Cooke's point, Sarah Cottle wondered whether it was better to not have bulge classes if it was preferable to ensure that spaces were distributed fairly and accordingly across the Borough, adding that it would incentivise headteachers to take on the bulge class if they were allocated more money.

Clive Haines, Deputy Director for Education (AfC), informed that Option C was more of a protection, and that the bulge classes had been approached and had been hard to do.

The Chair asked if Option C was the decided proposal.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: To choose Option C for Bulge Class Protection Funding Year 2 onwards.

Moving onto Proposal C, where schools would be allocated pupil growth funding if they admitted more pupils in excess of their PAN, Tracey-Anne Nevitt explained that the Forum had to decide whether they supported the option going forward as this had not been in place previously. She informed the Slough Borough and other LAs had followed this model where it

appeared to be working well, having a smaller impact and required less protection going forward. RBWM would agree with individual schools on the additional places they would add to their PAN as well as the period of time. She informed that Ben Wright suggested to have all three proposals in place but preferred to have Option C and Model A in most cases.

Perceiving this as sensible, the Chair asked if this was agreed.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: To support Proposal C – Numbers in excess of PAN.

The Chair asked if the funding had all been calculated within the projected funding for 2023-24, to which Tracey-Anne Nevitt confirmed.

DSG Budget and School Funding Proposals

Tracey-Anne Nevitt introduced the report which covered DSG (Dedicated School Grant) budget and school funding. The purpose of the report was to provide Forum members with a provisional DSG grant allocation for 2024-25 and the consultation proposals for the schools formula funding allocations, followed by the Forum being asked to note and comment on the proposals.

Going over the report, Tracey Anne Nevitt explained that RBWM had been given three sets of provisional DSG Block Funding. From the current year (2023-24):

- 2.3% increase for the Schools Block (£2,613,000).
- 2.8% increase for the High Needs Block (£788,000), which did not cover the current year's High Needs Block pressures.
- 2.9% decrease Central School Services Block (-£29,000), with the reasons being that ESFA had reduced the historic commitment funding element by 20% each year and we've had a population number change.

The Early Years Block would be notified in the next term while the Growth Fund would be notified later in 2023.

Referring to the Schools Block Funding (Table 3, page 40 in the report), Tracey-Anne Nevitt highlighted that the school allocations would include the mainstream school additional grant funding.

Regarding the school budget consultation for 2024-25, Tracey-Anne Nevitt explained that each LA was required to move 10% closer to the NFF (National Funding Formula) levels in each year. RBWM was working towards reaching full NFF and was not funded at the national funding formula level at the moment as primary legalisation had not changed; as a result, it was funded on pupil units for primary and secondary schools. In 2022, RBWM struggled to reach NFF levels due to changes in data which meant that it had to lower some of the rates.

The proposals in the consultation to the Borough's schools were to change the de-delegation rates for maintained schools for school improvement and reduce the current rates for contingency and staff cost for maternity cost due to the change in demand.

The Chair asked if the de-delegation to maintained schools was an increase. Tracey-Anne Nevitt confirmed this but added that it was not much of a change from 2022-23 to 2024-25. For 2024-25, the estimates were £329,000; while it was £277,000 in 2023-24, and £313,000 2022-23. This was partly due to the school improvement as well as a change in the rates. The suggestion to reduce the school contingency and maternity elements would partly fund the increase in school improvement.

Tracey-Anne Nevitt then went through the five school consultation questions in the report (pages 45-46 in the report). She asked if the Forum supported these questions going out to the schools.

Joolz Scarlett asked if there was a lack of engagement with the consultation from schools in the past, to which Tracey-Anne Nevitt confirmed, hoping that there would be more responses due to the fact that the Schools Forum had increased its membership.

Joolz Scarlett then asked whether something could be done through Bursar Support to explain to schools about the importance of responding to the consultation, speculating that some headteachers may not understand the questions. Tracey-Anne Nevitt replied that she had forwarded the information to Bursar Support in the past and directly to headteachers as well as sent out reminders. She stated that there could be consideration on what else could be sent out to encourage schools to engage.

When asked by the Chair on whether the consultation only went to maintained schools, Tracey-Anne Nevitt replied that it went to all schools, both maintained and academy.

Andrew Morrison (Furze Platt Senior) asked about the timeframe for the consultation, stating that there had been some concerns with another consultation a couple of years ago because it took place over a holiday period and the timeframe was short. He wanted to ensure that schools were given adequate time to respond to the consultations. Tracey Anne Nevitt replied that the consultation would be going out in the following week for two weeks.

Agreeing with Joolz Scarlett's earlier comments, Isabel Cooke suggested that a meeting (even via Zoom) with headteachers and Bursar Support to explain the question could have an impact and lead to better responses. Agreeing with this, the Vice-Chair reiterated the suggestion to further engage with headteachers.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: To approve the School Consultation questions in the report.

Medical Vulnerable Base 'The Bungalow'

Kelly Nash, Education Support and Strategy Manager (AfC), informed that a new project was taking place in the Borough: The Bungalow. She explained that there was a specialist teacher for medically vulnerable pupils in a statutory post. The aspiration for The Bungalow was to allow this specialist teacher to increase her ability to work with more children for a longer period; and therefore, increase children and young people's access to education within their week, as well as provide a hub to support children transitioning and reintegrating back into mainstream schools. As reintegrating young people back into secondary education was a major challenge, the idea was to create a transition hub to successfully transition those children to school.

Kelly Nash informed that part of the work involved designing the curriculum, which she hoped would be online based so that children could access it when they were at home as well. She also hoped to recruit a medically vulnerable TA (teaching assistant), who would be on site at The Bungalow and ensure that all the safeguarding elements were covered. Alongside, there would also be other adults of the children and young people to access to help build up their resilience for their transition back into the mainstream.

AfC (Achieving for Children) had secured The Bungalow (on the grounds of Homer First School), which had been leased out by the school. Referring to the Table 2 in the report (page 59), Kelly Nash went over the estimated total costs per annum. The minimum number of pupils in the Medically Vulnerable base at any one time would be four but she hoped to achieve the maximum number of eight young people who would access The Bungalow quite quickly.

The Bungalow would be open three days a week (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) to give specialist teacher space to work alongside children/young people who were not ready to access the Medically Vulnerable base and still required a home tuition. The Bungalow would

increase social interaction for those young people as a lot of them were isolated at home and struggled to get out and see people. The Bungalow was designed where there was an education space as well as a social area for them to interact. There was also consideration of adding nurturing and food preparation to the curriculum alongside the usual Maths, English and Science courses.

When asked by the Chair about the location, Kelly Nash responded that the old caretaker bungalow at Homer First School in Windsor was being used to provide it.

Joolz Scarlett conveyed concern about resilience due to The Bungalow having two members of staff, asking how this would be managed if, for example, one of them was off sick. She also asked what therapeutic input the children and young people were receiving. She suggested that this could be discussed further outside of the meeting. Kelly Nash replied that the focus was to increase the offer to young people. She acknowledged the concern of the responsibility being placed on two employees, stating this was the “beginning of a journey” and that there were responsive plans in place. She welcomed having a meeting with Joolz Scarlett outside of the meeting on how this could be improved and to answer further questions.

Joolz Scarlett then asked if Kelly Nash knew how many children met the criteria of being absent for 15 days, consecutively or cumulatively, elaborating that she suspected that there were many children which fell under this in which Kelly Nash was unaware of. She suggested this was an area of concern to highlight to headteachers, speculating that some were not notifying Kelly Nash. Kelly Nash agreed but added that the teaching specialist’s case load was a very strict criteria around the child needing to have medical evidence stating that they could not attend school. She received much information through the Pupils at Risk (PAR) panel where AfC supported schools by co-funding alternative interventions. This information gathering was expanding due to intelligence leads in school as well as from colleagues in the educational psychology service. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that there were young people who were part of the Medically Vulnerable base which AfC were unaware of and that this was something to work on.

The Chair commented that this was a positive step moving forward.

The Forum noted the report.

Wellbeing Service

Rebecca Askew, Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist for Wellbeing (AfC), presented the Wellbeing Service, namely its current and future provision, and that the Forum needed to note the report.

Rebecca Askew gave the data highlights from September 2022 to August 2023:

- A total of 199 individuals were referred to the Wellbeing and Getting Help Teams, representing a slight increase from last year with 172 young people being referred.
- 64 young people were referred to the Wellbeing Team, with 52% being male and 48% female.
- 108 children/young people and their families were referred to and supported by the Wellbeing Team.
- 43 young people and/or their families accessed individual, family or group-based therapy sessions during this period; of these four parents attended the Helping Your Child group course and six attended the Child Parent Relationship Therapy Group.

Moving onto ethnicity, based on the results displayed on the pie chart (page 72 in the report), Rebecca Askew informed that AfC needed to continue to find ways to meet the needs of children and families from the largest ethnic demographic, people of Asian backgrounds, and that AfC were working alongside the Specialist Parenting Worker from the Family Hub to target its provision towards these children and families.

Rebecca Askew briefly gave an overview of the Wellbeing Team Activity, highlighting that the total number of schools supported was 46 and that total individual referrals taken from the Early Help Hub was 64. She then explained that 2023 had seen an ongoing trend towards the Wellbeing Team offering play therapy and family-based therapies. Its close partnership with the Getting Help Team meant that it was now offering less CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) informed interventions. However, the increased capacity in low intensity CBT from Berkshire Healthcare Trust (NHS) had enabled the Wellbeing Team to focus its CBT capacity towards children and young people who needed a more flexible approach, particularly those with Emotionally Related School Avoidance (ERSA).

The Wellbeing Team continued to complete assessment and triage as part of their case work but tend not to offer standalone Wellbeing Assessments. In 2023, they completed 7 standalone assessments. 46 schools were supported by the Wellbeing team, the minimum number of cases supported in a school was one and the maximum number of cases supported in a school was seven.

Rebecca Askew then discussed the summary of the presenting difficulties of young people referred to the Wellbeing Service from September 2022 to August 2023. She highlighted that some cases had more than one presenting difficulty. The most frequently referred primary concerns were emotional dysregulation, attachment difficulties and anxiety. 21.8% of the cases referred to the Wellbeing Team had Emotional Related School Avoidance (ERSA) as a co-existing issue alongside the primary presenting issue noted above. This was a 12.5% increase on last year.

Regarding Play and Creative Arts Therapy, Rebecca Askew reported that during the period, 22 young people (77% male and 23% female) accessed individual Play Therapy, with the average age 8 years and 6 months old. The primary tool used to measure impact was the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) due to the younger age of this cohort. The results were positive, whereby children/young people reported a reduction in most subsets of symptoms and an increase in the kind and helpful behaviour domain. In addition, the data set indicated parents saw a reduction in most subsets of symptoms as well as a slight increase in kind and helpful behaviour. Similarly, the data set indicated teachers saw a reduction in all subsets of symptoms and an increase in kind and helpful behaviour.

On the outcome measures, the data from the Young Person's Mood and Feelings Questionnaire illustrated a reduction of symptoms from pre- and post- SDQ scores as well as a reduction in the stress scale from parents.

In terms of Service Evaluation of the Wellbeing Service, Rebecca Askew reported that following a one-to-one therapeutic intervention with the Wellbeing Team, parents and children/young people were sent a service user evaluation form to gather feedback on service development and delivery. The general feedback was that parents were very pleased with the provision which was offered:

- 100% of parents felt listened to by the Wellbeing Practitioner, that they were treated well, that their views were taken seriously, that the practitioner knew how to help their child and that overall the help they received was good.
- 97.4% of parents felt it was easy to talk to the Wellbeing Practitioner that their child worked with, that they were given enough information about the help available, that they would recommend the wellbeing team's support to a friend and that professionals were together to help their child.
- 78.9% of parents felt the appointments were at a convenient time.

When it came to feedback from children and young people, with 6 young people completing the service user feedback form (an improvement to last year where none were received), the highlights were:

- 100% of young people felt listened to by the Wellbeing Practitioner who saw them.
- 83.4% said they would recommend this support to a friend.

- 100% of young people said that overall the help they received was good.

In regard to areas for development based on the service user feedback and the response to this feedback:

- 16.7% of young people said they were not given enough information about the help available. Based on this, the Wellbeing Team be clearer on the support which they could offer. This would be done through the use of a flyer for young people which included the services the Team offered and who it was best suited for.
- 16.7% of young people said they did not feel professionals were working together to help them, namely the communication between professionals during intervention. In response to this, the Wellbeing Team would ensure that young people attended Early Help review meetings; and if they did not wish to attend, they receive feedback after the meeting while being able to have their input.

Rebecca Askew then mentioned the Helping Your Child Parent Group, a group intervention which engaged with the parents of children with anxiety which was offered by the Wellbeing Team and the Getting Help Team in collaboration. She reported that there were positive results from this.

Feedback from the service user evaluation for the Parent Child Attachment Play (PCAP) was also positive.

The Forum noted the report.

Before the meeting closed, Laurence Ellis, Democratic Services Officer, highlighted that the next Forum meeting was on Thursday 14th December 2023 (2:00pm start-time) and held virtually via Zoom.

The meeting, which began at 2.01 pm, finished at 3.07 pm

Chair.....

Date.....