

## SCHOOLS FORUM

THURSDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2021

PRESENT: Martin Tinsley (Chairman), Chris Tomes (Vice-Chairman), Isabel Cooke, Joolz Scarlett, Michael Wallace, Sarah Cottle,

Also in attendance: Councillor Maureen Hunt

Officers: James Norris, Kevin McDaniel, Clive Haines, Sarah Ward, Tracey Anne Nevitt, Rebecca Askew, Helen Huntley, Oran Norris-Browne, Alasdair Whitelaw and Frances Lee

### APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from John Fletcher.

### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

### MINUTES

**AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021, be an accurate record.**

### BUDGET MONITORING AND FORECAST 2021/22

The Director of Children's Services (Kevin McDaniel) placed on record his apologies to the panel for the late publication of the reports due to various technical challenges and the short time between this meeting and the last.

The Schools Forum considered the report regarding the budget monitoring and forecast for 2021/22.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children (James Norris) said that the report provided the forum with the indicative forecast position for the current financial year and the deficit position at the end of the financial year on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that the current reported position was a £1.755 million overspend, which was the same as the last reported figure. He added that it was expected that the financial update would be brought to the December Schools Forum.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that there was not a lot more to add that was different from the October Schools Forum meeting apart from saying that they were awaiting final confirmation from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) in respect to the early years block clawback. He said that just over £800,000 was accounted for at year-end to be received in 2021/22, although it was now anticipated that this would in fact be more. This notification was expected in November 2021 and therefore would be factored into forecasts for the December Schools Forum report.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that there was a cumulative deficit position of £3.5 million, which represented around 2.6% of the overall allocation.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children thanked forum members for attending a working party in November 2021. He said that 3 themes came from that meeting, which were as follows.

- The expansion of the local offer.
- Increased local partnerships.
- The improvement of the commissioning arrangements and the annual review process.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that these were agreed upon areas as to where attention should be focussed upon.

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE REPORT

The Schools Forum considered the report regarding the Social, Emotional and Mental Health Service.

The SEND Consultant for School Improvement (Helen Huntley) said that funding for the SEMH intervention programme would be ceasing in Easter 2022, however there was an overwhelming amount of support from the Schools Forum that this service should continue.

The SEND Consultant for School Improvement said the potential options for SEMH provision were:

1. To agree on the proposals to maintain a Royal Borough of Maidenhead and Windsor Social Emotional and Mental Health Service and provision and to further develop its SEMH provision.
2. To consider the recommendations as to how this service and provision would be funded which included changes to the use of the Designated School Grant (DSG) funding.
3. To consider Targeted Support for Social, Emotional and Mental Health Early Years Hub.

The SEND Consultant for School Improvement asked the Schools Forum to consider investing into early years intervention and prevention but admitted that there was no saying that it would be able to make a difference. She added that if no investment was made then this could lead to an extraordinary increase in costs.

These were broken down into 3 factors:

- The increase in number of children with SEMH as a prime need.
- The cost of alternative provision for permanently excluded pupils.
- The extraordinary cost for the specialist provision of Children with SEMH in an independent setting.

The SEND Consultant for School Improvement said that if a pupil had to be placed in a specialist independent provision for a period of 5 years, this could cost £400,000. She added that if a child was permanently excluded and spent 5 years in alternative a specialist Independent provision, then this would cost £87,000 for one child.

The SEND Consultant for School Improvement said that the borough wished to invest in non-statutory services to accommodate the best decision for young people and to implement indicative cost avoidance.

The Chairman said that he believed that the consensus at the working party meeting prior to the November forum, was that it was best to invest now to save in the future. He acknowledged that if they were to back this provision then other provision may have to be cut, which he said would be a difficult decision to make.

Isabel Cooke said that the cases of SEMH were escalating and that some thinking outside of the box was required to ensure that this provision could continue.

The SEND Consultant for School Improvement referred to Table 1 of the report which broke down the costs for the discussed provisions. She noted that the provision of the Core SEMH Service and provision for 2022/23 would be £195,814. She said that the first proposal would be to retain this service, with the cost including the salaries of an SEMH coordinator, 3 SEMH coaches and 2 members of the behaviour support staff. She added that one of the members of the behaviour support staff had resigned, with a discussion to be had on whether this position should be re-filled.

The SEND Consultant for School Improvement informed the forum of the 3 different options set out in 3.4 and explained them. Mike Wallace asked what the element of risk was if the local authority did not break neutral and if there would be a backup plan in this instance.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that the cost that would occur would come from the High Needs block, rather than from the local authority. He said that they were currently working with 21 pupils and if 7 of these had been permanently excluded and had to spend two years in Alternative Provision, this would have cost more than the total cost of the core SEMH service.

The Chairman asked if there was any evidence over the last few years that money was saved from other areas of the budget. The SEMH Coordinator (Alasdair Whitelaw) said that they had worked with 23 schools and 23 individual students, none of which had been permanently excluded. The Chairman acknowledged that this had therefore been successful.

The Director of Children's Services said that a decision had to be made on potentially stopping or reducing services with less of a priority as the one present, in order to balance the costs and risks.

The Chairman asked if this would put the borough at risk from an Ofsted inspection. The Director of Children's Services said that the borough had received a written statement of action in 2017 from Ofsted with regards to the borough's children with additional needs. He said that he was not worried about an Ofsted inspection overall, however he was worried that the borough would not provide the right services to pupils within the schools.

The Chairman asked how much the borough had spent per child over the last 2 years towards the 23 children mentioned. The SEMH Coordinator said that per child for a half term, they had one coach mentor with a salary of approximately £21,000, with schools also having the option of spending £2,000 on resources. He noted that not all schools spent this allocated money.

The Director of Children's Services said that it would have cost approximately around £17,000 per child compared to that of a special school placement, which would cost typically £35-40,000.

The SEND Consultant for School Improvement set out the 3 options to forum members in section 3.5 of the report. Joolz Scarlett said that if schools were to buy the discussed provision individually, then they would not be able to get the same deal as the one discussed.

The SEMH Coordinator confirmed this as the local authority had a license for 65 schools currently and 62 or 63 had subscribed to it, with 52 schools actively using it. He said that there was also a super user account with 34 schools having signed the SEMH Coordinator up as a super user, allowing him to see their data. He added that the cost of this would not be increasing in the next year and would remain at £16,900.

The SEND Consultant for School Improvement said that the super user account allowed for that person to see where there was a need for additional services, due to the overview that they had been allowed to see. She added that information could be used to support transitions in pupil's school careers.

The SEND Consultant for School Improvement stated the options available to the forum as set out in sections 3.6 and 3.7. These were noted by the forum.

The Chairman asked if the vacant post of an SEMH assistant was to be filled. The SEND Consultant for School Improvement said that this was a decision that the forum needed to make. The Director for Children's Services said that the money for this was currently budgeted for, however a discussion needed to be had on whether this was the best way forward.

The Chairman and the forum agreed that this service was an important one to maintain.

## WELLBEING SERVICE REPORT

The Schools Forum noted the contents of the Wellbeing Service report.

The Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist (Rebecca Askew) outlined the basis of the report to the forum and made them aware that there were 2 proposals that would be discussed, and clearly stated that the 1<sup>st</sup> proposal would be the one that would be focussed on, as made clear in Table 1 of the report.

The Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist said that 4 members of staff had resigned over the past 6 months from the wellbeing team. She said that the salary had been stated by these staff as being a main factor in their resignations. She added that they started on grade 5 salaries and that this did not equate to similar salaries within Achieving for Children (AFC), especially with the nature of the work being highly skilled, with high-risk management in working with children presenting with self-harm and on occasions suicidal ideation.

The Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist stated that the proposal was to fill the vacant posts, equivalent to 2 full-time positions. The request is to grade these positions at the upper spinal points of grade 5 on the salary scale.

The Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist outlined proposal 2 of the report, in relation to high intensity cognitive behavioural therapy training. This was often required for many cases that came through the early help service. She added that the proposal set out in the report may in the future be met through NHS funding through a band 8a post, and the practitioner would be employed by Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust.

*(Councillor Hunt left the meeting)*

The Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist made it clear to forum members that this would not be an immediate development due to there being significant difficulties in recruiting to senior NHS positions.

The Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist said that the proposal being put forward was to recruit 2 full-time equivalent wellbeing practitioners into the team. She added that this could be accounted for by the base budget against the increased income generation.

The Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist said with regards to the 2<sup>nd</sup> proposal that positively it would provide support for the high intensity cases moving forward, but there was no action required by the borough to fill the vacancy. However, without this position being filled it would ensure that waiting times for services such as CAMHS would potentially increase more requests for education, health, and care assessments with SEMH as a primary need.

The Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist referred the forum to part 4 of the report, which clearly stated the potential impacts that could exist if the 1<sup>st</sup> proposal was not taken up. She said that there would be a disproportionate impact on particular groups, particularly customer and public groups with SEN/disabilities due to the higher incidence of mental health needs in these groups.

*(Frances Lee left the meeting)*

The Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist summarised the appendices for the forum by stating the contents. She said that section 6.2 outlined support from the wellbeing service being open to all children and young person's attending schools within the borough, between the ages of 5 and 18 years of age. She added that this was with the exception of private schools.

The Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist mentioned with reference to section 6.3 of the report that support was also given from team members towards children known to the social care pods. She said that this was at a level of 0.4 full time equivalents, delivered by the team lead within the wellbeing team. Volunteers were highly encouraged in the team, and a volunteer Councillor was also currently enlisted one day a week.

The Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist outlined section 6.4 of the report to the forum by saying that there is currently an additional 1.5 full-time equivalency of practitioner time provided to the borough through Early Help via the Getting Help Team (employed by Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust).

The Chairman asked what the impact was of not having the 2 members of staff in place. The Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist replied by stating that waiting times were being seen to increase and the number of children being seen would decrease due to a lower capacity being available. The Chairman said that it was clear that this provision needed to continue. Isabel Cooke stated that she agreed with the Chairman wholeheartedly.

The Director of Children's Services made it clear that costs would potentially be seen to increase for services if all provisions were kept but recognised the importance of the provisions.

*(Sarah Cottle left the meeting)*

*(Helen Huntley left the meeting)*

## SCHOOL BUDGET CONSULTATION 2022/23

The Schools Forum noted the contents of the School Budget Consultation 2022/23.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children referred to the proposed reduction in the school improvement monitoring and brokerage grant by 50% for next year and 100% the year after that.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that currently the borough was seeing a 15% to 16% increase to volume and costs, with funding increases only addressing around 50% of the pressure that was expected in the following year.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that from 2024/25, the borough expected all authorities to be moving to the National Funding Formula. He noted that this had not yet been confirmed by the EFSA.

He then addressed some notable changes as being:

- The core factors had gone up by 2%.
- The minimum per pupil funding levels had gone up by 2%.
- The minimum per pupil level funding values for primary school children at £4,265 and secondary school children at £5,525.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that there were funding guarantees that now had to be met as stated in section 4.4 of the report. He said that the borough was currently running at a 0.5% year on year pupil protection funding.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children summarised by stating that the formula was very similar to that of last year and that there was a focus on closing remaining gaps on funding. He added that the borough was below the National Funding Formula on the lump sum allowance. He noted that further headroom would potentially lead to all schools regardless of size receiving a lump sum of around £129,000.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that the School Improvement Grant was proposed to be reduced by 50% from April 2022 and potentially 100% in 2023. He noted that

the view of the borough was that this was an area that the government should be continuing to fund.

The Chairman asked where this money had been found by the Department for Education (DfE). The Director of Children's Service paraphrased the DfE by saying that academies had led the way during COVID and that maintained schools should also be able to make their choices of services.

The Chairman asked for clarity over the £129,000 lump sum. The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children clarified this by stating that the current lump sum allowance was approximately £122,000, so the potential extra finance would be around £7,000.

The Director of Children's Services said that if the Schools Forum wished to transfer some funds from the schools' block to the high needs block, then this would be acceptable as long as the forum members voted unanimously in favour. He added that the Secretary of State would also need to ratify this.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said due to the low level of change in the formula, there would be no need in sharing the data from individual schools at the current stage, unlike in previous years. Consultation on the Schools Forum would run from 22<sup>nd</sup> November to 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021, with aggregated results being shared at the next Schools Forum.

The Chairman thanked all forum members and officers for their attendance.

The meeting, which began at 2.00 pm, finished at 3.23 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....