

SCHOOLS FORUM

TUESDAY, 7 JULY 2015

PRESENT: -

School Members: Steve Colledge, Chair - Academy Headteacher
Janet Urban, Vice-Chair - Primary Headteacher
Ray Williams, Primary Governor
David Bell, Secondary Governor
Jackie Smith, Special Headteacher
Lauren Costello, Academy Headteacher
Wendy Conaghan, Academy Headteacher
Kate Adams, Early Years
Nick Letchet, Swindon College
Ben Slater, EOTAS

Non-School Members: Peter Smith, Trade Unions
Ram Thiagarajah, BME

Officers: Ian Burbidge (Head of Finance, Schools)
Anne Mackay (Finance Manager, Education)
Peter Nathan (Head of Education)

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, was also in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from Sharon Kirwan (Swindon Association of Secondary Headteachers), Charles Law (Special Governor), Rhian Cockwell (Primary Headteacher) and Andrew Miller (16-19 Partnership).

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 17th March 2015 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

2. Public Question Time

The following question was asked in accordance with standing Order 28 –

Questioner

Alastair Dixon-Patterson, Lydiard Park Academy.

Question

Mr Dixon-Patterson asked a series of questions relating to the (a) reflection of responses to public questions in the minutes, (b) reference to recording of Special Educational Needs top up funding in the minutes, (c) work undertaken to ensure variances in funding and expenditure were reflected in budgets, (d) contingencies in place and effect on budgets due to Specialist Resource Provision units being opened by the Borough in the future.

Response

The Chair thanked Mr Dixon-Patterson for his questions and advised that a written response had been provided and circulated at the meeting. The Chair, Mr Ian Burbidge, Head of Finance, Schools, and Mr Peter Nathan, Head of Education responded at the meeting to the questions and comments.

3. Final Dedicated Schools Grant Outturn 2014-15

Mr Ian Burbidge, Head of Finance, Schools, presented a report regarding the final position of the 2014/15 retained Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget following closure of the Local Authorities 2014/15 final accounts. The report provided information on the final spend against the 2014/15 centrally retained budget including commentaries on those areas of the budget where forecast figures proved to be inaccurate.

Mr Burbidge referred to the Direct Funding of High Needs Places recouped by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and the funding retained of the equal pay liability that had been added to the DSG.

Resolved: That the School Forum notes:

(1) The reduction of the DSG by the EFA for Direct Funding of High Need Places for Post 16 Pupils.

(2) The final outturn on the 2014/15 centrally retained DSG budget was an in year overspend of £0.109m.

(3) The £0.500m equal pay liability was still outstanding

(4) That after taking account of the brought forward balance, in-year underspend and allocations of funding previously agreed by the Schools Forum, the total DSG balance available for redistribution as at 31st March 2015 was £1.098m.

4. Actual 2014-15 Year End School Balances

The Forum considered a report by Mr Ian Burbidge, Head of Finance, Schools, regarding the final position on 31st March 2015 school revenue balances compared with the estimated position as forecast by schools in December 2014.

Mr Burbidge talked members through the report, commenting on the various items and highlighting the decisions required by the Forum. He referred to the Schools Forum meeting in January 2012 where members agreed the criteria for a revised scheme to monitor and manage school balances. Mr Burbidge explained the reasons why four schools were forecasting a "Red" rating and referred to the reasons submitted by the schools for variances in their budgets. In response to a question relating to actions to be undertaken due to positive revenue budget positions held by schools, Mr Burbidge explained that this would be included in a report to be submitted at the next Forum's meeting in October 2015.

Resolved: That the Schools Forum notes that:

(1) Just over half, 23 of 42 (55%) of schools final year end reported balances were close to the estimates provided in December as measured by the thresholds agreed by Schools Forum.

(2) 15 of 42 (36%) of schools were reasonably accurate in forecasting their year end balances

(3) Only 4 of 42 (10%) schools have reported significant variances between their final and December estimates of their projected year end balances – commentaries on these schools are provided.

(4) Final school balances (adjusted to exclude in-year Academy conversions) are forecast to be £4.6m which is 30% higher, than the December estimates of £3.6million.

(5) The Special Resource Provision (SRP) Unit for one maintained school started the year in a deficit position and one maintained school and two SRP units were in deficit at the 31st March 2015.

(6) That further to (5) above, the maintained school was being supported by the Local Authority as it worked to balance its budget over the next three years.

(7) The Local Authority would present further information on the planned use of school balances to the October 2015 Schools Forum meeting.

5. 2015-16 Dedicated School Grant Retained Budget Position

Mr Ian Burbidge, Head of Finance, Schools, submitted a report regarding the latest projected 2015/16 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) retained budget position. He advised that as at the end of May 2015, there was a projected overspend of £0.201m against the retained DSG budget and explained that Appendix A of the report indicate reasons for the projected variances and commentaries on all high risk areas. In response to a query regarding the allocation of DSG money, Mr Burbidge advised that it would be prudent to retain funding at present.

Resolved: That the Schools Forum notes that the latest projection on the 2015-16 retained budget was an overspend of £0.201m.

6. 2015-16 Dedicated Schools Grant Budget

The Forum considered a report by Mr Ian Burbidge, Head of Finance, Schools, updating members on various unresolved budget issues that arose at the Schools Forum meeting on 17th March 2015. Mr Burbidge advised that the report addressed (a) changes to the Dedicated Schools Grant Allocation, (b) reference to Mainstream School Budgets, (c) a change to the overall budget requirement relating to Pupil Growth Funding and (d) changes to various High Need commissioned provisions. He further advised that the report then highlighted items to be considered by members as part of the 2016/17 budget setting process.

Mr Burbidge, Head of Finance, Schools and Mr Peter Nathan, Head of Education, responded to questions and comments regarding the following issues:

- The recruitment of an Early Years Engagement Officer to promote Early Years take-up.
- Effects on PDI outreach provision due to differences in funding between maintained schools and academies,
- Confirmation that moderation on banding systems within specialists' settings would be undertaken and how the system would benefit from a review of current timescales of reviews by the Special Education Needs team.

Resolved: (1) That the Schools Forum:

(1) Notes that due to the changes in the EFA funding, £0.500m equal pay liability remains outstanding and this will result in an increase in central costs of £0.031m.

(2) That further to (1) above, the Head of Finance be requested to circulate information relating to interest to be paid before the next meeting of the Forum.

(3) Notes the current position regarding Early Year's income and expenditure based on the current projection of take up.

(4) Agrees to the proposal to recruit an engagement officer and to purchase an application portal to link with the Council's existing IT systems.

(5) Notes the current position with regard to former non-recoupment academies.

(6) Notes the proposals to review the trigger funding policy to accommodate situations outside the current policy.

(7) Notes the proposal to start a consultation on a 6th form provision at Crowdy's Special School.

(8) Notes that £0.018m will be paid to Uplands Special School to maintain the current 138 places.

(9) Notes the changes to the Ridgeway HI Unit coming into effect on 1st September 2015.

(10) Notes the changes to the Ruskin ASC Unit.

(11) Notes the issues regarding the Nyland Campus Outreach Team (NCOT) service being caused by 6 academies choosing not to buy back the service.

(12) Notes the changes to the funding applications made to the Special Educational Needs Resource and Assessment Panel (SENRAP).

(13) That the Head of Education be requested to liaise with the Special Education Needs team regarding a review of timescales in moderating banding systems within special education needs settings.

(14) Agrees the proposals to use £0.030m of the exclusions income to support reintegration.

(15) Notes that there will be a further adjustment to Secondary School Basic Per Pupil Entitlement (BPPE) rates in 2016/17 to reflect the increase in place funding at the Education Other Than at School Service (EOTAS).

(16) Agrees to the creation of a Student Resource Package (SRP) Funding Review Task Group to review SRP funding and provide funding recommendations for the 2016/17 financial year.

(17) Further to (16) above, notes the suggested task group membership as referred to Appendix 1 of the report and would include Jackie Smith, Special Headteacher, Wendy Conaghan, Academy Headteacher, Steve Colledge, Chair and Academy Headteacher and Kate Adams, Early Years representative.

(18) That further to (16) above, agree the terms of reference as referred to in Appendix 1 of the report.

(19) That further to (16) above, an additional meeting of the Forum be set up in December 2015 to review a report by the Task Group.

7. Post 16 High Needs Funding Update Report

The Head of Finance, Education, presented a report updating the Forum on the level of funding available and proposes indicative funding allocations to providers for the 2015/16 financial year. Mr Ian Burbidge, Head of Finance, Education referred to the number of pupils accessing this provision, how the number of placements taken up at Further Education Colleges would be higher than previous years and why the Local Authority's request to increase the place numbers for exceptional circumstances was rejected by the Education Funding Agency (EFA). Members noted that the EFA had agreed to provide element 3 funding for 252 pupils. Mr Burbidge made reference to Table 1 in the report, reflecting planned placements for 2015/16.

Resolved: That this Forum notes that:

(1) The latest projected 2015/16 financial year costs arising from the LA new funding responsibilities for Post 16 High Needs Students is estimated at £2.019m for an estimated 386 FTE post 16 (excluding school sixth form) high needs students. This includes costs of 48 FTE placements at ISPs of £0.579m and

indicative allocations to FE colleges and training providers of £1.439m for 338 students.

(2) That indicative banding values for the academic year 2015 have reduced since 2014/15 academic year to fit within the available funding envelope as a result of a significant projected increase in student numbers.

8. Any Other Business

To enable out-turn figures to be determined, members agreed that discussions relating to pay liability be deferred to another meeting of the Forum.

9. Dates of Future Meetings

The Schools Forum is scheduled to meet on the following dates:

- 6th October 2015, 4 p.m. in Committee Room 6.
- 12th January 2016, 4 p.m. in Committee Room 6.
- 15th March 2016, 4 p.m. in Committee Room 6.