

SCHOOLS FORUM

TUESDAY, 17 MARCH 2015

PRESENT: -

School Members: Steve Colledge, Chair - Academy Headteacher
Rhian Cockwell, Primary Headteacher
Wendy Conaghan, Academy Headteacher
Ben Slater, EOTAS
Susan Banks, Secondary Headteacher
Alison Lowe, Primary Headteacher
David Bell, Secondary Governor
Ray Williams, Primary Governor
Charles Law, Special Governor
Kate Adams, Early Years
Jo Morris, Early Years

Non-School Members: Peter Smith, Trade Unions

Also Present: Councillor Fionuala Foley (Cabinet Member for Children's Services), Paddy Bradley (Head of Economy, Skills and Property Development), Ian Burbidge (Head of Finance, Schools), Anne Mackay (Finance Manager, Education).

Apologies for absence were received from Andrew Henstridge (Primary Headteacher), Ruth Lee (Diocese of Clifton), Andrew Miller (16-19 Partnership), Ram Thiagarajah (BME), Sharon Kirwan (Academy Headteacher), Janet Urban (Primary Headteacher), Jackie Smith (Special Headteacher), Jane Wheatley (Primary Headteacher) and Lauren Connor (Academy Headteacher).

21. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 20th January 2015 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

22. 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 (a) the amount of the £522,000 Dedicated School Grant surplus that had been allocated to reduce equal pay liabilities had been transferred to academies, maintained schools and central services, and (b) how an academy would see its share reflected or received.

Response

The Chair thanked Mr Dixon-Patterson for his questions and advised that a written response had been prepared and circulated.

23. 2014-15 Dedicated Schools Grant Budget Position

Mr Ian Burbidge, Head of Finance, Schools, presented a report setting out the latest position of the 2014/15 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget.

Mr Burbidge advised that based on information at the end of February 2015, an underspend of £0.491m was projected against the retained DSG Budget for the current financial year. He confirmed that the DSG figures were submitted monthly to the Commissioning, Economy and Leadership team. He drew attention to the £0.095m additional Capital expenditure required to support the Capital budget to build capacity in the two year old provision.

Resolved: (1) That it be noted that the latest projection on the 2014/15 retained budget was an underspend of £0.491m.

(2) That the Schools Forum agrees the additional Capital expenditure of £0.095m to support the capital budget of £0.067m and build capacity in the two year old provision as referred to in the report

24. Projected 2014 - 15 Year End School Balances

Mr Ian Burbidge, Head of Finance, Schools, presented a report advising of the indicative position regarding the level of projected 31st March 2015 school revenue balances as compared to the levels expected when 2014/15 schools budgets were set in June 2014.

Mr Burbidge confirmed the end of financial year position was that 29 schools had been effective in their financial planning. Only 3 schools indicated a difference in their budgets as opposed to their estimates. The Forum noted that the forecast level for 31st March 2015 was expected to be £3.40m.

Resolved: That the Schools Forum notes:

(1) That 29 out of 42 (69%) of Swindon maintained schools current estimates of their year end balances for 2014/15 were close to the estimates provided when budgets were set as measured by the thresholds agreed by Schools Forum.

(2) That only 3 of 42 (7%) of Swindon schools had reported significant variances between their current and initial estimates of their projected year end balances and that the narrative explanations for the variances had been provided to members of the Forum.

(3) That the latest estimated school balances (adjusted to exclude in-year Academy conversions) were forecast to be £3.40m, which was 12% higher than initial estimates of £3.08m.

(4) That two maintained schools were anticipating being in deficit at 31st March 2015, though one now expects to be in surplus at 31st March 2015.

(5) That the Head of Finance, Schools, be requested to present further information on school balances at the July 2015 Schools Forum showing how each schools' estimate compared to their final year end positions.

The Forum considered a report by Mr Ian Burbidge, Head of Finance, Schools, updating the Forum on the 2015/16 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) settlement, including (a) notification of additional funding to the DSG Allocation to support the introduction of the Early Years Pupil Premium, (b) the submission of the Authority Proforma Toolkit to the Education Funding Agency, enabling mainstream budget to be calculated, (c) the reasons for the need of additional Trigger Funding within the Pupil Growth Fund (d) the increase of £40,000 over the budget approved by School Forum in January 2015 for the purchases of national copyright licenses through the Department for Education, (e) on the importance that schools verify licences they bought to ensure unnecessary double payments were not made (f) the transfer of £0.235m from High Needs Contingency Budget to the Special Educational Needs Resourcing and Assessment Panel (SENRAP) budget, enabling expenditure to remain on track, and (f) in-year adjustment to the Notional Special Education Needs (SEN) Top Up funding.

Mr Paddy Bradley, Head of Economy, Skills and Property Development and Mr Burbidge responded to questions particularly on the implications of all three options being considered by Forum members regarding the Notional SEN Top-up funding. Forum Members noted that the Swindon Association of Secondary Headteachers was yet to comment on the use of permanent exclusion income from schools to support the integration of permanently excluded pupils and agreed to defer voting on the item until the next meeting of the Forum.

Resolved: (1) That the Schools Forum agrees:

(a) A total 2015/16 Pupil Growth Budget of £0.436m, as shown at Annex A of the report.

(b) Approves an increase in the National Copyright Licenses budget of £40,000 in recognition of the change to the arrangements for purchasing Performance Rights Society (PRS), Photographic Performance Ltd (PPL), Mechanical Copyright Protection society (MCPS) and Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) licenses.

(c) The transfer £0.235m of the High Needs Contingency budget to the Special Educational Needs Resourcing and Assessment Panel (SENRAP) budget which was currently overspending.

(d) In respect of the three options outlined in paragraph 9.5 of the report regarding the most appropriate use for the allocation of the £350,000 Notional SEN Top Up Funding budget, given that the current method was not affordable in 2015/16, Option C be agreed and implemented.

(e) The proposal to use the unallocated DSG of £0.165m to support Mainstream Schools High Needs Top Up Funding budget which was currently overspending.

(2) That, further to the decision in (1(d)) above, Notional SEN Top-Up Funding options be submitted to the Schools Forum in March 2016.

(3) That the Head of Finance, Education, be requested to submit a report to the School Forum's meeting in July 2015 to include the possibility of creating a ring-fenced budget of £30,000 to support the reintegration of permanently excluded pupils.

(4) That, further to the decision in (3) above, the Head of Finance, Education be requested to include the views of the Swindon Association of Secondary Headteachers on the subject in the proposed report.

26.

Schools Financial Value Standard Returns

Mr Ian Burbidge, Head of Finance, Schools, submitted a report (a) updating the Forum on the findings of the review of the 2013/14 Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) self-assessments, as required by the Department for Education, and (b) proposing a consistent process across all relevant schools for future submission.

The School Forum noted the IT issues arising when completing the self-assessment form. Mr Burbidge agreed to support schools in this and requested they contact the Finance department if they had any queries.

Resolved: That this Forum notes that:

(1) The Head of Finance is to issue guidance to schools on how best to complete the Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) self-assessment return.

(2) The Local Authority will be reviewing each Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) self-assessment response over the next few weeks in detail and may contact individual schools to verify evidence to support their assessments.

27.

Any Other Business

The Chair circulated a leaflet from the “f40” Group regarding school funding. He advised that the leaflet was circulated to parents and educationalists and drew members’ attention to the impact of funding formulas on schools, particularly secondary schools.

28.

Date of Next Meeting

Meeting dates for the next Municipal Year had not yet been finalised but it was anticipated that meetings would take place at similar times to this Municipal Year – that is in July, October 2015, and January and March 2016. Members would be informed of the dates when confirmed.