

Note: This is a briefing note, which has been written following the Schools Forum meeting that was held on 14 September 2022. This meeting went ahead as an informal 'briefing' only, as the meeting took place during the mourning period following the death of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. No resolutions were made and no decisions were taken. Review / approval of the minutes of the meeting held on 18 May 2022 are moved forward to the next meeting to be held on 12 October.

Briefing Note on the Informal Schools Forum meeting held on Wednesday 14 September 2022

Commenced 08:05, Concluded 11:05

RECORD OF MEETING ATTENDEES, APOLOGIES AND ABSENCES

Schools & Academies Members

IN ATTENDANCE

| Member | Membership Group |
|---------------------------|--|
| Ian Morrel (Chair) | Maintained Primary Schools - Headteacher |
| Ashley Reed (Vice Chair) | Academies Member |
| Victoria Birch | Academies Member |
| Wahid Zaman | Academies Member |
| Brent Fitzpatrick OBE | Academies Member |
| Melanie Saville | Academies Member |
| Helen Williams | Academies Member |
| Amanda Sloney | Academies Member |
| Richard Bottomley | Academies Member – Alternative Provision Academies |
| Bev George | Maintained Nursery Schools – Governor |
| Sian Hudson | Maintained Nursery Schools – Headteacher |
| Emma Hamer | Maintained Primary Schools – Governor |
| Graham Swinbourne | Maintained Primary Schools - Headteacher |
| Kathryn Swales | Maintained Primary Schools - Headteacher |
| Nicky Kilvington | Maintained Primary Schools - Headteacher |
| Jonathan Nixon | Maintained Primary Schools - Headteacher |
| Lyndsey Brown | Maintained Special Schools - Headteacher |

APOLOGIES RECEIVED

| Member | Membership Group |
|-----------------|---|
| Heather Lacey | Academies Member |
| Mathew Atkinson | Academies Member |
| Michelle Farr | Academies Member – Special School Academies |

NOT IN ATTENDANCE (WITHOUT APOLOGIES RECEIVED)

| Member | Membership Group |
|---------------|-------------------------|
| Andrew Morley | Academies Member |

| | |
|------------------|----------------------------------|
| Michael Thorp | Academies Member |
| Kirsty Ratcliffe | Pupil Referral Unit (maintained) |

Non-Schools Members

IN ATTENDANCE

| Member | Membership Group |
|---------------|-------------------------|
| Tom Bright | Teaching Unions |

APOLOGIES RECEIVED

| Member | Membership Group |
|---------------|-------------------------|
| | |

NOT IN ATTENDANCE (WITHOUT APOLOGIES RECEIVED)

| Member | Membership Group |
|----------------|--|
| David Johnston | Officer Representing Vulnerable Children |
| Junaid Karim | Council for Mosques (Bradford) |

Substitute Members present at the meeting as a Member (not as an Observer)

| Substitute Member | Membership Group |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| | |

Substitute Members present at the meeting as an Observer (not as a Member)

| Substitute Member | Membership Group |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Alison Kaye | Academies Member |

Local Authority Officers present at the meeting

| Officer | Position |
|----------------|---|
| Andrew Redding | Business Advisor (Schools) |
| Asad Shah | Committee Secretariat |
| Jonty Holden | Principal Finance Officer (Schools) |
| Marium Haque | Strategic Director, Children's Services |
| Niall Devlin | Assistant Director, SEND and Inclusion |
| Debbie Cousins | Senior Finance Officer |

Observers

| Name |
|----------------|
| Cllr M Pollard |

40% of the School Forum's membership (filled membership positions) must be present for a meeting to be quorate. This meeting was quorate, as 66% of members were present (18 out of 27 currently filled membership positions).

At the beginning of the meeting, the new Chair of the Schools Forum (Ian Morrel) explained that this meeting is going ahead as an informal briefing. The Chair led the Forum for a minute's silence, as a mark of respect for Queen Elizabeth II.

The Chair welcomed 3 new members to the Schools Forum (Jonathan Nixon, Amanda Slaney and Michelle Farr).

The Chair then made an opening statement. This statement is a very helpful point of reference for Forum members and so is recorded below:

“In taking over the role of Chair, I said to Andrew (*Redding – Schools Business Advisor*) that I want to make a Chair’s Statement, which I hope will be of benefit to both long-standing and new members, the purpose of what I will say is to help ‘set the scene’ for the work that we do as members of Schools Forum and to briefly outline the challenges we and school leaders will face over the next financial and academic years.

I wish to remind us all that we are representatives of sectors from across all the education sectors in Bradford and, as such, we have a responsibility to make sure we represent their views, to keep them informed of the points we discuss, and to ensure that the information that is produced by Andrew Redding and his team is effectively communicated to them. Also, to appreciate the challenges different sectors have, and that we have always worked together to support each other over the years. The next few years are likely to challenge our resolve even further. The guiding principle of our work is that the large amounts of funding we discuss is money that should always be to the benefit of children and young people – simply put, the money should follow the child. At times it may feel to us that this is not the case, and we have the right to make challenges. However, it is important that, in engaging with the discussion, we keep the focus that we are representatives of sectors and should not be making a case just for our own schools and colleges. At times we may feel conflicted, either because we know our institutions may benefit from a strategic decision and/or from some financial gain or loss due to a proposal or a decision being made, which is why procedure allows us to make declarations of interest and feel confident to engage fully in discussion and debate. Over the years, I have been keen that our discussions also focus on Strategies for education development across the District and that our work supports recommendations to those who have responsibility within the Council to implement strategy. This allows us to see if funding is having impact and to be able to hold members of the Council accountable – for me, this is a key part of what we have responsibility for.

I want to add that, as is inevitable, changes in membership mean that being a member of Schools Forum can seem daunting, not least because new members think everyone else knows what is being discussed – I can assure you that this is not always the case; discussions use terminology that not everyone will grasp – please, all members, ask if you do not understand the terminology or the point being discussed. We rely so much on the expertise of Andrew Redding and his expert team, in whom we know we can trust to help steer us through challenges, but they will make reference to matters such as Minimum Funding Guarantee and Headroom and Floors, for example, which we all need to understand for our own benefit and that of colleagues for whom we represent.

To ‘set the scene’ for 2023/24:

- We expect to follow our usual timetable for the 2023/24 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and formula funding cycle. Today's meeting, and then meetings in October and December, will prepare the way for the Forum to make its recommendations on 11 January. Today's meeting represents the starting point for discussions on the 2023/24 cycle. However, we will need to move quickly to formal consultation, beginning as usual mid-October.
- We were warned in the July meeting that we are likely to find the 2023/24 budget round challenging. This is not so much because of technical changes that we will be required to manage, but because we will find that the 2023/24 financial settlement is not at the level of recent years, the amount of budget headroom that we have will have reduced, and the financial position of our High Needs Block will worsen. It will be challenging also in respect of how the increases in funding for schools, academies and other providers (including early years' providers), that can be afforded by the 2023/24 settlement, compare with the current scale of growth in costs, especially as a result of pay awards and inflationary pressures. The Council will begin to present to today's meeting further details on the 2023/24 settlement, and the view that this year's cycle will be 'challenging' is very much confirmed – income does not always appear to match expenditure.
- One of the key messages for all schools and academies to take note of is the immediate need to review and update their 2022/23 financial year budgets, as well as their 3-year budget forecasts, for the latest available information on pay awards, costs and formula funding projections. Most schools and academies will find that their budget positions have changed (and most possibly have worsened) since original forecasts were produced earlier in the year. Andrew Redding and his team will shortly publish a 'key messages' summary on Bradford Schools Online, for schools and academies to access. It is also intended to publish shortly some early indicative modelling, in advance of formal consultation documentation, which will allow primary and secondary schools and academies to see more clearly what 2023/24 formula funding might look like.
- Now, it might be at this point that all new members think 'why on earth did I sign up to be a member of Schools Forum' and existing members may think 'my resignation is writing itself! But, I have been a member of Schools Forum for many years and have relished the challenge and enjoyed the debates, discussions and decision-making, because we care what happens to the children and young people of the Bradford District. So thank you for being a member of such an important body and let's work together and enjoy the challenge of making ends meet."

1. Declarations of Interest

Emma Hamer declared an interest in all matters concerning the High Needs and Early Years Blocks.

Ian Morrel, Lyndsey Brown and Richard Bottomley declared an interest in High Needs Block matters.

2. Minutes of the 18 May Schools Forum Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting 18 May 2022 have been moved forward for review / approval at the next meeting to be held on 14 September. The Business Advisor (Schools) reported the following, for information:

- As we have done in previous years, we would like to warn primary-phase maintained school representatives that, because of the timescales needed to confirm subscription, Members will be asked at the next meeting on 12 October whether they wish to de-delegate for the purposes of subscribing to Fischer Family Trust next year. As such, it will be helpful for them to have collected feedback from colleagues in advance of this. We will send an email to members following this meeting to help with this.
- Within the agenda reports pack is a confirmed statement of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) balances brought forward from the 2021/22 financial year. This statement replaces what was presented to the Forum in July. The only change in the confirmed statement is the balance held within the Early Years Block, which is now amended (increased by £0.287m) for the DfE's final Early Years Block figure.
- Also within the agenda reports pack is a statement, which aims to summarise the main points regarding the latest pay award information for teachers and for support staff. This is presented to ensure that Forum members are aware of this information, and also because it provides context for the information about the 2023/24 funding settlement, which will be presented through the agenda of this meeting.
- The Government made an announcement on 8 September, indicating that there will be energy costs protection for the public sector – a '6-month energy guarantee'. The details of this (and as this affects schools specifically) are not yet clear, but we will highlight on Bradford Schools Online the further detail when this comes.
- The new Prime Minister stated in her 'manifesto' that the recently introduced additional 1.25% National Insurance Levy will be removed. If it is confirmed that this will be removed for employers, this will provide some budget relief for schools, academies and other providers. The details (and timing) are currently not clear, but we will highlight on Bradford Schools Online the further detail when this comes.

In response to these information items, Forum members asked the following questions and made the following comments:

- Previously, when the teacher pay award was higher than 'expected', the DfE provided more funding in the form of an additional grant. Has the DfE indicated that more funding will be allocated this year? The Business Advisor (Schools) responded that recent messaging from the DfE indicated that no further funding would be allocated

(that pay awards must be met from existing school budgets). The DfE refers to the Schools Supplementary Grant, which has been additionally allocated this year to support the NI Levy as well as pay award costs more generally. The position may change (with the new Prime Minister and the budget (fiscal) statement to be made this month), but the DfE has not so far indicated that additional funding will be available.

- A member asked the member representing the Teacher Trades Unions whether there is any further information released from the Unions about their positions in respect of the teacher pay award? The member responded that the Unions are clearly very disappointed with the teacher pay award, but are also livid with the Government that no additional funding has been provided to meet its cost. The Unions are lobbying the Government hard about this. A ballot of Union members on the pay award is taking place towards the end of this month.
- What would the position be if schools and academies cannot balance their budgets? The Business Advisor made a few comments in response to this. Firstly, that the 'bottom line' requirement of all schools and academies is to set a balanced budget, irrespective of any view about the 'adequacy' of funding, which would be taken up with Government via lobbying and via consultation responses. He accepted that this response does not provide much comfort, but it is a reality of the school finance system. Ultimately, the back stop for maintained schools is Bradford Council. For academies, this is the ESFA / the DfE. The Council will always seek to support, guide and advise schools in their budget management. It is appropriate however, to emphasise the extent of the financial challenge that is currently facing Bradford Council. The extent to which the Council could directly support schools financially is extremely limited (to say the least). Cllr Pollard, attending the meeting as an observer, reiterated this message. He highlighted that schools nationally are currently (at the end of the 2021/22 financial year) holding larger reserves, meaning that the immediate budget challenge is an 'in year' one. He also emphasised that the situation regarding increases in costs (from inflation, energy prices etc) is fluid.
- Do governors and trustees have any personal liability here? The Business Advisor responded that, to the best of his knowledge, neither governors of maintained schools nor trustees of academy trusts hold personal liability in respect of a school's or an academy's financial position (a failure to set a balanced budget).

3. Matters Raised by Schools

It was reported that no matters have been raised.

4. Standing Item – DSG Schools Block Growth Fund Allocations

The Chair advised that no allocations are presented to the Schools Forum for approval.

5. DfE Consultation on Early Years Block Funding

The Business Advisor (Schools) presented a report, **Document OS**, which briefed the Schools Forum on the DfE's consultation on the Early Years Block for 2023/24 and on the

implications of the DfE's proposals for the funding of providers delivering the early years entitlements, as well as for our Early Years Block management.

The report also provided the Local Authority's response to this consultation, which has been submitted.

The Business Advisor explained that the proposed Early Years Block settlement for 2023/24 is the beginning of 'financial challenge' message. Under the DfE's proposals, we would only see a 1% increase in our funding rates. The 'inadequacy' of this uplift is a main point of our response to the DfE. The Business Advisor explained that there are likely to be complications, and knock on consequences, that we will need to work through, where the decision is taken by the DfE to merge Teacher Pay and Pensions Grants into the Early Years Block in 2023/24. We will shortly reconvene the Early Years Working Group (EYWG) to consider the detail of this and of our Early Years Single Funding Formula arrangements.

The Business Advisor asked for any members that are interested in attending the EYWG to contact him directly.

Forum members did not ask any questions and did not have any comments on this report.

6. Schools Block 'Hard' National Funding Formula – DfE Consultation

The Principal Finance Officer (Schools) presented **Document OT**, which gave the Schools Forum sight of the Local Authority's response to the DfE's latest consultation on the transition to the 'hard' National Funding Formula within the Schools Block.

The deadline for responses was 9 September and the Principal Finance Officer explained that the Authority has submitted a response. He then highlighted the key aspects of this response.

Forum members did not ask any questions and did not have any comments on this report.

7. 2023/24 DSG & Formula Funding Announcements – Briefing

The Business Advisor (Schools) and the Principal Finance Officer (Schools) presented **Document OU (Appendices 1, 2 and 3)**, which provided a briefing on the 2023/24 Dedicated Schools Grant settlement and formula funding arrangements, following the DfE's announcement on 19 July 2022.

The Business Advisor presented Appendix 1 point by point. He explained that the financial challenge that the 2023/24 settlement presents, across the Schools, Central Schools Services, and High Needs Blocks, is significant. He confirmed that the national 3-year funding settlement (2022-2025), that was announced in October 2021, has been weighted towards 2022/23, with reduced increases in 2023/24 and (expected) in 2024/25. He explained that, whilst this approach has increased funding levels (and the spending power) that are available now, which is a significant positive, in the context of the current scale of increasing costs, schools, academies and other providers are likely to see a quite substantial erosion in their spending power during 2022/23 and into 2023/24 if no further funding is allocated and if costs continue to increase.

The Principal Finance Officer presented Appendix 3 - graphs intended to better highlight the distribution of the Schools Block settlement, and the 'relative winners and losers', including highlighting the differences between the primary and secondary phases. He explained that, due to the primary phase being more reliant on the Minimum Funding Levels (MFLs) and Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG), the 2023/24 settlement for the primary phase is generally more challenging than for the secondary phase. The Business Advisor highlighted that the uplift in the MFLs and MFG of only 0.5% is one of the most challenging aspects of the 2023/24 settlement (as schools and academies that are funded on these factors will see only a 0.5% increase in their funding per pupil). The uplifts in the MFG and MFLs in recent years have been higher and most schools and academies will likely have estimated a greater than 0.5% increase in their funding in 2023/24.

Within the presentation of the challenges within the High Needs Block, the Assistant Director, SEND and Inclusion, presented some outline statistics, which emphasise how significant the increase in the numbers of EHCPs, and assessment requests for EHCPs, in the Bradford District has been (and continues). In 2019, Bradford District had 2,397 children and young people with EHCPs. The number of EHCPs currently is 5,288. The Authority currently receives (on average) 160 new EHCP applications per month.

Responding to the presentation of the report, Forum members asked the following questions and made the following comments:

- Who pays for the Minimum Funding Guarantee (where is the cost top-sliced from)? The Business Advisor explained that, within the Schools Block settlement, the DfE has funded a minimum 0.5% increase in funding per pupil for all schools and academies. This means that an MFG of 0.5% is funded, rather than being a call on other elements within the Schools Block. The cost of the MFG at the moment within our 2023/24 model is £1.8m.
- It was confirmed that the secondary school showing as a negative in Appendix 3 is the result of a 'statistical anomaly' relating to the nature of the school as a newly established school, and that this isn't indicative of a negative settlement for this school.

8. Outline – Formula Funding Arrangements & Consultations

The Business Advisor (Schools), and the Principal Finance Officer (Schools), presented **Document OV**, which outlined the working principles that are being considered in the development of Bradford's formula funding arrangements for 2023/24 for the Schools and High Needs Blocks.

At the start of the item, both the Chair and the Business Advisor provided a summary of key points so far, and sought to re-assure the Forum that there will be opportunity for members to understand and to better absorb these messages. For this purpose, the Business Advisor reminded members that 3 FFWG sessions have been arranged, and he encouraged members to book onto one of these.

The Business Advisor and the Principal Finance Officer then explained that they have developed a 'worked-through' formula funding approach for 2023/24, which follows established principles and which is likely to form the basis of what the Authority consults on (and what will be discussed with members within the FFWG meetings). A short

summary of the key aspects of this formula funding approach was presented. The Business Advisor also explained that, on current modelling, it is anticipated that approximately (very estimated at this stage) £8m of DSG reserves could be needed to afford our 2023/24 planned budget, without further 'mitigating' actions being taken to reduce spending. This position is after having 'exercised restraint' in uplifting formula funding within the High Needs Block (restricting uplifting rates of top-up funding to 1%). He emphasised that the Authority and the Forum have 2 levels of 'financial challenge' to consider and to balance: the challenge at individual school, academy and provider level (in relation to their expenditure in 2023/24 increasing at a rate greater than income, putting pressure on the Authority and the Forum to maximise delegated funding); and the challenge at DSG level, in setting formula funding arrangements for 2023/24 that are affordable and sustainable within the value of DSG funding that is available to the District. The Business Advisor stated that meeting the cost of new specialist places, and meeting the cost that has arisen from the recent and continued growth in the number of EHCPs, were the priorities for the High Needs Block in 2023/24.

In response to the presentation of the report, Cllr Pollard asked for clarification on whether any of the £3.8m that is stated as estimated for the cost of new specialist places was capital or could be capitalised. The Business Advisor responded that the £3.8m was only the revenue funding associated with the on-going cost of the new places (place element and top up funding), and did not include any capital costs associated with new building or the adaption of buildings. Forum members did not ask any further questions, and did not raise any further comments, on this report.

9. Work Programme and Schedule of Meetings 2022/23 Academic Year

The Business Advisor (Schools) presented **Document OW**, which outlined the School Forum's 2022/23 Academic Year work programme. He asked members to review this programme and to contact him if members identify any significant additional matters they feel should be discussed. Members did not make any comments or ask any questions on the programme within the meeting.

The Chair emphasised how important it is for members to attend Forum meetings and requested that members prioritise this.

10. Schools Forum Standing Items

Nothing further was reported.

11. AOB / Future Agenda Items

The Chair raised two items of additional business:

- Do we have information available yet on the numbers of admissions applications that are to be placed before the October Census? The Chair is concerned to ensure that the number of placements before the Census is maximised (to secure the funding for 2023/24) and, if there are any difficulties, that these are flagged and resolved. The Strategic Manager, Sufficiency, and the Assistant Director, SEND and Inclusion, responded that this is discussed weekly by the Children's Services management team

and that no issues are currently being flagged. The Business Advisor (Schools) stated that we normally provide a statement on 'placement by the October Census' to the Forum in October and that we plan to present this at the next meeting.

- What are the Council's strategies for supporting households with the 'cost of living crisis' and can the Council signal for schools the guidance that is available? This will help schools in talking to parents. The Business Advisor responded that he will follow this up, including to highlight through Bradford Schools Online the Council's guidance on support mechanisms, which is believed to already be on the Council's website.

12. Next meeting

Please see the published schedule of meetings – the next Forum meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 12 September, to take place in person at City Hall.