

Schools Forum Funding Group Meeting
10 December 2015, The Outen Room, Green Park
Meeting opened: 9.30am
Meeting closed: 12pm

Present

Members

Pete Rowe, Tessa Haddon, Alan Rosen, Michael Moore, Steven Sneesby, Wendy Terry.

Officers

Emma Wilding, John Huskinson, Gill Shurrock

1. Apologies for Absence/ Changes in Membership

Apologies were received from Katherine Douglas and Sue Stamp

2. Declarations of Interest

None

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 13 November 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

4. Admissions Appeals

The Department of Education is proposing to make a change to section 6.2 of the Scheme for financing schools guidance, to include admission appeals as one of the services in which a local authority can charge school budgets for agreed services.

The options are:

1. The local authority can continue to retain the funds centrally, or
2. The centrally retained monies are shared with all schools and then all schools are charged for their admission appeals.

The impact on schools

Option 1: If this option were followed then voluntary aided, foundation and academy schools could no longer be charged for appeals.

Option 2: all schools would be charged for appeals (having had finances distributed)

The full impact of each option would be considered before a final decision was made. The impact would therefore not be until 2017-18.

Recommendation

That if the proposed change comes into force, during 2016/17 Buckinghamshire Local Authority would consult all schools and seek the approval of the members of the Schools Forum representing maintained schools as to their preferred way of managing appeals charges from 2017/18.

Clarification of the number of primary school and 11 plus appeals received would be requested.

Emma Wilding/Debbie Munday

A business case would be presented at the March meeting of Schools Forum which includes the impact of the proposed change on all schools based on real data.

Action: Emma Wilding

5. High Needs funding

The Central Spend proposals 2016/17 were discussed. The key points highlighted were:

- There was a £1.5m pressure on the budget for high needs next year.
- There were savings in some areas and additional pressures in other areas.
- This year there had been a decrease in the number of children and young people placed outside the local authority.
- The Local Authority has a robust process in place with regards to placing pupils in specialist provision, both within and out of the local authority.
- Last year the spend on independent schools was approximately £16m. This year the spend was approximately £13m. Last year there was an overspend; this year spend is back on budget.
- The PACE centre numbers had decreased over the last 18 months as the needs of the children are being met locally.
- In 2014/15 the High Needs funding block was allocated to 153 pupils in schools comparison with an estimated 225 in 2015/16 and represents a 24% increase.
- There had been a 17% increase in the request for high needs funding from pre-schools.
- 3.2% of children and young people in Bucks have an education, health and care plan (EHCP) or a Statement of SEN in comparison with 2.8% nationally.
- Bucks currently has 12 special schools.
- A weekly report is received which advises the number of requests for Education Health Care Plans.
- There is a 20 week statutory timeframe for the completion of EHCPs.
- By 21 March 2018, all existing Statements of Special Educational Needs are either to be converted into an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or ceased if no longer necessary. Local Authorities are required to publish a conversion strategy for this process.
- The current 5 year strategy for SEND ends in July 2016. It has been agreed that a SEND review will take place from around mid-January until the end April 2016 which would include the provision of 5 year place planning for special educational needs and a 5 year DSG budget plan. An initial scoping meeting will take place in mid January. Benchmarking with other local authorities would take place as part of the review.
- There are a number of ARPs across the local authority that meets a range of SEN. Recently, some ARPs have changed their designation to support pupils with ASD, which is a growing area of need.
- There had been an increase in the number of requests being received for Education Health and Care Assessments.
- There is huge pressure on Special School places and demand is increasing. Concern has been expressed about not being able to meet demand.

Members of the Schools Forum Funding Group were advised that despite some last minute announcement from DfE regarding extra high needs funding (worth c £1m to Bucks in 2016/17) as part of a £90m+ national pot, the growth in high needs results in a significant net pressure which needs to be funded.

To avoid having to ask schools to fund this in 2016/17 from schools block, it was suggested that the £3.3m remaining capital contribution from DSG for pre-existing capital schemes could be rephrased, so that instead of it being £3.3m in 2016/17 then £0 thereafter, it became £1.65m for 2016/17 and 2017/18 then £0 thereafter.

This option would be recommended for agreement by members of Schools Forum subject to the APT announcement.

A spreadsheet giving details of the Central Spend Proposals for 2016/17 and a separate paper setting out Primary Lump Sum, High Needs, sector specific issues such as prior attainment, and the percentage of schools represented would be presented at the Schools Forum meeting on the 8 January 2016.

Action: Emma Wilding

6. Remaining Central budget

Following recommendation by the Schools Forum Funding Group that the DSG budget be reduced by 5% in 2016-17, budget holders were asked to provide full justification of their budgets. A business case was requested if the 5% saving for 2016-17 was unable to be met which included the impact on service delivery. If sufficient information was not provided for Schools Forum to agree to give back the additional 5%, the assumption would be the 5% saving would be taken.

7. Modelling of Formula changes

Modelling took place on the current formula with every factor pro rata to 98.5% to fit with the funding available. Modelling also took place in comparison with figures two years ago. The four new models were:

- Model 6 - Prior Attainment Balance
- Model 7 - AWPU Balance
- Model 8 - AWPU Balance retaining ratio
- Model 9 - Secondary Increased Lump Sum AWPU Balance

Following discussions model 6 was discounted as the move to the figure of £386 for Prior Attainment was felt to be too large; model 7 was discounted due to the primary/secondary ratio of 1:1:24; model 9 was discounted as it was felt unnecessary to increase the secondary lump sum in Bucks.

Model 8 was presented to members of Schools Forum for the consultation.

8. Legal position of current Schools Funding consultation

An Equality Impact Assessment would be undertaken as part of the process.

Action: John Huskinson

A reminder about the closing date for the Formula consultation would be put in the Schools Bulletin.

Action: Emma Wilding

9. Any other business

None

10. Date of the Next Meeting

Friday 26 February 2016, 9.30am, Green Park, Aston Clinton