

**ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY, 6TH MARCH, 2015**

Present:- P. Blackwell (Dinnington Learning Community Representative (in the Chair).

Learning Community Representatives: - P. Dilasio (Wales), C. Roberts (Wickersley), K. Sherburn (Rawmarsh), A. Abel and D. Naisbitt (Oakwood), L. Pepper (Clifton), H. McLaughlin (Saint Pius), D. Silvester (Wath), T. Mahon (Saint Bernard's), R. Fone (Brinsworth), D. Sutton (Maltby), R. Burman (Winterhill).

Stakeholder Representatives: - L. Redmile (Secondary Business Managers), P. Bloor (PRUs), A. Hardy (Colleges), M. Badger (Support Staff Trade Unions – Unison), S. Brooke (Teaching Trade Unions), A. Richards (Secondary Governors), D. Ashmore (Teaching Schools), N. Whitaker (Special Schools), G. Gillard (Sheffield Diocese), P. Gerard (Early Years), J. Morrison (Swinton), D. Ball (Aston), J. Fearnley (Wingfield).

Officers in attendance: - H. Etheridge (Clerk), K. Borthwick (Acting Director, Education and Skills, CYPS), V. Njelic (Finance), J. Robertson (Finance), D. Rae (SEN Consultant), I. Thomas.

Observers: - M. Young (Clifton Substitute), F. Sprague (Teaching Trade Unions Substitute).

Apologies were received from: - G. Alton and R. Williams (Colleges; A. Hardy representing), S. Mallinder (Primary Governors), J. Gray (Early Years PVI).

101. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

No Declarations of Interest were made.

102. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 16TH JANUARY, 2015.

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Rotherham Schools' Forum held on 16th January, 2015, were considered.

Under matters arising the following issues were raised: -

- **Minute number 86 - Devolved Central Budget:** - An update was requested in relation to the Exemption of Standing Orders in respect of this. The Acting Director for Education and Skills explained that the Exemption from Standing Orders would be addressed through Schools completing a pro-forma return regarding their intended use for the funds.
- **Minute number 89 – Classroom start-up funding the new schools:** - It was noted that the Foundation Stage One classroom start-up fees had been agreed in conversations between the

Assistant Head of the School Effectiveness Service and the School.

- **Minute number 91 – High Needs Update:** - This minute showed that the previous High Needs update had included consideration of the impact the closure of Abbey School would have on the High Needs' Block. It was noted that the pre-consultation had ended and Abbey School was now under consultation to remain open with a smaller number of places.

Resolved: - That the minutes of the previous meeting be accepted as an accurate record.

103. WELCOME TO THE NEW STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES DIRECTORATE.

Ian Thomas was welcomed to his first meeting of the Rotherham Schools' Forum.

Ian spoke a little about his vision for the DSG in Rotherham: -

- There had been a lack of transparency around the use of the DSG in previous years in Rotherham. This would be tackled from now on;
- There was a moral sense of purpose surrounding the use of any DSG funding;
- The funding was for all of Rotherham's children;
- It was public money and a collective resource;
- It would be uneconomical and not financially sustainable for individual schools to be protective of their own money;
- There were spiralling costs around High Needs budgets. Was Rotherham allocating enough funding to this area and was it spending in the right ways?;
- Future investments in High Needs areas would be required;
- Full accountability would be applied going forward.

Ian confirmed that full details for the 2015/2016 budget were being worked on and would be presented to the RSF meeting scheduled for 24th April, 2015.

104. NOTE THE LETTER OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR, CYPS, LETTER TO SCHOOLS AND OUTLINE THE IMPLICATIONS OF MOVING SOME BUDGET DECISIONS BACK TO 1ST JULY, 2015.

Paul Blackwell, Chair of the RSF and Dinnington Learning Community Representative, informed the meeting that the purpose of this item was to note the letter that had been sent to all Schools regarding the transfer of centrally retained budgets from the Local Authority to individual school budgets.

All funding would be in Schools' budgets from 1st July, 2015, with traded services operating from that date.

The Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services referred to the more sensitive budgets within those earmarked to transfer away from being centrally held by the Local Authority. These included the Children in Public Care and the funding received by the Sexual Exploitation Team. Schools in Rotherham could not distance themselves from this work or see themselves outside of the solution.

The Winterhill Learning Community Representative advocated that the decision was taken with the view that no schools would want to opt out of this work. It was firmly believed that they would be happy to pay more for these Services. With a traded service, schools would buy-in, there was no suggestion that some would opt-out.

The Strategic Director referred to an Officer who provided a great deal of added value to Schools through the provision of safeguarding advice. The challenge to the Local Authority was to now create a marketable offer or decommission services. There were the mechanics of contributions to think through. The Aston Learning Community Representative suggested that the provision of advice to schools was a part of the Officer's role, which involved other functions too.

Discussion moved on to the rationale for the decision taken to end centrally retained budgets: -

- The decision taken was one of principle i.e. all services should be traded so they could decide how to spend the monies allocated;
- RSF attendees who made the decision were aware that, whilst some services would be bought-back, other services would come under more scrutiny about the value for money/added value they provided;
- School budgets were not yet known and there were statutory areas that needed to be addressed;
- Confirmation was needed on what were the statutory and what were the additional areas provided by Local Authority Services;
- Who provides these services and who should provide the services?;
- RSF Representatives had not reported back to the Schools that they represent that the money was a 'windfall'. Only three schools had not bought back into Learners First, for example. Schools were using the funds appropriately.

The Strategic Director thanked the RSF members for their contributions; the dialogue had been successful and would continue. There was a serious problem with High Needs funding and a lack of control over the future pressures on the budget. The next RSF meeting would be presented with the full information on 2015/2016 budget setting with absolute transparency.

The Teaching School Unions' Representative asked for information that was sent to schools to be copied to the other stakeholder representatives. They did not receive this letter, or other information, but needed to see it in order to adequately represent their communities.

Resolved: - (1) That the information shared be noted.

(2) That all letters to school relating to Rotherham Schools' Forum business be copied to the stakeholder representatives.

(The Strategic Director left the meeting at the end of this item as he had another commitment.)

105. TOTAL SCHOOLS' BUDGET MONITORING REPORT AS AT 31ST JANUARY, 2015.

Joanne Robertson, CYPS and Schools Finance Manager, presented the Total Schools' Budget Monitoring report to the end of the 2014/2015 financial year based on income and expenditure to 31st January, 2015.

Overall, the budget was forecasting an overspend of £476k (+0.33%).

The report outlined: -

- The Total Schools' Budget was £145.087m;
- The budget had been revised by £16.975m since the start of the financial year;
- Since the previous budget monitoring report there had been a reduction of £677k in the Schools' Block due to two primary schools academising.

Budget virements had taken place between December and January, 2015, in each of the three Blocks: -

- Schools' Block: -
 - Transfers from the School Effectiveness Service to Ferham, Sitwell and Milton Schools;
 - Allocation of EYFS Profile Moderator funding to Sitwell, Broom, Thornhill, Thurcroft, Anston Hillcrest, Swinton and Herringthorpe Schools;
 - £445k funding devolved to maintained schools for the Rotherham School Improvement Partnership (£320k passed on to Academy Schools).
- High Needs' Block: -
 - SEN Top-up Funding;
 - Learning Support Service and Autism Communication Team.

- Early Years' Block: -
 - Additional Early Years' funding allocated to Flanderwell and Trinity Croft;
 - Reduction of £12k maintained Early Years' funding for academy payments following the latest conversions.

The report outlined the main areas of variance against the budget: -

- Schools' Block - £759k under-spent: -
 - Rates – forecast under-spend of £748k;
 - Behaviour Support Service – under-spend of £22k;
 - Children in Public Care – under-spend of £26k;
 - Contingency – over-spends on Pupil Growth Fund - £22k - and termination of employment - £57k and under-spend of £24k on copyright licences;
 - Trade Union activities – under-spend of £6k due to additional income from academies;
 - Free School meals assessment – under-spend of £6k due to additional income from academies.
- High Needs' Block - £1.743m over-spent:-
 - Special Educational Needs – over-spend of £863k;
 - Post 16 – 24 provision – over-spend of £741k;
 - SEN complex needs – over-spend of £75k;
 - SEN extra district placements – under-spend of £98k;
 - Hearing Impaired Service – over-spend of £82k;
 - Visually Impaired Service – over-spend of £31k;
 - Learning Support and Autism Communication Team - under-spend of £10k;
 - Portage Service – over-spend of £19k;
 - EOTAS Transport – over-spend of £8k;
 - Home Tuition Service – over-spend of £33k.
- Early Years' Block - £508k under-spent: -
 - PVI Nursery Funding for 3 and 4 Year Olds – under-spend of £62k;
 - Early Education Funding for 2 Year Olds – under-spend of £446k.

Discussion followed and the following issues were raised:-

- The Rates Budget had significant changes year-on-year. Often these could be backdated;
- Would the Early Years' under-spend be retained within Rotherham in the next financial year? – Yes, some would be proposed as a carry-forward to the next year as a larger number of pupils were expected. Rotherham's levels of take-up were high in comparison to national;
- The over-spend on Post 16-24 was phenomenal – could

Rotherham make their own provision in the Borough? - Yes, more on this to follow in the High Needs' item.

Resolved: - (1) That the report be received and the content noted, including the revised Total Schools' Budget allocation for 2014/2015.

(2) That the projected out-turn of £476k over-spend (+0.33%) be noted.

106. HIGH NEEDS STANDING UPDATE.

Donald Rae, SEN Consultant, gave a presentation to update the RSF on the work being undertaken on High Needs and the High Needs' Block.

The presentation covered: -

- Unrealistic budget set without reference to actual demand;
- Too much wishful thinking;
- Decisions taken without enough information or consideration of the impact of increasing or reducing budgets;
- Position not unique to Rotherham, although the pressures may be more extreme here;
- % of DSG spent on the HN Block – highest Wadsworth (21%). Lowest Tameside (8.44%). Rotherham 144 out of 148 (9.43%). National average = 13.38%. To get Rotherham to the national average would take an extra £8.6m of funding from the DSG;
- Tempered by the Minimum Funding Guarantee.

The Wales Learning Community Representative asked whether there was a connection between spend and quality? The SEN Consultant said that it was possible to spend less and get better outcomes.

- HN pressures;
- £1.7m deficit from 13/14 – this would need to be paid back;
- Top-up funding for mainstream schools – budgeted for £0.62m, cost £1.12m;
- Complex needs placements;
- Non-maintained special schools, placements up to 53 (from 42).

The Teaching Trades Unions Representative asked on the change in the consultation relating to Abbey and Kelford Schools. With Abbey remaining and Kelford increasing their number of total places, there would be a net increase of 40 places within the Phase. Would this lead to an increased pressure on the HN Block? - The SEN Consultant confirmed that the spreadsheet would need to be re-worked dependent on the outcome of the consultation. Overall, Special School budgets were working well.

The Wales Learning Community Representative asked about the potential impact of several special schools academising over the next year? - The

SEN Consultant did not envisage any particular change. Identification would remain the responsibility of the Local Authority.

The Special Schools' Representative spoke about the highly variable quality of non-maintained specialist provision. It was always expensive and could be poor quality. If a Rotherham child was placed in a non-maintained placement they more often returned to Rotherham less included and less prepared to move onto the next stage of their life successfully. It would be beneficial if the Local Authority, Rotherham's Schools and all partners strategically built up skills between the ages of 0-2 to be ready for High Needs childrens' journeys. It is a mistake to wait until Statutory Assessment began at 2 to be surprised. - The SEN Consultant agreed but referred to reducing budgets. Early intervention was important.

The Wingfield Learning Community Representative stated that Strategic SEN Reviews had been taking place for three years and nothing had changed. - The SEN Consultant agreed; he was the fourth SEN Consultant. An Inclusion Service was being developed alongside the bringing together of stakeholders.

The Teaching Schools' Representative referred to a comment by the Strategic Director that the RSF had been asked to increase the HN Block but had refused. He could not recall this having been the case. The Chair believed this to be a technical inaccuracy.

The Wingfield Learning Community Representative felt that the RSF had been misrepresented. The HN Block had been set and was insufficient based on needs and its staffing profile. The RSF had worked and been committed over many years. It was unfair to say this in a public forum.

The Wath Learning Community thanked the SEN Consultant for the clarity that was starting to emerge. This had been sought for a long time.

Resolved: - (1) That the update provided be noted.

(2) That future standing updates be provided on High Needs' work/development.

107. PROPOSED TOTAL SCHOOLS' BUDGET - 2015/2016: -

Presentation and consideration of this item was deferred to the next meeting to be held on 24th April, 2015.

108. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETINGS: -

Resolved: - (1) That the next meeting of the Rotherham Schools' Forum take place on Friday 24th April, 2015, to start at 8.30 a.m. at Rockingham Professional Development Centre.

(2) That future meetings take place on: -

- Friday 26th June, 2015.