

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SCHOOLS FORUM** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 21 September 2015

### PRESENT

Jim Parker (Chairman)

David Brandon-Bravo (Vice-Chairman)

School Members:	Ali Brabner Paul Burrett	Governor, Cranfield Academy Headteacher, Studham CofE Lower School and Pre-School
	Shirley-Anne Crosbie OBE Sue Howley MBE	Headteacher, The Chiltern School Governor, Greenleas Lower School
	Sharon Ingham John Street	Headteacher, Hadrian Academy Academy Middle School Representative
	Stephen Tiktin	Governor, Beaudesert Lower School
Non-School Members:		Trade Union Representative
Observer:	Cllr M AG Versallion	Executive Member for Children's Services
Apologies for Absence:	James Davis Mr M Foster Mrs M Morris Mrs S Mortimer Rob Watson	
Officers in Attendance:	Mrs M Clampitt Ms D Hill Miss H Redding	Committee Services Officer Senior Finance Manager - Children's Services Assistant Director School Improvement

### CBSF/15/15. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The Chairman asked the Forum for agreement on how the Election of Forum members would be carried out in future years. It was agreed that one half of the Forum will be elected at a time, ensuring there are some consistent representatives from each area.

From the next meeting, the agenda will include an information section for future agenda items.

**CBSF/15/16. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising****RESOLVED**

**That the minutes of the meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Schools Forum held on 15 June 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following points of clarification:**

CBSF/15/4 – The last sentence of the minute should read:

The Forum indicated that it did not support the proposal and requested that alternatives be considered and if necessary a special meeting be called.

[Note: At the request of a Forum member it was noted that no further discussions were held between the Schools Forum and the Local Authority. No special meeting was requested.]

CBSF/15/6 – The Early Years Reference Group should have been referred to as the Early Years Technical Sub Group. Forum members were unhappy that no meetings had been called to date.

[It is expected that the Group will meet before January 2016 and an update will be provided at the 18 January 2016 meeting.]

**CBSF/15/17. Revisions to the Scheme for Financing Schools**

The Forum considered the report which clarified the directed revisions to the Scheme for Financing Schools and were asked to approve the Local Authority (LA) proposed revisions to the Scheme for Financing Schools.

The Department for Education (DfE) directed revisions to the scheme are not subject to consultation with Schools Governing bodies or head teachers, however they do require Schools Forum approval.

The DfE are considering the following two revisions:

Section 2.9 – Register of business interest: The directed revision requires the additional of; “Details of any other educational position is that they govern, any relationship between school staff and members of the governing body” and “The governing body should keep the register up to date and publish the register on a publicly accessible website”.

Section 3.6 – Borrowing by schools: The directed revision requires the addition of: “The Secretary of State’s general position is that schools will only be granted permission for borrowing in exceptional circumstances” and “Schools are permitted to use any scheme that the Secretary of State has said is available to schools without specific approval (i.e. Salix scheme)”.

The Local Authority (LA) consulted between the 22 June and 17 July 2015 on the proposed changes. Schools received a letter dated 19 June and were advised that the consultation was available via the Schools learning portal. 16 schools responded out of 87 schools, which is a low response. The

breakdown is as follows: 12 lower schools, 3 middle schools and 1 upper school. 14 schools disagreed with the proposals to the required budget submission date change.

The LA proposed amendments to the following sections:

Section 2.3 – Submission of budget plans – changing the deadline for budget submission from 31 May to 1 May.

Section 2.10 – Purchasing, Tendering and Contracting Requirements add: “for contracts over £60,000 schools should seek LA’s Procurement personnel countersignature”.

Section 4.2 – Control and Surplus Balances – reference to uncommitted balances add: “The LA will monitor schools that have build up significant uncommitted balances, and challenge schools seeking reasons for holding these balances”.

Section 4.9 – Licensed Deficit – amend the rate of interest charged: Form “7 day London Interbank Bid Rate” to “Bank of England Base Rate”

The Forum noted that the date when the LA has been required to issue the Schools budgets has been brought forward as follows:

Prior to 2012/13 – no later than 31 March

2012/13 – no later than 15 March

2013/14 – no later than 15 March

2014/15 – no later than 27 February

The LA continues to issue budgets early when possible.

During this time the date of submission has remained as 31 May for submission of an approved budget. This is now being brought forward to the 1 May.

The Forum expressed concerns that this might cause difficulties for some schools. The general concensus was that if the change was to be made better to get it done now. It was noted that 8 months notice was being given to the Schools so that there is time for adjustments to their meetings to be arranged.

The Forum next noted that the Council had taken the opportunity to align the Council’s Scheme with the DfE’s statutory guidance for local authorities. There were seven main changes as detailed in paragraph 11 of the report.

The Forum noted that attached at Appendix A to the report was the track changed version of the Asset Loan Scheme. The changes would enhance the assessment criteria for asset loans and add clarity on the affordability of such loans. The Forum raised a query to paragraph 26 which references credit rating as detailed in paragraph 11. Paragraph 11 does not reference credit ratings. Officers have agreed to get clarification and amend paragraph 26 accordingly.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the amendments to the Central Bedfordshire's Scheme for Financing Schools in line with the Department for Education (DfE) directed Revisions be adopted.**
- 2. That the Local Authority (LA) proposed amendments to Central Bedfordshire's Scheme for Financing Schools be approved.**
- 3. That the Scheme has been amended numerically to align with the Department for Education's statutory guidance for LA's be noted.**
- 4. That the LA proposed amendments to Central Bedfordshire's Asset Loan Scheme be approved, subject to paragraph 26 being clarified.**

**(The maintained schools only could vote on these items)**

### **CBSF/15/18. Dedicated School Grant Contingency Budgets**

The Forum considered a report which provided an update on the use of the School Contingency Budgets for 2015/16. It was noted that the Dedicated Schools Grant since 2013/14 has been split into three notional blocks: Schools, High Needs and Early Years and each holds its own contingency budget.

#### **Schools Contingency**

The Forum noted that £500k had been ringfenced for the three schools which were closing through applying to the Secretary of State to disapply the regulations.

The carry forward of £208,413 is split between de-delegated ring fenced funding for maintained schools only of £171,572 and £36,841 for all schools.

#### **High Needs Contingency**

It was proposed that a request is made to the Secretary of State for £500k of unspent DSG be transferred in year to Capital for specialist provisions. It is anticipated that another request to the Secretary of State for a transfer of the balance of High Needs Block will be made at the end of the financial year but the Secretary of State will not allow an estimated amount to be approved. It must be done at the relevant time.

#### **Early Years Contingency**

The current balance of the contingency is £369,233.

**RESOLVED**

1. **That the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) Contingency spend to 31 August 2015 be noted.**
2. **That the transfer of £500k unallocated High Needs Block DSG to support capital development in specialist provisions/special schools from 2015/16 be approved.**
3. **That the transfer of any further unspent revenue High Needs Block funding to support capital development in specialist provisions/special schools be approved.**

**CBSF/15/19. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Update**

The Forum received a report which provided an update on the 2015/16 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and Growth Fund allocation. In addition, the Forum were asked to note the 2016/17 funding arrangements and the F40 group update.

From 2013/14, the DSG would be split into three notional blocks: Early Year, High Needs and Schools.

The Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) was set at negative 1.5% **per pupil** for 2015/16.

It was noted that the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) is no longer required to complete two statements annually instead the DfE have now requested one annual outturn statement, confirming that the DSG received by the Authority was fully deployed in support of the school budgets in accordance with the conditions of the School Regulations. In addition, it will also include a Non Maintained Special School (NMSS) statement and Fraud cases reported in school statement.

The DSG allocation for 2015/16 is £192.114(M).

The **Schools Block** is calculated using the school block unit of funding (SBUF). For 2015/16 the SBUF is £4,289.09 (after the CRC deduction of £7.51) an increase of £144.62 from 2014/15. There has been an increase of 718 pupils to 35,866 based on the October 2014 census data.

The DfE has transferred £353k for Central Bedfordshire University Technical College (UTC) for the 2015/16 formula base multiplied by the October census data uplifted by the Minimum Funding Level (MFL) increase.

The **High Needs Block** for 2014/15 has been carried forward plus:

- Increase in places for academic year 2015/2016
- Additional top-up of £47m (Nationally) distributed based on the 2 – 19 aged population in each LA. For CBC this is £233k in 2015/16.

The **Early Years Block** for 2015/16 is comprised of 3 elements:

- Three and four year old entitlement - £3,979.80 (same as 2014/15 rate) multiplied by the January 2014 census for the provisional allocation. This is updated for January 2015 pupil numbers.
- Early years pupil premium (EYPP) – the hourly rate of 53p per child per hour (for each eligible child that takes up the full 570 hours with them). The indicative allocation for CBC is estimated at £171k. Following an autumn survey to check take-up adjustments will be made in January 2016.
- Funding for disadvantaged two year olds – CBC allocation is £1.64m. This is allocated based on the number of eligible participating children.

The licences listed in paragraph 18 of the report includes four new contracts which are centrally paid. The Senior Finance Officer agreed to check the list to ensure no licences have been removed.

The Forum noted the breakdowns of the distribution of the DSG, in paragraph 20 and the centrally retained DSG in paragraph 23.

The 2015/16 Growth Fund is for the use of expanding schools and not for falling roles. The Fund included an adjustment of £248k which was for payments made to Academies.

### **Funding Announcement for 2016/17**

The DfE announced that the SBUF for 2016/17 and confirmed that the extra £390m fair funding uplift would continue in base-line budgets for 2016/17 and beyond.

The anticipated SBUF for 2016/17 is £4,294.39 (an increase of £5.30 for the former Non-Recoupment Academies (UTC)).

The Forum were advised that the LA would be approaching the Secretary of State with a request for another top slice of £500k for the three schools which are closing. The Forum expressed concerns that a third request would be required if spending continued.

The Senior Finance Officer confirmed that the closing schools were being encouraged to bring in as balanced a budget as possible. It was noted that one school should have a balanced budget. The Forum asked that the school be congratulated for their work.

The Forum considered the F40 group and the lobbying work being carried out for its members and their low funding levels. It was agreed that the Forum and Councillors would write requesting additional funding.

It was noted that the funding models provided by the F40 could result in a net increase to CBC budgets with only the High Needs Block being adversely impacted in one model. However, funds are able to be moved between blocks. Forum members were reminded that these were the latest F40

models, and that some F40 Las were negatively impacted by these models, and therefore should note these figures with caution.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the update to the 2015/16 DSG allocations be noted.**
- 2. That the update to the 2015/16 Growth Fund be noted.**
- 3. That the 2016/17 funding announcement be noted.**
- 4. That the F40 Group update be noted.**

### **CBSF/15/20. High Needs Technical Sub Group Update**

The Assistant Director School Improvement provided the Forum with an update on the High Needs Technical Sub Group, which had met two weeks before this Forum meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting would be in November. A meeting had been scheduled for 23 September but due to outstanding information relating to contracts, it was agreed that it would be better to meet in November when all relevant information would be available for consideration.

The Technical Sub Group had determined that three papers would be considered by the Forum rather than the one long paper previously reported. The papers would cover the following areas:

- Contracts
- Distribution to schools, including commissioning of special school places
- Centrally retained DSG for specialist services

The Technical Sub Group had found the discussions interesting and identified a lack of understanding on High Needs provision and costs. The meeting had demystified the High Needs provision process. It was understood how it could take 2 or 3 people to work with an individual whereas a mainstream school/academy may only need 1 person to oversee a number of students.

It was noted that not all Upper schools were carrying out the work which had been agreed to be provided.

A bench marking exercise would be carried out in relation to top up payments and EHB plans. The last benchmarking exercise had been in 2009.

### **CBSF/15/21. School Forum Budget**

The Forum received and considered a report which provided an update on the Schools Forum Budget for 2015/16.

The Senior Finance Officer confirmed that as at 31 August 2015 the remaining balance for the year was £5,316 of which £3,316 had been carried forward from 2014/15. It was noted that any unspent budget would be

carried forward to the next year. It was noted that the budget for 2015/16 was £3,000, with the continued membership of F40.

The Forum considered running a training event for members of the Forum and also use the opportunity as a possible recruitment event. The Forum also considered and rejected asking potential members to attend the Technical sub groups as the information would be very sensitive. It was agreed that the remaining vacancies would again be advertised in hopes of getting new members.

Members of the Forum were reminded that they could submit travel claims for attending the Forum meetings.

### **RESOLVED**

**That the Schools Forum Budget position statement as at 31 August 2015 be noted.**

#### **CBSF/15/22. Work Programme**

The Forum considered the Work Programme for 2015/16.

Members were reminded that should they have any issues to be raised at a meeting to please contact the Committee Services Officer for inclusion on the Work Programme.

Due to lack of business it was agreed that the November meeting would not occur and the next meeting would be the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

### **RESOLVED**

**That the Outline Forward Programme be noted.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 6.00 p.m. and concluded at 7.30 p.m.)

Chairman .....

Dated ..... ..