

Brent Schools Forum

Minutes of the 27th Schools Forum held on 9th December 2008 Claremont High School.

Attended by:

Members of the Forum

Governors

Mike Heiser (MH) (Chair)
Marianne Cohen (MC)
Stephen Greene (SG)
Martin Beard (MB)

Head Teachers

Jo Gilbert (JG)
Lesley Benson (LB)
Mike Maxwell (MM)
Sylvie Libson (SL)
Maria Shea (MS)
Terry Molloy (TM)

Lead Member

Cllr Bob Wharton (BW)

Officers

Mustafa Salih (MSA)
Bharat Jashapara (BJ)
Lin Diaby (LD)
Roger Annan (RA)
Roy Smith (RS)

Others

Greta Woodward (14-19 Sector) (GW)
Lesley Gouldbourne (LG)
Vilas Halai (Minute Taker) (VH)
Nicki Parker (Governor Services, Clerking Manager) (NP)

MH opened the meeting at 6.05pm

Welcomed those present, minutes were being taken by a new clerk so everyone introduced themselves.

1. Apologies

Wendy Yianni and Gil Bal.

2. Minutes of the previous meetings held on 24th September 2008

i) Accuracy

The minutes of the meeting of 24th September were agreed with one correction.

- In present list Goldbourne should read Gouldbourne.

ii) Matters arising

- Item 3. Early Years Funding Reforms. MSA reported that work is in progress on this matter and will prepare a report for the January meeting. Issues include the option of establishing a policy to make some full-time places available for the most vulnerable children in preparation for the 2010/11 deadline.

ACTION. February meeting to include an update on Early Years Funding Reforms.

- Item 5. Schools Budget Outturn. LG asked MSA if any news/updates were received on the Grove Park Special School and Hay Lane Special School curriculum materials funding. MSA confirmed he had been in close contact with schools and the funding issue had been resolved in line with what had been agreed at the last Forum meeting.

Item 5. Excessive surplus balances – the analysis was not available as a number of schools had still not returned the breakdown of their school balances. It was expected that a report would be presented at the next Schools Forum meeting.

- Item 6. Schools Capital Programme – MSA said a fundamental review of the funding available is being looked at over the next 10 years, in order to have a more strategic plan for local development. SL is already a member of the established consultative group on capital. The council is now in the process of working with this group to expand its membership and remit so that it is able to function as a more strategic planning group for the Schools Capital Programme, which could include reviewing options to fund some investment from the DSG from the year 2010/11.
MM asked if this would cover/include the BFS (Building Schools for the Future) and PCP (Primary Capital Programme).
MSA's response was that all funding was included, but the larger projects would also have their own governance framework.
MH asked MSA if funding had been allocated for the PCP.
MSA pointed out the PCP government funding made available was based on three decisions on how much would be received:
 - Two green lights – confirmed funding for two years.
 - One green light – confirmed funding for one year.
 - Amber light – would confirm no funding.

Brent was given one light, meaning more detailed plans were needed to get the second light.

- Item 10. Any Other Business. LB asked if there was any news on the withdrawal of extended schools funding from Nursery Schools designated as Children's Centres. She said that her governing body had been unhappy that

this was withdrawn mid-year after the money had been allocated within their budget. MSA is still looking into this issue.

- Item 10. AOB. Licensed Deficits Scheme. MM requested an update of the licensed Deficit Scheme. BJ agreed to bring a full list of all schools in deficit to the next meeting. There are about 8 schools in this position.

ACTION. Excessive surplus balances review paper and a list of schools in deficit was to be brought to the next Schools Forum meeting.

It was noted that changes in the way minutes are taken are needed, it was agreed they should hold more detail of discussions and decisions to be able to track back if needed.

ACTION. Clerk to produce detailed minutes.

3. Schools responses to consultation on the Lump Sum review.

RS introduced the paper referring the meeting to low level of response particularly from the primary sector albeit that the primary headteacher group had made a joint response. There was a small majority of respondees in favour of the proposed change but it could reasonably be concluded that those schools not responding to the consultation were not opposed to the change. Head teacher/governor Formula Working Group have unanimously recommended the Schools Forum that the Lump Sum factor should be amended as proposed in the first option.

The schools forum members are to decide on appropriate recommendations based on the outcome of the report and consultation.

RS referred to letters received from two large primary schools which would be losers under the proposed formula change. It was decided it was inappropriate for officers to comment on the content of the letters or to open any discussion on the matter and the concerned schools would receive written responses individually as appropriate.

SL recommended the loss of money should be phased in and not done in the one year as originally suggested.

LB commented the spread sheet/grid layout was confusing and it was not clear that in fact no school would be in a loss situation overall when the losses on the Lump Sum proposals were set against gains from the AEN formula changes still to be received in 2009/10 and 2010/11. TM felt the Lump Sum loss in one year was unreasonable and should be phased. It would be a small percentage taken off the overall funding total to provide the transition where as the amount for the schools in question would make it difficult to budget and plan for any future activities.

RS reiterated the point made by LB that losses on the Lump Sum proposal would be offset by the gains on the AEN funding changes already approved. Further schools were advised that when Budgets were issued for 2008/09 that there would be a formula review of the Lump Sum factor which would potentially mean some schools losing resources. It was emphasised in the letter to schools that they should not plan future years spending on the assumption of growth included in the indicative Budget Allocations. The consultation report indicated that the Lump Sum funding level enjoyed by the three largest primary schools, treated as being Group 5, could not be justified in relation to other schools. In the final analysis there is a minimum funding guarantee in place and losses so no school will receive less than a 2.1% increase in

its budget share except where there is a loss of pupil numbers. TM challenged the reference about some schools receiving more funding than they were entitled to and questioned whether heads and governors had any confidence over the consultations that had taken place over previous years.

MH clearly pointed out the protection guarantee is at 2.1%.

SL referred to the threshold funding loss and made the point that 113k is a large sum of money to lose which will effect planning ahead and making future plans.

MSA made it clear that consultations were taken very seriously and the transitional phasing can be built in for schools where this was appropriate but this could only be funded from other schools receiving less funding than they otherwise would. As had been explained the reason for not proposing phasing of losses under the Lump Sum factor was because the losses were offset by gains on other formula changes.

LB expressed concerns for nursery funding. Last year Nurseries were big losers and no agreement for special introduction were made which resulted in minimum funding with a 3% loss protection in place.

MH asked panel to agree the changes to the Lump Sum Factor. There were two clear divisions of opposing views and called them to a vote as follows;

1. Does the Forum recommend a change to the Lump Sum factor to the Council Executive?

The motion was passed.

2. Should this change be phased in?

In favour – 4 Against – 6 Abstain – 1

Recommendation is to propose to the Exec that the lump sum factor will be changed fully in the 2009/10 financial year.

3. Which model does the Forum recommend to the Executive?

MSA reminded the forum panel that all primary schools will be affected by the EY review so there is no reason to consider Nurseries separately. However, the Primary Heads had felt it right to do this.

A decision was formally taken by the panel,

Model 4 with 8 votes in favour.

Abstention – 3

Outcome is to recommend Model 4 to the Executive.

4. Update on Review of Special schools and Units

1. RS reminded Schools Forum that the review was still progressing and he advised that Special Schools meetings are frequently held and heads are fully informed to be able to make decisions of the review outcomes.

2. New formula could result in schools receiving more funding and others losing money.

3. The working group had agreed descriptors for six Bands of Special Education Need with associated staffing ratios for teaching and non teaching staff. Pupils would be placed in one of the bands, depending on need.

Any budget implications resulting from the review would be brought to the February Schools Forum meeting.

LG questioned who would carry out the moderation assessments to band the pupils. In response RS said no heads will be involved as this could result in a vested interest in their school.

It was suggested that an officer would carry out this moderation.

SL pointed out that as heads not everyone knows how to assess SEN pupils. RS's table (item 4, para 3) proposed doing away with Statements of SEN and AWPU.

LB made reference to point 17 – financial implications of the size of the overall pot of funding available.

MH referred to the table and asked if there would be a slight scaling down of the sector's MFG.

LG expressed concern of some schools having to use their budgets to fulfil pupil's needs.

RS – Schools were asked how many of them were having to use their budget for speech therapy.

LG suggested all reports to be sent out at least seven days before the meetings, which would enable time to consult and inform others.

ACTION. Special schools review to be on February's agenda.

5. Schools Budget 2009 – 2010

BJ Pointed out the DCSF have provided estimated pupil figures, which are higher than the Jan 08 pupil count, and this would lead to a larger estimated grant but these figures have not proved reliable in the past. The 2009 Jan pupil figures will be used to calculate the 09/10 schools budget.

MSA pointed out that the 2008/09 budgets were set in March 2008 and then confirmed when the DCSF gave their final DSG figures. As the final DSG was not materially different to what officers had estimated and used to determine school budgets in March, no further revisions were made.

LB questioned this as lots of final versions were handed out and only in September was this figure made definite. The way this was distributed was very confusing.

BJ assured Schools Forum that schools will get their budget amounts before June 2010.

SL referred to the contingency money for in-year statements as there appeared to have been a change of protocol for allocated unspent funds this year. The Forum had agreed that any unspent money would be returned to a central 'pot'. However this year a bidding approach to allocating this money. This had not been clearly explained at the last meeting and asked for clarity on this issue.

MSA clearly stated he was not in favour of a bidding process BJ commented the timing was difficult for the unspent sum to be reallocated to schools at the time of preparing the schools' budget and explained a number of proposed uses for the money had been suggested at the last meeting but they had not seen this as 'bidding'. It was agreed that there must be more clarity about the process in future.

6. Brent funding comparisons with London and Inner London Averages.

LD prepared a report Brent Funding Comparisons with London, Inner London and Statistical Neighbours with tables showing what position Brent are in compared to other boroughs. Comparisons were made with all 32 London Boroughs which

indicated Brent's funding to be ranked 15th for Primary, 18th Secondary, 15th for Special Schools and 2nd for Nursery.

MM pointed out the rate of inflation is 2.3% when in reality it should be more towards the 5% mark.

ACTION. LD will prepare a report to show comparison between inner London Boroughs' to the other Borough's and will distribute. MM asked if it could be done to show added averages for inner and outer Borough's.

Per Pupil Budget Share – MM Questioned why a Brent child is worth less than a child in comparison to other Borough's taking into account poverty etc in Brent, children are at a disadvantage.

Discussion held based on the tables and comparisons, and most common concern is budgets going down rather than up. Brent is not in the best position but it's also not in the worst position either.

MM asked for the minutes of the meeting when this was last discussed circulated. SG agreed to search back for these.

ACTION. SG to find and circulate the relevant minutes.

7. Future dates and venue(s) for Schools Forum Meetings

Suitable venues agreed were Claremont High, Queens Park and the Town Hall but not the Council Chamber.

It was agreed by the forum panel that both January and February were needed.

Wednesday 14th January 2009 at Claremont High School

Tuesday 10th February 2009 venue TBC

Thursday 25th June 2009 venue TBC

Wednesday 30th September 2009 venue TBC

Wednesday 9th December 2009 venue TBC

8. AOB

BJ circulated papers to advise Schools forum of the change in the recoupment arrangements. SENAS will be responsible for the payments to other local authorities for Brent pupils, the recoupment process will now be carried out by SENAS team and not the finance team.

TM commented, bearing in mind in some schools they recoup their own money from other local authorities, this was presented to finance officers without head teacher's knowledge and should have been presented to heads first.

MB added there was also an issue about the time it takes to get the money.

MSA pointed out that the time taken is no longer relevant now Brent funds schools up front then recoups from other local authorities.

LB welcomed the change.

Meeting closed 7.40pm