



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM
held on Wednesday 4 October 2017 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Governors

Mike Heiser (Chair)
Karen Zajdel
Helga Gladbaum
Narinder Nathan
Geraldine Chadwick
Titilola McDowell
Martin Beard
Jo Jhally

Head Teachers

Lesley Benson
Martine Clark
Melissa Loosemore
Rose Ashton (Vice-Chair)
Gill Bal
Kay Charles
Gerard McKenna
Andy Prindiville
Troy Sharpe
Jayne Jardine

PRU

Vivien Dean

Early Years PVI

Paul Russell
Sylvie Libson

Trade Union

Lesley Gouldbourne

Lead Member for Children and Young People

Councillor Mili Patel

Officers

Gail Tolley
Sue Gates
Shirley Parks
Sasi Srinivasan
Andrew Ward
Dena Aly
Nikolay Manov

The Chair welcomed members of the Schools Forum to the meeting and everyone introduced themselves.

1. **Apologies for Absence and Membership**

Governors

Herman Martyn
Umesh Raichada

Head Teachers

Rabbi Yitzchak Freeman

Special

Jayne Jardine

Nikolay Manov said that there were two vacancies on the Forum – a Secondary Academy Head and a 14-19 Partnership representative. He informed members that these had been advertised in the Headteachers' Bulletin but no nominations had been received.

2. **Declarations of interests**

None.

3. **Deputations (if Any)**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 8 February 2017, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting subject to making the proofing corrections requested.

5. **Matters arising (if any)**

In relation to Agenda Item 9 – Dedicated Schools Grant Financial Outturn 2016/2017, Andrew Ward said that there had been an issue with the maternity cover scheme and the Schools Finance Team was liaising with Trade Unions to resolve it. Once more information was available, this would be circulated to all members of the Schools Forum by email.

6. **Order of Business**

RESOLVED that the order of business be amended as set out below.

7. **Update on the implementation of the extended 30 hours childcare entitlement**

Sue Gates presented the report which provided an update on progress with implementation of the extended entitlement which came into force on 1 September 2017. Ms Gates spoke of engagement with providers and sufficiency of places – 179 providers across Brent offered 30 hour places; 57 did not; and 27 had not confirmed. She said that eligibility checking (carried out by HMRC) had been challenging as both parents and providers had experienced problems and there had been multiple issues with HMRC's website. Brent had had 1016 eligibility codes approved and 721 children had been in place as of the end of September (71%

take-up). Although new administration processes were in place to support the delivery of the extended entitlement, the technical difficulties described above had meant that manual headcount would be used to complement the automated process – for instance, temporary codes issued by HMRC along eligibility codes with a validity start date of 1 September onwards would be processed manually. Moreover, it was easy to re-apply for the entitlement rather than re-validate an existing code (re-validation was required every three months) which could mean that parents would have multiple eligibility codes.

In response to a request to compare take-up in Brent with other local authorities in London, Ms Gates said that the Local Authority did well, however, it was not possible to define the exactly proportion of new places, but this could be around 50% and more information would be available once the headcount was completed. A Member of the Forum enquired about a memorandum of understanding which had been signed by all schools apart from one and asked if count days were going to be aligned to which Ms Gates responded that the headcount had been the same for all providers and the days had been aligned, with schools having eight weeks and Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) providers having two weeks to submit their counts. Members of the Schools Forum raised the issue of children going to certain nurseries because they were guaranteed a reception place which was against the law. Ms Gates said that such concerns were being followed up with schools and PVI providers and there had been evidence that some schools had offered a guaranteed primary place if children were sent to nursery.

A Primary Governor asked when the provider portal would be rolled out to schools. Ms Gates said that it was being currently explored by the digital board at the Children and Young People Department and a further update would be provided by Brian Grady at the next meeting of the Forum.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the update on the implementation of the extended 30 hours childcare entitlement, be noted; and
- (ii) A verbal update on the roll out of the provider portal to schools be provided at the next meeting of the Schools Forum.

8. Dedicated Schools Grant Financial Forecast 2017/2018

Andrew Ward introduced the paper which provided an indicative forecast of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) spending against the budget for 2017-2018. He said that the current DSG forecast was reported to underspend by £0.7 million and drew the Forum's attention to Appendix A which contained the forecast as at the end of August 2017. Mr Ward provided details on various rows of the table on page 13 to the Agenda pack and said that following the adjustment on the Early Years block made in January 2017, the total income forecasted was £158,000 less than the net totals. Focusing on Schools Block expenditure, Mr Ward said that the underspend of £184,000 was due to the fact that the Floreat Free School was no longer opening and there was an indicative underspend of £0.5 million in Pupil Growth and Infant Class Sizes. Moreover, the Forum heard that interest rates remained low and there was underspend expected under 'capital expenditure from revenue'. Nevertheless, Mr Ward concluded that looking ahead there would be

financial pressures, and that he would provide an updated forecast at the next meeting.

A Head Teacher commented that it had not been possible to support children under five with significant needs to access the additional 15 hours provision under the ordinary funding regulations and asked whether the gap would be filled by the High Needs or the Early Years Block. The Forum heard that this would be done from the High Needs Block and it was noted that although the guidance for the Early Years Inclusion Fund was focused on children with low to medium levels of need, special attention had to be paid to high needs children. This would be reflected in future Schools Forum financial reports.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the Dedicated Schools Grant Financial Forecast 2017/2018 report, be noted; and
- (ii) An update on the DSG Financial Forecast be provided at the next meeting of the Schools Forum.

9. Pupil Demand And Pupil Growth Support

Shirley Parks presented the report which provided information on primary and secondary demand patterns for school places. She emphasised that a key message of the report was that demand for primary places was reducing while pupil numbers in secondary schools were set to increase as larger cohorts fed through from primary schools. Ms Parks said that this was phenomenon observed across London and it was possible that the level of demand could recover in the next few years as demographics changed (Table 1 on page 16 to the Agenda pack).

In relation to secondary places and projections Ms Parks pointed out that two new secondary free schools had been approved by the Secretary of State, but the Council had not received confirmation from ESFA of the sites for these schools nor the planned opening times. However, as provision would be required prior to the completion of these schools, the Forum heard that the Local Authority would be exploring options for expanding existing secondary schools in order to relieve the pressure for places. Ms Parks noted that in June 2017, Cabinet had approved a refresh of the School Place Planning Strategy 2014-2018 that reflected the latest forecasts provided by the Greater London Authority. Moreover, she referred to a series of policy questions presented on page 20 to the Agenda pack and explained the rationale behind them – for example, one of the key questions related to primary schools was whether the Local Authority had to support primary schools which had expanded and if it did, what kind of assistance would be provided to them.

A Member of the Schools Forum requested additional information related to the discussions about the potential use of spare capacity that had taken place between the Local Authority and schools. Ms Parks explained that the talks had been focused on supporting schools find alternative solutions to issues associated with pupil growth – for instance, pupils could be redistributed internally in order to avoid the need to open an additional class for a small number of children. A Primary Head Teacher commented that the impact of expanding schools had been felt across the Borough and noted that it had not been possible to control the opening of free schools neither the expansion of existing ones. Gail Tolley reminded the Schools

Forum that although Ark Somerville Primary Academy remained part of the School Place Planning Strategy, she did not anticipate any more primary free schools. Highlighting the need for alternative provision in the Borough (through free schools), Ms Tolley emphasised that the focus would be placed on secondary, special needs and alternative provision and not on primary schools for free schools.

Members of the Schools Forum raised concerns that related to the impact on school budgets of the responsibility to maintain expanded buildings after protected funding had ceased and when pupil numbers were lower than expected. This led to a discussion about the fact that primary and secondary schools did not have sufficient resource to work with children with special needs so there might be a need to support them to become more inclusive. Moreover, schools which did not offer the extended 30 hours childcare entitlement had experienced a reduction in their nursery numbers which affected their primary provision.

In relation to the percentage of children attending school outside of the Borough, Ms Tolley said that Brent was a net exporter of secondary school students. The Forum heard that places often depended on provision in other boroughs and this had been taken into account when calculating future needs.

A Member drew the Forum's attention to paragraph 5.8 of the report (page 20 to the Agenda Pack) and raised the issue of the one-off payment of £25, 000 used to support schools absorb the impact on management capacity of a school expansion. A Secondary Academy Head Teacher suggested an alternative approach which looked at increasing capacity without constructing new buildings or employing additional members of staff.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the Pupil Demand and Pupil Growth Support report, be noted;
- (ii) A Pupil Demand and Pupil Growth Working Group be established to look at the future policy for allocation of Pupil Growth funding, demand for places and falling primary rolls; and
- (iii) A report detailing 2017/2018 Pupil Growth Funding and proposals for 2018/19 be presented at the meeting of the Schools Forum in December 2017.

10. Dedicated Schools Grant Schools Budget 2018/19

Andrew Ward informed the Forum that the Department for Education (DfE) had announced the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding arrangements and budget setting process for 2018/2019. With only slight modifications, the plans for a National Funding Formula would proceed and Mr Ward directed members' attention to paragraphs 3.2.1 to 3.2.7 on page 24 to the Agenda pack which contained the main points relevant to Brent. He highlighted that the 0.5% per pupil cash increase was the most significant announcement for Brent as this meant additional funding of £1.5 million (approx. £30 per pupil), with average gains for a primary and a secondary school being £9,500 and £30,000 respectively. Mr Ward said that this could be redistributed locally if necessary. He referred to Table 1 on page 26 to the

Agenda pack which provided an estimate of some of the budget pressures that would be felt by schools in 2018/19. It indicated a funding gap of £2.1 million and, according to Mr Ward, the 0.5% funding increase would not be sufficient to mitigate pressures that mainstream schools would experience.

In terms of the Area Cost Adjustment (ACA), the Forum heard that Brent was a hybrid authority, as it paid inner London teaching salaries, but non-teaching staff were paid on the outer London scale. Mr Ward reminded the Schools Forum that the national funding formula was the same across the country with allocations for deprivation and additional needs being added as applicable. A Secondary Academy Head enquired why pension contributions from non-teaching staff in schools in Harrow were lower than in Brent (12% difference). Mr Ward explained that this had been examined and noted that rates were generally high, but vary due to historic decisions in each individual borough. The Chair suggested that a report providing information on Brent's position be provided at a future meeting of the Forum.

Mr Ward referred to sections six and seven of the report which focused on the Early Years Block and the Central Block respectively (pages 26-28 to the Agenda pack). The Forum heard that an increase in line with pay rises of 1% had been scheduled in the Admissions service budget for 2018/19, and that this was the first increase allowed on this budget since 2013/14. It was also reported that the Early Years budget had been balanced within £50,000 with the shortfall relating to 2 year old funding being made up from reserves. Members of the Forum questioned the budget allocated to the School Admissions Team and additional information about the increase of £7,000 was requested. A Secondary Head Teacher asked a question that related to the proposed budget for termination of employment costs. Mr Ward explained that it related to historic costs and had been set as the agreed DSG contribution, so it would not be possible to adjust it and it was unlikely that the allocation would drop below £600,000, given that the total cost was in excess of £2million.

Mr Ward informed the Forum that it was forecast that DSG reserve balances would exceed £6 million and that this would appear on the Council's Statement of Accounts. In response to questions from members of the Forum, he said that reserve figures varied across local authorities, with some councils being in deficit. He reminded the Forum that the 2018/19 funding figures discussed would remain indicative until the Department for Education published the final funding figures in late December 2017.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the Dedicated Schools Grant Budget 2018/2019 report, be noted;
- (ii) The Council continued to plan the 2018/19 DSG Schools budget in line with the outlined indicative block allocations;
- (iii) The current de-delegation and ESG support services funding be continued into 2018/19 and a breakdown on admissions be included;
- (iv) The High Needs Task and Finish Group and Early Years Task and Finish Group be tasked to set the High Needs

Block and Early Years Block budgets within the limits indicated in the report;

- (v) A DSG Working Group be convened to make recommendations on the DSG reserves budget to the Council;
- (vi) Lesley Benson, Geraldine Chadwick, Kay Charles, Mike Heiser, Titilola McDowell and Andry Prindiville be appointed to the DSG Working Group referred to in (v).; and

A report detailing Brent's position in relation to pension contributions from non-teaching staff be provided at a future meeting of the Schools Forum

11. Amendment to the Scheme for Financing Schools

Andrew Ward presented the report which proposed an update to the Brent Scheme for Financing Schools regarding early retirement and redundancy costs. He informed Schools Forum members that it would bring the scheme in line with the current Department for Education (DfE) guidance and make the scheme consistent with neighbouring boroughs. Members heard that Appendix A contained the Annex as published by the DfE and were encouraged to examine it if they wanted to gather additional information about the responsibilities for retirement and redundancy costs.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the Amendment to the Scheme for Financing Schools report, be noted;
- (ii) Annex B providing more detailed guidance with respect to section 11.11 of Brent Scheme for Financing Schools be added to the scheme; and
- (iii) Section 11.11 of Brent Scheme for Financing Schools be expanded to explain Annex B.

12. Any Other Urgent Business

None.

The meeting closed at 7.59 pm

MIKE HEISER
Chair