



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

held on Wednesday 12 December 2018 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Governors

Mike Heiser (Chair)
Helga Gladbaum
Geraldine Chadwick
Jo Jhally
Michael Maurice
Narinder Nathan
Martin Beard

Head Teachers

Lesley Benson
Martine Clark (Vice-Chair)
Michelle Ginty
Gill Bal
Kay Charles
Vivien Dean
Gerard McKenna
Raphael Moss

Early Years PVI

Sylvie Libson

Trade Union

John Roche

16-19 Partnership Representative

Mark Stacey

Officers

Brian Grady
Andrew Ward
Dena Aly (observer)
Nikolay Manov

Lead Member

Councillor Agha

1. **Apologies for Absence and Membership**

Governors

Tim Jones
Titilola McDowell

Head Teachers

Melissa Loosemore
Andy Prindiville
Jayne Jardine

Early Years PVI

Paul Russell

Members welcomed Raphael Moss who had been elected to sit on the Schools Forum as a Primary Maintained Head.

It was noted that there were three vacancies on the Forum - a Nursery Governor; an Academy Primary Head; and a Maintained Secondary Head.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

None.

3. **Deputations (if Any)**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 10 October 2018, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

Members of the Schools Forum requested that their views were reflected in more detail in the minutes.

5. **Actions arising**

The Forum examined the Action Log which had been included in the Agenda pack for the meeting.

It was noted that:

- Actions 28, 29 and 30 related to six-monthly updates on specific projects. Officers would consult with stakeholders, including the Brent Schools Partnership, in order to identify a suitable time to report back to the Schools Forum.
- Actions 32, 33, 34 and 37 would be considered at the Schools Forum meeting on 16 January 2019.
- In relation to Action 35, Members heard that there had not been any changes to the funding allocations so there had been a need to organise a meeting of the Early Years Task Group.

- Action 36 would be considered at the current meeting.
- An update on Action 38 would be provided at the Schools Forum meeting in January 2019.
- As far as Action 39 was concerned, Andrew Ward informed the Schools Forum that the Council was developing a Debt Recovery Strategy. He advised schools which had a significant single debtor to contact him and he would ask the Debt Recovery Team to work on the case. However, there were barriers to using the Council's resources to collect smaller sums from multiple debtors. Mr Ward had raised the issue with the Debt Recovery Team's manager. He reminded members that if schools intended to write off debts exceeding £1,000 for a single debtor, they had to notify the Council and the Chief Finance Officer could grant approval, while writing off debts exceeding £3,000 for a single debtor had to be agreed by Cabinet.

A Member enquired about underspends in previous years in the Early Years provision and Mr Ward clarified that all underspends were consolidated in the DSG reserve.

6. **Dedicated Schools Grant Support for Central Education Services 2019/20**

Brian Grady reminded members that the Local Authority had launched a consultation on the 2019/20 and 2020/21 budgets. It had been centred on the need to find savings from the revenue budget of £20 million across the two years. In addition, it had been forecasted that £40 million of savings would be needed to balance the budget by 2022/23. Mr Grady highlighted that the proposals affected the Children and Young People Department as well as the contribution from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). He noted that if the Council did not achieve the savings outlined in the 'Recommended' and the 'Difficult' budget proposals, it might be necessary to consider measures included in the 'Most Difficult' category.

Mr Grady directed the Forum's attention to proposal CYP001 ([Appendix A to the Draft Budget Proposals 2019/20 and 2020/21 report presented to Cabinet on 15 October 2018](#)) which suggested using £250,000 from the DSG to fund statutory education functions. This would provide services with a greater degree of protection from future savings as they would no longer be funded by the Council's General Fund. If this recommendation was adopted, granting the funding would require annual approval by the Schools Forum.

A Head Teacher commented that they were not content with allowing funds allocated from the DSG to support services to be ring-fenced and accessed by third party organisations such as the Brent National Health Service (NHS) Clinical Commissioning Group and the health economy. Mr Grady said that the intention of this part of the report had been to demonstrate that the resources of the Local Authority had been used to secure funding from stakeholders to deliver services which provided wider support for children and families in Brent and confirmed that the proposal would not result in access to DSG resources by other parties.. A Primary Governor pointed out that local authorities in London had experienced a reduction of nearly 70% to their core funding from Government in the last decade. They spoke of alternative approaches, adopted by some other local authorities, which protected frontline services and reduced back officer support. However, this could lead to a situation where it might not be possible to provide sufficient support to practitioners. Therefore, it would be advisable to support the proposal outlined in

the report in order to prevent the need to implement measures outlined in the 'Very Difficult' and 'Most Difficult' budget proposals.

Members queried the back office reductions that had been made by the Local Authority and Mr Grady explained that the Children and Young People Department had been restructured four years ago to provide a child-focused and responsive service. The new structure relied on two Operational Directors (some local authorities had three) which allowed for joint integration of resources. Nevertheless, if the 'Recommended' and 'Difficult' budget savings were not achieved, there would be a need to consider measures in the 'Most Difficult' category and services for children and families could be effected.

A Primary Head Teacher referred to paragraph 7.5 of the report (page 18 of the Agenda pack) and said that the changes that had been introduced as a result of the restructure had had a positive impact on the achievement of schools. They acknowledged the role of the Brent Schools Partnership which had helped to drive the changes and had provided a strategic steer to the relationship between schools and the Local Authority.

A Secondary Academy Head referred to the discrepancy in the amount of funding other local authorities had allocated to their Central Services (Appendix 1 on page 19 of the Agenda pack) and said that it would be interesting to know how the funds were used, including the rationale behind allocations and spending in relation to education welfare service; asset management; and statutory and regulatory services. Mr Grady noted that it was important to ensure that the measures would be sustainable in the future and said that, in his view, the offer to schools in Brent had been effective and compared favourably to the level of support other local authorities were able to provide. A Head Teacher enquired why Appendix 1 showed that the DSG did not make a contribution to central costs in Camden and Hounslow. In response, Andrew Ward confirmed this was currently the case for these two authorities but that this could change and he was not familiar with their proposals for the next financial year.

The request to use £250,000 of Schools Block DSG funding to support central services in 2019/20 (as set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report (page 15 of the Agenda pack)) was then put to the vote by a show of hands and declared **CARRIED**.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the Dedicated Schools Grant Support for Central Education Services 2019/20 report, be noted;
- (ii) The request to use £250,000 of Schools Block DSG funding to support central services in 2019/20 be approved; and
- (iii) Additional information on the way other local authorities used their DSG central support budgets, including the rationale behind allocations and spending in relation to categories outlined in Appendix 1, be provided to the Schools Forum.

7. **Dedicated Schools Grant Financial Forecast 2017/18**

Andrew Ward introduced the report which provided an update on the position of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Schools Budget for 2018/19. He highlighted that the forecast for Q3 showed that there were increased pressures in the High Needs Block, which along with other probable underspends indicated that the overall overspend could be limited to approximately £0.1 million. He directed members' attention to Appendix A (page 31 of the Agenda pack) which contained the full budget monitoring table. Mr Ward said that a slight overspend of £123,000 against the DSG budget had been forecast and provided detailed information about the financial position of the four blocks of the DSG:

- **High Needs block** – there had been a late 'Import / Export' adjustment to Brent's High Needs Formula which meant that the Block's funding was approximately £0.3 million less than budgeted for. The Forum heard that there were 2,200 children with Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), which represented an annual increase of 8% over the last four years. The current demand for support was expected to remain and officers would continue to monitor growth. It was noted that nearly half of the EHCPs were for children in mainstream education so additional funding would be allocated to schools according to need. Moreover, the High Needs post-16 budget of £1.8M had overspent by £0.6M in 2017/18 as approximately 180 young people had been supported (compared to 150 in the previous year) and the pressure was likely to continue in 2018/19.
- **Early Years block** – Mr Ward reminded members that 95% of the income of the Early Years block was passed to providers so little variance was expected on the remaining 5%. Expenditure in this block is forecast to underspend by approximately £0.3 million, but this remained in line with expected income and officers would continue to monitor its performance.
- **Schools block** – the funding formula for 2018/19 had already been set and it was likely that there would be a large underspend against the growth contingency budgets. Allocations would be known at the end of the autumn term, but indications based on the number of primary place offers made showed a likely underspend of £2.4m. Mr Ward said that officers did not expect to use all of the budget allocated to supporting schools in difficulty as the forecast showed that approximately half of it would be spent.
- **Central Schools Services block** – this block was expected to underspend due to the fact that the costs of running some services such as the Schools Forum had been lower.

Mr Ward said that information about the Council's General Fund had not been included in Appendix A. However, he noted that it was under pressure, particularly in relation to the Children and Young People Department. He reminded the Forum that the Achievement of Black Caribbean Boys project and the School Leadership project, which Schools Forum approved in June 2018, would be funded from the High Needs earmarked reserve for 2018/19. The funding pressures related to the High Needs block were not unique to Brent and the increase in expenditure was forecast to continue due to increased demand.

A letter to the Secretary of State for Education signed by the President of the Society of London Treasurers and the President of the County Treasurers (Appendix 2 (pages 33 and 34 of the Agenda pack)) argued that the reforms that had been made had created an increased demand for High Needs provision which had had financial consequences for DSG budgets.

Mr Ward directed members' attention to Appendix 4 (pages 37 – 48 of the Agenda pack) which contained slides of a presentation by the Society of London Treasurers and the Association of London Directors of Children's Services which had been provided for information. Data showed that Brent's expenditure had been close to the average and there were not any figures that could classify Brent as an outlier.

The Forum welcomed the report and the Chair summarised that the DSG had been balanced in the current year due to the fact that there had been an underspend on growth budgets which balanced the significant overspend in the High Needs block. If the situation remained the same, growth budgets would have to be re-allocated and there would be severe pressures on the high needs budget. However, there were limits to the amounts that could be transferred from mainstream DSG. Mr Ward said that Secondary Head Teachers in Barnet had signed a lobbying letter to the Secretary of State and a similar action could be considered by the Forum. Moreover, the Department for Education (DfE) had released a short consultation aimed at local authority finance officers about the creation of a negative DSG reserve to allow local authorities to have a deficit that could be carried forward from year to year. There were certain conditions associated with this proposal – for instance, local authorities and Schools Forums had to create three-year recovery plans outlining how balances could be returned to positive figures. However, if the deficit continued for too long, the Council's General Fund may have to cover it.

A Head Teacher addressed the Forum, stating that they had submitted a detailed response to the consultation on the EHCP proposals. It contained comments related to managing parental expectations; the discrepancy between private and maintained schools; and the fact that more money would be required for 19+ provision. They commented that in their view a system where parents could approach tribunals to request what they felt was required irrespective of the cost had been established. They welcomed the letter to the Secretary of State for Education and said that the issue was that if 19+ places continued to be created, this would inflate the amount of funding required and would lead to a situation where it had to be spent. A potential way forward would be to try to achieve savings by finding bespoke provision in the Borough for young people with high needs aged 0-25. For instance, four students, each costing up to £250,000 per year, could save up to £1 million annually. Such an approach would be in line with the Council's approach to explore ways of providing more placements in the Borough where possible.

A Nursery Head Teacher expressed a point of view that related to the consultation on the national funding formulae for the High Needs formula. They suggested that using proxy indicators had limited relation to the needs that had to be covered. Mr Ward clarified that 50% of the High Needs block formula was based on past spending, with the remaining 50% based on proxy indicators for 3-19 year old population. If adopted the National Funding Formula for High Needs did not give Brent as much funding as it received currently. Where funding had been increased,

this had not reflected demographic growth and demand on the High Needs block, e.g. the increase accounted for 0.5%, with other 0.5% expected next year. It was noted that the High Needs funding for Brent was £55 million and it had grown very little despite the fact that the number of children with EHCPs had increased in line with the national trend. In response to a question whether the formula which was based on the proxies would go up, Mr Ward said this would depend on weighting the proxies correctly.

A Head Teacher commented that the DfE used set categories to classify special needs which did not take into account multiple needs simultaneously. For example, the primary need for a child could be Autism but this could change the following year. A Primary Maintained Head Teacher added that there was a long delay between a child receiving a diagnosis and funding being allocated to the school. Therefore, it was necessary to consider not only the costs to the High Needs block, but the investment made by schools to support children with special needs as this could put pressure on their budgets.

A Primary Governor noted that the Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) transport had not underspent which had been unusual and asked whether this could be considered a saving to the Council's General Fund.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Dedicated Schools Grant Budget Forecast - 2018/19 report, be noted.

8. **Any Other Urgent Business**

None.

The meeting closed at 6:59 pm.

MIKE HEISER
Chair