



MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM
Wednesday 6 November 2019 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Governors

Martin Beard
Geraldine Chadwick
Michael Maurice
Titilola McDowell
Narinder Nathan
Tim Jones

Head Teachers

Martine Clark (Vice-Chair in chair)
Russell Davey
Michelle Ginty
Melissa Loosemore
Gerard McKenna
Raphael Moss
Andy Prindiville

Officers

Dena Aly
Brian Grady
Kunwar Khan
Andrew Ward

Trade Union

John Roche

**16-19 Provider
Representative**

Mark Stacey

Pupil Referral Unit

Vivien Dean

Early Years PVI

Paul Russell

1. Apologies for Absence and Membership

Governors

Mike Heiser (Chair)
Helga Gladbaum
Jo Jhally

Head Teachers

Jayne Jardine
Lesley Benson
Gill Bal

Early Years PVI

Sylvie Libson

Kunwar Khan (Governance Officer, Brent Council) informed the Schools Forum (the Forum) that the Council recently publicised the vacant posts and after the conclusion of a nomination process, appointments had now been made. All recent appointees were highlighted with an asterisk on the agenda front sheet. It was noted that Russell Davey had replaced Kay Charles as the Headteacher (Special). The Chair congratulated and welcomed the new appointees.

Following the conclusion of the process, it was noted that there were still three vacancies on the Schools Forum - a Nursery Governor; an Academy Primary Head Teacher; and a Maintained Secondary Head Teacher. The relevant sectors should encourage appropriate professionals to send their agreed sector nominations.

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 12 June 2019, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. Matters arising

The Forum examined the matters arising and in reviewing the relevant action points listed in the minutes, it was noted that:

- Action No. 41, to provide additional information on the way other local authorities used their DSG central support budgets, Early Years Central Spend based on published Section 251 Data; Central Spend Key with services described as or included in central provision; and Central Spend Summary documents were tabled. Andrew Ward (Head of Finance, Children & Young People, Brent Council) talked to the tabled information pack. In response to a query from the Chair, Dena Aly (Senior Finance Analyst, Brent Council) informed that the boroughs included in the information pack, were identified by the DfE as Brent's statistical comparators. The Forum noted the update and this action was now complete.
- Action No. 45, to provide a letter on behalf of the Chair to the DfE addressing the issues outlined in resolution (vii) of Minute Item 7 from a previous meeting, Andrew Ward (Head of Finance, Children & Young People, Brent Council) informed that he had raised this matter at a regional meeting with the DfE. He was of the view that this issue was not something DfE would be addressing in their move to the National Funding Formula as they would likely to argue that mobility funding answered some of the concerns here. The Forum noted the update and this action was now complete.

- Action 46, BSP/Brent would be bringing appropriate reports to future meetings following their previous update reports. The Forum noted the update.

(Action 47: Brian Grady)

- All other action points, including the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) monitoring, split site funding information and Early Years Group update, were now either complete or already covered in the agenda reports before the Forum at this meeting.

6. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Budget - Monitoring Report

Andrew Ward (Head of Finance, Children & Young People, Brent Council) introduced the report with an update on the forecasted financial position for 2019/20. In considering the report and the ensuing discussion, the following key points were noted:

- The financial position was reported against the budget set in consultation with Schools Forum and submitted to the Department for Education on the Section 251 budget return.
- The budget was analysed by funding block in Appendix 1 of the report.
- The increased demand for High Needs provision meant DSG expenditure would exceed income by a forecast of £3.5 million in 2019/20. This would eliminate the remaining reserves of £2.5 million and put the DSG into a deficit position of at least £1 million by the end of the financial year.
- The financial monitoring of the 'DSG Schools Budget' was presented in Appendix 2 of the report. The 'Actual to P5' column represented the spend to date as of the 31st August 2019, and the forecasts provided were those prepared during September 2019. This was, therefore, an early forecast position and the monitoring would be refined later in the Autumn term.
- There were some variances on block income compared to the budget set, though the largest, the mainstream Schools Block income, was forecast to budget at £231 million.
- The most significant variance was on the Early Years Block, where the provisional 2019/20 allocation had been reduced by £0.8 million following confirmation of the January 2019 Early Years census. The lower income reflected lower numbers of children in Early Years provision. This variance should be offset by reduced spending on Early Years provision, as this would also reflect the lower numbers of children.
- The High Needs Block varied slightly due to a late change to the import and export adjustment, which accounted for place funding for Brent pupils in other local authority areas. Allowing for the recoupment adjustment the forecast income for the block would exceed the budget set by £63k.

- In total the forecasted income would be £0.76 million less than budgeted for.
- In relation to Schools Block Expenditure, the mainstream funding formula had not been changed; however, there was a variance of £0.5 million against the net position of the funds allocated to schools (£228 million). The recoupment figure of £114m was reduced by a growth factor of 0.4m. This was due to the timing difference between Academy and Local Authority financial years.
- Funding for 2019/20 was based on October 2018 census data, which meant a time lag of 7 months until the Council's financial year begins, but a lag of 12 months for Academies. Recoupment covered 12 months of growth funding (allocated in the funding formula as planned pupil number variations) for Academies but it would not be fair or equitable for a Local Authorities DSG Schools Budget to fund growth for the 5-month difference between the financial years. This adjustment therefore created a budget variance which offset some of the spend from the growth fund.
- Concerning High Needs Block Expenditure, place funding of £7 million would be recouped from the block and allocated to Academy Special provisions, but this was in line with the total place funding budgeted for and would not cause a variance against the total £8.8 million place funding budget.
- The Central Block of the DSG (£2.4m) fund central services for schools. This also included a set contribution towards pension strain costs for former school employees of £600k, and was a long-term annual commitment. There were forecast underspends of £0.2m on the cost of the admissions service, which followed team restructures and system changes relating to improvements in the digital delivery of admissions support.
- The Early Years Block, at present, was the most self-contained of the four blocks, and totalled £23 million. 95% of this block income was passed onto providers, and little variance was expected on the remaining 5% which formed the central expenditure budgets. The 95% allocated out should be broadly in balance with the block grant income received. However, the amounts actually paid to providers were expected to exceed the income slightly because of supporting providers by maintaining 2-year-old provision at £6 per hour, a higher rate of funding than that received by the DfE.
- Mr Ward advised that if any school had a query about their NNDR funding, they should contact the Schools Finance team about necessary funding adjustments.
- High Needs top ups and targeted funding totals £42 million expenditure. Average cost was marginally down but there was an increase in Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) at 223. There were various factors underpinning this growth and rising demands were real but no specific evidence of why in particular EHCPs were increasing and no one factor seemed to trump another.

- With regard to Early Years, members reported that some parents were waiting until a child was three year old to start their early years education journey, Brent should consider the situation and any required actions through the Early Year Sub Group.

(Action 48: Andrew Ward)

As no further issues were raised the Forum thanked officers for the report.

RESOLVED that the Schools Forum notes the report.

7. Split Site and Pupil Growth Report

Dena Aly (Senior Finance Analyst, Brent Council) introduced the report. She updated the Forum about Split Site and Pupil Growth. The report explained the funding criteria and allocation of split site funding, provided an analysis of future growth funding requirements in comparison with current growth funding allocations and set out the methodology for funding academies through the rising rolls mechanism.

During the discussion, the following key points were noted:

- The DfE required Local Authorities and their School Forums to set clear, objective, fair and transparent criteria for allocating funding to schools, according to particular factors within the funding formula. These factors must be taken on board for all maintained schools and academies within the borough. The report explained how these funding mechanisms operated in Brent.
- The Forum enquired about an evidence base to demonstrate how the Brent allocation met the stipulated criteria. Brian Grady (Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy, Children and Young People, Brent Council) undertook to provide an update at a future meeting.

(Action 49: Dena Aly)

- Review of maintained schools and academies; affordable growth rates; estimated budgets and rising rolls together with examples were provided in tables 2-6, pages 24 and 25 of the report.
- Schools Place Planning Policy Update to be provided at a future Schools Forum meeting. This was already in public domain as part of Brent Council's Cabinet papers for its November meeting.

(Action 50: Brian Grady)

- The Forum considered the following options for addressing the funding gap:
 - a. Allocate some of the increased Schools block income to the growth fund budget (£600k had been illustrated in the report);

- b. Reducing the rates paid per pupil (as illustrated in the report);
- c. Top slicing the current secondary school funding formula and transfer funds to the growth budget;
- d. Raising the threshold for rising rolls funding up from 1.75%; and
- e. Reallocate the growth fund into the secondary phase mainstream funding formula and ask schools to accommodate the funding lag from within their own individual budgets.

The Chair suggested that careful consideration should be given how best to administer this funding gap, e.g. in percentage or amount terms. Secondary Heads commented that the growth funding had proved necessary to balance the budget in their expanding secondary schools. Other members said the growth funding rates should be reduced to manage the issue.

As no further issues were raised and no decision was required, the Forum thanked officers for the report.

RESOLVED that the Schools Forum notes the report.

8. **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Funding 2020/21**

Andrew Ward (Head of Finance, Children & Young People, Brent Council) introduced the report. In receiving the update, the Schools Forum noted the funding announcements made in September 2019. The report also provided information on funding arrangements for the 2020/21 financial year, including the provisional DSG block funding allocations.

During the discussion, the following key points were highlighted:

- The provisional funding allocations announced in October indicated that the Schools Block would increase by just under £3.5m, which equated to 1.5%. Under the current arrangements, the funding of in-year growth through the rising rolls mechanism would require approx. £1.8m of additional budget, which would leave the balance to allocate to schools. Additional High Needs funding of £4.8m would increase the budget towards a more realistic level for in-year expenditure, but funding increase would not be enough to recover the DSG deficit anticipated by the start of 2020/21, and might not cover the continued growth in the number of EHCPs.
- The funding increases in the other blocks were under 2%, which was low given the context of teacher pay rises and other inflationary pressures. Mr Ward reported that since the report had been written, confirmation had been received from government that the Maintained Nursery School grant would continue in 2020/21.
- Estimated DSG Block Funding of the report provided a breakdown as listed below:

Block	2019/20 Funding £'000	Estimated 2020/21 Funding £'000	Change £'000	Change %
Schools Block	231,026	234,500	3,474	1.5%
High Needs Block	56,286	61,157	4,871	8.6%
Early Years Block	22,593	22,900	307	1.3%
Central Block	2,374	2,206	(168)	(7.1%)
Total	312,279	320,763	8,484	2.7%

- Concerning the new Pupil Mobility Funding Factor and Methodology, it was highlighted that this was an optional factor, which allocated funding to schools with a high proportion of pupils who first joined on a non-standard date. Mobility funding was previously allocated based on historic spend. However, for 2020 to 2021, a new methodology was available that enabled to allocate this funding on a formulaic basis. Rather than relying on a single census, this new methodology involved tracking individual pupils using their unique pupil ID through censuses from the past 3 years. For example, if the first census when the pupil was in the school was a spring or summer census, they were a mobile pupil. This excluded reception pupils who started in January. This methodology also excluded pupils who joined in the summer term after the summer census, or pupils who joined in October before the autumn census. To be eligible for mobility funding, the proportion of mobile pupils a school had must be above the threshold of 6%. National Funding Formula factor (NFF) values for mobility would be published as part of the 2020 to 2021 NFF publication.
- In relation to the cost of teachers' pension increases not being covered by the government grant, schools could contest this directly with the DfE using details on its website.
- Brent was a hybrid authority and received the funding appropriately for its inner London weighted teaching staff, and outer London weighted support staff.
- A Forum Member felt that Early Years (EY) matters should be given a higher profile. High maintenance costs and 30-hours demands were having a real impact on the PVI sector, which in his view could do with more support particularly with more challenges on the horizon. The Chair stated that it would be a good idea to work out the exact challenges. Brian Grady (Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy, Children and Young People, Brent Council) undertook to request officers to look into this at the next Early Years Sub Group meeting.

(Action 51: Andrew Ward)

The Forum was invited to consider options for the growth fund and whether to consult with all schools on amending the mainstream funding formula. In considering the options highlighted in paragraph 5.7 of the report, the Schools Forum agreed the following resolution.

RESOLVED that:

- i. The contents of the report be noted.
- ii. Brent Council should consult with all schools about allocating additional funds through the formula and if a mobility funding factor should be included;
- iii. An extra Schools Forum meeting be scheduled for 11 December 2019 to make final decisions ahead of the production of the final funding formula. This will then in turn be presented at the January 2020 Schools Forum, and taken forward into the Council's budget setting process;
- iv. The Terms of Reference for the High Needs Sub Group as attached to the report as Appendix 2 be approved;
- v. Efforts should be made to publicise the consultation beyond the Schools Forum and to all schools and stakeholders using various available engagement channels. Andy Prindiville offered to circulate the information/consultation at The Brent Secondary Headteachers meeting on November 13th

(Action 52: Andrew Ward)

9. Early Years Sub Group Report

Dena Aly (Senior Finance Analyst, Brent Council) introduced the update report. In considering the paper, the School Forum noted the update on the work of the Early Years Task and Finish Group that last met on 27 March 2019. This update provided a summary of the discussion points and agreed actions.

In considering the report and the discussion, the following key points were noted:

- The Early Years Task and Finish Group discussed the 5% centrally retained budget, which was the equivalent of approximately £1.1m in 2018/19. Officers gave a brief presentation on the impact of centrally retained funding.
- Discussions were held on the option for a 0% retention, where providers would need to source their own support. However, members of the group acknowledged the impact of the support services on OFSTED ratings, provision for SEND children and that the support from Brent Council was good and that quality of nursery provision could be impacted if this were not in place.
- It was acknowledged that comprehensive information was provided on how the centrally retained funding had been used at Brent, but officers discussed the importance of benchmarking with other local authorities to include the minority of local authorities who retained little or no central funding in order to compare the levels of support delivered to providers. The benchmarking exercise would need to consider the trading offer and outcomes as well as OFSTED information.

- London Councils to be contacted for information around other Local Authorities funding retention, services and support offered and any recommended or best practice model. A benchmarking exercise was to be undertaken and reported back at the next meeting.
- In terms of the use of Schools Forum Reserves, of the £1m use of DSG Reserves agreed by Schools Forum, £600k had been utilised. This was to provide funding for the two Schools Forum Approved projects for raising attainment for boys of Black Caribbean heritage and strengthening school leadership and succession planning.
- A discussion took place around the decision made by Schools Forum to reject the two Early Years projects in June. The High Needs block pressures were also discussed and that if the DSG went into deficit, the local authority would be expected to pay this from future DSG funding, and the recovery plan would span the whole of the DSG.
- Concerning 30 hours' take-up against potential unmet demand and overall take-up of early years' provision and 'Progress for All', Members of the group discussed the Early Years provision and the take-up of entitlements.
- About Early Years virtual SEND hub, it was established that the Early Years Virtual SEND Hubs was not duplicating the work of the NHS. They did not undertake assessments of individual children but would provide training for practitioners and parents to upskill them in order to help meet their children's needs. The biggest increase in referrals related to SEMH (Social, Emotional and Mental Health).
- A Schools Forum Member requested more information about the Nursery Education Grants (NEG) at the next meeting of the Early Years Task and Finish Group. Another Early Years Sub Group meeting to be arranged.

(Action 53: Andrew Ward)

As no further issues were raised the Forum thanked officers for the report.

RESOLVED that:

The Schools Forum notes the report.

10. Any Other Urgent Business

The following issues were raised by Paul Russell (Early Years PVI):

In relation to short-term split changed (38 weeks), earlier it was 12-weeks winter, 12-weeks spring, 14-weeks Summer. Now 13-weeks winter, 12-weeks spring, 13-weeks summer. This affected the overall income - reduction due to low numbers in winter and high numbers in summer. Brian Grady (Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy, Children and Young People, Brent Council) undertook to ask the relevant officers to consider the situation.

(Action 54: Brian Brady)

Next meeting - 11 December 2019 confirmed at the Village School.

The meeting closed at 19:36 pm.

Chair

.

.