



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

held on Wednesday 10 October 2018 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Governors

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

Head Teachers

Lesley Benson
Martine Clark (Vice-Chair)
Michelle Ginty
Melissa Loosemore
Gill Bal
Kay Charles
Vivien Dean
Andy Prindiville
Gerard McKenna

Early Years PVI

Paul Russell
Sylvie Libson

16-19 Partnership Representative

Mark Stacey

Officers

Gail Tolley (for Item 7)
Brian Grady
Andrew Ward
Dena Aly
Nikolay Manov
Amanda Healy (observer)

Lead Member

Councillor Agha

1. **Election of Chair and Vice-Chair**

Mike Heiser was nominated to chair the Schools Forum for a two-year term in line with article 2.5.6.2 of the Schools Forum Constitution. Members of the Forum supported his nomination and it was **RESOLVED** that Mike Heiser be elected Chair of the Schools Forum.

Martine Clark was nominated for the position of Vice-Chair of the Schools Forum for a two-year term in line with article 2.5.6.2 of the Schools Forum Constitution. Members of the Forum supported her nomination and it was **RESOLVED** that Martine Clark be elected Vice-Chair of the Schools Forum.

2. **Apologies for Absence and Membership**

Governors	Michael Maurice Narinder Nathan
Head Teachers	Jayne Jardine
Trade Union	John Roche

Members welcomed Michelle Ginty 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 Primary Maintained Head; a Secondary Maintained Head; and a Primary Academy Head.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

None.

4. **Deputations (if Any)**

None.

5. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 20 June 2018, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

6. **Actions arising**

The Forum examined the Action Log which had been included in the Agenda pack for the meeting and noted that actions 26 and 33 would be considered at the current meeting, while updates on actions 28, 29, 31 and 32 would be provided in December 2018.

7. Council Budget Proposals

Gail Tolley introduced the item and reminded members that the last time she had addressed the Schools Forum in relation to Council budget proposals had been in 2015 when she had presented a consultation on the significant budget savings required at the time.¹ She informed the Forum that the budget proposals would be presented to Cabinet on Monday 15 October 2018 to agree to commence a consultation on ways to achieve half of the required £40 million savings over the next two years i.e. there would be additional consultations on further sums.

Gail Tolley stressed that no decisions had been made and Lead Members and Strategic Directors had examined every area of the Council's operation in order to identify potential savings and focused her presentation on proposals which were going to affect children and young people. Members heard that there were 17 children centres in Brent – 14 of them had been commissioned to Barnardo's and three were run by the Local Authority. Under the 'Difficult' Budget Proposals (Appendix B to Draft Budget Proposals 2019/20 – 2020/21 report), the number of children centres would be reduced by 50% and six family hubs would be created. Furthermore, it was noted that there was an intention to close the Challenge House Children's Centre.² As the building was unsuitable, social work staff currently working at the site would be transferred to the Willesden Centre for Health and Care and the Council would dispose of Challenge House.

Gail Tolley directed the Forum's attention to the 'Most Difficult' Budget Proposals, which included the closure of all children centres and a reduction of the Connexions service to the statutory minimum as these were funded by the only part of the Children and Young People Department's budget that was discretionary. However, Gail Tolley emphasised that implementing the 'Most Difficult' option could be avoided if the 'recommended' proposals were achieved, which on its turn, involved staff reductions and ending Council provision of youth services at Roundwood Youth Centre to allow the site to be transformed to an educational setting with voluntary sector run services.

It was noted that that the consultation on the draft budget proposals would start on 15 October 2018 and would continue until 31 January 2019, following which the budget would be set in February 2019. A Member of the Schools Forum commented that the Early Years Service had been included in the budget proposals outlined in the report that would be presented to Cabinet and enquired about the Council's communication strategy towards Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) providers. Gail Tolley directed the Forum's attention to Appendix A to the Draft Budget Proposals 2019/20 – 2020/21 report and said that a sum from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) contribution had been included in the list of 'Recommended' savings, subject to approval by the Forum. She added that she had met with Lead Members, backbench Councillors and senior officers across the Council, while Heads of Service had approached both staff and stakeholders and had informed them about the consultation.

¹ It had been in 2015 when the decisions to commission out children centres and close youth provision had been made.

² Provision at Curzon Crescent Children's Centre and Fawood Children's Centre would continue.

Questions raised by members related to the difference between a family hub and a children's centre and the impact of the proposed cuts on children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Gail Tolley said that the family hub model had been adopted by most local authorities that had kept their children centres open as it allowed them to provide holistic services to support families and including at risk adolescents. The existing contract with Barnardo's would expire in 2020 and it would be recommissioned in such way that the new provider would run six family hubs. She emphasised that creating family hubs was the next best solution to retaining the under five provision and providing support to parents. However, it was too early to identify sites that would be affected as this would happen once the concept of family hubs had been fully developed.

It was noted that even if the proposed changes were approved, there would not be a change in expenditure in the High Needs Budget.

The Chair summarised the discussion and said that the Schools Forum would consider the detailed DSG-related proposals once these became available.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the discussion on the Council Budget Proposals, be noted; and
- (ii) A detailed report on the proposals relating to the DSG be presented to the Schools Forum at the meeting on 16 January 2019.

8. Dedicated Schools Grant Schools Budget Forecast - 2018/19

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 overall forecast as at second quarter of the 2018/19 financial year was that the Schools Budget would break even in 2018/19. There had been a rising pressure on the High Needs provision due to an increase in demand, leading to an overspend of least £2 million on the block. However, underspends on the pupil growth budget were forecast to compensate this overspend, but this would not be confirmed until after December 2018 when final calculations would be made.

Mr Ward informed the Forum that the DSG expenditure budget for 2018/19 was £315 million which had been made up by £312 million of grant income and £3 million of reserves that had been released in consultation with Schools Forum. He explained that one of the reasons for the underspend in the Early Years block in 2017/18 was due to lower take up of the universal 3 and 4 year old entitlement. In addition, there had been changes to the national system of entitlement which had reduced take up in the autumn term. Although, the Early Years Block remained the most self-contained of the four blocks, with 95% of income passed onto providers, officers would review the way it was accounted for.

Mr Ward referred to the Central Block of the DSG and reminded members that it funded central services for schools, which included the pension costs for former school employees. In relation to the Schools Block, it was noted that there was little volatility in the net position of the funds allocated to schools (section 7 of the report, pages 14 and 15 of the Agenda pack). However, there could be variations if

changes were made to the National Non-Domestic Rates following any revaluations.

The Forum heard that the main risk to the DSG Schools Budget was the larger increase in demand for high needs provision – for example, the number of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) was approximately 2,200 compared to 1,650 four years ago, which represented an annual increase of 8%. Furthermore, there had been an increase in the number of post-16 placements and demand for provision for 19-25 year olds was also growing.

Mr Ward summarised the key points presented in the paper, pointing out that it was necessary to monitor the position and officers would continue working on securing the best value for money on the DSG. The High Needs Task Group continued to meet and discuss ways to set a balanced budget and the outcome of discussions would be reported back to the Schools Forum.

Members reported that the Early Years Task Group had not met since the previous meeting of the Schools Forum in June 2018 and Brian Grady said that he would review this. In response to concerns that the DSG budget would not be able to meet the teacher pay rise announced in July 2018, Mr Ward said the topic would be covered under Agenda Item 9 at the present meeting – 2019/20 Funding Announcements and Schools' Budget Position.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the Dedicated Schools Grant Budget Forecast - 2018/19 report, be noted;
- (ii) The requirement for an Early Years Task Group meeting would be considered before the next meeting of the Schools Forum on 12 December 2018; and
- (iii) Updates on the Dedicated Schools Grant Schools budget forecast 2018/19 be provided at every meeting of the Schools Forum

9. **2019/20 Funding Announcements and Schools' Budget Position**

Andrew Ward introduced the paper which informed members of the Schools Forum about various funding announcements made in the summer of 2018 and provided an assessment of these announcements, taking into the account the financial position of schools and the High Needs Block. The teacher pay rise had been announced in September 2018 (for details, please see paragraph 5.1 of the report on page 20 of the Agenda pack) and it would be funded by a grant separate to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in 2018/19 and 2019/20. It aimed to fund the difference between the confirmed pay rise and the 1% that had been assumed had been budgeted for. Mr Ward said that the Department for Education (DfE) had published the methodology for the Teachers' Pay grant, but detailed school level allocations had not been made available yet. He reminded members that Brent paid its teachers the inner London rate, but non-teaching members of staff received the outer London one. Estimates for each school for both 2018/19 and 2019/20 were available in the appendices to the report (pages 25-31 of the Agenda pack).

Members of the Schools Forum commented that the teachers' pay rise might not be sustainable in the long term as many schools were in a difficult financial position and were struggling to meet their needs. Brian Grady explained that a number of factors would be taken into account when setting the Schools Budget - planning would start earlier, consideration whether the existing Task Groups were fit for purpose would be given, and officers would be proactive in putting forward transparent proposals. In relation to a question about the way funding allocations would be made, Mr Ward said that the Council would pass the on the Teachers' Pay grant to maintained schools and academies would receive it directly from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). The 2018/19 allocation had come into force in September 2018 and it had been based on previous allocations in October 2017. A primary governor noted that as funding was not guaranteed after the initial two years, expanding schools with increased number of teachers could be at net loss. Mr Grady acknowledged the points raised by members and said that officers would be available to address specific concerns.

Mr Ward directed the Schools Forum's attention to section six of the report (pages 20 and 21 of the Agenda pack) and pointed out that the revenue funding for schools would continue to be made via the four-block structure of the DSG and this arrangement would continue until 2021. In the Schools Block, there would be an increase in cash terms (rather than in real terms) to funding allocations in 2019/20 accounting for 0.5% per pupil. Local Authorities would continue to set the local schools formulae for distributing the Block, although allocations would be aggregated from school level calculations using the national funding formula - a key change would be related to accounting for differences in Primary and Secondary Pupil growth as a fall in one would not net off or reduce the other. Mr Ward said that although Brent's growth budget had been reduced, an overspend had been forecast due the sudden change in growth patterns observed in the Borough. Therefore, if the growth pattern in the current year reflects the previous year's one, funding would be lost which could be a problem considering the overspend in the High Needs Block. Nevertheless, the Local Authority would still make the decision how to fund growth within its area.

The Forum heard that there would be a small increase of 0.5% per head of under 19 population in the High Needs Block. This would not be sufficient to contain the projected overspend of approximately £2 million and the growing demand for high needs support. Furthermore, it remained a concern that the national high needs formula had calculated £6 million less than the current allocation for Brent, while no announcements had been made on the Early Years Block. As inflationary pressures continued to exist within the sector, officers would continue monitoring the situation.

Mr Ward referred to the financial position of schools. He said that at the end of the 2017/18 financial year, six schools were in deficit, however, all but one had been successful in setting balanced budgets for the current financial year. He reminded members that the three-year budgets which schools submit to the Local Authority provided a medium-term view on their financial position. The proportion of available income that had been budgeted for employee costs in 2018/19 averaged 80% as predicted which led to a challenge as expenditure on staff costs was increasing, while the proportion of money spent on staffing had not changed. In relation to the use of reserves, Mr Ward highlighted that with reduced funds for growth and rising pressures in the High Needs block, it would not be prudent to continue to supplement the mainstream funding formula from reserves.

A primary governor enquired how officers would manage the process of setting a balanced growth budget. Mr Grady responded that work would be undertaken to ensure that young people with additional needs were funded fairly – additional resources would be made available in secondary provision and commissioning activity related to high-cost placements would be examined as in-borough provision had been considered to be better for young people.³ Furthermore, capacity across the Borough been examined in Brent's School Place Planning Strategy. Mr Ward addressed a concern related to schools which were in deficit by explaining that if they were unable to balance their budgets, they had to apply for a licence to operate in deficit which had to be approved by the Council's Chief Finance Officer. The Schools Finance Team would be available to support them to set a balanced budget by holding thorough discussions about various strategies that could be used to reduce deficit.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the 2019/20 Funding Announcements and Schools' Budget Position report, be noted; and
- (ii) That the mainstream funding formula be presented for final approval at meeting of the Schools Forum in January 2019

10. **Primary School Place Demand Update**

Brian Grady introduced the report which provided an update on the latest projections for primary school places. He said that the Council's Cabinet would consider the new School Place Planning Strategy 2019-2023 in November 2018. It would outline the projected need for school places in Brent and how this need would be met and it would also set out the objectives and operating principles underpinning the Council's approach to school organisation. Mr Grady reminded members that a new School Place Planning Strategy was published every four years, following which it was refreshed on an annual basis. He added that the headlines of the new School Place Planning Strategy 2019-2023 had been circulated to Head Teachers and Governors via the Headteachers' and the Governors' bulletins respectively.

Developing the 2019-2023 strategy had been based on an update of the assessment of need for places across the Borough, which had pointed to reducing Reception intakes and a temporary increase in spare places across Brent (section 4.2 of the report on pages 34 and 35 of the Agenda pack). Mr Grady said that although additional Primary provision had not been forecast, growth would come through Secondary provision which meant that the Borough would need 13 forms of entry for the duration of the 2019-2023 strategy. Furthermore, the opening of a new primary free school, Ark Somerville Free School, would be reviewed as long-term forecasts indicated that there would not be sufficient basic need demand until 2021/22.⁴

³ Children and Families Fair Access ... (CAFAI) Protocol is available [here](#).

⁴ The Ark Somerville Free School has been approved by the Department for Education and is expected to open in 2022.

Members of the Schools Forum noted that they were aware that pupil numbers in primary schools were decreasing. Therefore, it would be sensible for the schools to lower their nominal rolls because if classes were not completely filled, this could cause a budget-related problems. Mr Grady acknowledged this suggestion and said that a couple of schools would be reducing their publicised admission numbers. He added that Shirley Parks and her team would discuss it with primary schools in order to consider ways of implementing it.

In response to a question whether the Department for Education (DfE) could override the Council's decision not to open the Ark Somerville Free School until 2022, Mr Grady noted that the Local Authority did not power to decide on the opening year. However, it could provide communication in line with the 2019-2023 strategy – for instance, Mr Grady would be meeting representatives of the DfE in February 2019 and March 2019 to reconfirm Brent's position that there would not be a need for additional primary provision until the end of the strategy. A Secondary Academy Head Teacher asked if a location had been chosen and members heard that a planning permission had been given for a site on Wembley Hill Road in Wembley Park. Furthermore, it was noted that the site could be used for a special school, which would allow the Local Authority to provide additional capacity in this sector.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Primary School Place Demand Update report, be noted.

11. **Options for Financially Supporting Schools with Falling Rolls**

Dena Aly introduced the report which outlined options for financially supporting schools with falling rolls as per Schools Forum's request. She explained that according to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) operational guidance, there were some conditions under which a falling rolls fund could be established. In summary, there had to be a long-term reduction in pupil numbers; the Schools Forum had to agree the value of the fund and the criteria for allocation; the growth fund had to come from the National Funding Formula Schools Block (for details, please see paragraph 3.3 of the report on page 40 of the Agenda pack). Ms Aly pointed out that support would be available only to schools who had been judged to be good or outstanding in their most recent Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspection. She explained that the Department for Education (DfE) had proposed two different methodologies for allocating falling rolls funding – 'rate per vacant place' and 'lump sum payment'. In order to access funding, schools would need to provide evidence that staff would be made redundant, they should not hold any access surplus balances and they should not qualify for rising rolls funding in another year group.

Ms Aly directed the Forum's attention to sections five and six of the report (pages 41 and 42 of the Agenda pack) which contained some illustrative suggestions for both methodologies. Under 'rate per vacant place', a 15% reduction in pupil numbers would trigger falling rolls funding which would account for 75% of the age-weighted pupil unit (AWPU) rate for the relevant sector and it would be provided as a one-off payment in the year in which the decrease had taken place. As far as the 'lump sum payment' methodology was considered, Members heard that officers would need to decide how to calculate it as they had not been able to locate a Local Authority who had used this methodology.

Ms Aly referred to the last section of the paper (page 42 of the Agenda pack) which contained some advantages and the disadvantages of establishing a falling rolls fund. She emphasised that the disadvantages outnumbered the advantages and noted that there was a risk that no schools in Brent would qualify for the funding.

The Schools Forum welcomed the report. Members discussed the need for Head Teachers to plan ahead and it was emphasised that there were criteria which had been designed to prevent schools from using the falling rolls in the long term, which would not lead to significant expenditure. Furthermore, it was noted that there were schools who had not expanded, but experienced falling rolls. Therefore, it was important to support schools not to fall into deficit.

A Primary Head Teacher pointed out that most schools were struggling to recruit and retain good teachers. Therefore, making staff redundant and asking them to come back later in time would cause significant difficulties and could lead to increased use of agency staff which would be against the objective to invest in developing teachers. A similar view was expressed by a Primary Governor who said that introducing a falling rolls fund would have a positive impact on schools which needed to maintain the same number of teachers despite a reduction in the number of pupils. Furthermore, falling rolls funding could be used as a way to maintain standards – for example, if class sizes were increased significantly, the quality of teaching could decline.

In support of the argument against the introduction of a falling rolls fund, a member of the Forum referred to the reception forecast and capacity table included in the Primary School Place Demand Update report considered earlier at the meeting (page 35 of the Agenda pack) and said that having surplus places would continue to be a trend across the Borough, therefore, primary schools could continue having forms of entry they could not maintain, i.e. the use of a potential falling rolls fund would not be sustainable. Another argument put forward against the proposal was that it was contradicting the principle that funding should follow the pupil. It was also mentioned that schools that had expanded and were in good condition and would be eligible to apply in contrast to schools who had not expanded and were often in bad condition.

A Head Teacher explained that there was difference between a growth fund and a falling rolls fund as the former related to actual pupils who needed funding. They commended the work of the Schools Finance Team in preparing the report, but pointed out that the paper had not been able to convince them of the need to establish a falling rolls funding. Instead, it gave the impression that, if approved, a falling rolls fund would constitute an emergency source of finance for schools. Andrew Ward explained that there was a budget for schools in difficulty that was part of the Schools Block of the DSG and was focused on maintaining standards. Brian Grady added that this funding could be reviewed on the basis that standards in a school could fall due to falling rolls.

The introduction of a falling rolls fund in 2019/20 (as set out in paragraph 2.2.1 of the report (page 39 of the Agenda pack)) was then put to the vote by a show of hands and declared **LOST**.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the Options for Financially Supporting Schools with Falling Rolls report, be noted; and
- (ii) A paper examining options and providing specific costs to deploy resources to schools in risk of experiencing a fall in standards due to falling rolls be presented at a future meeting of the Schools Forum.

12. Updated Scheme for Financing Schools and Schools Financial Regulations

Dena Aly presented the report which contained details about the changes implemented to the Scheme for Financing Schools and the Schools Financial Regulations, which had become affective from 1 April 2018. She explained that both documents focused on the financial relationship between maintained schools and the Local Authority. She referred to appendices B and D (pages 93-97 and 141-144 of the Agenda pack respectively) and focused on key sections, pointing out that the ones that had been highlighted in yellow had been changed, while information that had been deleted had been stroked through. Some of the key changes made included changing VAT returns to take place on a monthly basis; changing budget payments; adding guidance on electronic banking; updating the guidance on contract value; and changing the value of debts to be reported to the Local Authority's Cabinet.

While members of the Schools Forum welcomed the report, they questioned officers why a consultation had not taken place prior to the implementation of the changes outlined in the report and the appendices. Andrew Ward said that some of the changes had been directed by Department for Education, while others were so minor that there was not a requirement to conduct a consultation. In addition, the papers for the present meeting had been published five clear working days in advance so members had had time to familiarise themselves with the proposals.

A specific issue that was raised related to the fact that a number of schools had passed debt for collection to the Brent Council's Debt Recovery Team and had not received an update. Andrew Wad and Brian Grady said that they would discuss the situation and it was noted that the matter would be followed up.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the Updated Scheme for Financing Schools and Schools Financial Regulations report, be noted;
- (ii) The fact that the Schools Forum had been formally consulted on the Brent Schools Financial Regulations 2018/2019 be noted;
- (iii) The amendments to the Scheme for Financing Schools 2018/2019 be approved; and
- (iv) The issue related to debt passed for collection to the Council's Debt Recovery Team be followed up and update be provided to affected schools.

13. **Any Other Urgent Business**

Andrew Ward informed the Schools Forum that there were two vacancies on the High Needs Task Group. Helga Gladbaum (Primary Maintained Governor) expressed an interest to sit on the Group as a representative of the primary sector. However, as no one volunteered to represent the secondary sector, it was agreed that the matter would be discussed at the termly meeting with Head Teachers.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) Helga Gladbaum be appointed as a primary sector representative on the High Needs Task Group; and
- (ii) Filling the secondary sector representative vacancy on the High Needs Task Group be discussed at the termly meeting with Head Teachers.

Karen Zajdel (Nursery Governor) announced that she was stepping down from her position as a Governor at College Green Nursery School. Members placed on record their appreciation for Ms Zajdel contribution to the Forum through the years and wished her well in her future endeavours.

RESOLVED that the Governance Officer supporting the meeting be authorised to conduct a recruitment campaign to appoint a Nursery Governor to the Schools Forum.

The meeting closed at 7.55 pm

MIKE HEISER
Chair