



MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

Held as an online virtual meeting on Thursday 20 January 2022 at 6.00 pm

Membership

Representing

PRESENT (all in remote attendance):

Governors

Mike Heiser (Chair)
Geraldine Chadwick (Vice-Chair)
Martin Beard
Jo Jhally
Narinder Nathan
Michael Odumosu
Ernest Toquie
Angela Turner

Headteachers

Danny Coyle
Nick Cooper
Jude Enright
Jayne Jardine
Melissa Loosemore
Gerard McKenna
Andy Prindiville

Pupil Referral Unit

Ranjna Shiyani

Non School Members

Early Years PVI

Wioletta Bura

Trade Union

John Roche

Officers

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children & Young People)
Jen Haskew (attending in place of Brian Grady -
Operational Director Safeguarding, Partnerships and
Strategy Children and Young People)
Olufunke Adediran
Folake Olufeko
Natalie Connor & James Kinsella (Governance Team)

Councillors

Margaret McLennan (Statutory Lead Member for Children's
Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care) and Tom

1. **Apologies for Absence and Membership**

Apologies for absence were received from Nisha Lingham (Nursery Maintained Head) and Brian Grady with the Forum advised that Jen Haskew (Interim Head of Setting and School Effectiveness) would be attending in his place.

In response to the request for an update on outstanding membership vacancies James Kinsella (Governance Team) advised that plans were being progressed to undertake a further round of elections in an attempt to fill the remaining membership vacancies on the Forum.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

None.

3. **Deputations (if Any)**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11th November 2021 as a correct record.

5. **Actions arising**

Action 81 – Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block Management Plan Update

Olufunke Adediran, Head of Finance at Brent Council, confirmed that an update on progress against the High Needs Block Deficit Management Plan was due to be provided at the next Schools Forum meeting on 17 February 2022.

6. **Change in order of Agenda - Any Other Urgent Business Update on Local Authority School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant**

At this stage in proceedings the Forum agreed to receive an update from Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children & Young People) under Any Other Urgent Business on the outcome of a recent consultation undertaken by the Department for Education (DfE) regarding the future School Monitoring and Brokering grant.

The Forum noted the following key points as part of the update provided:

- The use of the grant by the local authority to contribute towards the management and functions provided by the School Effectiveness Team to

- support collaborative working with all Brent schools regardless of maintained or academy status, which had been especially valued as part of the response provided on the pandemic.
- In 2020 the DfE had started discussions with regard to eventually removing the grant, based on the view that it should only be available to support maintained schools. This was not a view supported by Brent with the Strategic School Effectiveness Partnership Board supporting the case made to retain the grant, however the DfE had chosen to proceed with their consultation on removal of the grant and despite significant challenge and clear opposition (including from Brent) they had decided to push ahead with their proposals involving a 50% reduction in the grant for 2022/23 and its complete removal by 2023/24 with the DfE supportive of the growth in school led approaches towards school improvement focussed around the approach involving Multi Academy Trusts and funding arrangements becoming more like Academy Trust top slicing with de-delegation as the method to provide improvement funding for maintained schools.
 - Given the limited notice and time provided to plan for this grant reduction, work had been ongoing with the Council's Finance Team to assess the impact and as a result it had been agreed to offset the reduction for 2022/23 funded from within the Council's General Fund, which totalled £109k. As a result there would be no requirement to seek any de-delegation from the Dedicated Schools Grant for this purpose in 2022/23.
 - The approach had also been designed to enable a more detailed review to be undertaken in relation to the future delivery and provision of school improvement work linked to the proposals to be outlined within the expected Education White Paper and SEND Review Green Paper. It was felt this reflected the need to develop a more joined up and collective approach in terms of the configuration and future arrangements for funding and delivering school improvement, involving both the Forum and Strategic School Effectiveness Partnership Board.

Having thanked Gail Tolley for her update and the efforts made to secure funding for 2022/23 the Forum were keen to explore details on the possible funding arrangements beyond 2023/24. In response Gail Tolley advised that detailed guidance was still awaited on how the funding arrangements would be expected to operate although it was felt the DfE had now established a clear direction of travel. Given the need to await further guidance the position would, however, need to be kept under review in order to develop (following publication of the White Paper) a more joined up and comprehensive understanding of the changing education landscape and collective response with a view to sustaining the collaborative working valued in Brent for all young people.

As a result of the update it was **AGREED** that the Schools Forum would continue to be kept updated with a further paper to be provided following publication of the more detailed DfE guidance and Government's Education White Paper

7. **Dedicated Schools Budget 2022/23**

Olufunke Adediran, Head of Finance at Brent Council, introduced the report providing an update on the proposed DSG Schools Budget for 2022/2023.

In presenting the report the key points highlighted included:

- The final DSG block funding allocations had been announced in December 2021. Following the 2021 Spending Review, the government had announced that it would provide a Schools Supplementary Grant of £1.2bn, in addition to the DSG for mainstream schools. It had been estimated that Brent would receive £6.9m of this grant with school-level allocations to be published in Spring 2022. The grant would be available to primary, secondary, maintained nursery schools and Post 16 provisions to support cost pressures in respect of the 1.25% Health and Social Care Levy (Increased National Insurance Contributions) that would take effect from 2022/23 and other wider cost pressures. In addition the government had also announced an additional £325m in 2022/23 for Special Schools and other providers funded from the High Needs Block (HNB) through a top up of the HNB DSG. This represented an increase of 4% to the High Needs allocations announced in July 2021 with Brent estimated to receive an additional £2.9m as a result.
- The breakdown of the 2022/23 Brent DSG Funding Allocations, as detailed in section 3 and Table 1 of the report. The increase in relation to the Schools Block totalled £2.025m with an increase of £5.5m in relation to the HNB allocation compared to 2021/2022. Whilst this represented an increase of 8.3% the Forum noted that the 2021/22 HNB expenditure budget was currently forecast to spend £71.5m. This was inclusive of £7.6m recouped for Brent pupils with high needs placed in other local authorities, however given the continued increase in the number of children with Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs) the Forum was also being asked to approve, in addition to the measures outlined in the DSG deficit recovery plan, the recommended transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the HNB to mitigate the growing demand. This would equate to a transfer of £1.2m bringing the HNB budget to £73.1m with members noting that a more detailed breakdown of the HNB budget would be presented to Schools Forum in February 2022.
- The Early Years Block allocations had also been published in December 2021, with detailed provided in section 3.7 of the report. The Forum were advised that whilst funding had increased under the Early Years National Funding Formula for Early Years Provision at a per pupil level, there had been a reduction in overall funding of £1.4m mainly due to a decrease in children requiring early years provision, following repeated lockdowns from March 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic with a separate report having been provided for consideration by the Forum on the agenda.
- In terms of the Central Schools Services Block funding the Forum was advised this had been confirmed at £2.1m. This included funding for ongoing responsibilities as well as funding for historic pension costs for centrally employed teachers. The allocation represented a decrease across both elements of £0.155m compared to 2021/22.
- The exclusion, within the mainstream funding formula of £1.9m from the Schools Block funding clawed back by the DfE to cover payments for Non Domestic Rates directly to billing authorities on behalf of schools.

- In terms of de-delegated items the Forum was advised of the proposal to fund the cost of school redundancies (which in exceptional circumstances were eligible to be funded centrally), from the contingencies with a current budget of £175k as shown in Table 2 of the report. In addition the Forum was advised of the adjustments made to the per pupil rates in line with the decrease in pupil numbers in order to maintain the same level of funding for contingencies, licences and staff costs cover as in 2021/22, with full details on the proposed de delegated items detailed within section 6 and Table 2 of the report.
- In terms of Funding Formula Rates the Forum noted the details provided on the funding factor rates as set out in Appendix A of the report, with a minimum funding guarantee set at 1.5%. This had followed consultation with Schools and endorsement by the Forum in November 21 to change the local funding factors to enable a gradual move towards the National Funding Formula, as detailed within section 7 of the report. Further details were provided within Appendix B of the report on the impact by individual schools.
- The growth budget in 2021/22 had been £2.25m and was expected to spend to budget. It was proposed to retain the current growth budget and use any surplus generated by the Choice and Fair Access Interview (CAFAI) projects coming to an end (currently anticipated at £243k) to fund the projected growth in the Secondary phase.

No further questions or issues were raised in relation to the report and as a result the Forum **RESOLVED**

- (1) In line with 2021/22, to approve the transfer of £1.2m (0.5%) from the Schools Block to support the High Needs Block with it noted that Department for Education (DfE) regulations permit up to 0.5% of the Schools Block to be transferred subject to approval by the Forum.
- (2) To note the additional funding allocations to Brent, as mentioned in the 2021 Spending Review.
- (3) To recommend the budget for the DSG blocks, including the mainstream funding formula, to Full Council for approval.

The Chair then invited the Maintained School members represented on the Forum to consider the proposed de-delegation arrangements and as a result they **RESOLVED** to approve the proposed de-delegation arrangements, as set out within section 6 of the report, including the proposal to fund redundancy costs for school based staff from the de-delegated contingencies budget.

8. Early Years National Funding Formula 2022-23

Folake Olufeko, Senior Finance Analyst at Brent Council introduced the report which outlined the provisional Early Years Block DSG funding allocation for Brent as supported by the Early Years Funding subgroup.

In presenting the report key points highlighted included:

- The increases to the funding rates allocated to Brent for 2-year-old, and 3 and 4-year-old provision, however, overall funding allocations had reduced due to a reduction in demand for Early Years Provision since January 2020 as a result of the restrictions introduced due to Covid 19.
- The increased funding provided in relation to the EYNFF hourly rate for 3 and 4 year olds, as detailed within section 4 and Table 1 of the report. In terms of 3 and 4 year old funding it was proposed that this would be distributed to providers as a universal base hourly rate plus an additional allocation for deprivation; after the 5% reduction for central resources, on the basis of the details within section 5 of the report. The Forum also noted, in relation to the provision of funding supplements that the maximum 10% allowable had been applied in relation to deprivation.
- The DfE provisional funding estimates for 2 year old funding had been based on the January 2021 census data with confirmation provided that the actual funding allocation for 2022/23 had reduced in line with a 6% reduction in take up hours experienced between January 2020 and January 2021 as a result of the impact from the pandemic. Take-up numbers for both the 2 year old and the 3 & 4 year old entitlements had, however, since increased from January 2021 and were now at 90% of the pre-Covid- pandemic levels, based on headcounts as at November 2021. It was therefore anticipated that these increased numbers would be reflected in the final allocation for 2022/23, which would be based on the January 2022 census.
- With regard to centrally retained funding the DfE guidelines mandated local authorities to pass through 95% of the Early Years funding for 3 and 4 years olds to providers, however no mandate existed on how much of the 2 year old funding local authorities could retain for central services. It had therefore been recommended that 5% of Early Years funding for 3 and 4 year olds was retained in 2022/23. This would equate to £0.911m, compared to a £0.937m equivalent in 2021/22; a reduction of £0.026m on the previous financial year. In terms of the 2 year old rate, it was proposed to retain £0.13p of the increase to the 2 year old rate (£59k compared to £25k which was retained in 2021/22), as a contribution towards the provision of central services to support the sector. This allocation would ensure continued delivery of the training offer which had been acknowledged by the Early Years Funding subgroup as a required service and was valued by providers, as well as other key central support provisions. The Forum noted this would bring the total budget allocation for central services in 2022/23 to £0.970m, a reduction of £0.132m from the previous financial year.
- The detailed consideration and discussion of the proposals by the Early Years Funding Sub Group, as detailed within section 8 of the report.
- The update provided in relation to the Specialist Nursery Panel funding, which for 2022/23 valued £0.417m in order to ensure that children with the most complex needs would continue to be supported to attend one of the specialist nursery settings, where appropriate.

- In terms of additional funding for maintained nursery schools the provisional allocation of supplementary funding in 2022/23 was £0.732m which compared to £0.717m in 2021/22. This represented an increase of 2.1%. In addition, the Forum was reminded that the £6.9m it had been estimated Brent would receive as part of the Schools Supplementary Grant would also be available to support maintained nursery schools with cost pressures in respect of the 1.25% Health and Social Care Levy (increased National Insurance contributions) effective from 2022/23.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and asked if Forum members had any questions. In considering the update provided the following issues were raised by the Forum:

- In response to further clarification sought around the early years funding offer, confirmation was provided that detailed discussion had taken place regarding the proposed hourly rates and central retention with the Early Years Funding Sub Group. Members of the group, whilst recognising the significant financial pressures and challenges faced across the Early Years sector had been in agreement with the proposed retention of 2% for the 2 year allocation and 5% from the 3 and 4 year allocation for central support having recognised the value for money and nature of support and training provided through the Early Years Support Services.
- The Forum also recognised and supported the concerns highlighted in relation to the Early Years PVI sector given the pressures identified as a result of the impact of the pandemic on costs, staffing and also the reduction in children taking up places across the sector. Members also recognised the significant risks these challenges and pressures had created in relation to the ongoing sustainability of many PVI providers and strong support for the sector expressed by the Early Years Funding Sub Group in terms of the consideration of broader support options available given the constraints on the allocation of funding required under the DfE early years funding formula, focussed around maintained early years settings

Having noted the comments made, it was **RESOLVED** to endorse Brent Early Years Funding Formula for 2022/23, as supported by the Early Years Funding Sub Group, on the basis of the following recommendations being applied to the formula:

- (1) A universal base rate for Brent providers for 3 and 4 year old funding of £4.74 per hour, which has increased by £0.15p from £4.59 in 2021/22.
- (2) An allocation for deprivation for 3 and 4 year funding of 10%.
- (3) A base rate for Brent providers for 2 year old funding of £6.16 which has increased from £6.04 in 2021/22.
- (4) A cap on centrally retained funding by the local authority of 5% of 3 & 4 year old funding.
- (5) A retention of £0.13p from the 2 year old funding for support services.
- (6) The funding previously allocated under a disapplication for the 2017/18 academic year for additional 15 hour places for some 3 and 4 year old based on local eligibility continues to be allocated to the Under 5s Nursery Panel, and both PVI and maintained providers can apply for this, to ensure the funding continues to be targeted at vulnerable children.

9. Any Other Urgent Business

Dedicated Schools Grant / Age Weighted Pupil Unit Funding Lobbying Query

Andy Prindiville, (Headteacher – Secondary Academy member) shared with the Forum that he had been approached by a representative of the London Borough of Harrow Schools Forum with a request seeking support from Brent Schools Forum regarding lobbying they had agreed to undertake of the DfE for an increase in the Primary school AWPU funding to bring it in line with the Secondary School funding levels.

Whilst supportive of ongoing lobbying opportunities, particularly in relation to the move towards the National Funding Formula the Forum, in considering the request felt there was a need to seek further detail on the proposal and the basis on which it had been agreed by the Schools Forum in Harrow. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children & Young People) also advised that given the potential impact there would also be a need for a broader consultation with schools in advance of support being expressed for any such approach.

As a result it was **AGREED** that Andy Prindiville made contact with Harrow's School Forum to seek clarification of their proposal, with any further details obtained then shared at the next Schools Forum so members could make a more informed decision as to how they wished to proceed.

Capital Works – School building repairs

In response to a query regarding the funding of building repairs for maintained schools members were reminded that as these type of works formed part of the schools capital programme they did not fall within the Forum's remit and would need to be raised as part of the normal process for seeking access to the capital works programme.

In terms of future meetings, the Chair advised that whilst willing to accept items of any other business the preference would be for advance notice to be provided, whenever possible, in order to enable the necessary response to be prepared for the meeting.

The Forum noted the next meeting date as Thursday 17 February 2022 at 6pm.

The meeting closed at 7:00 pm

M HEISER
Chair