



MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

Held as an online virtual meeting on Tuesday 20 June 2023 at 6.00 pm

Membership

Representing

PRESENT (all in remote attendance):

Governors

Mike Heiser (Chair)
Geraldine Chadwick (Vice Chair)
Martin Beard
Jo Jhally
Michael Odumosu
Ernest Toquie

Head Teachers

Michelle Ginty
Jayne Jardine
Gerard McKenna
Nick Cooper

Pupil Referral Unit

Ranjna Shiyani

Officers

Shirley Parks (Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy)
Sharon Buckby (Head of Inclusion & Virtual School)
Olufunke Adediran (Head of Finance)
Folake Olufeko (Senior Finance Analyst)
Natalie Connor & James Kinsella (Governance Team)

Councillors

Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools.

1. **Apologies for Absence and Membership**

Apologies for absence were received from Cassie Lloyd Perrin, Andy Prindiville, Melissa Loosemoore and Raphael Moss

2. **Declarations of Interest**

None.

3. **Deputations**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 February 2023 as a correct record.

5. **Actions Arising**

The Forum was advised that –

- **Action Points 84 and 85** were addressed under Item 6 of the agenda.
- **Action Point 86** was addressed under Item 8 of the agenda.
- **Action Point 87** - The Forum was advised that financial support had only be provided to schools that were in the Rapid Improvement Groups.
- **Action Point 88** was addressed under Item 9 of the agenda.

6. **Dedicated School Grant (DSG) Final Outturn 2022-23**

Olufunke Adediran, Head of Finance at Brent Council, introduced the report that set out the final Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) outturn against the budget set for 2022/23 and provided detail on the in-year 2022/23 surplus of £1.3m.

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

- The DSG outturn was in its most advantageous position since the deficit started in 2019/20 with an in-year surplus of £1.3m in 2022/23.
- The in year surplus was mainly driven by a £1m underspend against the Early Years Block due to the Department of Education's (DfE) in-year adjustment and a £0.3m surplus against the High Needs Block (HNB).
- The cumulative DSG deficit carried forward from 2021/22 was £15.1m. This had reduced to £13.8m at the end of 22/23, however the Forum was advised that a risk remained that the EY Block surplus could be clawed back by the DfE in 23/24, dependant on the final allocations based on the January 2023 census data.
- The High Needs Block (HNB) forecast reported at Schools Forum in February 2023 had assumed an overspend position of £2.8m which was a prudent position based on trends as final pupil numbers were still outstanding. However, the actual outturn position reflected an improved position of a £0.3m surplus.
- The Forum's attention was drawn to Section 6.3, Table 2 of the report that detailed the variances against the HNB budget for 2022/23 and highlighted the areas of significance that had supported the improved budget position, this included £1.2m of recoupment income from other local authorities that had placed children in Brent schools.
- The successful bid for £1m of funding from the DfE programme – Delivering Better Value (DBV) in SEND was confirmed to be received over the next two financial years 23/34 and 24/25. The Forum was advised that the funding could not be used to address the historic deficit but was ringfenced for the delivery of the agreed SEND support strategies agreed as part of the programme which would over time support improved efficiencies and reduce costs in the long term.
- The final outturn for the Central Block indicated an underspend of £0.2m, that was mainly attributed to the reduced reliance on temporary school staff.

- The Forum's attention was drawn to Section 10, Table 3 that summarised School's balances over the past 3 years and highlighted that overall school balances had reduced by £1.9m with 19 maintained schools increasing their reserves balances and 37 maintained schools showing a decrease in their balance.
- The decrease in balances was partly due to the impact of falling rolls, where some Primary schools had seen reduced funding.
- It was expected that the funding and expenditure pressures within Brent schools would continue in to 23/24, with the requirement that many schools would need to take further actions to balance their budgets.
- The Forum was reminded that the statutory override for the DSG budget had been extended by the DfE until 2025/26, there remained a risk that any deficit left after this period would need to be funded by the Council.

The Forum was then updated on the following Action points from previous meetings:

Action Point 84:

The Forum was advised in relation to the previous request to receive further information on the tracking of savings made through schools being able to draw down funds from the Local Authority's redundancy reserves, that in the last academic year three schools had made in year support requests for funding. Two of these requests were not approved as the school had surplus reserve balances. One school accessed the funding, this had resulted in a £133k saving for the school.

Action Point 85:

In relation to the previous request to receive further data on the distribution of additional funding awarded by the Early Years Panel, the Forum was advised that 70 settings were supported in the 22/23 academic year. 23 of these were School Nurseries and 47 of these were PVI's.

In concluding the discussion, the Chair asked the Forum if they had any questions or comments on the report with the following points discussed:

- The Forum thanked officers for responding to the previously identified Action points, however queried if there was a list of the schools that had received the Early Years additional support funding and whether the criteria that was used by the Early Years Panel in making their decision to award funding had been published. In response the Forum was advised that the Panel Decision making criteria would be circulated to Forum members as an action point.
- The Forum was advised that their contributions would be welcomed in the development of the revised Early Years Panel funding criteria, that was due for review over the next year.
- Clarification was provided that officers acknowledged the importance of ensuring that data was kept up to date for the Brent children placed in other Local Authorities' and the out of borough children placed in Brent schools so that budgets accurately reflected the expected income and expenditure to limit inaccuracies on budget forecasts.

The Chair thanked members and officers for their contributions to the discussion on the report and the Forum **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report and the following Action Point to be taken forward:

Action Point 89:

Details of the Early Years Panel funding decision making criteria to be shared with Forum members.

7. Update on implementing the direct National Funding Formula (NFF)

Olufunke Adediran, Head of Finance introduced the report which updated the Forum on the government consultation response on implementing the direct National Funding Formula (NFF) which was published in April 2023.

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

- The Forum's attention was drawn to Section 4.1 of the report that outlined the changes that were likely to impact Brent schools. These included the Government allowing continued flexibility for Local Authority's to transfer funding to high needs budgets with an adjustment to mainstream schools' funding allocations, the introduction of a national approach to the calculation of individual schools indicative SEND budgets and the requirement for Local Authorities to use a standardised criteria in relation to changes in falling rolls and growth fund calculations.
- As previously discussed at Schools Forum the Government had confirmed plans to allocate split site funding nationally based on a formula factor made up of a "basic eligibility" element and 'distance' element from 2024/25.
- The Forum was advised that split site funding would be set at a maximum of 60% of the 2024/25 NFF. The maximum funding would impact all four Brent schools that were currently in receipt of split site funding as detailed in 4.1.5 Table 1 of the report.
- It was confirmed that any schools set to lose funding because of the policy changes through the transition to a direct NFF would see their funding protected through the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) for a limited time until the direct NFF was fully in place. This would continue to be closely monitored by officers to ensure schools financial preparedness for when the MFG ceased.

The Chair thanked officers for their report and asked the Forum if they had any questions in relation to the information provided. The Forum had one question in relation to when schools affected by the changes to split site funding would be able to meet with officers to discuss the wider implications of the reduced funding once the MFG period had ceased. Officers confirmed they had written to all schools affected and were happy to arrange a more detailed discussion with affected schools before the end of the Summer term.

As there was no further discussion on the item the Forum **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report and the implications of the proposed changes to the NFF from the 2024/25 financial year.

8. Delivering Better Value in SEND Programme Update

Sharon Buckby, Head of Inclusion and Brent Virtual Schools introduced the report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People to update the Schools Forum on the Delivering Better Value (DBV) in SEND programme. The following key points were highlighted:

- The Forum was reminded of the background of the DBV Programme whereby Brent was among a number of other local authorities invited by the DfE to take part in the programme with the objective to identify local and national opportunities to improve the outcomes of children and young people with SEND.
- Brent had successfully submitted a bid for £1m of grant funding to support the reform of high needs systems in Brent with the aim of improving the delivery of SEND services for children and young people whilst achieving efficiencies going forward.
- The Forum was advised that the funding could not be used to support the deficit, however through improved efficiencies over time, it would support the return to an in year balanced budget through associated cost savings.
- The DBV programme had identified that a significant cohort of children could make good progress with targeted support without the need for an Education, Health Care Plan (EHCP). It was felt that with earlier identification of targeted support when children started mainstream school, less support would be needed over time.
- Where EHCP's were necessary, it was felt that more could be time limited, with children receiving targeted support and remaining in mainstream provision where appropriate.
- In response to the themes the DBV programme had identified, the grant in Brent would be spent on establishing an Inclusion Assurance Team for a year to review provision and provide guidance on improving outcomes through time limited plans and the closure of plans on the achievement of outcomes and the use of a provision based model instead of hours based support.
- The grant would also be used to support the engagement with an SEN commissioner and analyst to ensure effective use of resources across the system, including a review of the current EHCP banding system and the development of a test and learn intervention first model to improve early intervention for 0-7 year olds to improve their ability to thrive in mainstream schools without the need for an EHCP.
- The Forum's attention was drawn to the findings from the 1st Tranche of 20 LAs of which Brent was a part, as detailed in Section 6.1- 6.3 of the report. This had shown that the single highest impact objective to pursue in order to provide improved support for children and young people and reduce the demand for EHCP's or a special school placement, was increasing the ability of local systems to support children in a mainstream setting.

The Chair thanked Sharon Buckby for the update provided and invited The Forum to ask questions in relation to the information reported on the Delivering Better Value (DBV) in SEND programme, with the following queries raised by the Forum:

- The Forum felt it was a positive step to increase early intervention with targeted support to improve outcomes for children, however required further clarity on what "targeted support" looked like in practice. Officers advised that targeted support would respond to children's specific needs through a series

of intervention programmes both offsite and in specifically identified school settings. This support may also include wrap around support from the Educational Psychology service, Speech and Language and Child Development specialists.

- The Forum queried how the funding methodology would work if it changed to basing costs on provision rather than allocated in hours. Officers advised that this was still in the early stages of development and would need to be thoroughly consulted on with parents, schools, and health to ensure the best model of support was achieved. A working group would be convened to look at the evidence where this model was already working well in practice in other parts of the country.
- In response to a query regarding additional support for secondary schools training costs, it was clarified that the DBV targeted group work was initially focused on the under 7's age group, however it remained a priority to explore how the 500k of funding for secondary school training could be used to support SEN support work to ensure that all children and young people in Brent were effectively supported.
- The Forum was advised that an update on the delivery of the DBV programme would be brought to the Schools Forum in January 2024.

As there were no further queries, the Forum **RESOLVED** to note the outcomes of the DBV Programme and the next steps in delivery of the programme.

Action Point 90:

Schools Forum to receive an update on the delivery of the DBV Programme in January 2024.

9. **Mayor's Free School Meals 2023/24 Academic Year Update**

Shirley Parks, Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy introduced the report that provided an update on the Mayor's Free School Meals (FSM) pledge for primary aged children in Key Stage 2 for the academic year 2023/24. The following key points were highlighted:

- Brent's indicative grant allocation was £5m, based on an assumed 90% uptake for the number of children who were not eligible for the current Government's FSM grant. The indicative figure was based on October 2022 census and would be finalised once the May 2023 school census figures were published.
- Payments would be at a rate of £2.65 per meal. This was above the Government rate of £2.41 because it included funding to cover the administration and staffing costs associated with the delivery of the programme.
- Payments would be made to schools termly in advance to allow for upfront costs to be covered - 50% of the funding was due to be paid in July 2023, with a further 20% in December and a further 20% in March 2024. A balance of 10% would be held back for the final payment and adjusted accordingly based on October 2023 and January 2024 census data.
- A balancing payment or claw back determined by the difference would be made before the end of the summer term 2024.

- The Forum's attention was drawn to the grant conditions as laid out in section 4.0 of the accompanying report that highlighted how the funding should be used to deliver the programme.
- It was noted that in order to provide culturally appropriate options, some schools may need to request the difference in funding from parents/carers to cover the costs. The Forum was advised that this may be the case in schools with large Jewish or Islamic communities due to the increased cost of sourcing Kosher and Halal food.
- The Forum was cognizant of the additional complexities for schools in delivering the scheme successfully, given the attention required on staffing and infrastructure as well as the potentially negative impact the scheme could have on eligible families applying for Pupil Premium funding.
- The Forum noted the amendment to the policy whereby schools that were unable to provide additional hot meals to pupils could choose to provide a cold lunch service. If it was not feasible to provide either option, schools could seek agreement from the Mayor of London's office under exceptional circumstances to provide vouchers.

The Chair thanked Shirley Parks for the update provided and invited Forum members to ask any questions they had in relation to the information heard. The following points were discussed:

- The Forum required clarity on whether special schools would receive the additional funding. Officers advised that they would seek confirmation from the Mayor's Office and special schools would be contracted to confirm the arrangements.
- The Forum questioned whether any of the funding provided could be used for capital infrastructure changes to support the delivery of the programme in schools. In response officers advised that as stated in section 3.3 of the report the increased rate of funding at £2.65 per meal was considered adequate to cover the costs associated with delivering the programme, however, could not be used for capital infrastructure changes.

As there were no further questions the Forum **RESOLVED** to note the report and the following action points to take forward.

Action Point 91:

Clarification to be provided to special schools to advise whether they were eligible to receive the funding to support the delivery of the Mayor's Free School Meals scheme.

Action Point 92:

Schools Forum to receive an update on the delivery of the Mayor's Free School Meal scheme at the Schools Forum in January 2024.

10. **Dates of Future meetings 2023-24**

The Committee agreed to note the schedule of dates for future meetings during 2023/24 as follows:

- Thursday 12 October 2023 (NB: Subsequently changed to Thursday 16 November 23)
- Tuesday 5 December 2023 (additional date if needed)
- Thursday 25 January 2024
- Tuesday 20 February 2024

The meeting closed at 7.12 pm

M Heiser
Chair