



MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

Held as an online virtual meeting on Thursday 16 November 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 Cassie Lloyd-Perrin
Headteachers	Jayne Jardine Melissa Loosemoore Andy Prindiville Gerard McKenna Nick Cooper
Early Years PVI	Wioletta Bura
Officers	Shirley Parks (Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy) 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 Michelle Ginty and Nisha Lingham.

The Forum was advised that existing forum vacancies would be advertised in the Head teachers and Governors Bulletin scheduled to go out at the end of the Autumn term 2023.

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 20 June 2023 as a correct record.

5. **Actions arising**

The Forum was advised that:

- **Action Point 89** – For the Forum to receive details of Early Years Panel Funding criteria, would be addressed at the next meeting of the Schools Forum in January 2024.
- **Action Point 90** – For the Forum to receive an update of the delivery of the DBV Programme, would be addressed at the next meeting of the Schools Forum in January 2024.
- **Action Point 91** – The Forum was advised that Special Schools were eligible for funding in relation to the Mayors Free School Meals scheme.
- **Action Point 92** – For the Forum to receive an update on the Mayors Free School Meals Scheme, would be addressed at the next meeting of the Schools Forum in January 2024.

6. **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Budget Monitoring Report 2023/24**

Folake Olufeko, Senior Finance Analyst introduced the report that provided an update on the forecast financial position for 2023-24.

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

- The cumulative deficit at the end of the financial year 2023/23 was £13.8m. The increased demand for High Needs provision was forecast to lead to the overall DSG expenditure exceeding income by £0.8m in 2023/24, this resulted in a forecast cumulative deficit of £14.6m by the end of the financial year. This was mainly due to the increased number of children and young people with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
- The detailed financial monitor of the DSG Schools Budget was presented in the accompanying Appendix 1, this provided details of the spends against each block of the DSG.
- The Schools Block was currently forecast to breakeven, of the total £261.7m Schools Block budget allocated by the DfE to Brent, £139.0m has been recouped and allocated directly to academies. £1.3m had been transferred to the HNB and £1.9m had been deducted for National Non-Domestic Business Rates to be paid by the DfE directly to the billing authority, leaving £119.5m directly allocated to Brent maintained schools and to fund centrally retained items including the growth fund.
- The High Needs Block budget, excluding the proportion allocated to academies was £74.7m, this allocation included the £1.3m transfer from the Schools Block that was previously approved by the Schools Forum.
- Place funding of £8.8m (£8.6m in January 2023) for Academies had been recouped from the Block and allocated to Special Academy providers,

- additionally there was a £0.3m in year adjustment by the DfE in July 2023 to increase the HN funding for Brent children attending schools in other local authorities.
- Overall, the HNB was projecting a deficit of £0.8m, section 7, Table 2 of the report provided a breakdown of the income and expenditure against different categories in the High Needs Block.
 - A pressure of £1.1m was projected against the cost of Post-16 provision, however the Forum noted that it was difficult to accurately forecast the Post-16 costs due to delays in various settings confirming their charges to the local authority and the issue of pupils joining mid-year, therefore the forecast pressure of £1.1m was subject to change later in the financial year, with the Forum due to receive an update at the January 2024 meeting.
 - The overspends were partly mitigated by an underspend in the mainstream and academy budgets due to the increased utilisation of in borough SEND placements.
 - The HNB Management Plan was in place to monitor and address the deficit, this included looking at longer term actions to reduce the deficit over time. A task group chaired by the Corporate Director of Children and Young People was in place to coordinate and monitor actions in the Plan, an updated Plan would be presented at the January Schools Forum.
 - The Early Years Block was currently forecast to break even. However, this position was likely to change over the next two quarters, as children moved on from early years' settings and new take-up hours were confirmed from September 2023.
 - It was noted that 95% of the Early Years Block's income was passed onto providers, and the remaining 5% was retained by the local authority for central expenditure budgets for Early Years services.
 - The Central Block was also currently forecast to break even.
 - In summary the majority of the DSG overspend was in relation to the HNB due to the increased EHCP numbers. This was recognised as a national issue, that was regularly under internal review. Additionally, it was expected that the benefits from the Delivering Better Value (DBV) in SEND programme would start to take effect over the next few years, therefore effectively reducing longer term pressures on the HNB.

The Chair thanked officers for their report and asked the Forum if they had any questions in relation to the information provided. The Forum queried if Brent were to be offered a DfE "safety valve" agreement to support the deficit of the HNB and queried why there had been such a significant reduction in funding.

The following responses were provided:

- The Forum was advised that Local Authorities identified by the DfE for the safety valve support agreement would be written to individually, based on their deficit increase. Brent had not received any contact from the DfE at this point, however it was noted that many other local authorities that had been offered the safety valve agreement were also part of the DBV programme.
- In relation to why the DfE had significantly reduced funding, the Forum was advised that the DfE's explanation of this was that the increase in allocated funding provided last year for a two-year period, had been allocated at 5% in one payment, rather than being split over two years.

- The DfE were currently reviewing management plans to inform future funding decisions.

As there were no further questions 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.

7. **Dedicated Schools Grant Provisional Funding Update 2024/25**

Olufunke Adediran, Head of Finance introduced the report which updated the Forum on the provisional DSG block funding allocations announced for 2024/25.

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

- The Forum was asked to note the provisional 2024/25 allocations which would form the basis of further detailed work to allocate funding to individual schools and settings at the January and February 2024 meetings, once the final funding was confirmed.
- The core factors in the NFF (such as basic per-pupil funding, and funding for additional needs such as deprivation) would increase by 1.4%, however a number of changes had been introduced, following the requirement for schools to move to the hard funding formula, as detailed in section 5 of the report.
- As discussed at previous Schools Forums, a small number of Brent schools would be affected by the split site funding; these schools had met with the finance team to discuss how their funding would be impacted.
- A further notable change was that, for the first time, in 2024/25 the DfE would allocate funding to local authorities on the basis of falling rolls, as well as growth. Local authorities could use the funding to support schools that experienced a short-term fall in the number of pupils on roll.
- A further change for 2024/25 would see local authorities being required to provide growth funding where a school or academy had agreed with the local authority to provide an extra class to meet basic need in the area (either as a bulge class or as an ongoing commitment)
- In relation to the high needs block, the national increase for 2024/25 compared to 2023/24 was 4.3% or £440m. The NFF would ensure that every local authority received an increase of at least 3% per head of population, compared to 2023/24, and no more than 5%. Brent would receive the minimum 3% increase like other Outer London boroughs. This was the lowest increase in the past few years, the Forum was advised that if demand continued to grow the funding would not be sufficient to meet the pressures and the deficit was likely to increase. This could have a significant impact for Brent and many other councils in the event that the statutory override ceases in 25/26 and local authorities are expected to clear any deficits from their general funds.
- Central Block funding in 2024/25 would see an increase of 1.57% for the ongoing responsibilities that local authorities continued to have for all schools, whilst funding for historic commitments in relation to pension costs within this block would decrease by a further 20% from 2024/25.

- The 2024/25 Early Years' block funding allocations were due to be announced in December 2023, with the revised rates setting the basis of the EY budget allocations to be presented at the January 2024 Schools Forum.
- The DfE had announced that they would support the teacher's September 2023 pay award with additional grant funding, the indicative allocation for Brent mainstream schools (excluding special schools) in 2023/24 was £2.56m, schools were not required to spend the grant in year.
- For 2024/25 financial year, the DfE would pay the grant as a separate grant and for 2025/26 the grant would be incorporated into the NFF core budget allocations.
- A new School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028 had been approved by Cabinet in October 2023 with a view to support schools with falling rolls, this included capping admission numbers, bringing schools together in federations and reducing capacity across the estate. In response to falling demand, the local authority was currently consulting on the closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School that was opened as bulge accommodation when primary demand was high, as well as a reduction in PANs at other primary schools.

The Chair thanked officers for their report and invited the Forum to ask any questions in relation to the information reported on the DSG provisional funding update.

The following queries were raised:

- The Forum queried if the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) funding for each key stage could be provided, in response the Forum was advised that the AWPU funding figures would be distributed once received in January 2024.
- Following a Forum query in relation to the projected budgets and expenditure within the HNB for the following year, in light of the overspends and reduced funding, the Forum was advised that longer range forecasting was looked at as part of the deficit management plan. This information would be provided at the next Schools Forum.
- The Forum highlighted to officers the significant challenges faced by schools when trying to manage continued reductions in funding and adequately support SEND pupils. Officers advised that they understood and were sympathetic to the challenges faced by schools in stretching funding to support all pupils, it was hoped that through the DBV strategies in place, along with the continued support from the Council that schools would in time, start to experience the benefits of the revised strategies and feel sufficiently supported in ensuring SEND pupils were receiving the help they needed.
- The Forum questioned where the £6000 SEN funding that schools were required to spend on SEN pupils before top up funding could be requested from the local authority, could be found within their budgets. In response the Forum was advised that the funding was within the core budget that assumed a notional amount for SEND provision, this could be found on the Best Brent website where schools could access their budget information; a separate column showed the notional SEND budget. The Forum was further advised that these figures could also be found in the main budget published in February 2024 and if there were any specific queries in relation to this,

schools could contact Folake Olufeko, Senior Finance Analyst, for further advice.

As there was no further discussion on the item the Forum **RESOLVED** to note the provisional 2024/25 allocations and the following Action Points to be taken forward:

Action Point 93:

Schools to be advised of the AWPU funding for each key stage.

Action Point 94:

The Forum to receive an update at a future meeting of the projected longer term financial position of the HNB as part of the deficit management plan.

8. Dates of Future Meetings 2023 - 34

The Committee noted that the provisional meeting scheduled for Tuesday 5 December 2023 was no longer needed and proceeded to agree and note the schedule of dates for the remainder of the 2023/24 municipal year.

- Thursday 25 January 2024
- Tuesday 20 February 2024

The Chair asked the Forum if they would like to consider a mixture a face to face and online meetings for future Schools Forums. The Forum was positive about the option of hybrid meetings so that they had the choice of in person or online attendance, dependant on their other commitments. It was therefore suggested that the first meeting of the next municipal year was held as a hybrid meeting at Brent Civic Centre and dependant on the success of this, the remaining meeting schedule could be agreed accordingly.

The meeting closed at 6.48pm

MIKE HEISER
Chair