



MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

Held as an online virtual meeting on Thursday 14 November 2024 at 6.00pm

Membership

Representing

PRESENT (all in remote attendance):

Governors

Mike Heiser (Chair)
Ilana Myers
Michael Odumosu
Ernest Toquie

Headteachers

Honor Beck (representing Melissa Loosemoore)
Jayne Jardine
Jude Enright
Andy Prindiville
Ranjna Shiyani
Nick Cooper

Early Years PVI

Wioletta Burra

Councillors

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

Officers

Nigel Chapman, Corporate Director Children and Young People
Shirley Parks, Director, Education, Partnerships and Strategy
Ravinder Jassar, Deputy Director of Finance
Roxanna Glennon, Head of Inclusion
Folake Olufeko, Head of Finance
Kamaljit Kaur, Senior Finance Analyst
Abby Shinhmar (Governance Team)

1. **Apologies for Absence and Membership**

Apologies for absence was received from Mellisa Loosemoore (Headteacher) with Honor Beck attending as a substitute representative.

Following completion of the recruitment process undertaken to fill existing vacancies on the Forum, the Chair took the opportunity to formally welcome Ilana Myers as a new Primary (Maintained School) Governor representative. It was noted that vacancies remained for the following positions, on which a further recruitment process would be undertaken later in the year:

- Academy Secondary Governor x 2

- Maintained Primary Governor
- Maintained Primary Headteacher
- Maintained Secondary Headteacher
- Academy Primary Headteacher

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 Wednesday 19 June 2024 as a correct record.

5. **Actions Arising**

None.

6. **Dedicated Schools Grant Budget Monitoring Report 2024-25**

Folake Olufeko (Head of Finance, Brent Council) introduced a report, which provided an update on the projected financial position for the second quarter of the 2024-25 financial year. The position was reported against the budget set in consultation with the Schools Forum and submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) in the Section 251 budget return in June 2024. It also provided an update on schools' additional in-year grant allocations from the DfE with Appendix 1 of the report containing a detailed budget breakdown and forecast by funding blocks. The Forum noted the following key points as part of the update provided:

- As of the close of the 2023-24 financial year, the cumulative deficit stood at £13.2m. Due to rising demand for High Needs provision, coupled with the pressures on top-up funding allocations, the DSG budget was now projected to end the 2024-25 financial year with a slight increase to the cumulative deficit, forecast at £13.5m.
- The DSG forecast was reflecting a deficit of £0.3m against grant funds of £235.9m for 2024-25, mainly due to pressures from the High Needs (HN) Block.
- The overall DSG allocation had decreased by £0.6m, from the position approved by Schools Forum, due to an in-year adjustment by the DfE in July 2024. The adjustment related to a £0.1m decrease in the HN Block funding for Brent children attending schools in other local authorities and £0.5m decrease in the Early Years Block following the completion of the January 2024 census which saw a reduction in hours of childcare provision compared to the January 2023 census data. There was a 9.5% decrease in take-up of the two-year free entitlement in Brent and this was reflective of a 7% decrease in take-up nationally. This decrease was attributed to three factors including falling birth rate in recent years, the transition to universal credit from legacy

- benefits and income thresholds for the eligibility criteria remaining unchanged whilst average incomes have risen in recent years.
- In terms of the Schools Block, of the total £274.4m allocated by the DfE to Brent, £149.1m had been recouped and allocated directly to academies. £1.4m had been transferred to the HNB and £2.3m had been deducted for National Non-Domestic Business Rates to be paid by the DfE directly to the billing authority, leaving £121.6m directly allocated to Brent maintained schools and to fund centrally retained items, including the growth fund. This block was currently forecast to break even.
 - In terms of the High Needs (HN) this totalled £77m (excluding the proportion allocated to academies) including a £1.4m transfer from the Schools Block. Place funding of £9.3m for academies had been recouped from the Block and allocated to Special Academy providers with a £0.09m in year adjustment by the DfE in July 2024 to decrease the HN funding for Brent children attending schools in other local authorities. Although the HN Block allocation had increased by £2.8m in 2024/25 (£6.9m in 2023-24), as in previous years, the number of children with EHCPs had also continued to rise. This growth in demand was recognised as a national and London trend but had not been supported by an increase in HN Block funding creating financial pressures. Between January 2024 and September 2024, there had been an 8% increase in children and young people with an EHCP, with the number increasing from 3508 to 3782 over this period representing a 12% increase when compared to September 2023.
 - In noting the HN Block forecast detailed in Table 2 of the report, the Forum was advised that the £0.3m deficit against the HN Block was mainly due to an increase in the expected costs of out borough and in-borough academies and special schools' top up funding. Further details in relation to the forecast position were highlighted as follows:
 - The £0.4m forecast pressures against in-borough mainstream schools' (including academies) top up funding due to the introduction of a new Band 7 top up funding rate on which further details had been included under Agenda Item 7.
 - There was a further pressure of £0.3m against the education costs of children placed in independent and residential settings. This was partially mitigated by an additional forecast recoupment income of £0.1m to claim back the cost of children attending Brent schools placed by other boroughs.
 - £0.7m pressure against the cost of placing Brent children in schools out of borough. The post-16 budget was projecting a breakeven position, as it was difficult at this stage to accurately forecast the post-16 costs due to delays in various settings confirming their charges to the local authority. New pupils joining in the spring term also made it difficult to predict the forecast based on pupil numbers. As such, the forecast against the post-16 budget line was subject to change later in the financial year.
 - The above pressures were expected to be mitigated by a forecast underspends of £0.7m against SEN support services, including Education Otherwise/Awaiting Placement and a further forecast underspend against the SEN support budget due to slippage against the training budget earmarked for the graduated approach programme.
 - Details on the HN Block management plan could continue to be regularly reported to Schools Forum, which included longer-term actions to mitigate the deficit. A Task Group chaired by the Corporate Director of Children and Young

People was coordinating and monitoring delivery of the Action Plan, which focussed on cost avoidance through managing demand, improving sufficiency of places and financial management on which the next update was due to presented at the February Schools Forum.

- In terms of the Early Years (EY) Block this had reduced by £0.5m following the completion of the January 2024 census. The census had shown an increase in take-up of the 3-and 4-year-old entitlement and a reduction in take-up 2-year-old entitlements with a clawback of £28.5k from the initial supplementary funding allocation for maintained nursery schools. To support these settings, the local authority was not proposing to recover this clawback from its Maintained Nurseries for this financial year. At this stage, the Forum was advised, the forecast for the EY Block indicated a break even position although 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 2024 and in the Spring term from January 2025.
- The Central Block of the DSG (£2.1m), including a set contribution towards pension strain costs for former school employees of £0.3m, was currently forecast to break even.
- In terms of DSG funding for 2025-26, the autumn 2024 budget announced that core schools funding would increase by £2.3b in 2025-26 with £1b of this to be allocated to support work to reform the system for pupils with special educational needs. The Forum was advised it was not clear at this stage how the funding would be distributed at local authority level and between the DSG Blocks. An announcement on the 2025-26 Schools Block DSG allocations was expected in December 2024 with the Council continuing to set a local funding formula (LFF) for mainstream schools in 2025-26 in line with the move of the funding factor rates closer towards the National Funding Formula (NFF) factors. The Treasury had advised that funding would be provided to assist schools cover the increase of 1.2% in Employers' National Insurance contributions, although final details were not due to be confirmed until spring 2025.
- In relation to the Core School Budget Grant (CSBG) for 2024-25 the DfE had announced almost £1.1b of funding to support schools with their overall costs in the 2024-25 financial year, including confirmation of the 2024 Teachers' Pay Award. The indicative grant allocation for Brent mainstream schools (excluding Special Schools) in 2024/25 was £2.56m and special schools would be funded at £703.05 per place. The funding for mainstream primary, secondary and all through schools would be incorporated into core budget allocations for 2025-26, through the schools NFF for 2025-26. Funding for Centrally Employed Teachers would be rolled into the Central Schools Services Block funding for 2025-26.
- The 2024-25 mainstream base funding rates, as detailed in section 11.2 of the report.
- The update on previous Action Points agreed by the Forum, as detailed in section 12 of the report relating to the Delivering Better Value (DBV) in Brent Programme, and update on the DSG Deficit Management Plan and agreed banding arrangements for Special Schools.

The Chair thanked Folake Olufeko for the update provided and welcomed any questions from the Forum, with the following noted:

- Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children & Young People. Brent Council) took the opportunity to highlight the national pressure on High Needs with the funding received by Brent recognised as marginal when compared to other local authorities and levels received in previous years. Whilst the overall HN Block deficit remained, Brent was managing to contain cost pressures through the targeted actions with its HN Deficit Management Plan although given the ongoing pressures identified in relation to ongoing funding the forecast deficit was expected to remain challenging to address.
- In response to further details sought on how it was anticipated the government would distribute additional funding support in relation to the increase in Employer National Insurance Contributions to each school, it was clarified that the expectation was for the DfE to use the schools' workforce data included in census returns to the DfE. Additionally, the government would shortly be publishing a Policy Statement with the MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) expected to provide further clarify around the funding position. In response to a query on how schools are funded for placements from out of borough, it was confirmed that the local authority allocates direct payments to schools and recoups funds from other local authorities on behalf of schools.

As no further questions or comments were raised the Forum **RESOLVED** to note the report and update provided.

7. **SEND Resource Allocation System**

Shirley Parks, Director, Education, Partnerships and Strategy introduced a report providing an update on the consultation process agreed by the Forum on 19 June 24 proposing a banding SEND Resource Allocation System (RAS) designed to move away from the current hours led system to a needs-led, provision-based approach for mainstream schools and Additional Resource Provisions (ARPs), early years settings and post-16 settings. Following consultation, the report detailed the proposed changes to the way that Brent would allocate resources for children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for children aged 0-25 in mainstream schools and post-16 colleges with the following key points highlighted as part of the update provided:

- Consultation had been undertaken during the autumn term with mainstream schools and post-16 colleges on the proposed RAS for mainstream schools and post-16 with further work being undertaken on application of the RAS for children in ARPs and Early Years. This paper therefore sets out.
- Currently, Brent allocated financial resources based on the number of hours of one-to-one teaching assistant (TA) support that a child was considered to need by the SEND Advisory Panel, in accordance with their EHCP. Brent was an outlier in allocating resources this way with the proposed SEND RAS designed to move Brent to a system of allocating resources to children with an EHCP based on an assessment of the child's level of need, as determined through the use of banding matrices applied to their EHCP at the SEND Advisory Panel. There was one banding matrix proposed for children aged 5-25 and another for children in early years aged 0-5. The RAS included 12 areas to support the assessment of the child's needs with each was scored according to the following ranking system - no additional support; some

- support; high level of support and exceptional level of support and the scores totalled and corresponding to a funding level.
- The new bands did not represent in themselves a change to the level of financial resources that children would receive (as detailed in Table 1 of the report) with the proposed banding matrices developed as part of Brent's engagement with the Department for Education's (DfE) 'Delivering better Value' (DBV) programme and matrices co-produced with members of Brent Parent Carer Forum (BPCF), representatives from Brent early years (EY), primary and secondary providers and relevant professionals within the Inclusion Service (Educational Psychology, Early Years Inclusion and SEND 0-25 teams), as well as the Schools Forum High Needs Block Working Group and the Early Years Working Group. The only financial changes proposed included – a rounding of amounts attached to each band and the introduction of a higher Band 7 funding intended for children in mainstream school whose EHCP stated that special school would be an appropriate setting.
 - The details provided on the consultation process undertaken (as set out in section 3.2 of the report) and level of feedback provided in response. In terms of qualitative data, overall respondents had supported the move away from resources being allocated in terms of 1:1 TA hours and towards a needs-based system (which represented the central question of the consultation). Respondents commented that the proposed new system of resource allocation would be clearer and more consistent, although, one respondent had expressed concern that parents may be made anxious by the move away from 1:1 TA hours and that this proposed change must be communicated carefully. Participants had commented positively on the implementation of Band 7 funding for children in mainstream awaiting a place in special school. Two respondents had requested more information and training on the matrix (should it be implemented), especially for SENDCos with concern also expressed in 3 of the 16 responses that the proposals would not solve the issue of high needs funding failing to match the cost of meeting the needs of some children with SEND.
 - Based on the responses received, officers were therefore recommending that Schools Forum approve implementation of the proposed new resource allocation process for children with an EHCP in mainstream schools with the new process to be implemented from 1 December 2024, applied initially to new plans and at phase transfer annual reviews and the aim for all Brent EHCPs to have been placed onto the new bands by September 2025.

The Chair thanked Shirley Parks for the update provided and then invited comments on the presentation and proposed way forward, with the following issues covered:

- It was confirmed that modelling had been in order to assess the impact of changes on a sample of primary and secondary schools which had informed the banding rates, alongside benchmarking information on funding allocated to children with SEND in mainstream schools and post-16 provisions. This had shown that Brent would be broadly in line with other neighbouring authorities for school-age children.
- The support expressed for the proposed changes and move away from the current hours led system to a needs-led, provision-based approach.

- Members were grateful for the consultation and asked whether learning had also been gained from other boroughs. In response, officers advised that consultation had been undertaken with other local authorities which had identified issues when trying to model on an electronic system. The aim introducing the proposals had been to start slowly and accurately whilst staff were undergoing training and working with SENCOs to get it right. Additional feedback provided by parents had identified a need for careful consideration of the language supporting introduction of the proposals to be used, which would be picked up moving forward.
- Consultation on Additional Resource Provisions (ARP) and Early Years (EY) funding was now anticipated to commence January 2025, which would be informed by modelling of the impact of proposed rates and benchmarking information. This had been delayed by a decision, since the report to Schools Forum in June 2024, to remodel some of the initial DBV data set assumptions given the changing needs profile of children placed in ARPs and in the presenting needs in early years cohorts. Further analysis was aimed at ensuring need was not underestimated to ensure that appropriate funding was allocated.

With no further comments raised, and in view of the support expressed the Schools Forum **RESOLVED:**

- (1) To approve the introduction of a Resource Allocation System for all children and young people with an EHCP in mainstream schools and settings.
- (2) To approve that the Local Authority and mainstream schools and settings work in partnership to implement the Resource Allocation System for all children and young people commencing with new EHCPs from December 2024.
- (3) To note that a report on the adoption of the Resource Allocation System for ARPs and Early Years settings would be brought to a future meeting following consultation in the new year.

8. **Any Other Urgent Business**

No items were raised for consideration at the meeting.

9. **Dates of Future Meetings**

To note the remainder of the schedule of dates for 2024 - 25 as follows:

- Monday 27 January 2025 at 6pm via Zoom
- Thursday 13 February 2025 at 6pm via Zoom

It was noted that the additional meeting scheduled (if required) for Tuesday 10 December 2024 would not need to take place.

The meeting closed at 6.46 pm

M Heiser
Chair