



MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM
Held as on online meeting at 5:30pm on Wednesday 17 June 2020

Membership

Representing

PRESENT (all in remote attendance:

Governors

Mike Heiser (Chair)
Martin Beard
Geraldine Chadwick
Jo Jhally
Titilola McDowell
Narinder Nathan

Headteachers

Martine Clark (Vice-Chair)
Gill Bal
Lesley Benson
Michelle Ginty
Jayne Jardine
Gerard McKenna
Raphael Moss
Andy Prindiville

Trade Union

John Roche

Early Years PVI

Paul Russell

Officers

Dena Aly
Olufunke Adediran
Brian Grady
James Kinsella
Rashella Rapley

1. Apologies for Absence and Membership

Tim Jones (Governor) and Councillor Agha (Cabinet Member for Schools, Employment & Skills)

James Kinsella (Governance Manager, Brent Council) informed the Forum that the filling of current vacancies in membership of the Forum had needed to be delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The process had been scheduled to recommence at the start of the summer term, with a further progress update to be provided for the next meeting.

Introduction and welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the School's Forum and advised them of the guidance for participating in virtual meetings.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

None.

3. **Deputations (if Any)**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED that subject to the following amendment, the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 February 2020 be approved as an accurate record:

Min 9. Updated 2020/21 Schools Funding Formula – It was noted that the discussion at the February meeting had involved agreement to the establishment of a Working Group by the Forum to review the issue of split site funding allocation as part of the decision to recommend the mainstream funding formula for 2020/21.

It was therefore agreed that the minutes should reflect this decision with the establishment of the Working Group to be progressed in conjunction with the consideration of the Split Site Funding review due to be considered later during the meeting. **(Action: Brian Grady)**

5. **Actions arising**

Action 59: DSG Deficit – It was agreed that Olufunke Adediran would prepare the draft letter requested on behalf of the Schools Forum to be signed by the Chair, in order to highlight the issues and concerns raised in relation to the continued pressure on DSG funding and deficit recovery plans announced by the DfE with the relevant bodies. **(Action 59: Olufunke Adediran)**

Action 60: Early Years Funding Formula – setting by setting information: The Forum noted this had been included as part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Outturn report to be considered later on the agenda.

Action 61- Establishment of Task & Finish Group to review the pressure in relation to ECHP and the High Needs DSG Block: The Forum noted that an update was due to be provided on this issue as part of DSG Financial Outturn report.

6. **Dedicated Schools Grant Financial Outturn 2019/20**

The Schools Forum received a report from Olufunke Adediran, (Head of Finance) detailing the final Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) outturn against the budget set for 2019/20 along with the breakdown of the overall £4.9 m deficit.

After reviewing the report, discussions that followed highlighted the following key points:

- At the end of the financial year 2019/20, the DSG deficit totalled £4.9 m, after the use of planned DSG reserves of £2.5m. The main reason identified was

the £3.8m deficit on the High Need block mainly due to rising demand and the growth seen in Education Health and Care Plan (EHCPs).

- The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations, made clear the requirement for any DSG deficit balance to be held within the Local Authority's overall DSG and be carried forward to recover from future years funding and or, recovery plans agreed with the Department for Education (DfE). This would require the deficit to be recovered from future years funding and/or through recovery plans agreed with the DfE.
- The breakdown of the detailed final DSG outturn position had been detailed within Table 1 and Appendix A of the report.
- The detailed summary provided on the outturn position in relation to the Schools Block (as detailed in section 5 of the report). Of the £230million Schools Block Budget, £111million had been allocated directly to Brent maintained schools, £115million had been recouped and allocated directly to academies, leaving a remaining expenditure budget of £4million to fund centrally retained items.
- The schools Block was in deficit of £1million, which was mainly due to a £1.4million pressure against the growth budgets, which covered the cost of the Choice and Fair Access panel (CAFAI) arrangements for new arrivals to Brent schools, as well as the impact of rising rolls in schools. The growth in pupil numbers had mainly been within the secondary school phase resulting in the budget for 2020-21 having been increased in line with forecast secondary growth, following a consultation with schools and as agreed by the Schools Forum. Pressure had also been offset by underspends in other school block funded budgets.
- The detailed summary provided on the outturn position in relation to the High Needs Block (as detailed in section 6 of the report). The High Needs Block budget was £58.7million and the allocation included a contribution of £1.1million (or 0.5%) of Schools Block income and £1.5million of DSG reserves. Of this allocation, £7.1million was recouped by the DfE to allocate directly to academies. As detailed within the summary, the main cost driver behind the deficit of £3.8million had been being the significant growth in the number of children with Education Health and Care Plan (EHCPs). The High Needs expenditure exceeded the allocated block income from the DfE by £6.7million with the growth identified in EHCPs a nationwide challenge, also recognised by Ofsted. The Forum were informed that Brent had seen a 35% EHCP growth over the last 5 years. At the end of 2018/19, there were 2,173 EHC plans, but by the end of 2019/20, the number increased by 12% to 2,435 despite the overall pupil population remaining broadly the same.
- There had been notable increases in Post 16 EHCPs where young people with SEND could remain in education provision until they were 25. This had led to a pressure of £1.7million following an increase from an average number of 182 in 2018/19 to an increased average number of 256 EHCPs in 2019/20. Also included in this pressure was approximately £0.5million of place funding, charged as an additional cost to the High Needs Block by further education colleges. The DfE had recently clarified that colleges should no longer make

this charge and confirmed that the commissioning Local Authority should not incur the charge. It was therefore expected that this would be a significant cost avoidance in 2020-21. Other pressures identified included out of borough mainstream top-ups as well as for residential and independent educational settings. Work continued to develop proposals to increase the amount of special provision within the borough with the 2020-21 High Needs Block allocation for Brent including an additional £5m, although it was noted that current expenditure would still need to be reduced in order to achieve a balanced in-year budget, ahead of a medium term plan to recover the DSG deficit.

- The detailed summary provided on the outturn position for the Early Years Block (as detailed in section 7 of the report) and Central Items (as detailed in section 8 of the report).
- The summary provided in relation to the outturn position of the level of DSG balances (as detailed in section 9 of the report) and in relation to school balances (as detailed in section 10 and Appendix B of the report). It was noted that the school balances had decreased overall by £2.5m with funding and expenditure pressures likely to persist and those schools in deficit continuing to be monitored closely.
- The deficit on the DSG was a challenge faced nationally with long term actions required to recover the deficit, which the Forum had already agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to co-ordinate and monitor, especially in relation to the High Needs Block.
- As part of the work being undertaken by the High Needs Task and Finish Group the need was identified to ensure the banding review currently being considered included a review of the impact any recalibration may have on special schools.
- Members of the Forum also highlighted concerns in relation to the approach being adopted towards the management of funding deficits within schools, which it was felt would need to take account of pressures not only on the DSG relating to pupil numbers but also in terms of managing the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Given the range of issues identified, it was also suggested that the Forum continue to monitor the implications and actions being taken to manage and mitigate the DSG deficit.

As an outcome of the discussion it was **RESOLVED**

- (1) That the Schools Forum note the report.
- (2) To ensure that the banding review currently being considered by the DSG High Needs Block Task & Finish Group include a review of the impact any recalibration may have on special schools. **(Action 63: Brian Grady/Dena Aly)**

- (3) To request that the officers review the flexibility and options available in relation to how the national policy framework and approach regarding the management of funding deficits within schools was applied within Brent taking account of pressures not only on the DSG relating to pupil numbers but also in terms of managing the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. **(Action 64: Olufunke Adediran and Dena Aly)**
- (4) That the Forum consider further the implications of the DSG deficit at a future meeting towards the end of 2020. **(Action 65: Olufunke Adediran and Dena Aly)**

7. **Update on Split Site Funding Allocations and Early Years Deprivation Funding Adjustments**

The Schools Forum received an update report from Dena Aly, (Senior Finance Analyst) that provided further information on the Early Years funding adjustment, which had been applied in 2020-21 to ensure no provider rate dropped by more than 1.5% compared to 2019/20.

The report also demonstrated how the criteria for Split Site funding had been met for the schools in receipt of this funding for 2020-21 and illustrated the impact any potential introduction of a cap may have.

After reviewing the report, discussions that followed highlighted the following key points:

- The local Early Years Funding Formula had been set for 2020/21 with the endorsement of Schools Forum in February 2020. This included increases to the funding rates allocated to Brent for 2-year-old and 3 and 4-year-old provision. The Local Authority continued to retain 5% of the total allocated to Brent, with 95% allocated to providers.
- The base funding rate to providers made up 90% of allocated funding. The deprivation factor allocated the remaining 10%, based on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), which was updated in 2019. Prior to this, the index had not been updated since 2015, meaning that individual provider rates would have changed more significantly compared to recent years. Therefore, for 2019-20, the deprivation allocation had been adjusted to ensure that no provider rate dropped by more than 1.5% compared to 2019/20, while ensuring that 10% of the rate was still allocated for deprivation overall. This adjustment had been for one year period only.
- The Forum noted the summary impact of the Early Years minimum funding adjustment, as detailed in section 3.3 of the report, with the Forum keen to review the data available on a setting by setting basis (including what it would be possible to provide in relation to PVI's) in order to assist in supporting the ongoing monitoring and strategic planning process in relation to application of the formula.
- In relation to the Early Years update, concern was also expressed in relation to the reconfiguration of the length of term (14 to 13 weeks) and lack of consultation with early years providers, given the significant impact on the

sector. In response, Brian Grady confirmed that he was aware of the concerns raised and apologised for the delay in the issue being responded to, which he advised he would raise with the Early Years Team.

The discussion then moved on to consider the update in relation to split site funding, with the following issues raised:

- As clarification, the Forum was advised that they were not being asked to consider the introduction of any cap at the meeting, with the report providing an opportunity to explore the potential options available in advance of any of final consultation being undertaken.
- The Forum noted there were currently four schools receiving full Split Site funding and one school in receipt of partial Split Site funding with the current criteria and funding allocation in Brent having been agreed in 2016. The current formula comprised a lump sum of £151,847, plus £113.70 per pupil. Where schools partially meet the criteria, they may attract a reduced lump sum of £50,000.
- Members noted the assessment of current split site funding allocations against criteria as detailed in section 4.4 of the report along with the current Split Site allocations, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report. It was highlighted that the current formula did not include a cap on the level of funding that could be allocated to individual schools.
- The Schools Forum were reminded that it had already been agreed to establish a Working Group to look at Split Site funding in more detail with any changes being considered needing to include clear, transparent and objective criteria. Rather than considering the recommendation within the report, Brian Grady advised that the Forum were being asked to formally establish the Working Group, which he would chair in order to consider the impact of the split site funding options identified, including any capping mechanism. The Forum were keen to ensure membership of the Group included representatives from those schools receiving split site funding.

As a result of the discussion it was therefore **RESOLVED**

- (1) That the Schools Forum note the report.
- (2) To formally establish a Working Group to review the potential impact of the split site funding proposals identified within the report. The Working Group to be chaired by Brian Grady with representatives from those schools currently receiving split site funding to be invited to join as members (including Gerard McKenna). The timescale for reporting back to the Forum to be agreed by the Working Group in consultation with relevant school leaders. **(Action 66: Brain Grady)**
- (3) That the concerns highlighted in relation to the reconfiguration of the length of term (14 to 13 weeks) and lack of consultation with early years providers be raised with the Early Years Team in order to highlight the significant impact on the sector and ensure an appropriate response was provided outlining the reasons for the decision **(Action 67: Brain Grady / Early Years team)**

- (4) Further review be undertaken regarding the provision of Early Years Funding Formula data on a setting by setting basis for the Schools Forum (including what it would be possible to provide in relation to PVI) in order to support the ongoing monitoring and strategic planning process in relation to application of the formula. **(Action 66: Brain Grady/Dena Aly/ Olufunke Adediran and Members of the Early Years Forum)**

11. Any Other Urgent Business

The Chair advised that he intended to use the remainder of the meeting to provide members with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences during the Coronavirus pandemic and the following key points were noted:

- The significant impact of the pandemic on the early years PVI sector was highlighted both in terms of the operational and financial difficulties experienced, and also in relation to the impact on staffing. Whilst many providers had continued to operate, the challenges and stress had been significant, which had not been assisted by changes in Government guidance and the support available with concerns raised that the DfE had not considered the full impact and immediate intervention and support required. The ongoing financial pressures experienced as a result of loss of fees and additional expenditure in relation to PPE & cleaning products were also highlighted.
- Brian Grady recognised the significant concerns raised and challenges identified across the early years sector as a result of the pandemic. Highlighting his support for the way the sector had continued to deliver in such challenging times, he remained keen to explore how the local authority could continue to provide appropriate support, recognising the flexible nature of the response to date.
- It was also noted that many Primary and Secondary schools had been working in collaboration with the Local Authority, with appreciation expressed for the support received, including the provision of PPE. In terms of ongoing consultation and engagement with schools a request was made for the timing of meetings to be scheduled outside of the school day.

The Chair thanked all those who had contributed for their comments and in response to the specific concerns raised in relation to the ongoing impact on the early years sector it was **RESOLVED** that Brian Grady liaise with Paul Russell outside of meeting on issues identified regarding the impact and support available to Early Years PVI providers in response to the pandemic and how to ensure the Early Years Providers Consultation Group could best ensure they were fully engaged in ensuring access to the necessary support and information. **(Action 67: Brian Grady)**

As no further issues were raised, the Chair thanked the Schools Forum for their participation.

12. **Dates of Future Meetings**

RESOLVED to approve the schedule of dates for future meetings during 2020/21 as follows:

Wednesday 4 November 2020 at 6pm

Wednesday 9 December 2020 at 6pm (additional date if required)

Wednesday 20 January 2021 at 6pm

Wednesday 24 February 2021 at 6pm

All of the above meetings to be undertaken as online virtual meetings.

Meeting closed at 7:00pm

Mike Heiser
Chair