



MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM
Held as an online virtual meeting on Thursday 25 February 2021 at 6.00 pm

Membership

Representing

PRESENT (all in remote attendance):

Governors	Mike Heiser (Chair) Martin Beard Geraldine Chadwick (Vice-Chair) Michael Odumuso Narinder Nathan Michael Maurice
Headteachers	Melissa Loosemore Danny Coyle Michelle Ginty Gerard McKenna Jayne Jardine Jude Enright Andy Prindiville Nisha Lingam
Trade Union	John Roche
PRU	Ranjna Shiyani
Officers	Olufunke Adediran Brian Grady Rashella Rapley Craig Player Sharon Buckby Kamaljit Kuar
Councillors	Stephens (Lead Member for Schools, Employment & Skills) Mili Patel (Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care)

1. Apologies for Absence and Membership

Apologies were received from Jo Jhally, Raphael Moss, Tim Jones, Paul Russell and Lesley Benson, who was substituted by Nisha Lingam.

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 21 January 2021 as a correct record.

5. **Actions arising**

Action 72: DSG contribution to central services and CAFAI projects funding – An update would be given under item 6 – Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring Report 2020/21 to be considered later in the agenda.

Actions 73, 74 and 75: Specialist Nursery Panel – An update would be given at the next meeting of the Schools Forum.

Action 76: Action to mitigate the HNB deficit – An update would be given under item 8 – Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block Deficit Management Plan to be considered later in the agenda.

6. **Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring Report 2020/21**

Olufunke Adediran, Head of Finance at Brent Council, introduced the report on the financial forecast position 2020/21. The position was reported against the budget set in consultation with the Schools Forum and submitted to the Department for Education on the Section 251 budget return.

The Forum was then invited to raise questions on the report, which focused on a number of key areas as highlighted below:

- It was explained that there was an error in the report which stated that mainstream top-up funding (inclusion) had been paid by the local authority to non-maintained schools half-termly. Mainstream top-up funding (inclusion) was in fact paid to maintained schools half-termly.
- In response to a question regarding the forecasted overspends in the Speech and Language Therapy service and the Education Psychology service budgets, members were assured that officers would be looking to address the overspend in the next financial year.
- Estimates had been given within the report of disbursements to support schools. It was explained, however, that the full cost of these could not be determined until the end of the financial year.
- Members expressed concern over the rate at which the High Needs Block deficit was growing. It was explained the growth in the number of EHCPs had been more than expected this year and that the effect of the pandemic on future demand was still unclear. Officers recognised the significant level

of increase and were keen to look ahead to be on top of current spend and to ensure financial impacts be addressed quickly.

- In response to a question regarding CAFAI funding, it was noted that a review into the CAFAI process was underway and secondary leaders would be contacted as part of the review.

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

7. **High Needs Block Budget 2021/22**

Olufunke Adediran, Head of Finance at Brent Council, introduced the report on the detailed High Needs Block budget for adoption in 2021/22.

The Forum was then invited to raise questions on the report, which focused on a number of key areas as highlighted below:

- It was noted that three different budget options were presented to the High Needs Budget Sub-Group on 11 February. Whilst referenced in the report, these options would be discussed in further detail under item 9 of the agenda.
- In response to a question regarding lobbying for additional SEN funding, members were assured that the issue of SEN funding was taken very seriously at both regional and national levels. Some of the lobbying was taking place through the Society of London Treasurers, which was currently looking to form a response to the High Needs Block National Funding Formula consultation. Other forms of lobbying were being undertaken through the Local Government Association and London Councils.

Having noted the comments provided, it was **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report.

8. **Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Deficit Management Plan**

Sharon Buckby, Head of Inclusion and Brent Virtual School at Brent Council, introduced the report on the High Needs Block Deficit Recovery Management Plan, including the timelines of the key strategies to mitigate the deficit.

The Forum was then invited to raise questions on the report, which focused on a number of key areas as highlighted below:

- Members noted the concerns raised by schools within the Kingsbury cluster which included: the need for appropriate funding relevant to the individual needs of the child, the appropriateness of funding for SEND children with complex needs within mainstream schools, concerns that children who need EHCPs were being denied them because of funding issues and the cost-effectiveness of ARPs when extra staffing and expertise are considered. Members were assured that the views of schools and providers within the borough would be integrated into the approach.
- In relation to actions being taken to expand the range of local placements for children with SEND and reduce the need for high-cost independent sector placements, it was noted that the ambition was to develop the capacity of

schools to support pupils with SEND thereby reducing out of borough mainstream, special and INMSS spend by at least £1m by 2023/24.

- It was noted that the Graduated Approach Framework would be focused on the skills of staff and how these can be developed. SEN support would take the form of a four-part cycle through in which earlier decisions and actions would be revisited, refined and revised with a growing understanding of the pupil's needs and of what supports the pupil in making good progress and securing good outcomes.
- Members were assured that a monitoring report on the progress of the High Needs Block Deficit Recovery Management Plan would be provided to the Forum on a quarterly basis.
- In response to a question regarding reviewing additionally resourced provision (ARP) in special schools, members were assured that officers were pursuing the most effective ARP model going forward. It was noted, however, that the Forum did not have the power to review of the budget of any individual Academy. It was explained that the additional special school expenditure was largely due to the increase in pupil intake.

It was **RESOLVED**:

(1) To note the timelines of the key strategies.

(2) That a breakdown of the costings for the key strategies to mitigate the High Needs Block Deficit be provided at the next meeting of the Forum. **(Action 77: Olufunke Adediran and Sharon Buckby)**

9. **Banding Review**

Sharon Buckby, Head of Inclusion and Brent Virtual School at Brent Council, introduced the report on the proposed Banding options following a Banding review process and the Graduated Approach Framework to be implemented.

The Forum was then invited to raise questions on the report, which focused on a number of key areas as highlighted below:

- It was explained that three options had been considered in the Banding review. It was noted that Option 1 would retain the current Bandings but include an inflationary uplift of 1.4%, Option 2 would adopt an additional Band for SEN support criteria for mainstream schools and Option 3 would adopt a Banding allocation for special schools increased in line with benchmarked neighbours. Officers recommended endorsing Options 2 and 3.
- Concerns were raised over the lack of additional support for mainstream schools if the Forum were to endorse Option 3, despite comparatively low balances. It was also noted that it would increase the recurrent overspend on the High Needs Block. Members were assured that each option sought to increase support for both special and mainstream schools. It was recognised that more assurance could be provided to address concerns around the allocation of resources.
- Concerns were also raised over the benchmarking process and the difficulty in comparing the Bandings of neighbouring boroughs. It was noted that a

review of Bandings applied by neighbouring authorities had demonstrated that funding for mainstream schools were comparatively higher in Brent. Allocations for ARPs were mid-range and funding for special schools was lower in Brent than in neighbouring authorities.

- Members requested further information regarding the Banding proposals at the next meeting of the Forum. Members were assured that this would not result in any delays to the arrangement of provision. The process for setting charges for out of borough placements, for example, would continue as normal.

Having noted the comments provided, it was **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note the contents of the report.
- (2) To note the implementation of the Brent Graduated Approach Framework.
- (3) That further information on value for money considerations and resource allocation under the Banding Review be provided at the next meeting of the Forum. **(Action 78: Olufunke Adediran and Sharon Buckby)**
- (4) That further information on the Brent Graduated Approach Framework be provided at the next meeting of the Forum. **(Action 79: Olufunke Adediran and Sharon Buckby)**
- (5) That further information on time limited EHCPs be provided at the next meeting of the Forum. **(Action 80: Olufunke Adediran and Sharon Buckby)**

10. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The Forum noted the provisional schedule of dates for future meeting during the 2021/22 municipal years as follows:

- Thursday 17 June 2021 at 6pm
- Thursday 4 November 2021 at 6pm
- Thursday 9 December 2021 at 6pm (additional date if required)
- Thursday 20 January 2022 at 6pm
- Thursday 24 February 2022 at 6pm

It was noted that dates were subject to change and would not be confirmed until the Annual Full Council meeting.

11. **Any Other Urgent Business**

None.

The meeting closed at 8.00pm

M HEISER
Chair