



MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

Held as an online virtual meeting on Thursday 11th November 2021 at 6.00 pm

Membership Representing

PRESENT (all in remote attendance):

Governors	Mike Heiser (Chair) Geraldine Chadwick (Vice-Chair) Martin Beard Jo Jhally Narinder Nathan Michael Odumuso Ernest Toquie Angela Turner
Headteachers	Danny Coyle Nick Cooper Jude Enright Michelle Ginty Jayne Jardine Nisha Lingam Melissa Loosemore Gerard McKenna Raphael Moss Andy Prindiville
Trade Union	Jennifer Cooper
PRU	Ranjna Shiyani
Early Years PVI	Paul Russell
Officers	Brian Grady Olufunke Adediran Folake Olufeko Sharon Buckby James Kinsella
Councillors	Tom 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 for absence were received from Wioletta Bura (Early Years PVI representative)

2. **Declarations of Interest**

None.

3. **Deputations (if Any)**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

Subject to Geraldine Chadwick being listed as Vice-Chair in the Chair at the end of the minutes, it was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 17th June 2021 as a correct record.

5. **Actions arising**

Action 81: Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block Management Plan Update

Brian Grady, Operational Director Safeguarding, Performance and Strategy (Brent Council) confirmed that Brent's Cabinet on 8 November 21 had approved a refresh of the School Place Planning Strategy which had included details on the planned strategies for addressing the significant and increasing demand for places that meet the needs of children and young people with SEND aged 0-25. This had been shared with school leaders and could also be accessed via the following link:

[Agenda for Cabinet on Monday 8 November 2021, 10.00 am \(brent.gov.uk\)](#)

6. **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Budget Monitoring 2021/22**

Olufunke Adediran, Head of Finance at Brent Council, introduced the report providing an update on the forecast financial position for 2021/2022. Key points included the following:

- The update provided in relation to Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) income, as set out in Section 4 of the report. The Forum was advised whilst the mainstream Schools Block income was projected to be in line with the budget, this would exclude £129m recouped by the DfE for academies. The Forum also noted the variance against the High Needs Block following an anticipated additional import/export adjustment due to be made by the DfE totalling £0.576m and academy recoupment of £7.6m.
- In terms of Expenditure Forecast:
 - The Schools Block was currently forecast to break even;
 - Expenditure on the High Needs Block (HNB) was currently forecast to exceed the budget by approximately £4m, with the overall pressure identified as £4.6m including the shortfall against income as a result of the import/export adjustment. The Forum noted the key driver in terms of HNB expenditure being the increase in number of Education Health & Care Plan (EHCPs). The total forecast expenditure on top up funding for 2021/22 represented a 7% increase on the previous year with a forecast overspend of £2.8m for pupils placed in mainstream schools and £1.4m against independent special schools. In addition the High Needs SEN

support services budget was currently being forecast to underspend by £0.6m mainly due to the relatively low number of pupils in Alternative Provision. The Forum noted the update on the deficit management recovery plan detailed within section 7.7 and Appendix 2 of the report, which detailed progress on the mitigating actions agreed to manage demand and improve the sufficiency of places and financial management. These mitigating items had resulted in a £2.162m cost avoidance and included 88 EHCP's having ceased as of August 2021; a review of all additional packages in place including for those attending out of borough provision along with an increase of provision in the number of maintained and special school places for children with EHCPs in Brent to attend these settings in the borough as opposed to out of borough placements and non-maintained schools. In addition the Forum was advised of progress on the pilot for SEN Support which had started in September 2021 with a £0.5m envelope which had been designed to increase early intervention activity on a schools based graduated approach in an attempt to reduce escalation of need to ECHP level. A more robust forecast of the impact and update on this would be provided at a future Forum.

- The outline position in relation to the Early Years and Central Block, as detailed in sections 8 and 9 of the report which were currently forecast as broadly in line with Block grant income but would be subject to ongoing monitoring and updates to future Forum meetings.

The Forum were then invited to raise questions on the report, with the following issue(s) raised:

- Members sought further details on the reference made within the update on the High Need Block Deficit Management Plan (section 7.81 of the report) to the 88 EHC plans in the borough which had ceased. In response the Head of Finance confirmed that this would have involved a number of reasons including (in the majority of cases) recipients turning 25 years old and/or having successfully entered employment or higher education.

As no further issues were raised the Chair thanked officers for the update and it was **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report.

7. **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Funding Update Report 2022-23**

Folake Olufeko, Senior Finance Analyst at Brent Council introduced the report, which detailed the provisional Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) block funding allocations for 2022-23 allocations that would form the basis of further detailed work regarding funding.

Key points highlighted within the report were as follows:

- The provisional school funding allocations announced in July 2021 had indicated that core funding was expected to increase nationally by £2.3 billion in 2022/23. This was in line with the confirmed 2020 Spending Review increases to funding for schools in England by £7.1 billion by 2022/23 compared to 2019/20.

- Overall the schools block funding in Brent would increase by £1.8 million in 2022/23, representing a 0.7% increase. This was lower than the national increase of 2.9% and lower than the average of 1.7% for London. Factors which had contributed to the lower increase in funding included London having a lower share of primary and secondary schools, with a per pupil funding level below the 2022/23 minimum per pupil rate of £4,265 per primary school pupil and £5,525 for secondary school pupils alongside the impact of decreases in primary pupil numbers.
- High needs block funding would see an increase of £5.3 million, representing an 8% increase however the Forum was advised this would still not be sufficient to cover the identified deficit brought forward from 2020/21 DSG of £10.5m and any further increase in demand for ECHPs in 2022/23.
- The Central Block would also see a reduction of 6% totalling approximately £145,000 in Brent with London also experiencing smaller than average percentage increases in funding for ongoing responsibilities. This was driven by the decrease in pupil numbers across the borough and London as a whole.
- As part of the Chancellor of the Exchequers 2021 Spending Review £4.7 billion growth had been announced for school's core budgets by 2024/25. This would include funding to cover the cost of the temporary increase in National Insurance Contributions and salaries although it was still unclear as to whether this funding would be subject to a levelling up process in the DfE's steps towards a hard National Funding Formula (NFF). The Review had also included £2.6 billion to support SEND provision, with further details now awaited on how the funding would be allocated.

In terms of the overall Schools Block allocation, the Forum noted the plans being considered by the Government to move towards compulsory implementation of a full National Funding Formula (NFF). Funding allocated through the schools NFF had been increased by 3.2% overall in 2022/23 and by 2.8% per pupil (2% per pupil for Brent which represented the minimum increase). In recognition of the potential impact any compulsory move may have the 3.2% increase was seen as a positive step towards matching the current local Brent formula, which included average funding levels per pupil of £5,408 for primary pupils and £6,826 for secondary pupils.

As no further issues were raised the Forum **RESOLVED** to note the 2022/23 allocations as the basis for further detailed work to allocate funding to individual schools and settings at the January 2022 School Forum meeting.

8. **Schools Block – Local Funding Formula (LFF) proposed arrangements for 2022/2023 & National Funding Formula (NFF) update**

Olufunke Adediran, Head of Finance at Brent Council introduced the report providing an update on the National Funding Formula consultation carried out by the DfE between July 2021 and September 2021. Members of the Forum were advised they were being asked to consider the proposed changes to the Brent Schools Block Funding Formula (LFF) from 2022/23 as a result of the consultation and Government's plans to transition towards a full NFF arrangement from 2023/24

which had been designed to enable a more phased approach. In addition the report updated the Forum about the proposed changes to payments of maintained schools Non Domestic Business Rates (NNDR) from 2022/23.

In presenting the report the key points highlighted included:

- Whilst the final outcome of the consultation undertaken by the DfE was still awaited the main proposals and changes which had been included for considered from 2023/24 were as follows (as detailed in section 4.1 of the report):
 - That local authorities be required to start bringing their local formula factors at least 10% closer to the NFF factor value by 2023/2024. This would include all NFF funding factors without local adjustment. Subject to the impact of the 10% move proposed in 2023/24 the DfE was then looking to move at least 15% closer to the NFF in 2024/25 and at least 20% closer in 2025/26. The Forum's attention was drawn to Appendix A of the report, which set out Brent's Local Funding Formula (LFF) rates for 2022/23. These were mainly higher than the NFF rates meaning adjustments would be required with the same appendix highlighting the impact on Brent's rates as a result of the 10% moved towards NFF;
 - To reform the premises factors from historic spend to a new formulaic approach following further consultation by the DfE. This would impact on the five schools in Brent that currently received split site funding;
 - To revise the basis of allocating growth funding for new and growing schools to meet basic need;
 - To change the falling rolls fund which provided funding for schools with short term reductions in pupil numbers and were judged to be "Good" or "Outstanding" at their most recent Ofsted inspection. The Forum was advised that Brent did not currently have a falling rolls fund and if that was required under the NFF only schools that fitted the eligibility criteria would benefit, which may include some within the borough;
 - The proposed changes to the role of the Schools Forum, including the removal of powers relating to the LFF, deciding on growth funds and falling rolls funds as well as agreeing a 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to support other funding blocks as had been used by the Schools Forum in Brent to support the High Needs Block. It was noted that the removal of this power may have an impact on Brent's deficit recovery plan, with the assumption that the option could be used moving forward over the next few years.
- The details of the consultation undertaken with Brent maintained schools and academies during October 2021 seeking views on any changes to the LFF for primary and secondary mainstream schools funding and to be applied to the schools block element of the Dedicated Schools Grant funding in support of the transition to NFF, as set out in section 11 and Appendix C of the report. There had been 11 respondents to the consultation, with the school level allocations for each option consulted upon set out in Appendix B of the report. Due to the relatively limited response the outcome had been broadly inconclusive providing, at this stage, no clear consensus for change with officers also acknowledging that the results could not be used as a fair representation on behalf of all schools in Brent.

- In terms of a proposed way forward, informed by the DfE consultation proposals and position in other local authority areas, officers were therefore recommending that the Forum consider incorporating changes within the Brent LFF to support a transition towards the full NFF in order to avoid a more significant impact in 2023/24. This would be based on a 10% gradual move in 2022/2023 as a step towards the NFF, as detailed within section 6 and Appendix B of the report as part of a phased approach including a minimum funding guarantee. It was proposed that the recommended approach would then be subject to final approval at the next Schools Forum meeting.
- In addition the Forum was provided with details of a further change from the DfE following the consultation undertaken on centralising the payment of Non Domestic Business Rates (NNDR). As a result it had been confirmed that from April 2022 the Education and Skills Funding Agency (EFSA) would pay NNDR directly to billing authorities on behalf of schools for 5 to 16 year olds with maintained schools no longer needing to make NNDR payments to billing authorities and budget share allocations for 2022/23 reflecting the funding for NNDR although schools would not receive the actual cash payment. EFSA would provide additional rates costs associated with additional buildings on a school site that were used to deliver education for pupils at the school, however they would not cover additional rates costs associated with other buildings on site not used to deliver education. In order to enable a smooth transition to the new payment system, schools were therefore being advised to ensure they registered any additional buildings on school sites not used to deliver education for pupils at the school as a separate entity with the Valuation Office Agency's rating list (VOA), to ensure two individual bills were produced.

The Forum were then invited to raise questions on the report, with the following issues raised:

- Forum members were supportive of the recommended way forward being proposed in terms of Option 3 that had been consulted upon involving the making of a 10% move towards the NFF funding rates whilst maintain the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) element at current rates and using the minimum funding guarantee to mitigate against losses. This was on the basis of the proposal being regarded as the least disruptive option for schools as part of the ongoing transition process although concerns were expressed should any more significant movement be required outside of the planned gradual and incremental increases over the next few years.
- Details were sought on the process to be undertaken in engaging and advising schools on the approach agreed in relation to the transition process. In response, Brain Grady assured the Forum of the measures being taken to actively engage and seek further views from all schools on the proposed changes. Further communication would be undertaken with schools following on from the Forum meeting with a further update to be provided for the next meeting on the outcome of the process and further comments received, prior to a final decision being made.

- Concerns were highlighted by members of the Forum that the limited response to the original consultation with schools may have been as a result of the frustrations felt by schools leaders about the financial pressures being faced in relation to school funding and budgets and a general acceptance that whatever the outcome the changes were going to need to be implemented anyway. In response, Councillor Stephens (as Brent Council's Lead Member for Schools, Employment & Skills) recognised the concerns being expressed given the current pressures being experienced in relation to school funding arrangements and assured the Forum, in support, of the continued lobbying actively taking place on the issues identified at both a regional and national level.
- Further clarification was also sought on the impact of the proposed changes around NNDR and the impact on Early Years and PRU providers, which officers advised they would investigate and respond separately to outside of the meeting.

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

- (1) Endorse as a way forward, the proposals to change the LFF to support a move towards the NFF rates and funding factors in order to enable further engagement with schools in determining the 2022/23 budget share allocations and a final decision on the LFF to be taken at the next Schools Forum meeting. These proposals to include:
 - (a) The introduction of the Free Schools Meals (FSM) funding factor; and
 - (b) making a 10% move towards the NFF funding rates, whilst maintaining the Age-Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) element at current rates and using the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) to mitigate against any losses.
- (2) Note the changes to payments of maintained schools Non Domestic Business Rates (NNDR) from 2022/23.

9. **Any Other Urgent Business**

The Forum noted the following as dates scheduled for future meetings:

- Thursday 9 December 2021 at 6pm (additional meeting, if required)
- Thursday 20 January 2022 at 6pm

No other items of business were identified.

The meeting closed at 6:40 pm

M HEISER
Chair