



MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

Held as an online virtual meeting on Thursday 3 November 2022 at 6.00 pm

Membership

Representing

PRESENT (all in remote attendance):

Governors	Mike Heiser (Chair) Geraldine Chadwick (Vice Chair) Martin Beard Jo Jhally Cassie Lloyd Perrin Michael Odumosu Ernest Toquie Angela Turner
Headteachers	Nick Cooper Jude Enright Michelle Ginty Jayne Jardine Nisha Lingham Melissa Loosemoore Gerard McKenna Raphael Moss Andy Prindiville
Pupil Referral Unit	Ranjna Shiyani
Non School Members	
Early Years PVI	Paul Russell
Trade Union	John Roche
Officers	Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children & Young People) Shirley Parks (Interim Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy) Olufunke Adediran (Head of Finance) Folake Olufeko (Senior Finance Analyst) Sharon Buckby (Head of Inclusion) Natalie Connor & James Kinsella (Governance Team)
Councillors	Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools.

1. Apologies for Absence and Membership

There were no apologies for absence received.

The Chair updated members on a number of changes to the Schools Forum membership. Cassie Lloyd Perrin was welcomed as newly appointed member to the Forum as a Maintained School Primary Governor, additionally Jo Jhally, Andy Prindiville, Martin Beard and Gerard McKenna had all agreed to a further term of office with the Schools Forum. A resignation had been received from Schools Forum member Narinder Nathan, the Forum extended their best wishes to Narinder Nathan and thanked her for her service to the Schools Forum. The Forum were advised that Danny Coyle had taken up a role as a head teacher in a different borough so would cease to be a member of the Brent Schools Forum.

The Forum was advised that vacancies would be addressed in the next round of Schools Forum elections in the New Year.

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 16th June 2022 as a correct record.

5. Actions arising

None.

6. Delivering Better Value (DBV) in SEND Introduction

Roseanne Furniss from Newton Europe, the Department for Education's (DFE) programme delivery partner was welcomed by the Chair who he advised had been invited to attend to share an overview of how the Delivering Better Value (DBV) in SEND diagnostic phase would work in Brent as well as meeting the wider objective to identify local and national opportunities to improve the outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

The Committee heard that the context of the DBV in SEND Programme was to address the recognised challenges in providing SEN Services, particularly with regards to the underlying funding challenges. The programme would seek to explore how funding could be most effectively used to ensure that better outcomes for children and young people with SEN were achieved. The four cornerstones to consider in achieving improvements were recognised as taking a child/young person centred approach; actively listening to those receiving support from the system; collaborating with key partners including service users and their families and exploring the issues around funding to ensure that funding that was available was used efficiently to ensure maximum impact. The Forum heard that the DBV

programme aimed to design its support through providing short term help to Local Authorities to identify sustainable changes that could drive high quality outcomes and assist in building an evidence-based grant application to support the implementation of the changes. Parallel to this the DBV Programme sought to inform long term reform by collecting the objective evidence base from participating authorities to inform future policy, drive legislative changes and share best practice.

The Forum were advised that Brent were currently at Module 1 of the 3 module grant application process, Module 1 included an understanding of Brent's historic and current position in SEN support and consideration of future SEN provision, identifying themes from the baselines and forecasts at this stage would support Module 2 which focused on exploring the main drivers of challenges specific to Brent. Module 3 required further exploration on the cultural and behavioural changes that would require adaptation in order to improve outcomes. At this stage in the application process Local Authorities should have a clear evidence base that would inform how the grant would be used ahead of the final stage of the process of making the grant application.

The Chair thanked Rosanna Furniss for introducing the item before offering Forum members the opportunity to seek further details or clarify any questions they had. Forum members raised questions regarding the level and frequency of funding, timescales and stakeholder involvement, with the following responses provided:

- In response to a Forum query regarding the level and frequency of funding it was confirmed that each Local Authority participating would be given £45k to support the grant and application phase of the programme, this would be followed up by the grant of up to £1m which would be awarded as a one off payment to kick start the plans created throughout the grant application process. There would be no additional funding available following the award of any grant
- It was acknowledged the application timescale was tight, however Brent were still at the initial stage and support would be provided at each step to ensure Brent had the support to gain insight into their specific challenges and were able to put a strong bid together to gain the funding to begin to implement changes.
- Officers were clear that they wanted stakeholder engagement to ensure that decisions made were informed by as many partners within the system as possible. A meeting would be taking place in November 2022 to give as many groups within Brent's SEN systems including the High Needs Block Sub Group and the Inclusion Strategic Board the opportunity to engage in the process. Officers welcomed the opportunity for schools to attend to ensure as broad a representation of partners could share their views and ideas.

The Forum welcomed the information shared and noted the positive opportunities for effective change in SEN provision in Brent as a result of the DBV in SEND programme. Officers confirmed that an update on the programme would be provided at a future Schools Forum.

7. DSG Budget Monitoring Report 2022-23

Olufunke Adediran, Head of Finance at Brent Council, introduced the report for the Forum to note that provided an update on the forecast financial position for 2022/2023, with the following key points shared:

- The increased demand for High Needs (HN) provision was forecast to lead to the overall Dedicated School Grant (DSG) expenditure exceeding income by £2.2m in 2022/23, resulting in a forecast cumulative deficit of £17.3m by the end of the current financial year. This was mainly due to the increasing number of children and young people with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) that had risen by 8% since last year.
- The £2.2m deficit against the HN Block had also been adversely affected by the increased forecast of costs at in-borough mainstream schools, academies and special schools and independent day special schools, as well as out-of-borough special schools. The forecast also included an increase in expenditure relating to £0.3m to be recouped from the HN Block and allocated to other local authorities for out of borough placements, following an adjustment by the DfE in July 2022.
- The pressures against the HN Block would be further offset by £1.9m underspends identified as part of the HNB Management Plan to review and realign costs that had been funded from the DSG but which could be funded by the DSG. Actions taken to alleviate the pressures included £1m contribution towards the costs of children placed in independent Residential Care Children's Homes and other education related costs for Looked After Children to be funded from the Placements budgets via the General Fund and a contribution of £0.9m towards transport costs for SEN children.
- The Early Years Block funding allocation had increased by £1.3m following the completion of the January 2022 census as a result of an expected increase in take up of the 3 and 4 year old entitlement and a small increase in take-up of the 2 year old entitlement. There would also be a reduction to the supplementary nursery grant, consideration was being given to how this reduction would be contained within the Early Years Block with the Forum being updated on this at a future Schools Forum meeting.
- The Central Block of the DSG (£2.1m) that funded central services for schools, including the long-term commitment towards pension strain costs for former school employees of £0.4m was forecast to break even.
- The outline position in relation to High Needs Block, Early Years Block and Central Block would be subject to ongoing monitoring and updated to future Forum meetings.

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

- Members sought further details on the increased pressured on the High Needs Block in relation to the high costs of the children placed in provision outside of the borough. Officers clarified that costs had not increased, however a deep dive would be undertaken in this area to better reflect the breakdown of expenditure in this area as it remained a costly expenditure for the Council.
- In response to a query regarding why SEN Services in schools had continued to be reduced when Section 6, Table 2 in the accompanying report showed an underspend in SEN Services, officers clarified that due to the financial pressures it was vital for the Council to consider how spending across SEN in the borough was managed. As further highlighted by the DBV Programme, the Council were encouraged to think about different ways to deliver services to maximise the funding available, as such any saving made in one area would be

used to mitigate pressures in other areas. Officers advised that in considering how SEN Services were re-shaped schools should not feel that there had been a reduction. Officers encouraged schools to make contact with them if they were feeling that this was the case at their school.

- Members sought clarity on Section 6.6 of the report in terms of cost avoidance as part of the HNB Management Plan. Officers advised the Forum that as part of the management plan that was endorsed by the Schools Forum in May 2021, key themes were set out that supported exploration of how effective support could be delivered in the most cost-effective way. This tied in with the DBV in SEND Programme in thinking about what could be done differently, identifying needs at an earlier stage to effect maximum impact and better outcomes and how this in turn would impact the financial plan.
- In response to a Forum query regarding the increased savings made on the transport budget, officers clarified that following advice from CIPFA, transport costs going forward could be funded from the General Fund rather than the HNB and the DSG.

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

8. **DSG Provisional Funding Update Report 2023-24**

Folake Olufeko, Senior Finance Analyst, Brent Council, introduced the report to inform the Schools Forum of the provisional DSG block funding allocations announced for 2023/24. The Forum were asked to note the 2023/24 allocations that would form the basis of further detailed work to allocate funding to individual schools and settings at the January and February 2023 meetings, once final funding was confirmed.

Key points from the report were shared as follows:

- High needs and central schools services blocks would increase by 2.7% nationally, equating to £1.4 billion in 2023/24. However, London would see an overall increase of 2.4%.
- In Brent, the overall Schools Block funding would increase by £2.964 million in 2023/24, representing a 1.16% increase. This was lower than the national percentage increase of 1.9% and lower than the average of 1.6% for Local Authorities (LAs) in London when compared to 2022/23 based on pupil numbers driving the allocation of funding. Primary pupil numbers had been declining across London and in Brent, resulting in lower DSG allocations. The funding floor would ensure that every school was allocated at least 0.5% more pupil-led funding per pupil compared to the 2022/23 allocation.
- The minimum per pupil funding levels would increase by 3%, compared to 2022/23. This would ensure that next year every primary school would receive at least £4,405 per pupil and every secondary school at least £5,715. These amounts were still lower than the Brent 2022/23 average under the Local Funding Formula (LFF) of £5,508 for primary and £6,900 for secondary.
- A further consultation, which closed in September 2022, focused on the implementation of the direct National Funding Formula (NFF) and the outcome of the consultation was expected to be published by December 2022. There were a number of proposals and those relevant to Brent included proposals in

relation to the transfer of funds between blocks, to introduce some flexibility to allow local authorities to continue to have the option to implement transfers, particularly from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block and the determination of notional budgets for mainstream schools' SEND support within the NFF.

- The High Needs Block (HNB) would also see an increase of £570 million nationally, which represented a 6.4% increase compared to 2022/23. The NFF would ensure that every local authority received an increase of at least 5% per head of population, compared to 2022/23, and no more than 7%. Brent would receive the minimum increase of 5% equating to £3.5 million. This was below the London average of 5.8%. A key factor that had contributed to this outcome was changing demographic trends. As London was experiencing a low percentage increase in population, it would receive low percentage increases across various funding factors such as Free School Meals and population funding. The additional £3.5 million was lower than the funding increase received in the past few years and was unlikely to be sufficient to cover the current 2022/23 forecasted imbalance between the High Needs expenditure and income and fund any further increases in demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in 2023/24. The increase would also not be sufficient to cover the 2021/22 DSG deficit of £15.1 million.
- The Central Block would see an overall 4.1% reduction nationally. This block consisted of funding for ongoing responsibilities, which would increase by 2.2%, while funding for historic commitments within the block would decrease by a further 20% from 2022/23.
- The outcome of the DfE, Early Years Block NFF consultation, which ended on 16th September 2022 was expected in December 2022. One of the proposals in the consultation was to roll the Teachers Pay and Pensions grant (TPPG) into 3 and 4-year-old funding rates estimated as £0.13 and £0.56 into the Maintained Nursery Schools supplementary funding rate for Brent. The TPPG rates have been included in the comparative 2022/23 rates and were not increases to the funding block allocation.
- The illustrative allocations to local authorities were based on the part time equivalent January 2021 census data, with final allocations based on the January 2022 census data due to be presented at the Schools Forum meeting in January 2023.
- Indicative rate increases for the Block were shared as follows, nationally, the 2-year-old rate would see increases ranging from 1% to a maximum 8.6%. The London average was 8.3%, however Brent would see an increase of 7.6%. Nationally, the 3 and 4 year old rates would see increased funding ranging from 1% to a maximum of 4.5%. The average increase for London was 1.7%, Brent would see an increase of £0.06, which represented a 1% increase from £5.81 for 2022/23 (including the illustrative TPPG rate) to £5.87.
- The Maintained Nursery Schools Supplementary (MNS) funding would see a £0.14 increase, this included an illustrative amount for the TPPG; the rate would increase from £4.99 to £5.13.
- There was also a proposal to introduce a minimum hourly funding rate and a cap on the hourly funding rate for MNS supplementary funding. The implications of this proposal for Brent would see nurseries' MNS funding being driven by take-up hours as opposed to the current funding methodology of allocating a £175k lump-sum and funding towards National Non-Domestic Business Rates (NNDR)

- In 2022/23, the number of Brent schools projecting an in-year deficit had increased to 67%. 23% of these schools planned to use over 50% of reserves to balance their budgets. Schools were feeling the impact of rising inflationary costs and increases in energy prices alongside the prospect of teachers pay increasing by 5% in 2022/23 and starting salaries rising by 8.9% to £30k.
- The DfE expected schools to manage these pressures within the allocated funding increase of 3.6% in 2022/23 and 1.2% expected in 2023/24. A number of Brent schools were also experiencing falling rolls that in turn had significantly reduced their funding. The Forum noted that the impacts of reduced funding had caused schools to have to make difficult strategic decisions to mitigate the impact of this.

The Chair thanked officers for the report before proceeding to invite the Forum to ask any questions they may have, with the following queries raised:

- Forum members felt it was important to highlight the level of challenge faced by schools who were trying to balance providing pupils with high quality education with continually decreasing budgets, this was further exacerbated by Brent teachers being paid at an inner London salary despite Brent being funded on an outer London scale.
- Officers acknowledged the scale of the budgetary pressures that schools were under, the Forum were further advised that there was not likely to be any uplift in funding in the short term, this highlighted the need for schools to continue to work together to explore how to manage smaller budgets whilst still providing a high standard of education.
- Forum members from Nursery settings advised that they were seeing an increase in 2, 3, and 4 year old funding uptake and queried if this was not the case across the borough, what action was being taken to encourage families to take up the nursery funding available, particularly as Nursery's were in a position to offer early SEN support, safety and continuity for vulnerable children.
- Officers welcomed the positive news that nursery numbers were increasing; however they were not yet at pre pandemic levels, it was confirmed that work was being done in Early Years to support families in terms of their entitlement to Early Years Funding.
- Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools empathised with the issues raised and shared her frustration at the lack of funding received from central government given the detrimental impact this was having on schools budgets. The Forum were assured that lobbying through the LGA continued to take place and the Administration in Brent would continue to advocate for better funding.

As no further queries were raised the Forum **RESOLVED** to note the 2023/24 allocations that would form the basis of further detailed work to allocate funding to individual schools and settings at the January and February 2023 meetings, once final funding had been confirmed.

9. Any Other Business

Shirley Parks, Interim Director, Safeguarding Performance and Strategy, Brent Council, advised that Schools Admissions were currently experiencing a high number of in year admissions for pupils in Year 10 and 11 who had moved to the borough

from within the UK which had created pressure on school places,. The Forum was informed that some schools who had the physical capacity may be asked to take on bulge classes to accommodate the increased pupil numbers, with funding being allocated from the Rising Rolls Fund to support the staffing costs to accommodate the additional classes. The Forum was advised that this would also be factored into the budget for 23/24 going forward.

In noting the update provided, the Forum recognised the necessity to ask some schools to take on a bulge class, whilst also noting that where schools experienced a stream of high mobility it was important to consider on a larger scale the most effective support that could be offered when pupils entered a new school and how they could be supported when potentially moving on, both from a financial perspective for the schools and the lived experience of the pupil.

The meeting closed at 7:17 pm

M Heiser
Chair