



## MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

Held as an online meeting on Monday 26 January 2026 at 6:00pm

### Membership

### Representing

#### PRESENT (all in remote attendance):

#### Governors

Martin Beard  
Michael Odumosu  
Jo Jhally

#### Headteachers

Raphael Moss  
Andy Prindiville (Vice Chair in Chair)  
Ranjna Shiyani  
Jude Enright

#### Non School Members

#### Councillors

Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for  
Children's Services, Education &  
Employment

#### Trade Union

Lucy Cox

#### Officers

Shirley Parks, Director Education,  
Partnerships and Strategy  
Gareth Drawmer, Head of Education  
and Learning  
Sasi Srinivasan, Early Years Manager  
Folake Olufeko, Head of Finance  
Pallavi Shah, Senior Finance Analyst  
Abby Shinhmar, Governance Team

### 1. **Apologies for Absence and Membership**

Apologies for absence were received from Jayne Jardine, Ernest Toquie, Nick Cooper, Michelle Ginty, Paul Russell and Melissa Loosemore. As apologies had also been received from Mike Heiser (Chair) Andy Prindiville (as Vice Chair) chaired the meeting.

### 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 Tuesday 11 November 2025 as a correct record.

#### 5. **Actions arising**

None.

#### 6. **Schools Forum Update Forward Plan**

The Forum **RESOLVED** to note the updated Forward Plan.

#### 7. **DSG Schools Block Budget 2026/27**

Folake Olufeko (Head of Finance, Brent Council) introduced a report from the Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development which set out the proposed DSG Schools Budget for 2026/27 for consultation and agreement by Schools Forum ahead of the Council budget being set and approved by Full Council in February 2026. The Forum noted the following key points as part of the update provided:

- The DFE has announced the Local Authority funding for Brent as £452m for the next financial year across all funding blocks and including the in-year additional grants.
- The Department for Education (DfE) has confirmed school funding increases for 2026/27 based on updated pupil data and formulae assumptions and integrating existing additional grants received within the current financial year, such as the Schools Budget Support Grant (SBSG) and National Insurance Contributions (NIC) grant into the NFF. Brent's confirmed DSG allocation was £452m.
- Pupil premium funding, which is funding to improve education outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in England, would increase to £1,550 for Primary aged pupils, £1,100 for Secondary aged pupils and £2,690 for children who were care-experienced.
- The High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) has been in deficit since the 2019/20 financial year. As at March 2025, the cumulative brought-forward deficit stood at £13.6m and this is forecast to increase to £18.3m by the end of the 2025/26 financial year.
- From 2022/23 onwards, a 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the HNB has been implemented each year following agreement by the Schools Forum to help address increasing SEND demand. However, these transfers have been insufficient to offset the cumulative deficit.
- In November 2021, following consultation with the Schools Forum, it was agreed to begin aligning school budgets with the government's requirement for local authorities to adopt or move closer to the National Funding Formula (NFF), also referred to as the hard formula.
- Brent has applied all NFF factor rates, except for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Low Prior Attainment (LPA), which are set at the minimum permitted levels. It was therefore proposed that, for the 2026/27 financial year, the previously approved 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the HNB be disapplied, as schools are unable to sustain this transfer.

- Brent is set to receive a total DSG funding allocation of £452m in 2026/27 compared to £432m in 2025/26, which represents an overall increase of £20m.
- The growth funding allocation has reduced to £1.3m compared to £1.8m in 2025/26. This allocation is based on the difference between the number of pupils on roll in each school between the October 2024 and October 2025 school censuses. This growth funding allocation is included in the overall Schools Block funding for 2026/27 as shown in Table 1 of the report.
- The final HNB allocation is £95.2m. This is £4.3m more than the allocation for 2025/26 and represents a funding increase of 4.7%.
- The 4.7% increase in funding in 2026/27 is considerably less than the 8% increase seen in EHCPs between January 2024 and January 2025 and would not contribute towards reducing the projected cumulative DSG deficit of £18.3m. It would, however, contribute towards funding any further additional pressures due to continued increases in the number of ECHPs. Members were advised that a detailed breakdown of the HNB budget was due to be presented to Schools Forum in February 2026.
- The Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) provides funding for local authorities to deliver central functions on behalf of pupils in maintained schools and academies. The CSSB funding is split into two elements: funding for ongoing responsibilities and funding for historic commitments. For 2026/27, the CSSB income has been confirmed as £2.5m, an increase of 1.4% compared to £2.4m in 2025/26. Table 7.1 in the report set out how the budgets are calculated for individual schools.
- As shown in Table 2 of the report, the mainstream funding formula for 2026/27 is £309m. This includes £2.9m of the Schools Block funding which had been clawed back by the DfE to pay for Non-Domestic Business Rates directly to billing authorities on behalf of schools. £0.54m has been excluded for the growth fund. The allocation has been reduced by £0.86m for de-delegated funds and £0.52m has been retained by the Council as a contribution towards fulfilling education services, including school improvement services. The remainder of £304.23m will be transferred to schools.
- The School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant that was introduced by the government in 2017 had now been discontinued by DfE. However, the DfE allows the local authority to, in consultation with schools, charge this funding directly to schools. This is de-delegated from the schools block and it was proposed to allocate £159,000 from the overall schools block funding to continue to provide this service.
- The de-delegated items, which the maintained schools members were required to agree were set out in Table 8.2 of the report.
- The proportion of schools relying heavily on reserves remains high with 43% of schools planning to use 50% or more of their reserves compared to 42% in 2024/25. It was therefore proposed to continue to de-delegate funds to support schools in difficulty at a reduced amount of £0.150m, in line with the forecast spend in the current financial year. This would lead to a reduction in the per pupil de-delegated rate of £1.19 at £7.78 compared to £8.97 in 2025/26.
- Schools Forum agreed in January 2024 that in exceptional circumstances school redundancies were eligible to be funded centrally through DSG funding, where a school requesting access to this support met the funding criteria in the redundancy policy. It was agreed that redundancies should be funded from the Schools Facing Financial Difficulties Fund (SFFDF) and to maintain this allocation at £0.3m. There was a £0.21 increase in the proposed rate for 2026/27

at £15.55 per pupil due to a fall in pupil numbers compared to the last financial year.

- The per pupil rates (£1.81) increase of £0.54 from last financial year was mainly due to a fall in pupil numbers. This was required to maintain the Free Schools Meals eligibility service at £35k, including an allocation increase to meet the costs (covering the pay award and NIC increase).
- It was proposed to increase the maternity and paternity supply cover budget by £72k, in line with the current 2025/26 outturn forecast and to raise the Trade Union service budget by £10k to meet additional staff costs resulting from the current year's pay award.
- The proposed set aside of a growth budget of £0.540m for the current Choice Advice and Fair Access Interview (CAFAl) arrangements was agreed. This is currently provided to 3 schools to continue to meet the local authority's requirement to meet basic needs for children who had newly arrived in the UK and required additional educational support. Members were advised this programme was currently under review and further updates on any proposed changes would be brought to Schools Forum for approval.
- There were currently no formal agreements between the local authority and any of the schools to support growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet basic need and therefore no budget is being set aside for this.
- Where local authorities operate a falling rolls fund, they are only able to provide funding where school capacity data (SCAP) shows that school places would be required in 2026/27 and/or the subsequent 2 years (this was a mandatory requirement). Brent's SCAP, as reported in Brent's School Place Planning Strategy 2025-28, shows that fallings rolls were projected for 2026/27 and therefore, this funding would not apply for the next financial year.
- For 2026/27 funding year, the DfE has reaffirmed that local authorities must continue to bring their local formulae closer to the NFF. Specifically, they are required to shift their local factor values by at least 10% closer to the national formula each year, unless they already mirror it. A fixed target date by which the direct NFF would be in place has not been set, although the expectation is a move to the direct NFF by the 2027/28 funding year at the latest.
- The change in formula rates primarily allocated 25% of the additional pupil led funding through AWPU for all Primary and Secondary schools and targets schools with high deprivation via FSM as well as schools with a high number of pupils with EAL across both phases.
- The Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) threshold range for 2026/27 is between -0.5% and 0.0%. The MFG has been set at the maximum allowable rate of 0%. This means that the per pupil funding rates will in the minimum remain the same as last year but not decrease. Under these proposals 17 out of 76 schools require an MFG allocation and this totals £0.87m. This adjustment is included in the overall post de-delegations and education functions budget as shown in Appendix B.
- Appendix B of the report contained an analysis of the funding formula by individual school, giving both the total formula funding and per pupil funding against the previous year.
- The split site factor set by DfE was compulsory for all local authorities, ensuring that split site funding is allocated consistently and fairly across the country. This recognises a basic eligibility criteria that attracts a lump-sum payment of £63k and a distance of 600m eligibility criteria that attracts an additional lump-sum payment of up to £32k.

- In regard to The Mayor's Free School Meals for 2026-27, the Mayor has confirmed his commitment to continue to deliver the universal Free School Meals scheme for state funded primary schools. Funding has been allocated for the next academic year and would be based on school census data.

The Chair thanked Folake Olufeko for her report and welcomed any questions from the Forum with the following being noted:

- Lucy Cox asked about the effect that falling rolls were having on schools and if there were any long-term plans to address the position. In response, Shirley Parks (Director Education Partnerships and Strategy) advised this was subject to review as part of the Brent School Place Planning Strategy reported to Cabinet in November each year. This detailed Brent's forecasts by planning area. In some areas of Brent, falling rolls were anticipated and in some areas, forecasts were more positive. It was noted that the strategy sets out all of the approaches that Brent is currently using to support schools with falling rolls, including capping numbers and reducing published admission numbers where appropriate. Brent has taken the decision to not to close any schools at this point in time, other than the Gwenneth Rickus site, the second site of Leopold School.

In reaffirming this commitment, Councillor Grahl outlined the work undertaken to ensure mitigations remained in place to support schools in managing the impact of changes in the forecast demand for pupil places and associated impact on school budgets, which also combined with efforts being made to increase SEND provision across the borough through the use of excess capacity.

- Raphael Moss asked about the High Needs Block and the implications of the deficit increasing for the Local Authority and for schools. Folake Olufeko stated that the budgets for the High Needs Block were currently being set and would be brought to the Schools Forum in February 2026. The service is forecasting a budget pressure of £4.7m in year which, combined with the lack of schools block transfer, would have an impact in 2026/27. An update on the HNB Management Plan aimed at addressing the funding gap would be brought to Schools Forum in February. The High Needs Block Sub-Group would also be meeting to review the position.

As a further update, Shirley Parks advised the Forum of the additional measures and investment planned by the local authority to enhance SEND capacity across the borough was a means of reducing the need for more costly out of borough placements. This includes the provision of additional special school places as well as Additional Resourced Provision with efforts also focussed on making the most effective use of the funding available to support schools. Engagement was also ongoing with the DfE in advance of the publication of the Schools White Paper and SEND reforms. It was noted that Brent compared relatively well to other local authorities in terms of the level of deficit budget on its High Needs Block.

The Forum also took the opportunity to praise the Council, Cabinet Member and officers on the recent opening of Wembley Manor School, as a specialist SEND school. The impact not only on the quality of education but in managing costs associated with SEND provision was noted.

The Chair thanked officers for the report. As no further questions or comments were raised the Forum **RESOLVED** to:

- (1) Endorse the 2026/27 budget for the DSG Blocks, including the mainstream funding formula, for reference to Full Council for approval.
- (2) Agree the 2026/27 growth fund, in line with the DfE's mandatory requirements for the treatment of the growth fund allocation.
- (3) Note the application of a Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) rate of 0%, in line with the DfE's MFG threshold range which was between -0.5% and 0.0% for the 2026/27 financial year.
- (4) Agree to disapply the previously approved 0.5% funding transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block (HNB) in order to set the budgets in accordance with the Schools Forum agreement and the government's directive to continue to move towards the National Funding Formula (NFF), using permitted NFF factors within DfE thresholds

Maintained school members of the Schools Forum **RESOLVED** to approve the proposed de-delegation arrangements set out within the report. These included include adjustments to the de-delegated contingencies budget to:

- Reduce the allocation for supporting schools in financial difficulty in line with current spend.
- Increase the allocation for free school meals eligibility checking service based on actual cost.
- Increase allocations for staff-related costs, including maternity and paternity supply cover and trade union facility time in line with current spend.

## 8. **Early Years Block Budgets 2026/27**

Pallavi Shah (Senior Finance Analyst, Brent Council) introduced a report from the Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development, which set out the DSG Early Years' (EY) Block funding for Brent. The Forum noted the following key points as part of the update provided:

- The report sought Schools Forum endorsement of the local EY Funding Formula for 2026/27, following the confirmation of the DSG Early Years' (EY) Block funding for Brent.
- The 2026/27 EY Block funding for Brent is £45.4m, an increase of 12.9% from 2025/26 allocations.
- The Forum was updated on Brent's EY Funding Formula for 2026/27, as supported by the EY Funding Subgroup.
- The maintained nursery schools supplementary funding has increased from £91m to £92m, which was an uplift of 9%. The hourly rate has also increased by 3.8%.

The Chair thanked Pallavi Shah for her report. As no further questions or comments were raised the Forum **RESOLVED** to

- (1) Note the requirement for local authorities to have an additional support 2-year-old rate that was at least equal to the rate for 2-year-old children of working parents.
- (2) Endorse Brent's EY Funding Formula for 2026/27, as supported by the EY Funding Subgroup on the basis of the following updates being applied to the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF):
  - a) A universal base rate for Brent providers for 3 and 4-year-old funding of £6.33 per hour. This represents an 9.9% increase of £0.57p from £5.76 in 2025/26.
  - b) Following a review of the benchmarking data, a reduction in the deprivation supplement from 10% to 5% from the 3 and 4-year-old funding allocation, bringing it in line with other local authorities.
  - c) A base rate of £9.91 to pay Brent providers for the additional support (formerly known as the disadvantaged) 2-year-old entitlement. This represents a 1.4% increase of £0.14 from £9.77 in 2025/26.
  - d) A base rate of £9.51 to pay Brent providers for the 2-year-old working parent entitlement. This represents a 0.7% increase of £0.07 from £9.44 in 2025/26.
  - e) A base rate of £13.00 to pay Brent providers for children aged 9 months up to 2 years. This represents a 0.6% increase of £0.08 from £12.92 in 2025/26.
  - f) A reduction of 1% (from 4% to 3%) of funding centrally retained by the local authority from the 3 and 4-year-old funding, following the DfE's mandatory requirement to pass through a minimum of 97% of this funding to early years providers.
  - g) An increase from 2% to 3% in centrally retained funding by the local authority from 2-year-old working parent and 9-months old to 2-year-old working parents, in line with the DfE's requirement to pass through a minimum of 97% of this funding to early years providers.
  - h) An allocation of £0.644m for the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIFF), in line with the DfE's expectation that local authorities earmark this funding for children below compulsory school age with special educational needs (SEN) eligible for or taking up the new and existing entitlements, regardless of the number of hours taken and based on local eligibility. This funding will be allocated by the Under 5s Nursery Panel, and both PVI and maintained providers can apply for this funding. The SENIFF will continue to target children with low-level and emerging needs, ensuring inclusive provision for vulnerable children.
  - i) An introduction of a contingency fund of £0.37m to help manage fluctuations in the take up of the entitlements after the census. This fund will serve as a key mechanism for maintaining flexibility and support the management of volumes and budgets throughout the year. A contingency fund was needed for 2026/27 in response to the DfE's move to a termly funding system, where all early years' entitlement will be funded based on actual termly census headcounts.
- (3) To note that local authorities must announce their funding rates to childcare providers by 28 February 2026, as this deadline was now a statutory requirement under the regulations from the financial year 2026/27.

## 9. Any Other Urgent Business

## **9.1 Family Friendly Policies**

Given the Forum's focus on school funding, it was **AGREED** that an issue raised by Lucy Cox regarding to Family Friendly Policies within schools would be picked up as part of the NEU's regular meeting with Shirley Parks. Director of Education, Partnerships and Strategy.

## **9.2 Head of Education & Learning**

Shirley Parks took the opportunity to introduce Gareth Drawmer to the Forum as Brent Council's newly appointed Head of Education and Learning.

## **10. Dates of Future Meetings**

Members noted the remaining date for the meeting of the Schools Forum for the 2025-26 Municipal Year as follows:

- Thursday 26 February 2026

The meeting closed at 6:50pm.

Andy Prindiville  
Vice Chair in Chair