

BRENT SCHOOLS FORUM

**Minutes of the Schools Forum held on
Wednesday 16 September 2015 at The Village School**

Attended by Members of the Forum:

Governors:	Mike Heiser (MH) Helga Gladbaum (HG) Sue Knowler (SK) Christine Starkl (CS)
Head Teachers:	Rose Ashton (RA) Lesley Benson (LB) Martine Clark (MC) Sylvie Libson (SL) Melissa Loosemore (ML) Andy Prindiville (AP) Troy Sharpe (TS)
PRU:	Terry Hoad (TH)
PVI Sector:	
Trade Unions:	Lesley Gouldbourne (LG)
14-19 Partnership:	
Lead Member (C&YP):	Cllr Ruth Moher (RM)
Officers:	John Galligan (JG) Cate Duffy (CD) Norwena Thomas (NT) Devbai Patel (DP) Carmen Coffey (CC) Angela Chiswell (AC)

ITEM DISCUSSION**i. Introductions**

There were a few new members due to recent elections, therefore introductions were made by everyone.

ii. Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair

NT opened the Forum. She said that following re-elections MH has been re-elected for Chair, and SL was re-elected to be the Vice-Chair.

The Forum commenced at 18:15. MH thanked DP for circulating guidance including links to the DfE's website, in particular the Schools Forum Operational Guide. He said there will be some abbreviations and jargon so if new members did not know what they were, they should feel free to ask. The Forum would be made jargon free as much as possible.

iii. Apologies for Absence

Gill Bal
Kay Charles
Rabbi Yitzchak Freeman
Desi Lodge Patch
Herman Martyn
Titilola McDowell
Narinder Nathan
Minesh Patel
Umesh Raichada
Paul Russell (retrospectively)
Gail Tolley

iv. Absences

Marc Jordan

1 Declarations of Interests

None

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 24th June 2015 and Matters Arising**2.1 Accuracy**

2.1.1 Paragraph 5.10 a, b and c should say that these recommendations were agreed unanimously instead of indicating there were no objections and abstains.

2.1.2 LB said she said a lot more than what was stated in paragraph 5.6 but felt that it wasn't all recorded. She couldn't remember what was said, but wanted it noted that more was said.

2.1.3 The above amendments were noted and the minutes were approved as an accurate record.

2.2 Matters Arising

2.2.1 Update on VAT as to why the VA schools are not exempted from paying VAT on the governors' liability of capital funding and Academies are exempted – NT said that a letter was written to and she understood that a follow up letter was sent. AP thought that the law had changed recently. His school was able to make a retrospective VAT claim of about £170k. NT stated that she was not aware of any changes to the law with regards to the VAT claims. TS suggested speaking to Inigo Woolf . This was to be followed up.

2.2.2 School Meals budget – officers to find out from other authorities if their schools have funding issue for meals that have to pureed and for kosher meals – NT said that a letter was sent out before Sara Williams left but was to be followed up.

2.2.3 Benchmarking of End to End process and cost per pupil in processing admissions application - CC apologised that this wasn't complete but will bring it to the October Forum.

2.2.4 Review of impact of funding a full-time post to manage Early Years Pupil Premium Grant (EYPPG) – This report is on the Forward Plan for October's Forum. LB said that she is still waiting for money. The process has still not been established. Children have left and schools are still chasing payment. CD said that she will take this back to check and will provide a response in the meantime.

2.2.5 SL asked if there was a person in post as there didn't appear to be much progress and no contacts have been made with the schools. CC

replied saying that there has been change since the post was approved by Schools Forum. The person has started and is currently dealing with applications coming in. The difference is that the eligibility checks are done with her team.

- 2.2.6 School Expansions - review amount per pupil - this was raised at the last meeting by Matthew Lantos to review the hourly rates for expanding schools. The schools that expand receive £3,300 or £3,600 if they are in an annexe. Matthew felt that this was low compared with the amount paid for pupils as calculated through the funding formula. CD apologised that there was no progress in this as she was new and wasn't present at the last Forum. She asked if a paper was required to be brought to Schools Forum. LB said that the officers need to communicate in order for the reports to be prepared when needed and presented to the Schools Forum.

3 Free School Meal Eligibility 2016-17

This report was for approval by the maintained primary and secondary schools.

- 3.1 CC presented this report. The de-delegation amount requested was £27,750. This amount covers staffing costs, application forms, web pages, on-line applications, liaising with DFE and DWP, updating information and advising schools of eligible pupils/families. Sometimes eligibility can be a contentious issue and the council deals with a high number of queries and applications where families are not eligible for free meals. Staff use the parents NI number to check eligibility with the DWP. Although parents are not required to re-apply each year, eligibility tests are undertaken at least annually. CC highlighted that there was an error in the report under paragraph 4.8 where it stated '*...a cost of processing eligibility for free school meals in Brent as £1.00 per application if based on the number of pupils in Brent School*'. This should have stated that '*...the total cost is £1 per pupil in maintained schools in Brent*'.
- 3.2 The report requests a continuation of the de-delegation arrangements. SL highlighted that there is a huge issue in schools in the lower primary schools due to pupils being offered free school meals. One of her schools is losing £50k this year compared to last year.
- 3.3 TS said that whether or not this was allowed, at his school they are telling parents that the pupils will not be given meals if they do not complete the FSM application form. The general consensus of the Forum was that this was not allowed and should not be done.

- 3.4 LB asked about the recent communication regarding the LGFL alternative to checking. CC replied that the LGFL allows parents to check if they are eligible, rather than the school checking. The communication was to promote the new system available. The LGFL system will then send Brent an email, and the council will carry out the normal checks. CC said that there is a School Admissions meeting on 12th November and FSM and the EYPP will be on the agenda of this meeting.
- 3.5 RA asked if parents go to Civic Centre and CC replied that they did not have to. The council continues to receive forms in a number of formats, including via the post, hand-delivered or sent through the school bags.
- 3.6 TS suggested learning from other boroughs like Islington for which It works. CD stated that Islington has a very different set up as they offer schools meals to all schools.
- 3.7 LG said she supports de-delegation. The service schools get from CC and her is team is very good. SK agreed and added that not many people would want to do the job the team was doing.
- 3.8 Both primary and secondary maintained schools were invited to vote on the de-delegation of Free School Meals eligibility assessments:
- Primary - agreed by all 6 representatives.
Secondary - agreed by 1 representative (there is only 1 representation).
- 3.9 It was asked if the academies pay for this service and was confirmed that they are not currently charged but this was to be looked into.

4 The Gordon Brown Outdoor Education Centre

This report was for approval by all members

- 4.1 AC presented this report. This report requested £60k to continue supporting the sustainability of the centre as a residential outdoor activity centre for Brent children. In 2014-15 revenue generated from Activity days and other non residential activities increased by 23%. 1,705 children stayed on residential visits and a further 2,969 took part in activity days. Brent schools receive subsidised prices and priority booking over other schools. The staff work increasingly hard to keep the centre going, and the centre is working at 94% of the maximum capacity.

- 4.2 AC added that since the last report, there had been a number of improvements to the centre, including a new high ropes course, a fox-proof area, and a new climbing wall. In addition corporate volunteers have contributed to improving the facilities at the centre. The centre has also recently had additional capital funding of £500k approved by Cabinet to replace the Shrubbery dormitory. This will make the centre sustainable with more flexible accommodation that will help to prevent under-occupancy e.g. owing to male/female ratios in visiting groups. The replacement for the Shrubbery should also result in lower maintenance and utility costs and will increase the capacity to house children from the current maximum of 26 to 40. Recently schools have expanded and in some cases have found that they are too big to attend the centre. The increased capacity will now be able to accommodate larger schools.
- 4.3 SL said that it is a fantastic resource centre used by children across the borough.
- 4.4 MH invited all members to vote and this was agreed unanimously.

5 Duke of Edinburgh's Award Programme in Brent Schools

This report was for approval by all Members

- 5.1 AC presented this report. The report requests funding from DSG for transition support from January to March 2016 to support schools to move to a position whereby each holds their own DofE Operating Licences from 1 April 2016 and in 2016-17 only, to pay for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) license on behalf of participating schools. Three options were presented.
- 5.2 The DofE Award Programme is delivered nationally under licence with the council currently holding the license for all participating Brent schools plus the Open Award Centre. Council staff meet with schools and provide quality assurance for the programme. As part of significant cuts to council services, the Youth Service is being affected and it will not be sustainable within Brent to run the programme under the current model within the remaining current budget. Subject to Cabinet decision in October, the Council's Open Award Centre will close from 1 April 2016. The net operating cost of the Open Award Centre is £63k with an additional £39k of income generated from schools and young people that take part. The service currently has 10 employees totalling 2.09 FTE.
- 5.3 AP said it was a great shame not to continue with the current operating programme but was not convinced that it would continue once passed on to schools to run under their own licences. TH asked if one year transition funding would be any help if the schools are unlikely to

continue. AC replied and said that transition support had happened elsewhere and that where that was the case, schools had continued with the DofE programme.. LB asked why it was being offered to schools that weren't already part of the programme. AC said it was a good enrichment programme for schools and achieves good outcomes. AP added that this would be a once only offer to give non-participating schools an option to take up the programme.

- 5.4 RM asked why the DofE programme was done in some schools, and the Jack Petchey Award in others. AP said this was historical. LB asked if this would be top-sliced from 2016-17 DSG. Can it wait to compare against other services to fund the priority ones. CD said that once the votes were taken, there wasn't a way of going back, and any further proposals would have to be considered in that context.
- 5.5 AP said that it was a good programme and if all schools engaged, he felt that there would be a chance of continuing with it as had happened with the Connexions Service to schools. SK thought the money was irrelevant. Secondary schools have never voted against the Gordon Brown Outdoor Education Centre even though it is mainly primary schools that benefit, this would act like a sweetener to allow the secondary school to take this over. SK also suggested that if it is cheaper for Brent to hold the license then the Forum should consider continuing to pay the license.
- 5.6 MC suggested as an alternative that schools worked collaboratively to continue with the present operating model and asked if BSP could take this up. This was agreed as a good option to explore. AP suggested providing further information at the next Secondary Heads meeting, and AC was happy to attend with AP.
- 5.7 MH invited all members to vote to fund up a maximum of £24,000 to include an offer to all 15 Brent Secondary schools to comprise:
- Up to £19,050 for the cost of 2016/17 licences
 - Up to £4,950 for transition support from DofE London Region from January to March 2016 in preparation for schools taking on their own licences from 1 April 2016. This was agreed unanimously.

6 Updated Finance Policies: Schools Financial Regulations and Scheme for Financing Schools

This report was for approval and consultation by maintained school members

- 6.1 NT presented this item. The report provides a revision to the Schools Financial Regulations and the Scheme for Financing Schools, both of which were approved last year. The changes are mainly around

procurement due to the change in contract regulations, and there were a few discrepancies between the two reports which have been identified and corrected for these revisions. There have also been two changes to the national Scheme for Financing Schools, which NT expanded on, as detailed within the report.

- 6.2 SL raised concerns about a number of regulations that she did not agree with. One area of concern is that schools are required to submit a budget by 1st June and to fix it. She did not agree with this deadline because they are not aware of their actual Pupil Premium (PP) by then. This was received in July. NT explained that the statutory deadline for schools to submit their budgets is between 1st May to 30th June. Brent has historically set a date in the middle of this deadline as 1st June. Schools are expected to set their budgets based on the best known information at the time, using estimates where necessary. Fixing the budget on the system enables an audit trail of virements made, which should tie back to those approved by the Governing Body and all appropriate documentation. With regards to the grant information, pupil premium numbers are not released by the DfE until July. This was previously not known until October. Schools had been advised to make an estimate based on the pupil information known to them.
- 6.3 RA referred to Control of Assets where it states that Brent strongly suggests that schools record all items above £100. She said this was very low amount for schools. NT responded that this was in last year's Scheme for Financing Schools, and is being clarified in this guidance. LB asked that Brent strongly recommends some things and when Audit comes, would it be a problem. NT said there shouldn't be because the regulations state over £1000. RA asked if Audit will accept what is written in the guidance to which NT said Audit and other relevant departments have been consulted and therefore should not be a problem. MH said Audit should have a copy of the regulations with them when auditing.
- 6.4 CD suggested if setting up a Task Group would be a best way forward. This was agreed by Head teachers. CD said it would be helpful if Head teachers would meet to consider the Regulations and send reps to the Task Group who could present the issues of general concern.
- 6.5 SL raised concern over the regulations for income receipting and felt that schools are being asked to do too much and that it is not possible to receipt all income. She felt that this is unmanageable e.g. cannot issue a receipt for every book sold to children. Some of these are less than a £1 and would create extra workload. RA stated that a stock control is used in her school, which clearly states what is sold and the cash is reconciled, rather than recording every single item sold by the school.

- 6.6 NT said that such areas can be looked at by the suggested Task Group, but cautioned that there are some areas that would not be up for negotiation as Brent must follow national regulations. There are however some areas which are open for interpretation and can therefore be reviewed.
- 6.7 SL suggested that the BSP could nominate Head Teachers representing all sectors. SL was asked to circulate her comments for Task Group to review.
- 6.8 LB wanted to know the time frame for the regulations to come back to Schools Forum. CD said we can aim for December 2015, though this could not be confirmed for sure as we do not yet know how much work, and therefore how long this will take.
- 6.9 An error was identified in Appendix B – Schools Financial Regulations, paragraph B.6.4. It states that ‘For schools that are in deficit, budget monitoring reports shall be submitted to the Schools Finance Team termly’. This should be monthly. NT clarified that from 2015-16 schools are required to submit budget monitoring reports quarterly and schools in deficit are required to submit them monthly. This was to be corrected before publishing the Schools Financial Regulations.
- 6.10 AP said that he was not aware of the changes in relation to the publishing of the Register of Business Interests. He asked if officers could send out an email to all schools. JG said that this was included in the last Governors newsletter and will also be included in the next Head Teacher’s bulletin. CD added that a graduate will start with C&YP soon and one of the tasks will be to review schools’ websites for compliance with regard to all the statutory information that should be published.
- 6.11 Recommendations:
- 6.11.1 The Schools Forum was requested to approve the changes to the **Scheme for Financing Schools 2015-16**.
- a. This was approved.
- 6.11.2 The Schools Forum was formally consulted on **Schools Financial Regulations 2015-16**.
- b. It was agreed that a Task Group would be set up to review this. This was also to be referred to the BSP to nominate Head teachers from all sectors to be represented. It was recommended that all Head Teachers should read the Schools Financial Regulations 2015-16 and provide a feedback to the Task Group. Once this was finalised by the Task Group, it should be brought back to the Schools Forum for consultation. This is anticipated to be in December 2015.

7 AOB

7.1 None

8 The Forum ended at 7.55pm

ACTION LOG

Item No	Action	Due	Owner
1	Update on VAT – why the VA schools are not exempted from paying VAT on the governors' liability of capital funding and Academies are exempted. If this has been followed up as no reply was received to the original query.	Oct 15	CD
2	Update on additional School Meals funding for pureed and kosher meals – If this has been followed up as no reply was received to the original query.	Oct 15	CD
3	Benchmarking of End to End process and cost per pupil in processing admissions application. This will be brought to September Forum.	Oct 15	CC
4	Review of impact of funding a full-time post to manage Early Years Pupil Premium Grant. Update on EY PPG payments.	Oct 15	SG
5	Clarification of query regarding hourly rate for schools that expand.	Oct 15	CC
6	Set up a Task Group to review Schools Financial Regulations 2015-16.	Dec 15	NT
7	SL to circulate her comments made on Schools Financial Regulations 2015-16.	Oct 15	SL