

SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.30 pm on 21 September 2017

Present:

Andrew Downes (Chairman)	Secondary Academy Governor
David Bridger (Vice-Chairman)	Non-School Representative (Church of England)
Linda Day	Business Manager, Chislehurst School for Girls
David Dilling	Primary Academy Governor
Richard Edmunds	Primary Academy Head Teacher
Neil Miller	PRU Head Teacher
Keith Seed	Special Head Teacher/Governor
Sally Weeks	Head Teacher, Poverest Primary School
David Wilcox	Secondary Academy Governor

Also Present:

David Bradshaw	Head of ECHS Finance
Pip Hesketh	Head of Access and Inclusion
Jo Partridge	Democratic Services Officer
Philippa Gibbs	Democratic Services Officer

6 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Patrick Foley, Paul Murphy, Sam Parrett, Karen Raven and Aydin Önaç. Sally Weeks attended as a substitute for Patrick Foley and Linda Day attended as a substitute for Karen Raven.

7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Neil Miller declared an interest by virtue of being the Headteacher of Bromley Trust Academy (BTA).

8 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 MARCH 2017

Neil Miller asked for an update on the review of the constitution, specifically whether provision would be made for a Special Academy School representative. The Head of ECHS Finance reported that the constitution would be kept as it was, with one Special School Representative. This decision was questioned on the basis that the DfE guidance for Schools' Forums stated that if a Local Authority had both a Special Maintained School and a Special Academy School, a representative from each should sit on the Forum. The Head of ECHS Finance confirmed that he had previously spoken to the DfE about this issue but nevertheless agreed to review the guidance again and report back to the next meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th March 2017, were approved and signed as a correct record subject to item 34: Apologies for absence, second paragraph, third sentence being amended to read:

"The Head of ECHS Finance...."

9 SPENDING BY PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND SPECIAL MAINTAINED SCHOOLS IN 2016/17

Report ED18026

The Schools' Forum considered a report which provided information on all revenue and capital balances held by Primary, Secondary and Special Maintained Schools as at 31st March 2017, and also provided a comparison to the balances held at the same time in the previous year.

The average level of revenue balances both committed and uncommitted for Maintained Primary Schools stood at 10% of School Budget shares compared to 11% at the end of 2015/16. For Maintained Secondary Schools this figure stood at 10% (compared to 9% in 2015/16) and for Special Schools this figure stood at 7.2% (compared to 7% in 2015/16).

All schools with balances in excess of 8% had been asked to complete a proforma detailing the reason for holding a high balance and their plans for reducing the balance in year. One primary school had ended the financial year with a deficit and had been asked to provide a deficit recovery plan.

The Head of ECHS Finance reminded members that the report did not provide spending details for academy schools, and advised that for 2016/17 no schools fell into the categories for which DfE would require further analysis to be undertaken. The Chairman noted that it would be interesting to look back at the report from the previous year to compare whether school expenditure was the same.

RESOLVED: that the balances be noted.

10 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN REPORT 2016/17

Report ED18008

The Schools' Forum considered a report which provided financial information reported to the Education, Children and Families Budget and Performance Monitoring Sub-Committee. This showed an underspend of £109,000 for the "controllable" element of the Non-Schools' Budget, a reduction from the last reported figure of £75,000 overspend based on activity at the end of December 2016. This was largely due to an underspend on staffing and running expenses for the Early Intervention Service including additional recharge of Public Health

grant, as well as a small underspend on the Youth Offending Service relating to staffing and running costs. There was also an underspend of £226,000 on the Schools' Budget which was funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant, and would be added to £1.4m carry forward funding remaining from 2015/16, giving a total of £1.6m to be carried forward into 2017/18. A number of carry forward requests had been agreed by the Council's Executive at its meeting on 20th June 2017, which related to either unspent grant income or delays in expenditure where cost pressures would follow through into 2017/18.

A member noted that the report seemed to show that there had been an overspend of £1.5m for the Beacon House refurbishment. The Head of ECHS Finance said that figure had been presentational, the money had been set aside and no additional cost had been incurred.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

11 UPDATE ON 2017/18 DSG EXPENDITURE

Report ED18025

The Schools' Forum considered a report which provided an update on DSG expenditure in 2017/18 with particular focus on the High Needs and Early Years Block.

In January 2017, the Schools' Forum agreed a balanced budget for the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2017/18, on the basis that a balancing figure of £1.057m from the Schools block was used to offset an overspend within the High Needs Block – the Early Years Block was at that time deemed to be self-funding. In August 2017, the Council was notified of an adjustment to the Early Years Block due to reduced pupil numbers on the January 2017 census. As a result of this the overall income for 2017/18 reduced from £20.029m to £19.096m with the reduction relating specifically to 3 and 4 year old and 2 year old funding. The Council reviewed the expenditure based on these numbers and was anticipating a potential underspend in the Early Years Block as a result of the reduction in numbers. However it was recommended that this be held in contingency as the underspend was likely to be recouped retrospectively by the DfE in 2018/19.

The Council was also notified of a retrospective adjustment to the Early Years funding for 2016/17 with £475,000 being deducted from this year's DSG to reflect a decrease in pupil numbers in 2016/17. There had also been a significant increase in High Needs expenditure during the year. This was due mainly to increased pressure resulting in increased place numbers for several of the special schools as this was deemed to be the most economical way for accommodating this pressure as opposed to sending pupils to out of borough placements which were often far more costly. However, as there was no adjustment to the DSG grant to reflect the needs of these pupils additional pressure was placed on the High Needs Block. The High Needs Block had already been charged with finding around £750,000 of savings in year – some of this had already been achieved by applying a 1.5% MFG reduction to top up funding for special schools and units

and also to matrix funding for SEND pupils within mainstream schools. Other savings were identified within the central SEND expenditure. The Council had commissioned a company called SEND4Change to carry out a full review of the overall High Needs Block and whilst it is envisaged that this would highlight areas of best practice where savings could be made it was expected that this would be a long term strategy and would not identify any additional savings within the current financial year.

A net overspend of £0.377m across the whole of the Dedicated Schools Grant had been identified, with the focus specifically on the increased overspend in the High Needs Block. However, the Council had identified an underspend of £1.623m to be carried forward from 2016/17. This could be used to offset the overspend and meant that the Council would move into 2018/19 with an expected underspend of £771,000.

The DfE carried out another exercise in April and May 2017 to collect information from Councils on spend in order to baseline DSG grant funding and mirror expenditure in each block as far as possible. The intention was that this was then used to inform the starting positions of the 2018/19 DSG allocations. The movement between the High Needs and the Schools Block of £1.05m had been consolidated into the re-baselined figures for 2018/19. There was also a further adjustment from the High Needs Block to the Schools Block of £1.54m which related to the proposed changes to funding for unit places in mainstream schools. The Head of ECHS Finance noted that guidance would be published in the summer, and that there could be the option for 0.5% to move across into the High Needs Block.

A member enquired as to where the core funding for the Harris Aspire Academy originated from. The Head of ECHS Finance said that historically the DfE had directed LBB to make payments to High Needs Academies and Free Schools following a 10% top slice. Members queried if Harris Aspire were held to account with regard to the number of students and quality of the provision, and questioned whether predominantly Bromley students were placed in the provision or whether Bromley funding was being used to support non-Bromley students. It was requested that information be provided to the Schools' Forum regarding how many students that attended the Harris Aspire Academy were Bromley residents; if the school was subject to the same scrutiny as others schools within the borough; and if the provision was subject to the same funding cuts as other Bromley schools. The Head of ECHS Finance agreed that it would be a concern for LBB if the provision was not being used by Bromley students and would provide details at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

12 SCHOOLS REVENUE FUNDING 2018/19

Report ED18028

The Schools' Forum considered a report which provided an overview of the operational guidance issued to local authorities in August to help them plan the

local implementation of the national funding formula for the 2018 to 2019 financial year.

In August 2017, the DfE published new operational guidance to help local authorities and their school forums to plan the implementation of the new national funding system for the 2018/19 financial year. The full national funding formulae for 2018/19 and 2019/20 would be confirmed in September 2017 with indicative LA level allocations for the schools, central school services and high needs blocks. Final allocations would be issued in December 2017, based on pupil numbers recorded in the October census.

The Government had confirmed that there would be an additional £1.3 billion for schools and high needs across 2018/19 and 2019/20. This would mean an increase for all local authorities over their planned spending for 2017/18.

In 2018/19 and 2019/20 the national funding formula would be used to calculate notional allocations for each school, which would be aggregated and used to calculate the total schools block for each authority, however in those years local authorities would continue to determine final funding allocations for schools through their local formula.

There were a number of both significant and smaller changes to the funding system which were set out in detail in the report. The Head of ECHS Finance noted that these changes had resulted in an additional £1.54m in funding for LB Bromley.

The local authority was required to engage in open and transparent consultation with all schools and academies, as well as with the Schools' Forum, about any proposed changes to the local funding formula including the method, principles and rules adopted. Any consultation had to include a demonstration of the effect of any changes on individual schools or academies. The Head of ECHS Finance advised members that allowable school funding factors had seen the baseline totality for the DSG increase by 1.5%, however it was noted that this figure was provisional until the October census. Three choices had been suggested for consultation with the schools – to continue to use the existing LA funding formula; to move directly to the national funding formula; to adjust the existing formula to move towards the national funding formula over a period of either one or two years.

A member noted that there was a problem within the funding formula in relation to Special School's core funding. It would result in a student at a mainstream school being allocated funding of over £16,000, as opposed to £10,000 if they were in a Special School. The Head of ECHS Finance agreed to raise this with the DfE.

Following a discussion, members agreed that the consultation process should begin and schools should be presented with two options - to continue to use the existing LA funding formula or to move directly to the national funding formula. A comment should also be added that if the schools disliked both options they should indicate if they would support a hybrid in between the two. The Head of ECHS Finance suggested that another meeting of the Schools' Forum, or a

working group, should meet to discuss the outcome of the consultation before the next scheduled meeting in November 2017.

RESOLVED: that

1. The report be noted; and

2. The LA consult with all schools providing at least two comparisons and the proposed time frame for consultation be agreed.

13 PRIMARY INCLUSION OUTREACH STRATEGY

Report ED18029

The Schools' Forum considered a report proposing that the development of Inclusion Outreach Services for Primary Schools for a two year period. Primary school permanent exclusions in Bromley had tripled in number since 2012 whilst the national trend was one of reducing numbers. In 2016/17 a total of 84 pupils were permanently excluded (compared to 46 in 2012). Of these, 17 were primary school pupils (compared to 5 in 2012). It was noted by the Head of Access and Inclusion that most neighbouring boroughs had low numbers of permanent exclusions of primary school children, most with none.

Previous decisions to reduce the Council run support services and instead re-distribute funding to schools had led to a greatly diminished ability to support schools from the centre. This was particularly acute where schools were supporting children who had additional learning needs or complex social and familial circumstances but did not meet the thresholds either for a statutory Education Health and Care Plan or for social care support. These children did not have the infrastructure of entitlement but without intervention, ran the risk of developing needs that would one day reach the required thresholds. The re-distribution of funding between schools was intended to give each school an individual allocation with which to procure their own support services. The Inclusion Support Advisory Teaching (ISAT) Team supported schools at a strategic level with systems development, training and advice. There was no capacity within the team (which comprised three posts) to support individual children.

What was being proposed was to pump-prime a specialist Inclusion Outreach Service to primary schools in order to support them with their most challenging children, as a pilot for 2 years. The funding would be split over either two or three financial years. It was hoped that the value and impact of the pilot will be demonstrated and it was the intention that schools each contributed to the project in year three to make it self-funding. Effectively, it would provide the foundation for collectively funded Outreach Services.

A member enquired as to why neighbouring boroughs had much lower exclusion numbers. The Head of Access and Inclusion responded that some neighbouring boroughs had central support services in place, while at LBB no one had been in

her post for the previous four years. Bromley had also seen a significant change in demographic whereas boroughs such as Croydon, for example, had not had the demographic shift that Bromley had experienced, and were therefore better equipped to deal with families that had lived in the borough for a number of years and may have been previously known to the central service.

In response to a question, the Head of Access and Inclusion advised members that exclusions were not always random and that some schools had higher rates of exclusion than others. These were often schools located within areas where the community faced a number of social challenges including low income and health issues. SEN students accounted for 75% of the cases, but tended to be students with underlying needs that had not been identified.

A member asked what the capacity for the service was in terms of number of pupils, and the criteria if the service became overwhelmed. The Head of Access and Inclusion highlighted that the service was overwhelmed currently, but that level of detail had not yet been finalised. There was a need to be flexible and work with the ISAT team to exceed what would normally be expected. Capacity would depend on the individual needs of the child, but could be up to 30 children at any one time. An individual package would be created for each child, with support being offered for two or three days a week.

In response to a question, the Head of Access and Inclusion advised members that the service would have tight performance requirements and a continuous review process. A review would take place at the end of the first year, as if the service was to continue into a third year, the procurement process would need to begin mid-way through the year two.

Members enquired as to what consultation had taken place with the primary schools regarding the service. The Head of Access and Inclusion noted that visibility was an issue, and that they did not want to compromise the services that schools were already buying in, but needed to ensure that the entitlement was offered. The Head of Access and Inclusion had attended the Primary Heads Forum and the Schools Partnership Board to present the service and had found the response to be generally supportive. A further presentation would be made at the next Primary Heads Forum to provide more details of the service.

Members raised concerns regarding the viability of the service continuing for a third year if not all schools agreed to pay. The Head of Access and Inclusion understood the concern which highlighted the importance of the review process. Some members felt that it was unfair if the cost was not spread borough-wide and suggested schools could agree and sign up before the service was implemented. The Head of Access and Inclusion said there was a need for an advisory board, consisting of Primary Headteachers and Finance Support which would create ownership and oversight.

A discussion took place and members agreed to support the development and commissioning of an Outreach Service for Bromley Primary Schools for two years in principle, but raised concerns regarding its sustainability. A request was made for Secondary School Headteachers to provide the Schools' Forum with

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information on their permanent exclusions including numbers of students, if any money was recouped and if so, what the money was used for. The Head of ECHS Finance agreed to report back at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: that the development and commissioning of an Outreach Service for Bromley Primary Schools for two years, in order to prevent the permanent exclusion of pupils be supported in principle.

14 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

15 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

23rd November 2017
11th January 2018

The Meeting ended at 6.07 pm

Chairman