

SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.30 pm on 12 July 2018

Present:

Andrew Downes (Chairman)	Secondary Academy Governor
David Bridger (Vice-Chairman)	Non-School Representative (Church of England)
Matthew Apsley	Primary Academy Headteacher
David Dilling	Primary Academy Governor
Richard Edmunds	Primary Academy Head Teacher
Angela Leeves	Non-School Representative (Early Years)
Neil Miller	PRU Head Teacher
Keith Seed	Special Head Teacher/Governor
David Wilcox	Secondary Academy Governor

Also Present:

David Bradshaw	Head of ECHS Finance
Amanda Russell	Head of Schools Finance Support

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Izabela Lecybyl, Karen Raven, Andrew Rees and Councillor Peter Fortune.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 JANUARY 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th January 2018 were approved, and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

Angela Leeves and Izabela Lecybyl to be added to the list of members present at the meeting.

There were no matters arising, however the Chairman noted that following the discussions that took place at the last Schools' Forum meeting, the London Borough of Bromley had decided to implement the National Funding Formula for all schools in 2018/19.

4 SPENDING BY PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND SPECIAL MAINTAINED SCHOOLS 2017/18

Report ED18057

The Forum considered a report setting out information on all revenue and capital balances held by Primary, Secondary and Special Maintained Schools as at 31st March 2018. The report also provided a comparison to the balances held at the same time in the previous year.

Balances were reported in accordance with the DfE Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR) Regulations. This was a framework for reporting income, expenditure and balances. It provided schools with a benchmarking facility for comparison between similar schools to promote self-management and value for money.

The average level of revenue balances, both committed and uncommitted, for Maintained Primary Schools stood at 9% of School Budget Shares, compared to 11% at the end of 2016/17, a decrease of 2%. Secondary School balances had also decreased by 3% to stand at 7%. Special School balances had increased from 8% to 10%.

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.

No further questions or comments regarding the report were received from members.

RESOLVED: That the balances be noted.

5 PROPOSED REVISIONS TO BROMLEY SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS

Report ED18056

The Forum considered a report outlining the proposed changes to the Bromley scheme for Financing Schools due to be issued in September 2018. Local Authorities were required to publish schemes for financing schools, setting out the financial relationship between them and the schools they maintain. Statutory guidance set out what local authorities must do to comply with the law.

The Bromley Scheme was last updated in 2013. Since then there had been only very minor changes to the scheme as proposed by the DfE and due to the reducing number of Maintained Schools the Bromley Scheme had not been updated on an annual basis.

The Head of Schools Finance Support advised members that as the pace at which Maintained Schools were converting to become Academies had slowed

over the last few years, with only one planning to do so in August / September 2018 and then no other conversions imminent, it had been considered a good time to review the changes. The Local Authority had therefore recently carried out a full review of the Scheme, and was proposing that a new Scheme be issued in September 2018.

It was noted that the minor changes made to the Bromley Scheme for Financing Schools were to reflect the changes of terminology that had taken place since 2013. The Head of Schools Finance Support highlighted particular changes, which included:

2.4 – Best Value – this section was now called 'Efficiency and Value for Money', and provided more guidance for schools as to how this might be achieved.

2.16 – Schools Financial Value Standard – outlined the requirement for Maintained Schools to comply with this annually, and would replace the current FMIS system.

3.6 – Borrowing by schools – provided specific mention that schools could participate in approved schemes. It had previously been forbidden for a Maintained School to borrow in any form, but this had been relaxed, allowing schools to use any schemes that the Secretary of State had said was available to them without specific approval, for example the Salix loan scheme which was designed to support energy saving.

The Head of Schools Finance Support confirmed that the Schools' Forum was the approving body for the changes made to the document. It was proposed that if members agreed to the suggested changes, which were largely cosmetic to bring the document up to date, it would be distributed to the Maintained Schools in September 2018.

Members of the Schools' Forum highlighted that as there were no Maintained School representatives present at the meeting, those being asked to approve the document would not actually be using it. In response, the Chairman noted that the meeting agenda had been circulated to all members of the Schools' Forum, and no feedback on the report and proposed changes had been provided by Maintained School representatives to be presented in their absence. The Head of Schools Finance Support stated that she would be happy to contact the relevant Maintained School Headteacher and Governor directly, and their responses could be provided to the next meeting of the School's Forum.

RESOLVED: That the proposed changes be agreed, with feedback from the Maintained Schools Headteacher and Governor to be provided to the next meeting of the Schools' Forum.

6 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A Primary Academy Headteacher advised members that he had been speaking with the LBB Head of Strategic Place Planning with regards to the current

situation of primary school places allocations. Four new primary schools had been established to meet the school places demand predicted for 2023 – Langley Park Primary School, Harris Primary Academy Beckenham, Harris Primary Academy Shortlands and La Fontaine Academy. The Local Authority had expected a school places allocation surplus of 5%, yet during the transition period, primary schools in Beckenham had a surplus of 10%, and across the Borough the surplus was envisaged to be greater than 5%.

At the previous meeting of the Schools' Forum, members had discussed the pros and cons of the National Funding Formula and the Bromley Funding Formula, and had considered that the only schools that would effectively lose out would be those not at capacity. Now, as a result of these four new schools being established, others schools that were usually full were now under capacity and it was highlighted that an additional surplus of places would result in a loss of funding that a school would receive.

The Head of Schools Finance Support said that whilst she was aware of the points made, she had not been given an opportunity to discuss this with the LBB Head of Strategic Place Planning prior to the meeting. It was noted that these four additional primary schools were Free Schools that were effectively imposed on the Borough, as the LA had not requested them and therefore had no involvement in where they were geographically situated. There was a similar situation in the secondary sector, with two new Free Schools being established. Eden Park High School had opened in September 2017, and subject to planning permission, Bullers Wood Boys School was due to open in September 2018.

The Head of Schools Finance Support advised members that there was a facility within the Funding Formulas for the Local Authority to have a 'Falling Rolls Fund' for those school that faced a drop in numbers. However there were stringent factors for accessing this type of fund – the school must have experienced a significant drop in numbers, and had an Ofsted rating of 'good' or 'outstanding'. The Head of Schools Finance Support said that any suggested changes to the Funding Formula would need to go out to full consultation with all schools during the autumn. The views of the Schools' Forum could then be discussed at the meeting in January 2019, following which agreement could be sought from the Council's Executive. It was noted that if any future alterations to the Funding Formula were approved, they would not be made retrospectively and would be implemented from April 2019 for Maintained Schools and September 2019 for Academies.

The Head of ECHS Finance advised members that he would contact the LBB Head of Strategic Place Planning to see if the report being produced could be circulated, as if so, would forward on to the clerk for distribution. Members of the Schools' Forum requested that an update on the situation be presented at the next meeting on 20th September 2018.

A Primary Academy Governor noted that the accounts for 2017/18 were not finalised, but enquired if there was any balances that would have an effect on the following year. The Head of ECHS Finance responded that accounts were

currently speculative, and the closing account report would be presented to the meeting of the Education, Children and Families Budget and Performance Monitoring Sub-Committee on 18th July 2018.

It was envisaged that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) would have a surplus that would be carried forward, which it had been agreed would be used to pay for elements within the central DSG block. It was not expected that there would be a huge surplus to carry forward into 2019/20, as there were ongoing pressures, especially within the High Needs Block that was experiencing a huge amount of demand. The Head of ECHS Finance advised that it was anticipated for information impacting on the 2019/20 budget to be received from the DfE by the end of the summer term, and would be circulated to members.

7 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

20th September 2018

29th November 2018

17th January 2019

The Meeting ended at 5.20 pm

Chairman