

SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.30 pm on 20 September 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
Patrick Foley	Primary Maintained Head Teacher
Izabela Lecybyl	Non-School Representative (Catholic Church)
Angela Leeves	Non-School Representative (Early Years)
Karen Raven	Secondary Academy Head Teacher
Andrew Rees	Secondary Maintained School Acting Head Teacher
Keith Seed	Special Head Teacher/Governor

Also Present:

David Bradshaw	Head of ECHS Finance
Philippa Gibbs	Democratic Services Officer

8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Richard Edmunds (Primary Academy Head Teacher), David Wilcox (Secondary Academy Governor), Neil Miller (PRU Headteacher), and Paul Murphy (Secondary Academy Head Teacher). Sunil Chotai attended as alternate for Paul Murphy.

The Chairman reported that after 15 years of fulfilling the role of Chairman to the Schools' Forum this would be his last meeting as he would no longer be eligible to sit on the Schools' Forum. It was noted that consideration would need to be given to electing a Chairman at the next meeting.

9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In respect of Minute 12 (Falling Rolls Fund), David Dilling declared that his grandchildren attended one of the schools that could potentially benefit from the fund.

10 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 JULY 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th July 2018 were approved, and signed as a correct record.

**11 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN REPORT 2017/18
Report CSD18144**

The Schools' Forum considered an information report outlining the financial information reported to the Education, Children and Families Budget and Performance Monitoring Sub-Committee on 18th July 2018. The provisional outturn for the "controllable" element of the Education, Children and Families budget in 2017/18 was an overspend of £925k compared to the latest reported figure of an overspend of £874k which was based on activity at the end of December 2017. The DSG Schools' Budget had underspent by £32k in 2017/18, this would be added to the £1.6m carried forward from 2016/17. The carry forward position had been adjusted by an Early Years funding adjustment made by DfE which had reduced the amount available by £475k. After a further adjustment of £190k for central funding the amount carried forward into 2018/19 would be around £800k.

In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman regarding the Early Years adjustment, the Head of ECHS Finance explained that the DfE assumed a level of funding and a level of take up for Early Years. Any adjustments arising from the difference between the reality and the assumptions were taken retrospectively.

The Forum noted that as a result of funding pressures the financial position was currently volatile. There were continuing pressures in the High Needs Block and work to mitigate against these pressures was ongoing. Further information would be presented to the Schools' Forum as part of the budget setting process. In the meantime, the Head of ECHS reported that further Budget Monitoring was due at the end of September 2018 and a further update could be provided to the Schools' Forum at its next meeting.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

**12 FALLING ROLLS FUND
Report CSD18143**

The Schools' Forum considered a report outlining the requirements for establishing a falling rolls fund to support schools that were facing financial difficulties due to a temporary reduction in pupil numbers. At the last Schools Forum meeting the Primary Head Teacher representatives raised an issue concerning the number of unfilled reception places across all primary schools in the Borough, and the financial impact that this was having on these schools. It was agreed that the LA would carry out a full review of this, to include the possibility of introducing a "falling rolls fund" to support schools experiencing the financial impact of this.

In accordance with DfE guidelines, local authorities were able to top slice the DSG in order to create a small fund to support good schools with falling rolls where local planning data demonstrated that the surplus places would be needed in the near future. Criteria for allocating falling rolls funding should contain clear objective trigger points for qualification and a clear formula for calculating allocations.

The October 2017 census data showed that there were 220 vacant reception places across the Borough – this varied from one or two vacancies across a large number of schools to vacancies of over 20 places in some individual schools. This data would have been used to calculate 2018/19 funding from April 2018 for maintained schools and September 2018 for academies. The final numbers for 2018 would not be known until after October, however early data indicated that the figures may be higher although it was anticipated that these numbers would change by October. Although the issue had not been highlighted by secondary schools, the year 7 admission data had also been included which showed there was only one school with a significant number of vacant places.

Current data indicated that whilst primary reception numbers had fallen slightly since their peak in 2015/16, need remained strong with further growth forecast in planning areas 3 (Hayes and West Wickham) and 4 (Central Bromley). The current vacancy rate across the Borough (7%) was slightly higher than the Council's target of 5% with vacancies generally spread across a small number of schools borough-wide. Future projections for secondary places very closely match the future provision of places with 2 additional Free Schools proposed due to open provided by the ESFA in future years. Currently there were some surplus places in the east of the Borough.

Based on the information provided, the Local Authority had looked at the possibility of introducing a falling rolls fund and what this may cost. It was noted that this cost would be top sliced from the Schools Block, as was done with the Growth fund, and would therefore impact on the amount of funding available to be distributed to all schools.

The suggested terms of the fund would be as follows:

- Support available only for schools judged Good or Outstanding at their last Ofsted inspection (this was a mandatory requirement)
- Surplus capacity exceeds 20% of the published admission number (PAN)
- Local planning data shows a requirement for at least 80% of the surplus places in the next 3 years
- Formula funding available to the school will not support provision of an appropriate curriculum for the existing cohort – school to provide copy of 3 year budget data to support this
- The school will need to make redundancies in order to contain spending within its formula budget – school to provide evidence of formal discussions at governing body level to support this
- To be funded at the AWPU value per vacant place, up to a specified maximum number of places equivalent to 80% of PAN
- No funding to be paid where schools are already being supported through the existing growth fund or to free schools which are funded on estimated pupil numbers.

Based on the indicative data that was currently available there were six primary schools that would be eligible for funding which was estimated at £98k, however

this figure would go down if the number of vacancies decreases as anticipated as there were often a number of new starters in September that did not show up through the admissions process. There were also a number of schools that were not eligible as they did not fulfil all the criteria above.

In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman, the Head of ECHS Finance confirmed that the Growth Fund was used to support schools that had taken additional classes. It was noted that over time the Growth Fund should either be shrinking or moving to Secondary Schools.

The Head of ECHS Finance confirmed that in developing the criteria Officers had looked at other local authorities that had established falling roll funds, although there was no requirement for local authorities to establish such a fund.

In discussion Members of the Forum felt that there were two main issues: firstly, the longer term issue of strategic place planning needed to be reviewed to ensure that there was the right number of school places available in the right areas. Secondly, in the short to medium term support needed to be provided to schools that would be directly affected by falling rolls in September.

A Secondary Head Teacher representative noted that strategic place planning decisions had a significant impact on school budgets and this urgently needed to be reviewed by the Local Authority. In two years' time there would be approximately 300 surplus places in the secondary sector and these surplus places would be costly.

Members of the Forum suggested that where schools had been consistently undersubscribed for a number of years the PAN needed to be reduced although it was acknowledged that this processes would take time due to the consultation period involved. A Member highlighted that it was possible for a school to change its PAN in-year for anything that was not a year of entry and that was what schools should be doing.

Members of the Forum expressed concern that the falling rolls fund could be an incentive for schools to maintain a high vacancy rate. Whilst Members acknowledged the principle of supporting some schools to mitigate against a short term pressure of falling rolls it was also noted that as the funding would be top-sliced from the DSG it would be unfair on other schools. A Member also suggested that this was not a decision that the Schools' Forum should take in isolation and as a result of the proposal to top-slice from the DSG there should be wider consultation with Head Teachers.

It was agreed that the Schools' Forum was unable to take a decision without further information and therefore the issue would be deferred to the next meeting of the Schools' Forum in November 2018. A Member of the Forum requested that the Growth Fund allocations for the last 5 years be included in the information provided at the next meeting. In addition, the Head of Strategic Place Planning at the Local Authority would be asked to attend the next meeting to respond to the issues raised by Members of the Schools' Forum. In the meantime, in order to ensure that the window of opportunity was not missed for those schools who were

facing pressure as a result of falling rolls, for the purposes of budget planning the Head of ECHS Finance would assume that the falling rolls fund was included and if necessary this could be removed from the budget at a later date.

RESOLVED that a decision on the proposals for a falling rolls fund to be established as part of the 2019/20 budget setting process be deferred to the next meeting to enable further information to be presented to the Schools' Forum.

13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Teachers Pay Grant Methodology for Special Schools

In response to a question from the Special Schools Representative, the Head of ECHS Finance confirmed that the Local Authority would follow guidance from the DfE.

New Schools' Forum Operation Practice Guide

The Head of ECHS Finance reported that this would be circulated to the Schools' Forum and an overview presented to the next meeting.

Schools' Forum Chairman

On behalf of the Local Authority, the Head of ECHS Finance thanked Andrew Downes for his many years of excellent Chairmanship. Members of the Schools' Forum also expressed their thanks and best wishes to Andrew Downes.

In response the Chairman thanked the Members and Officers noting that his time as Chairman had been enjoyable and stimulating.

14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would take place at 4.30pm on Thursday 29th November 2018.

The Meeting ended at 5.50 pm

Chairman