

SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.30 pm on 20 June 2019

Present:

David Dilling (Chairman)	Primary Academy Governor (Charles Darwin Academy Trust)
David Bridger (Vice-Chairman)	Non-School Representative (Church of England)(Aquinas Trust)
Richard Edmunds	Primary Academy Head Teacher (Warren Road Primary School)
Angela Leeves	Non-School Representative (Early Years)
Neil Miller	PRU Head Teacher/Governor Academy (Bromley Trust Academy)
Karen Raven	Secondary Academy Head Teacher (Chislehurst School for Girls)
Andrew Rees	Secondary Maintained School Head Teacher (St Olaves Grammar School)
Gareth Walters	Primary Academy Governor (Compass Academy Trust)
David Wilcox	Secondary Academy Governor (Darrick Wood School)

Also Present:

Councillor Marina Ahmad	Observer
David Bradshaw	Head of ECHS Finance
Jared Nehra	Director of Education
Amanda Russell	Head of Schools Finance Support
Philippa Gibbs	Democratic Services Officer

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Patrick Foley and Izabela Lecybyl. Janice Box attended as alternate for Patrick Foley.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10TH JANUARY 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th January 2019 were approved, and signed as a correct record.

The following Matters Arising were raised:

Primary School Falling Rolls Fund

In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman, the Head of Schools Finance Support confirmed that the Head of Strategic Place Planning would attend the September meeting of the Schools' Forum to provide an overview of place

planning. The Head of Strategic Place Planning had previously confirmed that the places identified in schools with falling rolls were needed for future years. The Head of Schools Finance Support outlined the next steps to the Schools' Forum confirming that the work that was being done was for schools facing pressures in the 2019/20 financial year.

The Chairman confirmed that the falling roll funding allocations would be brought to the Schools' Forum.

Disapplication Request

The Head of ECHS Finance confirmed that the Local Authority's disapplication request had been turned down by the DfE as a result of the strong views expressed by the Schools' Forum. As a result of this the Local Authority had made other arrangements for addressing the funding gap in the High Needs Block with an additional £0.9m contribution for 2019/20, bringing the Local Authority's total contribution to £1.9m. The Schools' Forum expressed its thanks to the Local Authority for the additional funding contribution but noted however that going forward there would continue to be a significant deficit in the High Needs Block. The Head of ECHS Finance confirmed that everything being equal the High Needs Block was balanced in 2019/20 albeit with significant pressures forecast for 2020/21. The DfE had acknowledged that there was a High Needs Funding issue. It was possible that Local Authorities may receive additional funding but previous experience suggested that the DfE would not expedite any decisions in terms of finalising levels of additional funding.

The Director of Education reported that within the High Needs Block there was a structural deficit of approximately £3m. This had formed part of the case that had been made at the meeting with the Minister earlier in the year when representative from schools and the Local Authority had lobbied for additional funding to address the lagged funding cost pressures. The Government had recently acknowledged that there was a nation-wide pressure on the High Needs Block, however there is currently uncertainty around the Comprehensive Spending Review. Through its Transforming Bromley Programme, the Local Authority is reviewing the totality of High Needs resources and how it is utilised. The aim is to achieve genuine transformation of services in a way that delivers sustainability going forward.

The Vice-Chairman emphasised that the Schools' Forum would like to understand any significant cost savings that were planned for the High Needs Block as they would inevitably impact on the other funding blocks.

3 FUNDING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES, AND THOSE WHO NEED ALTERNATIVE PROVISION – CALL FOR EVIDENCE CONSULTATION RESPONSE
Report ED18085

The Schools' Forum considered a report which provided an outline of the Local Authority's draft response to the DfE consultation on funding for special educational needs and disabilities and those who need alternative provision. The Local Authority's draft response had been developed collaboratively across services with the Council's Education Directorate. The deadline for submitting responses to the consultation was 31st July 2019.

The Director of Education encouraged every school and provider in the Borough to contribute and respond to the consultation which addressed a key issue.

Members of the Schools' Forum raised the following key points concerning the Local Authority's draft response:

Funding for SEN through schools funding formula

It was suggested that the answer to question 4 needed to be strengthened as the cohort of children with increasingly complex needs (specifically ASD) placed in mainstream settings was a group that historically 'fell through the net' as their needs did not neatly fit into criteria. This placed a growing burden on schools supporting this group of children. Acknowledging the pressures facing schools, the Director of Education highlighted that autistic spectrum conditions were a key priority for the Council's SEND Governance Board.

The £6,000 threshold

The Head of Schools Finance Support explained that having read the consultation a number of times her understanding of the explanation provided in relation to this issue was that any proposal to increase or decrease the threshold would be cost neutral across the DSG. There would be no additional funding, instead funding would be shifted between blocks.

Members of the Schools' Forum stressed that this clearly demonstrated why schools were in the position they were in in terms of funding. The DfE did not appear to acknowledge or accept that more money was needed.

A Member noted that the £6,000 threshold had been in place for a considerable length of time. One key result of this was that overtime its value in real terms had diminished – schools now received less for £6,000 than they did 20 years ago. The Member questioned whether there was any value in schools publishing how their notional funding was spent. It was also not clear how the historical figure of £6,000 had been decided upon.

The Schools' Forum discussed how the notional funding was allocated. It was noted that a working group had been reviewing this issue and had planned to

create some guidance/best practice that could be circulated to schools who had to demonstrate that their notional funding had been fully utilised before drawing down further funding from the Local Authority.

The Vice-Chairman suggested that one of the problems with the format of the consultation was that opportunities for detailed response were limited as not every question included a comment box. Funding for SEN was a key issue facing every school and it was essential that this message was clearly communicated to the DfE.

It was agreed that the response should reflect that the £6,000 threshold had not been increased as well as providing examples of how levels of need have increased. As a result of this increasing level of need more money was required and the level of funding required should be identified and distributed through notional funding including prior attainment and special needs.

Funding for pupils who need alternative provision (AP) or are at risk of exclusion from school

The Schools' Forum noted that the Local Authority's response proposed an additional funding block for Alternate Provision. Members endorsed this approach but did however stress that more money was required because without this it would simply amount to 'robbing Peter to pay Paul'.

A Member also suggested that it would be helpful to weave in comments around the benefit of respite provision in reducing rates of exclusion.

In addition the Director of Education suggested that it would be helpful to comment further about the benefits delivered by the Local Authority's Primary Outreach Service and the positive impact it had on levels of exclusion.

Improving early intervention at each age and stage to prepare young people for adulthood sooner

In relation to question 25, the Schools' Forum felt that it would be beneficial to highlight that each point of transition was equally important in terms of the stress or trauma for children with SEN. The Director of Education further noted that there was a responsibility to provide services from birth up to the age of 25 and it was therefore equally important to consider the transition beyond tertiary education and ensure that there was support and pathways in place for vulnerable individuals.

Other aspects of the funding and financial arrangements

The Schools' Forum agreed that it was important to draw out and emphasise the following points:

- Funding was not sufficient and the short-term nature of funding arrangements made it difficult to secure appropriate longer term arrangements;

- Funding needed to provide security. Currently Local Authorities were not able to guarantee that places were secured for their children;
- The importance of knowing where children were and the importance of the import/export process and how it worked. A Member suggested that there had been a benefit to the old recoument process as school eventually received funding.
- In terms of ensuring good value for money; it was not clear whether funding itself ensured value for money, instead it was the way in which funding was used that delivered value for money. Value for money was driven by the ability to utilise economies of scale and with continued uncertainty around funding it was not possible to fully utilise economies of scale.
- Issues around the cost and expense of tribunals.

As there has been support for the Local Authority's draft response and consensus amongst Members of the Schools' Forum it was agreed that following the meeting the response would be updated with any changes clearly tracked. The Clerk to the Schools' Forum would then recirculate the response for Members of the Forum to endorse outside of the meeting.

It was agreed that a joint response should be submitted on behalf of the Local Authority and the Schools' Forum. The Head of Schools Finance Support thanked Members of the Schools' Forum for their input.

RESOLVED: That

- 1. The consultation response be updated with any changes reflecting the suggestions made by the Schools' Forum clearly tracked;**
- 2. The consultation response be recirculated to the Schools' Forum for comment and approval outside of the meeting;**
- 3. That a joint response from the Schools' Forum and the Local Authority be submitted to the DfE by 31st July 2019.**

4 SPENDING BY PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND SPECIAL MAINTAINED SCHOOLS IN 2018/19

The Schools' Forum considered a report setting out information on all revenue and capital balances held by Primary, Secondary and Special Maintained Schools as at 31 March 2019. 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 – the 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 Schools' Forum heard that despite schools putting forward plans for the use of any surplus funds, as a result of forecast budget deficits for future years it was unlikely that the plans would in fact be realised. A Member of the Schools' Forum raised question around how long it would be possible for schools to use reserves

to balance their budgets as by their very nature financial reserves were limited and did not amount to a sustainable financial solution in the long-term. This was a clear illustration of the funding crisis facing schools.

Following discussion about the benefits of the Forum's access to schools' financial data, the Director of Education suggested that the Schools' Forum may wish to consider asking schools to share their financial information in the future to inform its discussion and consideration.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Vice-Chairman raised the issue of the potential for funding for teachers' pensions and pay being rolled into the Dedicated Schools Grant (DGG) and the impact that this would have on schools' financial planning going forward. The Vice-Chairman requested that in the event that the Local Authority became aware of any proposals they notified primary schools in particular as soon as possible, as it could have a significant impact in terms of loss of the minimum funding guarantee.

6 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 19th September 2019.

The Meeting ended at 6.05 pm

Chairman