

SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.30 pm on 21 January 2021

Present:

David Dilling (Chairman)	Primary Academy Governor (Charles Darwin Academy Trust)
Rebecca Cottage	Special Head/Governor Maintained
Andrew Ferguson	Non-School Representative (Church of England)(Aquinas Trust)
Izabela Lecybyl	Non-School Representative (Catholic Church)
Neil Miller	PRU Head Teacher/Governor Academy (Bromley Trust Academy)
Andrew Rees	Secondary Maintained School Head Teacher (St Olaves Grammar School)
Brid Stenson	Non-School Representative (Early Years)
Gareth Walters	Primary Academy Governor (Compass Academy Trust)
Steve Whittle	Secondary Academy Head Teacher (Langley Park Trust)
David Wilcox	Secondary Academy Governor (Darrick Wood School)

Also Present:

David Bradshaw	Head of Children's Services Finance
Julie Crew	Head of Schools' Finance Support
Jared Nehra	Director of Education
Philippa Gibbs	Democratic Services Officer

18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Patrick Foley.

The Chairman welcomed Ms Rebecca Cottage and Mr Andrew Ferguson to the Schools' Forum.

19 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

The Schools' Forum noted that the previous Vice-Chairman of the Schools' Forum, Mr David Bridger, had recently resigned. Mr Bridger had been a Member and Vice-Chairman of the Bromley Schools' Forum almost from its inception. Wishing Mr Bridger well for the future, the Chairman and Schools' Forum recognised the invaluable contribution that he had been made over the years recognising that his presence would be missed.

As there was currently no immediate candidate for Vice-Chairman, it was agreed that an item would be added to the agenda for the next meeting to enable all members to reflect on a suitable candidate for the role.

RESOLVED: That the election of the Vice-Chairman be postponed until the next meeting of the Schools' Forum.

20 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 NOVEMBER 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2020 were approved, and signed as a correct record.

Matters Arising

The Schools' Forum noted that training for Members of the Schools' Forum would be conducted at the end of March 2021.

21 2021/22 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT Report CEF21001

The report provided an outline of the final DSG allocation for 2021/22 and an overview of how this would be spent.

The final Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding for 2021/22 had now been provided to all LAs to reflect the October 2020 census data. The final DSG for 2021/22 was divided into four blocks – High Needs, Early Years, Schools and Schools Central with the expected income detailed below

2021/22 Dedicated Schools Grant					
	High Needs Block	Early Years Block	Schools Block	Schools Central Block	Total
Gross Grant Funding	£58,728,780	£23,343,423	£237,832,719	£2,133,601	£322,038,523
Recoupment adjustment	-£9,954,000				-£9,954,000
Net Grant Allocation	£48,774,780	£23,343,423	£237,832,719	£2,133,601	£312,084,523

In opening the discussion, the Chairman thanked the Officers from the Local Authority for the work they had undertaken, noting the very tight timescales involved in the production of the report.

Schools Central Block

The Forum noted that the increase in the Central Block has been mainly due to the inclusion of the Teachers' Pay and Pension Grant for centrally employed teachers which had now been merged into the DSG. This year the Council would be contributing £410,000 to support the Central Block.

Early Years Block

There had been an increase in the Early Years Block due to the increases in the hourly rates payable and expenditure was predicted to match income.

The Schools' Forum noted the anxiety that existed with some Early Years providers around the funding in light of possible closures arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. The Director of Education recognised the anxiety that existed and explained that the Local Authority had sought to do all it could to support local Early Years settings by offering additional funding protection within the grant conditions set by the DfE. Consequently, no significant fluctuations in the Early Years Block were anticipated.

The Schools' Forum supported the decisions that had been taken to ensure that Early Years Settings were fully funded during the period of closures arising from Covid-19.

Schools Block

The Schools' Forum noted that the Schools Block funding had been calculated using the October 2020 census pupil numbers and the per pupil units of funding calculated for 2021/22. Based on the published figures the Primary unit of funding had increased from £4,282 to £4,595, an increase of around 7.3% and the Secondary unit of funding had increased from £5,408 to £5,863, an increase of around 8.4%. Funding had risen significantly year on year (by £19.4m between 2020/21 and 2021/22), however the majority of this (£11m) was due to the teachers' pay and pension grant which had now been rolled into the DSG allocation.

The main changes to the NFF for 2021/22 were as follows – (a) Funding previously received through the Teachers Pay Grant (TPG) and Teachers Pension Employer Contribution (TPECG), including the supplementary fund, to mainstream schools for pupils from Reception to Year 11 had now been added to the baseline. (b) Unit values had typically increased by 4%. (c) Minimum per pupil funding levels were now compulsory and had been set at £4,180 for primary schools and £5,415 for secondary schools. (d) The Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) level was required to be between 0.5% and 2%. For Bromley the level had been set at 2%.

The Schools' Forum noted that there were 17 primary schools that had become eligible for minimum per pupil funding protection and would receive collectively around £1.89m.

The Forum noted that without the inclusion of the £11m grant for teachers' pay and pension that although there would be an overall increase in the levels of funding, these would be similar increases to previous years. It was agreed that, if possible, details of the grant discounting the teachers' pay and pension element would be provided to the next meeting.

In response to a question, the Head of Children's Services Finance explained that it was mainly primary schools that received the minimum funding guarantee. This had been expected as with the National Funding Formula funding was skewed more towards secondary schools than it had been under the previous Bromley Funding Formula. 53 primary schools and 1 secondary were currently in receipt of the minimum funding guarantee but not all schools received the same level of funding guarantee. The Schools' Forum noted that the minimum funding guarantee would be around for a period of time.

The Chairman suggested that it would be helpful to analyse growth funding, minimum per pupil funding and the minimum funding guarantee to see how individual schools were affected.

High Needs Block

The High Needs Block was seeing pressures coming through the system. Nationally the Government were seeing some authorities building up high levels of deficit reserves. This particular funding issue was acknowledged, and funding was committed for 2021/22 resulting in an increase in high needs block funding of £5.7m for Bromley. This was due to the increases in per pupil funding and the increase in pupils themselves. £939k of the increase related to pay and pension increases that were paid through specific grants which had now been integrated into the overall High Needs Block calculation.

Whilst the funding was welcomed it was predicted that levels of growth would outstrip the current funding levels over the next four years. Moreover, funding for the High Needs Block had not been confirmed beyond 2021/22 and therefore it had been assumed that Bromley would continue to receive similar increases in subsequent years. To mitigate against the predicted growth, further savings had also been assumed as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. These were predicated on slowing the rate of increase in EHCPs and to incrementally place more children in local schools although it was recognised that this approach carried significant risks. The Schools' Forum noted that there would continue to be significant pressures on the High Needs Block which remained a real concern and the Local Authority would continue to lobby for the High Needs Funding required to address increasing demand.

In response to a question, the Head of Children's Services Finance confirmed that the changes on the recoupment figure (from the figure presented in November 2020 report) were due to the effect of the updated October 2020 pupil census data and had been based on the figures provided by the DfE. The Director of Education noted that it was the mainstream academy units that were lower than the November report in terms of recoupment. The Head of Children's Services Finance agreed to undertake further analysis on this and circulate the information following the meeting.

The Head of Children's Services Finance confirmed in response to a question that there had been no further indication of levels of funding beyond 2021/22. It was hoped funding growth would continue in recognition of the increases in demand that had previously been acknowledged through funding increases. The Director

of Education confirmed that pressures on the High Needs Block continued to be a concern and would remain an area of focus. The Local Authority had welcomed the additional £5.7m allocated for the High Needs Block as this had been broadly in line with what the Local Authority felt was needed. However, the inclusion of the teachers' pay and pension grant unfortunately meant that there was no absolute confidence that there would be sufficient funding in future years. The Local Authority was also waiting for the DfE to deliver on the much-needed SEND Review which had been further delayed.

The Schools' Forum noted that the Local Authority was working to deliver sustainable services for the long-term within the high needs funding available. As part of this there would be more early intervention and a focus on outreach services.

In response to a question surround the high cost of out-of-borough provision, the Director of Education highlighted the ongoing need for more high quality in-borough local provision. As a result of this the Local Authority had sought to commission an in-borough Free School which would meet some of the local need. The process for securing a sponsor for the Free School was being led by the DfE and was ongoing and it was hoped that the process may conclude by the Spring of 2021. The Schools' Forum noted that out-of-borough cost pressures would continue to be a challenge for some time.

RESOLVED: That the final DSG income and forecast expenditure for 2021/22 be noted.

22 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

23 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Schools' Forum noted that an additional meeting would be held in March 2021. Meetings for the next municipal year would be circulated as soon as they were available.

The Meeting ended at 5.29 pm

Chairman