SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.30 pm on 8 July 2021

Present:

David Dilling (Chairman)	Primary Academy Governor (Charles Darwin Academy Trust)
Claire Bessa	Secondary Academy Head Teacher (E21C)
Andrew Ferguson	Non-School Representative (Church of England)(Aquinas Trust)
Patrick Foley	Primary Maintained Head Teacher (Southborough Primary School)
Chris Hollands	Primary Academy Head Teacher (Aquinas Trust)
Neil Miller	PRU Head Teacher/Governor Academy (Bromley Trust Academy)

Also Present:

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

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Tracey Davies, Gareth Walters, David Wilcox, Rebecca Cottage, Izabela Lecybyl and Brid Stenson.

2 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

The School Forum Members present confirmed David Dilling as Chairman for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

It was agreed that election of Vice-Chairman would be deferred to the next meeting and in the meantime, Andrew Ferguson would join the pre-meetings with Officers.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 21 JANUARY 2021 AND 23 MARCH 2021

The minutes of the meetings held on 21 January 2021 and 23 March 2021 were approved, and signed as a correct record.

Matters Arising

The Director of Education provided an update on the ongoing work around Alternative Provision. The programme was on track and progress was being made at pace. It was hoped that the 5-year agreement with London South East

Academies Trust would be signed in the coming weeks. In addition an approach to inclusion which included non-statutory elements of practice and fairer access panels had been agreed with secondary schools. This would be in place from September and there would then be a focus on primary inclusion arrangements in the new academic year.

4 CEF PROVISIONAL OUTTURN REPORT 2020/21
Report CEF21025

The report provided the Children, Education and Families Portfolio provisional outturn position for 2020/21.

The Forum noted that of 31st March 2021 there was an overall deficit in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and as a result of this it was likely that there would now be increased challenge from the DfE with the aim of rectifying the deficit as far as possible. It was however recognised that there were significant pressures, especially in High Needs, and these would need to be contained as far as possible as the view of Officers was that current government funding was not reflective of the pressures that existed.

The Forum noted that there were still a number of Education, Care and Health Plans (ECHPs) coming through the system and ultimately this would result in expenditure. There was evidence of increases in demand across London which demonstrated that Bromley was not in a unique situation and a number of London Boroughs were already subject to a deficit recovery plan.

The Director of Education suggested that the pressures were affecting Bromley later than may have been anticipated due to the effective financial management that had been in place over a number of years. The Local Authority had also worked in partnership with schools and alternative provisions to try to keep costs at an appropriate level whilst also meeting the needs of children. There had however been significant pressures in the system over the last few years and there would continue to be significant pressures in the future. There was currently insufficient funding from government to mitigate these pressures. These challenges would result in the need for difficult decisions being taken in the coming year if government funding was not forthcoming to resolve the issues. Consequently, there were a number of reviews underway to ensure that appropriate services could be provided in the funding envelope available.

The Forum noted that the Local Authority would almost certainly require a DSG deficit recovery plan and this was being reviewed now, ahead of being asked to do so by the DfE.

RESOLVED: That

1. **the projected position of the Children, Education and Families Portfolio be noted and;**
2. **the funding pressures for the forthcoming year evidence by the report be noted.**

5 SPENDING BY PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND SPECIAL MAINTAINED SCHOOLS IN 2020/21 Report CEF21023

The report provided information on all revenue and capital balances held by Primary, Secondary and Special Maintained Schools as at 31 March 2021, and also provided a comparison to the balances held at the same time in the previous year.

The Forum noted that there was no requirement for further reporting to the DfE. It was further noted that the Local Authority were asking for all schools with larger balances to report back their intentions for utilising the balances in the near future.

The Chairman observed the year-on-year fluctuation in the balances across the schools in terms of the percentages with some schools being consistently high. The Forum noted that the schools were asked to provide a plan setting out their intentions for spending the surplus.

RESOLVED: That the balances be noted.

6 FALLING ROLLS FUND 2021/22 Report CEF21024

The report provided information on the levels of use of the falling rolls fund.

The Forum noted that some schools with surplus places would have received bulge class funding and these bulge classes may not have filled as much as anticipated however those schools would not receive falling rolls funding. In relation to why some schools were struggling to fill places, the Forum noted that this was often down to demand in local areas and parental choice. It was noted that falling rolls funding would not be given for more than two consecutive years.

The Forum recognised that although only 3 schools qualified for falling rolls funding this year, feedback across the sector indicated that there were likely to be more schools qualifying for falling rolls funding in future years. It was clear that this was not an issue just affecting schools in Bromley as pressures were being reported across London.

A Members suggested that there were two key issues driving falling rolls, firstly, the pandemic – due to the national situation some parents had not realised that they should have applied for a school place whilst other families had taken the decision to move to cheaper areas outside of London. Secondly, there had been an impact arising from Brexit as some EU citizens had taken the decision to return to the EU.

It was recognised that the issue of falling rolls was a difficult one to manage. However, it was noted that schools would be facing further pressures arising from Covid recovery and it was therefore not the right time to withdraw falling rolls funding. It was also recognised that many smaller schools were already

managing additional pressures as they were not able to utilise economies of scale.

The Chairman noted that the Fairer Funding consultation published by the DfE earlier in the day sought comments around growth and falling rolls funding. It was agreed that further consideration would be given to this issue at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That

1. **Falling Rolls funding for 2021-22 be agreed subject to further clarification from the appropriate schools; and**

2. **It be noted that the decision for final release of any funding rests with the Director of Education once the final evidence has been obtained from schools and assessed to determine whether any evience satisifies the criteria.**

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

DfE Fair Funding Consultation

The Forum noted that earlier in the day the DfE had published its fairer funding consultation and the deadline for response was 30 September 2021. The Director of Education highlighted that Annex B to the main document made reference to changes to the responsibilities of Schools' Forums.

It was agreed that a Working Group would be established to consider the consultation in more detail. The Working Group would hold an initial brief meeting before the end of July in order to identify any financial modelling that would be required.

It was agreed that David Dilling, Patrick Foley and Neil Miller (if appropriate) would sit on the working group. Further Members would be sought following the meeting.

Virtual Meetings

The Forum noted that Regulations had now been published to enable meetings of the Schools' Forum to be held virtually.

A Member suggested that there had generally been better attendance at virtual meetings which, aside from some issues with technology, were easier and more convenient to attend.

It was therefore agreed that the next meeting of the Schools' Forum (in September) would be a virtual meeting and a further discussion about the future format of meetings could take place when more members were present.

The Meeting ended at 5.21 pm

Chairman