

SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.30 pm on 24 November 2022

Present:

David Dilling (Chairman)	Primary Academy Governor (Charles Darwin Academy Trust)
Andrew Ferguson (Vice-Chairman)	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)
Andrew Rees	Secondary Maintained School Head Teacher (St Olaves Grammar School)
Brid Stenson	Non-School Representative (Early Years)
Ian Travis	Special Head Teacher/Governor Academy (Glebe School)
Steve Whittle	Secondary Academy Head Teacher (Impact Multi Academy Trust)
David Wilcox	Secondary Academy Governor (Darrick Wood School)

Also Present:

David Bradshaw	Head of Children, Education and Families Service Finance
Jared Nehra	Director of Education
Philippa Gibbs	Democratic Services Officer
Kevin Walter	Democratic Services Officer

9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Claire Bessa.

10 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29TH SEPTEMBER 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th September 2022 were approved and signed as a correct record.

11 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) DEFICIT RECOVERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Director of Education introduced the Report and acknowledged that Forum members were all aware of the universal funding pressures within the High Needs Block and this was experienced by all Local Authorities.

The Deficit Recovery Management Plan set out a range of key performance data, forecast projections of future need and comparative benchmarking, which had informed the development of the actions being taken forward. The Report also set out details of actions already taken, projects and workstreams in place to drive improved outcomes and financial sustainability. Whilst the key underlying issues impacting on SEND resource pressures were at a national level, there was evidently a range of local factors impacting on Bromley's deficit position.

The proposed five-year Recovery Plan, modelled on forecast requirements and government funding in the next five years, did not show the DSG coming back into balance during this period. This was because the forecast demands on the DSG continued to exceed the anticipated funding made available at this time.

Officers would continue to meet with representatives from the Department for Education to discuss the Council's plans to address its DSG deficit. The Schools' Forum would be provided with updates.

The Director of Education explained that the Report proposed a set of transformations under the seven key areas as listed on page two of the Report, with the focus being on transformation and not cuts. There was the need to look at demand management alongside the requirement to meet statutory duties. The Director emphasised that the DRMP was a 'living' document and would be constantly updated and changed.

A Member of the Schools' Forum stated that the Forum understood that Bromley was in a deficit position and that savings must be made to prevent the projected increase in the DSG deficit by 2026/27 (£23,083m). However, a question was raised over the comparison data and Bromley's statistical neighbours i.e. where were those LAs in terms of their budgets/deficits? Other Forum members questioned the benchmarking data in other areas. In response the Director of Education said that he would look into this and provide/circulate additional information/data if available.

In response to questions from Forum Members regarding demand management and identifying and recommending needs in EHCPs, the Director of Education stated his view to the Forum that there were currently too many requests for statutory assessments and the number of EHCPs was growing too fast. There was an issue in that sometimes the recommendations made were the most costly and perhaps the least effective e.g. the standard recommendation of 1 to 1 support for those with additional needs.

However, there was a need to acknowledge that in some instances the recommendations were appropriate, but perhaps the LA needed to be better at promoting the most inclusive practice. Effective recommendations were required to determine whether a child's needs could be met differently.

The Director of Education also acknowledged that it was difficult for the LA to cease to maintain an EHCP and costs also increased over time. Parents could also commission private reports to request an EHCP from the school.

A Schools' Forum Member expressed concerns regarding the review of Alternative Provision with the observation that numbers requiring AP were increasing. The Director of Education responded by confirming to Forum Members that the proposed target saving/cost reduction of up to £478k by 2026/27 had already been included in the previous review, and it was not an additional saving. This was also the case regarding the review of High Needs Funding Bands, with the proposed target saving/cost reduction of £500k by 2026/27 already included in Bromley's medium-term financial strategy.

Regarding the section of the DRMP report on maximising funding and joint tripartite funding, The Director of Education confirmed to the Schools' Forum that the Integrated Care Board (ICB), formerly the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), was not presently agreeable to the proposals to make additional contributions, although discussions were ongoing.

There were concerns from Forum members that any cuts brought in could have a real impact on the Borough's children, although there was an acknowledgement that there still must be a plan in place. The Chairman stated that the feeling appeared to be that the Forum did in general endorse the DRMP but with reservations. In addition, the Chairman thanked the Director of Education and his team for putting the plan together.

RESOLVED: That the DSG Deficit Recovery Management Plan be noted.

12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting would take place at 4.30pm on Thursday 26th January 2023 via MS Teams.

The Meeting ended at 5.48 pm

Chairman