

SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.30 pm on 10 January 2019

Present:

David Dilling (Chairman)	Primary Academy Governor
David Bridger (Vice-Chairman)	Non-School Representative (Church of England)
Matthew Apsley	Primary Academy Headteacher
Richard Edmunds	Primary Academy Head Teacher
Ben Greene	Secondary Academy Governor
Angela Leeves	Non-School Representative (Early Years)
Neil Miller	PRU Head Teacher/Governor Academy
Karen Raven	Secondary Academy Head Teacher
David Wilcox	Secondary Academy Governor

Also Present:

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

21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Izabela Lecybyl and Andrew Rees.

The Chairman welcomed Ben Greene (Secondary Head Teacher Representative) and Jared Nehra (Director of Education, LBB) to the meeting.

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Matthew Apsley declared that the introduction of a Falling Rolls Fund would affect his school.

23 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 NOVEMBER 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2018, were approved and signed as a correct record.

Under matters arising; a Secondary Head Teacher representative sought an update on the representations that had been made concerning funding for new Free Schools being top sliced from the Schools' Block. In response, the Head of Schools' Finance Support confirmed that the issue had been raised with colleagues in other London Boroughs as well as the DfE. The Head of Schools' Finance Support reported that whilst other London Boroughs were experiencing similar issues it appeared that they were not as concerned about the issue as Bromley. Representatives from the DfE had suggested that the issues within Bromley could be overcome through accounting with lagged funding each year. Whilst the suggestion was understandable the view of LBB Officers was that this

was not a viable solution to the problem and therefore should not be implemented. The Head of ECHS Finance reported that he, the former Interim Director of Education, the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families, and a representative from schools had met with local MP Bob Neill to discuss concerns. The Local MP had agreed to write to the Minister responsible to raise the issue and outline concerns. Once a response from the Minister had been received it would be circulated to the Schools' Forum. A Secondary School representative further reported that she had raised the issue with a union who had not been aware of the figures involved and had also agreed to take up the issue.

The Vice-Chairman raised the issue of declarations of interest at meetings. During the ensuing discussion it was noted that whilst all Members of the Forum technically had a pecuniary interest, unlike school governing bodies the Schools' Forum was a consultation forum with no formal decision making powers. It was noted that Members of the Forum were appointed to represent their respective sectors and there was an expectation that Members would be representing the interests of their sectors as a whole, not their individual schools. In view of this it was agreed that that 'Declarations of Interest' item on the agenda would be removed.

The Head of ECHS Finance confirmed that work was underway to fill the vacancies on the Schools' Forum.

24 2019/20 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT **Report ED18085**

The Schools' Forum considered a report providing an outline of the final DSG allocation for 2019/20 and the budgeted expenditure across the four separate blocks. The final Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding for 2019/20, updated to reflect October 2018 pupil numbers, had now been provided to all LAs. The final allocation included the additional funding for SEND announced by the Secretary of State which for Bromley was £788,032 for both 2018/19 and 2019/20.

The DSG for 2019/20 was divided into four blocks – High Needs, Early Years, Schools and Schools Central, with expected grant income detailed below:

2019/20 Dedicated Schools Grant					
	High Needs Block	Early Years Block	Schools Block	Schools Central Block	Total
Gross Grant Funding	£48,820,619	£20,691,309	£208,637,223	£1,938,460	£280,087,611
Recoupment adjustment	-£7,813,333				-£7,813,333
Net Grant Allocation	£41,007,286	£20,691,309	£208,637,223	£1,938,460	£272,274,278

Central Schools Block

There were a number of pressures within the block due to certain items of expenditure over which the Local Authority had no control such as the costs of licenses (from which all schools benefitted).

It was proposed that a financial contribution would be made by the Council in order to balance the block. On behalf of the Schools' Forum, in anticipation of the Council's Executive approving the additional funding, the Chairman thanked the Council for the very necessary financial contribution.

Early Years Block

It was noted that the Local Authority provided higher rates of funding for 2 year olds than the grant received from government. This was done at the expense of 3 year old funding and this position had not been reviewed for a couple of years. The Early Years Representative highlighted there was a higher staff ration for two year olds than for 3 & 4 year olds and it was suggested that this may explain the higher levels of funding.

Schools Block and High Needs Block

Falling Rolls Fund:

A Secondary Head Teacher representative noted that there had been no agreement or recommendation from the Schools' Forum concerning whether specific funding for a falling rolls fund should be earmarked. It was noted that the report demonstrated that there were 306 surplus places in the primary sector within Bromley that were being nominally funded. Members of the Schools' Forum suggested that this was symptomatic of the way in which Bromley had evolved over time with primary schools now feeling the impact of the lack of strategy. There was now a pool of schools experiencing falling rolls and as a result these schools would be facing serious financial difficulties.

It was noted that at a previous meeting the Schools' Forum had requested information on trends and this had not yet been provided. The Forum had also requested that the Head of Strategic Place Planning attend a meeting of the Forum to advise Members. Members agreed that they could not commit to any long-term decisions until this happened.

The Head of Schools' Finance Support highlighted the strict requirements and criteria in place surrounding eligibility for Falling Rolls Funding. In summary, the following eligibility criteria had been set:

1. Low numbers
2. Judged Good or Outstanding
3. LA to demonstrate that places would be required in 3 to 4 years.
4. Schools required to submit detailed financial data.

The full criteria were set out in the minutes for the meeting of the Schools' Forum which was held on 20th September 2018.

The Director of Education agreed that the Head of Strategic Place Planning should come to a future meeting to advise the Forum. It was noted that the Pupil Place Planning document needed to be more outward facing and work to achieve this would commence.

Noting the eligibility criteria and recognising that the purpose of the Fallings Rolls Fund was to provide support to schools facing financial difficulties in order not to set a precedent for future years the Schools' Forum considered approving the Falling Rolls Fund for 1 year only. It was felt that if it could be demonstrated that falling rolls in a school were a "blip" and not a trend the schools should be supported. It was also felt that approval of the fund for a year would also give the Local Authority sufficient time to provide the Schools' Forum with the information it required to take a longer term decision. The Schools' Forum emphasised that in considering approving the Falling Rolls Fund for 1 year only it was not setting a precedent.

The Chairman put to the vote the motion that a falling rolls fund be introduced for one year only.

7 in favour
0 against

The motion was CARRIED.

Local Authority Disapplication Request:

The Head of Schools' Finance Support reported that following the last meeting of the Schools' Forum a full consultation with schools was undertaken and feedback from the consultation was attached at Appendix 3 to the report. The Local Authority had submitted the disapplication request to the DfE and the outcome was awaited.

The Secondary Head Teacher representative noted that the feedback that had been received from the schools was overwhelmingly against the proposals and it was confirmed that this feedback had been submitted to the DfE together with the application. Members of the Forum highlighted that reading the responses that had been received was extremely depressing in terms of the untenable financial situation in which schools now found themselves.

Noting that an additional £788,032 High Needs Block funding had been received for 2018/19 and 2019/20, the Schools' Forum expressed disappointment that the Local Authority had subsequently taken the decision to withdraw £1m from the initial £2m of Council funding it was originally contributing. The Schools' Forum highlighted that the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families had attended meetings with Head Teachers and had openly and honestly made an offer to support schools. A Secondary Head teacher representative commented that it appeared the Local Authority was now renegeing on its offer. It was

acknowledged that the Local Authority was also facing funding cuts however, the Schools' Forum felt that if the Local Authority were to honour the funding commitment that had been made the disapplication request would have been unnecessary.

The Director of Education, LBB responded that he fully understood the concern of Members of the Schools' Forum however there was underfunding of £3m which needed to be addressed and this level of underfunding had a significant impact on a Borough the size of Bromley. The only mechanism available to the Local Authority for raising the issue of underfunding was the disapplication request. The £788,032 additional funding for 2018/19 and 2019/20 which had been provided in recognition of the unprecedented demands being placed on the High Needs Block was insufficient to meet the additional demands that were being placed on already stretched and underfunded services.

It was noted that any of the additional funding for 2018/19 that was not used would be placed in the DSG Reserves in order to mitigate against risk of a deficit budget in future years.

Members of the Schools' Forum highlighted that there was a need to ensure that there was sufficient funding to support children with SEND attending mainstream schools. The Forum heard that there had been reports in the Local Press that LB Bexley was supporting Kemnal in relation to SEN provision. Members expressed disappointment suggesting LB Bromley could have done something similar and worked with The Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT) regarding SEN provision on the Kemnal site in order to help to tackle the High Needs issues in Bromley.

Members of the Forum agreed that at the last meeting of the Schools Forum there had been a vote not to support the disapplication request. The subsequent consultation feedback had also suggested that the request should not be supported and on that basis there was no reason to change the decision.

The Chairman put to the vote the motion that the disapplication requested submitted by the Local Authority is not supported by the Schools Forum.

6 in favour
1 against.

The motion was CARRIED.

The Schools Forum wished to express and acknowledge that it understood the reasons behind the disapplication request and that there was an obvious lack of Central Government funding for High Needs, but they felt that the Schools Block was suffering enough through lack of Government Funding and therefore the disapplication request was refused.

The Schools Forum noted that the comments from the Schools' Forum would be fed back to the Council's Education, Children and Families Budget and Performance Monitoring Sub-Committee which was due to meet in public at 7pm on Wednesday 23rd January 2019.

It was also noted that the DfE had requested that a copy of the minutes from the Schools' Forum be provided as soon as possible.

The Vice-Chairman noted that almost all primary schools in the Borough benefitted from the Minimum Funding Guarantee increment (additional funding from Government) which reduced every year. If the DfE increased the DSG allocation to primary schools this MFG Funding would be clawed back. It was emphasised that there was an urgency to primary schools across the Borough getting on top of their finances as it was clear from financial forecasts that the financial landscape for schools was not going to improve. A Secondary Head Teacher representative highlighted that in Bromley primary schools had been generously funded above the primary/secondary ratio for a number of years and therefore the current financial challenges were redressing this imbalance.

The Head of Schools' Finance Support confirmed that the Local Authority had until 16th January 2019 to submit the figures to the DfE.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. A falling rolls fund be introduced for one year only; and**
- 2. The disapplication requested submitted by the Local Authority is not supported by the Schools Forum.**

25 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

26 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Details of meeting dates for 2019/20 would be circulated when they were available.

The Meeting ended at 6.00 pm

Chairman