

SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.30 pm on 16 January 2020

Present:

David Dilling (Chairman)	Primary Academy Governor (Charles Darwin Academy Trust)
David Bridger (Vice-Chairman)	Non-School Representative (Church of England)(Aquinas Trust)
Tracey Davies	Non-Schools Representative(14-19 Partnership)(Bromley Academy Trust)
Patrick Foley	Primary Maintained Head Teacher (Southborough Primary School)
Izabela Lecybyl	Non-School Representative (Catholic Church)
Angela Leeves	Non-School Representative (Early Years)
Neil Miller	PRU Head Teacher/Governor Academy (Bromley Trust Academy)
Andrew Rees	Secondary Maintained School Head Teacher (St Olaves Grammar School)
Katie Scott	Secondary Academy Head Teacher (Langley Park Trust)
Ian Travis	Special Head Teacher/Governor Academy (Glebe School)
Gareth Walters	Primary Academy Governor (Compass Academy Trust)

Also Present:

Philippa Gibbs	Democratic Services Officer
David Bradshaw	Head of Education and Children's Services Finance
Jared Nehra	Director of Education
Amanda Russell	Head of Schools Finance Support
Julie Crewe	Schools Finance Support Team

19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Karen Raven and David Wilcox.

The Chairman reported that Richard Edmunds was no longer a member of the Schools' Forum having left his post of Head Teacher at Warren Road Primary School in December 2019.

The Chairman also welcomed Julie Crew, the new Head of School Finance Support, to the meeting and introductions took place. It was noted that Julie Crew would be taking over from Amanda Russell at the end of the month and was attending as an observer at the meeting.

20 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7 NOVEMBER 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2019, were approved and signed as a correct record.

**21 2020/21 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT
Report ED18085**

The report provided an outline of the final Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation for 2020/21 and an overview of how funding would be spent.

The expected income from the DSG, divided into the four blocks, was

2020/21 Dedicated Schools Grant					
	High Needs Block	Early Years Block	Schools Block	Schools Central Block	Total
Gross Grant Funding	£53,540,004	£22,530,224	£218,400,750	£1,919,714	£296,390,692
Recoupment adjustment	-£8,878,000				-£8,878,000
Net Grant Allocation	£44,662,004	£22,530,224	£218,400,750	£1,919,714	£287,512,692

Each of the four blocks had been reviewed and the related expenditure for 2020/21 forecasted based on information currently available. Full details of the projected grant income and expenditure were included at Appendix 1 of the report. In summary, the Schools Central Block was showing a £360k overspend, which was proposed to be met by a contribution from the Council to offset the deficit. The Early Years block remained balanced, despite a slight decrease in income, the Schools Block remained balanced, and the High Needs Block was showing a £1,100,000 underspend which would be carried forward to offset funding pressures in future years.

The outgoing Head of School Finance Support introduced the report and provided an explanation of each of the four blocks within the DSG, noting that on the whole there had been a good settlement for Bromley this year.

Schools Central Block

The Schools' Forum noted that much of the expenditure in this block was fixed (such as the licenses for all schools) and consequently there was limited scope for savings to be made. This block had been balanced by an expected contribution from the Local Authority (LA) of £360,000.

Early Years Block

The Head of School Finance Support circulated a document detailing the agreed increases in Bromley Early Years funding. The Forum also noted that there was a £500,000 contribution to the High Needs Block to support Early Years children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The Early Years representative confirmed that the funding for 2020/21 would be well received by the Early Years Settings.

In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman, the Head of School Finance Support explained that she did not know whether the new funding rates took account of the London Living Wage. However, it would be down to the settings to manage the funding they received and it was hoped that in allocating funding the Government had taken account of the London Living Wage. The Head of Education and Children's Services Finance confirmed that if the London Living Wage became a particular issue there would be a need for the Government to make in-year adjustments.

Schools' Block

The Head of Schools Finance Support provided a detailed explanation of the calculations for the block. Based on the published figures the Primary unit of funding had increased from £4200 to £4282 (an increase of around 1.95%). The Secondary unit of funding had increased from £5183 to £5408 (an increase of around 4.34%). The funding for each school was calculated using the National Funding Formula (NFF) with additional funding added for premises and growth. The Head of Schools Finance Support emphasised that it did appear to be a good settlement with real increases in funding for schools. However, schools had to be mindful that there may be changes around factors such as pupil numbers which would affect their bottom line.

The report set out the main changes to the NFF in 2020/21, and the Head of Schools Finance Support highlighted in particular that unit values had typically been increased by around 4%, with the exception of Free School Meal Funding which had been increased in line with inflation.

In response to a question concerning whether the cost of Free School Meal provision was likely increase as a result of increased staffing costs resulting from the London Living Wage, the Head of Schools Finance Support explained that if it became an issue nationally it would be addressed by the Government outside of the settlement. The Director of Education noted that typically catering contracts were negotiated for a number of years and included an inbuilt inflationary increase. This meant that it was less likely for schools to face an immediate increase in costs as a result of the London Living Wage. The issue for schools may arise at the point they were required to renegotiate their catering contracts.

The Head of Schools Finance Support also highlighted that minimum per pupil funding levels were now compulsory and had been set at £3750 for primary schools and £5000 for secondary schools with the primary level set to increase to £4000 in 2021/22.

Turning to the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG), the Head of Education and Children's Services Finance confirmed that the LA continued to lobby around the Free School issue. So far there had been no changes around the position in terms of lagged funding but, as Bromley found itself in a unique position, the LA would continue to push for a change in funding. The Chairman noted that Karen Raven had submitted some questions and it was agreed that an update on the impact of Free Schools upon overall schools' funding and per school impact would be provided at the next meeting.

It was also noted that Karen Raven had raised a second issue: for the drop in primary numbers to be projected through to Secondary schools, based upon current 'feeder' patterns, so that areas were able to plan the longer term impact and the LA could plan the 'falling rolls' support well in advance. The Chairman noted that this was not in the direct remit of the Schools' Forum but the Head of Education and Children's Services Finance would be asked to refer the matter to the most appropriate Officer. The Director of Education explained that GLA projections did not indicate a likelihood of significant surplus capacity in the next 4 years and if anything more places would be required to meet demand in the immediate future.

High Needs Block

The Forum recognised that there was significant pressure on the High Needs Block and the block was far more volatile and harder to predict than the other blocks within the DSG.

The Forum noted that in August 2019 the Government allocated £700 million extra nationally for children with SEND in 2020 to 2021, with the intention that every pupil could access the education that was right for them, and none were held back from reaching their potential. This represented an additional £4.3m for Bromley meaning that the £1.9m of Council funds which had been supporting High Needs expenditure would not be required in 2020/21. It was however 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 2020/21 and it had therefore been assumed that Bromley would continue to receive £4.3m in subsequent years, with no additional increase in funding. It was proposed to carry forward £1.1m of this additional funding into 2021/22 in order to smooth the deficit over the next four financial years and to, as far as possible, avoid spikes in funding deficits.

In relation to the proposed 1% increase to levels of top up funding for special schools, AP provision, Additional Resourced Provisions and children with EHC plans in mainstream schools, a Member noted that previously the funding had been cut by 1.5% and, bearing in mind that mainstream provisions were receiving a 4% increase, it seemed a little unfair that the top up funding was increasing by only 1%. In response, the Head of Education and Children's Services explained that Officers were having to work within tighter funding envelopes and a result of this was that certain difficult decisions had to be made. The Director of Education noted that the resolution of the Schools' Forum at its last meeting had been to

propose a 0.84% increase therefore the 1% now proposed represented a further increase. Once there was a level of certainty in terms of High Needs funding the position could change and a multi-year settlement could be taken forward however, for the time being prudence was advised. The Director of Education emphasised that top up funding was only one of the elements of funding and further work could be done around options for future years.

Neil Miller proposed that a recommendation should be made to the LA that levels of top up funding for special schools, AP provision, Additional Resourced Provisions and children with EHC plans in mainstream schools be increased by 1.5%. The motion was seconded by Patrick Foley.

The motion was put to a vote. It was noted that only School representatives on the Schools' Forum were eligible to vote.

In favour: 7
Against: 1
Abstain: 0

The motion was therefore CARRIED.

The Schools' Forum noted that the recommendation would be put to the Children, Education and Families PDS Committee on 30 January 2020.

Falling Rolls Fund

The Head of Schools' Finance Support explained that at the request of the Schools' Forum the Falling Rolls Fund had been introduced for 2019/20 for one year.

Opening the debate, a Primary Head Teacher suggested that support for the Falling Rolls Fund should be withdrawn on the basis that the majority of schools benefitting from the fund had a historic deficit in numbers and were not experiencing a short term fall in numbers. Whilst largely agreeing with comments that had been made another Member suggested that where schools required ongoing funding there should be a gradual reduction in the funding received (e.g. 50% in the second year and no further funding in subsequent years).

The Director of Education noted that for some schools the funding they received was not based on falling rolls but on funding vacancies in reception. The Director further noted that some schools on the list had taken the decision to increase their PAN (published admissions number) and this decision had resulted in them benefitting from funding.

The Head of Schools' Finance Support confirmed that the funding had been earmarked in the budget and there was strict criteria in place with schools needing to provide clear evidence that they met the criteria before any funding was released.

The Chairman proposed that the Falling Rolls fund continue for a further year

In favour: 3
Against: 1
Abstentions: 4

The motion was CARRIED.

The Vice-Chairman suggested that Officers should be asked to develop alternative proposals for the Falling Rolls Fund in future years. The Head of Schools' Finance Support emphasised that the current Falling Rolls Fund was based on clear DfE guidance. If the Schools' Forum were to decide that they wished to move away from the current fund Members of the Schools Forum would have to provide Officers with a clear set of parameters within which further options could be developed.

RESOLVED: That

- 1. An update on the impact of Free Schools upon overall schools' funding and per school impact be provided at the next meeting.**
- 2. A recommendation be made to the LA that levels of top up funding for special schools, AP provision, Additional Resourced Provisions and children with EHC plans in mainstream schools be increased by 1.5%.**
- 3. The Falling Rolls Fund continue for a further year.**

22 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

In bringing the meeting to a close, the Chairman noted that this was Amanda (Mandy) Russell's last Schools' Forum meeting. Mandy had been instrumental in setting up the Schools' Forum and had supported it from the start. The Chairman noted that Mandy would be a big loss to the Schools' Forum and the Forum wished her well in retirement and thanked her for everything she had done.

23 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Provisional dates for the 2020/21 municipal year were

11 June 2020
17 September 2020
5 November 2020
21 January 2021

The provisional dates were subject to change and would be confirmed in May 2020.

The Meeting ended at 6.25 pm

Chairman