

SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.30 pm on 17 September 2020

Present:

David Dilling (Chairman)	Primary Academy Governor (Charles Darwin Academy Trust)
David Bridger (Vice-Chairman)	Non-School Representative (Church of England)(Aquinas Trust)
Patrick Foley	Primary Maintained Head Teacher (Southborough Primary School)
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)
Brid Stenson	Non-School Representative (Early Years)
Ian Travis	Special Head Teacher/Governor Academy (Glebe School)
David Wilcox	Secondary Academy Governor (Darrick Wood School)

Also Present:

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

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Gareth Walters and Clare Grainger.

2 CONFIRMATION OF CHAIRMAN

Mr David Dilling was confirmed as Chairman for 2020/21.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 JANUARY 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2020, were approved and signed as a correct record.

In response to a question concerning whether High Needs Block Funding had been confirmed beyond 2020/21, the Head of Finance for Children, Education and Families explained that the Council had received £4.3m funding for 2020/21 however levels of founding beyond 2020/21 had not been confirmed.

The Schools' Forum noted that in relation to the proposed increase to levels of top up funding for special schools, AP provision, Additional Resourced Provisions and children with EHC plans in mainstream schools, an increase of 1% had been agreed by the Local Authority in January 2020.

**4 CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES PORTFOLIO OUTTURN
2019/20
Report CEF20014**

The report provided the provisional outturn position for 2019/20.

The Schools' Forum noted that there were currently no proposals for a hard funding formula and consequently there was some flexibility in offsetting deficits between blocks.

The Head of Finance for Children, Education and Families confirmed that there was ongoing management action to deal with the unprecedented level of demand for services. The Director of Education explained that there remained an intention to develop more in-borough provision and have more children accommodated closer to home and some positive steps forward had been taken in this regard.

The Schools' Forum noted that the overspend in the Home and Hospital Service had been reviewed as part of 2020/21.

In terms of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and balances brought forward, the Head of Finance for Children, Education and Families confirmed that £1.7m had been brought forward into 2020/21 and this had, in the main, be used to support High Needs. Moving forward the level of carry forward was expected to reduce.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

**5 MAINTAINED SCHOOLS BALANCES
Report CEF20015**

The report provided information on all revenue and capital balances held by Primary, Secondary and Special Maintained Schools as at 31 March 2020, and also provided a comparison to the balances held at the same time in the previous year.

The Schools' Forum noted that there was no substantial change in the balances from previous years and no schools were of concern to the Local Authority.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

**6 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS FOR SCHOOLS 2020
Report CEF20024**

The report provided an update to the Financial Regulations for Schools. The main changes to the regulations had been summarised in the report.

In relation to the registering business interests, a Member of the Schools' Forum noted that the Academies Financial Handbook required that the following interests should be recorded: directorships, partnerships and employments with businesses; trusteeships and governorships at other educational institutions and charities; and for each interest: the name and nature of the business, the nature of the interest and the date the interest began. The Financial Regulations for Schools 2020 did not appear to mirror what Academies were required to do and the question was raised as to whether there should be consistency. The Head of Finance for Children, Education and Families agreed to follow up on the query and provide feedback to both the Audit Sub-Committee and the Schools' Forum.

RESOLVED: That the updated regulations be noted.

**7 FALLING ROLLS FUND
 Report CEF20022**

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

It was noted that many of the schools in receipt of the funding had rolls consistently lower than their PAN and it was suggested that it was not sustainable to fund rolls consistently lower than PAN. The intention had been for the fund to meet a shorter term need not a longer term structural issue.

The Forum noted that 10 schools had received falling rolls funding for two years or more.

The Vice-Chairman proposed that the recommendations in the report be approved:

Funding should be awarded to schools for no more than 2 years and that the Local Authority consider encouraging any school that has not reached PAN in 3 years or more to reduce PAN.

The motion was seconded by David Wilcox, put to the vote and CARRIED.

The Chairman highlighted that he had asked Officers to circulate details of the allocations to members of the Schools' Forum.

The Schools' Forum also noted that any surplus monies from the falling rolls fund would transfer back into the Schools' Block and be distributed to all schools.

RESOLVED: That the Falling Rolls Fund continue with the additional criteria that funding should be awarded to schools for no more than 2 years and that the Local Authority consider encouraging any school that has not reached PAN in 3 years or more to reduce PAN.

8 SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS Report CEF20023

The report provided a directed revision from the Secretary of State regarding Schemes for Financing Local Authority Schools.

The Schools Forum noted the following directed revisions from the Secretary of State

Section 2.3: Submission of financial forecasts: From the 2021 to 2022 funding year each school must submit a 3-year budget forecast each year, at a date determined by the local authority, between 1 May to 30 June.

Section 4.5: Planning for Deficit Budgets: Schools must submit a recovery plan to the local authority when their revenue deficit rises above 5% at 31 March of any year. Local Authorities may set a lower threshold if they wish. The 5% deficit threshold will apply when deficits are measured as at 31 March 2021.

Section 10 Insurance: Instead of taking out insurance schools may join The Secretary of States risk protection arrangement (RPA) for risks covered by RPA.

The Chairman highlighted that whilst schools were expected to provide a 3-year budget forecast each year, they were not provided with the same level of certainty over levels of funding received from central government.

RESOLVED: That the revised Scheme for Financing Schools be approved.

9 VERBAL UPDATE ON FUNDING

The Head of Finance for Children, Education and Families provided the Forum with an update on the current position in relation to funding.

In July 2020, the DfE announced funding changes. Some estimates had been provided which indicated increases in the Schools Block and the High Needs Block and decreases in the Central Block. As usual, information about the Early Years Block would be provided later in the financial year.

The Teachers' Pay Grant and the Pension Grant had been rolled up and included in the Schools Block and the High Needs Block so whilst there appeared to be large increases a significant proportion was the result of the pay and pension grants being included in the overall position.

In theory school funding had increased by 4% overall, 2% on pupil-led funding. However, the devil would be in the detail as the funding would, as in previous years, include an element of Free School funding that would need to be absorbed although the Local Authority continued to lobby government around this issue. Growth funding had not yet been announced and was expected later in the financial year.

In terms of High Needs Funding, there was an expectation that there would be an increase with estimates of £730m nationally (an estimated £5m for Bromley to also include the teachers' pay and pension grant). There had been some acknowledgement of the issues around high needs and the demands and associated costs being incurred by schools and Local Authorities.

Updates were also being made to the deprivation data that was being used.

Further outlines would be brought back to the Schools' Forum in the November meeting and detailed proposals would be presented in January 2021.

In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman, the Head of Finance for Children, Education and Families confirmed that the changes made in respect of teachers' pay and pension for 2021/22 should not have an impact on the Minimum Funding Guarantee as the DfE had been aware of risks and had taken account of this in calculating funding for schools. Further information would be available for the meeting in November.

The Forum noted that of the estimated £16m additional funding in the Schools' Block, approximately £10m was linked to the teachers' pay and pension grant. The decision had been taken not to circulate information on a school by school basis at this time as the position was subject to change and there were a number of factors that may or may not affect a school's funding.

10 SCHOOLS FORUM CONSTITUTION

The Forum noted that there were currently no proposals to change the Schools' Forum constitution.

It was noted that a report would be drafted for consideration at the next meeting to enable the Constitution to then be approved by the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families.

11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman noted that Mrs Karen Raven had recently retired and was therefore no longer a member of the Schools' Forum. Karen had been a member of the Forum since its inception and had contributed a great deal over many years. The Forum expressed its thanks to Karen and wished her well for the future.

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Thursday 5th November 2020.

The Meeting ended at 5.23 pm

Chairman