

SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.30 pm on 20 January 2022

Present:

David Dilling (Chairman)	Primary Academy Governor (Charles Darwin Academy Trust)
Andrew Ferguson (Vice-Chairman)	Non-School Representative (Church of England)(Aquinas Trust)
Claire Bessa	Secondary Academy Head Teacher (E21C)
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)
Sally Weekes	Primary Maintained Head Teacher
Steve Whittle	Secondary Academy Head Teacher (Impact Multi Academy Trust)
David Wilcox	Secondary Academy Governor (Darrick Wood School)

Also Present:

Carol Arnfield	Head of Early Years, School Standards and Adult Education
Julie Crew	Head of Schools' Finance Support
Philippa Gibbs	Democratic Services Officer
David Bradshaw	Head of Children, Education and Families Finance
Jared Nehra	Director of Education

23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Gareth Walters, Claire Grainger and Patrick Foley. Mrs Sally Weekes attended as alternate for Patrick Foley.

Richard Baldwin, Director of Children, Education and Families also sent apologies for the meeting.

24 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 NOVEMBER 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 4th November 2021 were approved, and signed as a correct record, subject to a minor amendment.

Matters Arising

In response to a question the Head of Children, Education and Families Finance confirmed that predictions indicated that by the end of the financial year there would be a £3-4m deficit in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), primarily in the High Needs Block. The Local Authority would be asked by the DfE to set up a deficit recovery plans.

**25 2022/23 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT
Report CEF22009**

The report provided an outline of the final DSG allocation for 2022/23 and an overview of how this would be spent.

The overall position of the DSG was summarised as follows:

2022/23 Dedicated Schools Grant					
	High Needs Block	Early Years Block	Schools Block	Schools Central Block	Total
Gross Grant Funding	£67,378,913	£21,748,109	£245,142,018	£2,090,559	£336,359,599
Recoupment adjustment	- £10,272,000		-£1,742,295		-£12,014,295
Net Grant Allocation	£57,106,913	£21,748,109	£243,399,723	£2,090,559	£324,345,304

Strict guidelines were in place concerning how the DSG was spent.

Schools' Central Block

There had been a reduction of 2.5% in this block. There would continue to be a year-on-year reduction of 2.5% until the block reached the level considered to be appropriate by DfE. The reduction had been slightly compensated by pupil numbers although overall there had been a reduction of £43,000.

The Council continued to provide funding to address the gap between expenditure and grant received. Expenditure had been reviewed with some changes in the amounts allocated through the DSG, but broadly expenditure remained the same.

In response to a question, the Head of Children, Education and Families Finance confirmed that the contribution made by the Council in 2021/22 was £410,000 with the contribution increasing by £50,000 for 2022/23.

The Forum noted that expenditure in the Schools' Central Block related to areas within the Education Department such as access and admissions, licenses and pupil support.

Early Years Block

Funding for Early Years had reduced by £1.6m year-on-year due to a reduction in pupil numbers. Pupil numbers had dropped considerably and there were various reasons for this. The risk regarding the way the block was funded was that if pupil levels began to increase between January and April 2022, the increases would not be funded for the first five or six months of the year and this could lead to a further deficit in the DSG.

The DfE had increased rates for 2022/23 by 21p for 2-year-olds and 17p for 3- and 4-year-olds. LBB was proposing to increase rates by 6p for 2-year-olds and 12p for 3- and 4-year-olds. Consequently, grant funding for 2-year-olds would be approximately £6.03 per hour with the funding provided by LBB being £6.64 per hour. The grant funding for 3- and 4-year-olds would be £5.22 per hour with the funding provided by LBB being £5.10 per hour. This would be reviewed later in the year when it was hoped numbers would stabilise. The Local Authority was required to pass through 95% of the grant funding and continued to more than meet these requirements set by DfE.

The Schools' Forum noted that there was the potential that low numbers in Early Years Setting could feed through and impact funding for the Schools' Block in future years. It was agreed that further information would be circulated following the meeting. The Director of Education reported that it was still too early to analyse the impact on future Reception rolls. The September 2021 intake had been slightly down, and the position was being closely monitored. More would be known about the September 2022 intake once preference data had been analysed. Further information could be provided once the data was available.

Schools' Block

The Schools' Block had increased by £7.3m primarily due to increases in per pupil funding and a slight increase in pupil numbers. The Local Authority tried to follow the National Funding Formula (NFF) and funding was broadly at NFF levels or slightly above. When the DfE started to fund schools direct their intention was to do a "hard" NFF where the national formula would be followed exactly.

The Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) level had been set at 1%. 29 schools (all primaries) were in receipt of MFG and 19 schools (all primaries) received minimum pupil funding protection from the DfE.

The Schools' Forum noted that the DfE had announced an additional £7.1m for Bromley schools, although this was not included as part of the DSG calculation. The funding would be passported straight to schools and was to acknowledge further costs for aspects such as the National Insurance health and social care levy and other costs that the DfE considered needed to be funded. The intention was that the funding would be included in the DSG in future years but, as yet, the grant determination had not been released.

Concerns were raised that currently there was no detailed information about additional funding for specialist settings. It was noted that specialist settings faced the same cost pressures in terms of National Insurance contributions, increased energy costs and increased staffing costs. It was suggested that a further update should be provided at the next meeting once the grant determination details had been received.

The Forum noted that the issue of lagged funding for Free Schools was not having as big an impact as it had in previous years and a further update could be provided at the next meeting. The Local Authority continued to lobby around the issue of funding as Bromley received a comparatively low level of funding across the board.

High Needs Block

Funding for the high Needs Block had increased by £7.5m - £5.1m of this was due to increases in funding of which the Local Authority was already aware as well as pupil number increases. The additional £2.4m supplementary funding had been added to cover additional costs being incurred such as the National Insurance levy. In the case of the High Needs Block the funding had been added to the DSG.

There were still high levels of demand for high needs services and this demand continued to grow at a very fast rate. Whilst there were mitigations in place, pressures continued to manifest themselves in the High Needs Block and the rate of growth in demand was outstripping the funding available. There was currently a deficit of approximately £1m in the High Needs Block, although predictions were that this would significantly increase to £3-4m by the end of the year. In due course, the Local Authority would be asked by DfE to deliver a deficit recovery plan.

The Forum noted the high costs for SEN out-of-borough fees, noting that they were estimated to further increase in 2022/23. The Head of Children, Education and Families Finance confirmed that mitigations were in place for in-borough placements however the mitigations would not have an immediate effect. The Director of Education highlighted that the pressures seen from the growth in demand for EHCPs was unsustainable and this was a national issue around the statutory and legislative framework for SEND. It was hoped that change at a national level would be delivered through the Government's SEND Review. One key driver was that of tribunals. The Local Authority was consistently seeing the impact of tribunal decisions. In many cases the Local Authority was being effectively forced, through decisions overturned by a tribunal at appeal, to place a child in independent non-maintained out of borough high-cost provision where professional advice did not support that as being necessary to meet the needs of the child. There were multiple examples of where this had happened and was a key factor in increases in pressures on the High Needs Block. This issue was replicated across a number of Local Authorities. Another driver in terms of the pressures on the High Needs Block was the extension of EHCPs to 19-25 year olds. This cohort was the fastest growing due to the extension of the obligations placed on the Local Authority.

The Local Authority was seeking to increase the number of SEN places within the Borough. A new Special Free School was being established and was going through the feasibility stage. The timescales for opening the Free School were dependant on the DfE although the aim of the Local Authority was that the School would open in September 2023. The Local Authority was also having conversations with existing specialist providers, including some mainstream schools, to seek to increase capacity within borough wherever possible.

In relation to therapies, the Local Authority was seeking to increase the capacity of mainstream and specialist settings in the Borough through delivering an enhanced and improved contribution for therapies. There was an Integrated Therapies Project being led by Integrated Commissioning Colleagues which was seeking to enhance the provision of therapies however, it was a very challenging landscape with a lack of available therapists within the local area.

The Director of Education confirmed that as a proportion of the overall growth in the high needs funding block, increases in expenditure on out-of-borough placements were less than increases in expenditure on in-borough provision. In terms of the fees being set by independent non-maintained provisions, local authorities were seeing significant increases in the fees being set and this was having a significant impact on both the DSG and social care budgets and needed some form of regulation as budgets were under significant pressures from these increases.

RESOLVED: That the proposals presented be supported.

26 VERBAL UPDATE: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT

The Schools' Forum noted that in October 2021 the DfE conducted a consultation on the provision of school improvement and monitoring grants issued to Local Authorities. Proposals were to remove the grant entirely, phased over a two-year period. Despite receiving significant opposition through the responses received, the DfE had taken the decision to go ahead with the proposals. For the financial year 2022/23, 50% of the normal grant would be received and from 2023/24 onwards no separate grant for school improvement activity would be received. This would mean that local authorities would be required to go to Schools' Forums to request de-delegation to ensure sufficient funds were available to carry out school improvement duties. A new definition of the activities considered by the DfE to be 'core school improvement monitoring duties' was awaited as well as a new definition of 'schools causing concern'.

Bromley expected to be able to manage the reduction in the grant for the next financial year, although it would mean slightly less activities. A further update would be provided when the DfE released more information about the new definitions and the core school improvement activities to be delivered that may require de-delegated funding.

27 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Training

The Chairman thanked the Head of Children, Education and Families Finance for the training that had been provided following the last meeting. It was likely that further training would be provided when the current vacancies on the Schools' Forum were filled.

28 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting would be confirmed in the coming weeks.

The Meeting ended at 5.55 pm

Chairman