

## **SCHOOLS' FORUM**

Minutes of the meeting held at 4.30 pm on 7 July 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)
Andrew Rees	Secondary Maintained School Head Teacher (St Olaves Grammar School)
Ian Travis	Special Head Teacher/Governor Academy (Glebe School)
David Wilcox	Secondary Academy Governor (Darrick Wood School)

### **Also Present:**

Julie Crew	Head of Schools' Finance Support
Philippa Gibbs	Democratic Services Officer
David Bradshaw	Head of Children, Education and Families Service Finance
Jared Nehra	Director of Education
Jo Partridge	Democratic Services Officer

### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Chris Hollands (Primary Academy Headteacher) and Brid Stenson (Early Years Representative).

### **2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 JANUARY 2022**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2022 were approved, and signed as a correct record.

### **3 IMPLEMENTING THE DIRECT NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA - GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION Report CEF22045**

The report provided details of the National Funding Formula consultation and the proposed approach.

The Head of Children, Education and Families Finance introduced the report and explained that the proposal was to submit a joint response from the Local Authority and the Schools' Forum. As such it was suggested that a working group be established to consider the Forum's response. The Chairman reported that it

was proposed that the first meeting of the working group would take place on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2022. Volunteers for the working group would be sought following the meeting.

The Forum noted that the consultation was seeking views on proposals that all schools be funded on consistent principles. The consultation confirmed that the National Funding Formula would progress from 2023/24 being fully implemented from 2027/28.

In response to a question, the Director Education confirmed that whilst the consultation could have an impact on the review of high needs provision being undertaken by the Local Authority, the reality was that it was likely that it would be some time before any changes arising from the Government consultation would impact at a local level. It was therefore important that the Local Authority continued with its review and where necessary took account of any national policy changes which may have an impact as and when they were announced.

In addition, the Forum noted that a consultation on Early Years Funding had recently been launched and a working group would be established to consider the response of the Schools' Forum. Since the deadlines for submission of the two consultations to the DfE were before the next meeting of the Schools Forum, the drafts produced by the Working Groups would be circulated to Schools Forum members for their consideration prior to submission to the DfE.

The Chairman highlighted that Members of the Schools' Forum should provide any general comments on the consultation to the Head of Children, Education and Families Finance.

**RESOLVED: That a Working Group to consider the response to the Direct National Funding Formula Consultation be established.**

#### **4 SPENDING BY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS IN 2021/22 Report CEF22033**

The report provided information on all revenue and capital balances held by Primary, Secondary and Special Maintained Schools as at 31 March 2022, and also provided a comparison to the balances held at the same time in the previous year.

In response to a question, the Director of Education confirmed that the Local Authority would seek to support any Bromley school facing financial difficulties and for maintained schools, the Local Authority had a duty of care to ensure a stable financial footing.

The Schools' Forum noted that since the publication of the report the Governing Body of Downe Primary School had unanimously resolved to apply for academy status with the consultation concluding in the next couple of weeks.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

## **5 CEF OUTTURN 2021/22 Report CEF22044**

The report provided the CEF provisional outturn position for 2021/22.

The Forum noted the significant continuing financial pressures with deficits emerging in the Dedicated Schools Grant around High Needs. The deficits had been declared to the DfE and discussions were taking place around recovery plans to reduce the deficit. The Director of Education reported that a first meeting had taken place with the ESFA (Education Skills Funding Agency) and DfE and discussions had been positive with a recognition of the work that was ongoing on the Local Authority's deficit recovery plan. Bromley's deficit recovery plan was currently in draft form and would be presented to the Schools' Forum, the Children, Education and Families PDS Committee and the SEND Governance Board in September 2022.

The Forum discussed the systematic challenges to be addressed in respect of high needs funding, noting that 24 of the 32 London boroughs had entered a deficit position before LB Bromley. In addition, a number of local authorities had found themselves subject to the DfE's "Safety Valve" – directly accountable to the DfE on a set of challenging and robust deficit recovery arrangements.

In response to a question, the Director of Education confirmed that the Local Authority continually pursued the efficient use of public money and was seeking to reduce reliance on high cost out-of-borough independent placements. One of the key national policy issues was to address the disconnect between parental expectation and what could be afforded locally, especially going forward in the context of exponential cost rises associated with increasing inflationary pressures.

The Forum heard that whilst it was early days, the increased use of mediation appeared to be having a positive impact and additionally evidence of some progress in the tribunal decisions being reached.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted**

## **6 HIGH NEEDS FUNDING BANDING REVIEW**

With respect to the High Needs Funding Banding Review, the Schools' Forum noted that at this stage no decisions had been taken and the review process was ongoing. A further update would be provided in the new academic year.

## **7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Director of Education drew the Forum's attention to recent concerns that had been raised regarding a decision taken by one Academy to raise the charges levied for wrap around care. Whilst recognising that it was not the role of the Local Authority to become involved in any decisions taken by academies around charging, the Schools' Forum noted that although there was no current Government Guidance on hardship funds, a number of schools did have Hardship Funds in place, and these were available to support families struggling with the

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cost of extracurricular activities. A Member of the Schools' Forum reported anecdotally that one such fund was in place at an Academy Trust and, to date, there had not been an enormous call on the fund.

**8            DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on 29 September 2022.

The Meeting ended at 5.25 pm

Chairman