

Minutes of Schools Forum

4pm, 11th July 2019

Saracens High School

Members Present:

Gilbert Knight

Keith Nason

Simon Horne

Lucy Rodgers

Alexander Banks

Nigel Taylor

Dr. Matthew Stevens

Sarah Sands

Ian Kingham

Marc Lewis (late arrival)

Officers present:

Ian Harrison

Gaspare Nicolini

Dr. Helen Phelan

Claire Gray

Councillors:

CLlr David Longstaff

Observers:

Simon Allin, Newsquest

Claire Edwards, Bursar - Saracens High School

Did not attend:

Andrew McClusky

John Bowra

Annette Long

Jude Stone

Anthony Vourou

Lucy Harrison

Curtis Sweetingham

Luke Bridges

Jack Newton

Robin Archibald

Jo Djora

Sarah Vipond

Joann Kelly

Ziz Chater

Apologies:

John Bowra, Jude Stone and Luke Bridges in advance of the meeting. SS gave apologies for Robin Archibald and Jo Djora at the meeting.

Declarations of Interest:

Keith Nason declared an interest in DSG de-delegation, as his role is part funded from the DSG. GK advised that as de-delegation is not an item on the agenda on this occasion, the declaration of interest is not relevant to discussions at this meeting.

Minutes of last meeting:

Confirmed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Item 6a: 2018/19 final outturn and reserve position.

As there were only 9 voting members present at this time and Schools Forum was not quorate, item 6a on 2018/19 Final outturn was deferred until a 10th voting member arrived.

Once ML arrived, GN presented item 6a giving the final 2018/19 DSG outturn and reserve position. The HN block final position improved from previous reports, due to disputed invoices from other LAs/establishments.

The Early Years block reported an underspend, but a claw back by the DfE is expected once final EY pupil numbers are adjusted.

The final position was an in-year underspend of £1.042m. The planned £0.501m call on reserves was not needed in 2018/19 and therefore total reserves carried forward to 2019/20 are £1.543m.

Members were asked to note and approve the final 2018/19 outturn position.

Agreed unanimously.

Item 6b: School balances and deficits.

GN tabled a paper showing provisional school balance and deficit positions at 31/3/2019. The figures have not been finalised and approved by the DfE, so will not be published until later in the year. Overall, school balances have increased in 2018/19 to an average of 5.9% of school revenue income. 8 schools had end of year deficits, but 4 of these were less than £25,000.

Erratum: Noam Primary school balance at 31.3.18 is incorrect, as the school was not maintained at that time and therefore balance was not known – should be zero.

There are 5 schools with licensed deficits brought forward from 2018/19, and a further 6 schools have not set balanced budgets for 2019/20 and are in discussions about licensed deficits.

SS asked if the increased level for accruals had distorted the balances. GN advised that as accounts were closed on 20th March, there should not have been significant accruals this late in the financial year and the impact on balances was not material.

GN asked if individual schools had issues they should contact schools' accountancy, providing the invoices between £1,000 and £4,999 and the LA would advise for 2019/20 account closure.

SH wanted to point out that although some schools were showing increased balances, the actions taken by schools to reduce costs and achieve this position should be acknowledged. In some cases, this has included several staff redundancies.

IH confirmed that the council acknowledges and understands the actions taken by schools to achieve savings and set balanced budgets.

KN queried whether licensed deficit requests involved cash payments to schools. GN advised that it does not necessarily require a cash transfer but is in effect approval to run in overdraft. If a cash transfer is required, it is borrowing against the credit balances held by all schools.

Item 6c: 2019/20 provisional DSG budget and s251 submission.

CG presented the item on the provisional 2019/20 DSG budget, showing the income/expenditure by block. The Schools and Central blocks are final, but the HN and EY blocks will change based on adjusted pupil numbers for Early Years, Imported/Exported High Needs pupils, and HN place recoupment.

The LA must set a balanced budget, including any brought forward reserve, so an amount of £1.543m has provisionally allocated within the HN block as this is where the cost pressures exist, although some of this may need to cover any expected EY adjustment when confirmed.

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Item 6d: Teachers' Pay and Teachers' Pension Grants.

There has been not confirmation of continuation of the Teachers' Pay grant in 2020/21, nor specific details of the Teachers' Pension Grant covering the period September 2019 to March 2020. IK asked when the school level allocations would be confirmed and payments made. CG advised that this would be in October 2019. The LA will receive the grant and pay maintained and Special schools, the ESFA will make payments direct to academies and free schools.

Item 6e: Schools Capital programme – Specialist provision fund.

IH presented the item on use of the Specialist provision capital fund, and explained that in order to assess priorities, a needs analysis and sufficiency assessment has been undertaken and mapped to projected future needs.

Any increase in local provision is expected to achieve savings in out-Borough and independent placements, as parents will have more choice of high quality provision locally.

New ARP provision has been identified, and the needs are expected to be met by the new ARPs that opened in 2018 and the Whitefield ARP that comes online in 2019. The main shortfall in Special School provision is likely to be met by the Windmill Special Free School. However, approximately 10 additional places per year will be required before then, increasing to a total of about 40 by 2023.

There is therefore a need for temporary provision until the Windmill opens, and in case the opening is delayed. The opening of the Windmill depends on progress by the ESFA with land acquisition, planning permission and building works.

IH advised that the full consultation can be accessed on the Engage Barnet website, but Schools Forum's views are being sought on planned capital expenditure and place increases.

HP confirmed that by 2023, there should be sufficient place provision in-borough to meet need, and this would give more parental choice. She agreed that placement of SEN pupils needs to be developed and become more proactive in looking across the local system and matching provision to need.

GK commented that many pupils encounter difficulties in the transition period between Primary and Secondary placements, and that additional suitable settings may need to be provided.

HP advised that pieces of work are being undertaken identifying clear pathways for SEMH pupils, and how additional support can be given in mainstream schools to pupils with social communication rather than learning needs.

IK confirmed that there are pupils being placed in Barnet secondary special schools from mainstream primary to resolve this issue.

LR asked if interim places are given in ARPs until special provision is available, what support and resources will be provided to ARPs, and over what period.

HP advised that additional ARP places will be available in September 2019 and March 2020. and there may be a need for some children with complex needs to be placed in mainstream ARPs, until more special school places are available, but appropriate top-up funding would be allocated.

Item 6f: High Needs block 3-year projections.

Based on the needs analysis and sufficiency assessment discussed in item 6e, this paper provides the 3-year costings based on the place requirements identified. The ARP funding review is ongoing and is

intended to reflect the original intention of ARP pupils spending some of their time in mainstream classes. There is also a review of placements of complex pupils.

GK commented that the authority must work with parents to identify HN provision at an early stage. However, SH commented that conversely, several parents apply to mainstream schools rather than opt for specialist provision.

NT commented that a significant amount is spent in Independent and Non-Maintained special schools. HP agreed that these were exceptional placements based on need but are invariably high cost.

The tables in the paper show the increased expenditure based on volume increases in pupil places and numbers of EHCP pupils, as projected by the demographic projections. Some areas of savings have been identified, but it is not enough to prevent the overspend. The tables show the pressure on the HN block over the next 3-years, savings identified and the likely overspend as a result.

IH confirmed that an overspend seems likely without an additional injection of funding from the DfE. Depending on whether/ how much is forthcoming, the authority may have to request a 0.5% transfer from the Schools block to the High Needs block for the 2020/21 financial year.

Item 6g: DfE consultation and call for evidence.

HP advised members that the DfE has opened a consultation and call for evidence as part of a review of pressures on the HN budgets reported by most authorities. Members are invited to respond.

Item 7a: Proposed revisions to the Scheme for Financing Schools.

GN reported to Schools Forum that there are some changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools that will be consulted on in the autumn term. The main changes are directed by the DfE, but other changes proposed by the authority are around clarification on capital expenditure time limits being met before any revenue to capital movements; also, formalisation of arrangements for licensed deficits; and clearer guidance on redundancy/ early retirement criteria.

GN confirmed that the authority will provide Headteacher/ Bursar training or workshops on the changes. KN suggested that these should also be offered to governors. GN confirmed that governors would also be invited to any events.

Item 7b: Schools Improvement Grant, 2019/20 and 2020/21 proposals.

As the DfE has continued the School Improvement Grant for September 2019 to March 2020, and as discussed at the meeting in October 2018, the full amount of de-delegated funding by maintained school will not be required to support the LNI service for 2019/20. As the authority is unable to reimburse maintained schools in-year, any underspend in SI will be rolled forward and used to offset the de-delegation requested from maintained schools for the service in 2020/21.

Item 7c: 2020/21 National Funding Formula.

CG advised members that there have not been any significant announcements regarding the National Funding Formula proposals. 2020/21 will still be a 'soft' formula, giving authorities some discretion over factors used in their local formula. Barnet proposed to continue to move towards implementation of the NFF, but with additional protection provided by a more generous Minimum Funding Guarantee if affordable. The funding formula, MFG and cap will be subject to consultation with all schools next term.

It is not known whether the government will continue to provide additional High Needs funding as it did in 2018/19 and 2019/20, as this is pending the spending review and SEN call for evidence. Depending on the level of any additional amount allocated in the HN block and the expected pressures on the HN block discussed previously, Barnet may need to request a transfer of up to 0.5% of the Schools' Block to the HN block for 2020/21.

The authority may also need to consult with maintained primary and secondary schools on proposals to continue to fund former Education Services Grant services from the Dedicated Schools Grant. The Secretary of State approved this in 2019/20, and given the council's loss of £2.8m in ESG, the council is likely to make the request for further funding from maintained schools for the affected central services for 2020/21. This would also be subject to consultation in the autumn term.

Item 8: AOB.

None.

Item 9: Agenda for next meeting.

Agreed as shown.

Item 10: Dates of future meetings.

~~Thursday, 3rd~~ October 2019 – to be rescheduled

(same date as Headteachers Residential conference)

Tuesday, 10th December 2019

Thursday, 12th March 2020

Tuesday, 7th July 2020