

## SCHOOLS FORUM

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 1 DECEMBER 2022

Membership	Name	Phase	School	HT/Gov	Start Date	End Date
Maintained	*Luke Bridges	Primary	All Saints CE, N20	HT	03/07/2018	30/11/2024
Maintained	Ziz Chater	Primary	Martin Primary	HT	02/11/2018	30/11/2024
Maintained	*Simon Horne (C)	Secondary	Friern Barnet	HT	26/11/2018	18/01/2024
Maintained	*Sarah Sands	Primary	Garden Suburb Infants	HT	02/11/2018	30/11/2024
Maintained	Anthony Vorou	Primary	St John's CE, N11	Gov	15/10/2015	18/01/2024
Maintained	*Harvey Freeman	Primary	Hasmonean Primary	Gov	18/01/2021	18/01/2024
Maintained	Chaya Posen	Primary	Noam School	HT	07/07/2021	07/07/2024
Maintained	Kirstie Barrett	Primary	Coppetts Wood	HT	01/01/2022	31/12/2024
Maintained	Liz Longworth	Primary	Northside	HT	01/01/2022	31/12/2024
Maintained	Sarah Maltese	Primary	St Pauls N11	HT	01/01/2022	31/12/2024
Maintained	Vacant	Primary	Frith Manor	Gov	01/01/2022	31/12/2024
Academy	Dan Hawkins	Primary	CHC Federation	HT	01/01/2022	31/12/2024
Academy	*Clare Wagner	Secondary	Henrietta Barnett	HT	01/01/2022	31/12/2024
Academy	*Sian Morris	Primary	The Hyde Primary Academy	HT	07/10/2021	07/10/2024
Academy	* Claire Barnes	Secondary	Ark Pioneer	Gov	01/01/2022	31/12/2024
Academy	*Marc Lewis for Gavin Smith	Secondary	Wren Academy	HT	02/11/2018	30/11/2024
Academy	*Matthew Stevens	Secondary	Saracens	HT	07/11/2018	30/11/2024
Academy	*Robin Archibald	Primary	Broadfields Academy	HT	29/04/2016	30/11/2024
Academy	John Bowra	Secondary	Chris's college Finchley	Gov	22/06/2017	18/01/2024
Academy	*Violet Walker	Secondary	Queen Elizabeth Girls' School	HT	01/01/2022	31/12/2024
Special	*Ian Kingham	Special Academy	Oak Lodge	Dp HT	11/05/2018	18/01/2024
special	*Gilbert Knight (VC)	Special Maintained	Oakleigh	Gov	26/11/2018	18/01/2024
EY	Vacant	Maintained Nursery	Moss Hall Nursery	HT	26/11/2018	30/11/2024
EY	*Sarah Vipond	PVI	Middx University Nursery		28/04/2015	18/01/2024
PRU	*Joanne Kelly	PRU	PRUs	HT	28/04/2015	18/01/2024
Post-16	Vacant					
Trade Union	*Keith Nason	Trade Union	National Education Union		28/04/2015	18/01/2024

In attendance:

\*Cllr Pauline CoakleyWebb, Chair of Children, Education & Safeguarding Committee

\*Neil Marlow, Director, Barnet Education and Learning Service (BELS)

\*Karen Flanagan, Director of SEND & Inclusion

\*Sharon Palma, Head of Finance

\*Ashley Hughes, Investments & Innovation

Madiha Bhenick, Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Finance Manager

\*Richard Cox, Interim DSG Finance Manager

\*George Peradigou, Clerk

\*Denotes member present

## 1 INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair invited introductions, which were made by new members of staff, including Sharon Palma, new Head of Finance, Richard Cox, Interim DSG Manager, Karen Flanagan, Director of SEND & Inclusion, and Ashley Hughes, Deputy Director of Finance Investments & Innovation.

Apologies for absence were received and accepted on behalf of Sarah Maltese, Ziz Chater, Dan Hawkins, and Liz Longworth. It was noted that Steve Bernard of the Department for Education, who was due to attend as an observer, had also sent apologies.

## 2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

No declarations of interest were declared related to the agenda items to be discussed.

### **3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2022, copies of which had been circulated prior to the meeting, were confirmed, and approved by the Chair.

### **4 MATTERS ARISING**

#### **Budget Working Party**

The Chair reminded members that the previous meeting had noted a large variance of balances with some schools having high balances and a record number of schools having deficit balances. Sarah Sands had since co-ordinated a Budget Working Party to investigate this and gave an update on proceedings.

It was noted that the first meeting had recently taken place with schools represented by Headteachers and Business Managers. She thanked the Local Authority (LA) for its support and representation from Neil Marlow, Director of BELS, Katie Dawbarn, Co-Head of School Improvement, and Ben Thomas, Strategic Lead, Sharon Palma, Head of Finance, Madiha Bhenick, Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Finance Manager, Richard Cox, Interim DSG Finance Manager.

Members noted that the first meeting was useful in helping to understand why such budget variances existed and what support was available for schools struggling with deficit balances. Financial challenges were discussed, including those related to staffing, energy usage, SEND funding, building costs, and decreasing pupil rolls.

Suggestions from the meeting included:

- Requesting that the finance team deliver termly/quarterly briefings to keep schools updated on the latest financial and budgetary news impacting them.
- Obtaining clearer guidance on building support to ensure transparency (this will be discussed at the next meeting where the relevant staff have been invited).
- A presentation on pupil place planning to help schools plan accordingly.
- Explicit guidance on financial planning where schools faced financial difficulties.
- Guidance around timelines for budget settings to enable better budget modelling.
- Knowledge-sharing from schools who have built up healthy reserves.

The Chair thanked Sarah Sands for her thorough update and invited members to contact her if they wanted to get involved with the Budget Working Party. Sarah Sands undertook to advertise the next date and see if anybody else wanted to join.

Action: Sarah Sands

There were no other matters arising.

### **5 SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS**

Sharon Palma stated that there had been no direct revisions to the scheme. Members also noted that the Salix Scheme, a school borrowing facility, had closed.

There would be no transitional impact, or otherwise, for Barnet Schools as a result because the Local Authority already matches the National Funding Formula.

## **6 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) MONITORING FORECAST OUTTURN 2022-23**

Sharon Palma gave a summary of the report, stating that, since the last meeting revised allocations had been received with regards to the DSG budget. The following was noted:

The latest DSG allocation showed an additional £2.688m. The Forecast DSG reserve at year end as £4.1m with a forecast saving of £1.5m (£1.460m) against the Growth Fund.

There was an additional £2.4m for Early Years due to an increase in pupil numbers and an additional £0.3m for High Needs due to the import/export adjustment (this adjustment was received for pupils living outside of the borough but attending Barnet schools).

It was noted that the DSG reserves brought forward at the start of the year were £4.87m, of which £2.8m was earmarked – £1.4m for Hong Kong and Afghan refugees, £0.4m for maintained nurseries, and potentially £1m for Barnet Hill Academy.

A discussion ensued on the unexpected surplus in the High Needs budget. In response to a query from Sarah Sands, Neil Marlow confirmed that the number of pupils entitled to high needs support has increased as opposed to the number of pupils overall.

In response to a query from Ian Kingham, Sharon Palma confirmed that, while there was currently an underspend, she expected the high needs budget would be spent by year end.

It was noted that the LA would undertake a High Needs Review which is due to be commissioned by Karen Flanagan, the new Director of SEND and Inclusion. This was due to be discussed later in the meeting.

## **7 NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA (NFF) 2023-24**

That Forum **NOTED** the provisional funding allocations and changes compared to 2022-23:

The NFF meant Barnet was set to receive £383.4m, an increase of £9.3m (2.5% uplift) compared to the previous year. This was broken down into:

Indicative DSG Funding 2023-24

- Schools Block £309.265m (+£5.15m)
- High Needs Block £71.757m (+£4.0m)
- Central Services Block £2.337m (+£0.111m)

Sharon Palma reminded members that the report did not reflect the £2.3b promised to schools nationally by the Government in the Autumn statement. This was expected to be received within the month, although no official confirmation has been

received. She confirmed that this was likely to be received by way of a grant in the first year and then possibly merged into the funding formula henceforth.

It was noted that the factor values were being increased for Free School Meals (FSM) 6 IDACI with an uplift of 4.3% while other funding factors increased by 2.4%.

2023-24 would be the first year that LAs would transition to the Direct National Funding Formula without allowing for adjustment through local funding formulas. She was pleased to remind Members that Barnet were one of the few LAs which matched the national funding formula, meaning there would be no impact on schools because of this transition. The Schools Supplementary Grant (SSG) grant was also due to be rolled into the NFF.

The Chair commented that the school budgets were indicative as they hadn't built in census data but could only increase because of the extra funding expected (as per the Government's Autumn announcement).

## **8 DE-DELEGATION 2023-24**

### **8.1 2023-24 Central Schools Services Block**

Members noted that the report was an update to show indicative figures which had slightly increased to approximately £2.3m, for which the split had been pro-rated based on the 2022-23 budget.

The Forum was asked to agree to the ongoing responsibilities and uphold the historic commitments.

Members of the forum **AGREED** the figures for ongoing responsibilities and noted that the final figures will be presented to the forum in January 2023.

The Chair also thanked Sharon Palma for including a breakdown in the report which showed how the money was being spent.

### **8.2 2023-24 De-delegation**

The Chair introduced the item. Maintained school Forum members were asked to agree to the following de-delegations from the Schools Block:

- Behaviour Support £77,038
- Narrowing the Gap £355,142
- Trade Union Duties £47,629
- School Contingency £460,461

Sharon Palma explained that the rates would be held the same as the current year 2022-23. Figures were based on the 2022-23 Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) which was subject to change.

Forum Members representing maintained schools unanimously **APPROVED** the de-delegation rates for financial year 2023-24.

### **8.3 2023-24 Former ESG Services**

The Forum was asked to agree to the following de-delegations from the Schools Block for the following services formerly funded by ESG.

- Statutory and regulatory duties for Finance, Internal Audit, Consistent Financial Reporting, Pensions Admin and Human Resources £550k
- Asset Management £125k
- Monitoring National Curriculum Assessments £25k

Sharon Palma reminded members that this was agreed by the forum the previous year.

Members of the Schools Forum **APPROVED** the proposal for 2023- 24 to charge the cost of services formerly funded from the ESG to the budgets of maintained schools, to the amount of £700,000.

#### **8.4 Proposal to increase de-delegation due to removal of School Improvement Monitoring & Brokering Grant (SIMB) 2023-24**

The Forum was asked to agree to the following de-delegations from the Schools Block for the following:

- to continue the historic school improvement de-delegation of £118,908 to support the Learning Network Inspector Team.
- an additional sum of £361,416 following the removal of the remaining SIMB Grant to support the work of the School Improvement Team.

Neil Marlow outlined the importance of the School Improvement Team support to Barnet schools and reminded Members of the previous consultation where the Forum agreed the additional de-delegation, although the DfE subsequently decided to continue with the grant, meaning this previously agreed de-delegation had not materialised at the time. This was added to the DSG reserves and used to fund the Schools Improvement Service for the current year, when half the SIMB grant was removed.

Maintained school representatives on the School's Forum were asked to agree an increased amount of de-delegated funding for the school improvement service from £118,908 to £480,324 to cover the complete loss of the SIMB Grant and enable the school improvement service to continue in its current form. This would ensure the continuation of the current non-traded parts of the School Improvement Service following the removal of the entire SIMB grant in April 2023.

It was noted that disapproval of the proposal would make it necessary to reduce the budget of the non-traded school improvement service and reduce the council funding for the Learning Network Inspector team to a single post, tasked with carrying out the core statutory functions envisaged by the DfE.

Maintained school representatives of the Forum **AGREED** the following:

- to continue with the historic school improvement de-delegation of £118,908 to fund the Learning Network Inspector Team to deliver its statutory functions.
- to de-delegate, from the DSG Schools Block, the additional sum of £361,416 to support the work of the school improvement team following the governments withdrawal of the SIMB Grant.

- The options for de-delegation were outlined as set out in the report. Following a vote, the Forum opted to adopt **Option 3**: A weighted rate of £18.57 applying to primary aged children and a weighted rate of £6.67 applying to secondary aged children.

In response to a query from Cllr CoakleyWebb, Neil Marlow confirmed that amalgamated schools would be charged once whereas federated schools would be charged separately.

## **9 FORMULA FACTORS – CRITERIA FOR AGREEMENT – SPLIT SITES AND GROWTH 2023-24**

Richard Cox outlined that both the Split Site Criteria and Growth Fund Criteria for 2023-24 were unchanged from previous years and that only the resulting figures had been updated as outlined in the report.

It was noted that, as of 2024-25, the Split Fund element would be determined by the national formula funding and schools were encouraged to contact the LA if they thought they qualified for split sites before the end of December 2022.

The Forum **AGREED** the proposed Split Site Criteria and Growth Fund Criteria for 2023-24 as set forth in the report.

## **10 MINIMUM FUNDING GUARANTEE (MFG) & DISAPPLICATION 2023-24**

Sharon Palma outlined the report, which was an update. Members **NOTED** that the LA would be holding the minimum funding guarantee at the top end of 0.5%. It was noted that the DfE had stipulated that this was the maximum LA could set the MFG.

## **11 HIGH NEEDS BUDGET UPDATE**

The Forum **NOTED** that the review of the high needs block would be undertaken shortly, which the LA has commissioned to come out of the Transformation Fund.

Members of the Forum were asked to participate in the review via stakeholder interviews, where they'd represent their area and phase, and later be involved in the recommendations stage.

Action: Forum Members

It was noted that, since 2018, the number of children and young people with Educational Health Care Plans (EHCPs) had increased 10% every year. Within Barnet this equated to an 85% increase since 2015 (including those in post 16 settings). It was noted that, due to the increased age range, an increase was expected.

Karen Flanagan commended the Forum for its work related to High Needs following the LA being chosen by the DfE as part of its research into good practice with regards to the High Needs Block. However, it was noted that the current trajectory showed that the LA was potentially heading into a deficit position, hence the importance of being proactive in terms of commissioning a High Needs Block review

to ensure funds were being used effectively to improve outcomes for high needs children.

The review was planned to begin in early January and end by early summer 2023, which is when recommendations would be expected.

## **12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

A discussion ensued regarding the membership of the Forum. It was noted that Nicola Curtis and Anette Long had resigned. Thanks were recorded to them for the terms they had served on the Forum.

The Forum now had three vacancies and the Clerk undertook to arrange elections and source replacements.

Action: Clerk

Neil Marlow reminded Members that it had previously been **AGREED** to consider the appointment of Chair and Vice Chair annually at the first meeting of each calendar year. The Clerk undertook to add this to the agenda for the next meeting.

Action: Clerk

Gilbert Knight reminded staff to ensure the website was kept up to date with meeting details, as it was a public meeting.

It was also noted that future dates would be set and circulated soon.

Action: Clerk

There being no further business for discussion, the Chair brought the meeting to a close.