

**SCHOOLS FORUM**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD**  
**ON THURSDAY 30 MARCH 2023**

Membership	Name	Phase	School	HT/Gov	End Date
Maintained	*Luke Bridges	Primary	All Saints CE, N20	HT	30/11/24
Maintained	Ziz Chater	Primary	Martin Primary	HT	30/11/24
Maintained	*Simon Horne (C)	Secondary	Friern Barnet	HT	18/01/24
Maintained	*Sarah Sands	Primary	Garden Suburb Infants	HT	30/11/24
Maintained	Anthony Vorou	Primary	St John's CE, N11	Gov	18/01/24
Maintained	Harvey Freeman	Primary	Hasmonean Primary	Gov	18/01/24
Maintained	Chaya Posen	Primary	Noam School	HT	07/07/24
Maintained	*Jackie Menczer	Primary	Menorah Primary	HT	03/02/26
Maintained	*Liz Longworth	Primary	Northside	HT	31/12/24
Maintained	Sarah Maltese	Primary	St Pauls N11	HT	31/12/24
Maintained	*Ian Phillips	Primary	Squires Lane Learning Fed.	Gov	30/03/26
Academy	Dan Hawkins	Primary	Childs Hill, Clarendon Fed	HT	31/12/24
Academy	Clare Wagner	Secondary	Henrietta Barnett	HT	31/12/24
Academy	Sian Morris	Primary	The Hyde Prim. Acad.	HT	07/10/24
Academy	Claire Barnes	Secondary	Ark Pioneer	Gov	31/12/24
Academy	Marc Lewis (Sub for Gavin Smith)	Secondary	Wren Academy	HT	30/11/24
Academy	Matthew Stevens	Secondary	Saracens	HT	30/11/24
Academy	*Robin Archibald	Primary	Broadfields Academy	HT	30/11/24
Academy	*John Bowra	Secondary	Chris's College Finchley	Gov	18/01/24
Academy	Violet Walker	Secondary	Queen Elizabeth Girls' School	HT	31/12/24
Special	*Ian Kingham	Special Academy	Oak Lodge	Dp HT	18/01/24
Special	Gilbert Knight (VC)	Special Maintained	Oakleigh	Gov	18/01/24
EY	*Ben Hasan	Maintained Nursery	Moss Hall Nursery	HT	07/12/25
EY	Sarah Vipond	PVI	Middx University Nursery		18/01/24
PRU	*Joanne Kelly	PRU	PRUs	HT	18/01/24
Post-16	Vacancy				
Trade Union	*Keith Nason	Trade Union	National Education Union		18/01/24

Non-Members:

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

Ben Thomas, Strategic Lead, Barnet LA (Local Authority)

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

\*Karen Flanagan, Director of SEND & Inclusion (BELS)

Sharon Palma, Head of Finance

\*Richard Cox, Interim DSG Finance Manager

\*George Peradigou, Clerk

\*Denotes member present

## **1 WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS**

The Chair introduced and welcomed new members Jackie Menczer, Primary Headteacher representative from Menorah Primary, and Ian Phillips, Primary Governor representative from the Squires Lane Learning Federation. Both had recently been elected to the Forum.

The Chair also confirmed that Gilbert Night had accepted the nomination received, in his absence, for the position of Vice Chair.

## **2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received and accepted on behalf of Dan Hawkins, Sarah Maltese, Matt Stevens, Clare Wagner, Sarah Vipond, Sian Morris, Marc Lewis, Ziz Chater, Claire Barnes, and Harvey Freeman.

### **3 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST**

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

### **4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2023, copies of which had been circulated prior to the meeting, were confirmed, and approved by the Chair, subject to minor amendments.

#### **Matters Arising**

#### **5. Minutes of the Previous Meeting: Budget Working Party**

Members were reminded that the Budget Working Party had been co-ordinated by Sarah Sands, with support from the LA, to help deal with the high number of schools with deficit budget balances.

Sarah Sands gave an update on proceedings, as follows:

- The working party had received support and representation from Headteachers and the various LA departments, including finance and building compliance.
- Meetings were focused on supporting schools to manage budgets, with the most recent meeting focusing on buildings and the criteria used to allocate funding to schools for building projects. It was established that 'big' ticket' projects had to be of the value of £10,000 or more and that the LA received between £3-3.5m a year for such works. Examples included roofs, window replacements, subsidence, and structural problems. A conditions audit and health & safety scoring system underpinned the prioritisation of such works. Schools with 'big ticket' items had agreed to inform Alison Dawes as soon as possible.
- Particularly larger and cost-heavy projects could be broken up and delivered gradually over a longer timeframe.
- Projects for voluntary aided schools were prioritised using a different mechanism, and academy schools would apply directly to the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF).
- Schools requested improved communication regarding the progress of capital projects or bids.
- The estates team was due to present to the Admin Forum regarding compliance. Schools would also be provided with a contact list and information on which services were free and traded.

#### **5. Minutes of the Previous Meeting: Document Uploads**

The Clerk confirmed that the meeting documents had been uploaded and that the membership details and links to previous minutes had now been corrected.

#### **8. Budget Proposal 2023-24: Special School Funding from the High Needs Block**

In response to a query raised by Ian Kingham at the previous meeting regarding the passporting of High Needs Block Funding to Special Schools, Karen Flanagan confirmed that there would be a 3.4% uplift, as outlined in the High Needs Block 2022-23 Outturn and 2023-24 Budget to be discussed under Item 8.

## **8. Budget Proposal 2023-24: Band E Pupil Funding**

Dan Hawkins had previously raised the concern that he had a number of pupils in his schools identified as Band E, meaning they had met the criteria for a special school place, although they remained in mainstream schools due to a lack of available special school places. He stated that he experienced difficulties accessing the funding available for these pupils and enquired as to whether this funding would still be available.

In response, Karen Flanagan stated that her team had circulated information to all Headteachers regarding the funding changes following the review that was conducted the previous year. This was also included in the appendix of the High Needs Block 2022-23 Outturn and 2023-24 Budget (item 8) to be discussed.

There were no other matters arising.

## **5 DSG MONITORING (MONTH 11)**

Richard Cox outlined the report which contained an update of the 2022-23 DSG forecast outturn as at Month 11.

It was noted that, as per Table 1, in November 2022, the DSG allocation for 2022-23 was revised to include the additional £234k received for the schools' block, increasing the overall budget by £2.501m.

As per Table 2, the forecast expenditure for 2022-23 was £247.802m.

Forecast reserves for the end of year stood at £6,540,000.

In response to a query, Neil Marlow explained that Barnet Hill Academy (an independent school) had withdrawn its application to become a voluntary aided school as it was not able to meet some of the criteria. Therefore, the originally monies set aside within the growth fund was freed up and would drop into reserves.

The Chair commented that, whilst the reserve budget seemed high, a large amount will be required to deliver suggestions arising from the high needs block review, as would be discussed later as well as the continued increasing costs within high needs.

## **6 SCHOOLS IN FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY**

Richard Cox presented the report, which gave an update on the financial position of all maintained schools over the last year.

At the closing of accounts for 2021-22, the cumulative net surplus for all maintained schools was approximately £12.24m, with 65 schools in surplus and 22 schools in deficit.

During quarter 2 monitoring, the position had deteriorated with 35 schools expecting to go into deficit and 49 expecting to stay in surplus by year end. This reduced the cumulative net surplus of all maintained schools to £2.49m.

The recent quarter 3 monitoring suggested that the cumulative net surplus position had improved to £3.94m, with 54 schools with projected surpluses and 28 with projected deficits.

With the increased number of schools going into deficit and increasing financial pressures, it was proposed that a Schools in Financial Difficulty Panel be established to meet on a termly basis, which would consist of key stakeholders from the LA, BELS, schools, and the Schools' Forum to review the latest data. The proposed Terms of Reference for the proposed Panel was reviewed.

Sarah Sands commended the proposal as the Headteachers she had spoken to felt isolated with regards to dealing with financial pressures.

The Forum **RESOLVED** that the Schools in Financial Difficulty Panel be established.

The Chair requested that expressions of interest from members of business managers be directed to Richard Cox and Neil Marlow. Sarah Sands undertook to cascade the requested expressions of interests to the Budget Working Party.

Action: Members and Sarah Sands

Ben Hassan conveyed that the Panel needed to think extensively about how to sustainably deal with the coming financial pressures moving forward. Richard Cox pointed out that, short of lobbying the Government, there was not much the LA could do to alleviate national financial pressures. Neil Marlow added that Officers were actively meeting schools with financial difficulties to provide support and commended Richard Cox for his work in this area. He stated that the LA may eventually need to consider closing schools or merging schools due to falling school rolls, as had happened in some Inner London Boroughs.

Sarah Sands stated that the Nursery and Primary Headteacher Forum was due to circulate another survey to schools to gather data about what the main financial pressures are and what schools were anticipating. The aim was to then work with unions and lobby the Government using this information. Sarah Sands undertook to update the Forum about this.

Action: Sarah Sands

Luke Bridges challenged the LA to support this lobbying and expressed his dismay at the statement from the Secretary of State for Education suggesting that financial pressures would be alleviated by the fact that energy costs would be half of that initially predicted. Richard Cox added that, as schools were locked into energy contracts, school budgets were unlikely to be positively impacted by this any time soon.

The Chair and Neil Marlow stated that the LA would continue lobbying and they expected unions to do the same. Cllr CoakleyWebb reiterated that this was a national problem affecting all boroughs.

## **7 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK REVIEW**

Karen Flanagan gave an update of the High Needs Block Review, as outlined within the report. She recorded thanks to all who had been involved so far with phase one of the review.

Members noted that phase two of the review had begun with consultations with special schools, ARPs and PRUs. Phase three was scheduled to begin in May with further meetings with stakeholders. The Headteacher Network would also soon be consulted.

The final report was expected to be available by the end of the current academic year, at which point recommendations would be reviewed and decided upon. Reserves had been earmarked as a contingency of the high needs block to support the agreed recommendations.

## **8 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK 2022-23 OUTTURN AND 2023-24 BUDGET**

Karen Flanagan stated that the High Needs Block was in slight deficit by £28k (0.05%). Allocations had been increasing from the Department for Education (DfE), the latest being an increase of 10.45%. She brought members' attention to the fact that the current increase in expenditure was also 10.4% and highlighted that it would be challenging if this trend continued, without the DfE allocations continuing to increase.

It was noted that this was a national issue and that Barnet had done very well to manage its high needs block. A high number of LAs had significant deficits and Barnet planned to avoid this by undertaking the review and taking preventative action early.

The main reason for the increase in expenditure had been the increase in the number of commissioned specialist placements, as outlined within the report. This included the Windmill Special School, which was due to initially open on a satellite site from September 2023, until the new school building was expected to open fully in February 2024. Karen Flanagan explained that the decision was taken to open on a satellite site first to ensure that those requiring special school placements were not lost to independent provisions. She stated that it would have been very difficult to get these children back into the Barnet education system once they had moved to the independent sector.

There had been a national increase in the number of children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and those requiring SEND provision. As per the banded levels, there was attached funding for children with EHCPs, whereas SEND provision was funded by schools.

The LA's EHCPs had increased by 8.6% for the year, compared to national yearly increases of approximately 10%.

Several additional costs, such as special school costs which were currently funded by supplementary grants, had been accounted for. This was done for prudence because such grants were sometimes rolled into the overall budget.

Members noted the increased high needs block expenditure and the number of EHCPs maintained by Barnet and the potential impact for the HNB in terms of a future deficit position, should no action be taken.

The Forum **AGREED** the increases of 3% (totalling £136k) top up to ARPs and 5% (totalling £610) for Bands. The risk of deficit to the High Needs Block if no further action was taken was also noted.

## **9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **SEND and AP Improvement Plan and Strategic Partnership Board**

Karen Flanagan reminded members that the DfE's SEND and AP Improvement Plan had been published. She also stated that members were needed for the BELS SEND and AP Strategic Partnership Board and that expressions of interest should be sent to her.

Action: Members

### **Next Meeting Date**

It was noted that the next meeting date would be circulated shortly.

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