

SCHOOLS FORUM
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 19 OCTOBER 2023

Membership	Name	Phase	School	HT/Gov	End Date
Maintained	*Joel Sager	Primary	Pardes House	HT	12/10/26
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	Vacant	Primary		HT	
Maintained	Vacant	Primary		Gov	
Academy	Vacant	Primary		HT	
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	*Aaron Livingston (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	QE Girls' School	HT	31/12/24
Special	*Ian Kingham	Special Academy	Oak Lodge	Dp HT	18/01/24
Special	Vacant	Special Maintained		Gov	
EY	*Kelly Brooker	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	*Kate James	Post-16	Barnet & Southgate College	HT	30/05/26
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)

*Sharon Palma, Head of Finance

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

Alison Dawes, Director of School Access, Skills & Corporate Services

*Jacob Davies, Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Finance Manager

*George Peradigou, Clerk

*Denotes present

1 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and extended a special welcome to new members Joel Sager, Headteacher of Pardes House, Kelly Brooker, Headteacher of BEYA, and Aaron Livingston, who replaced Marc Lewis to represent Wren Academy. He also welcomed Jacob Davies the new DSG Finance Manager replacing Richard Cox, for whom thanks were recorded.

The following membership updates were also noted:

- A special maintained school governor representative was still required after a recent election resulted in no confirmed nominations.
- An academy primary headteacher was required to replace Dan Hawkins, who had recently stepped down.
- A maintained primary school governor was required to replace Ian Phillips, who had resigned as a governor at Squires Lane Learning Federation.
- A maintained primary school headteacher was required to replace Sarah Maltese, who had resigned as Headteacher of St Pauls N11.

Members joined the Chair in thanking the above members for their contributions during their terms of office on the Forum.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted on behalf Robin Archibald.

3 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

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

4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2023, a copy of which was circulated prior to the meeting, were confirmed and approved.

5 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

7. Schools Balances 2022-23

A discussion had previously ensued related to the projected sharp reduction in pupil rolls. It was noted that the West Hendon ward councillors requested information about the financial pressures faced by schools in their ward resulting from this.

Neil Marlow stated that Alison Dawes had given a presentation outlining the pupil place projections at the recent Directors Briefing to Chairs and Vice Chairs, as well as the recent Directors Meeting with Headteachers. At these briefings, it was agreed that Headteachers should ensure that their ward councillors were aware of the pupil place projections.

9. KS2 Free School Meals (FSM) Working Party

It was noted that this working party was no longer required as the Mayor of London had, since, confirmed that additional FSM money would be offered for kosher meals and that the funding was not based on meal take up but a minimum of 90% take up per day. Schools can receive top ups if their take up exceeds 90%.

10. Schools in Financial Difficulties Panel

Sarah Sands confirmed that, following the surveys conducted with schools, the outcomes report was sent to MPs, Councillors, and Unions to help lobby the government to help alleviate financial pressures. However, the response from the DfE had not raised hopes of any additional funding.

There were no other matters arising.

6 VICE CHAIR NOMINATIONS

The Chair highlighted that the position of Vice Chair was still vacant. After no nominations were received, the Chair invited members to express an interest or discuss their potential interest with him prior to the next meeting.

Action: Members

7 SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS

Sharon Palma outlined the report which contained an update on the DfE statutory guidance for the Scheme for Financing Schools. Arising from the discussion:

Members noted that there had been no directed revisions. However, as outlined under 2.3 of the report, the guidance was updated related to the handling of income from the sale of assets.

8 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) OUTTURN 2023-24

The report updated the Forum on the 2023-24 DSG Outturn. Sharon Palma outlined the following:

The report gave a snapshot of the DSG outturn at month 6. For the benefit of new members, she explained that the grant was made up of what the Local Authority (LA) received before passporting it onto schools.

At midpoint in the year, the forecast outturn was predicting an underspend of £1.8m, which was largely to do with the underspend against the growth fund as well as the underspend against the individual schools' budgets of approximately £600k. As discussed at the last meeting, the latter related to cash advances paid to schools to assist with cashflow. As previously agreed, leniency would be exercised, via payment plans, when recovering these from schools.

In response to a query, Sharon Palma explained that, while the reserves seemed high at £8m, some of this had already been committed and it would also be required to cover the High Needs deficit forecasted.

The earmarked spending for the reserves was outlined as follows:

- £787k for Hong Kong and Afghan refugees
- £1m for High Needs Therapies
- Approximately £1.5m for Early Years (subject to clawback)
- High Needs projected deficit (to be determined)

8 NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA (NFF) 2024-25

The Chair apologised for the late circulation of the report and explained that this was due to an error by the DfE in its original July 2023 report, which it then corrected before recirculating.

The report provided an overview of the provisional NFF for 2024-25 based on the recent DfE published data. Sharon Palma outlined the following:

Based on the new published figures, the amount to be received by Barnet was revised down by £2.4m, when compared to the figures published in July 2023.

In response to a query from Cllr CoakleyWebb, Sharon Palma stated that, based on the original July figures, the Funding Factor Values per pupil were set to rise by 2.6% but would now only rise by 1.4% based on the corrected publication. Cllr CoackleyWebb requested that a breakdown of the Funding Factor Values per pupil be sent to her via email.

Action: Sharon Palma

The funding formular did not include the Teachers' Pay Award Grant, for which Barnet was set to receive £3.2m to be equally split between maintained schools and academies.

Jackie Menczer pointed out that her school, Menorah Primary, will be “de-amalgamating” in January 2024, creating two separate schools; Menorah Boys Primary and Menorah Girls Primary. This had not been reflected in the provisional NFF spreadsheet. Neil Marlow would investigate this alongside the Finance Team to confirm what was agreed between Richard Cox, the former Interim DSG Finance Manager, and the DfE to ensure this is covered by the budget settlement for Menorah Primary Boys and Menorah Primary Girls. The Chair suggested that this matter be dealt with outside of the meeting as it was an isolated case.

9 CENTRAL SCHOOLS SERVICES BLOCK (CSSB) 2024-25

The report contained an update of the 2024-25 Central School Services Block (CSSB). Sharon Palma outlined the following:

The indicative CSSB for 2024-25 had increased by £0.120m to £2.487m. The increase had been pro-rated as per the current year's budget as outlined in Table 1 of the report.

Historic commitments and ongoing responsibilities were outlined. It was noted that ongoing responsibilities included an ongoing responsibility for copywrite licencing, which was fixed and dictated by the DfE.

For the benefit of new members, the Chair summarised Table 1 of the report.

The Forum unanimously **APPROVED** the ongoing responsibilities and the proposed pro-rating of the CSSB to fund them.

10 DE-DELEGATION 2024-25

The report contained an update of the 2024-25 de-delegation. Sharon Palma outlined the following:

The Forum was asked to consider ratifying the de-delegation rates proposed for year 2024-25, which, as set out in the report, were the same as those for 2023-24.

Keith Nason requested that academies be given the option to subscribe to traded services from September to August as opposed to April to March. The Chair requested that this be considered by BELS staff and responded to by the next meeting.

Action: Neil Marlow

In response to a query from Jackie Menczer, Sharon Palma confirmed that federated schools would still be charged separately and would not be able to split the charge for these services.

Primary school representatives of maintained schools **RATIFIED** the primary school de-delegations proposed for 2024-25.

Secondary school representatives of maintained schools **RATIFIED** the secondary school de-delegations proposed for 2024-25.

It was noted that the confirmed budgets would be updated in January 2024 based on the October 2023 census data.

11 FORMER EDUCATION SERVICES GRANT (ESG) SERVICES 2024-25

The report contained a proposal to continue to fund services previously funded from the ESG, from maintained school shares. Sharon Palma and Jacob Davies outlined the following:

When the grant was originally revoked from the schools block funding, the Schools' Forum agreed to fund these through de-delegation. The services and total amounts to be funded under the proposal were statutory and regulatory duties, asset management, and monitoring national curriculum assessments, as detailed in section 3.7 of the report.

In response to a query from Aaron Livingston, it was confirmed that academies would need to fund the outlined services themselves as de-delegation related to maintained schools only. This was because this process brought money from maintained schools' budgets to the central budget to cover the cost of running these services. As this didn't happen for academies, they would need to fund these services out of their own budgets.

The Forum **APPROVED** the continued use of £700k for 2024-25 to maintain the level of services previously funded by the ESG.

11 SPLIT SITES, GROWTH FUND, AND FALLING ROLLS CRITERIA 2024-25

The report contained an update of the 2024-25 split-sites, growth fund, and falling rolls criteria. Sharon Palma and Neil Marlow outlined the following:

Some LAs established a Falling Rolls Fund to support schools with falling rolls. However, to qualify for this, the LA required data to show that school rolls would be going back up within 3-5 years. This would be difficult to prove in Barnet.

Sarah Sands suggested contacting boroughs which had successfully accessed this funding to find out more about the data they provided to prove to suggest rolls would be increasing within that timeframe.

Action: Neil Marlow/Sarah Sands

The Forum noted the new changes to Split-Site Funding, the Growth Fund criteria, and the new methodology for calculation and allocation of falling rolls for 2024-25.

12 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK REVIEW AND SEND UPDATES

The report contained an update of the Financial Position for the High Needs (HN) Block, expenditure for 2022-23 and predicted expenditure for 2023-24. Karen Flanagan outlined the following:

It was noted that, for the past 3 years, the HN block allocation had increased year-on-year by circa 10%, which had been in line with the growth in demand. However, this year, the interim allocation received had shown an increase of only 3.75%. This presented a forecasted deficit of £3.1m for 2024-25, which would increase year-on-year if the 8% projected increase in demand for EHCPs continued. This was outlined further in section 3 of the report.

It was noted that, the previous year, additional grants were given to LAs to help the HN block budget. It was hoped that this would be the case again for the following year and the Forum would be updated accordingly.

The Forum also noted the changes to the fair share formula following discussions with schools. This meant that all EHCPs, as opposed to just Barnet EHCPs, were taken into account through the new calculation.

In response to a query, Karen Flanagan confirmed that the DSG would be used to cover the cost of the recruitment the full-time HN block project lead recommended in section 6 of the report.

The High Needs Review Report, a summary of which was given, would soon be circulated to the Forum. The recommendations of the report would need to be reviewed by a Task and Finish Group to help explore and, where appropriate, implement any changes moving forward.

Ian Kingham stated that he had received an email regarding the NFF (before deductions) for 2024-25, which seemed more optimistic than what was now being presented. Karen Flanagan undertook to check the discrepancy between the two figures (£71m and £74m).

Action: Karen Flanagan

Ziz Chater stated that many of her colleagues had concerns about proposals for peer moderation to determine the funding accessed schools. Karen Flanagan stated that the Parent-Carer Forum had supported this approach. It had worked well in other LAs and Headteachers she had spoken to were in support. This approach also supports transparency as well as allowing for continuous professional development (CPD) and peer challenge for those involved.

Sian Morris echoed the concerns raised by Ziz Chater. She also stated that, while schools would welcome earlier funding and intervention, there were concerns about the impact this would have on those children who genuinely needed EHCPs. Karen Flanagan made clear that this is not an approach to end EHCPs. EHCPs would still be needed for children who, for example, needed specialist provision.

While appreciating it depended on relations with neighbouring boroughs, Sian Morris raised concerns about children who would transfer between boroughs and how this would affect their support/application, when compared to the continued support offered by an EHCP.

Sarah Sands and Neil Marlow assured members that recommendations were not suggesting that EHCPs be abolished. The aim was to allow schools to access funding and support at an earlier stage without the need for the lengthy EHCNA process to be completed. Karen Flanagan reiterated the benefits of early support

and funding for schools as the EHCNA process takes a lot of capacity which could be better utilised elsewhere in the system.

The Forum **AGREED** with the proposals set out by the report. A Task and Finish Group would be established to work with the Project Lead to review the recommendations of the HN Review. Karen Flanagan will liaise with appropriate officers to better understand the funding splits for the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) between Early Years (EY) and HN blocks of the DSG.

Action: Karen Flanagan

13 SCHOOLS IN FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES PANEL

Neil Marlow thanked the members who had joined the panel, the first meeting of which took place earlier that afternoon. Arising from the discussion:

Stakeholders were well represented, including members of the Schools' Forum, school governors, the LA's Finance team, the School Improvement team, and the Internal Audit team. The Panel sought after more school governor representatives. Governor members of the Forum were asked to express their interests to Neil Marlow.

Action: School Governor Members

The Panel agreed that what was lacking for schools was the strategic support required when faced with budgetary difficulties, which would help them use funds more efficiently whilst still delivering a high-quality education. The Panel aimed to produce guidance and flow charts to help guide schools accordingly.

Neil Marlow and colleagues from Finance would also attend the next Primary and Nursery Headteacher Forum to hear more about their main challenges.

14 ATP DEADLINE

Sharon Palma reminded Members that the DfE would send out the final budgets on 22nd December 2023 based on the October census.

This would be presented to the Forum at the meeting on 25 January 2024.

15 PROPOSED USE OF DSG UNDERSPEND

Neil Marlow introduced the item and explained that the current situation in the middle east was the reason for the late circulation of this proposal. Arising from the discussion:

It was anticipated that there would be an influx of pupils from the middle east requiring school places. As the October census date had already past, schools would not receive extra money for admitting these pupils. £441k remained from the original amount allocated to displaced families, which was expected to be enough to cover any new arrivals. However, the Forum was asked to approve the widening of the current criteria for additional funding to include new arrivals from Israel and Gaza and the use of an extra £250k of the DSG underspend to ensure schools had access additional funding, if required.

It was noted that the LA awaited the Government's decision with regards to whether those coming from Gaza would be designated as asylum seekers, enabling them to go on rolls at Barnet schools.

The Forum **APPROVED** the proposal to widen the current criteria to include new arrivals from Israel and Gaza and the use an additional £250k of the DSG underspend on incoming of pupils from the current conflicts in the middle east.

16 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC)

In response to a query from Harvey Freeman, Neil Marlow confirmed that RAAC costs for maintained schools had not come out of DSG funding nor school budgets and was covered by the Barnet Estates Team through core central funding.

Due to a change to the guidance, surveys were conducted at the start of the year and found no LA maintained schools with RAAC issues. Only one school in Barnet, a secondary academy, was found to have RAAC and this school was aware of the issue by April 2023. When the guidance changed in September 2023, just before the start of term, the school needed to ensure they were compliant.

Violet Walker stated that she was also awaiting a response from the DfE regarding her school's RAAC status. She stated that she had received no responses to numerous emails sent after the initial survey was carried out. Neil Marlow stated that the DfE would have reported back if the school had a RAAC issue but offered to follow up with the DfE if needed.

Action: Neil Marlow

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled to take place at 4pm on Thursday 25th January 2024.

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