

SCHOOLS FORUM
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 11 JANUARY 2024

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	19/01/27
Maintained	*Sarah Sands	Primary	Garden Suburb Infants	HT	30/11/24
Maintained	Jade Cheung	Primary	Deansbrook Infant School	Gov	19/01/27
Maintained	*Harvey Freeman	Primary	Hasmonean Primary	Gov	19/01/27
Maintained	Julie Eyres	Primary	Monken Hadley CE Primary	HT	07/07/24
Maintained	*Jackie Menczer	Primary	Menorah Primary	HT	03/02/26
Maintained	Liz Longworth	Primary	Northside	HT	31/12/24
Maintained	*Kim Sanett	Primary	Foulds	HT	19/01/27
Maintained	*David Rosenthal	Primary	Menorah Primary Schools	Gov	19/01/27
Academy	Vacant	Primary		HT	
Academy	Vacant	Secondary		HT	
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	19/01/27
Academy	Violet Walker	Secondary	QE Girls' School	HT	31/12/24
Special	*Ginny D'Odorico	Special Academy	Windmill Special School	Dp HT	19/01/27
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	19/01/27
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, Cabinet Member for Family Friendly Barnet
- *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
- *Sanjaya Gunatilake, Finance Manager (DSG)
- *George Peradigou, Clerk

*Denotes present

1 **WELCOME, MEMBERSHIP UPDATES AND APOLOGIES**

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and extended a special welcome to new members.

Membership Updates

The following membership updates were noted:

- Simon Horne, Headteacher of Friern Barnet Secondary School, was re-elected.
- Jade Cheung, Governor of Deansbrook Infant School, was elected and replaced Cllr. Anthony Vourou, for whom thanks were recorded.
- Harvey Freeman, Governor of Hasmonean Primary School, was re-elected.
- Kim Sanett, Headteacher of Foulds Primary School, was elected and replaced Sarah Maltese, for whom thanks were recorded.
- David Rosenthal, Governor of Menorah Primary Girls and Menorah Primary Boys Schools, was elected and replaced Ian Philips, for whom thanks were recorded.

- John Bowra, Governor of Christ's College Finchley, was re-elected.
- Ginny D'Odorico, Headteacher of Windmill Special School, was elected and replaced Ian Kingham, for whom thanks were recorded.
- Joanne Kelly, Headteacher of The Pavilion Study Centre, was re-elected.

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received and accepted on behalf:

- Kate James
- Liz Longworth
- Joel Sager
- Joanne Kelly
- Violet Walker
- Jade Cheung

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 19 October 2023, a copy of which had been circulated prior to the meeting, were confirmed as an accurate record, and approved.

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

10. De-Delegation 2024-25

Keith Nason previously enquired as to whether academies could be given the option to subscribe to traded services from September to August, rather than April to March. He expressed that he discussed this with the traded services team and received a satisfactory response.

12. Split Sites, Growth Fund, and Falling Roles Criteria 2024-25

It was previously agreed to check how other boroughs accessed the Falling Rolls Funding. Neil Marlow explained that, whilst efforts were being made to obtain this information, Barnet's data did not show predictions that rolls would increase again within 3-5 years, which was one of the criteria for accessing the funding.

13. High Needs Block Review

Ian Kingham has previously spotted a discrepancy between the figures announced for the National Funding Formula (NFF). Sharon Palma had responded to Mr Kingham outside of the meeting to explain that one of the figures had not accounted for the recoument that went to academies.

14. Schools in Financial Difficulties Panel

Neil Marlow called for more governors to join the panel. He undertook to promote this via the upcoming Director's Report to Governors.

In response to a query from Cllr CoakleyWebb, Neil Marlow stated that the relevant staff were soon due to meet to discuss schools in deficit and ensure 3-year recovery plans were in place. Sarah Sands added that this was also on the agenda for the next Headteachers' Forum.

All other actions had been resolved prior to the meeting and there were no other matters arising.

5 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 outside of the meeting. He undertook to contact some members individually to gauge their willingness.

Action: Chair

As suggested by Neil Marlow, it was agreed that, should no nomination be received, and no Vice Chair in place, in the event of the Chair being absent from a Schools Forum Meeting, another Forum member would Chair the meeting.

6 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) FORECAST OUTTURN 2023-24 (M9)

The report updated the Forum on the 2023-24 DSG Forecast Outturn. Jacob Davies outlined the following:

The report gave a snapshot of the DSG outturn at month 9. Members noted that the grant was made up of what the Local Authority (LA) received before passporting it onto schools.

Since the last Schools Forum meeting on 19th October 2023, the DSG allocation for 2023-24 had been revised to reflect additional High Needs funding of £0.500m due to import and export adjustments and, confirmed Early Years 2022-23 funding clawback of £1.129m (originally estimated at £1.5m). The impact of these changes was an overall reduction of £0.629m in the final budget allocation.

The Forum **NOTED** that, at month 9, the reported DSG Forecast Outturn was a £1.823m favourable variance against the budget of £265.806m as set out in Table 1 of the report. The 2023-24 Forecast Outturn was £263.983m as set out in Table 2 of the report.

The Chair commended the Finance Team for managing the DSG efficiently in order to show this potential surplus.

7 BUDGET PROPOSAL 2024-25

Members noted that the report summarised how Barnet was funded for its education functions through the DSG and provided detailed analysis of each of the four blocks that made up the DSG. It also showed how the LA intended to fund its schools through the National Funding Formula for 2024-25.

Sharon Palma explained, for the benefit of new members, that Barnet mirrored the National Funding Formula (NFF) and didn't apply any local formulas within allocations. In response to a query from Sarah Sands about whether not mirroring the NFF was possible, Sharon Palma and Sanjaya Gunatilake explained that, while some flexibility was possible in the past, the DfE had now stipulated that all funding formulas should closely mirror the NFF.

The Forum **NOTED** the 2024-25 DSG budget allocation of £458.6m, an increase of approximately £32m (7.6%), as outlined in Table 1 of the report. This included the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant (MSAG), amounting to £10.8m. When deducting the MSAG grant, the actual increase to Barnet schools was 5%.

The Forum **AGREED** the 2024-25 formula factor rates used in the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Authority Proforma Tool submission (National Funding Formula rates) as shown in Appendix 5 of the report.

The Forum **AGREED** the Growth Fund criteria and amount.

The Forum **NOTED** the Early Years funding rates 2024-25.

8 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 Forum noted that the final CSSB for 2024-25 had increased by £0.117m to £2.486m, compared to 2023-24. Where appropriate, the increase in budget had been pro-rated against the 2023-24 budget.

The Chair explained that, while this was not much money in the grand scheme of things, it was essential in funding ongoing responsibilities, such as admissions and appeals, Schools Forum administration, and copyright licensing.

The Schools Forum **APPROVED** the updated figures for the expenditure lines that comprise the final 2024-25 budget for the CSSB, as set out in Table 1 of the report.

9 DE-DELEGATION 2024-25

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

The de-delegation rates based on the October 2023 census had been finalised and showed an additional recuperation of approximately £17k. Table 2.4 of the report showed the change per pupil.

In response to a query, Sharon Palma explained that this was only affecting primary schools because it was at primary level that census numbers had fallen.

The report proposed that the Forum consider approving the change in rates in order to retain the cash-value of these funds. Sharon Palma stated that the funds had not been uplifted by the LA.

The Chair highlighted that approval meant that the LA could continue the current level of support to maintained schools.

Members enquired as to what future options would be if trends continued. Ziz Chater asked whether services could be reduced in line with falling rolls, thus, reducing costs. Neil Marlow undertook to investigate this for a further discussion at the October 2024 Schools Forum meeting, along with benchmarking against the de-delegation amounts of other local authorities.

Action: Neil Marlow

The Forum **APPROVED** the updated de-delegation rates for 2024-25.

10 USE OF DSG RESERVES

Neil Marlow introduced the report and outlined the following:

While the DSG Reserves seemed high, this was required as a cushion in case the High Needs budget overspent. While this wasn't predicted for the current year, projections showed potentially high overspends over the next two or three years.

The report proposed the use of DSG Reserves the following:

1. Movers in: Expansion of existing criteria. It had been previously agreed to allow access to DSG reserves to support children coming in from the Hong Kong resettlement and asylum seeker hotels. This was then extended to include children arriving from Ukraine, and then further expanded to include those arriving due to conflicts in Israel and Gaza. Schools would otherwise receive no funding for these pupils as they were not part of the October census.

The report proposed expanding the criteria further to allow schools to use £400k of this funding (the amount it was anticipated would remain from the originally agreed amount during the current year) to fund SEND support needed for these children. This support would include completing EHCP assessments and supporting up until EHCPs are obtained.

Neil Marlow emphasised that this was not asking for additional money but just the expansion of the existing criteria.

The Forum **AGREED** to expand the existing criteria to support schools which were being asked to admit movers into the borough with high levels of SEND.

2. Urgent exceptional repairs to school buildings: the proposal was to earmark £200k per year to allow schools to bid for this funding for exceptional repairs by meeting the set criteria, as outlined under point 8.4 of the report.

In response to a query from Ziz Chater and Jackie Menczer, Neil Marlow confirmed that the process for bidding for this funding would be announced to schools and the criteria explained.

The Forum also **AGREED** to the use of DSG Reserves for urgent exceptional repairs according to the criteria outlined within the report.

11 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK (HNB) REVIEW UPDATE

The report contained an update with regard to the High Needs Block. Karen Flanagan outlined the following:

Members were given a recap of proceedings thus far. It was noted that the council had commissioned a review of the HNB spend, the findings of which had been shared at the previous meeting.

One of the recommendations of the review was to explore alternatives to funding exceptional high needs without recourse to an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

Members **NOTED** the next steps of the review, one of which were to second a project lead into a term time only secondment to lead the task and finish group. The key aspects of the role were outlined in the report. This role had been advertised to schools, but no candidates had come forward yet. Members were asked to promote this within their schools and noted that the post-holder would be paid for their time, meaning the school could back-fill them.

Action: Members

The Chair stated that one of the main benefits he could see in the proposed new system was the flexibility it allowed with the use of funding. He gave the example that, once children with EHCPs no longer necessitated the utilisation of the attached funding, the money from this funding could be used to support other children. This also reduced administrative costs as less applications for EHCPs would need to be processed.

Karen Flanagan confirmed that this cost-avoidance, along with the ability to reach more children from the same funding, would be beneficial. In Camden, where this system was used, this was evidenced by the significant reduction in requests for statutory assessments, as the children's needs were already being met via the more flexible use of EHCP funding.

12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting was agreed to take place at 4pm on Tuesday 19 March 2024.

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