

SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 14 January 2020 **at 1.00 pm at Whitmore High School**

Members Present: Sue Hammond – Headteacher, Whitmore High School (CHAIR)
Pam Virdee – Headteacher, Longfield School (VICE CHAIR)
Rebecca Hastings – Headteacher, Cedars Manor School
Anne Monahan – Headteacher, St Anselm's Primary School
Louise Browning – Headteacher, Norbury Primary School
Patrick O'Dwyer – Div. Director Education Services (Special Needs Services)
Simon Arnell – Principal, Avanti House Secondary School
Anna Smakowska – Headteacher, Woodlands School
Emma Stabler (on behalf of Sue Maguire) School Business Manager, Hatch End High School
Geraldine Higgins – Headteacher, Sacred Heart Language College
David O'Farrell – Headteacher, St Bernadette's Primary School
Christine Robson – Portfolio Holder, Young People & Schools
Rutinder Mahil-Pooni – Headteacher, Kenmore Park Infant School

Officers in Attendance: Jo Frost - Finance Business Partner

Observer: Gaspare Nicolini, Local Authorities and Funding Policy Team, ESFA

SH opened the meeting.

1. Apologies and Order of the Agenda

Apologies were received and accepted from:

Nigel Hewett – AHGB
Sue Maguire – Headteacher, Hatch End High School (represented by Emma Stabler)
Clare Tarling – Finance Director, Pinner High School
Paul Gamble – Headteacher, Harrow High School
Mike Baumring - Headteacher, Kenmore Park Junior School
Jo Daswani – Headteacher, Whitchurch Primary School

- 2.** The order of the agenda was agreed.
The minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2020.

3. Matters Arising

Trade Union Duties funding for academies

POD advised that the LA would be consulting with all academies in the near future and the issue will also be raised at DJC later this week.

ACTION POD

4. DSG Budget Setting 2020-21

JF introduced the report which set out the latest 2020-21 DSG settlement and final school budgets approved by the DfE on 2 March 2020.

Schools Forum noted the DSG allocation and DSG budget for 2020-21.

Additional /Capacity Funding

JF set out the final decision made by the DfE in respect of the disapplication request to disapply the MFG from the total £3.2m additional and capacity funding.

JF advised that the request for £1.1m to be treated in this way was approved because this is money from the contingency and one off money in the Schools Block. However, the request to apply this treatment to the remaining £2.1m was rejected on the basis that this is funding within the Schools Block for 2020-21.

JF advised of the alternative options which had been considered to distribute the funding through formula and why they were discounted. The final methodology approved by the ESFA was to increase MFG to 4.24% which the LA believes may impact on the affordability of the schools funding formula in future years as baselines are set above the funding baseline we will receive.

SH expressed disappointment on behalf of Schools Forum at the DfE decision to reject the disapplication as it undermines our strategy of the last three years to get to a 'clean' National Funding Formula and this decision could set us back three years in regards to the MFG position. It impacts on schools that are becoming more disadvantaged not receiving the funding they need whilst schools that are becoming less disadvantaged are being protected from funding reductions.

GN reinforced the DfE decision to reject the second disapplication on the basis that Harrow's proposal would have treated the funding as one-off when it is not one-off funding. Based on current government announcements there is projected to be an additional investment in school funding of £4.9bn in 2021-22 and £7.1bn in 2022-23.

SH expressed concern that as long as MFG continues the NFF becomes irrelevant because the MFG continues to distort the true distribution of funding.

ES asked whether other LAs had been required to set such a high MFG.

GN suggested that 4.24% set by Harrow appears artificially higher than it is in reality because we have set negative MFGs over the past two years. In addition the majority of the funding formula factors in the NFF have increased by 4% in 2020-21 and so other LAs had to use MFG as a mechanism for fully distributing all funding through the formula.

High Needs Block 2020-21

JF set out the position in relation to the HNB for 2020-21. Despite additional funding in the HNB for 2020-21 a £2.4m deficit budget has been set. Compounded with the projected deficit for 2019-20 it is expected that the full deficit by March 2021 will be approx. £6m.

JF explained that the LA will be required to submit a DSG Deficit Recovery Plan at the end of this financial year. This requires Schools Forum approval and will be on the agenda for the meeting in May

ACTION POD/JF

SH explained that Schools Forum made a decision to ensure that the real deficit on the HNB was highlighted and not offset by transfers from the Schools Block or contingency.

SH expressed concern that there is a huge chasm between legislation changes and requirements and funding of the HNB. This leads to limited areas that the LA can influence costs one of which is mainstream EHCPs but this is counter-productive.

GN explained that 30/33 London boroughs are expected to have a deficit by March 2020. The ESFA has visited 25 LAs with DSG Deficit Recovery Plans and is pulling together guidance on the basis of what they have learned and any good practice examples for other local authorities.

There was a discussion about other contributing factors that have led LAs to have HNB deficits including the LA being unable to secure an additional special school in the free school bidding round. The issue of HNB funding is a system issue and not limited to Harrow.

GN explained that the ESFA, through the DSG Recovery Plan process, needs to be reassured that LAs are doing everything that they can to mitigate pressures.

Schools Forum raised concerns re the 'negotiation' of funding students in FE colleges and the difference between school and college funding rates for the same child and whether the matrix method should apply to colleges.

Early Years Block 2020-21

Schools Forum noted the additional funding and changes to the EYSFF for 2020-21

Schools Forum requested data to show the number of children with disabilities accessing free nursery entitlement and how many are benefitting from pupil premium, Disability Access Funding and the SEND Inclusion Fund.

ACTION POD

5. 2019-20 DSG Budget Monitoring

JF introduced the Q3 DSG budget monitoring report for 2019-20.

Schools Forum noted the updated projected position on the DSG for 2019-20.

High Needs Block 2019-20

JF explained that the overall position on the HNB had reduced by £513k due to a number of provisions for movers in and September transitions predominantly in the independent sector not coming to fruition or being placed in lower cost provision. However there is still a risk with regards to the projections for FE Colleges as a number of contracts are still being negotiated.

Contingency Balance 2019-20

JF set out the position on the contingency. After committing £1m to the Schools Funding Formula for 2020-21 and a further £700k for the place element of mainstream ECHPs there is a further £548k

which is not earmarked. Schools Forum need to make a decision about whether to earmark this funding or leave it as non-earmarked so that it may offset any HNB deficit at the end of the year.

A discussion took place around possible options.

SH explained that the LA has identified the need to open 2/3 Y7 bulge classes in September 2021. Secondary heads have agreed that three schools which have the lowest first choices will offer an additional 30 places each. If these pupils then join the school above PAN the school will be entitled to bulge class funding. The funding mechanism still needs to be agreed but it will be similar to mechanism for primary school bulge classes. This would require approx. 50% of the funding currently not earmarked in the contingency.

For the remainder of the contingency balance there was a discussion about whether this could be used to support projects within the HNB. It was proposed that this could be earmarked to support projects to extend specialist provision in the borough in line with the SEND Strategy and DSG Recovery Plan.

A vote took place on these proposals:

Yes	No	Abstain
9	0	2

It was agreed that the contingency should be used as follows:

- 50% to support secondary bulge classes September 2021
- 50% to support projects within the HNB

Any Other Business

SH thanked GN for his attendance and for answering questions.

Next Meeting

The meeting closed at 2.45pm

The next meeting will take place on 5 May 2020 at Whitmore High School

Future Dates

5 May 2020

7 July 2020