

## **THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN**

At a meeting of the **SCHOOLS FORUM** held on **TUESDAY, 6TH FEBRUARY, 2024** at 6.00 pm in Remote meeting via Microsoft Teams. This meeting can be watched live at [www.camden.gov.uk/webcast](http://www.camden.gov.uk/webcast)

### **MEMBERS OF THE FORUM PRESENT**

Katy Forsdyke, Christ Church School (Hampstead) (Chair)  
Daniel Silverstone, Parliament Hill (Vice-Chair)  
Jules Belton, St Mary & St Pancras Primary  
Rob Earrey, Fitzjohns Primary School  
John Hayes, Gospel Oak Primary School  
Nick Hewlett, Hawley Primary  
Perina Holness, Thomas Coram Centre  
Deborah Issacs, Edith Neville Primary, Richard Cobden Primary, Primrose Hill Primary  
Nicholas John, Acland Burghley School  
Vijita Patel, Swiss Cottage School  
Colin Reader, Kentish Town School

### **MEMBERS OF THE FORUM ABSENT**

Jen Allan, Eleanor Palmer Primary School  
James Hadley, Haverstock School  
Bob House, Camden School for Girls

### **ALSO PRESENT**

Debbie Adams, Head of Early Years  
Councillor Marcus Boyland, Cabinet Member for the Best Start for Children and Families  
Vikram Hansrani, Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion  
Joe Lynch, Schools Financial Advisor  
Di Osborne, Head of SEND and Inclusion  
Nick Smith, Head of Education Commission & School Organisation  
Victor Saunders, Schools Budget Financial Advisor  
Paul Taunton, Finance and Commissioning Manager

**The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting of the Schools Forum and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.**

### **MINUTES**

#### **1. GUIDANCE ON REMOTE MEETINGS**

#### **RESOLVED -**

THAT the guidance be noted.

**2. SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP LIST**

**RESOLVED -**

THAT the membership list be noted.

**3. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Jen Allan and Bob House.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA**

There were no declarations.

**5. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Broadcast of the meeting**

The Chair announced the following: "In addition to the rights by law that the public and press have to record this meeting, I would like to remind everyone that this meeting is being broadcast live by the Council to the Internet and can be viewed on our website for six months after the meeting. After that time, webcasts are archived and can be made available upon request.

If you have asked to address the meeting, you are deemed to be consenting to being filmed and to the use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes. If you are addressing the Committee your contribution will be recorded and broadcast."

**6. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED -**

THAT the minutes of the held on 5 December 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

**7. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

There was no urgent business.

## **8. SCHOOL FUNDING 2024/25 UPDATE**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Education Commissioning and School Organisation.

Victor Saunders, Team Leader Schools and Designated Schools Grant (DSG), introduced the report which covered the following areas: Education Schools Funding Agency (ESFA) resources allocation to Camden; Camden overall school budget; planning for future funding pressures; changes between the 2023/24 and the 2024/25 National Funding Formula (NFF); national comparison of London boroughs funding; distribution of resources in Camden 2024/25; distribution of Local Funding Formula by Camden in 2024/25; funding pressures - preparation by schools for future pressures support and ESFA Announcements since December 2023; de-delegated schools budget; energy costs; and the schools funding timetable.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and invited questions and comments from the Forum. The following was discussed:

- In response to a question, it was confirmed that the final adjusted allocations would be distributed to schools on week commencing 12 February.
- In response to a question, it was confirmed that Camden schools buying power had decreased c.20% compared to a decade ago, due to several factors, including falling rolls and inflation. The falling rolls alone had cost the Council c.£2.5 million. There were growing discussions between London schools and London Councils about the financial shortfall, who had started conversations with Government.
- In relation to section 5.2, it was confirmed that in the past the schools block made contributions to the Early Years block of c.£0.5million, which were no longer required through that channel. This was a contributing factor to the schools block reserves recently increasing.
- In relation to section 4.9, it was confirmed that the ESFA had not yet informed the Council how the teacher pensions grant would be allocated, however it was expected the Department for Education (DfE) would use the per pupil funding rate.
- A member asked how the Council would collectively or individually support schools where budgets were becoming more unsustainable and potentially become in a position where a licenced deficit recovery plan would not suffice in balancing the budget. In response, officers stated that Camden's schools block budget was in a more stable position than many other local authorities, which meant they were in a better starting position a challenging environment. However, there was no scope in revenue funding therefore the Council had to support schools strategically and collaboratively, for example when facing boroughwide challenges in primary school organisation and SEND.
- It was confirmed that schools would be notified of the additional financial support from the ESFA for refugee grants before February 2024 half-term.
- Members noted that schools were awaiting notification of the level of funding that individual schools would receive for meals provision. In response, it was

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confirmed that the Greater London Authority (GLA) had distributed the first two tranches of meals funding, and the third was expected before fiscal year end.

### **RESOLVED -**

THAT Schools Forum

- a) Note and agree the latest estimates of individual schools and growth budgets (section 3.7) and Appendix 1 and 2.
- b) Note and agree the provisional Early Years funding rates (section 3.11)
- c) Provide any further comment regarding the 2024/25 funding (section 2.13)
- d) Identify any areas of funding for review in autumn 2024 ahead of the funding year 2025/26.

### **9. NEW FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS FOR EARLY EDUCATION**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Education Commissioning and School Organisation.

Debbie Adams, Head of Early Years, introduced the report which covered the following areas: free early education entitlements; the funding formula; Camden Local Inclusion Fund (CLIF); the application process; and the timeline for implementation.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and invited questions and comments from the Forum. The following was discussed:

- A member stated that CLIF had the potential to target resources more effectively and expand provision, by should be used carefully.
- A member stated that it was an ongoing concern that there were schools with a significant number of unfilled school spaces. In response, officers stated that schools could consider offering provision to younger children and suggested that if a family enrolled a child at 1 year old, parents would be unlikely to move the child when they reached 2-3 years old, which would stabilise the school intake.
- In relation to section 3.11 and table 5, a member noted that £12.50 did not cover the costs to care for babies with a staff-to-child ratio of 1:2. The member noted that for every hour of CLIF funding their nursery lost money, which exacerbated by the needs of younger children increasingly requiring more intensive 1:1 support, alongside increasing staff wages, which CLIF does not compensate for; there was a financial disincentive for settings to take children with additional needs. The member added that an advantage of CLIF was that that the paperwork was easier to complete. Officers stated that there was not enough money in the system and funding allocation was a financial balancing act. The Council was required to pass through at least 95% of the funding received by government to providers, and Camden was now able to pass through 97% for children under three. The funding for providers was allocated to local nurseries

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using a local funding formula and could be used by nurseries flexibly, such as for 1:1 or group-based support. Officers stated that CLIF received funding from the High Needs Block (HNB), and the actual spend on CLIF had increased due to increasing needs but the hourly rates per child had decreased. Officers confirmed they would discuss the HNB contribution to CLIF, including CLIF rates and CLIF demand, at the High Needs Subgroup.

### **Action By – Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion**

- A member noted that Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) nurseries usually had higher on roll figures because of the more flexible offer to working parents, such as offering hours other than the standard 9am-3.30pm. The member also stated that schools should positively consider enrolling 2 year olds because it was a good opportunity to keep those children when school age, a nursery offer could be explored to be flexible and generate income for a school in a businesslike and sustainable model. Another member said that schools would also have to consider the space and resource implications of extending their provision to young children, and different districts of the borough would have different circumstances and challenges, such as competition with other settings and birth rates. A members noted they did not in theory support the idea of running an education setting as a business but acknowledged the need for sustainable provision in the borough. They added that nursery was early education and not childcare to fit around parents working lives and that there were no guarantees children would stay at the school beyond nursery age.

### **RESOLVED -**

THAT Schools Forum

- a) approve the proposed funding rates for Early Education providers in the borough from April 2024.
- b) approve to consult with Early Education providers on a new approach to the allocation of Camden's Local Inclusion funding.

### **10. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK (HNB): POSITION UPDATE FOR 2023/24 AND PROJECTIONS FOR 2024/25**

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion.

Vikram Hansrani, Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion, introduced the report which provided an update on the position of the 2023/24 HNB and funding proposals for 2024/25.

The Chair thanked officers for their report and invited questions and comments from the Forum. The following was discussed:

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- In response to a request from a member, officers confirmed they would provide a breakdown of newer Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) issued in the last calendar year and a breakdown of the total EHCPs and Exceptional Needs Grants (ENGs) based on year groups.

### **Action By – Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion**

- Officers stated that there were strengths but also challenges for Camden in additional needs provision for children and council officers would collaborate with school leaders and health partners to strengthen early intervention to meet children's needs in areas within the Council's control. The development of the HNB Subgroup would ensure there was strong oversight and governance around how the HNB was used and that the money was being used efficiently and positive outcomes could be demonstrated.
- A member asked if the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) process would consider the thresholds between the ENG model and the transition towards EHCPs and if that model could be linked into the High Needs Subgroup's scoping work and recommendations. Officers responded that the HNB Subgroup had started to explore the cluster model, which was based on ENGs, and the group had identified that the ENG model and the measurement of successful outcomes needed to be strengthened. Officers confirmed the group would be looking at transitional events where children moved from ENG to EHCP and what support children needed. An email had been sent to schools to capture feedback on ENGs.
- A member noted that the paper set out a changed financial position and forecast compared to the June 2023 meeting, in that officers were now reporting that the reserves position would be depleted by 2027/28. It was understood that there had to be sustainable planning of the model, however it was noted that schools still needed money now. The member suggested the group should investigate the model going forward in great detail because that pot of money could make a significant difference to children.

### **RESOLVED -**

THAT Schools' Forum note the updated High Needs Block position and the funding proposals for 2024/25.

## **11. SCHOOL MEALS DELIVERY IN SCHOOLS UPDATE**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Education Commissioning and School Organisation.

Nick Smith, Head of Education Commissioning and School Organisation, gave an update on the school meals contract position. The Council was conducting background work and was receiving legal advice on the procurement options for a

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sustainable food offer to schools. As part of the consideration of the different options, in addition to the views of Schools Forum, the Council would engage with schools and headteachers in a subgroup that would run until Easter. The quality element on meals would involve Public Health colleagues. The final decision on whether the new contract was insourced or outsourced would be for Cabinet.

**RESOLVED -**

THAT Schools' Forum note the current position and the timeline of activity over the next period.

**12. FORWARD PLAN 2023-24**

The forward plan was noted.

**13. FUTURE MEETING DATES**

The final meeting date of the 2023-24 academic year would be on 4 June 2024.

**14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 7.25 pm.

**CHAIR**

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**MINUTES END**