

## **THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN**

At a meeting of the **SCHOOLS FORUM** held on **WEDNESDAY, 5TH FEBRUARY, 2025** at 6.00 pm in Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

### **MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT**

Katy Forsdyke, Christ Church School (Hampstead) (Chair)  
Daniel Silverstone, Parliament Hill (Vice-Chair)

Jen Allan, Eleanor Palmer Primary School  
Rob Earrey, Fitzjohns Primary School  
Alex Wilson, Heath 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  
Izzy Jones, William Ellis (attending as a substitute for Bob House)  
Vijita Patel, Swiss Cottage School  
Jacob Sam, Hampstead School

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

Mark Anthony, Maria Fidelis School  
Jules Belton, St Mary & St Pancras Primary  
Bob House, Camden School for Girls  
Nicholas John, Acland Burghley School & H3 Federation  
Kateryna Law, Camden School for Girls

### **ALSO PRESENT**

Councillor Marcus Boyland, Cabinet Member for the Best Start for Children and Families  
Councillor Nanouche Umeadi, Associate Cabinet Member for Educational Inequalities

Debbie Adams, Head of Early Years and Family Hubs  
Vikram Hansrani, Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion  
Di Osborne, Head of SEND and Inclusion  
Victor Saunders, Team Leader Schools and Designated Schools Grant  
Nick Smith, Head of Education Commission & School Organisation  
Paul Tanton, 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. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Nicholas John, Bob House, and Kateryna Law. Izzy Jones was attending a substitute for Bob House.

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

There were no declarations.

**3. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

**4. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the minutes of the last meeting held on 4 December 2024 be approved as a correct record.

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

There was no urgent business.

**6. SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP LIST**

The Chair welcomed Luca Salice, governor at Robson House, as a new Schools Forum member. The Chair also confirmed that four members were re-nominated by their relevant groups to start a new term of office, which could be viewed on the membership list.

**RESOLVED -**

THAT the membership list be noted.

**7. SCHOOL FUNDING 2025/26 - UPDATE**

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

Victor Saunders (Team Leader Schools and Designated Schools Grant) introduced the report which updated on the estimated funding available for 2025/26 following the recent Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) finance settlement and detailed the anticipated use of this money to fund schools Early Years and high needs. The report also outlined the future funding pressures, the current DSG reserves position, de-delegation, and the latest ESFA support.

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

A member highlighted the financial strain on schools due to falling rolls, noting that fixed costs remained unchanged unless class numbers and staffing were reduced. Many schools were operating below their Published Admission Number (PAN), with most admissions coming from first-choice applicants, making financial planning challenging. Members stressed that schools were increasingly struggling, and despite numerous meetings, in their view there was no clear plan to manage the issue. A proactive approach was needed to address the situation before significant damage occurred. Officers acknowledged the difficult financial position reflected in the data and noted that a range of initiatives, including reducing PANs, had been implemented over the past 12 months to mitigate risks. While the situation could have been worse in the context of previous decisions, such as school closures, there was no sign of an upward trend, making it necessary to explore further options and address ongoing risks. It was confirmed that out-of-borough preference data for 2025 had not yet been received, but it was unlikely to change the overall position. A longer-term view was needed, given the structural difficulties schools faced. Schools had requested an implementation plan based on the principles of school place planning, with a clear short and medium-term strategy. Work was underway to develop this, with the aim of presenting it to the School Place Planning Group on 25 February 2025.

Members expressed frustration at repeatedly receiving similar responses from officers, who stated they were working on the issue. They questioned when it would be concluded and noted the year-on-year decrease in the number of children. One member highlighted that reducing the PAN did not address the current fixed costs and stressed the need for well-developed proposals to present to councillors. Concerns were raised about the situation worsening, with neighbouring boroughs cited as examples of potential outcomes. Officers responded that they were actively working on the strategy, having spoken to numerous colleagues and bringing in additional resources, including Housing colleagues. They described the issue as complex, involving housing and assets, and stressed the need to consider the utilisation of property assets to avoid losing them. They assured that substantial work was taking place and that there would be a detailed update on school place planning. They also mentioned recruiting an officer to drive this work and engaging corporate colleagues to highlight the scale of the challenge.

Officers stated that if members would like to discuss their individual school figures, they should contact them outside of the meeting.

Members asked about place planning, expressing concern about recruitment struggles at some schools and certain schools exceeding their PAN. They hoped this would be monitored, as they did not want some schools to grow while others reduced in size. Officers responded that parental preferences often led to vacant spaces not balancing out across the system, regardless of the quality of education offered. This was more of an issue in secondary schools than in primary schools. Officers noted that when schools were full, they often over-recruited, though this had not been the case recently. For schools with their own admission authority, and if over-recruitment was detrimental to Camden schools, the Council's view was that it

should not be approved. Members emphasised that these policies should be clearly communicated to schools, which officers acknowledged.

**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 (as per the Early Years Report) the provisional Early Years funding rates (section 3.10).
- c) Provide any further comment regarding the 2025/26 funding (section 2.13).
- d) Identify any areas of funding for review in autumn 2025 ahead of the funding year 2026/27.

**8. EARLY YEARS ENTITLEMENTS FUNDING 2025-26**

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding.

Debbie Adams (Head of Early Years and Family Hubs) summarised the report which detailed the proposed allocation of national free entitlement funding using Camden's local funding formula. Recommendations in the report sought approval for the proposed hourly rates payable to providers and for the retained element of funding used by the local authority to administer the schemes.

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

- Members inquired about the retained budget for Early Years Entitlements, asking if Camden had a breakdown of what the funds were spent on, whether the spending was required, the range of wages, and what was covered, particularly regarding essential teams. Officers explained that the funding covered the administration of the Free Entitlement Team, including the checking of eligibility codes, and also funded equality advisors. They noted that Camden followed a mixed provider model, involving Private, Voluntary, and Independent (PVI) providers and schools. All providers in Camden had a named advisor, which not all local authorities offered, ensuring that all settings met the required standards. The funding also supported admin and support functions.
- A member asked why Camden increased the pass-through rate to 97%, which was above the 96% requirement for local authorities. Officers explained that the aim was to pass through as much funding as possible while still managing available resources. In response to members questioning the impact on the central team, officers stated that they had not expanded the team as other local authorities had, as the new entitlement for 2-year-old working parents and, more recently, 9-month-old children of working parents, was being met by the existing workforce.
- A member raised concerns regarding Figure 7, noting that Band D referred to 100% of a child's nursery hours, which implied full funding, but this was not the

case. They highlighted that unions were asking for Teaching Assistants (TAs) to move to a higher salary grade, which was not covered by the funding. The member stressed that the paper appeared too positive and did not reflect the true costs, which resulted in a shortfall per TA. They requested more accurate wording in the report. The member also expressed concern that parents might believe children requiring 1:1 support would be fully funded, when this was not the case. They questioned whether children needing 1:1 support could be sent home for 3 hours per week, as the funding would not cover these hours, and asked if the matter could be brought back to the Schools Forum for further discussion. Another member added that both parents and staff were misinterpreting the funding, especially for Band D children, causing confusion about the actual hours of support needed. Officers acknowledged that the wording could be clearer and explained that the intention was not to fund 100% of the additional time but to represent the potential need for full-time support in nursery. Officers to update the wording in the report in relation to figure 7, which currently implied hours were fully funded, to reflect and clarify the actual position and funding shortfalls. A new document would be recirculated and the updated wording to be reflected in a future iteration of the report.

#### **Action By - Head of Early Years and Family Hubs**

- A member stated that the Exception Needs Grants (ENG) and Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) were funded at the same level, while the Camden Local Inclusion Fund (CLIF) funding was substantially lower. They noted that Early Years TAs cost the same as primary TAs, and Early Years children were of the same value, highlighting equity issues. They asked why there was not the same commitment to paying the London Living Wage (LLW) for Early Years settings as there was for primary schools. Officers explained that they would like to pay more per hour, but they were applying the government allocated local funding formula to the hourly rate. The disparity arose from the higher staffing ratios in Early Years settings, and they acknowledged that the funding did not cover the full staff costs. They noted that if the hourly rate for CLIF was increased, it would reduce universal provision and affect other areas, so they were aiming to balance the funding to ensure providers could remain open in Camden. Members pointed out that schools and nurseries wanted to pay LLW, but private providers were not able to, leading to worse conditions. Some providers reported that they had to either pay staff less or turn away SEND children. Additionally, it was highlighted that shortfalls in CLIF funding were drawn from the HN block. Officers responded that they were adjusting the funding formula, either by funding fewer children or implementing a stricter application, of the supplement from the HN block. It was agreed that this issue would be beneficial for discussion in the High Needs Sub Group (HNSG). Officers also mentioned that it would be helpful to analyse the number of children and the uptake of CLIF funding across different settings. They added that they would look into the context, particularly if a higher proportion of children were transitioning into primary schools, and would consult Early Years colleagues to assess the uptake of CLIF funding. It was agreed the discussion points would be referred to the HNSG (incorporated into Recommendation B, Item 9).
- A member asked, given the increasing financial pressures, at what point 2-year-old and nursery provisions would be forced to close due to financial

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unsustainability. They noted that both of their schools were supplementing nursery funding to keep them open, but as nursery education was not statutory, this would not be viable in the long term. Officers stated that they would need to review the situation. They noted that three nurseries had been closed in 2021, partly due to falling rolls, and that they would need to reassess the data. They confirmed they were open to discussions but acknowledged that it was not sustainable to maintain a large number of under-enrolled nurseries.

- A member stated that in their view the issue was that school nurseries operated from 9am to 3pm, whereas working parents needed provision from 8am to 6pm. They emphasised that without adapting to the needs of working parents, families would opt for PVI providers instead. They urged schools to approach nursery provision as a business, considering operating hours, because many PVIs were full while school nurseries were closing. Officers noted that with the introduction of new entitlements for working parents, children starting in a school nursery at 9 months old were unlikely to transfer to a different setting at age 3. In response to the point about nursery operating hours, another member added that their nursery was open for extended hours, yet 60% of children were on Free School Meals (FSM) and came from non-working families. They highlighted that in Camden, many families did not require 8am to 6pm provision. They stated that their nursery would not close due to a lack of demand but rather due to insufficient funding.
- Officers agreed to provide another Early Years funding update at a future School Forum meeting, following discussion at the HNSG.

### **Action By - Head of Early Years and Family Hubs**

#### **RESOLVED –**

THAT Schools Forum agree the following hourly funding rates for 2025/26 and the retained funding required to administer the free entitlement schemes.

1. Proposed Hourly rates for 2025/26
  - Under 2's: £14.19
  - 2-year-olds: £9.78
  - 3 and 4-year olds: £7.42 2.
2. Proposed pass-through rates which values total £774,972.00.
  - Under 2's 96%: £144,641.00
  - 2-Year-olds 97%: £119,441.00
  - 3 and 4-year-olds 97%: £510,890.00

#### **9. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK (HNB): UPDATE ON 2024/25 PROJECTION AND PROPOSALS FOR 2025/26**

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

Vikram Hansrani (Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion) and Di Osborne (Head of SEND and Inclusion) summarised the report which provided an updated financial projection on HNB spend for 2024/25 and reported a further

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increase in the deficit projection since the last report. Proposals for the 2025/26 HNB budget were made against this background and that were sustainable while also working to improve life outcomes for children/young people with high needs.

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

- A member stated that the proposed change to proportionality payments should have been reviewed in detail by the HNSG, as that forum was intended for in-depth discussions on specific areas and the potential outcomes of such changes before proposals were presented to Schools Forum. The member acknowledged that officers had attempted to bring this issue to a previous meeting, but it had not been discussed.
- A member noted that if the change recommended to Schools Forum was implemented on an interim basis, it might be difficult to reverse, as providing the money to schools upfront, rather than as a proportional payment at the end of term, would have made future adjustments more challenging.
- A member stated that they did not disagree with devolving money to schools, or the principle of providing certainty regarding funding, but noted a contradiction in the report. They highlighted concerns about a proposed formula based on proxy measures, which did not create perverse incentives for identifying children with SEND. However, the formula now included identifying the number of SEND children as part of the calculation. An officer acknowledging that it could be seen as a similar perverse incentive, as there was a factor based on high needs pupils. However, it would be done annually, and the excess money would be calculated based on what the school would have received through the devolved payment. The officer explained that while the formula reflected the number of high-needs pupils, there was no direct relationship, as the process would occur once a year and would not encourage identifying more children for financial gain throughout the year.
- A member asked for clarification on the current system, noting that a £1.8 million budget had been set for the devolved amount, which was then shared out to schools through a formula. They asked if the set amount had changed to £4 million, as it had been last year, or if it was a different figure. The member also requested details on the new formula, as this information was not included in the report. They pointed out that the current formula included prior attainment, FSM, and the number of Camden residents, and asked how these factors would change when using the numbers for the proportional payment. An officer responded, explaining that the new formula would leave the pot at £1.8 million through the old factors and then add 75% of what would be generated through the proportionality formula. This would be added to the existing factors. The officer clarified that the £1.8 million would be generated as it had been in the previous year, and the 75% would be based on the full-year cost of proportionality using the latest numbers.
- A member raised that part of the purpose of the HNSG was to find savings, emphasising that there could be savings and alternative ways of spending less money in this area, but acknowledging that there were many areas to explore. An officer responded that savings considerations would involve significant discussions, all dependent on what would happen to HNB funding in future years

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and whether numbers of children with SEND would continue to increase. The officer noted that the current approach was framed as an interim measure, which could be adjusted in the future. They suggested that other areas, such as EOTAS and independent special schools, should be examined for potential savings first.

- In response to members, officers confirmed that conversations were taking place with Robson House about their funding arrangements and it was not appropriate to comment at this stage in this forum. Those discussions would be taken to the HNSG and then an update on any decision made would be provided to Schools Forum in the summer.
- A member praised the work carried out around remodelling ENG and clusters, as well as the responsiveness of SEND funding, which had been helpful to schools. However, this meant that officers needed to stay on top of the processing and administration of funding. The member expressed concern over the delay in funding, particularly when the money arrived 18 months after being agreed upon. Given that resources were becoming tighter, the member questioned what steps were being taken to review systems and processes. An officer responded that the issue of delayed payments was being addressed, with additional SEND officers being assigned to work with schools to ensure that payments would be made more promptly.
- A member raised concerns about falling rolls and catchments, particularly in schools that admit a significant number of out-of-borough pupils. They questioned whether any modelling had been done on the impact of Camden schools, as some may have half of their students as non-residents. Officers responded that HNB funding was allocated solely for Camden residents. They explained that the weighting for the devolved amount was based on 20% residency, 20% FSM, and 60% prior attainment, with importance placed on these factors. The allocation was not based on the proportion of Camden residents in a school.
- Officers confirmed that any changes agreed would be circulated to schools as soon as possible. Members emphasised the importance of ensuring schools understood the changes.
- Members agreed to add the CLIF budget as another key area in Recommendation B, to incorporate an analysis of the funding disparity between ENG, EHCP and CLIF and an analysis of the uptake of CLIF across different settings and transitions, including a consultation with EY colleagues on their assessment of the uptake of CLIF.

### **RESOLVED –**

THAT Schools Forum

- a) Note the updated HNB position for 2024/25.
- b) Agree the HNB Subgroup to oversee a review of key areas including ARP admission criteria and funding, the growth in our use of independent and non-maintained special schools, Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) packages, alternative provision, and the CLIF budget.
- c) Agree an interim change to the formula for devolved funding to Camden mainstream schools pending a fuller review of mainstream high needs funding.



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

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

Nick Smith (Head of Education Commissioning and School Organisation) introduced the report which provided an update on the outcome and detail of the school meals tender. The following points were made:

- Officers confirmed that the existing contract had been awarded to Caterlink. During the consultation phase with schools, Camden addressed management control concerns and incorporated improvements into the specification, with a focus on resolving ongoing cost and quality issues. Officers emphasised that issues varied between sites and highlighted the importance of strong relationships between on-site staff and school leaders, beyond contractual arrangements.
- Discussions regarding a potential insourced model would continue, with three bespoke engagement sessions planned, including one with schools. Officers noted that key messages about maintaining quality, avoiding additional costs, and ensuring effective food delivery had been acknowledged by all stakeholders, including the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families. More detailed engagements with individual schools were scheduled over the next two to three months to explore the advantages of an insourced model.
- A December 2020 session with ten school leaders saw reasonable attendance from schools of various sizes. Feedback highlighted operational concerns with current provisions and emphasised that an insourced model must address these, with further discussions on workforce arrangements planned for future sessions.

### **RESOLVED –**

THAT Schools Forum note the report.

## **11. SCHOOLS FORUM WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER 2024/25**

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

Nick Smith (Head of Education Commissioning and School Organisation) summarised the report which outlined the work programme for the remainder of the 2024/25 academic year and the action tracker.

As discussed on Item 8, it was agreed that another Early Years funding update would report to a future School Forum meeting, following discussion at the HNSG (to incorporate an analysis of the funding disparity between ENG, EHCP and CLIF and an analysis of the uptake of CLIF across different settings and transitions, including a consultation with EY colleagues on their assessment of the uptake of CLIF).

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As discussed on item 9, an update on Robson House funding arrangements would be provided at the next meeting.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT Schools Forum note the report.

**12. FUTURE MEETING DATES**

The Chair stated that the final meeting date of the 2024-25 academic year was on 4 June 2025.

It was noted that the Clerk would circulate the provisional meeting dates for the 2025/26 academic year.

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

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 7.30 pm.

**CHAIR**

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**MINUTES END**