

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **SCHOOLS FORUM** held on **TUESDAY, 5TH DECEMBER, 2023** at 6.00 pm in Remote meeting via Microsoft Teams. This meeting can be watched live at 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
Alan Chesters, Acland Burghley School
Rob Earrey, Fitzjohns Primary School
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
Nick Hewlett, Hawley Primary
John Hayes, Gospel Oak Primary School
Perina Holness, Thomas Coram Centre
Bob House, Camden School for Girls
Deborah Issacs, Edith Neville Primary, Richard Cobden Primary, Primrose Hill Primary

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Marcus Boyland, Cabinet Member for the Best Start for Children and Families
Jessica Juon, Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion
Vikram Hansrani, Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion
Nick Smith, Head of Education Commission & School Organisation
Victor Saunders, Schools Budget Financial Advisor
Joe Lynch, Schools 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

Nick Hewlett, Chair of Governors of at Hawley Primary School, was a new member of Schools Forum.

RESOLVED -

THAT the membership list be noted.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Jen Allan, Nick Hewlett and Perina Holness.

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 last meeting held on 1 November 2023 be approved 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

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 updated the Forum in the following areas: primary and secondary schools formula funding available for distribution to schools 2024/25; central school services block (CSSB); Camden local formula and the historic and planned use of school block DSG reserve; the effects of the Education Schools Funding Agency (ESFA) miscalculation and republication of 2024/25 national funding formular (NFF); notional NFF funding allocations to schools for 2024/25; de-delegation of funding; academies and free schools; high needs DSG block and the 2023-2024 provisional forecast of high needs spending and future HNB for 2024/25; Early Years DSG block funding for 2023/24 and 2024/25; Pupil Premium and Pupil Premium Plus; and recent funding announcements.

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

- In relation to section 8.5, Teachers Pay Additional Grant (TPAG) 2023/24, a member asked if there was an additional mechanism which special schools could apply for to access the pay award, due to the differing funding formula. It was confirmed there was not currently a route the Council was aware of, but one might be introduced. Officers would provide a fuller update on the query outside of the meeting.

Action By - Team Leader Schools and DSG

- In relation to section 2(d), it was confirmed that if the contingency of £0.240m to cover extra costs of bulge classes and changes in pupil numbers (where funding

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regulations allow extra funding to be given) were not spent, the money would go into the DGS reserves.

- In relation to section 7.13 to 7.22, Homes for Ukraine Education and Childcare Grant 2022/2023 final payment and the Afghanistan Resettlement (Education) Grant 2022 to 2023, it was confirmed that the funding was both back and forward looking, including schools who set up service delivery but were no longer involved in provision. The grants were related to how many children were on roll. It was noted that the Afghanistan Settlement Grant scheme was less flexible to allocate to schools than the Ukrainian Grants.

RESOLVED -

THAT Schools Forum

- a) note the level of reserves to be used to support the funding allocations to schools as set out in paragraphs 1.10;
- b) note the provisional National Funding Formula allocations to individual schools discussed in the report in section 1.1 and set out in Appendix 1. Also, that these are only indicative National Funding Formula allocations and are not yet the final school budgets;
- c) note the current forecast spending plans and funding for the high needs and early years blocks as set out in sections 4 and 5 respectively;
- d) note the continued use of the CSSB replacement of the former top sliced amounts detailed in section 1.5;
- e) approve the de-delegated budgets as set out in section 2.1; and
- f) note the potential effects of the future funding and cost pressures outlined in sections 8 and 9 on schools budgets.

9. 2023 SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING REPORT

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

Nick Smith, Head of Education Commissioning and School Organisation, introduced the report. The following points were highlighted:

- There had been a fall in demand for school places in the previous 6-7 years and a number of Form Entries (FE) had been reduced. The decreasing demand position was due to a number of factors, including a falling birth rate, falling fertility rate, and the impact of migration in the pandemic period. This years' report presented a better position, suggesting that many of those factors were stabilising. Additionally, the Council had managed the primary school estate to ensure they were in a more sustainable position, which going forward would have an positive effect on the secondary sector. The secondary sector was also affected by other variable factors.

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- The estimated proportion of pupils attending secondary independent schools rose to 38% during the pandemic, from 34% in 2018/19. Recent analysis had shown this proportion fell to 32%.
- A school place planning group had been established to sit alongside the High Needs Block (HNB) subgroup. This purpose of this group was to review pupil numbers, population data, demand factors and the school estate. There was potential for surplus mainstream school estate to be used for the high needs sector. The school place planning group was expecting to meet in January 2024 and a number of headteachers had come forward interested to participate and they were looking for more interested stakeholders to take part. School place planning was still a live issue and the Council had taken significant actions to address the position, which was not uniform across the borough. There would be more detailed work to follow the group's work involving more stakeholders and schools.

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

- In relation to section 5, independent school numbers, it was confirmed that Camden's status was similar to statistical neighbours. It was also noted that Camden was a net importer of pupils. To attract more children into Camden schools, there had to be realism in which parents should be targeted, as there were many parents who would not engage with the state sector at all, but there were sections parents who were more on the fence and would be willing to be given the case for state education. Councillor Boyland, Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families, stated that the Comms Team was working on promotional and digital work for Camden Schools, would be speaking to headteachers in January 2024 about the work, and there were ideas to engage a focus group. A digital marketing officer would be recruited to Camden Learning soon.
- It was confirmed that Camden did benchmark with other boroughs and local authorities regularly and they were confident Camden schools had a strong offer.
- Officers stated that Camden was active in monitoring and reviewing primary and secondary pupil numbers by focussing on keeping the sectors sustainable and best supporting the school system. The cohorts between and within the primary and secondary sectors were different and there were nuances within the school system and across the borough. Camden was not alone in facing challenging decisions about school place provision.
- It was confirmed that the next iteration of the school place planning paper would incorporate SEND place planning and that the HNB subgroup would sit next to the work of the school place planning group. There was an opportunity for growth in in the pattern of provision.
- It was confirmed that Camden engaged with the Catholic and Church of England school groups in their forecasting and decision making.
- It was confirmed that it was forecast data which suggested that Camden's declining birth-rate was stabilising, however Camden's track record for forecasting this variable was reliable.

RESOLVED -

THAT Schools Forum note the report.

10. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK (HNB): POSITION UPDATE FOR 2023/24

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

Jessica Juon, Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion, introduced the report. The report covered the following areas: 2023/24 HNB funding update; HNB Outturn from 2020/21 with updated 2023/24 projection; and the 2024/25 settlement and the use of reserves.

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

- In relation to section 3.2, members noted that whilst it was important to use funds from reserves for one-off capacity projects, the acute current needs of schools had to be balanced. A member said that schools needed money now for provisions for SEND children because deprivation and SEND needs were increasing. The member stated their school applied to a charity for a sensory room, and they would like to see these projects funded by the surplus in HNB reserves instead. In response, officers stated they would pick up this specific case offline with the member. In a more general response, it was stated that there was a national challenge in how bandings worked and disparities between them across the country. Camden discharged funding before the statutory Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) level, but it was a key piece of learning for the authority in seeing how well funding was being discharged. A sensory room could not be funded using HNB reserve money, however there was a SEND capital extension grant pot which could be explored. Officers confirmed there would be comms on how that funding could be equitably used.

Action By – Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion

- It was confirmed that the first HNB subgroup took place on 30 November which discussed the Camden HNB context with different school leaders, primary and secondary representatives, special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinators (SENCO), and alternative provision colleagues. The purpose of the first meeting was to provide context with funding methodology, discuss where the challenges and opportunities were, work with special providers, and to discuss school place planning and the school estate within the Camden context. Educational Needs Grants (ENG) were a key point of discussion, and it was recognised that whilst Camden was nationally recognised for this work, ENGs did not always work across the whole piece as desired. ENGs were a good way of

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distributing funding quickly, but an EHCP was the correct route for children and young people who had needs to be met for the life course of their education. The next meeting would focus on clusters, ENGs, and discuss an advisory service to ensure the sustainability of the HNB. The session was used to receive feedback from school leaders in how to refine the system. Officers confirmed the membership of the HNB subgroup and the minutes and actions from the first meeting would be circulated.

Action By – Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion

- A member stated that they appreciated the speed of being able to access ENG funding, because there was frustration in how long EHCP funding could take, but they noted there were children accessing ENGs who should be receiving EHCP support. Members noted there was a discussion at the HNB subgroup about emergency funding which could support schools. Schools did not know in advance the total children joining their schools which would require SEND support, and schools had to meet the additional cost immediately on their existing budget.
- Officers noted that the growth in Camden's surplus reserves had taken place in recent years and prior to that a deficit was forecast. The overwhelming majority of other local authorities were in a deficit position. A member stated that having participated in the Forum for many years and seeing previous deficit positions, the focus should be on strategic use of the reserves because it was likely the deficit position would return. Another member stated that there should be investment in sustainable structures and specialist support services.
- Officers confirmed there was survey to schools planned to be circulated asking for feedback on ENG funding, where Camden was aiming to strengthen the model.
- Officers confirmed there was no national guidance on how much the carry forward limit of the HNB reserves could reach, however the Education Schools Funding Agency (ESFA) questioned the authority about the position from 5% surplus.

RESOLVED -

THAT Schools Forum note the updated High Needs Block position.

11. SCHOOL MEALS DELIVERY IN SCHOOLS

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

Nick Smith, Head of Education Commissioning and School Organisation, introduced the report. The presentation covered the following areas: the current central contract;

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future service delivery models, and school input into decision-making. The following points were highlighted:

- The Council had been seeking various legal views on how an in-house service could be provided.
- It was noted that the cost implications of any service procured had to be carefully considered in the context of the borough, costs could not be passed on to schools, and the quality of the food had to be maintained.
- There would be engagement and consultation with schools on the options within the next few months.
- In response to members, it was confirmed that the timeline of activity was tight. The decision would report to Cabinet before the end of the financial year with a strategy for development. Following Cabinet, long-term engagement would commence before a new contract.

The Chair thanked officers for their report.

RESOLVED -

THAT Schools Forum note the current position and the time-line of activity over the next period.

12. FORWARD PLAN

Schools Forum members requested an update on school food provision at the next meeting.

The forward plan was noted.

13. FUTURE MEETING DATES

The remaining meeting dates of the 2023-24 academic year were noted:

- 6 February 2024
- 4 June 2024

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 7.35 pm.

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CHAIR

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MINUTES END