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THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **SCHOOLS FORUM** held on **TUESDAY, 5TH NOVEMBER, 2024** at 6.00 pm in Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE FORUM PRESENT

Katy Forsdyke, Christ Church School (Hampstead) (Chair)
Jules Belton, St Mary & St Pancras Primary
Alan Chesters, Acland Burghley School
Rob Earrey, Fitzjohns Primary School
John Hayes, Gospel Oak Primary School
Nick Hewlett, Hawley Primary
Perina Holness, Thomas Coram Centre
Bob House, Camden School for Girls
Nicholas John, Acland Burghley School
Vijita Patel, Swiss Cottage School
Jacob Sam, Hampstead School
Daniel Silverstone, Parliament Hill (Vice-Chair)

MEMBERS OF THE FORUM ABSENT

Deborah Issacs, Edith Neville Primary, Richard Cobden Primary, Primrose Hill Primary
Jen Allan, Eleanor Palmer Primary School
Jules Belton, St Mary & St Pancras Primary

ALSO PRESENT

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

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. SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP LIST

The Chair noted that there were a number of terms of office expiring in 2025 and head teacher members should consult their respective forums about future nominations.

RESOLVED -

THAT the membership list be noted.

2. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

There were no declarations.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the last meeting held on 5 November 2024 be approved as a correct record.

6. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no urgent business.

7. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION ON SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA FOR 2025/26

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

Victor Saunders, Team Leader Schools and Designated Schools Grant (DSG), introduced the report which provided an overview of responses from primary and secondary schools regarding proposals for the local funding formula for 2025/26. The Forum had previously agreed to maintain the current formula, pending any major changes, and since then the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) had confirmed no significant changes to the National Funding Formula (NFF). The consultation period revealed no substantial objections or additional comments from schools. The Forum was now asked to confirm its approval of the proposals presented in September 2024.

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

- Members asked for updates on general budget announcements. In response, it was confirmed that the Autumn Budget allocated £1 billion to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) funding, which formed part of the £2.2 billion to the core schools budgets. The 1.8% increase to school core budgets would need to cover inflation and the teacher pay award for 2025/26. There was still a question as to whether any of the SEND allocation would be used as bailout funding for financially struggling local authorities, which would result in a lower uplift distributed to other local authorities using the funding formula. The details would be confirmed by government between now and December 2024 to allow local authorities to proceed with their budget planning and Forum would be updated at the next meeting.
- A member commented that it would be unfair for local authorities to be penalised and receive a lower SEND funding uplift for being more financially responsible. In response, it was confirmed that the ESFA was aware of Camden's good practice and if the funds were not distributed using the formula, there would be dismay from many similarly financially responsible local authorities.
- It was confirmed that a low response rate to the consultation was expected due to the low impact nature of the proposals for no change and the continuation of a previously agreed approach by schools. Camden had already moved the local funding formula in-line with national averages which the national funding formula now used, therefore the formulas were drifting closer together anyway. Officers said that within the consultation documentation an invite was offered to schools to discuss any queries. It was noted by members that for other consultations which asked more impactful questions, officers should ensure schools were supported to engage and fully understand.
- It had been communicated by government that National Insurance would be funded for schools on top of the £2.2 billion, however there had been no contact yet to confirm this to local authorities.
- In response to a question asking if funding for staff pay awards would be a real terms increase, it was stated that they were likely to be grant based on pupil premium and schools were unlikely to receive the full amount of money to cover the increase in salaries of experienced staff

RESOLVED –

THAT Schools Forum

- a) confirm its acceptance of the formula proposals set out in the consultation report following the positive endorsement from the level and response and those schools that responded;
- b) provide any additional comments on the proposals; and
- c) note any additional Schools funding information.

8. CAMDEN LOCAL INCLUSION FUND (CLIF)

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

Nick Smith, Head of Education Commissioning and School Organisation, introduced the report which outlined the financial support provided to Early Education and Childcare providers to meet the needs of children with emerging SEND. The report detailed the budgeting model used and included an analysis of the recent increase in demand for these services.

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

- In relation to section 2.1, it was confirmed that the contribution from the High Needs Block (HN) Block Designated Schools Grant (DSG) of £500,000 was in addition to the £804,000 funding.
- A member asked which of the HN Block or Early Years (EY) Block would be used if the level of funding exceeded the £1.3 million budget and they asked if there was a cap. In response, it was stated that if money used exceeded either budget there would be a potential impact on both budgets. Officers said that the DfE did not legally distinguish between EY Block or HN Block within the DSG, but Camden could trace its own reserves in what had been spent in different blocks. An overspend on either block had the same net affect. This had not occurred before in Camden, and if the scenario arose, it would involve a discussion between the services on how to react. It was clarified that an overspend would form a deficit and not a reduction in the EY rate.
- In relation to Figure 7, a member stated that funding for Band C did not cover 75% and funding for Band D did not cover 100% of a child's nursery costs, on the assumption that nurseries were expected to pay the London Living Wage (LLW), therefore the report was not factually correct. The member asked for more detail on how nurseries would pay the wages of CLIF staff, because 30 hours was not funded and it was known that CLIF was allocated at least £10 less than the Exceptional Needs Grant (ENG) and Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) funding. Another member stated that the funding for ENG and EHCP also did not cover costs. Members said it was helpful to see the band separation and they would like to see the actual funding amounts per band presented in a future report.
- A member noted there were no illustrative figures in the report which related to banding and there was also no account for the cost of assessments attached to each band. They also noted that the wording in the summary of the report overstated how much the funding met the costs of SEND provision.
- Members requested that a representative from EY attend a future meeting and prepare a more detailed report, which responded to points raised at this meeting.

Action By - Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

9. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK (HNB): UPDATE ON 2024/25 PROJECTION AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS

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, introduced and summarised the report which provided an update on the financial position as of September 2024, with a projected deficit of £1.85 million, which had now increased to an overspend of £2.1 million. The overspend was driven by rising pupil numbers, individual tuition for children not attending school and education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) provision. It was noted that reserves were expected to be depleted sooner than anticipated, compared to previous reporting. In addition to the report, it was noted that there had been recent parliamentary debates and two national reports, including one from the National Audit Office (NAO), warning that 43% of local authorities may face deficits by March 2026. Work was ongoing with corporate finance to monitor HN Block spending, particularly in mainstream and independent schools, where costs had significantly risen.

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

- A member queried the £5 million allocated to independent and non-maintained placements and asked how many pupils this covered. Officers said that the placements involved approximately 70–80 children, but highlighted Camden's success in reducing residential placements. It was also noted there were a number of placements which were awarded through parental tribunal preferences. The average cost per pupil was £70,000, however some cases exceeded this amount significantly. Officers noted placements typically involved low-incidence, high-cost cases jointly funded by health, social care, and education, and suggested that the High Needs Subgroup explore the cohort further to assess value for money and outcomes. Officers emphasised the need to expand mainstream provision within Camden to reduce the reliance on independent placements.
- A member asked if SEND resource provisions would be integrated within Camden schools, utilising available space more effectively which was increasing due to falling pupil numbers. They also asked if there was a strategy to reduce the number of EHCPs within the local authority. Officers clarified that there was no specific strategy to limit EHCPs, emphasising the council's focus on providing timely support and interventions, whether that was through EHCPs or ENGs. Last year Camden's net increase in EHCPs was six, which was significantly lower than neighbouring authorities with some seeing net increases of over 300. The importance of ensuring local families felt supported was highlighted. Concerns

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were also raised by members about the rising costs of ENG's, with funding for EHCP's and ENG's drawing from the same budget, which should necessitate closer monitoring of both.

- A member raised concern over the VAT (value added tax) status of independent special schools, which were not VAT-exempt like non-maintained special schools, but officers clarified that local authorities could reclaim VAT, so there was unlikely to be a direct financial impact on Camden. The member suggested benchmarking the issue with other local authorities, as it was being discussed nationally by special school networks and lobbying groups. Officers further noted that under current rules, parents could send their children to an independent special school without an EHCP if they were prepared to pay the fees themselves and they would not be excluded from VAT.
- A question was raised about whether costs had been modelled for increasing special provisions and how this aligned with falling budgets. Officers explained that while no specific modelling had been carried out, there was recognition of the benefits of keeping children in Camden schools as part of the place planning strategy. Officers also highlighted rising costs in the independent and non-maintained sector, driven by factors such as tribunals and increasing EOTAS package expenses, which were beyond the Council's control.
- In relation to Table 3, officers confirmed that the total of 215 EHCP's only included maintained secondary schools.
- Members asked if the rise in ENG's had reduced the number of EHCP's as intended, or if ENG's had increased disproportionately. Officers explained that without ENG's, many young people would require EHCP's, with the main driver being transitions from EY. Some children moved from CLIF to ENG's, and by the end of Key Stage(KS) 1, they may still require EHCP's, although there were successes where children settled into mainstream education without progressing to EHCP's. Despite this, overall numbers were rising, mirroring national trends. Officers highlighted the significant increase in SEND cases but shared positive outcomes for children supported by ENG's in reception through the EY Inclusion Team.
- Concerns were raised about the increasing number of ENG's, particularly for EY's and KS1 pupils, and whether they resulted in children settling into mainstream education or if support usually continued indefinitely, driving numbers up over time. It was suggested that data showing how many ENG's successfully transition children off additional support would be helpful.
- A member said both ENG's and EHCP's should be regularly reviewed to ensure the child still needed the support. ENG's were highlighted as less burdensome for schools and parents compared to EHCP's, given their simpler application and assessment process.
- Members said the High Needs Subgroup should review the points raised in this discussion in more detail.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

10. SCHOOLS FORUM HIGH NEEDS BLOCK SUBGROUP: RECOMMENDED TERMS OF REFERENCE

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

In response to members raising the error that not all High Needs Block Subgroup members were also Schools Forum members, officers agreed to remove the following line: 'Membership will consist of Schools Forum members'.

RESOLVED –

THAT Schools Forum agree the updated High Needs Block Subgroup terms of reference (Appendix 1), subject to the correction, and for the updated version to be appended to the Schools Forum terms of reference.

11. 2024 SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING REPORT

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

Nick Smith, Head of Education Commissioning and School Organisation, introduced and summarised the report which set out the composite and live data projections for school places and demonstrated the basis for school place planning decision-making in Camden. The report noted a decline in birth rates, with births in Camden remaining lower than expected. While previous reports suggested a possible recovery, the current data indicated that the low point had likely been reached, but the situation may change over the next ten years, depending on future births. Primary schools, secondary schools and different planning areas of the borough faced different contexts. There was a need for caution in looking at the data, as previous predictions about increased demand from additional housing had been overestimated. The School Place Planning Group would involve more stakeholders and work closely with the SEND team.

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

- Cllr Boyland emphasised the importance of aligning SEND needs with place planning and suggested that it would be helpful to see figures for both areas mapped out together.
- Cllr Boyland raised concerns over the high level of Camden students entering the independent sector in the transition to secondary school. He suggested that the Communications Team and Camden Learning could attract students back into the mainstream sector with the right messaging, and now would be an opportune time with rising fees due to VAT being introduced on private sector schools in January 2024. A Member asked if the reasons for this trend were known, and it was confirmed there were several factors and there had been a review 18 months ago, however it was hard to pinpoint reasons at a granular level. A member

suggested gathering insights from primary school head teachers about why students leave Camden schools when transitioning.

- A member expressed concern over the financial impact of the projected 28% surplus in secondary school places by 2032, noting that some schools were still relatively full but facing potential enormous losses due to low year group numbers. Action was needed quickly to address this, especially as increasing EHCPs were requiring more money from school budgets which affected the curriculum offer. Officers acknowledged the need for action, explaining that while measures like caps on admission numbers had been taken, long-term solutions may require statutory action by the Council and further consideration of grouping schools together. The Schools Place Planning Group was looking at Camden's position within the broader context of falling rolls in inner London and the potential impact of school closures. A member noted that closing schools to help other schools were difficult but necessary decisions and hoped the Group would focus on schools with very low numbers. Officers said that Camden had already made some tough decisions in previous years, however there were challenges ahead and all options needed to be considered.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

12. WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER

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

Nick Smith, Head of Education Commissioning and School Organisation, introduced and summarised the report which outlined the work programme and action tracker.

As discussed on item 8, members requested that the EY Team prepare a more detailed report to report to a future meeting, which responded to the points raised at this meeting, and that they be present to answer questions.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

13. FUTURE MEETING DATES

The remaining meeting dates for the 2024-25 academic year were noted.

- Wednesday 4 December 2024
- Wednesday 5 February 2025
- Wednesday 4 June 2025

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 7.20 pm.

CHAIR

Contact Officer: Anoushka Clayton-Walshe

Telephone No: 020 7974 8543

E-Mail: anoushka.clayton-walshe@camden.gov.uk

MINUTES END

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