

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FUNDING FORUM
CEME
13 June 2019 (8.30 - 11.00 am)**

Present:

Representative Groups

LA Maintained Schools

Head Teachers: Emma Allen, Special
Margy Bushell, Primary
Kirsten Cooper, Primary
Georgina Delmonte, Primary
Nigel Emes, Primary
David Unwin-Bailey, Primary

Governors: Dave Waters, Primary

Academies: Denise Broom, Secondary
Nigel Emes, Primary
Vicki Fackler, Special
Simon London, Secondary
Kate Ridley-Moy, Primary

**Non-School
Representatives:** Mark Halls, Early Years PVI Sector

Trade Unions: John Delaney

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS OR OBSERVERS

Apologies were received for the absence of Bernard Gilley (LA Maintained Governor) David Denchfield (Primary Academy) Keith Williams (Secondary Academy) and Gary Pocock (Special Academy).

Vicki Fackler was substituting for Gary Pocock and Hayley Durrant was in attendance as an observer.

2 TO AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 7TH MARCH 2019

It was noted that the list of members present at the previous meeting needed a slight amendment to the format in the minutes. The minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 7 March 2019 were otherwise agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

4 SCHOOL BALANCES 2018-19

The report before the Forum only covered school balances for Local Authority maintained schools. Whilst total funding had increased as a result of higher pupil numbers, total balances as a proportion of funding had lowered considerably. There were no longer any schools with a balance greater than 15% and only 4 schools carrying forward 10-15%. The number of schools with a balance of 5-10% had remained fairly constant.

All schools with balances in excess of 10% had been written to by the Strategic Finance Manager and some responses were still awaited. Some 13 schools were now in deficit (a record high figure for Havering) and some deficits were unlikely to be recovered over three years. The Council was working closely with these schools and a report on this would be brought to a future meeting of the Forum.

Whilst most schools had restructured and reduced the number of their teaching assistants and senior leadership team, deficits were often due to a school having low pupil numbers. It was noted that schools with high balances also needed to address their spending plans as high balances reflected on the overall position of Havering.

The Schools Funding Forum noted the report.

5 DSG OUTTURN 2018-19

A report before the Forum advised that there had been an underspend of £2.4 million in the Dedicated Schools Grant and that this was partly due to a need to retain a contingency for transition to the National Schools Funding Formula. There had been an underspend of £772k for the early years block and the Forum had previously agreed to allocate this as a contingency in 2019-20 in order to increase base rates for early years providers. An additional £7k had been retained to go towards the software review.

A £25k underspend for the schools block was due to less secondary school insurance being needed due to the number of Academies. The main proposal for these funds was to offset the 2018-19 high needs deficit or add to the high needs budget for 2019-20. De-delegation had seen £121k refunded to primary schools with a £9k contingency held for Trade Union facility time. The High Needs block had overspent by £954k although accounting adjustments had reduced this from the previous forecast of £1.2 million. A fuller report would be given at the next meeting of the Forum. Underspends from Central Schools Support would be put into the High Needs budget.

The Pupil Growth Fund had been used to fund two new permanent expansions at Parklands and Whybridge Juniors as well as previous year expansions in 16 schools. Some 15 schools had unfilled bulge classes and unfilled primary school places often led to financial problems. New permanent expansions had taken place at three secondary schools – Marshalls Park, Redden Court and Royal Liberty. Whilst there was an underspend of £435k on a £2.7m budget, this was likely to be lower for 2019/20 due to the Government formula.

Seven primary and one secondary school received funding via the Falling Rolls Fund. SEN recoupment write-offs would be put into the High Needs budget as would a £775k contingency although £185k would be retained for next year's National Funding Formula. The £130k saving in ARP funding would also be added to the high needs block. The £25k held under Balance of Grants would be retained in case this needed to be returned to the DfE. It was therefore proposed that a total underspend of £2.1m would be transferred to the High Needs block.

It was accepted that underspends needed to be reported to the Forum on a more regular basis. ARP set up costs were for additional revenue costs not covered in provision of new ARPs from the capital budget. It was necessary however to keep monitoring the levels of pressure on schools with ARPs. It was also clarified that there was no longer any legal time limit on when SEND recoupments could be written off. Forum members felt that SEND provision was working in some places but not in others. The relevant transport budget had been overspent by £700k due to the numbers of SEN children being placed away from local schools.

The High Needs provision deficit figures would be published in the s.251 outturn statement and overspending was surveyed regularly.

The Forum agreed the allocation of the DSG underspend in support of 2019-20 funding.

6 SECTION 251 BUDGET STATEMENT 2019-20

It was noted that the budget statement would be published on the Council's website. Officers explained the main points of the statement. It was noted that the figures in the Schools Table for high needs places related to those in maintained school ARPs and not those in Academies.

The report would be submitted to the DfE who could raise any questions, prior to it being put in the public domain. It was agreed that ideally, more funds should be allocated to schools that took in more high needs pupils in order to incentivise inclusion. This would be covered as part of the high needs review with the Council.

The pupil planning team budget was in line with that for benchmarking Councils and the Strategic Finance Manager would bring benchmarking data to a future meeting of the Forum. It was noted that the Support for

Inclusion budget would be apportioned to primary schools in the final version of the report.

The Forum noted the Section 251 budget statements.

7 HIGH NEEDS STRATEGY REVIEW

A report before the Forum gave details of progress following the review of the High Needs Strategy that had been held two years previously. The vision of the review had been to promote inclusion within local schools and communities. One additional ARP was now open with three more at different stages of development. More secondary ARPs were still needed however.

A new Special School was due to open in the 2021/22 school year for children with the most complex needs. A new capital grant would allow for an increased number of ARPs and £100k had been ring-fenced for providers to bid for funding for e.g. sensory rooms in early years settings.

Focus groups looking at progress since the review would be re-established and the outcomes of these together with a refreshed action plan would be brought to the Forum.

Issues raised by Forum members included that children were still reaching reception needing an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and that speech and language services were separate systems in nursery and reception. Financial support to schools to support high needs children was only received once an EHCP had been completed.

The Council was committed to working with schools on High Needs issues, in spite of delays to the central Government spending review. It was felt there were not enough local respite services for children with very complex needs and there was a plan to develop a local residential unit to offer this service.

Other issues to be considered when establishing new ARPs included age ranges and matching provision to the geographical spread of the borough as well as staffing and training issues. It was noted that even at schools such as Hacton Primary with a large and long standing ARP, many children still had to access facilities outside the borough. It was hoped to establish a secondary school sensory needs hub.

The review would be discussed at primary cluster groups.

The Forum noted the report.

8 DFE CALL FOR EVIDENCE ON HIGH NEEDS FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

It was explained that the DfE was aware that there was insufficient funding for high needs and this would be addressed in the Comprehensive Spending Review. It was also wished to remove barriers to decision making in the current arrangements and a draft response to the call for evidence on these issues was before the Forum for consideration.

The Council proposed agreeing that more funds should be targeted via the low prior attainment factor and that the Council should retain its own method of targeting SEN funding. It was felt that the notional SEN budget was not helpful to schools and that the £6,000/11 hour funding threshold for schools should be lower, provided that high needs funding was increased.

It was also felt that the underfunding of health and adult social care prevented effective partnership working and that the real issue – the lack of high needs funding was not addressed by these questions.

The Forum approved Havering's draft response to the DfE call for evidence.

9 NEXT MEETINGS

The Strategic Finance Manager would circulate proposed future meeting dates shortly.