

Meeting of the Schools Forum

Tuesday 24th November 2009

(4.00 pm, Topaz Room, Emerald Suite at NLBP)

Attended

- Members:
- John Marincowitz (Head, QE Boys)
 - Tim Bowden (Head, Holy Trinity)
 - Sarah Vipond (Early Years Working Group)
 - Elizabeth Pearson (Governor, Livingstone)
 - Johnathan Hewlings (Governor, East Barnet)
 - Kate Webster (Head QE Girls)
 - Mick Quigley (Principal Inspector, Children's Service)
 - Lisa Clarke (Head, Brookhill Nursery)
- LA Officers:
- Robert McCulloch Graham (Director of Children's Service)
 - Carol Beckman (School Funding Manager)
 - Nick Adams (School Services Finance Manager)
 - Linda Parker (Strategic Finance Manager)
 - Val White (Assistant Director, PPP)
- Observers:
- Lucy Salaman (LSC Partnership Manager)
 - Elaine Runswick (16-18 Commissioning Board)
- Consultant:
- Geoff Boyd (Consultant)
- Clerk:
- Claire Gray (School Resources and Support Officer)

Not Present

- Members:
- Helen Schmitz (Head, Cromer Road)
 - Gary Tucker (Head, Christ's College Finchley)
 - Hazel Godfrey (Governor, Broadfields)
 - Dee Oelman (Head, St Mary's & St John's)
 - Lynda Walker (Head, Oak Lodge)
 - Anthony Vourou (Governor, St John's N11)
 - Kevin Hoare (Head, Finchley Catholic)
 - Anthea Abery (Head, Rosh Pinah)
 - Alan Homes (NASUWT)
 - Jo Djora (Head, Coppetts Wood)
 - Gilbert Knight (Governor, Oakleigh)
 - Derrick Brown (Governor, Ashmole)
 - Jayne Franklin (Head, Childs Hill)
 - Jeanette Adak (Head, Monkfrith)
 - Ken Huggins (Governor, The Compton)
 - J Goring (Bishop Douglass – sub for Angela Murphy)
 - Stephen Parkin (Governor, St Mary's High)
- Others:
- Cllr Fiona Bulmer
 - Angela Trigg (London Academy)
 - Sarosh Malik (School Resources & Support Officer)
 - Graham Durham (Assistant Director, Inclusion)
 - Denise Murray (Strategic Finance Manager)
 - Paul Lawrence (Head of Insurance)

1. Apologies for Absence

- 1.1** Apologies were received from Anthea Abery, Jo Djora, Dee Oelman, Jeanette Adak, Lynda Walker, Ken Huggins, Stephen Parkin and Alan Homes. JM thanked RMG for attending the meeting.

2. Minutes of previous meeting (6th October 2009)

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.
Proposed: JH, Seconded: TB.

3. Matters Arising

Further information regarding item 4.5 – Free Milk in schools was included in the Schools Forum papers. Members were advised that proposals for the administration of this to be transferred to Cool Milk with effect from April 2010 have now been finalised.

No further questions on this issue were raised.

4. Items for Agreement

5.1 Pupil Place Planning

VW recorded the LAs thanks to those schools that expanded their Reception place intake in September 2009 in response to the unexpected pressure on available places. However, there is likely to be a continuing need for additional places in the coming years and the LA wishes to ensure that a suitable funding procedure is in place in future. This is particularly important to those schools that commit to providing additional classes that are not subsequently filled.

Two options are therefore proposed:

Option 1 would offer a minimal funding level in 1 form entry schools providing additional KS1 classes similar to the current 'ghost pupil' formula factor. This would apply where numbers in the additional class have fallen below 21 in the January PLASC after opening.

Option 2 uses the same criteria, but would apply to 1, 2 or 3 form entry schools that have opened additional classes at the request of the LA.

Schools Forum members noted that the proposals would reassure Headteachers that a school would not suffer financially if it assisted the LA in providing additional KS1 classes.

Members voted to adopt Option 2 by 7 votes to 0, and this change will come into effect in the funding formula from April 2010.

CB

5.2a Consultation on Changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools – School Balances

NA presented a paper summarising the results of the consultation with schools regarding excess revenue balances. The response to this consultation was very low, and therefore a Schools Forum decision on this matter is requested.

The 2 proposals for consideration by the Schools Forum are as follows:

Option 1 – provides additional clarification of a committed item, but does not allow unspent Standards Funds in addition to the permitted levels of 5%

(secondary) or 8% (nursery, primary and special). This option also provides for a school in exceptional circumstances to allow for a falling roll.

Option 2 – All revenue balances in excess of 5% (secondary) or 8% (nursery, primary and special) would be clawed back, but with a 'right of appeal' to a sub-group of the Schools Forum if the school concerned can demonstrate and provide evidence that items have been appropriately deferred and assigned, or if the school is anticipating a fall in pupil roll.

Members asked whether schools are clear about planned expenditure that could be excluded from revenue balances and also the process for committing funding for multi-year projects. NA confirmed that there is clear guidance to schools on how to assign commitments and the documentary evidence needed to support such items. Some members felt newer Headteachers might need additional guidance and more support from their finance liaison officers and the schools accountancy team before this could be put into effect. Members also debated whether a sub-group of the Schools Forum would be necessary, or whether officers could submit regular reports to members for a full Schools Forum decision, giving a summary of schools with excess balances together with any appeals and supporting evidence. JM commented that Headteachers are fully aware of the level of balance permitted, and that either clawback proposal would stimulate action to reduce excess balances.

Members voted unanimously to apply Option 2, but without the establishment of a sub-group of the Schools Forum. LA officers will present reports detailing proposed clawback and balance levels, and any appeals will be dealt with by the full Schools Forum group. NA advised that these proposals will come into effect from 1st December 2009, and therefore will affect school revenue balances held as at 31st March 2010.

NA

5.2b Consultation on Changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools – 'Minor Changes'

NA advised that a revision of some of the items in the Scheme for Financing Schools needed updating to bring them up-to-date. Most of these are regulatory changes, out of date wordings and value limits and would also provide clearer and more simplified guidance, e.g. Purchasing, Tendering and Contracting Requirements.

NA

This proposal was unanimously agreed by members.

5.3 Re-election of Schools Forum members

CB advised that in accordance with the constitution of the Schools Forum, members are due for re-election every two years. In light of the fact that there are few applications to join the Forum, it is proposed that the current members will remain in post but that a review will be carried out before the next meeting to establish length of service and which members are due for re-election. So as not to cause disruption in membership over the critical school budget setting period, it is proposed that the LA seek nominations for new or re-election of existing members during the summer term 2010.

CB

This proposal was unanimously supported by members.

6. Items for information

6.1 Dedicated Schools Grant 2009/10 – Centrally Retained Budget Monitoring

The month 6 budget monitoring report was included in the agenda & papers for this meeting, but LP highlighted a small number of under/overspends in the following areas:

1.2.4 Fees for placements at independent special schools - £223,252 projected overspend due to complexity and cost of placements

1.2.7 Inter-authority recoupment - £422,769 projected underspend, This is likely to be a one-off underspend in relation to inter-authority agreement over outstanding long-term debts

1.3.1 Pupil Referral Units - £54,548 projected overspend due to additional staff costs in relation to students permanently excluded from schools. This is not expected to happen in future years.

Although all items give a projected total underspend of £323,913, the LA is not proposing to allocate any of this amount at this stage, as amounts needed for volatile areas, such as SEN and placements may vary. It is proposed that further updated budget monitoring reports are presented at future Schools Forum meetings.

LP

Members unanimously agreed to this proposal.

6.2 Building Schools for the Future

VW advised that officers have met with all the Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of Wave 1 schools. The majority of schools have agreed to provide a contribution to BSF from their Devolved Formula Capital allocation to support the funding proposals put forward. Further meetings are due to be held between officers and governors at the schools concerned.

VW

6.3 Early Years Working Group

CB confirmed that the Single Early Years Formula Funding (SEYFF) proposals have now been put forward to Cabinet for first year implementation, but that the impact of these will be continually monitored. The LA is aware that a number of providers are unhappy with the proposals, particularly the entitlement being 'free at the point of delivery' and compliance with the Code of Practice. Also a number of providers are concerned about pupil count arrangements and tracking changes in attendance.

SV advised that an earlier meeting for PVI providers had agreed to continue raising the issue of top up fees and additional service charges to both the local authority and nationally, also requesting that implementation should be deferred from April 2010.

There is also concern about the impact on maintained nursery schools, however in Barnet these are protected by the minimum funding guarantee at present

RMG has sent a letter to all providers confirming that these are statutory requirements on the LA, and that these cannot be waived by the authority. However, officers will continue to support providers during the implementation process, particularly in the area of fee structuring and billing to parents

6.4 14-19 Education: Machinery of Government changes and National Commissioning Framework

ER provided an update on the transition of responsibilities from the LSC to the YPLA with effect from April 2010. The London-wide Regional Planning Group (RPG) is working with the 32 boroughs regarding 2010/11 funding allocations, and also with regard to the planning and commissioning of services. The outline timetable for RPG meetings and provider submissions was included in the papers for this meeting, but ER requested that providers submit proposed planning numbers for 2010/11 to the LA by 9th December (changed from 11th December). It was noted that due to the over-supply of places in 2008/09, any growth for 2009/10 is unlikely for all London authorities.

ER also advised that the consultation on 2011/12 funding and the National Commissioning Framework is now available, with a deadline of 5th February 2010 for responses. VW suggested that this should be included as an information item in the School Circular so that schools can submit their responses to the consultation directly. The RPG will be co-ordinating a group response on behalf of London authorities.

VW

ER advised that further information, additional guidance and resources can be obtained from the 'react' website at www.lga.gov.uk/react

7 Any Other Business

7.1 The full council meeting setting the budget headlines for 2010/11 is due to take place on 12th January 2010, so members are asked to note that a special Budget meeting of the Schools Forum has been arranged for 13th January.

7.2 TB advised that a number of schools in Barnet are currently being approached by companies providing contracts for IT, photocopier and telephone services which would involve schools in costly long-term financial commitments. RMG asked that any schools receiving such approaches should forward him the company details and any proposals or documents received for monitoring. RMG advised that this seems to be a national problem at the moment and he will forward details to the DCSF for information.

TB/RMG

8. Dates of future meetings

8.1

Weds 13 th January 2010	4.00pm (Special budget meeting)
Tues 2 nd February 2010	4.30pm (with briefing at 4pm)
Tues 18 th May 2010	4.30pm (with briefing at 4pm)
Tues 13 th July 2010	4.30pm (with briefing at 4pm)