

Minutes of the meeting of the Ealing Schools Forum

Date: Thursday, 4 May 2023

Venue: Council Chamber, Ealing Town Hall, New Broadway, Ealing W5

Attendees (in person):

P Adair (Chair), J Hannay (Vice-Chair), S Dhillon, J Hicks, P Portwood, M Cassidy, S Simms, W Smith and Cllr C Anderson

Apologies:

R Kruger (Vice-Chair), P Broadbent, E Appelby, J Maloy, M Budd, D Woods and I Woolley

Attendees (virtual):

T George, S Sajid, K Herring, M Pye, C Hames, R Walsh, I Buchanan, Cllr H Haili and Cllr A Steed

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

PRESENT

Members:

Special Schools: Paul Adair (chair, in person), Ian Buchanan (virtual)

Primary Schools: In person: Jeremy Hannay, Mike Cassidy, Philip Portwood and Wendy Smith

High Schools: Mia Pye, Charlotte Hames (both virtual)

Academies: Kimberley Herring, Roisin Walsh and Toni George (all virtual)

Pupil Referral Unit: Jon Hicks (in person)

Representative of Staff nominated by recognised trade unions: Stefan Simms (in person)

PVI Nursery Provider: Susan Dhillon (in person)

16-19 Partnership: Sajada Sajid (virtual)

Non-Executive Members of Council: Councillors A. Steed and H. Haili (both virtual), C. Anderson (in person)

Vacant positions

Primary Schools x 2

Representative of Non-Maintained SEN providers x1

There were apologies for absence from:

Primary Schools: Iram Woolley, Jamie Maloy, Dave Woods and Emma Appelby

High Schools: Marion Budd and Rachel Kruger

VA and Faith Ethos Academy/Free School Providers: Pete Broadbent

Absent

Nursery Schools: Nick Hassanali

2 Urgent Matters

There were none.

3 Matters to be Considered in Private

There were none.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

5 Minutes

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Ealing Schools Forum held on Thursday 19 January 2023 be approved by the Forum and signed by the chair as a true and correct record.

6 MEMBERSHIP

Resolved:

That the Forum noted the membership and current vacancies on this committee. The chair welcomed the new members on the Forum and the following officers: Mr Robert South, LBE Strategic Director, Children's Services; Madhu Bhachu, acting AD Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) and Angie Dennison, acting AD Early Help & Prevention.

7 Schools Forum Report - School Funding 2023-24

Tamara Quinn, Assistant Director, Schools Planning, Resources and Service Development, introduced the May 2023 report on School Funding 2023-24, the purpose of which was to agree the scheme for financing schools in the year 2023-24 and to provide Forum with an update on the government's early years' childcare reforms and with an update on high needs including the government's SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan and Ealing's joint Strategy for SEND, as outlined in the report.

Kim Price, Planning and Resources Strategic Lead, presented the part of the report relating to the summary of changes to the Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools and to the revised draft Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools, attached as Appendix 1 to the report. The main change in the draft scheme related to the incorporation of further guidance from the DfE on retention of funds from the sale of land assets.

There was a discussion on whether the local authority should consult with maintained schools on changing the balance control mechanism (BCM), this point had been raised at the last meeting of the Forum. Currently, the BCM was set at 8% for nursery, primary and special schools and 5% for high

schools. The number of schools who would have potentially been in scope for clawback of 2021-22 balances based on the current scheme and two alternative options were presented in Table 1 of the report. Ms Price noted that as stated in the report, changes to the scheme would require full consultation with governing bodies and headteachers of maintained schools ahead of a Forum decision. Therefore, should Forum wish the Local Authority to consult on changes to the scheme, this would be included within the school funding consultation in Autumn 2023 to inform a decision at the November Forum.

Ms Quinn informed the Forum that the decision around the local authority's recommendation regarding implementation of the balance control mechanism (stated on page 16 of the report), would come to the Forum's June 2023 meeting. Maintained schools had just closed off the 2022-2023 financial year and would soon be submitting balance forms to officers. The outturns would be reported to Forum at the June meeting in order for Forum to decide whether to apply the mechanism as set out in the scheme.

The Chair clarified that the issue for the Forum at this meeting was to comment on whether it wanted possible revisions to the balance control mechanism to be included in the consultation in autumn or whether it was happy with the parameters of the current BCM.

Members of the Forum expressed the following views:

- the percentage clawback should be greater than 5%, 10% or 15% for schools with excess balances year on year.
- holding a consultation would be a neutral position to garner the opinions of colleagues and move forward.

In response to questions from the Forum, Ms Quinn clarified that:

The schools' Forum had requested that the LA implement a mechanism and the purpose of the BCM was to encourage schools to spend the money that they received for children while those children were in school and to reduce the accumulation of significant balances among schools in Ealing. There were concerns that in some schools, the balances were continuing to increase. The purpose of considering a change to the current BCM was that a change may be needed to prompt the desired effect (a reduction in surplus balances) in some schools.

Ms Quinn went on to say that each year there were conversations with schools that fell within the BCM. Ms Quinn acknowledged there could be further work done around the communications to schools, including the timing of such communications so that schools and governors understood the implications of not spending their funding and encouraging them to keep their balance at an appropriate level.

Ms Price explained that any agreed change, stemming from the consultation would relate to the implementation of the balance control mechanism during the 2024-25 academic year. The chair explained that the Forum had requested that the BCM be re-visited and the mechanism to do that was

through the consultation.

A Forum colleague made the point about the ringfencing of certain funding and that schools had received some funding that they had not necessarily anticipated; in addition, some schools faced recruitment challenges and had not been able to appoint to all posts that they wished to; there was an instability around staffing and pupil numbers in the future. There was therefore an argument for continuing with the current percentages. Additional communications and guidance would be welcomed.

The Chair pointed out that the jump from 4 to 30 schools in the options presented was quite stark and asked whether it would be appropriate to put all that work in for four schools. The issue for this meeting was whether to include the BCM in the next consultation round.

In response to questioning from the Forum, Ms Quinn explained that the agreement with the Forum was that the funds clawed back would be applied to the High Needs Block which benefited all schools. Minor adjustments could be made for ring-fenced funding such as catch-up grants, however the purpose was that the broader maintained school community would benefit. Ms Price added that use of any subsequent funds that were clawed back would be agreed with Forum members.

Tamara Quinn informed that so far the BCM was having the desired effect; with most schools were only subject to the BCM for one year, although a small number had been subject for more than one year. Awareness of the BCM prompted the decision-making and the planning that it was designed to do in most cases. However, it needed to continue to be informed by the context that schools were operating in.

Officers reiterated that options would be presented in the consultation, which could include continuing with the present mechanism; applying the BCM as a single year snap-shot or increasing or decreasing the incremental levels to which the BCM was applied.

Ms Quinn added that officers would also seek to consult on the principles underpinning the Balance Control Mechanism (BCM). Forum members should be clear on the implications of going to consultation and that it was possible that schools might respond that they did not wish to continue with the BCM. She advised that the consultation should be anchored in the principles and outcomes that the Forum was seeking, as well as on the technical values.

The chair summed up the consensus that the issue to be consulted on was not whether to have a BCM, rather on what type of BCM was appropriate.

Angie Dennison, acting Assistant Director Early Help & Prevention, presented the part of the report relating to Early Years as per paragraph 3.2 in the report. This related to the Chancellor's childcare reforms announced in the Spring 2023 budget. The effect of these reforms was intended to increase availability, reduce costs and increase the number of parents using childcare,

with the roll out starting from the 2023-24 academic year till 2028. Challenges around capacity was one of the issues the local authority would be faced with. The Forum raised the issue providers might be facing in terms of the impact of the cost of living pressures on sustaining or expanding on their offer.

A Forum member raised the challenge of getting trained staff to provide expanded care or wrap-around care, particularly for children that were aged three and under. Ms Dennison said the authority was awaiting further guidance and would hope to bring a further update to the Forum in the autumn.

Madhu Bhachu, acting Assistant Director, Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND), presented the part of the report relating to High Needs as per paragraph 3.3 in the report. This reflected the government's response in March 2023 to the March 2022 Green paper. The LA was mindful of the challenges around training, resources and capacity that the government's improvement plan might require.

Ms Bhachu thanked the local authority officers and all the stakeholders that had been involved in producing Ealing's Strategy for Additional and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, 2023-2027, which had been approved by cabinet on the 19th April 2023. She said looked forward to working with schools including Forum members to bring the strategy to life.

Ms Bhachu also reported on the one off £0.450m grant from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), received in Autumn 2021 to transform and enhance the support to parents and preschool children with SEND. She said the feedback from schools and parents had been positive and that the authority was looking for ways to continue funding the model it currently had.

Robert South, Strategic Director, Children's Services, said he was keen to go out to individual schools and get their feedback and that he would welcome that Forum members and officers would actively engage with each other and other colleagues as much as possible and keep a log of questions, challenges and ideas for the DfE and other colleagues that could be used for lobbying purposes. There was a case for working with other local authorities in terms of putting the case for the government getting it right and communicating to government what the authority believed the government needed to do to get the best outcomes for children and young people in their education journey.

Ms Price went on to present the section on SEND sufficiency and High Needs deficit recovery. Reporting that the number of EHC plans maintained by Ealing had increased by a further 326 (10%) between January 2022 and January 2023 to 3,445 plans, continuing to place considerable pressure on the high needs block. She continued by outlining the information on this topic as detailed in the report.

Robert South stated that SEND was a critical area of concern nationally and that Ealing's high needs deficit was not within the government's range of

concern at present. He mentioned the government's Delivering Better Value in SEND Program, which operated in three phases; an initial, safety valve phase which focussed on those local authorities with the highest proportion of over-spends, followed by two further phases. He said the government would use the learning coming out of these phases to work with local authorities to develop programs to address demand in High Needs and look at evidence based forms of practice and operations that have an impact on the demand. Officers would report the government's findings to the Forum with considerations of how those findings might fit the demands in Ealing. Ealing will also collaborate with other authorities. The painstaking work needed to be done to find out what worked evidentially for children and young people in different cohorts in the Ealing context.

Officers explained that the nearest SEND free school approved in the latest round was in Hillingdon. The reasons set out by the DfE why the Ealing bid had not been successful were around i) a clear and compelling case; ii) Ealing's SEND Strategy, which has now been finalised, had not been available at the time of the bid; iii) Ealing's bid had been joint with Harrow and Hounslow, however the DfE had struggled to evaluate the bid on the basis of that cross-borough, regional working. Officers would be meeting with the DfE to better understand their feedback and to receive feedback on the kind of joint bids that they would be keen to receive to inform any possible future bids in subsequent free school rounds.

Ms Bhachu reassured the Forum that officers were doing some work regarding the roll-out of therapeutic thinking, which was a borough-wide 'whole school approach' to supporting young people, and providing clarity around 'ordinarily available provision'.

Mr South said it was important to keep talking to all the diverse stakeholders, including families with young children. The Forum noted that schools were struggling to recruit staff to support children that were neuro-diverse. Resources were an issue and a strategy that dealt with matters on the ground was urgently needed.

Ms Quinn responded that there was a broader governance structure around the delivery of the SEND strategy which included partners. The decision-making role of the Forum in respect of high needs would be focussed on the management of the deficit recovery plan and ensuring that was built into the strategy. Ultimately if the provision was received – right place, right time – the LA would be able to use money effectively whether it was in deficit or not. Forum decisions were around the transfer of the 0.5%, which would be consulted on in the autumn. These topics would be the focus of future reports to the Forum, alongside contextual information.

The Forum made the point that future support for the 0.5% transfer may need more concrete details about how the money would be spent. The chair encouraged schools to engage in this difficult process.

Ms Price then presented on Top up funding arrangements for 2023-24

[Special Schools], as per the report. Officers confirmed that the bulk of the work in setting the budget for 2023-24, had now been done, although there was still ongoing work to agree the distribution of children across the level descriptors for one special school. The LA would continue to work with schools across settings to ensure that there was a mechanism to review funding on an on-going basis. The LA and all schools were having to make difficult decisions in terms of high needs top-ups, in view of inflation, however officers felt the budget [for 2023-24] was broadly in the right place. Officers would place the detailed level descriptors and additional information in Ealing Grid for Learning (EGfL) and inform schools of this via Gatekeeping. Ms Quinn thanked those schools who had participated as it had required a significant time commitment. The chair said a range of professionals had visited schools as part of the process and that the process had added value, including from a professional development standpoint.

There was a discussion on School Place Planning and Organisation, with reference to section 3.4 of the report. In response to a query from a Forum member, officers clarified that the SEND Strategy was a 0 – 25 strategy and that the Early Years' block funding arrangements were brought to the Forum for consultation.

There was a discussion on Attendance guidance and funding arrangements, with reference to section 3.5 of the report.

Officers said they were keen to set up a working group with some representative heads, in order to discuss the development of the Attendance Service offer. However, this was separate to Forum's decision-making role. Funding for the Attendance Service is primarily from the Central School Services Block, which is separate from the Schools Block and decided on by Forum on a line-by-line basis. De-delegation was not an option for the attendance service.

Forum was therefore limited in the way it could make decisions about funding the attendance service and a consultation was needed to set thresholds and expectations for the attendance service. What were statutory functions and what was the responsibility of the individual schools but could be delivered through a traded service, needed to be worked through in more detail. The view was expressed by the Forum that the consultation should focus on statutory requirements.

Resolved

That the Ealing Schools Forum:

Scheme for Financing Schools

- i. Note the summary of changes to the Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools.
- ii. Agree to the revised Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools, attached as **Appendix 1** to the report, coming into effect from 1st April 2023.
- iii. Note that should there be any further amendments following feedback on the provisions in the scheme, these will be reported and considered

at the next meeting of the Forum.

- iv. Note and comment on the alternative Balance Control Mechanism approaches and agree whether Forum wish the Local Authority to consult with maintained schools on changing the mechanism in the 2024-25 Scheme for Financing Schools.

Early years

- v. Note the update on the childcare reforms set out in the Chancellor's Spring 2023 budget announcement.

High needs

- vi. Note the update on the government's SEND and AP Improvement Plan, Ealing's joint Strategy for Additional and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, the early years SEND programme, SEND sufficiency and high needs deficit recovery.
- vii. Note the top up funding arrangements for 2023-24.

School Place Planning and Organisation

- viii. Note the update on the School Place Planning and Organisation Working Group which has been set up to inform the development and delivery of responses to changes in demand for mainstream, specialist, and alternative provision.

Attendance service funding arrangements and extended duties

- ix. Note the funding arrangements for the school attendance services and the extended duties set out in the governments *working together to improve school attendance* guidance.

8 Date of Next Meeting

Resolved:

That the Ealing Schools' Forum notes the next meeting will be held on Wednesday 21 June 2023.

Meeting commenced: 6.00 pm

Meeting finished: 7.45 pm

Signed:

Dated: Wednesday, 21 June 2023

P Adair (Chair)