



Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
People Directorate

Agenda Item 3

A

Minutes

**BARNSLEY SCHOOLS
FORUM**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FORUM HELD ON THURSDAY, 12th
MARCH 2020 AT KIRK BALK ACADEMY**

PRESENT

Headteacher Representatives

Nick Bowen, Antoinette Drinkhill, Nichola Smith and Kirsty Wordsworth

Governor Representative(s)

Margaret Gostelow, Jackie Milliner, Mark Pawson and Michael Sanderson (Chair of the Schools Forum)

Alternative and Special Provision Representatives

Josh Greaves

Non-Schools Group Representative

Ayesha Baggley

Officers

Nina Sleight

Service Director (Education, Early Start and Prevention) Barnsley MBC

Josh Amahwe

Strategic Finance Manager (Core Services Directorate) Barnsley MBC

Richard Lynch

Head of the Barnsley Alliance for Schools

Shafeek Khan

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Also in Attendance

Martin Copson

National Education Union

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Formal apologies were submitted by Mrs Beever, Mr Buckley, Mr Crook, Mr England, Mrs James, Mr Potter, Mr Smith and Mrs Wilks.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL AND PECUNIARY INTEREST

Representatives from the Forum declared their interest in relation to matters being considered as part of Agenda Item 4 of today's meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE FORUM

RESOLVED

(1) **The minutes of the meeting of the Forum, held on 16th January 2020 were agreed as a correct record.**

4. MATTERS ARISING THROUGH CONSIDERATION OF THE MINUTES

No matters arose during consideration of the minutes of the previous meeting.

5. SCHOOLS BUDGETS

Schools Block Budget (2020/21) Latest Outturn

Mr Amahwe presented his report on changes to the Schools Block Budget following the Secretary of State's recent decision not to approve a 2% transfer of funding from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block and, instead, to approve a 0.5% transfer. Mr Amahwe detailed the following changes to be implemented to the local schools funding formula:

1. The funding baseline had been adjusted to accord with the revised transfer amount of 0.5% (or £0.8 million) with the result that total baseline funding available for distribution had increased from £156.2 million to £158.6 million.
2. AWPU rates for both primary and secondary schools have been increased by 1% to 6% to reflect the additional level of funding. Barnsley's AWPU rates for both primary and secondary schools were now higher than those for the National Funding Formula.
3. The lump sum unit had now been increased to match the National Funding Formula level of £114,000.

Further detail on the changes to each funding factor was highlighted in the table in Page 3 of Mr Amahwe's report. Whilst these changes would result in additional funding for the majority of schools in the Borough, it was acknowledged that five schools would witness marginal or no change in their funding position, due to the protection afforded by the Minimum Funding Guarantee. Responding to queries from Ms Drinkhill and Mr Pawson, Mr Amahwe stated that given the Government's commitment to funding the Minimum Funding Guarantee, this was

likely to be a recurring problem. Mr Bowen enquired over how the decision to increase the Lump Sum unit within the local formula had been taken and Mr Amahwe replied that this had been in accordance with the policies and assumptions which formed the Local Authority's service and financial plans for 2020/21.

Mr Sanderson expressed alarm that a decision which had been rationally taken by the Schools Forum at its meeting on 12th December had been rendered futile by the DfE. Other members of the Forum agreed unequivocally and both Mr Amahwe and Mr Lynch commented that many other areas who had agreed similar percentage transfers from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block had experienced the same outcome. Some of these areas were contemplating a judicial review of these decisions as it would have serious implications not only for tackling High Needs Block funding deficits but also the financial sustainability of these councils.

Mr Lynch advised that the Director of Children's Services would be corresponding with the Secretary of State urging him to re-consider his decision not to support a 2% transfer to the High Needs Block in the Borough and, in view of his earlier comments, he invited Mr Sanderson to be a co-signatory to the letter.

RESOLVED

(2) The Schools Forum notes the changes implemented within the local schools funding formula following the DfE's recent decision to limit the percentage transfer of funding from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block to no more than 0.5%.

(3) That arrangements be made for Mr Sanderson to be a co-signatory to the Director of Children's Services letter to the Secretary of State, following the decision not to support the Council's disapplication request.

High Needs Budget (2020/21) and Funding Arrangements

Similarly, as a result of the Secretary of State's decision to decline the disapplication request, Mr Amahwe reported on the subsequent effect upon the High Needs Block. In particular, he commented upon the following:

- The total funding allocation for 2020/21 and adjustments to the budget.
- Changes to operational guidance for High Needs Funding which were published last October and which will come into effect during 2020/21.
- The financial context and the current deficit in the High Needs Block.

On the latter, Mr Greaves, Ms Sleight and Mr Lynch commented on the commissioning decisions which needed to be taken in order to meet growing demand for school places and how demand could increasingly be met through investing in the capacity of local mainstream and special schools whilst, at the same time, ensuring value for money. Ms Sleight and Mr Lynch added that these commissioning intentions would form part of the Borough's refreshed School Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children and Young People with SEN(D) to be published shortly.

Ms Sleight and Mr Lynch went on to describe how the changes implemented to the SEN(D) system in 2014 significantly under-estimated the level of future demand, leading to a serious level of under-resourcing, nationally. Therefore,

both cautioned against the notion that failures in local authority leadership and management had been the cause of the funding challenges facing local schools.

Ms Drinkhill was struck by the cumulative deficit in the High Needs Block which had been forecast for 2022 and Ms Sleight and Mr Lynch replied that this was a situation which was prevalent in many areas of the country. In order to reduce the deficit, Mr Bowen argued that more local schools needed to grasp the nettle in meeting the needs of such children and thereby prevent the costlier alternative of independent out of borough provision. Ms Sleight re-iterated that this was where the gap between local performance and the National Average needed to be closed.

RESOLVED

(4) The Schools Forum notes the changes to the High Needs Funding Block arising through the Secretary of State's response to the disapplication request, including the funding requirements for commissioning school placements and the payment of top-up funding to mainstream and special schools or academies; alternative provision, post 16 providers and independent and non-maintained special schools, during 2020/21.

6. TRADE UNION FACILITIES AGREEMENT AND REVIEW OF EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATION IN SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES IN THE BOROUGH

Mr Sanderson reported that as a result of Mr Potter's role and responsibilities to the Local Resilience Forum and the co-ordination of the Borough's response to the outbreak of Covid-19, Mr Potter was unable to attend today's meeting.

Mr Sanderson went on to outline the purpose of Mr Potter's report which referred to the nature of the Trade Union Facilities Agreement with local maintained schools, how this had become the subject of a Local Authority budget saving proposal and how the increasing conversion rate into academies had led to the gap in funding having to be met through increased contributions from maintained schools.

Members will recall that this conundrum had increasingly troubled maintained schools whilst at the same time, Local Authority funded trade union convenors were having to meet demand from members employed by academy trusts. In approving an increase in contributions by maintained schools during the corresponding meeting last year, the Forum's decision was conditional on the development of a proposal aimed at providing a more equitable and sustainable model of employee representation across maintained schools and academies in the Borough. On this, Mr Copson advised the Forum of the nature of current discussions between trade unions and Mr Potter towards this objective. Mr Potter's report specifically referred to discussions which had taken place with St Mary's Multi Academy Trust aimed at brokering a facilities time agreement on behalf of a number of academy trusts in the Borough for both teacher and non-teacher members.

Mr Potter was awaiting further details on this proposal which would help in identifying the exact costs, together with any risks as well as the funding gap which would still need to be met.

RESOLVED

(5) That a further report, detailing the trade union facilities agreement to be brokered by the St Mary's Multi-Academy Trusts, should be circulated for the attention of the Schools Forum as soon as possible to enable a

decision to be taken on the way forward by the end of March.

7. TRANSFERS OF FUNDING AND FURTHER INVESTMENTS IN THE HIGH NEEDS BLOCK: IMPROVING OVERSIGHT

At the December 2019 meeting of the Forum at which the decision was made to transfer a percentage of funding from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block it was recognised that the decision would not be without impact upon individual school budgets. Ms Dickinson, therefore, recommended that the Forum should be enabled to oversee and challenge the value added through such transfers and investment.

Discussion continued at the January meeting where it was agreed that members of the Forum be consulted for their views on how this oversight could best be maintained. Ms Sleight and Mr Lynch presented the outcomes of the consultation and in view of recent developments which had taken place in the governance of wider SEND related investments made by the Local Authority and the need to avoid any overlap and duplication, the report recommended that Mr Sanderson, as Chair of the Forum, be invited to become a member of the local SEN(D) Sufficiency Sub-Group. This would enable the Forum with an opportunity to witness first-hand how commissioning decisions took place and on what evidence this was based.

RESOLVED

(6) That Mr Sanderson be nominated to become a member of the local SEN(D) Sufficiency Sub-Group and to report on the deliberations of the Sub-Group to meetings of the Forum.

8. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

No matters were raised.

9. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Forum noted that a set of indicative dates for its schedule of meetings during 2020/21 upon which brief discussion took place.

RESOLVED

(7) That a schedule of dates be circulated to the Schools Forum, taking into account the scheduling of other meetings.

In concluding today's meeting Mr Sanderson thanked members of the Forum for their attendance and contribution whilst, also, expressing his appreciation and gratitude to the staff of Kirk Balk Academy and Northern Education Trust for their co-operation and hospitality in hosting the meeting.

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Signed by the Chair of the Barnsley Schools Forum