# MINUTES OF THE TOWER HAMLETS SCHOOLS FORUM WEDNESDAY 13 June 2018

**School Members**

Governors: Jill Cochrane (Chair)\*, Bob Stevenson\*, Dave Lake\*, Veronica Kennard\*, Pip Pinhorn\*, Shahanur Khan, Salma Mahbub and Bridget Cass\*, Motiur Rahman.

Headteachers: Gillian Kemp\*, Lorraine Flanagan\* (Vice-Chair), Sarah Helm, Remi Atoyebi\*, Jemima Reilly\*, Matthew Rayner\*, Jill Baker\*, John Bradshaw\*, Joanna Clensy\*, Esther Holland\* Sheila Mouna\* Avril Newman\*, Martin Nirsimloo.

**Non School Members:**

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| 1. **Apologies for absence** Apologies were received from Neville Murton, Terry Bennett, Sarah Helm and Kim Arrowsmith. An apology for lateness was received from Sailesh Patel.  The Chair apologised on the behalf of the LA for the delay in circulating meeting papers to members. This had been down to staffing issues. The Chair had requested in future papers be circulated no later than the Friday prior to the meeting.  Christine McInnes welcomed John O’Shea, the newly appointed Head of SEN to the Schools Forum. John explained he had previously worked in schools so was aware of the frustrations faced by schools in relation to data coming from the LA. It was John’s plan to revise current processes to ensure the LA had the data it required so it did not continue asking schools for information. Data was currently being migrated into a new system, after this was completed it was hoped the information held would be accurate.   |  |

Terry Bennett (CE Diocese), Alison Arnaud (Tower Hamlets College), Kim Arrowsmith (PVI EYs Providers), Alex Kenny (Trade Union Rep)\* and Mahmudul Choudhury (Council of Mosques).

**Observers**:

Tracy Smith (THEP)\*

*\*indicates attendance*

**Officers in attendance**

Debbie Jones (Director of Children’s Services Partnership), Christine McInnes\*, John O’Shea (Head of SEN)\*, Steve Worth (Schools Finance Advisor), Suzanna Jones (Supporting Divisional Director Finance) Runa Basit (Clerk to the Schools Forum)\* and Rochelle Clarke (Supporting Clerk)\*

 **Action:**

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| 2. **Minutes of the meeting on 18 April 2018 and matters arising**  **Resolved –** The minutes were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:  * *Steve Worth had not been present at the meeting*
* *Veronica Kennard had been present at the meeting*

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| 3. **Schools Budget Outturn 2017-18** Steve Worth informed members he would be presenting on behalf of Sailesh Patel as he was running late.  Steve presented a report on Schools Budget Outturn 2017/18.  The outturn position for the schools budget 2017/18 had been confirmed, there was an underspend of £185k. Sailesh Patel had set out in the report how this sum was made up.  The Schools Forum was informed the surplus had come from the Schools Block.   |             |
| 4. **Schools Funding –NFF Working Group.** Steve Worth presented a report on the School Funding Formula Review Group.  National School Funding Formula would come into force from 2020-21. The LA was not sure what the outcome would be on the 20202021 budget but were currently planning how they would calculate school funding in the next financial year.  Steve informed he was looking for volunteers to take part in looking at possible funding formulas for 2020. An email had been sent asking for volunteers and there had been some take up. However the current group was not a representative group.  The group was currently under represented in the following:  * Primary Maintained Schools- 4 more volunteers were needed
* Primary Academy – 1 more volunteer was needed
* Secondary Academy- 1 more volunteer was needed

 The group had met for the first time on 6th June 2018. The Terms of Reference and a draft timetable were to be agreed at the next meeting.  Steve requested members assisted the LA to encourage colleagues from underrepresented groups to attend.  |  |

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|  Alex Kenny questioned if there was any flexibility in the submission date on January 2019 for a local formula to the DfE?  Steve answered no and informed the National Formula was the amount of money schools would receive. The LA had additional funding they would use to make up its minimum funding guarantee at an extra 0.5% per pupil for 2018-19.  Lorraine Flanagan commented it was a very tight timescale, Headteachers had committed to take part in other Forums and groups. Looking at the report the information presented was clear and it seemed the LA was already on the right track.  Suzanne Jones informed members the LA had looked at and compared the current funding formula to the new national formula. This had shown schools would come out better off. The LA was happy for the group to continue with its current membership, if colleagues felt they wanted to have some input this would be welcomed.   | It was Agreed to widen the group to include School Business Managers and Finance Managers.  |
| 5. **Schools Surplus Balances** Steve Worth presented the Schools Surplus Balances report in the absence of Sailesh Patel.  The report set out the level of school balances as of March 2018 and the movement of balances year on year and included surplus control balances.  Appendix 1 outlined Schools in the LA with excessive balances above 5% and 8%.  Esther Holland informed the Forum these figures did not include any financial commitments. There had been a request for a list of financial commitments last year but these had not been the numbers published in May .These numbers were incorrect and this was concerning as false figures are unhelpful. With schools in very difficult financial situations it is not helpful to see other schools with large surplus balances especially when this information is incorrect.  Suzanne Jones requested to withdraw this paper without further discussion and this was Agreed by the Forum.  | More work to be carried out on the paper. Once this has been completed it would be brought back to the Forum for further discussion.  |
| 6. **Update- High Needs Funding Block Review**  Christine McInnes and John O’Shea presented a report on Update following High Needs Funding Block Review and DfE Allocation for 2018-19.  |  |

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|  The Headteachers group had been put together last year to look at the use of the high needs funding block. Costs have risen much higher than anticipated. As well as this the number of high needs pupils were rapidly increasing. Young people at the top of the funding scale have increased. The LA is currently looking at a much bigger overspend this year than was previously anticipated. The LA was currently looking at the following options to reduce the overspend:  * Reducing the retained element from Support for Learning Services
* The LA was looking to potentially half the funding the team received.
* Looking at top up funding and conducting reviews
* Looking at expanding Phoenix School Bow site as this would reduce future costs. The LA would also save money as they would no longer need to transport children out of Borough.
* Review the SEN high needs provision in the LA.

 The LA is aware of the amount of groups and committees members were asked to attended but was looking for volunteers to form a committee to help set out what the next steps would be for the high needs funding block. This did not have to be a Headteacher.  Lorraine Flanagan asked if there would be a shift in high needs banding to make it harder to hit the threshold. Schools needed the money they received to stay afloat, if this was to be looked at could it be the last resort?  Christine answered the LA was looking at finding funding from elsewhere but it was likely banding would need to be looked at to bring the budget in line.  Joanne Clensy expressed her concern as the numbers of children requiring support from the High Needs Funding block was increasing.  Christine informed members the High Needs Funding Block was not linked to numbers but was instead a round figure given to the LA. This was a national issue but the LA was one of the hardest hit due to its high numbers of SEN. The LA was looking at a training programme for SENCO to assist as funding was not increasing in the same way numbers and costs were.  Matthew Rayner felt there needed to be a review of banding. The requests from schools were sometimes so high it was disproportionate for the needs of the children involved.  Christine was in agreement; how funding was being distributed was  |  volunteers to contact Christine McInnes if they are interested in being part of the committee  |

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| not consistent across all schools in the borough.  Gillian Kemp suggested legal advice was taken to ensure even distribution of funds to all schools. Currently some children were travelling past 4 or more schools to attend a particular school they may have heard has good SEN provisions.  John O’Shea informed members he had requested a list of all the schools in the borough with detailed figures per year to assess the issue. The LA was aware there was an issue and was in the process of looking at ways to address this.  Remi Atoyebi commented her school did not have the capacity for the amount of applications of SEN children they were receiving but as the school was being named as parents preferred choice the school had to take the children.  Esther Holland commented on a school that received £1million worth of funding but had no SEN provision. This should not be happening.  Jill Barker commented her school was being named in parents personal statements as parents were being told the school catered well to particular needs. There was not much the school could do about this.  Christine informed members the review was long overdue. The results would be shared with the Forum when complete.  |  |
| 7. **SF Membership and Constitution** Runa Basit presented a paper on the Schools Forum Membership and Constitution.  A review of membership of the Schools Forum had taken place. The forum were asked to consider the following:  Page 3 3.3 ‘*consider whether they wish to recommend any changes to non-school membership. Once category often included in nonschool membership is a Non-Executive member of the Council.’* *Page 3 3.5 ‘ in reviewing the current position members are asked to consider whether they wish to recommend retaining two representatives each of nursery and maintained special schools.* The Schools Forum **Agreed** to continue with 2 representatives from nursery and maintained special schools.  The Chair questioned if this was for the purpose of reducing the size  | The Schools Forum **Agreed** to continue with 2 representatives from nursery and maintained special schools.  |

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| of the schools forum?  Runa replied this was calculated using pupil numbers and to reflect the current landscape of schools in Tower Hamlets. The Forum is asked to consider the report and how they would like to continue. It was also highlighted that the membership and constitution would be reviewed annually to ensure the Forum remained compliant.  The Chair felt given the amount of time it took for members to get up-to-speed with the set-up of the Forum and how it worked, it was best for it to stay in its current format. The Forum had some valuable members who she did not want to lose.  Why was a Non-Executive member required?  Runa informed it was good practice to have a non-executive member on the Forum. It would also give an LA perspective.  It was **Agreed** to recruit a Non-Executive member to the Schools Forum.  Lorraine Flanagan requested all three faith positions be removed as since the Forum had been convened no topics had been discussed that required any faith perspective.  Esther Holland commented Muslim schools were not being represented at the Forum due to poor attendance. This needed to be looked at as it stated members would be removed if they did not attend regularly.  It was **Agreed** the following three faith positions be removed:  1. The Church of England Diocese
2. The Roman Catholic Diocese
3. The Council of Mosques.

  The recommendation from the Forum would now be put to the Council for agreement.  Members requested a breakdown of school (Headteacher) members of the Forum. Runa Basit will share this with the Chairs of Consultative.   |             It was **Agreed** to recruit a non-executive member to the Schools Forum. It was **Agreed** to remove the three faith positions.     |
| 8. **Forward Plan** Runa Basit presented the draft Schools Forum timetable for 201819. Members were informed this would be a working document so changes would be made regularly.   |  |

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| The Forward plan was noted by the Forum.   |  |
| 9. **A.O.B** **Local Authority Day Nurseries (LADN)** Christine McInnes presented a paper on the Local Authority Day Nurseries (LADN).  Members were informed a decision had been made and the Day Nurseries would be closed.  Debbie Jones apologised for the late delivery of papers to members. The paper was going to be discussed at the Mayors Advisory Board this evening and would then go to Cabinet in July. The new administration had only been formed approximately 4 weeks ago but had made the decision to close the LADNs. This had been a very difficult decision for the Mayor to make with the amount of opposition that had been raised during the consultation.  Christine commented after the previous discussion at the Schools Forum it became apparent transferring staff wasn’t financially viable. There had been a lot of interest in expanding child care in the borough but not at the expense of transferring over staff.  Members were informed that Mary Sambrook would have only 2 children over the summer so the LA had taken the decision to close the nursery over this period. The 2 children would then attend one of the other day nurseries.  The biggest issue for the LA was how they continued to provide its deaf provision. Children’s House Maintained nursery was part of the PFI provision but had limited space. The LA intended to develop the nursery adding more space. This would then house the deaf provision unit.  Suzanne Jones explained the LA was unable to agree to this within the Schools Forums guidelines. They would be able to make some savings but were unable to give any figures at the present time until a final decision had been made. The LA was requesting the School’s Forum release the remaining 50% of the LADN budget to allow the process to run its course.  Members asked if the LA had any idea on what the maximum spend would be and what the earliest or latest date of completion would be?  In response members were informed this information was not yet available but the LA hoped they would be able to provide this information over the coming weeks. After the Cabinet meeting they  |  |

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| would have a better idea on the next steps.  Lorraine commented it was hearting to hear the LA was looking for a solution to its deaf provision but reminded members there were currently Primary Schools in the Borough who had established deaf provision. However creating a deaf provision at Children’s House was a good idea. Was the remaining money being requested to fund the closure of the day nurseries? If so, was it right to use the money to fund redundancies?  Debbie Jones responded the money would be used to fund the closure of the LADN. The LA did not plan on making any staff redundancies and hoped they would be redeployed and be placed into other roles. The issue of equity would be raised again at Cabinet. The LA was requesting some flexibility from the Forum. Phased closure was the LA’s preferred option with the LADN closed by June 2019. The LA was not requesting funding for the next year and hoped the process would be completed by the end of this year. The LA had looked at redundancy costings but in the eventuality it went this way the funding for this would come from elsewhere.  Matthew Rayner informed he could see the logic of creating a provision at Children’s House and could also see the logic of children going to a primary school run provision. However, if members declined to give the LA the remaining 50% of the budget where would the remaining funding come from?  Gillian Kemp commented this had been going on for a long time. The Mayor had been aware of these issues and felt the LA was putting guilt on the Schools Forum to force them to release the remaining amount.  In response to this Debbie Jones said the money had come from DSG for historical reasons. Politicians were doing their best but ultimately the decision was down to the Schools Forum and not the Mayor. The Schools Forum had made the decision and this was why the LA was here making this request. The pressure members had put on the LA had been helpful to assist in pushing through the decision making process. 86% of the response from consultation was no to close so this had been a very difficult decision to make.  A member commented that with the primary group currently looking to close schools was it fair to release the remaining money to the LADN?  Bridget Class expressed concern about making a decision on releasing money when no amount or timings had been provided and commented it would be very irresponsible to make a decision on that basis.  |  |

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|  The Chair asked if the LA would be happy with a percentage of money being released.  In response Suzanne informed this could be done, if there was any over spend this would then have to come out of Children’s Services Budget.  Lorraine questioned what decision the Forum was being asked to make, to release the remaining funds or to release an amount and then to use the remaining funds for other causes such as the struggling maintained nurseries in the Borough?  Bridget suggested members release 10% of the remaining funds, and then in September when a better proposal was presented the Forum could then make a decision on the remaining amount.  Lorraine felt no money should be released until a better proposal was presented to the Forum.  The Chair suggested an extraordinary meeting be convened once a proposal had been drafted as September would be too long a time to wait for a decision.  It was Agreed that no money would be released until a proper proposal was brought to the Schools Forum. An extraordinary meeting to be organised at the end of term in July should this be needed. A proposal for how to use contingency money effectively if the Schools Forum decline to release the remaining funding will also be drafted and brought to the next meeting.  Alex Kenny informed the TU were currently working with colleagues working in the day nurseries and questioned why the LA was not looking at redundancy costs.  Suzanne responded the LA intended to avoid redundancy however staff had the option to say they would rather go but this would have costings attached.  **Chair**  Members thanked the Chair for helpful and clear chairing of the Schools Forum this year and congratulated her on receiving an honour award over the weekend. *Chair left the meeting at 10am* *Lorraine Flanagan took the position of Chair for the remainder of the meeting.*  |  |

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| **Save School Funding Campaign**  Alex informed members a lot of work had been done around the Save School Funding Campaign. The TU now had completed postcards to deliver to parliament and were asking members if they knew any celebrities that would be willing to assist in delivering the postcards.   **Next Meetings 2018-19**  Meeting dates for 2018-19 to be circulated once agreed.  Lorraine thanked all members for their service on the schools Forum this year. And informed those who may not be re-elected their service to Tower Hamlets was greatly appreciated.  |  |

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