**LB TOWER HAMLETS SCHOOLS FORUM**

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| Date of Meeting | 10 March 2021 |
| Venue | Virtually, via Zoom |
| Chair | Fanoula Smith |
| Vice-Chair | Monica Forty / Brenda Landers |

# MEMBERSHIP

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| **TYPE** | **MEMBERSHIP** |
| GOVERNORS | Alan Morton (AM)\*; Bridget Cass (BC)\*; Pip Pinhorn (PP)\* and Dave Lake (DL); Gwen Wright (GW). |
| HEADTEACHERS | Fanoula Smith (Chair)\*, Monica Forty (MF)\*; Brenda Landers (BL)\*, Stewart Harris (SHa)\*; Liz Figuerelo (LF)\*; Belinda King (BK)\*; Paul Woods (PW)\*, Maria Lewington (ML)\*, Astrid Schon (AS)\*, Kevin Jones (KJ)\*, Becky Dolamore (BD)\*, and Danny Lye (DL)\* |
| Non-School Members | Kim Arrowsmith (PVI EYs Providers)\*; Alex Kenny (NEU Trade Union Rep)\*; and Tracy Smith (TS)\* |
| OBSERVERS | Jill Baker (JB)\*, Gabriela Salva-Macallan (GSM)\*, Asma Begum (AB)\* |
| Officers in Attendance | Pauline Maddison (PM)\*; James Thomas (JT); Kay Goodacre (KG)\*(Strategic Finance Children and Culture), Nikki Parsons (NP)\* (Senior Accountant); Runa Basit (RB)\* (Head of Governance & Information); and Terry Bryan (TB)\* (Service Head Pupil Access and School Sufficiency), Pauline Hoare (PH) (Head of Early Years); John O’Shea (JO)\* (Head of SEND), Patricia Wells (PW)\*, Amanda Harcus (Divisional Director HR) |

**\*denotes attendance**

[The meeting commenced at 8:32 hours]

## Agenda Item 1: Introductions and Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies.

The Chair welcomed Patricia Wells who attended on behalf of Pauline Hoare.

The Chair also welcomed Cllr Asma Begum and Cllr Gabriella Salva-Macallan.

## Agenda Item 2: Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 13 January and Matters Arising.

## Presenting: Chair

**2.1 Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting were **APPROVED** as a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

**2.2 Action points**

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| **Agenda Item** | **Action Points** | **Lead** | **Update** |
| 2.2 | **210113-1** Kay Goodacre to have a meeting with HT’s from the SF for their steer on the criteria for the HNB. | Kay Goodacre | Update will be given at today’s meeting. |
| 3.2 | **210113-2** Present a breakdown of how the historic commitments are used. | Kay Goodacre | This will be presented at the relevant meeting in June. |
| 4 | **210112-3** Present a breakdown of how the centrally retained budget for Early Years is used. | Pauline Hoare | Update will be given at today’s meeting. |

## Agenda Item 3: Financial Accounting

## Presenting: Kay Goodacre

Kay Goodacre presented an update on school finance and the Forum was asked to note the following:

1. The 2020/21 Year End Timetable
2. Individual School Budget (ISB) allocations 2021/22
3. The Revised School payment schedule for 2021/22
4. The Ongoing position on the Councils Statement of Accounts.
5. The Council School Finance Improvement Plan

The Year End Timetable was shared, and KG said that for 2020/21 the Year End has reverted to 31 March 2021 with a clear cut-off. The finance team has been addressing a lot of the issues which arose previously and is working hard to clear all charges to schools.

All schools have been asked to return their Quarter 3 return and the Finance Team are using this to address some of the problems which arose last year. Mop-up payments at the end of March will pick up all outstanding payments owed to schools.

The deadline for all Schools Year-end Returns is 16 April and the Schools Reconciliation deadline for the Finance Team is 29 April and the team will be reliant on all returns being made on time. Workshops have been run for School Business Managers in which the revised timetable was presented, and the feedback has been that this is achievable.

BL enquired about SEND payment issues. Will SEND payment issues be resolved by the end of March when mop-up payments will be made? KG said that if it is not sorted by then, those payments will have to go through next year; the team is doing best to get those payments cleared. BL said that the SEND payments could make a significant difference to some schools when it comes to balancing their finances.

The Forum **AGREED** the Year-end timetable.

The Finance Team is making some changes to the way funding is allocated to schools which will bring in regular and consistent payments for all schools and reduce the current transaction costs. The main budget share (ISB) will be paid in equal monthly instalments, with 2 instalments paid at the beginning of April to support the schools in building an initial cash reserve. Quarterly payments of Early Year SEND, and any Ad Hoc payments will start in May.

The Council is still in a position of not having the 2018/19 and 2019/20 Statements of Accounts signed off by the Auditors. The Accounts have been restated and Auditors continue to check transactions including some schools’ transactions.

Through an independent review of the Council’s final years accounts provision a comprehensive improvement plan has been put in place to support the required changes in all areas with a significant workstream focusing on the internal treatment and monitoring of the Schools Financial position and the transactional data held in the Councils General Ledger. Details of the school improvement plan were included as an appendix.

A small number of schools may be moved to monthly monitoring if it is agreed that they need closer monitoring.

## Agenda Item 4: National SEND

## Presenting: Kay Goodacre

Kay Goodacre gave a verbal update on national SEND.

The DfE SEND consultation was a technical consultation and did not make many adjustments to the SEND factors. The consultation looked at some of the factors used in managing the formula and will have minimum effect on funding at present.

KG shared how the High Needs formula currently works and said that it operated with a floor which ensured that funding was not lost as the base level was protected. The consultation is looking at how historic spends work and whether that percentage should change.

KG requested feedback from the Forum on the proxy indicators which look at population, living allowances, children in poor health, KS4 and KS2 low attainment and FSM and IDACI. KG asked if the Forum had any concerns about the proxy indicators or any suggestions for other indicators. At present the proxy indicators will not impact the cash allocation but may feed into future consultations.

The Chair said that schools in Tower Hamlets have good attainment figures at KS2 due to the amount of resources and intervention put in from EY to KS2. Looking at baseline data in EY may be a better indicator.

JB said that for some schools the IDACI data is skewed by mixed communities where there are some wealthy communities alongside some very deprived communities. The Forum discussed the effectiveness of using the using the IDACI as an indicator and that some schools may be losing funding through this. KG confirmed that at present due to the base level protection there is no actual loss of funding but in the long term if the IDACI is continued to be used there could be issues. FSM will be a better indicator for Tower Hamlets.

KG said that previously a 5-year weighted average was used for attainment however due to a lack of exams last year and this year it is proposed to use 3 years of data with greater weighting on 2019 data.

## Agenda Item 5: Tower Hamlets SEND

## Presenting: John O’Shea

John O’Shea presented SEND funding for 2021/22 and the Forum was asked to:

1. Note the number of High Needs Place for Special Provision for 2021/22
2. Note minor revisions to top ups rates (rounding) for 2021/22
3. Agree to the setting up High Needs working group with and nominate membership.
4. Agree timeline for producing High Needs Recovery plan

JO gave an update on the number of funded places and the levels of top-ups provided and proposed future developments.

The costs to the High Needs block continue to be a pressure for all Local Authorities. Whilst significant increases in the allocation for Tower Hamlets has supported the position for 2020/21, the bought forward DSG deficit of £11.8m at the end of 2019/20 will need to be addressed over the coming years. An updated full recovery plan will need to be developed, working with all schools with the assistance of the Schools Forum.

There is a significant backlog of cases which is delaying EHCP plans and the finance accompanying them. The team is working with schools around this and exploring how financial pressures can be eased during the assessment period.

John O’Shea gave an update on the number of Special and HNF places and said that Cabinet has agreed the closure of Cherry Trees and a new SEMH provision by Ben Jonson School and Bowden House School has been agreed.

The number of children with special needs in mainstream schools in Tower Hamlets is above average nationally. This is enabling TH to look at the future need and potentially creating a pathway for children with ASD, into secondary school. Currently over 52% of children are in mainstream schools, 21% are in Special Schools, 9% are in other Local Authorities and 9% from other Local Authorities are coming to Tower Hamlets and 3.6% are at resource-based units. It is important to explore how available funding is used to support mainstream schools in the inclusive agenda.

MF commented that lots of parents whose children might be pending an EHCP or have had a diagnosis without an EHCP, are applying to the schools with provisions because they think that their child will be able to access additional resources. MF said that these Resource Bases may attract lots of other children who will not be part of the base when they start the school but then will have plans in place. This will need to be discussed as part of the conversation for funding.

KG said that this was a valid point and it will be important to look at using the funding put aside for those schools who have an exceptional number of high needs pupils. This is something which will be considered. The Chair enquired what the timescale was for this? KG said that this would be best supported through the High Needs working group. The funding has been agreed at just under £1 million remaining in the headroom and this will be distributed at the beginning of the academic year.

JB said that before the pandemic struck a piece of work was started with the secondary schools to persuade parents not to send their children to a particular school to evenly distribute the numbers across the borough. This piece of work will be picked up again once things settle down.

JB also said that calling schools a resource base may not be a good idea as this implies that there will be lots of resources available there. Will it be more appropriate to call them by another name? The Chair suggested that this may be something that the working group can look at, to make clear what the expectations can be from the resource bases and what they should be called.

JO said that the LA had been working with Ben Jonson to produce an SLA which looks at the whole picture such as agreeing the admissions criteria and the KPI’s. This does not exist for those resource provisions that have historically existed within the borough. JO recommended that a review of those provisions takes place to ensure that similar types of SLA’s are in place.

BK asked, thinking about inclusive schools and sensitivity around finance, does the HN Working Group have the correct representation and mix of schools? There needs to be more mainstream representation on the group.

MF said that there is a need for metrics which look at accountability of the use of public funding for the resource base. There has been a lack of clarity about how other resource base provisions are held to account both in terms of attainment and the admissions criteria.

JO said that in general the expectation is that most children will be in mainstream schools and that the team is working with school SENCO’s on a threshold document which outlines the different levels of support that are available, and starts to clarify some of the decision making processes that happen through panels and how funding is agreed.

KG said that there were no significant changes to the top-ups this year. The Chair said that there had been some cuts in the last year and was pleased to note that there will be no cuts this year.

The Forum discussed membership of the HN Working Group, and the following membership was agreed:

2 Special Schools / LEAP: Stewart Harris (Phoenix School) and Astrid Schon (LEAP)

1 Secondary School with a base: TBC either George Green or St Paul’s Way

1 Secondary School without a base: Danny Lye (Bow)

1 Primary School with a base: Monica Forty (Ben Jonson)

2 Primary Schools without a base: Liz Figuerelo (St Peter’s) and Maria Lewington (John Scurr)

Forum AGREED the timeline for the High Needs recovery plan.

## Agenda Item 6: Pupil Place Planning & PRAG

## Presenting: Terry Bryan

Terry Bryan gave an update on pupil place planning.

Terry Bryan said that there were 3 strands to the school organisation programme which began in 2018:

* The Primary Review which addressed surplus primary places in some parts of the borough.
* The Basic needs requirements which planned to deliver additional secondary and primary places in areas where there is growth.
* The SEND expansion programme which addressed the rising demand for specialist SEN places.

Terry Bryan explained about the work of PRAG and said that PRAG was set up for schools and the LA to work together to develop a strategy to address the shortfall of primary aged children in the west of the borough. PRAG also looked at strengthening monitoring and reporting systems and looking at new models of school reorganisation through establishing formal partnerships.

Terry Bryan gave an update on some of the school organisational changes which have taken place or have been agreed:

* School amalgamation between Smithy Street School and Redlands School to form Stepney Park School.
* Cubitt Town Infants and Cubitt Town Juniors are planning an amalgamation.
* Amalgamation between St Anne’s and Guardian Angels Schools.
* A proposal for the amalgamation of Ben Jonson School and Harry Roberts Nursery is in the early stages of consultations.
* Federation between Stewart Headlam School and Hague Primary School.
* A proposal to establish a specialist provision for ASD at Hermitage School is going through the final processes of agreement by Cabinet.
* Phoenix School is expanding to open the Upper School.
* Planned expansion of Beatrix Tate and LEAP.
* Planned expansion of Oaklands from 4FE to 6FE.
* Planned expansion of Canary Wharf College from 4FE to 6FE.

All of this has achieved a necessary reduction in over 200 places. However, some parts of the borough have experienced growth in some areas and a new 2FE primary school will open to meet some of this need.

This will require additional capital funding for the expansion. Any school expansion plans will have implications for the Forum in how the additional places are funded. The Chair said that some headroom had been agreed in previous meetings and enquired about other sources of funding. Terry Bryan said there will be revenue implications for the expansions mentioned above and clarified that the capital funding streams are limited. The current position is that there is a potential shortfall of £30-£40 million. The school closures give the LA opportunities to explore options of how to dispose assets in some areas to raise some funds.

KG said that revenue funding will come out of the Schools Block; the growth funding allocated is based on medium super output areas and it identifies that numbers are increasing. A paper will be presented on the proposed revenue support funding later in the year.

AK commented that this is a difficult process to go through and there can be anxieties around loss of jobs, and it is important to recognise that there are human issues as well.

BK asked how are newly arrived pupils allocated? TB said that pupils who arrive after the census date and in need of a school place are allocated to schools which would benefit from an increase in their pupil numbers.

## Agenda Item 7: Early Years Funding

## Presenting: Kay Goodacre

Kay Goodacre gave an update on Early Years funding.

The agreed Early years formula for 2020/21 included the provision of a mandatory deprivation factor which has worked well in PVI provision by measuring the relative levels of deprivation using IDACI.

For Primary Schools currently the same level of detailed information is not held on the council synergy system and this mapping of post codes had not taken place, and regardless of relative levels of deprivation all schools received the deprivation supplement for all pupils in Nursery settings in both 2019/20 and 2020/21.

For 2021/22 Deprivation for School based Nurseries will use the current school level of FSM eligibility as a proxy indicator of Nursery pupil’s deprivation and that proportion of Nursery age pupils will receive the 30p per hour supplement. In the longer term a fully consistent methodology across the whole sector is being explored.

In normal years indicative budgets for School and mainlined Nursery budgets are based on historic occupancy. With the turbulence for all provision during 2020/21 for 2021/22 budgets will be based on the school’s nursery capacity. Indicative budgets will be allocated to all school and maintained Nursery provision based on 80% of their normal capacity, and then adjusted accordingly once the census data has been confirmed.

The Chair requested for the Consultative to receive the illustrated impact of the school indicative allocations for 2021/22 as there are some anxieties around funding.

The DfE have yet to confirm how the Early Years funding block will be calculated for 2021/22, however it does appear this is likely to be different to that used in previous years.

## Agenda Item 8: Future Agenda Items

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None.

## Agenda Item 9: Any Other Business

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The Chair informed Forum that Gabriella Salva-Macallan had been in contact to request that meeting minutes, agendas and invitation be publicly available. The Chair said that meeting minutes and agendas are public on the Schools Forum page, and as yet it does not state that observers are welcome to join the meeting. This will be updated to include requesting attendance in keeping with good practice elsewhere.

The Forum has benefited from being online as the room is small and this would need to be considered prior to requests to attend. We have historically only had one to two observers attending regularly. If people were willing to attend in person a different venue may need to be considered.

All meeting papers and minutes are public.

GSM said that the meeting can be listed as part of the calendar events with information on how to request the link to join the meeting.

## Agenda Item 10 : Next meeting Date

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* Wednesday, 28th April 2021
* Wednesday, 23rd June 2021

**[The Chair drew the meeting to a close at 10:15 hours]**

**Chair’s signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Fanoula Smith**

