# LB TOWER HAMLETS SCHOOLS FORUM

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| Date of Meeting | 13 January 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)\*, Danny Hassel (DH)\*, Gabriela Salva-Macallan (GSM)\* |
| Officers in Attendance | Christine McInnes (CM)\*; 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), Emdad Abul (Schools Finance). |

**\*denotes attendance**

[The meeting commenced at 08:32 hours]

## Agenda Item 1: Introductions and Apologies for Absence

Apologies were noted from Paul Woods.

The Chair welcomed Danny Lye to the meeting.

* 1. Update on membership.

RB said that Runa Basit, Kay Goodacre and Nikki Parsons met with the Chair to establish the vacancies and are now in the process of filling them.

RB updated on the current vacancies:

* 1 Academy representative
* 2 Governor representative

## Agenda Item 2: Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 2 December 2020 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 subject to the following correction:

Agenda item 8, point 8 (PAGE 9)

“*The area that is generating a lot of debate in the community is sensory impairment because the proposal for the Support for Learning Service (SLS) includes cuts in this area. The data for Visual Impairment is at a steady level. However, Tower Hamlets is an outlier for Hearing Impairment and has higher numbers of deafness and Hearing Impairment – however overtime cases where Hearing Impairment is the primary need is decreasing”*

Should be changed to:

The data shows that the proportion of pupils with Visual Impairment has been the same over three years at 1% of the cohort. With regard to Hearing Impairment, whilst Tower Hamlets has higher than average incidence, the data shows the proportion of pupils with HI has reduced from 3.1% to 2.5% of the whole cohort with EHCPs.

**2.2 Action points**

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| **Agenda Item** | **Action Points** | **Lead** | **Comment** |
| Item 2.4 | **201014-1** The Chair proposed that she looks at the membership along with NP and RB to look at the gaps and how to fill it in line with the Schools Forum operational guidelines. The Chair said that the membership needs to consider VA representation. The membership will then be taken back to phase consultative. | Chair, Nikki Parsons, and Runa Basit. | Updated under agenda item 1.1.  Current vacancies are:  1 Academy vacancy,  2 governor vacancy. |
| Item 3.2 | **201014-2** Schools Finance team to look at what information has been received in relation to school balances and a follow-up communication will be shared via the HTB. | Kay Goodacre /Schools Finance Team | KG said all information has been received and questions have been raised on how the balance has been calculated. This has not been sent out in the Headteacher’s Bulletin yet as there have been other pressures and more pressing information was sent out in the bulletin. |
| Item 4 | **201014-3** KG said that the High Need Funding block would be an agenda for the March 2021 meeting and will include a look at a set of criteria and how this will impact on the schools with unusual EHCP numbers. | Kay Goodacre /Schools Finance Team | KG said that at the last meeting it was agreed that any remaining headroom would be transferred to the HNB. How notional SEN is measured is being reviewed and the balance of the headroom will be considered in the report. In March, a report on the Distribution Methodology will be presented.  MF said that it would be good to have greater HT involvement in drawing up the criteria before it is presented to SF in March.  KG said that it may not be possible to complete this in time for the next HT Review Group but suggested that a set of criteria could be bought to the next SF for discussion and have final agreement in the June meeting.  The Chair said the HT’s in this group may be able to provide initial steer before it is taken to the wider group.  **Action** – Schools Finance Team to have a meeting with HT’s from the SF for their steer on the criteria. |
| Item 4 | **201014-4** The spend of the ESG to be added to the forward plan for June meeting | Kay Goodacre / Runa Basit | This will be covered in the June meeting. |
| Item 9 | **201014-6** The Chair commented that website accessibility was an issue across the council and asked whether CM could take this up with Comms and IT. | Christine McInnes | CM thanked the Governor Services Team for updating all the documents to meet the accessibility standards. All documents are with the Communications Team, waiting to be uploaded by the end of the week. |

**2.3 Matters Arising**

The Chair wanted to update the Forum on discussions around SLS and said that a proposal to restructure aspects of the SLS service was discussed in the previous meeting and a paper was presented by Roland Ramanathan to request de-delegation. KG informed the SF that this is not a de-delegated item. RR has met with other HTs and Chairs to discuss the need for change and the plans going forward. The Chair said that currently there is a disparity between the number of children and the funding allocated comparative to other forms of need. There are 14% and 17% of pupils with ASD and SEMH needs which are not provided for as compared with the much lower percentage of pupils with sensory needs. To illustrate this the chair explained that currently in her school a child with sensory impairment receives daily support whilst children on the spectrum receive half-termly support. SEND funding needs to reflect levels of need.

The Chair concluded that this is not a matter for the SF.

CM added that the picture of what is happening at a school level illustrates the difficulty that the LA is facing in meeting its statutory duties in allocating resources where the needs are. There are challenges in moving from an existing system to a fairer, more transparent system more equitable in meeting needs across the system.

The Chair added that the LA has to make cuts to SEND funding due to debt, funding has to be equitable and reflect current needs.

BL said that the SLS service was well intentioned however at times it is cumbersome to access and not as flexible to access as it could be. The LA is not the only provider of support and help and it is important to manage the budget and get it under control because each time the budget is overspent the schools ultimately pay for this.

Observers were invited to ask questions or share comments.

Gabriela Salva-Macallan introduced herself as a Councillor for St Peter’s ward, joining today’s meeting as an observer. GSM said that the stress on the HNF block is very significant and was concerned that cuts will continue to be made and hoped to bring everything up to the standard experienced by pupils accessing SLS. GSM said that Councillors wanted to be more mindful and engaged with meetings and will have conversations with Cllr Danny Hassell, cabinet lead member for children and schools, and come back to the group. The Chair thanked GSM for joining this meeting and reiterated that funding needs to be aligned with overall need. Sadly whilst outcomes in SEND are one of the highest in London, funding has to be sustainable and equitable. The Chair thanked the member for her contribution, support of SEND and invited GSM to observe the next meeting of the SF where the HNB will be discussed.

MF added that schools are making difficult decisions in challenging times and said it was important to use this opportunity to make sure that the SLS service is meeting the needs of the schools and the funds are evenly spread across all needs and inclusive of everybody. MF stated that there is experience in the local authority of having to re-structure and reviewing terms and conditions.

The Chair reiterated that the SF is not the mechanism for making decisions on the SLS or their terms of conditions.

AK stated that commenting on terms and conditions was not part of forum and comments which have been made do not belong in the SF discussions, requesting that they be struck from the record. The remit of the SF is to make decisions on the strategic allocation of funding, it is not within its remit to comment on terms and conditions or service delivery.

The Chair affirmed that the matter is not for SF and concluded that the minutes would stand to reflect the strength of feeling by Heads and schools on the matter, previous local experience on restructures and the request of feedback on the SLS service by Roland Ramanathan in previous meetings.

## Agenda Item 3: Schools Block Strategy 2021-22

## Presenting: Kay Goodacre

**Schools Block Headlines**

Kay Goodacre presented the paper on the Schools Block Strategy and requested the Forums consideration on the Schools Block modelling and the de-delegation rates. KG said that the final Schools Block models will need to be submitted to the DfE by 21 January 2021.

KG said that as per Schools Forum agreement, the National Funding Formula (NFF) has been applied including the area cost adjustment for Tower Hamlets. Schools will see a 2% per pupil increase in their funding. The pay and pensions grant will now be included in the baseline allocation for schools.

**Formula amendments**

KG summarised the formula amendments which have been made:

* The methodology for the allocation of the of Split Site funding has been adjusted to an allocation equivalent to an additional lump sum.
* A disapplication has been made to the DfE for schools who have admitted 5 or more pupils after the census date, to make an adjustment in the number of pupils.

BK enquired which schools this applies to. KG responded that this applies to 8 schools and they are: Bonner School, Harbinger School, Woolmore School, Lansbury Lawrence, Marion Richardson, Old Ford School and Stebon School. The Chair thanked the Finance Team for their work on this as this will make a significant impact on the finances of the schools affected.

* A disapplication has been made for the filtration system at Bow School.
* On inspection of the budget modelling tool output it was found that this was producing an error in the calculation for Mulberry UTC which gave a higher budget than the school were receiving because of a historic baseline problem. This has been corrected with no cost to the school, however it has returned £260k to the school’s block for redistribution.
* Additional 2 form entry (60 pupils) has been built in for Oaklands School to accommodate pupils who would have been previously attending Raine’s School, in line with the growth policy discussed in the last Forum meeting.
* Adjustments to Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) will be reimbursed to schools. A significant number of school’s were previously underfunded, and this is being reimbursed.
* The growth fund has been set at £1m.
* This gives an available headroom in the region of 0.4%. the final amount will be presented at the March meeting.

DL enquired about the disapplication for Bow School and what is was about. KG explained that Bow School have a special air filtration system due to their location and the maintenance cost of that is in the region of £71,000 a year. KG explained that schools are allowed to make a disapplication for any costs which are unique to them and amounts to 1% of their overall budget.

ML enquired how the 8 schools were chosen for the disapplication for the adjustment in the number of students. The Chair responded that previous applications for pupil numbers below 5 were unsuccessful and that this figure of 5 pupils or more was used as the criteria for choosing the 8 schools. KG confirmed that this was correct. KG added that disapplication for 1 or 2 pupils were not generally successful.

**3.1 De-Delegation**

KG presented the proposed de-delegation items and said that for all schools the percentage would be less than 1% with an average percentage of 0.86% for a primary school and 0.7% for a secondary school.

KG requested approval of the Schools Forum to continue the de-delegation of:

1. Contingencies
2. Free School Meal eligibility
3. Trade Union facilities
4. Behaviour Support/anti-bullying
5. Statutory Duties for maintained schools.

The Chair said that it may be useful for Forum Members to know what the steer from the Primary and Secondary Consultative is. The Primary Consultative has agreed the de-delegation with the proviso that the BASS support is limited. JB said that the Secondary Consultative has agreed the de-delegations.

**Resolved:** Primary and Secondary School Forum Members voted in agreement to the above modelling of de-delegation in line with the rates within the report.

**3.2 Central Retained Budget (CSSB)**

KG presented the paper on the Central School Services Block (CSSB) setting the background of the CSSB and the allocation for 2021-22, and the budget lines the LA wishes to continue through the CSSB.

KG said that the Central School Services Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) brings together centrally retained budgets transferred from the Schools Block and funding for duties retained for both maintained schools and academies. This is reducing year on year with a cut of £0.505m for 2021-22.

The aim of the CSSB is to improve transparency and KG requested approval from the Schools Forum on the budget lines within the CSSB. KG explained that the funding is made up of 2 elements:

1. Funding through a national formula for ongoing responsibilities, such as admissions, and former ESG services. For 2021-22 the allocation is £2.107m compared to £1.974m for 2020-21, this represents a decrease in real terms of £59k as an allocation of £192k is included which was previously paid separately as pay and pensions grant.
2. A lump sum element for historical commitments. For 2021-22 this will be £1.780m compared to £2.226m for 2020-21, a reduction of £0.446m. This is a significant reduction in funding and although a reduction in this element was expected, as the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) assumes a downward trend in historical commitments it represents a significant reduction in LA resources.

KG presented a summary of how budget lines have changed compared to last year and recommended distribution of historic commitments and requested agreement on the budget allocations.

**Resolved:** The Schools Forum Members voted in agreement to the above modelling of the CSSB budget allocations as laid out in the report.

The Chair enquired about the recommended distribution for Education Psychology Services and asked if this will be included within the SEND spending? JO responded that this funding is used to provide the equivalent of 3 days of service schools receive from an Education Psychologist. The Chair asked if agreeing to the recommendation to remove this commitment will have an impact on the service. JO said that it will have an impact. KG responded that it may be possible to balance this with the in-reach/out-reach service and this will be looked at further.

The Chair asked what the in-reach/out-reach work involves? KG explained that this involves all the work that is done with schools around school improvements and other work done centrally with schools. The Chair asked for further clarity as THEP is responsible for work around school improvement. KG said that a contribution is made to THEP.

The Chair said that it would be useful to understand the work and services which come under each of these areas. The Chair requested further clarification on these areas.

**Resolved:** Agree historic commitments element continues but how the funds are allocated will be presented at the next meeting.

**Action:** Present a breakdown of how the historic commitments are used.

**Kay Goodacre**

## Agenda Item 4: Funding Formula 2021 (Early Years Update)

## Presenting: Pauline Hoare/Kay Goodacre

Pauline Hoare presented the paper on the Early Years Block Funding and provided a budget update, explaining how Early Years places are funded and key changes which took place in 2020 which ensured settings were able to cope with the fluctuations in numbers. PH explained that in December 2020 the DfE informed the LAs that from January 2021 funding would return to being based on the January census. Considering the lockdown, LAs have contacted the DfE requesting that early years funding follow the model for Spring and Autumn last year. The current unprecedented financial situation makes it difficult to predict available budgets for the LA and early years settings.

PH said that since December there has been further guidance on the census from the DfE which stipulate that childcare settings should not be penalised for short term absences of children and settings should use their discretion where absence is recurring or for extended periods. Families may delay a new start due to the pandemic and lockdown; if they decide to do this the child can be included in the headcount. PH said that she had received information this morning that the government is looking to issue new guidance to LAs ahead of the census, to ensure that children who are temporarily not attending can be included in the data collection.

James Thomas updated the Forum that, nationally the lobbying has been very active, and TH has been lobbying through various methods. Bridget Cass added that this has been causing a huge amount of anxiety to colleagues from early years.

BC said that further clarity is needed on the 5% retention and how it is used. BC asked specifically how the inclusion support for childcare settings and subsidised training budget lines are used. PH explained that every year a detailed breakdown is included and this year she was requested not to include that appendix.

The Chair added that Table 1 specifies how the retained funding was spent and provided further detail on some of those items: the moderation is a set number of schools every year and moderators conducted training during the autumn term. Moderators were trained and visits took place. Some of the work around quality assurance is relevant to PVI settings. Support is provided to PVI setting for any issues in any area of the provision.

PH offered to send the appendix to BC as they are ready. KG said that a paper on the central charges and how they are used will be presented in the June meeting and it may be useful to present the early years breakdown in that meeting. This will allow all the information to be reviewed together.

**Action:** Kay Goodacre and Pauline Hoare

PH provided some headline figures:

* + The inclusion team have supported 350 children.
  + The percentage of childcare settings achieving a “Good” and “Outstanding” rating from Ofsted has increased from 49% in 2013 to 99% in 2020.

**Resolved:** The Schools Forum voted to agree the Centrally Retained Budget provided that further detail is presented at a later meeting.

## Agenda Item 5: Revised Workplan

## Presenting: Runa Basit

The revised Workplan was shared. Runa Basit informed the Forum that the workplan is a live document and invited Members to contact her for any clarifications and amendments.

## Agenda Item 6: Future Agenda Items

## Presenting: Chair

* High Needs Block (March 2021)
* Union Facilities time breakdown (June 2020): clarity on how the money is spent.

## Agenda Item 7: Any Other Business

## Presenting: All

The Chair thanked Christine McInnes for her contribution, strategic overview, and kindness. CM thanked everyone and said that it has been a privilege to work with everyone.

The Chair said that the agenda item on PRAG would be moved to the March Schools Forum meeting.

The Chair thanked everyone for their participation.

## Agenda Item 8: Next meeting Date

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* Wednesday, 10th March 2021
* Wednesday, 28th April 2021
* Wednesday, 23rd June 2021

**[The Chair drew the meeting to a close at 09:57 hours]**

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

**Fanoula Smith**

**Schools Forum 13 January 2021- Summary Action Log**

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| **Agenda Item** | **Action Points** | **Lead** | **Timescale** |
| 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 | ASAP |
| 3.2 | **210113-2** Present a breakdown of how the historic commitments are used. | Kay Goodacre | ASAP |
| 4 | **210112-3** Present a breakdown of how the centrally retained budget for Early Years is used. | Pauline Hoare | June 2021 |

