**LB TOWER HAMLETS SCHOOLS FORUM**

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| Date of Meeting | 14 October 2020  |
| Venue | Virtually, via Zoom |
| Chair | Monica Forty (Vice Chair) |
| Vice-Chair | - |
| Clerk | Salma Siddiqua, Governor Support Officer |

# MEMBERSHIP

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| **TYPE** | **MEMBERSHIP** |
| GOVERNORS | Alan Morton (AM)\*; Bridget Cass (BC)\*; Pip Pinhorn (PP)\* and Dave Lake (DL)\* |
| HEADTEACHERS | Monica Forty (Chair)\*; Brenda Landers (BL)\*; Stewart Harris (SHa)\*; Liz Figuerelo (LF)\*; Avril Newman (AN)\*; Belinda King (BK)\*; Paul Woods (PW)\*, Maria Lewington (ML)\*, Astrid Schon (AS)\*, Fanoula Smith (FS)\* and Becky Dolamore (BD)\* |
| Non-School Members | Kim Arrowsmith (PVI EYs Providers)\*; Alex Kenny (NEU Trade Union Rep)\*; and Tracy Smith\* |
| OBSERVERS | Kevin Jones \* - Culloden Primary School; Jill Baker (JB)\* |
| Officers in Attendance | Christine McInnes (CM)\*; James Thomas (JT)\*; Shamila Ganeshalingam (Senior Accountant) (SG)\*; Runa Basit (RB)\*; Daksha Chauhan (DC)\*; Pauline Hoare (Head of Integrated EYS) (PH)\*, Kerrigen Marriner (KM)\*, Kay Goodacre (KG)\*, Roland Ramanan (RR)\*, Terry Bryan (TB)\* |

**\*denotes attendance**

[The meeting commenced at 08:38 hours]

## Agenda Item 1: Introductions and Apologies for Absence

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Schools Forum. Apologies were received and NOTED from John O’Shea.

Jill Baker informed the forum that she was attending as an observer. Kevin Jones also joined as an observer. The Chair welcomed James Thomas, the Director for Children and Culture, to the Forum.

RB noted that there is a vacancy for an Academy/Free schools rep and invitations for nominations have gone out. There are 2 vacancies primary governor representatives and invitations for nominations will be sent out soon.

## Agenda Item 2: Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

## Presenting: Clerk

2.1 The clerk invited nominations for the position of Chair of the Schools Forum. Any member of the Forum is eligible to be the Chair of the Forum.

As there were no nominations, the election of Chair and Vice-chair was deferred to the next meeting and members were requested to send their nominations before the next meeting.

It was Agreed that Monica Forty would Chair this meeting.

## Agenda Item 3: Minutes of the Last Meeting held 17 June 2020 and Matters Arising.

## Presenting: Chair

**3.1 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 amendment:

[Page 1] – Bridget Cass was present at the meeting.

**3.2 Action points and Matters Arising**

Page 2 - BK met with David Waller (Independent Financial Consultant) last week and David Waller has also met with the LA’s finance team in the summer term.

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| **Agenda Item**  | **Action Points carried forward from 4 March 2020**  | **Lead** | **Update** |
| Item 4 | 200617/01 – Explore how schools and Schools Finance Team can work together to better manage the flow of information.  |  | FS updated that the Finance team’s workplan fed into the Schools Forum workplan. The style of reporting needs to be finalised. FS proposed that a style of reporting be explored which will include necessary data to support Headteachers in making decisions.  |
| Item 5 | 200617/02 - Finance team to give a breakdown of the points discussed in the meeting with the DfE. | JOS | CM will provide an update under item 10. |
|  | 200617/03 – HNB to be highlighted in Work Plan. | RB | RB informed that this point ties in with action point 5 and action point 1. This is still ongoing and will be finalised by December. |
| Item 6 | 200617/04 - Final School Balances Report to show school balances, capital commitments, and balance available for clawback.  | SG | The Chair thanked SG for incorporating this in the September report. |
| Item 8 | 200617/05 - Circulate Work Plan  | Clerk/RB | First draft of the workplan was shared at the last meeting. Once this is finalised it will be shared with everyone by December. |

**Action:** RB to work with the primary consultative Chair and officers to formulate guidelines for finance reports. December/next meeting.

**Action:** Final draft of workplan to be shared with all members.

The Chair wished to formally note the Forum’s thanks to Steve Worth for his work in supporting the Forum and for his excellent training.

## Agenda Item 4: DSG Outturn 2019-2020

## Presenting: Daksha Chauhan

## Challenge/Discussion

The DSG Outturn 2019-2020 report was circulated to the Forum members prior to the meeting.

Dhaksha Chauhan made the following points on the outturn:

* The provisional report was presented in June and the updated report was presented at this meeting.
* Members were asked to note the outturn position and agree the carry forward and spend.
* The report also sets out the proposed transfer to the High Needs Block (HNB).
* The highlight from the overall in year position is the £7472,000 overspend in the HNB. The pressure on the Early Years block has been mitigated by the adjustments in the July DfE allocation.

**Resolved:** The Outturn 2019-2020 was noted and the carry forward and transfers to the HNB were agreed.

## Agenda Item 5: Schools Block Strategy 2021-22

## Presenting: Daksha Chauhan

## Challenge/Discussion

5.1 Daksha Chauhan presented the Schools Block Strategy 2021-2022 and made the following salient points:

This report outlines the following:

1. Indicative settlement for the Schools Block, the HNB and the Central Schools Services Block.
2. Proposed Growth Fund for 2021-2022
3. Proposed schools funding formula for 2021-2022
4. The possibility of headroom in the Schools Block
5. The de-delegation of:

a. Delegated funding

b. Former Education Services Grant (ESG) general duties elements.

The provisional allocations show growth in the schools and high needs blocks and a reduction in the CSSB. A 2.18% increase is expected in the Schools Block and 10.5% increase in the HNB. The EYB allocation for 2021-22 has not yet been released.

**5.2 Schools Block**

In setting individual school budget shares the LA is seeking the School Forum’s permission to top-slice two contingencies: The Growth Fund which is a formula funded allocation, and the Falling Rolls Fund if the decision is made to create one for 2021-22.

BL enquired if Academies and Free Schools contribute to the Growth Fund. DC responded that the School Budget is top sliced before allocation to all schools.

* 1. **Tower Hamlets Schools Funding Formula 2021-22**
		1. Forum was asked to recommend using the National Funding Formula (NFF) for 2021-22. All formula factors are included in the appendices.
		2. A year-on-year comparison of the proposed factors and their values is shown in Appendix 3
		3. Rental payments will need to be paid to Oaklands school as part of the closure of Raine’s School. As rent is not a standard element of the NFF, permission of the Secretary of State is needed. The Forum must be consulted, and its view recorded in the request for permission.

**Q&A**

BL stated that if rental payment is allocated to a school, this will reduce the total allocation to other schools. In secondary schools there is a difference in the funding allocation for pupils depending on which school they went to. BL proposed that the funding allocation of Oaklands be reviewed before proposals for adding rental payments to the NFF are considered.

JB reminded the Forum that there are historic inequalities built into the secondary schools NFF and Oaklands School is funded more generously than other schools.

PW added that it was important to consider the points made above.

AM requested further information on the context of Raine’s School and Oaklands School.

The Chair suggested that a separate paper on this issue is presented as more information is required in order to make a decision on this. The paper can include the context, the timelines and the impact it will have on other secondary schools. The Chair suggested that DC work with other secondary schools to prepare that paper.

BC added that when a decision is made it should be time-bound as there is a risk of some decisions becoming institutional over time.

**Action:** Prepare a paper on rental payments to Oaklands School. Daksha Chauhan

DC explained that some schools are funded more generously than others due to the minimum funding guarantee.

JB added that when proposing changes to the NFF, considerations should include whether a school is in a favourable position so that historic inequalities are not further amplified.

CM added that Oaklands has taken over part of Raine’s school when Raine’s was closed and as a result has accrued additional capital costs. Oaklands is also a small school and this affects its funding allocation.

* 1. The Forum is requested to agree in principle to transfer any ‘headroom’ in 2021-22 up to the limit of 0.5% of the block to the HNB. This decision will be reviewed once the modelling for the next year is complete.

BC expressed concerns over making agreements in principle as there may be possibility of in principle decisions becoming institutionalised.

FS acknowledged concerns about decisions becoming institutionalised and also said, referring to item 3.4 on the report, that this is a decision which needs to be made as Oaklands School is taking on extra pupils and the space needs to be paid for.

The Chair asked DC to confirm if the LA is asking for the Forum’s go ahead to pursue points 1,2 and 3 with more information so that a more informed decisions can be made in December. DC confirmed that this is correct. DC added that this guidance from the Forum will help the LA to progress with allocation models before December.

Referring to point 3.4 in the report, KG said that if the rental is agreed then this would only affect other schools in-year funding in the first year. In subsequent years this rental payment will become a part of the NFF and will be funded by the DfE as additional funding.

The Chair asked if the Forum agrees for the LA to present the Forum with modelling for the formula allocation for Growth, and the Schools Funding Formula. The Forum will then be in a position to make a decision on the transfer of any headroom to the HNB.

**Resolved:** The Forum agreed the LA to present models for the formula allocation for Growth, and the Schools Funding Formula.

* 1. **De-delegation**

5.4.1 CM said that the LA is requesting de-delegation for BASS and SLS. BASS is an annual request and SLS is a new request this year. DC confirmed that the LA is asking for a decision in-principle for the Forum to accept the de-delegation request and will provide more detailed, modelled proposals at the next meeting for members to vote on.

DC said that the de-delegation decisions will need to be made separately by phase for primary and secondary. The de-delegations are the same as last year with an increase of 2%.

DC confirmed that the behaviour support/antibullying component is separate to the BASS.

BK asked whether academies will be contributing to the BASS service. KM replied that some academies have bought into the service. Academies who have not subscribed to the service do not access the service.

FS said there is a need for greater in-depth reporting and the strategy should be a part of the whole SEMH strategy. FS added, last year it was agreed that without more detailed reports this in-principle decision will not be agreed once more. The reports therefore need to include data on numbers and impact before the request for de-delegation is made.

The Chair asked FS to clarify what specific details are required. FS replied that more information on impact and which services were accessed and what impact they had should be included.

KM said that it will be possible to add further detail to the report. Last year Primary Headteachers raised concerns about the removal of individual diagnostic assessments. A hybrid model has now been agreed which will include individual assessments linked to whole school practice. A meeting with headteachers did not take place due to the Covid crisis but this will take place this year.

FS said that there were concerns from Headteachers for more support with individual provision and schools need the BASS team for areas where their expertise is limited. FS offered to work with the LA to develop this.

CM said that where there are areas of de-delegated funding which all schools contribute to and which potentially only benefit some schools, and some of the debate needs to be informed by looking at patterns across schools. Is there whole school development work? Is it effective and is it being implemented? What is the relationship between the whole school work and what is happening with individual pupils? CM thought it might be useful for the Forum to have an overview of the financial position of BASS and its sources of funding. It would be useful to separate the statutory elements of the work that all schools are entitled to access and the additional elements.

KM clarified that the team responds to all referrals, and more intensive work happens with schools which have indicators of concern. KM said the team would welcome input from Headteachers to identify the criteria for response.

BK said it was important to acknowledge that there will not be an equitable spread across all schools, but it was important that the service is accessed where needed and makes a difference.

BL asked why there was such a difference in the per pupil rate between primary and secondary. KM said that there are a greater number of primary school pupils, so the cost is spread out. Also, the work with secondary school is usually more intensive and requires more contact. In primary school the number of contacts is usually 8, in secondary schools it is often between 12-14.

Referring to table 3: Proposed indicative de-delegation, the Chair asked about the FSM eligibility and requested that colleagues from the primary consultative discuss this again as the LGFL checker is used by many schools instead.

The Chair asked Forum members to confirm if enough information has been requested to make a decision about de-delegation in December and it was agreed that there was enough information.

AK invited Headteachers to contact him if further information is required about Trade Union Facilities. The Chair asked how much of the recent work has been Covid related. AK responded that from March 2020 until now most of the work has been Covid related. Other areas of work have now begun to pick up.

**Resolved**: The Forum recommended that further information be provided for BASS in time for a decision to be made in December.

**5.4.2 Former Education Services Grant (ESG) Services.**

The LA requested the Forum to agree in-principle to de-delegate the same amount of funding for 2021-22 as it did in 2020-21 as a contribution towards its statutory duties.

The Chair requested further information on what the areas of finance support, development of policies and other central HR support includes, as mentioned in point 4.2.4 of the report. DC agreed to present more detail to the Forum.

FS asked for clarification on the LA’s statutory duties to schools as set out in the scheme of delegation when requesting de-delegation.

CM said that looking at the LA’s statutory duties as they are set out in the scheme of delegation would be a good starting point for re-setting the relationship between the LA and schools and will tie in with some internal work which has started. CM added it would be useful to do some benchmarking with other LA’s and see how Tower Hamlets compares.

JT added that this should not be a one-off request for more information in December. This should be a starting point for setting a standard of more clarity and more detail and setting out statutory duties would be a good starting point.

**Action:** Further information is required about the statutory duties of the LA to schools.

## Agenda Item 6: Support for Learning Services – Sensory De-delegation proposal

## Presenting: Roland Ramanan

## Challenge/Discussion

The Sensory de-delegation proposal was circulated prior to the meeting and Roland Ramanan made the following salient points:

The Support for Learning Service is currently being restructured with a significant proposed reduction of staff in the Deaf Partially Hearing (DPH), Visual Impairment (VI), SPLD and Language and Communication Teams as laid out in the proposal.

RR expressed concern about the impact of the restructure on pupils and requested the Forum to de-delegate funding by considering one of two proposals as presented in the proposal document. The size of the team is carefully calibrated to the complexity and the size of the caseload according to a nationally agreed formula. The proposal presents comparative data and Tower Hamlets is not as generously resourced as some other boroughs.

CM set the context and added that the structure that is being consulted on has undergone benchmarking and there will be a public consultation which schools can participate in.

CM requested an indication from the Forum on its position on the de-delegation of funds.

BL asked if the request was for an interim proposal or a long-term change to the system. RR responded that any de-delegation would need to be agreed annually.

FS said that as an accessible school St Saviour’s School has always had visually impaired students, however the school cannot support a budget of £15.7 per pupil. FS also added that usually there is in-school expertise already in place.

JB also expressed that this budget is not one which can be supported by schools. JB also asked for further clarification about the number of staff proposed.

CM explained that the proposal is underpinned by a move towards building capacity and resource bases in schools. The LA is looking at allocating resources across all areas of need in an equitable manner.

AM asked about how the service is currently funded. CM explained that currently it is funded by the High Needs Funding Block. BASS and SLS were previously aggregated but these budgets have been disaggregated. There was a traded offer, but schools are not buying into this as much and there was an overspend in the last year relating to traded services.

BK asked when will the reductions take place? CM said that consultations are taking place on the new structure and it will be in place from the next financial year.

AK said the proposals to cut support to the SLS service is causing concern amongst SENCOs in schools. During the lockdown the SLS was highlighted by parents as an invaluable source of support for very vulnerable children. AK also added that often capacity building in school translates to members of staff taking on increased workloads which is often not sustainable.

BL said schools are facing a difficult choice here and for many schools spending on SLS means they cannot spend somewhere else.

Forum members indicated that they do not have enough information at this point to decide.

CM said more information can be provided and it was agreed that a decision will be made at an extraordinary meeting if needed.

FS summarised that further information is needed on the types of needs across TH and the number of children already in specialist provision. The Chair and FS agreed to meet with CM to agree what information will be relevant for Headteachers.

**Action**: Further detail on the SLS proposal needs to be presented.

## Agenda Item 7: School Balances 2019-20

## Presenting: Shamila Ganeshalingam

## Challenge/Discussion

The School Balances 2019-20 report was circulated prior to the meeting, and members posed questions to Shamila Ganeshalingam.

The Chair asked about the Surplus Balance Control Mechanism and when could schools expect to be asked to complete any surplus plans and any possible clawback of funds.SG explained that the DfE limits for surplus balance is 15% and Tower Hamlets limit is 5% for secondary schools and 8% for primary schools. SG added that clawback has not taken place in TH previously and currently the finance team have not received any instructions to proceed with a clawback. The balances are presented here for information at present.

AM stated that if there is going to be a clawback it needs to be made very clear to schools when this will happen. SG replied that if a clawback takes place then schools will be informed of the process of clawback and what will happen. The Chair enquired if schools which have a surplus balance above 15% receive a letter from the DfE. SG replied that the letter from the DfE is received via the LA. Headteachers confirmed that they have not received a letter when their surplus balance was above 15%.

The Chair summarised that this report is for information only, schools have not received letters when they were above 15% and currently there are no plans for clawback in TH, and if there is a clawback schools will have an opportunity to complete the surplus plan proformas.

It was noted that this discussion happens every year and schools are not challenged on their surplus balance. JT agreed that a clearer position is needed on this and will pursue this further.

**Action:** present a clearer position on school’s surplus balances.

## Agenda Item 8: Early Years Update

## Presenting: Christine McInnes/Pauline Hoare

## Challenge/Discussion

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

Pauline Hoare asked the Forum to note that there is a possibility of creating a contingency fund to cover the free early education entitlement and asked Forum members to consider this before the next meeting.

## Agenda Item 9: Maintained Nursery Schools

## Presenting: Christine McInnes/Pauline Hoare

## Challenge /Discussion

The Maintained Nursery School Report was circulated in advance for prior reading.

Christine McInnes updated that over the last few years nursery schools have moved from being well resourced to being less well resourced due to a lack of funding. The LA is requesting a steer from the Forum on the way forward. The report lays out proposed actions which have been discussed with nursery Headteachers.

BC said nurseries have been scrutinising their budgets and it was important to maintain the quality of the Early Years provision and balance that with the financial realities.

FS enquired if the report will be going to Primary Review Advisory Group (PRAG) and what the communication plan for this is when it goes ahead. CM responded that this can be added to the agenda for PRAG. The LA will be working with the communications team and nursery Headteachers to manage communications effectively.

AK asked about the status of the report and if it is ok to share the report with other colleagues. CM said that once plans for each nursery school are agreed then the report can go to the Trade Unions Forum as that report will include indications for any possible reductions in staffing. It may be possible to bring about changes through natural wastage rather than staff reductions.

The Chair confirmed that the report is confidential at this stage and should not be shared outside of the Forum.

## Agenda Item 10: SEND Update

## Presenting: Christine McInnes

## Challenge /Discussion

10.1 SEMH Resource Base

The report presented outlines the process of commissioning a resource base provision in a mainstream primary school for children with SEMH as their primary special educational need. Following the rigorous process, the decision was made to take forward the proposal from Ben Jonson and Bowden House schools. The successful schools will work in partnership with the Local Authority to develop a unique partnership model for resource based SEMH provision.

JT asked if the number of children in the new SEMH provision is known. The Chair responded that Bowden House will provide the high end need of the SEMH provision and Ben Jonson will provide for children with an enhanced mainstream provision and the total number of provision across both with be approximately 12 children and this is up for negotiation with the LA.

10.2 Update on the HNB recovery plan

It was agreed that this update will be circulated in writing to Forum members.

## Agenda Item 11: Any Other Business

## Presenting: All

The Chair thanked everyone for their participation.

**[The Chair drew the meeting to a close at 10:40 hours]**

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

**Monica Forty**

**Schools Forum 14 October 2020 - Summary Action Log**

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| **Agenda Item**  | **Action Points**  | **Lead** | **Timescale** |
| Item 3 | **201014-1** Formulate guidelines for finance reports.  | Runa Basit | Next meeting |
|  | Final draft of workplan to be shared with all members. | Runa Basit | Next meeting |
| Item 5.3.3 | **201014-2** Prepare a paper on rental payments to Oaklands School. Daksha Chauhan | Daksha Chauhan/ Schools Finance Team | Next meeting |
| Item 5.4.1 | **201014-3** Provide further information on impact and services accessed from BASS team. | Kerri Marriner/ Schools Finance Team | Next meeting |
| Item 5.4.2 | **201014-4** Further information is required about the statutory duties of the LA to schools. | Daksha Chauhan/ Schools Finance Team | Next meeting |
| Item 6 | **201014-5** Further detail on the SLS proposal needs to be presented. | Christine McInnes | By November  |
| Item 7 | **201014-6** Present a clearer position on school’s surplus balances | Schools Finance Team | TBC |

