**LB TOWER HAMLETS SCHOOLS FORUM**

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| Date of Meeting | 4th March 2020 |
| Venue | Bethnal Green Centre, 229 Bethnal Green Road, E2 6AB |
| Chair | Lorraine Flanagan |
| Vice-Chair | Monica Forty |
| Clerk | Runa Basit; Head of Governance & Information |

# MEMBERSHIP

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| **TYPE** | **MEMBERSHIP** |
| **GOVERNORS** | Conor Magill (CM); Gwen Wright (GW)\*; Alan Morton (AM)\*; Bridget Cass (BC); Dave Lake (DL)\*; Pip Pinhorn (PP) |
| **HEADTEACHERS** | Lorraine Flanagan\* (Chair); Brenda Landers (BL)\*; Monica Forty (Vice-Chair)\*; Sarah Helm (SH); Stewart Harris (SHa)\*; Jill Baker (JB)\*; Liz Figuerelo (LF)\*; Avril Newman (AN)\*; Belinda King (BK)\*; Martin Nirsimloo (MN); John Bradshaw (JBr); Paul Woods (PW)\* and Fanoula Smith (FS)\* |
| **Non-School Members** | Alison Arnaud (Tower Hamlets College); Kim Arrowsmith (PVI EYs Providers)\*; Alex Kenny (NEU Trade Union Rep)\*; Tracy Smith; |
| **OBSERVERS** | Ben Carter (BC)\* - Old Ford Primary School; |
| **Officers in Attendance** | Christine McInnes (CMc); Steve Worth (Schools Finance Advisor) (SW); Shamila Ganeshalingam (Senior Accountant) (SG); and Pauline Hoare (Head of Integrated EYS) (PH) (for Item 2). |

**\*denotes attendance**

[The meeting commenced at 08:30 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 Bridget Cass, Sarah Helm, John Bradshaw, Tracy Smith and Pip Pinhorn.

## Item 2. Minutes of the last meeting – 15th January 2020

## Presenting : Chair

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were **APPROVED** as a true and accurate reflection of the meeting subject to the following amendments:

[Page 1] - To include Fanoula Smith as present at the meeting.

The Forum reviewed the action points from the last meeting.

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| **Agenda Item** | **Action Points carried forward from 4th December 2019** | **Comment /Update** |
| Item 2.2 | 12/2019 -03 (carried forward) - SW to organise another Induction training session in the new year. | SW stated that he had previously shared induction dates however these did not suit all members. The Chair said that SW had gone above and beyond for flexibility. |
|  |  | SW said that at the last training it was suggested that the Chair of the Schools Business Managers Forum should be invited to join the Schools Forum.  RB advised that this can be looked at when the membership is reviewed in the summer term. The Schools Forum constitution will be an agenda item for the summer term meeting.  **Action: RB** |
| Item 2.2 | Action Point –10/2019 -12 – (carried forward) The Finance/Early Years to submit a clear rationale around the proposal to hold back 20% of funding for a term as part of the quality assurance process. | Pauline Hoare (PH) said that a decision had now been reached on this and that it appears to be no longer required. PH added that this proposal initially came from Finance but looks like it will not be necessary as IT systems can be used as an alternative. |
| **Agenda Item** | **Action Points from 15th January** | **Comment/Update** |
| Item 3 DSG and Schools Block | **AP –200115/01 -** A report on the Growth Fund will be brought to the next meeting. | This item is on the agenda. |
|  | **AP –200115/02 -** A report of the proposal for the HNB recovery plan will be brought to the next meeting. | This Item is on the agenda |

**Matters Arising:**

Action Point from the minutes of 4th December 2019 – Item 5 Early Years National Funding Formula: Consultation had been carried out previously and a report will be presented at a future meeting.

* Free School Meals

The Forum had agreed at the last meeting to continue with the current arrangements and de-delegated for the FSM eligibility checker, with the condition that schools will work with the Benefits Section towards constructing a viable alternative for next year.

JB reported that secondary Headteachers were keen for this to continue as they did not have the capacity to carry out FSM eligibility checks internally.

A discussion ensued and it was noted that this was raised by a small group of primary Headteachers at the Primary Consultative meeting.

SW explained that as reported at the last meeting all the de-delegation items will be under review throughout the year and reported to Neville Murton (Corporate Director for Resources).

*[Sharmila Ganeshalingam arrived at stage]*

Page 9 – PH updated that the percentage of childcare setting achieving Good and Outstanding ratings from Ofsted had increased to 98%.

Page 9 – Closure of accounts.

SG reported that regular updates were sent to schools and information was included in the Headteachers Bulletin. The deadline for the closure of accounts was 20th March 2020.

Schools have since contacted the Schools Finance team with queries in relation to accurate figures.

The Chair asked whether this was the deadline going forward.

SW said that this deadline was due to government deadlines brought forward which meant that the Council had to respond. SW stated that most Councils were closing on estimates.

BK asked about the capacity for schools to respond to the deadline and asked whether there was any progress with working with David Waller (Independent Finance Consultant) who was working with several schools in Tower Hamlets. SG said that they had reached an agreement and will be working with David Waller.

SG reported that they had largely discussed the school closure account with David Waller, however they had also touched on the Early Years Funding. It was noted that the Finance Team was looking at collecting data for Early Years funding from the performance data. PH said that this was being looked at and they were making progress, but they had not yet reached a resolution.

FS stated that it was difficult to close on estimates as they did not have accurate figures. This had made the budget process uncertain and the estimates may be largely inaccurate. Furthermore, this did not provide accounting security and left schools with very tight margins.

SW agreed that it was not good accounting and said that this was not a local decision. SW said that they were working on providing more consistent and accurate data to schools and recognised that more needed to be done.

GW asked when will the budget forecast become accurate and was informed that as the transactions take place the budgets will become clearer and more accurate.

Members commented that this situation was further compounded by the current financial strains on schools that are in scope for the Primary Review.

A discussion ensued and SG informed members that at the training in February they had shared workable solutions on how to estimate the budgets, including estimates of the March salaries.

SG informed the Forum that 90% of the issues relating to SEND funding, as raised by schools had been resolved. SG added that by 10th March further information, including Early Years and SEND adjustments will be shared with schools.

SG said that this will enable schools to forecast a more accurate budget, other than the March salaries.

*[Pauline Hoare left the meeting at this point]*

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| **Agenda Item** | **Action Points carried forward from 4th December 2019** | **Lead** | **Timescale** |
| Item 2.1 | **200304/01** – The Schools Forum constitution will be an agenda item for the summer term meeting. | RB | Summer Term |

## Agenda Item 3: Schools Contingency and Growth Fund

## Presenting: SG and SW

## Challenge/Discussion

Shamila Ganeshalingham (SG) presented the above Report.

The Report provided an update on the Schools Contingency and Growth Fund for 2019/20 and 2020/21 and included recommendations on the treatment of balances.

The Forum noted that the Growth Fund in 2019/20 was £2.218m and included £1.496m budget allocated in 2019/20 and the carry forward balance of £0.722m from 2018/19.

Table 1 in the report sets out the resources paid out to schools against the budget available.

SW commented that the funding for Stephen Hawking should be met from the High Needs Block.

The Forum noted that £1,265,059 had been spent, which left an underspend of £952,941.

The Chair asked why there was a substantial underspend and why it was harder to manage this fund.

SW said that this budget was over provided for and was not helped by uncertain pupil planning.

SW said that they were proposing to use this underspend for the High Needs Block.

SW referred to the Growth Fund and said the allocation for 2020-21 was £1.413 however this was in excess of what was required, and Schools Forum had agreed to reducing this to £1.1m to cover commitments for 2020-21.

JB asked about the St Pauls Way adjustments for 2018/19 for growth for the secondary school. SW said that he would investigate this.

**Action: SW**

* Schools Contingency 2019/20

The Contingency for schools in financial difficulty currently covers changes in formula allocation, schools in difficulty due to falling rolls and changes in other costs covering rents, NNDR and legal.

The Schools Contingency budget for 2019-20 was £0.892m. This included £0.435m allocated in 2019-20 and an approved carry forward balance of £0.457m from 2018-19.

SW advised that for 2019-20 the projected call upon the contingencies was £0.318m. This was lower than the budget allocated, however it was expected that the call on this budget will rise in 2020-21, especially as the revised criteria for allocation (set out in Appendix 2 of the report) will cover schools facing financial difficulties as a result of falling rolls.

Table 2 in the report set out the resources available and the estimated spend against it.

BL asked who makes the decisions on access to the funding and was informed that this fell under CMc’s remit. Schools would in the first instance contact CMc if they were experiencing difficulties and this would be considered under the set criteria.

AK asked about the budget line against Cyril Jackson (in table 2) and the reason provided ‘Review of Governance Arrangements’. SW commented that this was in relation to governance arrangements.

CMc said that this was not appropriate and that they could not comment on this. The Chair stated that this was not for the Schools Forum.

DJ stated that schools would apply for support under the contingency budget. There was now more clarity and transparency for this area.

SW highlighted that the Contingency for 2020/21 was £0.440m plus a projected brought forward of £0.574m giving a total of £1.014m and recommended that this is retained in full as the contingency to ensure sufficient provision for issues arising from falling rolls.

**Resolved –** That the Schools Forum agreed to retain the £1.014m as the Schools Contingency funds.

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| **Agenda Item** | **Action Points** | **Lead** | **Timescale** |
| Item 3 | **200304/02 –** JB asked about the St Pauls Way adjustments for 2018/19 for growth for the secondary school. SW said that he would investigate this. | SW | Summer Term |

## Agenda Item 4: Update on the High Needs Block Deficit Recovery Plan

## Presenting: John O’Shea

## Challenge /Discussion

John O’Shea (JOS) presented the report. The report updated the Forum on the revised recovery plan as discussed with the DfE on 20th February 2020. The report included a summary of the financial implications as an appendix.

JOS reported that they had met with the DfE and as part of this process the previous plan was revised. The DfE was happy with the recovery plan and had noted that Tower Hamlets’ recovery plan was recovering funds which was different to other LAs.

JOS highlighted that the most up to date position was outlined in the report and included information on the pressures going forward.

JOS reported that an extensive consultation process had taken place on the way in which the LA spends the HNB. Following the analysis from the formal consultation there was a recommendation to reduce top-up fees by 2%. The financial modelling of such a reduction indicated a savings of £316K for 2020-21.

JOS said that the number of Education Health & Care Plans (EHCP) had increased by approximately 7%. A rigorous review of the data had taken place and plans at Post-16. That process was more systematic. The data was more accurate and presented a better position with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH).

Moving forward the pressure included increased requests for plans for under 5s. This was reflected the increased needs and the increased parental requests. This would put pressure at an earlier stage. There was also a larger number of children coming through the system.

JOS updated that next year Phoenix College for Post-16 provision will be in place and this will allow any pupil to stay on in education if they wish.

It was noted that there was a real pressure at the point of Year 6 and Year 7 transition. There were currently 200 children transferring from Year 6 to Year 7 – on average this was 10 children per school. This skewed the balance in relation to parental choice.

JOS said that they will be looking at this in relation to Tribunals as it was a difficult position to defend when parental choice is clear.

JOS said that it was commendable that 50% of the children with EHCP were in mainstream schools. This demonstrated a high number of inclusivity and should be celebrated.

BL said that the balance and proportionality needs to be reviewed as even at large secondary schools there comes a tipping point. Headteachers commented that certain schools have disproportionate numbers of children with EHCP and complex needs.

BL asked whether the LA had considered additional funding for those schools taking in more children with EHCP to meet the needs. This would make the situation more equitable. JOS that he will look at this with the Finance colleagues.

It was also suggested that the LA considers recouping funds from schools that are less inclusive and re-distributing this fund to schools with high proportion of SEND children.

Headteachers requested information on what other LAs were doing.

MF said that previously the LA had produced a paper on the SEND figures per school. However, figures were disputed by some schools at the time. If this is re-produced – accurate data would be required, and it would need to be clear that this was a snapshot of the numbers at the time.

SW said that he will look at possible mechanism to include this as part of the contingency for this area.

**Action: JOS and SW**

CMc commented that there was a disparity in the proportion of SEND children within schools and there was a need to clearly articulate the expectation from the LA.

CMc stated that the DfE was in support of the plan and the LA was making progress, however a bigger commitment was needed from the education community in ensuring there was a fair balance across schools. CMc added that joint work was required in relation to the practicalities of the recovery plan and to carve out the funding, given the £7m deficit.

Headteachers agreed that they wanted to work with the LA on this area to resolve the funding issues in the HNB.

SHa asked about the figures in relation to additional Special School places for 2020-21, particularly the 197 places required. JOS explained the figures were based on last year’s figures and future projections.

JOS agreed to send the figures used to calculate the place payments.

**Action: JOS**

JOS explained that going forward they will review the top-up funding to reflect the current need.

AK asked about recent publication referring to a lack of SEND places. CMc clarified that it was not a case of not having sufficient places, more that parents not agreeing with the places offered.

JOS said that they were utilising the different forums to engage stakeholders in discussions. JOS reported that the recent SEND conference was challenging, and rigorous debate had taken place. The review and recovery plan for the HNB needs to include long term and ongoing discussions with the education community.

Members requested data on inclusivity to be shared in order to better understand the situation.

AK asked about the review of the Support for Learning Service (SLS). CMc responded that the review was progressing through the various internal processes and was due to go to the Corporate Trade Union Forum in April.

CMc highlighted the SEMH sections in the report (item 2, page 3) and highlighted that it included the background and update on the review, including the work of the Working Party.

Members asked that remains to be done and when will there be a further update.

JOS said that John Bradshaw had undertaken work for the LA and had updated the Forum at the last meeting.

MF commented that the Working Party was a task and finish group and had fed back to the SEMH review.

CM commented that section 2 did not include any further information or update. CM asked how long before details of the review will be shared.

CMc advised that correct process needs to be followed and further details will be shared in due course. CMc advised that specific information relating to a school will be shared with the school’s Governing Body in the first instance.

DJ assured the Forum that extensive discussions were taking place on various levels.

Forum members requested timely updates relating to SLS and Behaviour and Support Services (BASS) review.

The Forum was asked to NOTE the content of the report.

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| **Agenda Item** | **Action Points** | **Lead** | **Timescale** |
| Item 4 | **200304/03 –** SW said that he will look at possible mechanism to include this as part of the contingency for this area. | JOS/SW | Summer Term |
| Item 4 | **200304/04** – JOS agreed to send the figures used to calculate the place payments. | JOS | Summer Term |

## Agenda Item 5: HR Proposal

## Presenting: CM

## Challenge /Discussion

CMc advised that a paper on the proposal was circulated.

The proposal included using centrally retained funding towards providing HR support to schools – such as policy review. CMc advised that a HR professional had been approached to carry out this piece of work and the further details were included in the paper.

Members thanked CMc for the proposal and were in favour of the proposal.

In response to a question it was noted that the list of policies for review was not an exhaustive list and key policies will be prioritised. Members were asked to contact the Chair or the Chair of the Phase Consultative if they wished to add policies to the list.

**Resolved –** That the Schools Forum agreed the proposal as presented.

CMc will share the proposal with the Children and Young People Trade Union Forum.

## Agenda Item 5: Any Other Business

## Presenting: All

## Challenge /Discussion

None.

## Agenda Item 7: Date of Next Meeting

**Next meeting** – Wednesday, 22nd April 2020

* Wednesday, 17th June 2020

**[The Chair drew the meeting to a close at 9:40 hours]**

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

**Lorraine Flanagan**

**Summary Action Log**

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| **Agenda Item** | **Action Points carried forward from 4th March 2020** | **Lead** | **Timescale** |
| Item 2.1 | **200304/01** – The Schools Forum constitution will be an agenda item for the summer term meeting. | RB | Summer Term |
| Item 3 | **200304/02 –** JB asked about the St Pauls Way adjustments for 2018/19 for growth for the secondary school. SW said that he would investigate this. | SW | Summer Term |
| Item 3 | **200304/03 –** SW said that he will look at possible mechanism to include this as part of the contingency for this area. | JOS/SW | Summer Term |
| Item 4 | **200304/04** – JOS agreed to send the figures used to calculate the place payments. | JOS | Summer Term |