

Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors held on
Wednesday 17th March 2021
(Virtual – MS-Teams meeting)

Members

- Councillor David Longstaff (DL) - Chairman of the Children, Education & Safeguarding Committee and Lead Member for Children's Services
- Chris Munday (CM) - Executive Director, Children's Services, London Borough of Barnet
- Ben Thomas (BT) - Assistant Director, Education, Strategy and Partnerships, London Borough of Barnet
- Sarah Sands (SS) - Chair of Barnet Nursery and Primary Headteachers' Forum
- Samson Olusanya (SO) - Chair of Barnet Secondary Headteachers' Forum
- Lisa Coffman (LC) - Barnet Parent-Carer Forum
- Ricky Rebello (RR) – BELS staff
- Ian Harrison (IH) - Chief Executive and Director of Education and Learning, Barnet Education and Learning Service

MINUTES

| | Item | ACTION |
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| 1 | Apologies – CM. Meeting chaired by BT | |
| 2 | <p>Minutes of the meeting held on 26th January The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.</p> <p><u>Matters arising:</u> Services. The post-16 Strategic Manager had spoken to the Head of the Pavilion PRU about focussed support for year 11 pupils on the outreach programme at the PRU. Mentoring was already being offered but now extra mentoring is being made available to a particularly vulnerable group of pupils. LC thanked IH and the team for the follow-up which was very much appreciated.</p> <p>DL said a Post-16 strategy is currently being put together by IH which is coming to the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee. IH said he was in discussion with CM about this and how it fits in with the Skills Strategy currently being developed. He added that there may be two separate documents but he will work with council officers to ensure that both match.</p> | |
| 3 | <p>Declarations of Interests None declared.</p> | |

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| 4 | <p>Chief Executive's report</p> <p><u>Budget report</u></p> <p>IH introduced the budget report. The report showed a £378,000 improvement in the financial position for 2020-21. This is mainly the result of the allocation to BELS of £293,000 from the council's Covid Outbreak Management Fund. The rest of the movement in the outturn position relates mainly to reduced transport costs as a result of the closure of schools from January to early March and some in-year increases in income.</p> <p>The allocation from the Covid Outbreak Management Fund was a contribution to the cost of the time spent by BELS staff in supporting the council's work to help manage the COVID outbreak locally. This has included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and advice to schools in dealing with covid19 cases, contact tracing, self-isolation of pupils and staff, and compliance and enforcement of restrictions. • Enhanced communication and engagement with schools and trade unions over the management of schools through the pandemic. • Provision of additional specialist support to schools to assist them in responding to the pandemic with a particular focus on support for those disproportionately impacted, such as vulnerable pupils. <p>Work in response to the pandemic has diverted resources away from the normal work of the service and BELS will now be working with schools to support recovery and reinvest resources to make up for some of the normal work that would have taken place.</p> <p>In terms of the outturn position for 2020-21, the receipt of the Covid Outbreak Management Fund allocation (£293,000), taken together with the general cost provision reported at the last meeting of the Board, means that BELS will have an end of year surplus. If this can be carried forward, some of it will be used for one-off expenditure to support key priorities over the coming months, such as the recovery programme for schools. It is also proposed to make provision for a possible shortfall in traded services income as there are clear indications that many schools are facing financial difficulties, partly for historic funding reasons or because of falling rolls and partly due to extra costs and/or reduced income as a result of the pandemic.</p> <p>DT highlighted the fact that surplus end of year balances means there could be some liability for corporation tax, depending how HMRC treats the trading status of BELS. KPMG has been commissioned to provide advice on this.</p> <p>IH also briefly went through the initial draft budget for 2021-22 for BELS Limited. It incorporates the expected new income streams for 21-22 and includes the budgeted savings earmarked in agreement with the council. It represents a balanced budget and does not include any carried forward surplus from 20-21. However, it needs further review to ensure its completeness and accuracy.</p> <p>DL asked when the final budget will be ready. DT indicated this will be in May, once indexation figures are known – and it will be reported to the next meeting of the Board in June.</p> | |
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| | <p><u>Staff</u></p> <p>IH reported that staff meetings were held in the second week of March to brief staff on the BELS Business Plan including the budget, various increases in staffing, investments and IT systems and applications.</p> <p>IH explained that staff continue to work from home, with exceptions for activities that can be delivered more effectively through face to face meetings (e.g. in schools or with families). The position will be reviewed after the Easter break in the light of national developments on the 'roadmap' out of lockdown. Staff who need to visit schools or families are being encouraged to get covid19 lateral flow tests twice a week, as for school staff. Staff working regularly and closely with vulnerable children will be prioritised for vaccination. This applies to staff in Special Schools, PRUs, ARPs and SEND transport, including all passenger assistants and including other BELS staff who need to visit schools to work with such pupils.</p> <p><u>Services</u></p> <p>IH also highlighted the top priorities for the next four months - Safe Schools, Recovery, Service Quality and the SEN Inspection.</p> <p>LC commented on the Recovery projects, that some SEND children are still shielding and some parents of children with complex needs still have anxiety about sending their child back to school. IH agreed and said that the Transition and Reintegration Plans were designed to address this – providing assessments of individual needs and individualised plans to support parents and children in the transition back to school.</p> <p>SS asked if there were any conversations about, or proposals for, reductions in prices for BPSI for last year due to Covid19 and not having any conferences last year. She said schools have been struggling due to increasing budget constraints and asked if there would be any increases to Traded Services prices for schools this year.</p> <p>IH explained that BELS aims to achieve balanced budgets for traded services, not to make a profit. [Note: There was no income from schools in the summer term 2020 for most traded services – the income year switched to the school year from September]. IH said what can be looked at is the overall income coming in for the following year and if there is a significant surplus of income we can then look at the charging rates again but this cannot be done until the income is known. He said services have tried to hold the prices down and are sensitive to school financial issues. He also said BELS may have to invest in a new conference centre for BPSI etc for next year when the re-building of Claremont School is expected to start.</p> <p>DL asked what does the Virtual School Business Manager do? IH said the post is responsible for 'school business manager' functions, such as business support, data and financial management for the Virtual School.</p> <p>The Chief Executive's report was noted and approved.</p> | |
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| 5 | <p>Draft Business Plan 2021-22</p> <p>IH introduced the draft Business Plan. The previous business plan has been updated and the new one follows the same format. Members of the Board were asked to send any comments to IH and the plan will then be adjusted accordingly.</p> <p>Asked about the Skills Escalator Project, IH explained it was a project in the west of the borough which the post-16 education and skills team were commissioned by the Council to work on, involving support for employment schemes, providing mentoring and advice around skills and apprenticeships to adults.</p> <p><u>KPIs</u></p> <p>DL asked about KPIs which are not listed in the report and how will the KPIs be used to measure the quality of services as schools return and given the way things have been disjointed over the last 12 months.</p> <p>IH said there is a mixture of KPIs, some being strategic KPIs which are mainly based on pupil outcomes and school performance, where we do not have full control, but can influence. Then there are operational KPIs where we have control over delivery, such as responding to complaints on time, following up children missing in education etc. We have ambitious targets and expect 100% compliance with most of these.</p> <p>IH said that staff knowing that KPIs are monitored on a very regular basis helps with service performance in the longer term. We have also found ways to assess quality e.g. through the satisfaction surveys on each service in October of each year. There has very positive feedback and comments from schools during the pandemic in terms of how we have assisted them.</p> <p>DL asked whether KPIs will be included within the plan itself or are they reported separately? SO said there may be a case for revising some KPIs in light of findings in terms of return to onsite education.</p> <p>IH said the KPIs are part of the contract with the council and therefore already agreed. The full list was reported to a previous meeting on the Board (November 2020). Monthly KPIs are reported to each meeting of this Board and the CMB. In May there will be an annual KPI report for the whole of the financial year 2020-21 (including the school year 20-21 for school performance measures), which will be reported to the next BELS Board and then CMB. There will be a review of KPIs at the same time.</p> <p><u>Service Quality</u></p> <p>LC suggested that co-production work between the Parent Carer Forum and the SEND service and the Council is a major contributor to service quality. It was agreed to add that to the section on service quality. IH said that partnership working with headteacher was another key factor. SS agreed and it was agreed to add this to the same section.</p> <p><u>SEND Needs Analysis</u></p> <p>LC asked about the report on SEND needs analysis, which had been discussed at the SEND Development Group and how it fitted with the Business Plan and how the additional specialist provisions will be funded. IH explained that the SEND needs analysis draws from historic and current demographic data and forecasts and is used to</p> | |
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| | <p>inform the Specialist Places Plan, which sets out where additional specialist provision is needed and what type. It then sets out a plan for increasing specialist places to meet the analysed needs over the next three or four years. The production of the specialist places plan will be mentioned in the Business Plan but the plan itself derives from the separate SEND and Inclusion Strategy agreed by the council.</p> <p>The assessed needs are closely matched by the plans in place for expansion of ARP provision at Broadfields and the Windmill and other growth in resource provisions and at existing special schools. The high needs budget amounts to about £40m and sits outside the BELS budget because it is money we manage on behalf of the Council That budget pays for the revenue costs of specialist places (top-up payments, place costs and fees to independent special schools) and there is separate capital funding held by the council to pay for accommodation and building adaptations for specialist provision.</p> <p><u>CMB</u></p> <p>IH said the Business Plan will go to CMB (the Contract Monitoring Board) to be signed off next week 24 March, incorporating any comments from the BELS Board.</p> <p>ACTION:</p> <p>The plan was agreed subject to amendments agreed and any further comments from members of the Board. IH will update the Business Plan in light of comments from the Board and report the revised draft to CMB. The Annual KPI report and Review of KPIs will be brought to the next Board meeting.</p> | IH |
| 6 | <p>Key Performance Indicators</p> <p>IH reported that all the monthly KPIs have hit 100%; one on children missing education was deemed to be met following an agreed exemption from BT due to parents with children moving abroad and not letting us know.</p> <p>SO stated how supportive heads have felt during covid on issues such as risk assessments, lateral flow testing and other support for schools by BELS and thanked all the team. SS added her thanks from Primary schools too.</p> <p>The report was noted.</p> | |
| 7 | <p>Risk Register</p> <p>IH stated the Risk Register has not changed but if there are any comments to let him know. The report was noted.</p> | |
| 8 | <p>AOB – None.</p> | |
| | <p>Date of next meeting – Wednesday 30th June 2021, 3-4pm</p> | |