

**THE SOUTHWARK SCHOOLS FORUM****MINUTES OF THE MEETING****Thursday 17th June 2021**

1. **Attendance and Apologies:** - See Annex A -
2. **Quorum:** The Clerk confirmed that the meeting was quorate - Note that the meeting was conducted via Zoom virtual technology.
3. **Declaration of Interests**  
Members were asked to declare any pecuniary or other interests they might have that were greater than the interests of other members of the Schools Forum in any matter on the agenda for discussion. None were declared.
4. **Minutes of the Meeting of 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021**
  - 4.1 These were agreed for accuracy.
  - 4.2 Matters Arising:
    - a) Report back on LA consulting Maintained Special Schools as to whether they wish to participate in the Contingency Fund - The maintained special school rep confirmed that they did not.
5. **Dedicated Schools Grant- 2020-21 Outturn**
  - 5.1 This previously circulated report provided the Schools Forum with the provisional financial outturn for the 2020-21 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) that is still subject to external auditors agreement.
  - 5.2 The final position was an overspend of £2.1m in comparison with the £3.2m previously predicted which is still subject to external audit. The key movements between the January forecast and the outturn position relate to the high needs budget which closed being overspent by £2.1m, lower than expected.
  - 5.3 This was mainly due to a large underspend on the Alternative Provision budget of £700k. A cautious approach had been taken during the year partly due to COVID-19 and the likely numbers of children that would be needed to be supported as well as the impact of new online tuition. The growth in pupils with Education, Health, Care Plans (EHCPs) was not as great as the original forecast built into the budget monitoring statement, and this brought the cost of the placements down.
  - 5.4 The underspend in the Maternity De-Delegated budget was noted and was due to reduced number of claims. The Schools Forum agreed by a unanimous vote of maintained primary and secondary schools members to accept the LA's recommendation not to distribute the funds but retain them pending the projected outturn for 21-22 in case it was showing an

overspend. It was also noted that the threshold of the claim had been reduced from 90% to 70% and this may be reviewed.

- 5.5 The Falling Rolls Budget had been supplemented by the unallocated £1.4m from 2019-20 and this finished the year with an underspend of £1.3m which will be carried over. Pupils are moving school early from the closing schools for which the receiving school gets no financial recognition until the following financial year - this may be looked at in the autumn term.
- 5.6 The High Needs block remained the main DSG budget pressure and has been carefully monitored. Following a question; the Director confirmed that this block was scheduled to have an in-year net zero balance in 2021-22 so not adding to the deficit. Of course, reducing the £20m deficit will take some years and she thanked the Schools Forum High Needs Working Group for all their support to bring about this change.
- 5.7 The LA said that they are aware that a number of LAs have had their High Needs Deficits written off by the DFE and are actively pursuing getting the circumstances in which this happened and why it has not been applied to Southwark.
- 5.8 Following a question, concerning Schools in Financial Difficulty, the LA confirmed that the payments made to schools were a contribution to the cost of staff redundancy and they are not required to pay back those monies. Also, currently the fall in the numbers of children is impacting on primary schools which will, at a later time, impact to secondary schools. The overspend of £0.6m relates to the capital cost of redundancies, which will be recovered from schools during the next financial year.
- 5.9 Under the current regulations the Schools Forum has a responsibility to decide whether to agree to the carry forward of a deficit on central expenditure to the next financial year so being funded from that year's schools budget. This was agreed.

## **6. Maintained Schools Balances 2020-21**

- 6.1 This report, previously circulated, showed that the schools' cumulative revenue balances have increased from £10.9m as at 31 March 2020 to £13.8m as at 31 March 2021 with 18 schools in deficit as at 31 March 2021 compared to 24 as at 31 March 2020.
- 6.2 The Balance Control Mechanism (BCM) is the threshold the LA has set that above it the LA requires the schools to justify what it is they are spending these excess balances on, for primary that is 8% of income and 5% for secondaries.
- 6.3 Following a question concerning the large surpluses a few schools have and have had for some years and why had not the LA clawed back this excess? It was said that Schools Finance are increasing its staffing to, along with other areas, address actively pursuing these issues. However, although schools are doing what they can to address the issues, falling rolls is a major issue and there are a number of options but the LA cannot rule out further closures.
- 6.4 The Schools Forum commented that there are often criticisms of schools having in-year deficits, but this is required when schools are reducing their carry forward balances i.e.

spending more than the income they receive in that financial year. All maintained primary schools are considered good or outstanding.

The report was noted.

## **7. The 2021-22 Dedicated Schools Grant Budget Monitor and Financial Update**

7.1 This had been previously circulated and was projecting an in-year balanced budget meaning that the £20.595m deficit from 2020-21 will not change.

7.2 The previous concerns about the dates used for data collection for Early Years funding have not materialised as the LA now has an option on which count date to use. Plus, the DFE has changed the count date for Pupil Premium which will reduce funding to schools, but this will be offset by more children being eligible.

The report was noted.

## **8. Schools Forum Future Plans**

8.1 The Director said that a number of headteachers had expressed the need for a wider and larger forum for the LA to discuss with them issues including, High Needs, Falling Rolls, Alternative Provision etc. As a consequence, the LA is considering how best to bring this about, acknowledging the legal regulations relating to Schools Forums.

8.2 This could, perhaps be, an education forum that the Schools Forum is a subset of - which more headteachers can input to. Steve Morrison said that there is the logistics to be considered, avoiding repetition with the large group and the Schools Forum, meetings becoming too long etc. Pia Longman said that it was a good idea and sounded like the "Partnership" which failed and so need to look at why that happened in order to avoid repeating the same mistakes. Janice Babb said that there were elements of the "Partnership" that worked.

8.3 Kevin Morris believed it would not be the same and that this new group could be a different group without constraints on its size. Nick Tildsley thought that in some way what it could feed into existing Schools Forum meetings, the chair said that for secondary schools there is SASH which all secondary schools, maintained and academy, are members of. Also, the new group should be comprised of Headteachers and not other school staff.

8.4 How it meets post COVID-19 needs to be considered as it could be virtual. The clerk said that the Schools Forum reconstitutes every two years and there are periodically difficulties in recruiting members. The LA will report back.

## **9. A.O.B.**

9.1 There is the issue in a neighbouring borough of the cost of holiday pay for TTO staff that could impact on Southwark's schools budgets, can the LA monitor and keep schools informed?

9.2 It was reported there may also be an issue of meeting the cost of ill health retirements.

9.3 This was Teresa Neary's last meeting as she is taking semi-retirement and so will be standing down - the Schools Forum thanked her for all her contributions to the business of the Schools Forum over the past years and wished her well.

10. **Date of Next Meeting**

These will be determined and circulated for the new academic year

Annex A  
SCHOOLS FORUM ATTENDANCE SHEET  
11<sup>th</sup> March 2021  
VOTING MEMBERS

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PRESENT
Janice Babb	Primary School Headteacher	Yes
Susannah Bellingham	Primary School Headteacher	Apologies
Pia Longman	Primary School Headteacher	Yes
Vacant	Primary School Headteacher Community	
Trevor Cunningham	Primary School Governor	Yes
Vacant	Primary School Governor VA	
Rebecca Sherwood	Nursery School Headteacher	Yes
Teresa Neary	Special School Headteacher	Yes
Nicola Howard	Early Years – Private/Voluntary and Independent Settings	Yes
Steve Morrison	Academy	Yes
Nick Tildsley	Academy (Primary)	Yes
Mike Antoniou	Academy	Yes
Simon Eccles	Special School Academy	Apologies
Yomi Adewoye	Pupil Referral Units	Yes
Sister Anne-Marie Niblock	Secondary School Headteacher	Yes
Vacant FE SEN	Awaiting nomination from LA	
Catherine May	Diocesan Boards	Yes
Betty Joseph	Trade Unions	Apologies

Senior Officers in Attendance

Nina Dohel	Yes
E Nolan	Yes
Dave Richards	Yes with colleagues
Yvonne Ely	Yes
Jenny Brennan	No
Kevin Morris	Yes
David Cross	Clerk