

## **SOUTHWARK CHILDREN'S SERVICES - SCHOOLS FORUM**

**THURSDAY 5<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2023**

**14.00 to 15.30**

**Via Teams**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

### **1. Attendance and Apologies: - See Annex A**

The Clerk confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

### **2. 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.

### **3. Election of Chair**

Members of the forum agreed the Co-Chair model for the Forum. Pia Longman and Janice Babb were nominated for the position of Co-Chair of the Schools Forum by Susannah Bellingham, there were no further nominations. The nomination was seconded by Nicola Howard and accepted unanimously by the Forum members. Pia Longman chaired the meeting.

### **4. Minutes of the Meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023 and Matters Arising**

4.1 These were agreed for accuracy.

Aron Brown has been appointed to the Senior Finance Manager role replacing Tim Gibson.

### **5. Membership – Review TOR and makeup of the Forum based on pupil numbers in Academies and Maintained schools**

The circulated paper proposed;

That the current membership be noted and that the existing members be reappointed to the Forum.

That the Schools Forum agree to amend the membership structure as proposed.

That the Clerk (and officers) continue to take steps to fill the current vacancies across maintained and other categories.

That the Academy schools take steps to fill their vacancies on the Forum and to contact the Clerk if they require assistance in doing this.

That the council write to those members that have recently resigned from the Forum to thank them for their service on behalf of the Forum and the Council.

The intention of the paper is look to redress the balance of places between maintained and academies sectors. The number of pupil numbers have been used to assess the number of places for each sector, Based on pupil numbers it is recommended that a further 2 places be allocated to academy representatives in order to bring the membership more in line with the current split of pupils. It is further recommended that the Diocesan Boards representative be reclassified as an "Other" representative rather than as a "maintained school" representative. This will mean that this place could be allocated to any representative that the Diocesan schools choose whether they are from maintained, academy or another representative of the Diocesan Boards. It will also help to further rebalance the membership between maintained, academies and other. The proposed changes to the membership were approved by the members.

### **6. Feedback from High Needs Sub-Group meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023.**

The draft minutes were circulated and noted by the members. The following points were noted.

Considerable focus was given to the future constitution of the group.

Reconsideration of the terms of reference and future ways of working.

Discussion on changes to the group membership over time and more specifically over recent months has warranted a revisit to the original intended purpose of the group. Attention was given to the fact to it is a task group and not for information sharing and reporting. There was focus on what those tasks should look like.

Key outcomes related to the proposed tasks. The terms of reference would be amended to reflect a focus on inclusion in mainstream schools, additional representation will be sought from mainstream schools within the group. Clarification that the group should have a specific focus with defined objectives and to continue to be solution focused.

Agreements were made on setting objectives for those future meetings and avoiding a repetition of reporting. The objectives would be centred around key SEND priorities and pressures from the Safety Valve programme. The next meeting will focus on inclusion in mainstream schools and key priorities to support with that.

Reporting on the Safety Valve programme and ongoing discussion and debate about top ups and frozen top ups.

## **7. DSG Quarter 1 Monitoring**

This report sets out the latest in-year budget monitoring for the 2023-24 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and provides an update to members on the latest school finance events.

### **Schools Forum Actions**

That the Schools Forum

Note the DSG end of year financial forecast position for the year ending 31 March 2024, which is an overspend of £462,000 before receipt of expected Safety valve Funding of £2.77m.

Note that the Council has received £0.923m in this financial year to date under the safety valve and thus the cumulative deficit is currently sitting at £13.7m.

The overspend is driven from the high needs block. There is a DfE management plan in place to bring the spend back into balance over a number of years, the overspend is part of that plan.

The DfE has announced £525m to support schools with the September 2023 teachers' pay award in the 2023/24 financial year, with a further £900m in 2024/2025. The £525m covers 7 months and the £900m a full 12 months. Primary, secondary and all-through mainstream schools will be eligible for the grant. Schools will receive one payment for the 2023/24 financial year in November 2023. The ESFA has calculated allocations for each school and these amounts will be passed on to schools in full. Individual school allocations have been published by the ESFA. The funding is based on the number of pupils, free school meals and a lump sum. The DfE did assume that 3.5% of the increase would be covered by schools budgets.

Special, hospital and PRU schools have been consulted, there was one positive response on the way the Local Authority intend to distribute their funding which is in same way the funding was received from the DfE based on the number of commissioned places in those institutions. If there are further responses they will be considered before proceeding.

As the Post-16 grant year runs from August to July, the additional Post-16 funding has been added to the Post-16 grant, with revised allocations published in September 2023.

There will be no separate Teacher Pay Addition Grant amounts for Post-16 provision.

## **8. Update on Schools Block Funding announcement**

In December 2023, the DfE will publish the Schools Block allocation. This will consist of the Primary Unit Funding (PUF) and Secondary Unit Funding (SUF) multiplied by the relevant pupil numbers from the October 2023 census, plus funding for premises, growth and falling rolls. The growth and falling rolls elements of the allocation are also based on October 2023 census data. The primary figure is increasing by 1.2%, the secondary figure by 0.4%. the overall increase for Southwark is

0.86% compared to a national figure of 2.7%. The figures will change once the October census numbers are submitted.

There are two adjustments that the DfE are making to the Schools Block funding for next year, the split site funding will be given to Local Authorities based on a lump sum amount plus an amount dependant on the distance between the schools and Local Authorities will have to use this method when they are funding schools.

The DfE is adding a falling rolls allocation to the DSG Schools Block from 2024/25. Southwark has been split into 34 geographical areas (Medium Super Output Areas – MSOA's). October census roll numbers from 2023 and 2022 in each MSOA will be compared and where a fall of over 10% takes place, funding will be allocated. The 10% threshold is quite high, but there are a small number of MSOA's where it is possible that Southwark will qualify for funding.

LA's are still free to set the size of their Falling Rolls Fund. There are however changes to the operation of the Falling Rolls Fund. Firstly, the restriction that only schools with 'good' or 'outstanding' Ofsted judgements are eligible is being removed from 2024 to 2025. Secondly, the eligibility requirement for increasing roll numbers in future years has been amended to specify the use of data from the School Capacity Survey 2022.

LA's will have to set the Minimum Funding Guarantee for 2023/24 at between 0% and 0.5%. The same range was the requirement in 2023/24. By setting a low MFG, the DfE creates headroom that it can use to fund LA's with lower levels of per pupil funding.

17 of Southwark's 27 formula factors will need to increase from their 2023/24 levels and 3 will need to decrease. All rates were set within the permissible range in 2023/24, but as the range narrows each year, further movements will be required. Further detail on these requirements will be brought to the December 2023 Schools Forum meeting.

The provisional High Needs Block allocation for 2024/25 shows a 3.9% increase which is higher than the London average of 2.9% but lower than the national average of 4.3%.

There is a minimum funding guarantee that applies to special schools, as with mainstream that will set between 0 and 0.5.

There is a 2.67% increase in the Central School Services Block compared to a national average of 3.47%.

## **9. Update on Early Years Block Funding announcements**

The following points were raised.

In terms of the current financial year additional funding is being provided in the form of the Early Years Supplementary Grant which will cover the autumn and spring terms of the current financial year.

The amount of grant the Local Authority will receive will be determined by the January 2024 census it is impossible to commit to funding rates for providers that will ensure 100% distribution of the grant and which could be guaranteed not to require a reduction come the spring term. the providers allocations will be calculated in the Spring term and making interim payments to providers with 2 year old provision based on hourly rates of £2.25 for two year olds and 20 p for 3 and 4 year olds. These interim payments will be paid following the autumn and spring census returns with the final distribution at the end of term.

For the next financial year which sees the start of the phased transition to Early Years provision from 9 months up the DfE are proposing changes to the funding formula for Local Authorities and how the Local Authorities fund their providers. At present 3 and 4 year old funding is provided by the DfE based on hours, early year's pupil premium, disability access fund and maintained nursery school supplementary funding. The DfE is proposing to replicate this funding formula for both 2 year olds and under 2s with the exception of the maintained nursery schools supplementary funding which

will only be part of the 3 and 4 year old formula. This will effectively lead to 3 separate formulas for the three age groups.

The 3 and 4 year old funding that Local Authorities provide to Early Years Providers is made up of hours, supplements for deprivation and teacher pay grant replacement, early years pupil premium, disability access fund and maintained nursery school supplementary funding Early and SEND inclusion fund. The DfE are proposing to replicate the 3 and 4 year old formula for both 2 year olds and under 2s with the exception of the maintained nursery school supplementary funding.

There is a further proposal for a reduction in the amount that Local Authorities can hold back for Central Services to reduce that from 5% to 3%. This would not be for the coming year there is no indication of when this will be introduced.

The Forum approved the proposal to consult with providers over the autumn term. Consultation after the December meeting would limit the time available for the consultation and would mean the consultation taking place over the holiday period.

#### **10. Updates from Education Directorate (or their nominated officer)**

The following points were raised.

There have been a number of restructures across the Local Authority. Education has been integrated with Children's Services.

Keeping Education Strong strategy was published in April. The work with the external consultants is continuing mainly on PAN reductions. Townsend and St Francesca Cabrini closed last year, there was a successful amalgamation with Cobourg and Camelot, the amalgamated school is now known as Bird in Bush. Feedback from schools has been budgets are more secure and numbers on roll have increased slightly.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met to discuss Keeping Education Strong particularly St Mary Magdalene. If there is a request for academisation the Local Authority must support that request. There is no directive from the Church of England for schools to academise.

#### **11. Forward Plan and Dates of Future Meetings Verbal Update**

14th December 2023

18th January 2024

14th March 2024

13th June 2024

#### **12. AOB**

There was no other business.

#### **Items Affecting Maintained Schools Only**

#### **13. Update on De-delegated budgets**

The following points were raised.

De-delegated services applies to maintained schools only with separate decisions being taken by primary and secondary schools respectively. This funding is allocated to schools through the funding formula but can be passed back, or 'de-delegated', for maintained mainstream primary and secondary schools with schools forum approval. De-delegation does not apply to special schools, nursery schools, or PRUs. Where de-delegation has been agreed for maintained primary and secondary schools it is possible for these services to be offered to the other schools and academies in Southwark, that were not covered by the de-delegation arrangements, on a buy-back basis. Information on the rates was included in the circulated paper.

Summerhouse Behaviour Support Service and Provision is the Local Authority Service which offers SEMH intervention for primary pupils at risk of permanent exclusion from Southwark mainstream schools. Interventions are tailored specifically to the individual pupil by specialist staff who have proven expertise and skills in this area. There are some financial pressures at the school with an overspend expected. The service are reviewing the budgets and any savings, there may be a request for additional funding to support that service. The unit rates for the school in terms of how they are funded have not increased since 2021. The school are funded by de-delegation the number of pupils have reduced and the number of schools that have academised also reduces the pupil numbers. The budget has continued to fall and the number of pupils they are supporting has not. The service are looking at making savings.

The amount de-delegated for 2023/24 was £618k of which £36k has been set aside for the cost of Internal Audit leaving £582k to support schools in financial difficulty. Nursery and Special Schools can also choose to buy back into these arrangements and this has generated £22k, so in total there is £604k available in 2023/24.

Maternity cover has £565,000 available to spend. It is expected that there will be further commitments against the fund in the remainder of the financial year. If any amount remain uncommitted at year end these will be carried forward to next year.

#### **14. Schools Balance Control Mechanism**

In general, schools are expected to spend the funding allocated in any one year on the education of pupils within the school during that year. However, it is recognised that schools will need to hold reasonable contingencies for unforeseen items and, from time to time, may wish to save funding over a few years for a major project subject to the approval of the governing body. The additional risks posed by falling pupil numbers and the Council's Keeping Education Strong agenda are also noted. It is thus proposed that the existing BCM be amended to one of the two options.

EITHER

To do away with the existing BCM altogether and to amend the Scheme to place a greater onus on Schools' Governing Bodies themselves to determine an appropriate level of balances to hold in reserve. In this case the LA will continue to require evidence that the schools' governing bodies have properly considered and documented the levels of balances that they intend to hold and the reasons that any surplus funds are being held. The LA will also follow up whether the stated plans are actually carried out and will reserve the right to still be able to intervene where very large balances are being built up without any clear plans being in place on the reasons for holding such balances or where the stated plans are repeatedly not carried out. In such cases the LA will refer any non-compliance back to the Schools Forum along with any proposed remedial action.

OR

b) i) That the threshold at which at which school balances are considered to be excessive be increased to 11%. The threshold of 11% is considered to be a sufficient level of reserves to provide sufficient resilience against unforeseen events and is considered to be sufficient in the current economic climate. In the consultation schools views on whether this threshold is appropriate or if it should be higher or lower.

ii) It is proposed that the level of excess balances be looked at annually and that only that portion that has been excessive for four or more years be considered for capping under the mechanism.

iii) Should an approved plan not be in place for the use of large balances, and where the school has held an excess balance for greater than four years, the authority will consider using its powers to take back part of the funding held by the school. The local authority will seek to encourage schools on an ongoing basis to use their funding for the benefit of the pupils at their school and thus to minimise the level of balances held to avoid a clawback of funding. Funds derived from sources other than the authority will be excluded from any clawback. The level of balances will be shared with the schools forum annually and the schools forum will be notified of action taken by the local authority in relation to excessive balances.

iv) It is proposed to keep broadly the same appeals process that exists currently to resolve any disagreements that may occur. Note however that rather the Director of Education on the panel, this will in future be the Director of Children’s Services or their nominated representative

v) Any funding taken back from schools will be available to be used for the benefit of maintained schools subject to the same restrictions that exist for other DSG related spend and any reallocation will be agreed with the schools forum.

The Forum approved the proposal to carry out a consultation with all maintained schools on proposed changes to the Southwark Balance Control Mechanism.

## Annex A

### SCHOOLS FORUM ATTENDANCE SHEET

5th October 2023

#### VOTING MEMBERS

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PRESENT
Janice Babb	Primary School Headteacher (RC)	Yes
Susannah Bellingham	Primary School Headteacher (Com)	Yes
Pia Longman	Primary School Headteacher CofE	Yes
Vacant	Primary School Headteacher (Com)	
Jane O’Brien	Primary School Governor (Com)	Yes
Vacant	Primary School Governor (VA)	
Helen Rowe	Nursery School Headteacher	Yes
Heidi Tully	Special School Headteacher	Yes
Nicola Howard	Early Years – Private/Voluntary and Independent Settings	Yes
Steve Morrison	Academy	Apologies
Nick Tildesley	Academy (Primary)	Apologies – RESIGNED
Declan Jones	Academy	Apologies
James Wilson	Academy	No
Steph Lea	Special School Academy	Yes
Yomi Adewoye	Pupil Referral Units	Yes
Catherine May	Secondary School Headteacher	Yes
Vacant	FE SEN	Awaiting nomination from LA
Vacant	Diocesan Boards	
Betty Joseph	Trade Unions	Yes

Senior Officers in Attendance

Alasdair Smith	Yes
Steve Tanner	Yes
Aron Brown	Yes
Kate Bingham	Yes
Nikki Tilson	Yes
Richard Hunter	Yes
Neil Gordon-Orr	Yes
Hayden Judd	Yes
Andrea Dennis	No
Eniko Nolan	Yes
Jenny Brennan, Family Early Help & Youth Justice	Yes
Sarah Cooper	Clerk

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