

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL - SCHOOLS FORUM

Date:	Thursday 19 th September 2024
Location:	Room G02B and G02C, Southwark Council Offices, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH
Time:	2.00pm
Clerked by:	Hayley Cutchey, Southwark Governor Development Advisor

VOTING MEMBERS		ATTENDANCE
Helen Rowe – Nursery School Headteacher	HR	Attended
Susannah Bellingham – Primary School Headteacher (Com)	SB	Attended
Kate Wooder – Primary School Headteacher (Com)	KW	Attended
Janice Babb – Primary School Headteacher (RC) - Chair	JB	Attended
Jane O’Brien – Primary School Governor (Com)	JO	Attended
Catherine May – Secondary School Headteacher	CM	Attended
Heidi Tully – Special School Headteacher	HT	Apologies
Yomi Adewoye – Pupil Referral Unit	YA	No apologies
Steve Morrison – Academy	SM	Attended
James Wilson – Academy	JW	No apologies
Steph Lea – Special School Academy	SL	Attended
Non-School Representatives		
Nicola Howard – Early Years – Private/Voluntary & Independent Settings	NH	Apologies
Pia Longman – Diocesan Boards – Co-Chair	PL	Apologies
Betty Joseph – Trade Unions	BJ	Attended
Vacant – Primary School Headteacher CofE	N/A	N/A
Vacant – FE SEN	N/A	N/A
Vacant – Academy (Primary)	N/A	N/A
Vacant – Academy	N/A	N/A

LA OFFICERS		ATTENDANCE
Alasdair Smith - Director, Children and Families	AS	Attended
Aron Brown - Senior Finance Manager	AB	Attended
Eniko Nolan - Assistant Director of Finance	EN	Attended
Kate Bingham - Schools Finance Consultant	KB	Attended
Nikki Tilson - Principal Advisor	NT	Attended
Lizzie Everett - Trainee	LE	Attended

OPTIONAL		ATTENDANCE
Matt Jones - Ark Globe Academy Representative, Pending Member	MJ	Attended
Hayley Cutchey – Governor Development Advisor	HC	Attended

ITEM NO.		ACTION FOR
1	<p>WELCOME AND APOLOGIES All were welcomed to this face-to-face meeting. Quorum is 40% of the total membership excluding observers and vacancies which was met. JB chaired the first part of the meeting.</p>	
2	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST None.</p>	
3	<p>ELECTION OF FORUM CHAIR KB chaired this item. Nominations were requested in the meeting.</p> <p>JB was unanimously ELECTED as the Chair for this academic year.</p> <p>PL was unanimously ELECTED as Co-Chair (in her absence but with prior agreement).</p>	
4	<p>APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES FROM 13 JUNE 2024 Minutes were AGREED as an accurate record of the meeting.</p>	
5	<p>SCHOOL FORUM CONSTITUTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE Paper was shared prior, and KB read through.</p> <p>The High Needs Subgroup terms have been substantially amended after a consultation period. This group would normally meet prior to the School Forum meetings.</p> <p>The School Financial Support Panel has been amended in reference to Good or Outstanding schools mentioned due to the change in Ofsted framework.</p> <p>Following a governance review at the beginning of the 2024-25 financial year, it was agreed that, essential to the successful delivery of the improvements recommended, a time limited Governance Improvement Working / Task and Finish Group would be constituted to ensure that appropriate actions were taken from the Governance Improvement Plan.</p> <p>Q. Section 2.17 regarding the election/appointment of school members says, 'Representation from the early years private and voluntary institutions shall be elected / decided / invited by / at XXXX', is that deliberate?</p> <p>A. The nomination procedures are yet to be confirmed.</p> <p>Q. What would they look like?</p> <p>A. When the governance review took place, each member was asked to complete a survey on the nomination and election process. The XXX means that it was unclear so the next step would be to ask the member representing that category to decide if formal elections are required or if the group simply elects and appoints.</p>	

A. The process been amended to recognise many are sitting under an academy banner rather than maintained.

Q. Regarding the collective mutual agreement of academy representatives, is there no expectation that it should be done in a specific way? SASH represents most of the secondary academy schools so this is the vast majority, so could we seek our own nominee and bring it back to this group?

A. Absolutely.

Q. Would it be helpful for a circular to be shared with all members saying that nomination procedures are yet to be confirmed?

A. I can confirm that if the constitution is agreed today, all will be informed by the 11 October SASH meeting.

Q. Does the representative from secondary have to be a headteacher?

A. Maintained representatives must be a headteacher or governor but for academies, it can be a nominated person.

Page 23/24, part d in appendix C within the School Financial Support Panel Terms of Reference about settlement, considering the other aspect, these are ways to stop legal action being taken by staff members, but it also leaves things open to further legal challenges, so that's something to consider.

A. Members of the panel are aware of this, and receive expert advice from Southwark HR, she attends these meetings. We have the necessary support in place for these decisions.

Q. As a governor, I was unaware of this Schools Forum before I become a representative, so communication needs to be improved. The maintained primary sector may be very different from the academy sector, so would it be worth having two reps to reflect that?

A. We've decided to invest more in clerking support so we will be publishing on the website in a timelier manner, and the intention is to invest in the communication. We're lucky to have KB's experience around the governance area, different schools' systems are weighted differently but it's your forum to at which make these decisions.

KB clarified that she had been a maintained primary school governor and a CEO in an academy.

A. We can share communications, but it is down to you as the representatives to share and feed back to your groups, and vice versa, to bring back anything from your groups. We're hoping to deliver training for forum members to assist with this.

A. We are looking into whether there is a need for two reps.

Q. Where do we stand with other colleges?

A. The forum can determine the membership of sub-groups. We can adopt the terms as they stand, followed by further discussion.

A. Southwark College is part of SASH so they would be represented.

	<p>High Need Subgroup members can ensure relevant communication is shared with the relevant organisations.</p> <p>The Schools Forum ADOPTED the Constitution and the following Terms of Reference:</p> <p>High Needs Subgroup – AGREED Schools Financial Support Panel – AGREED Governance Improvement Working / Task and Finish Group - AGREED</p>	
6	<p>SCHOOL AUDIT UPDATE</p> <p>KB briefly explained the Internal Audit Schools Annual Summary report which was shared prior.</p> <p>Whilst it's an improved position, many of the recommended themes remain the same. The Schools Form is asked to comment on the report and be aware of its content.</p> <p>All were advised that the audit only applies to maintained schools.</p> <p>ACTION: It is important that the themes from the Internal Audit Schools report are passed on to colleagues to ensure schools are better prepared.</p> <p>Q. What do the numbers 8 and 9 refer to in the table on page 5 of the report?</p> <p>A. They are the number of recommendations in that category (high, medium, low).</p> <p>The Schools Forum noted the Internal Audit Schools Annual Summary report.</p>	Maintained reps
7	<p>CENTRAL EXPENDITURE REVIEW</p> <p>KB gave a summary of the Central Expenditure Review report that was shared prior.</p> <p>The review is forward-facing and is not intended to realign funding for this year. The document outlines the Schools Forum decision-making role.</p> <p>Q. Who is performing the review?</p> <p>A. KB with support from the budget holders in the service.</p> <p>The value for money seems a bit subjective.</p> <p>A. We often have comparators to where the LA sits which helps with understanding of value for money.</p> <p>Q. Is that considering the impact on number of pupils served?</p> <p>A. Value for money is for benchmarking, which is a requirement of LAs. We would look to London to compare. We're not just looking at numbers, but input. Historically, it's not been done in the same way by LAs and it will determine key lines of enquiry which will direct areas of impact to analyse.</p>	

	<p>Q. How is impact discussed?</p> <p>A. It will be internally with the service provider’s leadership team. There will be KPIs in terms of impact on children, primarily for attainment.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">SM arrived 2.45pm</p> <p>The Schools Forum noted the statutory framework and principles underpinning the central expenditure review, and that final proposals for centrally retained expenditure from all DSG funding blocks will be presented to the December Schools Forum.</p>	
8	<p>DSG – MONITORING & SAFETY VALVE UPDATE</p> <p>AB explained the report outlining the budget monitoring for 2024-25 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and updating on the Safety Valve process that was shared prior.</p> <p>Q. The deficit is reducing but what is the impact of the safety valve in schools?</p> <p>A. It was noted that it would be a challenge so it will be observed by officers to understand the impact as we go along, but it remains a central part of our savings plan to remain in surplus. The high blocks must be sustainable.</p> <p>A. The council agreed to put more money into SEND so it wasn’t a gift from the DfE. It is tough but it is going to a better place.</p> <p>The deficit happened because there was a need in the SEND area and we’ve been asked to reduce it, so knowing the day-to-day impact is important.</p> <p>A. There is collaboration happening which is having positive impact. It will take time to recognise impact and identify the approach needed in schools to ensure there is a collective ring of support around these children. I can only applaud those who sit on the High Needs Subgroup because making the right decisions is a challenge. Although there are supportive measures being put in place, when there are recruitment and retention issues in schools, the impact is not necessarily being felt.</p> <p>A. The special heads are being asked to do more with less.</p> <p>A. It’s no doubt there are challenges in classrooms and it’s the hot topic in schools during visits we conduct. There are SEND consultants and a hub which is helping. The way people are teaching and learning has improved in terms of being inclusive.</p> <p>Exclusions, attendance, academic outcomes and destinations are being, and should be, monitored to identify impact of changes made. The process for EHCP (Education and Health Care Plan) applications often does not meet statutory requirements which also has an impact on students.</p> <p>Q. Is there anything that could be done by the LA collaboratively?</p> <p>A. I was at a conference which spoke of this, it was high on the agenda. There was a report which investigated this in detail and contained solutions. We cannot influence politicians but there may be opportunities through Helen Hayes who had recently shadowed an MP.</p> <p>A. The National Audit Office is currently conducting a SEND review with school representatives who spoke here in July. A good discussion had taken place about</p>	

	<p>improvement, so the government is trying to do something. We tried to influence as much as we could during that discussion.</p> <p>The Schools Forum noted the DSG monitoring position showing an overspend of £678k on the high needs block and the current position with the Safety Valve.</p>	
9	<p>SCHOOLS FUNDING FORMULA UPDATE</p> <p>AB explained the report outlining the authority’s approach to the 2025-26 schools funding formula that was shared prior.</p> <p>Q. Could we not work out what we could afford for the funding guarantee?</p> <p>A. We don’t know what the maximum level is, nor what our allocation is.</p> <p>The Schools Forum APPROVED the Schools Block transfer of £1.2m and AGREED to the priorities for the 2025-26 funding formula for schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To set the minimum funding guarantee (MFG) at the maximum affordable level (within the permissible range). • Ensure formula rates that are in the National Funding Formula (NFF) matching zone do not fall below that zone. • Set FSM (free school meals) formula rate to £3.00 to match Mayor of London’s KS2 funding rate. • Set lump-sum formula rate to the maximum. • To apply any remaining resources to those formula factor rates furthest below NFF rates. <p>The Schools Forum noted that the scheduled DfE July funding data release has been delayed as a result of the election with no release date yet provided. Final allocations are still anticipated in late December as per previous years.</p> <p>The Schools Forum noted the additional funding announced over the summer break in response to the teachers’ pay award, including the Core Schools Budget Grant and Early Years Budget Grant.</p>	
10	<p>VERBAL UPDATES FROM EDUCATION DIRECTORATE</p> <p>AS gave a general update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Southwark 2030 strategy is being launched after a long process of community engagement. - Looking at setting up a steering group to strengthen how the LA works in partnership with schools. The discussion about SEND will be important. - Continuing to work on the issue of falling pupil numbers and school sustainability. <p>NT gave a further update:</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Risk assessment for standards is sent out in October to RAG rate support required, particularly for primary and nursery. - There is no financial assessment in academies, but there will be a roll assessment for primary academies. - 96.1% Good and above Ofsted grades. Two schools are recently graded as RI (Requires Improvement), now four in total. Compare well nationally and within London. - Slight decline in outcomes as a result of SEND issues and savings made in primary schools over the last few years. They are, however, still above national. <p>Q. How will the change in Ofsted grades work?</p> <p>A. This cannot be known yet. The LA standards are different and would grade more schools at risk of RI than Ofsted.</p> <p>Q. is it possible to make use of a closed school building or other facility as a form of alternative provision for use by schools?</p> <p>A. A Review of alternative provisions is being undertaken.</p> <p>ACTION: AS to speak further to MJ after the meeting about alternative provision possibilities.</p> <p>Q. There are lessons to be learned from schools that have closed, e.g. there were problems placing children. What's happening to the buildings?</p> <p>A. There is a plan for each of the buildings which will go to cabinet. Mostly, we are talking about developing a provision locally for special education which has not happened historically.</p> <p>Q. Does the DfE have any say in what happens to the buildings or land, if we could change it to a special school for example?</p> <p>A. I don't know the technicalities. It's public land and we must be transparent with how it's used; the deeds are quite complicated. Permission of Secretary of State must be gained for any change of use from educational purposes.</p> <p>A. In certain circumstances, the DfE has a right in the scheduling of what happens if land was to be sold.</p>	AS
11	<p>FORWARD PLAN AND DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS</p> <p>The Schools Forum voted on whether to hold future meetings online or in-person. The majority AGREED in-person was more engaging and to hold all future meetings at Tooley Street.</p> <p>ACTION: Confirm if a hybrid option can be facilitated for anyone unable to attend in person.</p> <p>Next planned meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thursday 12 December 2024, 2pm - Thursday 16 January 2025, 2pm - Thursday 20 March 2025, 2pm - Thursday 26 June 2025, 2pm 	Chair

	It was confirmed that these are public meetings and, as per 2.23 in the updated constitution, 'Observers shall be invited to attend Schools Forum meetings. Observers may participate in the debate but will not have voting rights should any business of the Schools Forum require a vote'.	
12	ANY OTHER BUSINESS None.	

Item	Action	For
6	Share themes from the Internal Audit Schools report with colleagues to ensure schools are better prepared.	Maintained reps
10	AS to speak further to MJ after the meeting about alternative provision possibilities.	AS
11	Confirm if hybrid option to join meetings is possible for anyone who cannot make an in-person meeting.	Chair

Item	Decisions Made
3	JB was ELECTED as the Chair for this academic year. PL was ELECTED as Co-Chair (in her absence but with prior agreement).
5	ADOPTED the Constitution and the following Terms of Reference: High Needs Subgroup Schools Financial Support Panel Governance Improvement Working / Task and Finish Group
9	APPROVED the Schools Block transfer of £1.2m and AGREED to the priorities for the 2025-26 funding formula for schools.
11	AGREED to hold all future meetings in person at Tooley Street.