

**Hammersmith & Fulham
Schools Forum – 16 June 2020
Minutes of the meeting**

Present

Voting members	Non-voting members
<p>Primary School Heads Claire Fletcher, St Paul's CE Primary Kathleen Williams, Holy Cross Primary Wendy Aldridge, Sullivan Primary Michelle Barrett, Randolph Beresford and Vanessa Nursery</p> <p>Academies and Free Schools Gary Kynaston, Hammersmith Academy (Chair) Clare Wagner, West London Free School</p> <p>Alternative Provision Academies Krishna Purbhoo, Exec Head of TBAP</p>	<p>Observers Jo Chapman, Business Manager Aidan Smith, LA Governor at Jack Tizard</p>

Guests

Gemma Donnelly, Head of the Local Authority Stakeholder Engagement team (ESFA)

H&F Officers

Tony Burton, Head of Finance, Children's Services & Education
Phil Tomsett, Head of Early Years
Jacqui McShannon, Director of Children's Services
Jan Parnell, Assistant Director of Education
Mandy Lawson, Assistant Director SEN and Disabilities (SEND)
David Abbott, Head of Governance

One member of the press was also in attendance.

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS & MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Welcome and introduction

The Chair, Gary Kynaston from Hammersmith Academy, welcomed everyone to the meeting and led a round of introductions.

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from:

- Daniel Upfield (Ark Swift)
- Alex Parker (Lady Margaret)
- Katie Beardsworth (Old Oak)
- Tim Scott (Fulham College)

Minutes of the previous meeting

The Chair asked Tony Burton to follow up on the action on page 6 relating to sign-ups to universal free school meals.

ACTION: Tony Burton

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed by the forum.

2. EARLY YEARS FUNDING

Tony Burton, H&F Children's Services Head of Finance, presented the report which updated the forum on the 2020-21 Early Years Block funding numbers and gave details of the current issues and spend for the summer term. Tony Burton highlighted some key sections of the report.

Section 1.4 noted that the budget for 19/20 would be revised in the summer to account for the DfE's revision based on the January 2020 census. Tony said he expected a £200k upside based on census data but that would only be confirmed in late summer.

Section 1.5 noted the budget risk in relation to the allocations in Table 1 if the census returned fewer hours eligible for Government funding. Gemma Donnelly, ESFA, said this was a live issue for the ESFA and they were looking at options to address it as the census won't be as reliable this year. An answer was expected at the end of July at the earliest.

Table 2 showed the same budget that came to the forum in January. There was provision for the SEN inclusion fund of £300k and an additional contingency of £300k that could be used to support the sector.

Michelle Barrett asked if there was any news on making the application process for the SEN inclusion fund more user friendly. Jan Parnell said it had been adapted and would relaunch as part of the Early Years strategy.

Table 4 showed the central services budget which was limited to 5 percent of overall funding with the rest paid out to providers in the sector.

Tony Burton noted that the deficit on the Early Years block had been repaid and a surplus of £66k would be carried into 20/21. He expected a £200k retrospective adjustment.

Section 5.2 showed adjustments made on the estimates for the spring term made in March. The adjustments had been made in full. PVI adjustments were made later and where providers had been owed, they have now been paid. The clawback was delayed to avoid additional strain on providers. It will be done in a planned and sensitive way.

Section 5.5 noted the summer term estimates of £4.4m had been paid to providers.

Tony Burton informed members that funding would be revised by the ESFA in the summer.

RESOLVED

The report was noted.

3. SCHOOLS BLOCK AND CENTRAL SERVICES BUDGET 2020/21

Tony Burton, H&F Children's Services Head of Finance, presented the report that provided details of the final Schools Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant budget allocations to schools calculated after the disapplication request to transfer 1% of the schools block allocation was rejected by the Minister of State on 13 February 2020. The report also set out the recommended budget for the Central Services Schools Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant in financial year 2020/21.

The final allocations had to be revised in February following ministerial decision limiting transfer to the High Needs Block. Tony said it was disappointing that the decision wasn't agreed as it was one of the key items in the deficit recovery plan. The factor rates used for the final allocation were recalculated after the disapplication request was refused to allocate the additional £0.525m. Appendix 2 showed the total funding broken down by schools. This had been communicated to schools in February when the adjustments were made.

Section 3 covered the falling rolls fund. In January it had been agreed to set up a panel to consider bids for funding, but it was important that the panel was independent of schools who were bidding. Tony's team would write out to schools to submit submissions of interest to the fund based on the DfE criteria. Tony asked if there were any volunteers for the panel. Michelle Barrett, Kathleen Williams, and Clare Wagner volunteered.

Section 4 was a reminder of the de-delegations for maintained primary schools only. Kathleen Williams asked to see a breakdown of how the fund was spent.

ACTION: Tony Burton

Section 5 covered the central services block allocation and what it was used for. Tony noted a total reduction of £537k in 20/21 vs 19/20. He also noted that since 18/19 significant efficiency savings had been made from the central services block – totalling around £800k. He informed members that if the ESFA confirmed that the historic element would continue to reduce at this pace we may lose the ability to transfer between blocks.

Gemma Donnelly, ESFA, said there would be more information on the 21/22 position with the summer announcement – though it was pertinent to expect a reduction.

The Chair addressed the forum and said that it was clear that further cost efficiencies from central services were not sustainable if there were further reductions. It had a significant impact on the High Needs Block and decisions around that.

Tony Burton added that the recovery plan had targeted £500k in 2021 and that would have been exceeded if not for the block reduction.

RESOLVED

The report was noted.

4. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK BUDGET ALLOCATIONS 2020/21

Tony Burton, H&F Children's Services Head of Finance, presented the report that provided a summary of the 2020/21 High Needs Block budget allocations and the predicted forecast outturn position.

Tony highlighted paragraph 2.7 which showed that the total loss of funding in 2020/21 to support High Needs Block expenditure as detailed in the deficit recovery plan was £1.044m. Paragraph 2.8 explained the ESFA and DfE position on how local authorities should be treating accumulating DSG deficits – i.e. that they should be carried forward to be met from future schools budgets.

Gemma Donnelly, ESFA, commented that Hammersmith & Fulham was not the only authority that was struggling with a deficit. The reason for ring-fencing and not using the general fund was more to do with accountancy practices and making sure it didn't impact on the authority as a whole. She noted that the ESFA was happy with the recovery plan. The first priority was to get in-year spend inline, then we should be looking at the deficit.

Tony Burton said what was really needed was a medium-term plan of what would be happening to the funding. Gemma Donnelly said this was being considered by Ministers and would be communicated as soon as possible. The ESFA were aware that High Needs was a pinch point for Local Authorities across the Country. Provisional allocations would be communicated in July.

Tony explained that 2021 presented an improved position, due to additional DfE funding and ongoing work to reduce spend. If it had not been for the transfer limit of 0.5%, we would have been close to a balanced position on the High Needs Block.

Section 5 outlined the ongoing challenge and next steps. Tony Burton, to put the challenge in perspective, explained that the current deficit of £19m would take around 40 years to pay off with a £500k annual underspend.

The Chair noted that with the ESFA and DfE limiting how much money could be passported and the potential reductions in the central services block, the Forum's original recovery plan had been affected. There was a real challenge

about how to get the High Needs Block to break even, especially with rising EHCP pressures.

Jacqui McShannon said the Council recognised the scale of the challenge. With attention currently on Covid-19, schools and the Council would have to refocus on this issue.

RESOLVED

The report was noted.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair requested a note from the local authority on any updates from the DfE / ESFA in Summer.

ACTION: Tony Burton

The Chair gave thanks to the local authority for their work on the Covid-19 response, supporting schools, families and students in the community. He also thanked all of the members of the forum who have given their time and efforts to Schools Forum over the past year.

Meeting started: 2.00 pm
Meeting ended: 2.55 pm

Chair

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