

Schools Forum

Minutes

Thursday 17 November 2022

PRESENT

Voting members	Non-voting members
<p>Schools Members Claire Fletcher (St Pauls CE Primary) Joe Brown (Old Oak Primary) Sam Naismith (Flora Gardens Primary) Alan Campbell (Cambridge Special School) Michele Barrett (Randolph Beresford / Vanessa Nursery)</p> <p>Academies Members Gary Kynaston (Chair) (Hammersmith Academy) Sally Brooks (Fulham Cross Academy and Fulham College) Daniel Upfield (Ark Swift Primary Academy)</p>	<p>Observers Aiden Smith (Governor, Jack Tizard School) (attended remotely)</p>

Officers

Jacqui McShannon (Strategic Director of Children's Services)
Peter Haylock (Director of Education and SEND)
Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education)
Daryle Mathurin (Strategic Lead - Education, Assets and Operations) (attended remotely)
David Abbott (Head of Governance)

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Alex Parker, Jacqueline Munroe, and Mary Berrisford.

2. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 October 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

3. SCHOOLS BUDGET 2023/24 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Peter Haylock (Director of Education and SEND) discussed three major challenges for schools – falling rolls, a significant increase in the number of applications for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and rising costs due to inflation:

- **Falling rolls:** While year 10 places were full this year, numbers were down at the lower stages with fewer children entering the primary school system.
- **Increase in EHCPs:** The borough had experienced a rapid increase in applications for EHCPs, rising from 1200 one and a half years ago to 1500 today. That increase was not reflected in additional funding from the Government and would have a significant impact on the High Needs Block.
- **Rising costs:** Steep increases in inflation was putting further pressure on schools – particularly around energy bills and wage bills. National funding was not matching these additional costs.

Members added that schools were still dealing with the longtail of the pandemic and younger children especially were showing greater levels of need. Peter Haylock said this had come up in school visits and, in response, officers were looking at what funding streams were available to access to pay for additional resources in schools to support areas of acute need. They planned to work with headteachers and nurseries to put a bid together before Christmas. The Chair requested a paper for the next meeting on what had been picked up at a high level and where triage was needed.

ACTION: Peter Haylock

Members asked if officers had any detail of the additional money for schools announced by the Chancellor in the 17 November 2022 budget. Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education) said the detail would come in the new year, but he expected it might come in the form of a supplementary grant, similar to the previous year. The Chair asked for a high-level analysis of the new funding in January.

ACTION: Tony Burton

Tony Burton introduced the consultation responses. He noted that the responses were broadly similar to previous years and feedback on the workshops and the approach taken within the budget constraints was positive. The Chair suggested gathering feedback at the end of the workshops in future, rather than afterwards, hoping it would improve engagement.

Tony Burton noted that maintenance and the rebuilding of schools came up as a key theme at the workshops. He wanted to clarify that school rebuilds were not part of schools capital maintenance or basic needs grant funded schemes. They were self-financing schemes, using the development of private housing and other amenities to fund the building of the school. Peter Haylock said he would speak about the policy at the next headteachers meeting. Jacqui McShannon (Strategic Director of Children's Services)

suggested inviting a member of the Economy department to attend with him to explain the detail of the self-financing approach.

ACTION: Peter Haylock

A member of the forum said some headteachers had asked them if the borough was moving towards the National Funding Formula (NFF) too quickly. Tony Burton said that the alignment to NFF had been undertaken gradually over recent years during the 'soft' transition to a hard NFF from 2023/24. Whilst the proposed budget closely mirrored NFF funding factor rates after area cost adjustment, funding on a per pupil basis year on year was protected via the minimum funding guarantee mechanism in the NFF (albeit in cash terms). He added that in a sense, the NFF was moving towards the borough's funding model, as NFF funding had been increasing nationally in recent years, whilst funding growth in Hammersmith and Fulham has been constrained. This is resulting in the funding premium in Hammersmith and Fulham versus the NFF reducing over time, He noted that local authorities now had very limited local discretion within the NFF and the impacts of local discretionary changes on funding for individual schools was marginal in Hammersmith and Fulham.

A member of the forum asked why pupil numbers were decreasing and if they were attending private schools instead. Peter Haylock and the Chair said there were a number of factors, primarily that the birth rate was declining. The most recent census showed a 23% decline in the number of 0 to 4-year-olds.

4. SCHOOLS BLOCK TO HIGH NEEDS 1% TRANSFER DISAPPLICATION PROPOSAL

Peter Haylock (Director of Education and SEND) presented the report on the disapplication request for 2023/24 to support mitigating the High Needs Block (HNB) budget pressures over the medium term.

The Chair asked where schools could find the plan to mitigate cost pressures on the HNB. Peter Haylock recommended referring to the papers for the 11 October 2022 Schools Forum meeting.

Peter Haylock noted that there had been ongoing conversations with the Department for Education (DfE) about the HNB budget and officers had stressed the importance of protecting the existing good-quality services in schools. He added that it might be useful for some headteachers to attend meetings with the DfE to speak about the on-the-ground-impact of these decisions.

The Chair asked for a short report that outlined the short- and medium-term plan and explained what the consequences would be without the safety valve agreement. He felt it was important for schools to understand the reality of the situation.

ACTION: Peter Haylock / Tony Burton

Members discussed the disapplication proposal and unanimously agreed the recommendation in the report.

RESOLVED

1. That Schools Forum approved the 1% disapplication request from Schools Block to High Needs for the 2023/24 financial year, totalling an estimated £1.154m in 2023/24 based on the provisional funding allocation.

5. DISCUSSION AND DECISION ON MERITS OF LIMITED FALLING ROLLS FUND IN 2023/24

Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education) opened the discussion on the falling rolls fund. He noted five primary schools had expressed interest in accessing funding.

Peter Haylock proposed an independent steering group be set up to look at falling rolls and de-delegated funding requests and then make recommendations to the Forum. A member of the forum suggested using anonymised data to ensure fair decision-making. Another suggested inviting headteachers from another part of the country to look at H&F's requests and H&F's headteachers could look at theirs.

Peter Haylock and Jacqui McShannon are meeting with Cabinet Member for Children and Education to sign-off the school organisation document. Following that, the school organisation paper would be sent out for consultation. Then Peter Haylock would write to schools about the potential membership of the steering group.

ACTION: Jacqui McShannon / Peter Haylock

The Chair asked officers if they could write to headteachers and governors at maintained schools with an analysis of the roll, what funding they qualified for, and an offer of support and guidance.

Daryle Mathurin (Strategic Lead - Education, Assets and Operations) said officers were preparing a data and support pack for schools to help them navigate financial challenges. Peter Haylock added that officers were also looking for consultants to support schools.

The Chair asked that officers sent a letter to schools on falling rolls and that a decision on falling rolls funding be made at the next meeting. A member of the forum requested to see data showing which schools had received de-delegated funds and falling rolls funding year-on-year.

ACTION: Peter Haylock / Tony Burton

6. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT MONITORING QTR1

Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children’s Services and Education) presented the report which provided an update on the 2022/23 quarter 1 budget monitoring position after updates to the allocation received in July 2022 from the Education and Skills Funding Agency. It also included the forecast accumulated Dedicated Schools Grant carry forward deficit position.

The Chair asked if officers were seeing PVI Nurseries closing. Peter Haylock said two were at risk of closing, but they weren’t anymore. The borough had 44 places for every 100 children which was close to the national average of 41 so it was well served in terms of childcare provision.

7. UPDATED SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS AND SCHOOLS FINANCIAL PROCEDURES

Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children’s Services and Education) presented the papers for formal confirmation.

RESOLVED

1. That Schools Forum formally confirmed that the updated Scheme for Financing Schools and Schools Financial Procedures were adopted following Autumn 2021 consultation and following Schools Forum in January 2022.

Any other business

A Schools Forum member asked for more information about notional funding as there were a lot of misconceptions about how it was calculated. Tony Burton explained that it was a part of the NFF, not a local decision, but officers could provide the Department for Education’s operational guidance on Schools Financing in respect of this.

Meeting started: 2.30pm
Meeting ended: 4.00pm

Chair

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