

Schools Forum

Minutes

Tuesday 14 March 2023

PRESENT

Voting members	Non-voting members
Schools Members Claire Fletcher (St Paul's CE Primary) Sam Naismith (Flora Gardens Primary) Kathleen Williams (Holy Cross Primary) Michele Barrett (Randolph Beresford and Vanessa Nursery)	Observers Jacqueline Munroe Freddie Adu (Queensmill) Steven Lewis
Academies Members Gary Kynaston (Hammersmith Academy)	
Non-Schools Members Jane Gleasure (Little People, Early Years PVI)	

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)
Caroline Baxter (Finance Manager)
Phil Tomsett (Head of Early Years)
Daryle Mathurin (Strategic Lead - Education, Assets and Operations)
Satwinder Saraon (Strategic Lead for Education, Early Years and Transformation)
Valerie Irolla (Principal Accountant)
Ozioma Onwochei (Principal Accountant)
David Abbott (Head of Governance)

At the start of the meeting the Chair spoke about the tragic death of Tim Scott from Fulham Cross. He asked that any messages of condolence be sent to Sally Brooks at Fulham Cross Academy Trust.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Daniel Upfield.

Apologies for lateness were received from Clare Fletcher (who entered the meeting at 2.30pm).

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

3. SCHOOLS BLOCK BUDGET 2023-24 - UPDATE

Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education) presented the report that covered the confirmed funding allocations for individual schools' budget shares for the April 2023 to March 2024 period.

Members asked if reserves were factored in to falling rolls applications. Tony Burton confirmed they were as part of the process agreed by the Forum.

Members asked if officers knew how many schools were planning to apply for falling rolls funding. Tony Burton said only two schools had put forward proposals. A sub-group would meet and look in details at the requests – taking level of reserves, sustainability, and compliance with the funding regulations into consideration. The Chair agreed the principles of the approach were appropriate and asked for volunteers for the sub-group. Kathleen Williams, Sam Naismith, and Claire Fletcher volunteered. Tony Burton said he would contact members outside of meeting.

ACTION: Tony Burton

4. FINAL EARLY YEARS BUDGET 2023-24

Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education) presented the report which updated members on the final proposed allocation of Early Years Block funding for 2023/24, based on the January 2022 census numbers and following consultation with the sector in February.

RESOLVED

1. Schools Forum to agree final 2023/24 Early Year budget including:
 - an increase to the 3 and 4 year old offer base rate from £6.39 to £6.48 and proposed hourly rates for deprivation detailed above.
 - Deprivation rates held at 2022/23 levels
 - Additional Quality Supplement to ensure Primary Schools continue to benefit from the funding provided in 2022/23 to meet exceptional teachers pay and pension inflation
 - Special Educational Needs Inclusion fund budget at 2022/23 expenditure levels plus 5%
 - Maintain the help and support for families in need at 2022/23 levels

2. Schools Forum to agree final Early Years Central Services Budget for 2022/23 as detailed above in Table 5 totalling £0.650m.
3. Schools Forum are asked to note the increase in the disadvantaged two year old funding which will be passed to providers in full.

5. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK FUNDING 2023-24 - SPECIAL PROVISION

Caroline Baxter (Finance Manager) presented the report that covered the final High Needs Block allocation for the financial year 2023/24 and changes to the Dedicated Schools Grant conditions prescribed by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in relation to the High Needs Block.

The Chair said it would be useful to get an update from special schools on their understanding of the funding agreement at the next meeting.

ACTION: Caroline Baxter

RESOLVED

The Forum noted the report.

6. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK 2022-23

Peter Haylock (Director of Education and SEND) presented the report which provided an update on the High Needs Block programmes of work and performance against the Department for Education safety valve agreement at Q3. He spoke about the challenges for the High Needs Block, the safety valve agreement, and the work required to ensure the yearly goals were met and the final savings were delivered. He also spoke about the robust local offer in the borough and the success of early intervention work, which officers were looking to expand further.

The Chair said it would be useful to see the savings plan in a risk register format. He also asked to see the impact of the SEND sufficiency review.

ACTION: Peter Haylock

Members raised the gap between funding and cost for SEND children in mainstream provision. Members said this was one of the biggest factors in budget management and was a major risk factor for the high Needs Block. Peter Haylock said officers were aware of the issue and would look at a banding system after the SEND sufficiency data was available.

The Chair said it would be useful for schools to see a three-year timeline with the different steps (SEND sufficiency review, banding etc).

ACTION: Peter Haylock

RESOLVED

Schools Forum noted the current position of the High Needs Block and forthcoming transformation programmes.

7. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT MONITORING QUARTER 3 2022-23

Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education) presented the report that covered the 2021/22 quarter 3 budget monitoring position for the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Regarding the contingency funding for schools in financial difficulty, members asked if any other schools could come forward for it given the surplus. Tony Burton said officers had asked schools to come forward ahead of the budget deadline. There could be more, but those were likely to come through in the next financial year.

Members raised the issue of some schools losing money to the pot and others benefitting. Tony Burton said the money was ringfenced and had to be transparently reported. Once the outturn for the current financial year was known, it would be reported back to Schools Forum with proposals for the balance. He expected it to be repaid in proportion to the amount paid in, as it had been in previous years.

The Chair asked officers to update the report template to make the executive summary and any decisions required clear to readers.

ACTION: David Abbott

RESOLVED

Schools Forum approved the de-delegated allocations for payment, subject to virtual review and approval of a subgroup of the Schools Forum.

8. LBHF PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE FINANCIAL SCHEME

Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education) presented the report that requested approval for an amendment to The Scheme for Financing Schools with respect to the deadline regarding the submission of the detailed breakdown of the planned use of the school's budget share.

The Chair supported the proposal and agreed that it was good practice. He recommended that officers get buy-in from primary school headteachers and business managers. Tony Burton said officers would engage widely.

RESOLVED

That Schools Forum:

1. Reviewed and approved the updated Scheme to be consulted on with all maintained schools (in line with provision 1.4 of the policy).

2. Agreed to the scheme being placed on the agenda for the next Schools Forum meeting so that consultation responses can be reviewed ahead of the final policy being approved and implemented from 2023-24.

9. **DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair requested the following items be added to the work programme:

- Feedback from special schools on their funding
- Communications to key groups and questions back from primary, early years, and secondary schools
- Upskilling schools

ACTION: Tony Burton / Peter Haylock

10. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chair thanked Tony Burton and the finance team for their work, noting that the quality of data and information continued to improve year on year.

Meeting started: 2.00 pm

Meeting ended: 3.30 pm

Chair

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