

MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM
Wednesday, 18 January 2023 at 8.30am
At the PDC Room 101

TYPE	MEMBERSHIP
GOVERNORS	Alan Morton* (AM); Jo Faulkner* (JF); Pip Pinhorn (PP); Abdul Chowdhury (AC). Tracy Edwards (TE)
HEADTEACHERS	Fanoula Smith* (FS), Brenda Landers* (Chair), Paul Woods (PW), Maria Lewington* (ML), Astrid Schon (AS), Kevin Jones* (KJ), Becky Dolamore* (BD), Veronica Armson* (VA), Danny Lye* (DL), Graham Clifford* (GC); Jemima Reilly* (JR); Terry Bennet (TB), Dee Bleach* (DB), Martin Nirsimloo.
Non-School Members	Tracy Smith* -THEP , Alex Kenny* – NEU,
OBSERVERS	Owen O'Regan*; Rachael Mrvos* (Early Years); Jess Milne* (Head of Early Years)
Officers in Attendance	James Thomas (JT)*; Kay Goodacre (KG)*; Farhad Ahmed (FA)*; Nikki Parsons (NP)* Steve Nyakatawa* (SN) and Terry Bryan (TR)*;

The meeting started at 08:35

AGENDA ITEM 1: Welcome and apologies

PRESENTING: Chair

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received and accepted from Abdul Chowdhury, Paul Woods, Pip Pinhorn and Terry Bennet.

AGENDA ITEM 2: Minutes of the last meeting

PRESENTING: Chair

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

Matters arising

- The Lead Member for Education has been invited to attend the Schools Forum. He will not be attending today but will look at attending in the future.
- The Falling Rolls Strategy, High Needs Funding and de-delegation are on the agenda for today's meeting.
- Modelling for schools monitoring and brokering will be covered as part of item 4 on the agenda.
- The next meeting of the Schools Forum will be a virtual meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 3: Update on Dedicated Schools Budget Strategy 2023-24

PRESENTING: Kay Goodacre

Kay Goodacre gave a verbal update on dedicated schools budget strategy.

The schools budget planning stage is coming to an end. The budget planning proforma will be submitted to the DfE by the end of the week. The opening of the school at London Docks has been included as part of the growth and this will use up all the budget allocated for the Growth Fund. Previously, any surplus in the growth fund was transferred to the High Needs block.

The Schools Finance Team have completed modelling of new grants for individual schools and schools will receive indicative budgets soon. The average increase for schools is approximately 2.5%. For schools (2 schools) with consistent pupil numbers the overall increase in funding is 3.5%.

A Member asked what the final increase for teacher salaries was. KG replied that it was an average of 5%.

A Member asked if the Schools Finance Team can carry out modelling for the increase in teacher and support staff pay for individual schools. KG replied that it will be better for schools to do this themselves, based on their staffing profile.

A Member commented that the High Needs Block will need to remain within budget as there will not be any additional funding which can be transferred over. KG responded that there is growth within the HNB and this will be discussed further.

A Member asked, if teachers are awarded a pay rise will this additional cost be funded. KG replied that if a pay rise is agreed, it is unlikely that this will be added in-line. Additionally, previous pay awards were felt to be affordable within the current level of funding and it may well be the same this time.

AGENDA ITEM 4: Vote on Proposed de-delegation 2023-24

PRESENTING: Kay Goodacre

Kay Goodacre gave an update on the proposed de-delegations for 2023-24.

At the last meeting of the Schools Forum, maintained primary and secondary school representatives were asked to agree the proposed de-delegation of services, rates and values. Maintained schools were asked to agree the proposals for de-delegation to facilitate school improvement support.

For 2023-24 the proposal is to maintain the current range of de-delegation of budgets but increase the per-pupil rate by 0.5% which matches the capped limit of the MFG. This will be equal to an additional 8p per pupil.

At the time, Schools Forum members agreed to consult with their colleagues and vote on this at the next Schools Forum meeting. This was subsequently presented to all headteachers at the Full Consultative and headteachers agreed this on the condition that a report is received on this in the summer.

A Member commented that it would be useful for the Executive Head's and Officers to receive the report first before reporting back to the Full Consultative in the summer. KG suggested, and it was agreed, that the report is presented to the Executive Head's and Officers in the Summer and presented to the Full Consultative in the Autumn. **Action.**

A Member commented that previously smaller schools were recognised and accommodated and asked if there is any protection for smaller schools. KG replied that there is no longer any protection for smaller schools in London. The team is working with smaller schools to develop a more supportive model.

KG added that often the support for smaller schools comes from all schools through de-delegated budgets, and sometimes the proposed de-delegations are not relevant to all schools. A Member commented that the presentation on the BASS de-delegation was very helpful and gave the Forum an opportunity to understand the reason for de-delegation and its impact. KG commented that it is becoming more challenging as funding to the LA is reduced. There are some services which the LA is responsible for providing, however, some schools may not want or need them. The LA is responsible for recovering this funding from schools. A Member asked if these are discretionary services. KG replied that these are not discretionary services, and the LA must provide them.

Referring to the Full Consultative meeting where headteachers voted on the proposed de-delegation, Jo Faulkner asked about the process and what opportunity there is for governors who are members of the Schools Forum to be a part of the discussion. KG replied that although headteachers have voted, this has to be agreed at the Schools Forum and governors on the Schools Forum will have the opportunity to vote.

JF stated that at the last meeting, there was an expectation that there would be a further discussion at the next meeting. Governors have not been a part of the discussion which took place at the Consultative meeting. Members discussed what the process could look like, and it was agreed that this would be discussed outside of the Schools Forum to identify a more meaningful and inclusive process. **Action**

A Member asked how the relationship with THEP is maintained and how the

commissioned services and membership-based services are managed. James Thomas replied that the relationship with THEP is managed in 3 interlocking ways:

- 1. Key officers are members of the THEP Board.
- 2. There is the commissioning relationship with THEP.
- 3. Systems Leadership Responsibility is shared with THEP.

JT added that schools in Tower Hamlets schools have a strong culture of collaboration.

Vote on the proposed de-delegation of services, rates and values

Primary school representatives RESOLVED to agree the proposed de-delegation for 2023-24.

Secondary school representatives RESOLVED to agree the proposed de-delegation for 2023-24.

Vote on the proposal for de-delegation to facilitate school improvement support

All school representatives RESOLVED to agree the proposed de-delegation to facilitate school improvement work.

AGENDA ITEM 5: Growth Fund allocations 2023-24

PRESENTING: Nikki Parsons

A report on Growth Fund allocations was circulated to all prior to the meeting.

Nikki Parsons informed everyone that the paper sets out what the Growth Fund can and cannot be used for and all known changes to Tower Hamlets schools in 2023-24. The new free school, Mulberry Academy London Dock, due to open in September 2023 has already been factored into schools budget setting for 2023-24.

Appendix 1 sets out the Proposed Growth Fund Policy for 2023-24. This is the same as the existing policy with changes to point 2 which sets out the DfE minimum average amount for pupil set for that year (2023-24, primary £4,405 secondary £5,715).

Schools Forum were requested the agreed continuation of the growth policy to be used for 2023-24.

Schools Forum RESOLVED to agree the Growth Policy 2023-24.

AGENDA ITEM 6: Early Years Block update

PRESENTING: Jess Milne

A report on Early Years Block Funding 2023-2024 was circulated to all ahead of the meeting. The report included the total funding available to providers in 2023-2024 and the centrally retained budget via the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) as set by the Department for Education through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

The LA is required to consult annually with Schools Forum on the arrangements for Early Years Funding Formula (EYNFF) for participating Early Education and Childcare funded provision. All areas of the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) have had an uplift.

Multiple options and variables were worked through based on projected hours for funding using EYNFF DSG allocations, the new updated formula, previous years' uptake and an assessment of trajectory for the upcoming year.

Jess meets with the DfE monthly and continues to raise the issue of 2-year-old entitlement. A few different options have been modelled to raise the 2-year-old funding higher. The biggest increase is seen in the Disability Access Fund (DAF). Schools are urged to look at children who may qualify for DAF (must be in receipt of Disability Living Allowance).

A Member asked if children with hidden disabilities would qualify for the DAF. JM replied that to be eligible for the DAF children must be in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA). If DLA applications are rejected then schools can help support parents to appeal.

A Member asked if Claudine and her team can support with this as they are involved in assessments. JM replied that support can be provided by the team at the point of registering a child in school. Currently discussions are taking place about equitable support across Early Years.

A Member asked if all children 5 years and under are eligible for the DAF. JM replied that the DAF is only for children in nursery.

Action: A member requested that information about the DAF is included in the Headteacher's Bulletin.

A Member asked if it will be possible to include questions which would capture information relating to any disabilities on the admissions form in order to help release funding sooner. JM replied that there are some boxes currently which relate to this.

Jess will check to see if it is possible to make this clearer.

Action

Currently, the PVI sector can apply for additional funding for children with SEND. This has unwittingly created a challenge for school-based nurseries and maintained nurseries as this is not available to access. EY will work closely with the SEND service and the sector to create a more equitable offer.

Jess shared the proposed and comparative base rates per hour, per child, as detailed in Table 2 of the report. A breakdown of the centrally retained budget (5%) was included in Table 4 of the report.

Vote on proposed central retention.

The Schools Forum resolved to AGREE a centrally retained spend of 5%.

A member asked how Early Years moderation is funded. JM stated that EY moderation used to be the responsibility of SEN, however moderation stopped during the pandemic. Previously this was funded by the DfE. Members discussed previous arrangements for moderation and Jess agreed to check how this was funded previously.

Action: Check how Early Years moderation was funded previously and share findings with the Primary consultative.

Veronica Armson joined the meeting at 9:21.

AGENDA ITEM 7: Update from Working Groups

PRESENTING: Nikki Parsons

A report on the Schools Working party was circulated to all prior to the meeting. Nikki Parsons gave the following update:

The Schools Working Party extended group was established last year, at the request of the Schools Forum, to work alongside the existing Schools Working Party to continually improve the year-end (YE) closure of accounts process. In addition to Schools Finance Officers and School Business Managers (SBMs), the extended group includes representatives from the Headteachers Group and Corporate Accountancy.

The Schools Working Party met twice last term and reported to the extended group. Appendix 1 of the report included a summary of the resulting outcomes following discussions at these meetings and the subsequent work of the group.

The group reviewed a sample of Year End returns. Issues identified from the review were covered in a Housekeeping drop-in session for School Business Managers (SBM) held in December. All SBMs were reminded that all accruals must be evidenced by supporting documents.

The SAGE Systems Year End template has been updated to allow the correct treatment of VAT for trade creditor accruals. This had previously caused issues. A walkthrough of the revised template will be undertaken and reported back to the Working Party before year-end.

Previously, schools had reported that some funding is not received until March resulting in increased accruals. An additional supplementary cash advance payment will be made to maintained schools in February 2023, to passport any grant income and ad hoc requests which have been received since the December quarterly payment. The earlier payment will assist schools with their year-end cashflow and housekeeping.

A final mop-up cash advance payment will still take place at the end of March 2023 for any remaining items.

Monthly payroll reports are now being run and made available earlier to schools to assist with their month-end processes. An updated report is then issued to any schools which have payroll items on the later supplementary payment run. The March payroll will run slightly earlier (on the 23rd March 2023) so that the resulting direct debit transactions will clear the schools bank accounts before year-end.

Schools were encouraged to report any cashflow issues to Schools Finance immediately so that appropriate measures can be taken. Schools Finance are currently working with 10 schools which are projecting a deficit this year.

The year-end returns deadline is Friday 21 April 2023. The external payroll year-end return date will be later.

Workshops will be held remotely on 8-9 February 2023 to go through the revised year-end template and process. All SBMs and finance consultants are invited to attend.

Schools Finance Team will be meeting with the SEN team to formalise a process and timeline for SEN funding which will then be made available to schools.

AGENDA ITEM 8: High Needs Block Modelling

PRESENTING: Kay Goodacre

Kay Goodacre gave a verbal update on the High Needs Block.

A key issue for the HNF block is issuing EHCP statements. The Schools Finance Team will use the 2022-23 numbers to calculate the funding allocation for 2023-24.

AGENDA ITEM 9: Schools Reorganisation

PRESENTING: Terry Bryan

Terry Bryan introduced himself as the Service Lead for Pupil Access and School Sufficiency and gave a verbal update on schools reorganisation and pupil numbers.

There is a sustained reduction in pupil numbers across London as reported by other London Boroughs. If the current trends continue this may lead to eventual need to reduce school places. This picture is reflective of the challenges faced in Tower Hamlets which also continues to see falling rolls in the west of the borough and an increase of pupil numbers in the east of the borough.

A new school will be opened at London Docks which takes up all the Growth fund. Other school development projects will be on hold for this period.

Tower Hamlets will be launching a strategy later this month looking at school places across years. The approach will be to secure provision for all children by identifying needs for new provision, identifying school closures and amalgamations.

The strategy will outline activities to ensure sustainability and will set out support available to schools to sustain pupil numbers. It will include detailed information on options for new models of school collaborations. The strategy will be issued by the end of January for consultation and school leaders will have a period of 2 months to respond.

The LA will be establishing a new strategy group and nominations will be invited from school leaders to be a part of this. The group will be advising and steering the strategy going forward.

A Member asked where the bulk of challenges in relation to school places were being seen. TB stated that a significant number of school places are affected. It was anticipated that there would be no need for amalgamations and closures until 2025, however it now looks like a reduction in places may be needed from 2024. This

strategy will be led by school leaders. The LA will provide a framework and support to schools, but it will be up to schools to decide what they want to do.

A Member asked how long school development projects will be on hold for. TB replied that the council's priorities have been rearranged and housing is a top priority for the Mayor currently. A Member commented that it is important to ensure that the suspension of development work does not impact the quality of education provision. James Thomas replied that the funding of schools capital work is composed of separate streams, some of which are restricted for education and cannot be used for other purposes.

TB added that a clear deadline has not been given for the delayed projects and this will be determined at a later date. Funding specified for schools capital projects cannot be used for projects until the LA has ensured sufficient places for pupils. SN added that the council will ensure that no health and safety risks arise as a result of the projects on hold.

A Member asked if children can be transported across the borough to schools as was done previously. TB replied that transporting children across the borough is not considered a reasonable strategy and is not a long-term solution.

The meeting ended at 9:58.

Next meeting - Dates for 2023-24
Wednesday, 8 March 2023 at 8.30am (Virtual)
Wednesday, 21 June 2023 at 8.30am

Summary of action points

1. Report on the de-delegation to Executive Head's and Officers and Full Consultative. Kay Goodacre
2. Discuss the process of discussing items in a more inclusive manner involving both HTs and governors. Kay Goodacre
3. A member requested that information about the DAF is included in the Headteacher's Bulletin. Jess Milne
4. Ensure questions related to disability on nursery admissions forms are clear. Jess Milne
5. Check how Early Years moderation was funded previously and share findings with the Primary consultative. Jess Milne