

MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM
Wednesday, 29 November 2023 at 8:30am
At the PDC Main Hall

TYPE	MEMBERSHIP
GOVERNORS	Alan Morton; Jo Faulkner; Pip Pinhorn*; Abdul Chowdhury; Tracy Edwards*
HEADTEACHERS	Veronica Armson; Dorothy Asare; Dee Bleach; Graham Clifford; Hodo Dirir*; Becky Dolamore*; Brenda Landers* (Chair); Nicholas Langham*; Danny Lye*; Owen O'Regan* (Vice-Chair); Jemima Reilly; Astrid Schon; Fanoula Smith; Jessica Williams.
Non-School Members	Tracy Smith* -THEP , Natasha Chaudhury* – NEU,
OBSERVERS	Ruth Roberts (THEP), Shoshannah Thompson
Officers in Attendance	Kay Goodacre*; Farhad Ahmed*; Nikki Parsons*; Lisa Fraser*; Pauline Maddison*, Sara Walsingham*.

The meeting started at 08:33 and was not quorate.

AGENDA ITEM 1: Welcome and apologies

PRESENTING: Chair

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received and accepted from Alan Morton, Abdul Chowdhury, Becky Dolamore, Dorothy Asare, Jo Faulkner, Hodo Dirir, Astrid Schon, Veronica Armson, Graham Clifford, and Dee Bleach.

AGENDA ITEM 2: Minutes of the last meeting

PRESENTING: Chair

The minutes of the last meeting were reviewed and will be agreed at the next meeting.

Action point update:

- 2 expressions of interest have been received for the High Need Working Group. This will now be open to the Headteachers Consultative groups.
- Veronica Armson has contacted all special schools regarding the Trade Union Facilities Time charges. Schools have opposed the proposal to be charged for 2023-24 as their budgets are set already. They agreed to be charged for 2024-25 onwards.
- Kay stated that the issue of the office space allocation needed to be raised at the Trade Union Forum (TUF). Natasha Chaudhury informed everyone that the Regional Office has raised this with Pat Chen. Pauline Maddison informed everyone that the next TUF meeting may need to be rearranged due to some

practical difficulties.

AGENDA ITEM 3: Dedicated Schools Budget Strategy 2023-24

PRESENTING: Kay Goodacre

This item was moved to the next meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 4: Update from Early Years

PRESENTING: Jess Milne

Jess Milne gave a verbal update on Early Years.

Information on the DfE allocation is now available although a detailed breakdown is yet to be released. This information will be shared with schools once it is available.

In January, the Schools Forum will be asked to vote on 5% centrally retained, as usual. There is a suggestion from the DfE to reduce the centrally retained to 3%, and consultations for this are currently underway. This is based on the idea that with a greater EY offer, the 3% centrally retained budget will be greater.

A member asked if other LAs also retain 5% centrally. Jess replied that they do. There is no % retention on EL2 and Tower Hamlets awards more than its statistical neighbours.

A supplementary funding grant has been received for the Autumn Term and will be received again in the Spring Term. This will be passed on to schools as a one-off grant.

EL2 funding has increased by £2.43 per child, per hour. Tower Hamlets is one of the 7 boroughs with less EL2 funding and had been lobbying the DfE to increase this, which has resulted in this increase. The uptake of EL2 is low at 58% and this is being promoted throughout the borough. Universal uptake has increased in the PVI sector, but not the school sector, and this may be due to the flexibility of hours offered in the PVI sector.

The SENIF has increased to £250,000. 123 applications have been approved and 19 applications were not approved due to the child being in Reception. The SENIF guidance will be updated to reflect this and to avoid this in future. The EY team is working closely with SEN teams and Family Hubs to see how these children are supported.

Timeframes for the new childcare offers will be shared soon. From April working parents will be able to access 15-hour provisions. From September all schools will start providing wrap-around care; schools will have the 2025-26 year to set up their provision and will need to have it up and running from 2026-27. From September 2025, 30-hour provision is being introduced for children from 9 months. Tower Hamlets has been asked if it can be a part of the pilot for this before 2025 and the Early Years team will consider this.

A virtual session for headteachers has been organised to share more information about Early Education and Childcare Service. Governors on the Schools Forum were also invited to attend the training.

Action: Share the meeting details with governors on the Schools Forum.

A member commented that 8am start for childcare provision can be a late start for working parents. Jess replied that the PVI (Private, Voluntary and Independent) provisions offer greater flexibility in hours, and it may be possible for schools to explore partnerships.

A HT added that their school had attempted to offer longer hours, but they had not had the numbers to make the offer financially viable. The school is currently working with Family Information Service and Terry Bryan to explore options and will share any developments.

Tracy Edwards commented that the uptake of the EL2 offer is quite low. It may be that there were children who would benefit from the offer, but they were not accessing the services. A review of the admissions process may be helpful, feedback received from schools suggests that they struggle with the centralisation of the admissions process. Many families have reported that they do not receive communication or confirmation of application from the admissions team in Tower Hamlets.

AGENDA ITEM 5: Central School Services Block

Presenting: Sara Walsingham

This item was moved to the next meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 6: National Funding Formula – Initial modelling

PRESENTING: Kay Goodacre

Kay Goodacre gave a verbal update on the National Funding Formula (NFF).

Tower Hamlets schools are not affected by the recent issues in the DfE calculations as all schools in the borough are on the minimum funding guarantee.

The final census data clearance will be finalised in December and this will be used to calculate the funding. Indicative figures will be available at the next Schools Forum Meeting. The minimum funding guarantee is based on a per pupil basis and not the total funding. If all factors remain the same, the total funding will increase by 5%.

AGENDA ITEM 7: Update on High Needs and DBV

PRESENTING: Kay Goodacre

Kay Goodacre gave a verbal update on Delivering Better Value or DBV which is a

DfE programme designed for Local Authorities which are overspent on their High Needs Block and administered by consultancy firm Newton Europe. Tower Hamlets is currently in this programme.

DBV is a programme to critically analyse spend and consider where spend might be better utilised and how, it is not a cost-cutting measure and it does not give LAs an instruction to cut its spending, nor does it make suggestions of savings. It is a fast-paced, data driven programme, rooted in co-production.

The programme has supported the LA in exploring what would happen if changes were not made. Workshops suggest that early intervention is an area which needs more focus. It has been found that approximately 42% of cases would not have been escalated if adequate early intervention had been put in place. Other LAs also have similar figures. Tower Hamlets has the highest number of EHCPs and is the second highest spender per EHCP. The LA is now exploring different workflows and has made a grant claim for £1m to support this work.

The Chair commented that there is consensus that early intervention is needed, however setting up an effective early intervention system will require funds. The Chair asked if there was acknowledgement of the funding requirement. Kay replied that setting up early intervention systems will take a few years and it will take several more years before the impact is felt.

The chair added that issues with how EHCPs are banded need to be corrected. Kay replied that benchmarking exercises have demonstrated that currently the bandings are too tight, and the starting point is too high. It is acknowledged that the bandings had not been reviewed for some time.

A member asked if there were links to be made between the work on High Needs and Early Years. Lisa replied that there were a few different things happening in different parts of the borough and there will be some work on consolidating all that is already in place and adding to these. Pauline Maddison agreed that everything is linked and looking at only High Needs is not enough.

The Chair added that it is also important to consider how children were allocated to schools in an equitable manner.

AGENDA ITEM 8: AOB

PRESENTING: Chair

It was agreed to table the decision on whether the March meeting should be cancelled to the next meeting in January.

AGENDA ITEM 12: Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is 17th of January 2024.

The meeting finished at 9:40.

Summary of action points

1. Share the details of the EYFS workshop with governors on the Schools Forum.
2. Include the following agenda items on the January Schools Forum agenda:
Dedicated Schools Budget Strategy and Central School Services Block.