

MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM
Wednesday, 30 November 2022 at 8:30am
At the PDC Room 101

AGENDA

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) and 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
Officers in Attendance	James Thomas (JT)*; Kay Goodacre (KG)*; Farhad Ahmed (FA)*; Nikki Parsons (NP)* Steve Nyakatawa

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 Danny Lye, Abdul Choudhury, Paul Woods, Fanoula Smith, Veronica Armson and Martin Nirsimloo.

AGENDA ITEM 2: Minutes of the last meeting

PRESENTING: Chair

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

Matters arising

- A member asked if there will be an update on the falling rolls strategy. Steve Nyakatawa replied that a revised School Organisation Strategy will be presented to the Cabinet. Schools will be updated on this at the next meeting.

Action: Give an update on the Falling Rolls Strategy in January.

- A member asked if there are any updates on the Schools Funding Formula. Kay Goodacre replied that there is no update at present as the details of how the funding will be distributed has not been received yet. Alex Kenny stated that Trade Unions are working with headteachers and governors to see what can be done to lobby the government. A survey with headteachers was carried out and Trade Unions will look to see how the information can be used

to talk to MPs.

- Steve Nyakatawa confirmed that he will speak to the Lead Member for Education about attending the Schools Forum meetings.
- Kay Goodacre shared a presentation on Falling Roll Fund modelling. The proposed eligibility criteria for the fund are:
 1. The school must have been judged as good or outstanding at their last Ofsted inspection (mandatory)
 - 2a. The total number on roll (excluding early years/post 16) is less than 80% of total planned admission number (PAN) and
 - 2b. The total NOR (excluding early years/post 16) has dropped by at least 5% between last October census and the previous year's October census
 3. The school is not undergoing a planned reduction in PAN, that would have allowed a measured reduction in expenditure
 4. The school is in a planning area where the vacant places are required, and local planning data shows the places will be required within the next 3 - 5 years

Kay said the concern was the fund would not solve the problem of falling rolls and a separate strategy will be needed for that.

The fund would only be able to support Good and Outstanding schools even though a school with a Requires Improvement judgement may be the one needing most support. The modelling considered all schools and found that only one school would be eligible.

Kay stated that it is important for the Forum to consider if this will address the problem of supporting struggling schools. Only one other LA has a Falling Rolls Fund. Any Falling Rolls Fund would be top-sliced.

Alan Morton asked if one of the criteria is that the falling roll will be reversed in a few years. Kay confirmed that this was correct.

The Chair asked if there was any capacity for schools to receive financial and HR support to reorganise and restructure. Tracy Smith replied that THEP had received some funds from the LA last year to support with this and there is some limited funding remaining for this year. Steve also added that the School Reorganising Team is also able to provide some support in this area. Kay added that the Schools Forum can choose to de-delegate funding to support schools.

A Member asked if there is a cut off point when support to a school facing financial difficulty stops. Kay replied that when a school closes some of the costs related to the closure are covered by the LA, not all costs are covered by other schools. Steve added that some work can be done on identifying a sustainable model going forward.

- A proposal on delivering better value will be shared by the High Needs Group before progressing further.

AGENDA ITEM 3: Dedicated Schools Budget Strategy 2023-24

PRESENTING: Kay Goodacre

3.1 De-Delegation

Kay Goodacre asked maintained primary school representatives and maintained secondary school representatives 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.

Schools Forum members agreed to consult with their colleagues and vote on this at the next Schools Forum meeting.

Schools Monitoring and Brokering options

Kay informed the Schools Forum that the Local Authority's role in school improvement has changed in recent years, with the DfE encouraging a school-led approach. They are seeking to replicate experience from the multi-academy trust model in the maintained sector. This transfers the school improvement responsibilities to schools, in anticipation of the strongest schools forming partnerships and supporting those in challenging circumstances. The decision will rest with the maintained school community on how they wish the responsibilities and support to be delivered.

In 2022-23 Schools Forum agreed to de-delegate £158k back to the authority to commission THEP's continued coordination of these functions. With the final ending of the grant Schools Forum is asked to agree one of the following options:

Option A:

Request additional de-delegation to match the reduction in grant (total grant value = £341k), which would allow the authority to maintain the current level of support for school improvement. This model would continue to offer the support outlined in appendix B

Option B:

To continue with a partial de-delegation (2022-23 value for part year + inflation). The authority would need to review the possibility of an increase in LA funds to support the THEP offer, combined with a possible reduction in support offered.

The final option would be to reject any de-delegation and for the school community to establish support mechanisms and accept these responsibilities in full (0 de-delegation).

Schools Forum members agreed to consult with their colleagues and vote on this at the next Schools Forum meeting.

The Chair asked if the Schools Forum decided not to de-delegate this amount, would the LA have the authority to overhaul this decision? Kay replied that if the Schools Forum say no to the de-delegation the LA can apply for a disapplication to the DfE to overturn this decision. James Thomas added that the LA hopes that schools would support this and if they choose not to, then the LA would want to hear the views of schools on why the decision was made before deciding next steps.

A Member asked if the rationale behind this decision is that school improvement work is better done by schools rather than the LA. Kay replied that the DfE is encouraging a school-led approach similar to MATs (Multi Academy Trusts).

A Member asked if there is a clear description of the responsibilities in regard to school improvement. Kay replied that this is a statutory obligation for the LA and not for individual schools. The government is asking schools to consider how they will support the LA to discharge that responsibility in the same model that MATs do.

A Member requested greater clarity about what are the consequences of choosing option B and what cuts would be made.

Tracy Smith added that there are two elements to the service provided by THEP. The first element is the service which schools buy in. The second element is the service commissioned by the LA which all maintained schools will receive. A Member asked if the THEP membership dues would increase. Tracy replied that this would depend on the THEP offer. James added that THEP is running a deficit budget this year.

A Member asked if this will need to be voted on each year and commented that voting every year can be quite destabilising. Kay replied that the Forum can vote on the intention to de-delegate for a number of years, but that decision would need to be formally confirmed each year.

A Member requested some modelling of cost implications for schools. Action: Kay Goodacre.

Use of potential headroom

Kay requested that, as in previous years, once the school's budgets have been fully allocated, growth commitments set aside and the MFG maximised, any surplus (headroom) be directed to support the high needs expenditure.

A Member asked if the headroom can be used for school improvement. Kay replied that the headroom cannot be used for school improvement as it applies to both maintained schools and academies, not just maintained schools.

Kay confirmed that the headroom from last year has not been allocated to schools yet.

Members commented that it is important that the High Needs Block stays within budget. Kay replied that this is a national problem and other LAs are also reporting increased high needs. The HNB budget has increased, and the LA is not proposing to redirect funds from schools to the HNB.

3.2 Falling Rolls Fund

This item was discussed above as matters arising.

3.3 Disapplications

A report on Schools Block Disapplication Requests for 2023-24 was shared with Schools Forum prior to the meeting, outlining the proposals for 2023-24 that have been submitted. School Forum are asked to give a view on these proposals, which will be reported to the DfE.

Kay informed members that the Department of Education (DfE) allows for local authorities to dis apply elements of local formula by seeking agreement from the Secretary of State. The LA has put forward 2 disapplications.

Disapplication A: The school funding formula includes provision for National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) funding automatically. This does not extend to rental costs, for which a disapplication needs to be applied for.

Tower Hamlets currently receive exceptional rents funding for Bygrove Primary School which was last agreed in 2017/18. Such approvals can continue without a further request for 5 years. On this basis the council has been advised that should the LA wish for this to continue, a new disapplication would be required in 2023/24. The rental cost is in the region of £200k per year (2021-22 costs), approximately 12% of the budget share.

Oakland Secondary school is currently negotiating a rental agreement, allowing expansion of the upper school into a vacant school site. The lease agreement for the additional site is expected to be in the region of £150k per year, which represents a possible 2% of the budget share.

Disapplication B: Following the expansion of St Paul's Way Trust to include primary pupils, the funding per pupil built into the Minimum Funding Guarantee has applied the secondary rate to all pupils in the school, including the primary sector pupils. The local authority is requesting a disapplication to adjust the MFG baseline and resulting funding levels, using a calculator tool issued by the DfE for just this purpose.

The adjustment would be applied to the 2022-23 base rate used in the 2023-34 formula. On the current modelling the impact would be a reduction of -£28.92 per pupil, or -£44,764 in the value of the MFG.

The Schools Forum was asked to agree the 2 disapplications.

Tracy Edwards asked about nurseries which occupy rented premises and if they would be eligible for support. Kay Goodacre replied that only 5 to 16 provisions are eligible. Tracy replied that previously the nursery school had received support with the rent but this is no longer the case. Kay replied that there may have been a historical arrangement in place.

Schools Forum AGREED the disapplications.

AGENDA ITEM 4: Schools Census and Early Years Data Checks

PRESENTING: Nikki Parsons

A report on Schools Census and Early Years Data checks was shared with the Schools Forum prior to the meeting.

Nikki Parsons informed everyone that the paper was for information and provided an overview of the financial data checking process undertaken by the Local Authority of the termly Schools Census and Early Years data collections, to identify potential errors which could lead to subsequent funding implications for schools and academies.

Nikki stated that points 3.8 and 3.11 were the main errors identified during this process and could have resulted in a loss of £62k and £470k in total. These errors arose as a result of schools using incorrect codes.

A Member asked if it is the responsibility of the Schools Finance Team to check this. Nikki replied that it is the responsibility of the school to submit their data. The Schools Finance Team does an element of checking to ensure that schools and the LA are receiving the correct funding.

AGENDA ITEM 5: Exceptional High Needs Funding Proposal

PRESENTING: Kay Goodacre

A report on Exceptional High Needs Proposal was shared with the Schools Forum prior to the meeting.

Kay Goodacre asked the Forum to consider how the funding retained from the Schools Block for exceptional High Needs Funding is allocated.

Kay presented 3 possible ways of allocating funding:

1. Based on total SEN numbers
2. Based on total EHCP numbers
3. Based on additional backdating of Current EHCP funding

Maria Lewington joined the meeting at 9:40

Kay stated that this would be a one-off agreement.

Terry Bennet commented that even before a child receives an EHCP they still have needs and schools still provide support for them, therefore the third option is a good option.

Tracy Edwards added that nurseries are also facing a lot of pressures. Kay replied that the LA can explore how early intervention can be provided before EHCPs are received. Dee Bleach commented that nurseries cannot access Payment During Assessment (PDA).

Members commented that there is a strong argument for backdating before EHCP funding is received and this would be an opportunity to recognise the disproportionate numbers in some schools.

Alan Morton stated that it can be difficult to agree something abstract and some modelling would be useful.

Kay Goodacre agreed to present some modelling at the next meeting in January.

The Schools Forum AGREED to fund based on the third option of backdating EHCP waiting times.

AGENDA ITEM 6: CSSB

PRESENTING: Kay Goodacre

A report on the agreement of Central Schools Services Block 2023-24 was circulated prior to the meeting.

Kay Goodacre asked Schools Forum to agree the proposed budgets in principle, allowing budget setting to proceed.

The Schools Forum AGREED the proposals for CSSB allocation set out in the report.

AGENDA ITEM 7: Meeting times and presentations

PRESENTING: Kay Goodacre

Kay Goodacre suggested that the Schools Forum meetings are alternated between mornings and evenings to make it easier for governors and other non-headteacher members. Kay also suggested that virtual and hybrid meeting options could be considered.

Members discussed the options and effectiveness and engagement in hybrid and virtual meetings. It was also noted that calendars get booked up and most schools hold their GB meetings in the evenings and it may be difficult to find a day when everyone is free.

A suggestion was made for allowing substitutes if a member is unable to attend a meeting. A member commented that it can take a long time to get familiar with the processes of the Schools Forum and someone new may not be able to participate and contribute in the same way.

The Chair, Farhad Ahmed and Kay Goodacre will discuss these options and share a proposal at the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 10:04

Summary of action points

- Lead member to join Schools Forum. SN
- Give an update on the Falling Rolls Strategy in January. SN/TB?
- Present modelling of High Needs Funding allocation based on backdating EHCP waiting times. KG
- Prepare modelling for schools monitoring and brokering options. KG.
- Prepare a proposal for alternating meetings online/in person – FA/BL/KG
- Vote on Proposed de-delegation 2023/24 primary maintained – add as agenda item at phase meetings – agree on statement on internet to continue for three years- kay to give indicative costing