School forum minutes 2022

Date of Meeting: 9 March 2022

Venue: Virtually via Zoom

Chair: Fanoula Smith

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| **TYPE** | **MEMBERSHIP** |
| GOVERNORS | Alan Morton (AM)\*; Jo Falkner (JF)\*; Pip Pinhorn\* (PP); Abdul Chowdhury (AC) |
| HEADTEACHERS | Fanoula Smith (Chair)\*, Brenda Landers\* (BL), Liz Figuerelo\* (LF); 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); Dee Bleach\*(DB) |
| Non-School Members | Kim Arrowsmith (PVI EYs Providers); Alex Kenny\* (NEU Trade Union Rep); and Tracy Smith (THEP)\*. |
| OBSERVERS | Gabriela Salva-Macallan\*; Asma K Begum\*; |
| Officers in Attendance | James Thomas (JT); Kay Goodacre (KG)\*; Farhad Ahmed (FA)\*; Jess Milne (JM); Pat Chen (PC); Jess Milne; (JM); Sara Walsingham\* (SW); Steve Nyakatawa\* (SN); Nikki Parsons\*(NP); Terry Bryan\* (TB) |

*The meeting started at 8:31am.*

## AGENDA ITEM 1: Welcome and apologies for absence

PRESENTING: Chair

Apologies were received from James Thomas and Abdul Choudhury.

## AGENDA ITEM 2: Minutes of the last meeting

PRESENTING: Chair

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as an accurate record subject to the following amendments:

* Pip Pinhorn was present at the meeting.
* page 4 - the THEP delegation rate is 5.6% (5.49 +2%).
* agenda item 10 – AK (Alex Kenny) should be changed to AM (Alan Morton).

A member requested a written clarification be issued to all about what has been agreed.

**Action. KG.**

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## 2.2 Matters arising

School improvement - a member asked does the LA not have responsibility for school improvements. KG replied that in the response to the consultation for removing the grant, it was recommended that this is funded through de-delegation. The consultation result was published a few weeks before the meeting. School Improvement is the responsibility of the LA but the expectation is that this would be funded through de-delegation.

A member requested that all resolutions made by the Schools Forum are sent out to all schools as a clarification about what has been agreed.

**Action. KG**

Tracy Smith stated that the de-delegation is funding the statutory function of the LA. The Chair stated that although Headteacher’s are in agreement with this, this is an agreement for one year only and the LA needs to identify ways of funding their own responsibility and to ensure that this is not a permanently de-delegated service.

Steve Nyakatawa added that the LA is in discussions about 2023-24 funding and how to go forward. The council has set a 1-year budget due to unknowns.

A member added that HTs value the work of THEP.

Trade Union Facilities Time – a report will be presented at the June meeting of the Schools Forum.

Early Year Funding Block - Information about completing the census has been included in the Headteacher’s Bulletin. An update on the 5% EY centrally retained funding for 2022-23 was also included in the Headteacher’s Bulletin.

School Balances – a report will be presented in September/October 2022.

## AGENDA ITEM 3: School Grants

PRESENTING: Sara Walsingham

Schools Forum NOTED

* This paper outlines the administration arrangements and asks the School Forum to agree the grants administration arrangements.
* Major grants are paid as estimates, following confirmation the amount is adjusted and reconciled at the end of the financial year to ensure the grant is fully transferred.
* The remaining ad-hoc grant payments are made in the quarterly schedule following receipt of the income.
* Those grants the Local Authority anticipates to be continuing in 2022-23 were listed in the paper with values to be updated.
* The LA are responsible for pass-porting several grants to schools as issued by the government under the Department for Education. The grants are determined using government criteria largely based on data provided by schools, usually via school census’. These are generally agreed at the beginning of each period.
* The revenue recurring grants are paid through monthly advances.
* Details of all revenue recurring grants and non-recurring grants were included in the paper.

The Schools Forum AGREED the grants administration process.

A member asked which grants are coming to an end. SW replied that all grants other than Covid grants will be continuing. Announcements are usually made throughout the year.

Kay Goodacre added that all schools have been sent a calculator to calculate the amount of School Supplementary Grant they will receive. This is a substantial additional grant and has been introduced to provide support for the costs of the Health and Social Care Levy and wider costs.

The Chair asked KG to make this known to all Headteachers at the Full Consultative Meeting.

**Action. KG**

A member asked if there will be a grant to cover the recommended rise in the teacher’s pay award. KG replied that there has been no indication of this from the DfE. Even if schools received a grant, it would take a long while to get an indication of what that may be. KG also added that the teacher’s pay increase is only a recommendation at present and hasn’t been finalised.

## AGENDA ITEM 4: Maternity Scheme

PRESENTING: Nikki Parsons

Nikki Parsons presented the report on the Maternity Scheme.

For some years, London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) have offered schools the option to purchase an annual Service Level Agreement (SLA) to join the Schools’ Maternity Pooling Arrangements Scheme. These pooling arrangements were originally set up at the request of schools to reimburse for the supply (or other) rate for designated permanently employed staff on maternity leave.

Participation and buy in to the service has declined over recent years. Over the last 2 years, the scheme is paying out in claims more than it is collecting in contributions. If this trend were to continue, there is a risk to all schools participating in the scheme as this shortfall would have to be met.

There are a large number of companies offering staff absence insurance schemes. The Schools Finance Team is seeking agreement from Schools Forum to run a four-week consultation with schools on the intention to withdraw the Schools Maternity Pooling Arrangements from the 2023-24 financial year. A report will be presented on the consultation at the next Schools Forum meeting.

The Chair added that schools do buy services from other schemes as they receive a lot of additional services.

The Chair asked if it will be possible for the LA to recommend some companies and if good rates can be obtained for mass procurement from a large number of schools? Nikki Parsons replied that the Department for Education provides an approved framework for insurance and related services for public sector schools which includes staff absence insurance.

The Chair suggested that it may be useful to have a comparison of what the rates would be for the LA scheme and through another provider, thus enabling schools to make an informed response. KG stated that originally the scheme was intended as a mutual scheme, however it has gone from having a lot of schools buying in to a having very small number of schools, most of which have a younger staff community and a higher number of maternity leaves. This information and warning would need to be included with any comparison.

As this scheme is for maintained schools, only maintained school Headteachers and governors voted.

The Schools Forum AGREED to run a consultation with schools.

## AGENDA ITEM 5: Update on Education Capital Programme

PRESENTING: Terry Bryan

An update on the Education Capital Programme was circulated before the meeting. The report set out the Local Authority’s statutory duties in relation to ensuring sufficient school places. The paper sets out what the capital programme covers and how it is funded.

The report outlined specific activities for school expansions. In the east of the borough there is a need to increase provision and projects have been identified as listed below:

* New school at Wood Wharf, in the Isle of Dogs. Mulberry Schools Trust has been appointed as the new school provider.
* St Saviour’s Primary School will be expanded to incorporate an additional 1FE. The LA is required to expand school places in areas of growth but also needs to consider the school’s performance and popularity with the local community.
* A SEMH Resources Base is being developed at Ben Jonson School.
* There are some plans for improvements to existing school’s estates with a significant programme of work at George Green School.

Further funding will be identified to fund future schemes to meet projected need and to improve the school estate as part of the regular review process.

A member enquired how many pupils can be accommodated at the ASD provision at Hermitage School and the SEMH provision at Ben Jonson School. Terry Bryan replied that Hermitage school can accommodate 12 fulltime pupils or 24 part-time pupils. Ben Jonson School can accommodate 12 pupils in its SEMH resource base.

A member asked which former school sites are being disposed? Terry Bryan replied that when the LA closes a school, it makes a decision about the site’s future use. If the LA determines that a school site is unlikely to be required in the future then it has to decide if it can be used for another purpose or if it can be disposed to generate capital receipts for re-investments. The two sites referred to for disposal in the report are the former Shapla and Cherry Trees sites. The LA requires the permission of the DfE before disposal.

Referring to a drop in pupil numbers in the west of the Borough a member asked for clarity on PRAG and reassurance that there will be some strategic support in planning next steps for affected schools. Terry Bryan stated that the LA’s priority are the issues around sufficiency as this is a statutory responsibility. A white paper has been published recommending schools to work in clusters and to establish federations. The LA wants to facilitate schools working together to achieve that and the intention is to provide support to schools. It is still not clear if there will be a further decline in pupil numbers.

Terry Bryan stated that there have been a number of factors which have impacted pupil numbers in the borough. There has been a period of welfare reform which have affected migration levels in the borough, there is now net negative migration at primary school level and more children are moving out than moving in. At secondary school level it is the opposite. There has been an impact from Brexit, and impact from the change in the availability of housing stock. Birth rates in Tower Hamlets are also falling.

A member asked if it would be possible for the LA to present some initial thoughts on their response to the white paper at the next Schools Forum meeting. Terry Bryan replied that the LA was planning to issue a response to the report progressing the ambitions from the work by Dr Helen Jenner. By June the LA will be in a position to say what its response may be. It is important to consider the financial sustainability of schools.

A member asked about the future plans for expanding accommodation at London East Alternative Provision to facilitate a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and asked if there is increasing demand for places. Terry Bryan replied that the PRU is now called London East Alternative Provision (LEAP) and it has been identified that there is a higher presentation of children in the primary sector who are struggling to remain in mainstream schools and need more support including access to some external provision. Therefor there is an intention to expand the primary provision at LEAP.

In relation to falling rolls, a member asked if the LA would stop rehousing families outside of the borough. Terry Bryan replied that the LA is aware that there is a challenge in meeting some of the social housing requirements for families and in some circumstances it has been necessary to rehouse families out of the borough. The LA does have plans for a number of new housing developments.

The Chair clarified to the SF that PRAG had agreed that the LA could have the power to generate capital reinvestments through schools which were shut down, and this is also the DfE position.

The Chair also directed members to a data dashboard report on SEMH, where the needs for each area of SEND were identified. Terry Bryan added that the provision at LEAP is not only about SEMH but also supports students who would struggle to remain in mainstream provision. The Chair added that there is less provision for primary aged pupils and it will be important for this to be brought back to the Schools Forum. The Chair asked if Dr Helen Jenner will be speaking to school groups about this. Terry Bryan replied that Dr Jenner has said that she was available to support schools or group of schools who wish to commission her services and the LA is also available to support schools.

Terry Bryan added that there is separation between the LA’s statutory duties in relation to ensuring enough school places and school sustainability, even though both are related.

The Chair asked Terry Bryan to elaborate on potential school places for pupils from refugee families. Terry Bryan stated that report will be circulated to Headteachers which looks at school rolls and the factors which impact that including migration. Terry reiterated that Tower Hamlets is still a borough with net negative migration in the primary sector. Even with significant number of pupils coming in, the net migration is negative, and it is unlikely that there will be a significant increase. Also there is a significant challenge in meeting the needs of some of the new arrivals who come with significant requirements for additional support.

A member commented that the members understanding of the white paper, which has been referred, is that there will be recommendations for schools to go beyond federating and look at joining Multi-Academy Trusts (MAT). There will need to be lots of discussions about the implications of this for Tower Hamlets and to what extent MATs can be contained within a Tower Hamlets border. KG commented that there may be an opportunity for a LA led MAT.

Steve Nyakatawa added that the LA is well placed for providing local leadership in terms of pupil place planning, managing risk and managing relationships. In terms of moving forward, once the white paper is published a wider education strategy will need to be developed.

## AGENDA ITEM 6: High Needs Block Update

PRESENTING: Kay Goodacre

A paper on the High Needs Block update was shared with members prior to the meeting and was for information only.

Kay Goodacre updated the Schools Forum that the High Needs Block working party needs to be reconstituted. This will be brought back to the next meeting for agreement.

## AGENDA ITEM 7: Any other business

PRESENTING: Chair

A member asked if there will be an opportunity to discuss the white paper at the next meeting. The Chair added that this can be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

## AGENDA ITEM 8: Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Schools Forum will take place on Wednesday, 22 June 2022.

*The meeting ended at 9:59.*

Chair’s Signature: Date:

## Summary of action points

1. Written clarification issued to all regarding the agreed delegation to THEP. KG
2. Remind all Headteachers that they have been sent a calculator for the Schools Supplementary Grant. KG
3. A summary of all resolutions made by the School’s Forum to be sent to all schools. KG