

SOUTHWARK SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

THURSDAY 9th DECEMBER 2021

14.00 to 15.30

Via Zoom

- 1. Attendance and Apologies:** - See Annex A -
- 2. Quorum:** The Clerk confirmed that the meeting was quorate - Note that the meeting was conducted via Zoom virtual technology.
- 3. The Chair welcomed newly elected members**
- 4. Declaration of Interests**

Members were asked to declare any pecuniary or other interests they might have that were greater than the interests of other members of the Schools Forum in any matter on the agenda for discussion. None were declared.
- 5. Minutes of the Meeting of 7th October 2021**
 - 5.1 These were agreed for accuracy and there were No Matters Arising not already on the agenda.
- 6. Dedicated Schools Grant - 2021-22 Budget Monitor**
 - 6.1 This report, circulated with the agenda, gave the latest in-year budget monitoring for the 2021-22 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and provided an update to members on the latest school finance events including a request to amend the terms of reference of the Schools' Financial Panel.
 - 6.2 The report showed that the DSG was on track with a balanced in-year budget. However, the projected outturn is showing a net deficit of £20.595m which has accumulated from previous years. This will need updating for any changes to pupil numbers from the various censuses.
 - 6.3 The Maternity Fund was still projecting an underspend. Although, with the number of schools, 17 at the moment, in deficit and likely to rise, the Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund is under pressure. This will require a process for re-deploying staff as more schools close - the LA will be submitting a paper with proposals to a future meeting.
 - 6.4 The proposal for merging the Schools Organisational Group with the Headteachers Schools Strategy Board was noted.
 - 6.5 The amendment to the Terms of Reference requiring that applications to the Financial Difficulty Panel should be submitted to the Local Authority 10 working days before the panel meeting and that Panel members to receive the papers 5 working days before the meeting was agreed.

All other items of the report were noted.
- 7. Scheme for Financing Schools**

- 7.1 This report presented the outcome of the local authority's consultation with maintained schools on its changes to the Southwark's statutory Scheme for Financing Schools for 2022-23 which defines the relationship between a Local Authority and its maintained schools.
- 7.2 The LA said that the proposed changes were predominantly required by the changes to the DFE template and in the majority supported by those who had responded to the consultation (10 responses). It was confirmed that the LA offered zoom information sessions to schools as part of the consultation process. The main query raised by schools related to funding staff redundancies and that will be picked up by the LA with a review of the current process as mentioned in 5 above.
- 7.3 As a consequence all LA proposals will proceed. The revised scheme for 2022-23 was agreed by the maintained schools and PVI representatives of the Schools Forum,.

8. Dedicated Schools Grant - High Needs Budget

- 8.1 This report, previously circulated with the agenda, gave details of the high needs management plan and the current activities and the milestones that need to be met to ensure the required savings are delivered. In addition, the Local Authority was seeking the Schools Forum's views on its proposal to consult schools on a potential high needs block transfer of £1.9m.
- 8.2 The Local Authority, in its introduction, to the report said that it was fully aware that many schools were struggling in the current financial climate and so wished to move as much funding into the Schools Budgets as it can, and at the same time, take account of the impending introduction of the National Funding Formula (NFF).
- 8.3 The High Needs Sub Group of the Schools Forum will scrutinise the detail of the Plan and the Director paid thanks to that group that had done an excellent job so far in actually reducing the spend in the High Needs Block to the extent that it was an in-year balance. But, of course, with a high deficit brought forward from previous years.
- 8.4 The LA said that the government settlement was expected soon and should be at the high end of the range and so should only require an additional £1.2m to be transferred from the Schools Block, which is less than last year, However, exercising caution, the LA would like to seek £1.9m that is £0.7m more as a precaution should the settlement not be as beneficial as it believes it should be.
- 8.5 This additional £0.7m would require the LA consulting all schools, whereas the £1.2m represents 0.5% of the Schools Budget and so the Schools Forum can authorise that transfer without the need to consult. The LA believed that the Plan was realistic and that the High Neds Sub Group will be looking at a lot of the preparations the LA are putting in place as the savings are scheduled to kick in from September 2022 onwards.
- 8.6 Following a question the LA confirmed that the current deficit is held on the Council's Balance Sheet. The LA was still in discussion with the DFE concerning a potential "Write Off" of the deficit, but would be subject to stringent decisions. The 1.9m would be a Safety Mechanism for 2022-23.

8.7 As it was previously agreed that this item along with those on De-delegated budgets and the schools funding formula were all inter-dependent of each other then at this stage the Schools Forum members voted to Note the report.

9. Dedicated Schools Grant - 2022-23 Retained Budgets

9.1 This report that was circulated with the agenda was seeking views on the Local Authority's proposals for centrally retained and de-delegated budgets of the 2022-23 budget of the schools block.

9.2 The LA explained that again it was seeking to increase the funds available to schools as the borough had experienced a 3% reduction in pupils (330) compared to the previous year. There are two types of funds falling into the category of retained budgets. One which is a top slice of the funds to be distributed to schools and the second, after distributing the funds to schools to, then, take the funds back to run fund certain service etc being provided by the LA, known as De-delegated.

9.3 The LA then explained those that would be Top Sliced from the quantum available to distribute - these covered the Growth Fund and the Falling Rolls Fund.

9.4 The Growth Fund it is used to contribute to the cost of running of bulge classes which do not permanently increase all year groups and are only funded when need has been identified and agreed with the LA. Some schools are still expanding in the Secondary sector, although most of the funding for this is built into the schools funding formula by using estimated pupil numbers. It is proposed to keep a small amount (£100k) as an emergency provision.

9.6 The Falling Rolls Fund, the criteria for which is set by national regulations although there is limited scope to adjust them locally. The current level of the fund is £200k, with the schools re-organisation programme, some schools in Southwark will start to see their pupil rolls rise. The impact is largely unknown but it is proposed to increase the fund to £300k.

9.7 The funds for De-delegated services for 2022-23 are £3.136m which is less than the £3.231m needed for 2021-22. In broad terms there is a reduction of £198k for maternity cover and an increase of £184k in the contingency - schools in financial difficulty.

9.8 The other major change in De-delegated services was to increase the amount taken for School Improvement Services as the grant that partly funds the service from central government (the Schools Brokering and Monitoring Grant) is being halved.

a) Option 1 – Increase de-delegated fund

Increase the de-delegated amount from schools, we would need to increase the amount from the current £3,300 to £6,300 in 2022-23 and in 2023-24 to £9,300.

b) Option 2 – To use, as a source of funding, the amount de-delegated for Family Early Help (FEH) as an alternative

9.9 The consequence of option1 would be an increase from £198k to £363k. It was noted that the FEH also received funding from other parts of the Dedicated Schools Grant and the Council.

9.10 There were differing views by members of the School Improvement Service and one member believed that reducing the FEH would be detrimental. The Director explained that there had not been the time to explore the full range of options nor carry out a full analysis of the impact.

9.11 Following discussion, the Schools Forum agreed that there was insufficient detail to come to a conclusive and informed view especially as the final decision will be taken at the meeting of the 13th January 2022.

9.12 The review now taking place of the Central Services and the Education Support Services was noted.

10. Dedicated Schools Grant - 2022-23 Schools Funding Formula

10.1 The report, previously circulated, outlined the anticipated issues relating to the 2022-23 schools funding formula and sought views on how to proceed with possible changes to a number of formula factors.

10.2 Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG): The LA took members through the mechanism setting the rate and the fact that by not deducting so much from the Schools Block to transfer to the High Needs Block gave a higher level of funding available to distribute by the formula factors. For the 2021-22 financial year, regulations allow the MFG protection rate to be set between plus 0.5% and plus 2%.

10.3 As the DSG allocations are not published until later in December, the amount for distribution to schools is not yet known. However, and with that caveat in mind, current estimates indicate that there may be sufficient funding to set an MFG at the maximum of plus 2%.

10.4 Being able to afford the plus 2% figures, does not necessitate setting the MFG at that rate. A lower MFG could be set and the funding this freed up could be targeted at a priority area or areas. However, the DfE have expressed an expectation that as national funding is guaranteed to increase by 2%, MFG rates should reflect this.

10.5 Following discussion, the Schools Forum supported the view that the MFG which is a cushioning mechanism, should be set at 2%, subject to the funding announcement, to maximise the financial support to schools and moving Southwark's formula close to the National Funding Formula (NFF).

10.6 Free School Meals (FSM): this was a new factor to Southwark but an existing one in the National Funding Formula (NFF) and is not to reflect social deprivation, which is done by Ever6 and IDACI Child Poverty Index, but the cost of providing a free school meal.

10.7 The LA had modelled moving funds from the Ever6 factor to the FSM factor and this can be done without altering the total funding the vast majority of schools get just how they get it. This was supported by the Schools Forum.

10.8 Pupil Mobility: again, not previously used by Southwark but within the NFF. It provides funding to reflect schools additional costs for admitting pupils outside of the standard admission times e.g. not in the September of the school year. If applied in 2021-22 it would have distributed £120k and may distribute around £160k in 2022-23 a relatively small amount overall. This was supported by the Schools Forum.

10.9 National Funding Formula Rates and Proportions: it was agreed that once the Mobility and Free School Meals factors had been considered, the remaining funding available to be

distributed be allocated to those areas of the formula where the funding rates are below the NFF. This will avoid some turbulence in the funding system when or if the NFF is introduced.

11. Dates of Further Meetings for 2021/22 -

13 January 2022 via zoom, 10 March 2022, 16 June 2022 agreed media yet to be determined

**Annex A
SCHOOLS FORUM ATTENDANCE SHEET**

9th December 2021

VOTING MEMBERS

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PRESENT
Janice Babb	Primary School Headteacher (RC)	Yes
Susannah Bellingham	Primary School Headteacher (Com)	Yes
Pia Longman	Primary School Headteacher CofE	Apologies
Sarah Bowmer	Primary School Headteacher (Com)	Yes
Trevor Cunningham	Primary School Governor (Com)	Yes
James Black	Primary School Governor (VA)	Apologies
Rebecca Sherwood	Nursery School Headteacher	Apologies
Kelly Hawker	Special School Headteacher	Yes
Nicola Howard	Early Years – Private/Voluntary and Independent Settings	Yes
Steve Morrison	Academy	Yes
Nick Tildesley	Academy (Primary)	Yes
Declan Jones	Academy	No
James Wilson	Academy	Apologies
Steph Lea	Special School Academy	Yes
Yomi Adewoye	Pupil Referral Units	Yes
Sister Anne-Marie Niblock	Secondary School Headteacher	Yes
Vacant	FE SEN	Awaiting nomination from LA
Vacant	Diocesan Boards	Awaiting Nomination
Betty Joseph	Trade Unions	Yes

Senior Officers in Attendance

Nina Dohel	Yes
E Nolan	Yes
Dave Richards	Yes with colleagues
Yvonne Ely	Yes with colleagues
David Cross	Clerk