

THE SOUTHWARK SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING**7th October 2021**

Held remotely via Zoom

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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. **Governance**
 - 3.1 Election of Chair: The clerk called for nominations, Sister Anne Marie Niblock was nominated, there being no other nominations, was duly elected.
The Chair then took the meeting.
 - 3.2 Election of Vice Chair: The Chair called for nominations, Janice Babb was nominated, there being no other nominations, was duly elected.
 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 17th June 2021**
 - 4.1 These were agreed for accuracy and there were No Matters Arising not already on the agenda.
 5. **Dedicated Schools Grant- 2021-22 Budget Monitor**
 - 5.1 This previously circulated report provided the Schools Forum with the budget monitor as at 30th September 2021 for the 2021-22 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and provided an update to other financial matters.
 - 5.2 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. Concern was expressed by the Schools Forum that at least one school was miscounting pupils who are recently arrived Afghanistan refugees - the LA said it was aware of the situation.
 - 5.3 It was reported that the Council's internal auditors, BDO, had, due to COVID-19, switched to looking at a few schools assessing the design and operational effectiveness of the controls at each school to mitigate key risks. The EFGA School Resource Management Advisers had reported on 3 schools with 4 more due. It was raised that academies are audited annually and LA schools less frequently. The LA explained that although a statutory requirement on the LA, it obtains a contribution from schools as a de-delegated budget (£36k) and are constrained by cost to schools budgets. However, a risk assessment of each school is carried out.

- 5.4 The schools accounts are consolidated into the Council's own accounts, the LA said that it was tightening up the process regarding deficit recovery with Recovery Plans required for up to 5 years - however as schools address current falling rolls and problems there are further reductions as pupil numbers are still dropping. The issue of TTO support staff costs is still a risk that the LA is following up.

The report was noted.

6. Falling Pupil Rolls

- 6.1 There were no papers for this item prior to the LA presentation of the current position.
- 6.2 The Director explained that there was a Council Place Planning report going to Cabinet on the 19th October 2021 on the actions proposed to address this position. The presentation showed how rolls had fallen over time and the impact on the different parts of the borough. Later on the agenda is the LA's proposal that a member of the Schools Forum joins a LA working group looking at the financial implications of the roll drop and reporting back to the Schools Forum.
- 6.3 As a rule LAs should operate allowing for its primary school places being around a 10% surplus to immediate need - Southwark is currently operating at 18%. There are a lot of 1FE schools in the borough and both Lewisham and Lambeth have excess forms of entry but lower than Southwark.
- 6.4 The LA has already applied PAN capping and proposing amalgamations and supporting closures and collaborations. The surplus capacity is around 10 FE but the reduction cannot happen instantly and will need to be planned over the next few years and will need involvement of the Diocesan Boards.
- 6.5 The Schools Forum said that the current position for primary schools has implications for secondary schools in 5 years time and indeed some schools are seeing the impact now. There are of course some schools that are over subscribed or close to it and is a London wide issue that needs a London wide strategy to address, this is being looked by London Councils and the Regional School Commissioner.
- 6.6 Details of the Planning Areas and the schools in each will be circulated separately.

7. Briefing on the Government consultation: *Fair school funding for all: completing our reforms to the National Funding Formula*

- 7.1 This report previously circulated with the agenda gave the Local Authority's response to the Department for Education (DfE) consultation; "*Fair school funding for all: completing our reforms to the National Funding Formula*". This sets out the government's proposals to move towards a fully delivered hard National Funding Formula (NFF). The consultation was launched on 8 July 2021, with responses due by 30 September 2021.
- 7.2 It was noted that due to the timing of the consultation, it was not possible to consult with the Schools Forum on the Council's response prior to it being submitted.
- 7.3 The Local Authority believe that local authorities are in the best place to identify local needs and that local flexibility is key. This is not supported by the government's proposed Hard NFF. Appendix B to the report gave the prescribed funding factors and the proposed funding values with a comparison to what the current Southwark Funding Formula provides.

- 7.4 There were still issues around the Minimum Funding Guarantee and if applied at what level? The LA reported that it is unlikely that NFF will come in prior to 2024-25 and the Growth Fund for popular schools would then only apply to academies. There were also concerns over Federations not being able to pool funds. It was also noted that schools could move to the academic year for funding purposes, as are academies.

The report and consultation response was noted.

8. High Needs Management Plan

- 8.1 This report, previously circulated, gave the 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 so that the High Needs Block is back into balance.
- 8.2 The Director thanked the High Needs Group for their work with the LA on drawing up and now monitoring the proposals and activities of the Plan. The LA reported that the DfE Provisional Settlement for 2022-23 was more generous than anticipated and the 11% increase will assist with achieving a balanced budget.
- 8.3 The Schools Forum asked why the Plan was not showing the financial impact to date of the various individual work streams and will this be regularly reviewed? - the LA reported that the savings were not due to start until September 2021 and the LA is committed to bringing a regular progress monitor to the Schools Forum and the role of the High Needs Sub Group will be to monitor in detail the progress being made.

The report was noted.

9. Balance Control Mechanism

- 9.1 The report, previously circulated, gave details of 14 schools who had exceeded the balance control mechanism capping limit and looked at each school individually to ascertain the reasons and inform whether to remove their excess balance.
- 9.2 Following comments from the Schools Forum, the LA has now developed a mechanism that will remove excess balances from maintained schools. Currently schools have a threshold, where if under there is no requirement to justify to the LA why they are holding such level of balances. Currently that is 5% for secondary schools and 8% for all others.
- 9.3 Currently of the balances held, over £8m of that excess is over those thresholds and are held by 33 schools. Following a question these were confirmed to be revenue balances, capital funds are discounted. Also, monies in revenue to fund capital are in fact only commitments until spent. Such monies will be held "in trust" by the LA on behalf of the school and released as the capital project progresses. If a school changed its mind about the capital spend the "committed" monies would be forfeited and redistributed to other schools.
- 9.4 The LA Maintained Schools representatives voted to support the proposals for capping the schools and the associated appeals panel - 7 were in favour and 1 abstained. In addition, the Schools Forum noted that the distribution of any funds will be made on the recommendation of the Schools Forum to the Director of Education and the Strategic Director of Finance and Governance.

10. School Organisation Group

- 10.1 The Local Authority will be setting up a School Organisation Group to assist it with the problem of falling rolls in the borough - this will have a wide ranging remit that will provide an

opportunity for school and other representatives with a professional interest in school admissions and place planning and provision to gain an understanding of, and influence policy and thinking in this area of the Local Authority's work. The group's intention is to consider these issues from a parental point of view to ensure school places are made available and processes to obtain them, accessible, equitable and transparent.

- 10.2 Membership would need to be drawn from all sectors, fairly representing community and Voluntary Aided schools, and at least one member of the group needs to be a member of the Schools Forum to oversee the area of, and report back on, the financial implications of falling rolls and the strategies to mitigate the negative impacts on the quality of teaching and learning.

This was supported.

11. Any Other Business

- 11.1 That holding future meetings by zoom in 2022 be reviewed at the December meeting.

12. Dates of Further Meetings for 2021/22:

9 December 2021, 13 January 2022, 10 March 22, 16 June 22

7th October 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	Yes
Sarah Bowmer	Primary School Headteacher (Com)	Yes
Vacant	Primary School Governor (Com)	
Vacant	Primary School Governor (VA)	
Rebecca Sherwood	Nursery School Headteacher	Yes
Kelly Hawker	Special School Headteacher	Substituted by Lisa Butcher
Nicola Howard	Early Years – Private/Voluntary and Independent Settings	Yes
Steve Morrison	Academy	Yes
Nick Tildsley	Academy (Primary)	Yes
Declan Jones	Academy	Yes
James Wilson	Academy	Yes
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	Apologies

Senior Officers in Attendance

Senior Officers	In Attendance
Nina Dohel	Yes
Eniko Nolan	Yes
Dave Richards	Yes with colleagues
Yvonne Ely	No
Jenny Brennan	No
Kevin Morris	Yes
David Cross	Clerk

A.O.B. Any items must be with the Clerk by Noon 1st October 2021 (5 minutes)

14. Dates of Further Meetings for 2021/22: 9 December 2021, 13 January 2022,
10 March 22, 16 June 22
At 2.00pm until further notice