# SOUTHWARK CHILDREN’S SERVICES - SCHOOLS FORUM

**THURSDAY 16 JUNE 2022**

**14.00 to 15.30**

Via Zoom

**MINUTES**

## **1. Attendance and Apologies**: - See Annex A

## **2. Quorum:** The Clerk confirmed that the meeting was quorate - Note that the meeting was conducted viaZoom virtual technology. The Vice Chair took the chair for the meeting.

## **3. 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.

## **4. Minutes of the Meeting of 13th January 2022**

## 4.1 These were agreed for accuracy.

## 4.2 Matters Arising:

## a) Charging for Family Early Help Service – Item 7.8 Not progressed – will be reported at next meeting

## b) Maintained Secondary School Improvement Service 7.9 Not progressed – will be reported at next meeting

## 5. **Dedicated Schools Grant - 2022-23 Outturn**

## 5.1 This report, circulated with the agenda, gave the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Outturn position which is still subject to external audit. The LA reported that it is basically as reported in January 2022 except that the overspend in the High Needs Block had increased by £1.1m to make the overall deficit for the year £21.7m.

## 5.2 This was caused by the increase in spend on EHCPs due to the number now being issued has increased to 2783. The overall spend on the High Needs block was £57.1m an increase of £4.0m on last year, however the average cost per EHCP had fell by £705 per EHCP across all categories of spend in the High Needs Block.

## 5.3 There had been a fall in centrally de-delegated budgets, maternity, which needs to be returned to schools but the LA is waiting for any late claims for 2021-22 before actioning.

## 5.4 The LA, following a question, confirmed that the increase in EHCPs was in line with what is happening nationally.

 The Schools Forum agreed to carry forward the overall deficit of £21.7m to the 2022-23 financial year.

## **6. School Balances 2021-22**

## 6.1 This report, previously circulated, provided the annual update of the maintained schools’ balances as at 31 March 2022 and showed that schools’ cumulative revenue balances hade decreased from £14.0m as at 31 March 2021 to £12.6m as at 31 March 2022. And, there are 16 schools in deficit as at 31 March 2022 (18 were in deficit as at 31 March 2021).

## 6.2 However, this change includes the holding of certain schools excess balances from the previous year which are only released for agreed committed expenditure made under the Balance Control Mechanism. The total amount held and “earmarked” was £1.8m, without this the overall balance would have stood at £14.4m, a small increase of £0.4m.

## 6.3 Data in the tables showed the balances, both surplus and deficit, for each school and there were still some schools with large surpluses and 16 with a deficit which is down on previous years. Schools were more financially aware and are taking more steps to get a balanced budget although falling rolls is reducing the funding to them.

## 6.4 Following a question regarding the 5% secondary and 8% primary balance control mechanism threshold, the LA will report back as to whether these percentages can be varied in the LA’s Scheme especially due to inflation of expenditurecosts.

## 6.5 There is a Panel consisting of LA Officers and Headteachers that scrutinises a school’s individual balances and decides on the validity of the evidence given by schools as to why they have excess balances and what they propose it is spent on – then these excess balances are “taken away” from the school’s accounts and held as “earmarked” by the LA and only released to the school when evidence is shown that there is valid actual spend against their intended spend.

## 6.6 Again, following a question concerning the role of the governing body who has the responsibility for budgeting, the LA confirmed that all communications concerning this subject go to both the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors. And if there are serious concerns by the LA then a financial notice of concern is issued.

## 6.7 The LA said that it will bring to the next meeting the Terms of Reference of this Panel along with any changes they may be proposing to its constitution and functions.

The Report was noted

## **7. High Needs Management Plan**

## 7.1 This report circulated with the agenda gave details of the High Needs Management Plan and the current activities and the milestones that are needed to be met to ensure the required savings are delivered.

## 7.2 The LA said that the 300 increase in EHCPs per year equated to an annual budget increase of £2.4m. The LA has been in discussion with the DFE in order for Southwark to be able to access their Safety Valve Funding to assist with the current deficit and its projected increase. This does not wipe out the deficit but requires a robust action plan to bring the budget into balance.

## 7.3 The Schools Forum commented that the increase in EHCPs will continue as they do not believe the full effects of the pandemic have yet to be felt.

## 7.4 Previously the LA recently reported that it did not believe that further requests for block transfer of funding to the High Needs Block would be needed, however with this increase in EHCP assessments and the cost of living, this may now not be the case.

## 7.5 The Schools Forum Sub Group, which had done some previous good work in reducing costs, will continue and also continue to report back to each meeting of the Schools Forum.

##  The Report was noted.

## **8. Managing Surplus Capacity in Southwark’s Primary Schools**

## 8.1 The LA gave a presentation on the current position regarding the managing of the surplus places in the borough’s primary schools. The slides used are attached to these minutes.

## 8.2 The Director said that the LA had been working with schools to reduce Published Admission Numbers (PAN) and where possible bring schools together in federations and amalgamations. Vacancy rates are still increasing and in primary are currently 22% and expected to increase to 26% representing 5044 places and has still not peaked.

## 8.3 There are LA Place Planning Meetings with Headteacher representatives and a Strategic Plan is being finalised ready to be published in the next few weeks. This will include the criteria for looking at the schools estate and the where and how. School closures are a last resort and an Independent Review is being actioned with key milestones.

## 8.4 The overall aim is to protect and maintain the quality of education in the borough’s schools.

##  This was noted.

## **9.** **Review of Centrally Retained Budgets**

## 9.1 This report gave the detail of the Local Authority’s review of current central education expenditure supported by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) that had been circulated with the agenda.

## 9.2 The LA said that this had been proposed in the Budget setting papers for 2022-23 and a review by the LA is currently underway to look at the detail of the services provided in relation to the legislation and to consider whether costs are at the right and appropriate level whilst maintaining the principle of no increase to the level of de-delegation.

## 9.3 The scope of the review aims to:

* determine whether the DSG is, and remains, the appropriate source of funding;
* establish if the level of DSG allocated to those services optimises the use of those resources and continues to represent value for money;
* ascertain the impact of the findings of (a) on the Council’s general fund; and
* identify the risks to maintaining the current level of provision of those services in the context of the:
	+ - current and projected reduction in pupil numbers; and / or
		- potential reduction in the number of schools maintained by the LA.

## 9.4 The LA proposed that preliminary findings will be reported to the October 2022 Schools Forum and with the impact of any change being considered at the December 2022 School Forum.

##  This was welcomed and noted.

## **10. Schools Finance Procedure Manual**

## 10.1 The Local Authority informed the Schools Forum that that it is updating the 2017 Schools Financial Procedures Manual for Maintained Schools for 2023-24 and gave details of the major changes in its report.

## 10.2 The main amendments required included: a revised model Scheme of Delegation to ensure consistency between it; the Scheme for Financing Schools and the Council’s own Financial Regulations, an update to procurement rules and the approved Financial Institutions for school bank accounts, following the UK’s departure from the EU and the inclusion of the recently launched licensed deficit framework.

 This was noted

## **11. Dates of Meetings for 2022/23**

## These were provisionally set for: 6 October 2022, 8 December 2022, 12 January 2023, 15 June 2023.

## The clerk was asked to canvass members as to whether they prefer the meetings to be in person at a suitable large enough venue and/or as recently via a virtual medium, e.g. zoom or MS Teams.

**Annex A**

**SCHOOLS FORUM ATTENDANCE SHEET**

**16th June 2022**

**VOTING MEMBERS**

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

Senior Officers in Attendance

| Nina Dohel Yes with colleagues |
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| E Nolan Yes |
| Dave Richards Yes with colleagues |
| Kate Bingham Yes  |
| Nikki Tilson LA SI  |
| Richard Hunter LA SI |
| David Cross Clerk |