

## SOUTHWARK CHILDREN'S SERVICES - SCHOOLS FORUM

THURSDAY 15<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2023

14.00 to 15.30

Via Teams

DRAFT MINUTES

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

The Clerk confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

It was noted that a representative from the DfE was attending the meeting as an observer, they introduced themselves and the chair welcomed them to the meeting.

### 2. **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.

### 3. **Minutes of the Meeting of 4<sup>th</sup> March 2023 and Matters Arising**

3.1 These were agreed for accuracy.

3.2 A paper detailing the cases being managed by Family Early Help was previously circulated. Some funding for the Early Help Service is taken from the contributions from maintained schools, academies have not contributed. However, the academies have used the service. Representatives from the academies suggested writing to the academies to request a contribution. Due to the timing of the letter academies had already set their budgets. There was a request for a further letter to be sent to the academies. The following points were noted.

- 36 academies and voluntary aided schools were written to on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2022 asking for confirmation of the financial contribution to the funding of Family Early Help Services to the match funding delegated by the Southwark Schools Forum Dedicated Schools Grant.
- From the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2022 there was a response from an academy stating that some of the information in the letter was not correct. A further response from an academy stated that their schools had not budgeted for the service in that academic year.
- A reminder letter was sent on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2022 with a request for a response by the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2023. A response was received from Harris Academies who reiterated that this was optional and would not be feasible in this academic year. However, it would be left to individual Harris Academies and those Principals to make decisions and engage in a Service Level Agreement in the 2023-24 academic year.
- Another academy responded stating that due to financial constraints they would not be able to contribute suggesting that something of this nature should go out to all leaders for consideration in the decision making around this. There was a suggestion that a report from Family Early Help to clearly outline what the offer would be, the impact and the evaluation relative to the value for money.
- A number of schools had asked for more information in relation to the support provided by Family Early Help a further letter was sent out to schools on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023 which included data on all assessments completed for children attending individual schools over the last three academic years to quantify the whole family support provided by the service. This data did not include the work of the Education Inclusion Team, any work of the Team around the School meetings provided, any parenting support that came as a result of any

referrals, any information signposting advice and support offered by Team Managers and Seniors that are the single point of contact linked to any of the schools. Family Early Help also seconded a full time Practitioner into the AP Task Force.

- One academy who had previously responded said they would not be in a position to make a financial contribution. A Head from a Federation that is moving to an academy wanted to raise some questions and would be making a contribution.
- One primary school was committed to making a contribution.
- In summary one school confirmed their commitment to the financial contributions, three secondary schools have indicated they will not be making a contribution. One school acknowledged that they may make a contribution. Leaving 31 schools that have not made a formal response.

#### **4. Feedback re Chair's action to approve amendments to the Scheme for Financing Schools**

The amendments to the Scheme for Financing Schools were circulated, the consultation period was held and responses received. The consultation period has now closed. The amendments have been implemented as proposed. Since the closure of the consultation and the publication of the Scheme comments have been received. The comments will be held in abeyance until the Scheme is due for review.

#### **5. Feedback from the High Needs Sub-Group meeting held on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023**

The minutes of the meeting were circulated and, the following points were noted.

- Presentation on the consultancy work completed by Ian Morris. There was subsequent discussion and some challenge. Clarification of the timescales and processes for the review of the top up funding for each school.
- Budget overview and update. The current financial position was provided. One of the priorities was the number of EHCPs being requested.
- Update on the Safety Valve. Information was shared on the timetable for monitoring. The agreement provides funding over the period of the agreement that will extinguish the cumulative DSG deficit projected over the period of the plan. The agreement has nine specific conditions which are linked to the SEN strategy. They range from the successful implementation of a capital programme to create more local provision particularly for young people with ASD. Increasing capacity of SEN professionals. A universal multi agency offer and reducing unit costs. The Local Authority will receive payments over four years, the payments are entirely dependent on sufficient progress and completion of the actions required to meet the nine conditions and to bring the High Needs Block back into balance. The progress is measured by three reports each year. The monitoring will be reported back to the High Needs Sub Group and Forum.
- It was agreed that a timetable for review of the top up funding to be discussed at the next meeting in September.

#### **6. DSG Outturn**

The following points were noted.

- DSG outturn position which is an underspend of £7.1m after receipt of Safety valve Funding of £9.2m. There was an overspend of just over £2m prior to receipt of this funding.
- The Schools Block is in a broadly balanced position.
- Early Years Block is in a broadly balanced position.

- The Central Services Block has a small underspend.
- The High Needs Block is overspent by £2.2million. There are pressures with costs and the volume of EHCPs which have increased over the years. Some inflationary pressures from providers.
- The Schools in Financial difficulty de delegated fund carried forward £300,000.
- The maternity de delegated fund carried forward £200,000. From experience there are usually a considerable number of claims outstanding at the end of each financial year that are still due to schools. Any carried forward amounts are taken into consideration when determining the amounts to be de-delegated in future years.
- Trade Union de delegated fund carried forward £45,000.

## **7. Schools Balances**

The report provides the annual update of the maintained school balances as at 31 March 2023.

- The schools' cumulative revenue balances have increased slightly from £12.6m as at 31 March 2022 to £12.7m as at 31 March 2023, however note that two schools joined multi-academy trusts during 2022/23 and these schools had cumulative revenue balances at 31 March 2022 of £0.4m and thus when this is stripped out, there has been a like for like increase in balances of £0.5m.
- There are now 14 schools in deficit as at 31 March 2023, compared to 16 that were in deficit as at 31 March 2022. A Licensed Deficit Framework is in place for schools in deficit with a monitoring programme. Work continues with the schools in deficit. There were 31 (43.7%) schools that operated an in-year deficit in 2022/23, compared to 50% the previous year (i.e. they spent more than they received in 2022/23). With the continuing fall in pupil numbers this trend is likely to continue and possibly worsen.
- In relation to the schools that are amalgamating and closing a group of officers are working closely with the schools.