

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL - SCHOOLS FORUM

Date:	Thursday 26 June 2025
Location:	Conference Rooms G02A and G02B, Tooley Street
Time:	2pm

VOTING MEMBERS		ATTENDANCE
Maintained Nursery School		
Helen Rowe – Dulwich Wood Nursery Headteacher	HR	Attended
Maintained Primary School		
Susannah Bellingham – Brunswick Park Headteacher	SB	Attended
Kate Wooder – Bridges Federation Executive Headteacher	KW	Attended
Jane O'Brien – Heber Chair of Governors	JO	Apologies
Janice Babb – St James the Great & St John's Catholic Federation (RC) – Co-Chair	JB	Attended
Megan Pacey – Dulwich Village CofE Chair of Governors	MP	Attended
Maintained Secondary School		
Catherine May – St Savior's & St Olave's Headteacher	CM	Attended
Maintained Special School		
Heidi Tully – Tuke Headteacher	HT	Attended
Pupil Referral Unit		
Michael Jarrett – SILS	MJA	No apologies
Academy Primary School		
Haley Foxworthy – Nexus Education Schools Trust (Assistant Director)	HF	Attended
Vacancy	N/A	N/A
Academy Secondary School		
Steve Morrison – Kingsdale Foundation School	SM	Attended
James Wilson – Bacon's College	JW	Apologies
Matt Jones – Ark Globe Academy (Chair of SASH)	MJ	Apologies
Jessica West – Ark Walworth Academy	JWN	Attended
Felicity Corcoran – St Michael's Catholic College	FC	Attended
Alison Harbottle – The Charter School East Dulwich	AH	Apologies
Academy Special School		
Steph Lea – Spa Education Trust Executive Headteacher	SL	Attended
Non-School Representatives		
Nicola Howard – Early Years Private/Voluntary. 1 st Place Children's and Parents Centre	NH	No apologies
Pia Longman – Southwark Diocesan Board of Education – Co-Chair	PL	Attended
Jane Button – 16 to 19 Year Providers. Southwark College Principal	JBN	Attended
Betty Joseph – Trade Unions	BJ	Attended
Vacant – Archdiocese of Southwark Schools'	N/A	N/A

LA OFFICERS	ATTENDANCE
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Alasdair Smith – Director, Children and Families	AS	Attended
Aron Brown – Senior Finance Manager	AB	Attended
Eniko Nolan – Assistant Director of Finance	EN	Attended
Kate Bingham – Schools Finance Consultant	KB	Apologies
Hayley Furniss – Governor Development Advisor	Clerk	Attended

OPTIONAL		ATTENDANCE
Anna Chiva – Assistant Director for SEND	AC	Attended
Donna Muir – Head of Governor Services	DM	Attended
Nikki Tilson - Principal Advisor Learning and Achievement	NT	Attended

Quorum required – 40% which is 9

Members in attendance – 15

ITEM NO.		ACTION FOR
1	<p>WELCOME AND APOLOGIES</p> <p>All were welcomed to the meeting which JB chaired.</p> <p>Apologies received from MJ, KB, JO, AH, JW. No apologies received from MJA or NH.</p>	
2	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>None.</p>	
3	<p>SCHOOLS FORUM CONSTITUTION AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE</p> <p>Report was shared prior, and DM, Head of Governor Services gave a brief overview in the meeting.</p> <p>The Schools Forum noted that there were no proposed changes to the number of representatives in each membership category, and no changes to the current Constitution until October 2025.</p> <p>The following terms expire on 31 July 2025 and all were notified prior:</p> <p>Primary Maintained School Headteacher x1 (SB re-nominating) Primary Maintained VA (RC and CofE) x1 (JB not re-nominating) Special Maintained School Headteacher x1 (HT) (HT re-nominating) Secondary School Academy x1 (SM not re-nominating) Early Years Private/Voluntary and Independent Settings x1 (NH) Teachers Professional Associations x1 (BJ re-nominating)</p> <p>The following are existing vacancies:</p> <p>Primary School Academy x1 (2 nominations received) Archdiocese of Southwark Schools' Commission (RC) x1</p> <p>All vacancies will be published with the relevant categories after this meeting with a view to starting in September.</p>	

	<p>AS, Director of Children and Families, added that the above was as a result of the Governance Improvement working group.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">JW arrived 2.05pm</p>	
4	<p>APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES FROM 20 MARCH 2025 Minutes were AGREED as an accurate record. The previous action was covered in the next item.</p> <p>ACTION: Query had been raised after the last meeting about point 36 in the Banding Redesign Resource Base Review Progress report 8C under the Impact on School Budgets section which states “a 5% transitional funding can be agreed for each school at this stage” which was incorrect. Transitional funding was agreed as a principle but the reference to 5% should have been removed. AC to send updated report to the clerk for circulating for completeness.</p>	AC
5	<p>FEEDBACK FROM SUBGROUPS <i>High Needs</i> ACTION CARRIED FORWARD: Impact report on the funding management review and paying schools and providers on time to come back to Schools Forum in October.</p> <p>SL gave a verbal update; the High Needs Subgroup had discussed the following at the last meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms of reference - was reviewed and will be approved by the Schools Forum in September. • SILS briefing – considered and agreed recommended numbers for September 2025 which will be 95. Further information had been requested before any future years are considered. • Progress report on the banding review and timescales – presentation had been given on work done to date with feedback from testing. The timeline remains the same and this will come to the Schools Forum in December for approval. A summary of feedback from various task and finish groups will be considered at next subgroup meeting. • Finance update – positive and on track but caution remains around challenges ahead. There will be more updates on this later in the agenda. <p><i>Governance Improvement</i> See next item.</p> <p><i>Schools Financial Support Panel</i> JB confirmed that no meetings had taken place since the previous Schools Forum meeting. The forum was, however, advised that an invitation had been received to form part of a consultation in relation to</p>	AC

	support staff pay scales, so the Schools Financial Support Panel had fed into this.	
6	<p>GOVERNANCE IMPROVEMENT – CONCLUDING REPORT Report was shared prior; and DM, Head of Governor Services, gave a brief overview in the meeting.</p> <p>The Schools Forum was asked if there were any questions or comments on the business as usual activity in appendix 3. Although initially delivered in person, the training programme will be available via recorded webinars so that any new joiners have immediate access. There were no comments.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">SM arrived 2.10pm</p> <p>The Schools Forum noted the successful conclusion of the Governance Improvement working group and AGREED to disband it.</p> <p>Members of the working group were thanked for all their hard work on reshaping and improving the governance element of the Schools Forum.</p>	
7	<p>SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS 2025-26 Report was shared prior, along with the Scheme for Financing Schools 2025-26 appendix, and AB gave a brief overview in the meeting.</p> <p>The seven maintained Schools Forum members in attendance noted and ADOPTED the changes to the DfE statutory guidance and the necessary updates in accordance with Teachers’ Pension regulatory requirements.</p> <p>AB, Senior Finance Manager, confirmed that, although these changes are not directed, maintained schools are not consulted because the LA has no discretion over them. As a result, they are similar to directed changes.</p> <p>The seven maintained Schools Forum members in attendance APPROVED the revised Southwark Council’s 2025-26 Scheme for Financing Schools.</p> <p>All maintained schools will be notified of the publication of the revised scheme for financing schools.</p>	
8	<p>DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT 2024-25 OUTTURN REPORT Report was shared prior; AB read through in the meeting and explained the surplus in more detail below.</p> <p>The Schools Forum noted that the Dedicated Schools Grant was in deficit by £5.8m at the end of the 2024/25 financial year, which included the deficit carry forward of £8.7m from 2023/24.</p> <p>The closing deficit balance of £5.8m will be carried forward into the new financial year, and the position is provisional subject to external audit opinion.</p>	

The high needs and safety valve position had been shared in more detail with the High Needs Subgroup.

The outturn for the year showed overall underspend on the DSG. However, cost continued to rise, and whilst the increase in grant was sufficient to mitigate those costs this year, it is expected that the increase in grant in future years will be considerably lower, adding to the pressure on the High Needs block. In addition, EHCP (education, health and care plan) numbers are anticipated to continue rise and add pressure to high needs budgets and so the position on the DSG will remain extremely challenging as we progress through the next few years.

Chair asked the Schools Forum members to recognise how hard the council and High Needs Subgroup have worked in trying to balance the increasing high needs among pupils.

Member asked about the empty school buildings and opening SEND hubs, and how would this affect the budget.

AS replied that this is separate from the DSG budget. It is important to maximise the opportunities for funds received, and this could include developing SEND hubs.

AC, Assistant Director for SEND, added that children are not sent out of borough as there are no spaces in independent schools. The council has just undertaken a capital strategy review for SEND which will inform next steps, and this will include the development of hubs and nurture provisions to support sustainability. They are an expensive resource to manage, and the smaller the hub, the more expensive they are. This is part of a 5–10-year plan.

Clarity was requested on whether the surplus would reduce.

It was confirmed that capital grants are separate and not related to the high needs revenue.

Member asked if it is expected that the deficit will reduce.

Under the safety valve, the target is to reach a point of zero by the end of 2026-27. This is only possible through the support of the safety valve grant. Additional pressures and changes must be addressed as they arise, and the council is constantly reviewing and updating.

AS added that it is estimated that the target will be achieved, but the concern is that once reached, the rising need and estimated income disparity that will accrue debt may cause issues. Some councils have a much larger deficit, so Southwark is in a good position which is down to the hard work of all involved. There was even more of a risk before the safety valve grant, and there are still concerns about what is to come. AC advised that things are being put in place to work with social and health care, re-banding early intervention funding and preparing for adulthood which will have an impact but take time. The demand is outstripping the budget.

Member asked if the safety valve grant was calculated by a specific formula.

	<p>AB advised that it was originally based on the size of the deficit at the start of the programme - only those with a large deficit qualified.</p> <p>AS added that the government took on those they thought could be achieved.</p> <p>EN, Assistant Director of Finance, clarified that certain financial targets must be met to receive the grant.</p>	
9	<p>SCHOOL 2024-25 BALANCES</p> <p>Report was shared prior, and AB, Senior Finance Manager, gave an overview in the meeting.</p> <p>The Schools Forum noted that, after adjusting for closed and academised schools, the school's cumulative revenue balances have increased by £57k during 2024-25, with combined balances finishing at £15m for the year ending 31 March 2025.</p> <p>The Schools Forum also noted that, after adjusting for closed and academised schools, there are 11 schools in deficit as at 31 March 2025, the same number as at 31 March 2024.</p> <p>There remains an extremely challenging position for Southwark schools with continuing falls in pupil numbers, with further declines anticipated over the coming years. As a result, there has been a rise with several schools being in deficit in the year ending 31st March 2025. Going forward, there will continue to be a significant pressure on school budgets, and it is likely that schools' financial positions could deteriorate in the long term if no action is taken by schools to continue tightening financial management. Work also needs to continue to address the oversupply of places in Southwark.</p> <p>Member asked how the teachers' pay increase affects schools as the government is only funding 3% of the 4% awarded.</p> <p>AB advised that it depends on how schools have budgeted. Some have catered for inflation so grants may improve their position, but it will put pressure on some budgets, and the council continues to work with those schools to help recover. The allocations have not been made but the rates are available on the website to get an idea.</p> <p>Chair advised the Schools Forum that the finance team offers training for governing bodies and headteachers and can offer one to one support.</p> <p>AB added that Southwark maintained schools have access to SRMSA advisors via the council who can benchmark finances.</p> <p>Member asked if the outturn is the same for academies as the maintained sector.</p> <p>The DfE has two different reporting formats for academies and maintained, and they come in separate reports. There is a structured system that allows comparison across school types. Budgets cannot be shared between schools.</p>	

	<p>AS formally acknowledged and showed appreciation for the work done to reach such an improved financial position.</p> <p>EN recognised the improved position in some schools and emphasised the importance of those that are not in financial deficit to make good use of resources and training. There is concern around secondary schools to ensure they are as forward-thinking in decision making as possible.</p> <p>Member added that, as an EHT (executive headteacher) running a federation of three maintained schools, there are tipping points created by falling pupil numbers and increasing SEND. Even schools that balance budgets are feeling challenged.</p> <p><i>Whilst acknowledging the importance of training, a member emphasised that strategy and governance has a real impact in preventing deficits. Member therefore asked what investment is in place from the council to help schools forward plan.</i></p> <p>Chair replied that when a head is appointed, they are encouraged to attend a training programme with the council which covers finance. The responsibility of finance sits with the governing body which is made clear. Over time, staffing structure changes have required consideration and planning. There has been support in place but as mentioned, there will be a tipping point.</p> <p>AB added that over the last couple of years, some schools have seen an unanticipated deficit late in the year, so understanding monitoring and sharing quality information is important. There are external bursars that support schools, so making sure they are delivering is also important. There is support available from the council, but if information is not available internally, issues can result.</p> <p>DM advised that the governance team at the council works hard to provide a variety of relevant training for governors. It has been difficult to recruit given that it is a voluntary role and this may have impacted the quality of governance, so there is some work to do in ensuring skilled boards are in place to help carry out the school's strategy.</p>	
10	<p>UPDATES FROM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES</p> <p>AS, Director of Children's Services, shared the following verbal update:</p> <p>Cabinet had agreed to two primary school closures last Monday; Charlotte Sharman and St Mary Magdelaine. There are different characteristics between the two schools that led to the difficulties that resulted in closure.</p> <p>It is hoped there will be no maintained school closures next year, but this cannot be guaranteed. The risk assessment process engaged in with schools is transparent and working out the best solution as far in advance as possible is key.</p> <p>Cabinet also agreed for a school that was closed last year to be developed as a SEND provision, and for the expansion of Cherry Garden School into another school to maximise investment.</p>	

	<p>An audit of teachers' pensions for all schools will take place. There are no particular concerns, but it will form part of due diligence and risk management.</p> <p>NT, Principal Advisor Learning and Achievement, shared the following verbal update:</p> <p>There are currently 97% of schools in the borough that are the equivalent of being graded as good or better. There are three that are Requires Improvement but one of these is St Mary Magdelaine which is closing. Once closed, the borough will be at 98% of schools equivalent of being graded as good or better.</p> <p>Member mentioned the proposed new Ofsted report cards and asked how the different framework and grading will work within Southwark.</p> <p>NL replied that she had meant 97% for quality of education.</p> <p>For the LA and school-to-school close working, the council continues to collaborate with the ISOS Partnership. This will be for all schools and developments will be shared at headteacher briefings.</p> <p>AC, Assistant Director for SEND, shared the following verbal update:</p> <p>Although challenging, SEND outcomes show the positive work being done and all were asked to keep this in mind.</p> <p>The expansion of Cherry Gardens School is a positive step in using space available in a nearby council maintained primary school.</p> <p>Highways have committed to improve parking and access for those who are disabled.</p> <p>There is a new White Paper coming in September with a focus on inclusion and support. We will continue to work over the summer holidays to map our work on banding, resource base and provision to support sustainable inclusion within known constraints.</p>	
11	<p>FORWARD PLAN</p> <p>Report with draft agenda for the next meeting was shared prior and comments were welcomed.</p> <p>Member wanted to make sure the reports requested from previous meetings were included/covered.</p> <p>It was confirmed that the piece around attendance had been reported on and discussed at the previous meeting. The high needs impact report will be coming to the Schools Forum in September as per action carried forward.</p> <p>The 2025-26 academic year's meeting dates were also shared prior. Invitations will be sent during the school holidays.</p>	

12	DATE AND DRAFT AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING Thursday 2 October 2025, 2pm at Tooley Street	
13	ANY OTHER BUSINESS None.	

Item	Action	For
4	Send updated Banding Redesign Resource Base Review Progress report with the 5% removed from point 36 to the clerk for circulating.	AC
5	Impact report on the funding management review and paying schools and providers on time to come back to Schools Forum in October.	AC