

Minutes (*Draft*)

Schools Forum

Notes of meeting on **19th January 2023**

Members:

Paul Lufkin (PL)	Primary School rep (Wimbledon Park) - Chair
Fr Simon Peat (FSP)	Primary Governor rep (St Mary's)
Kirsten Taylor (KT)	Secondary School rep (Raynes Park High School)
Martin Roughley (MR)	Primary School rep (Cranmer)
Emma Greer (EG)	Primary School rep (Pelham)
Rachel Shephard-Walwyn (RSW)	PVI rep (Montessori Children's House)
Steve Donegan (SD)	Primary School rep (Malmesbury)

In Attendance:

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (EF)	LBM CSF - Assistant Director for Education and Early Help
Patricia Harvey (PH)	LBM CSF – Finance
Allison Jones	LBM CSF - Early Years
Andrew Good (AG)	LBM CSF – Finance
Colette Levingston (CL)	LBM CSF – Finance
Jayne Ward (JW)	LBM CSF – Finance
Chloe Windsor (CW)	LBM MSCP – Note taker
Richard Ellis (RE)	LBM CSF - Assistant Director - Strategy, Commissioning & Transformation

Apologies:

Hamish Dowlen (HD)	Secondary School Gov rep (Raynes Park High School)
Phyllis Sternberg (PS)	Academies rep (Beecholme)
Julia Waters (JW)	Secondary School rep (Ursuline)
Carla Chandler (CC)	PRU School rep (Melrose)

1.	Welcome and introductions	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PL welcomed all attendees, both in-person and attending online. 	
2.	Minutes from previous meeting	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The minutes from the last meeting were considered and accepted. The following updates were noted against the actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The consultation document was updated. PH provided a breakdown of supply staff cost to cover public duties. None of this funding covers jury service. There is an underspend of £39k. 	
3.	a) Schools' Consultation Responses (Appendix 1) b) Early Years Consultation Responses (Appendix 9) c) Merton's DSG Funding Allocation 2023/24 and Schools Funding Formula (DSG Funding Report and appendices)	
	A) Schools' Consultation Responses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Consultation was with regards to Schools Funding formulae. A 33% return was received, composed of 11 primary schools and 4 secondary schools. 	

<p><u>Schools Funding Formula Options</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 67% of respondents were in favour of replicating the National Funding Formula. The group voted to adopt Option A. Comments were received from respondents and queries addressed. The original appendix had calculated outturn based on last year's census/pupil numbers. The Local Authority proposed Option A as a transition to bring this in line with the National Funding Formula. <p><u>Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 93% of respondents were in favour of setting the MFG at maximum 0.5%. The group voted to adopt Option A. <p><u>De-delegation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group voted on the areas of de-delegation below. PL, EG, MR and SD represented primary schools. KT represented secondary schools. 2.4.5 – Respondents 100% agreed with de-delegating around schools in challenging circumstances. The group all voted to de-delegate. 2.4.6 - 91% of primary respondents and 100% secondary voted to de-delegate the Merton School Effectiveness Partnership. The group all voted to de-delegate. 2.4.7 - 100% of primary and 50% of secondary respondents voted to de-delegate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EF informed the group of comments from JW around the tree maintenance service not fulfilling schools' needs. PL suggested that this should be a buy-in service; de-delegated and commercial purchases must be separated. Tree issues are unforeseeable and expensive. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> JW had also raised comments that work will be taking place with schools to consider developments to Service Level Agreements (SLAs) this year. All primary representatives were in agreement to de-delegate; although KT voted in favour (as a secondary representative), she felt this may need to be re-looked at due to JW's query. 2.4.8 – 100% of primary respondents voted to de-delegate primary school meals management. The group all voted to de-delegate. 2.4.9 – 100% of primary and secondary respondents agreed to de-delegate licenses and subscriptions. The group all voted to de-delegate. 2.4.10 - 100% of primary and secondary respondents agreed to de-delegate parenting cover and public duties. The group all voted to de-delegate. 2.4.11 - 100% of primary and 75% of secondary respondents voted to de-delegate support to underperforming ethnic groups. The group voted to de-delegate. 2.4.12 – 100% of primary and secondary respondents agreed to de-delegate behavioural support. The group voted to de-delegate. 2.4.13 – This item was not applicable. 2.4.14 – Primary and secondary respondents all agreed to de-delegate school improvement. The group all voted to de-delegate. 2.4.15 - 100% of primary and secondary respondents agreed to de-delegate school improvement containing attendance. The group voted to de-delegate.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.4.16 - 100% of primary and secondary respondents agreed to de-delegate the school improvement and brokering grant. The group voted to de-delegate. • Queries were received from respondents to the consultation and addressed. <p><u>Transfer between blocks (section 2.7)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block was proposed, along with an additional transfer of £500k in support of the Merton DSG Recovery Plan. • 100% of primary and secondary respondents were in favour of the 0.5% transfer. 91% of respondents were in favour of the additional £500k transfer. • The group voted in favour of the 0.5% transfer and additional £500k. <p><u>High Needs Block - Targeted support to schools with high SEN pupil numbers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 79% of respondents supported reduction in targeted support outside of the formula for a cap on the budget allocation of £350k and applying the percentage to fit the model of funding. • This provision was previously £550k. • Comments were noted from respondents regarding the impact on schools for whom this is a significant budget allocation, due to high numbers of EHCPs. This money is reallocated through various formula factors. • The group voted in favour of the adjustment to the budget allocation. • JW had flagged via email that there are variations in figures around allocations/estimate by school, as well as de-delegation and line items, between the consultation document in appendices and the most recent financial models shared for this meeting. As these documents give a steer around decision making, large changes can add complexity. • PH confirmed that she had responded to these comments – the model is based on DSG figures provided by the DfE and without school census numbers. The settlement is now known; EF confirmed that final budgets will not be shared with schools until February. • PL requested that it be noted for next year that with regards to individual school allocation pages, these are indicative numbers based on out-of-date census numbers and should not inform more than a rough guideline. <p><u>B) Early Years Consultation Responses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AJ flagged the low consultation response and suggested that increasing sector engagement needs to be considered. • Funding formula for 3 and 4 year-olds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No changes have been proposed to the National Funding formula for 3 and 4 year olds, and the majority of respondents agreed with this. Feedback was received around hourly rate. ○ There have been changes to underlying factors in the National Funding formula to delegate Early Years provision to the Local Authority. ○ The Schools Forum agreed with the proposed format of no changes to the funding formula for 3 and 4 year-olds. • Funding formula for 2 yr. olds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It was proposed to keep this allocation separate from the funding formula for 3 and 4 year-olds. Comments were received and responded to. No vote was required on this item. A higher uptake of 2 year-old funding needs to be secured. • SEN Inclusion Fund (SENDIF):
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It is a requirement to consult on the descriptors that determine SENDIF value – this is based on the previous year’s expenditure and on headcount. ○ Respondents agreed with this proposal. The group voted to approve primary and Early Years settings maintaining the SENDIF. ● Contingency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A 93% passthrough rate to the sector was proposed, with some funding held back for contingency and not reallocated. The majority of respondents agreed. The group voted to approve the proposed contingency. ● Early Years Retention: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It was proposed to retain 5% of the budget to fund key statutory duties. Respondents and group members provided no comments. ● Passthrough Rate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This is a proposed request to the Secretary of State that when a small Early Years contingency budget funding is left over, it is used to support the high-needs bloc. Questions were received by respondents and addressed. No comments were noted from group members. ● Since the consultation was issued, the DfE undertook a national consultation re elements in the Early Years funding formula. Teachers’ pensions and pay grants (TPPG) will now be required to come in as a separate budget through the single funding formula. This enables fair distribution between schools – growth for all schools is projected. It is not clear at this point whether this will apply to independent schools. ● The Schools’ Forum were asked to agree the proposed methodology (Appendix 8) to distribute the TPPG, as it was too late to consult with the sector until next year, when it will form part of the baseline. ● The group voted to agree the proposed TPPG methodology; 6 voted yes, and RSW abstained. <p>C) School’s Forum report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This report includes recommendations lettered A-O. Many had been voted on above. EF noted the following recommendations for the group’s consideration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ B – The criteria for the £300k falling rolls/growth fund allocation is designated by the DfE, and relates to 13 schools. 1 member felt that this amount was too low. The group voted to approve this recommendation. ○ F – The group voted to approve the £650k de-delegated contribution. ○ G – The Schools Funding formula will be submitted on January 20th to the ESFA for data validation. The APT reflects report/appendices figures. The group voted to approve this. ○ H – The DfE are currently reviewing 1 figure around Central Schools’ Services block budgets. School admissions, Schools Forum servicing, borrowing for schools, regulatory duties and the teachers’ pay grant/pension contribution grant were all approved by group vote. ○ No comments were noted for recommendations J and N. Recommendation L was agreed earlier in the meeting. ○ I – Consultation does not take place on Early Years Block allocations. ○ O – Safety Valve work was noted in Item 4. 	
4.	Merton’s DSG Recovery Plan	
	<p>The DSG Safety Valve was included in this update.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Currently 10 months in to a 5 year plan. The plan will be delivered by 2026/7, with aims to deliver in 2025 if possible. Work with neighbouring boroughs will positively impact this work. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good progress has been made against the 9 factors agreed with the DfE. • New EHCP plans are still being assessed and approved. COVID-19 resulted in delays in review. However, there is noted stability compared to previous years. • The DfE have responded positively to an application for a new special school, that was submitted prior to Christmas. The amount of in-borough capacity has increased, including the capacity for special schools. • The senior deficit has decreased by £6.5m and is on-track with aims. If the new special school moves forward, this will be achieved within 4 years instead of 5. • £1.2m is being saved compared to placing in the independent sector. PL raised that there are significant inflationary pressures on this – the Schools Forum Subgroup met this week to consider this in more detail. Criteria are on track and targets are lagging; however, it will be possible to catch up. 	
5.	Any Other Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheme of Delegation 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EF confirmed that an updated draft Scheme of Delegation will be brought to the next meeting. This document discusses the financial relationship between the Council and schools and recommends changes to refresh the old scheme. Schools have a statutory responsibility to adopt this scheme each year. • The low response rate to the schools' consultation was discussed. EG suggested that the complexity of school funding may be a factor in this. • There was discussion on how to increase consultation engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Training for new Headteachers was proposed, via a crib sheet format to break down elements of school funding. ○ It was previously agreed to separate the questionnaire from the document for next year. ○ KT flagged that she considers this document with her Business Support Manager, who does not have access to this forum or other key information. This needs to be considered when planning accessibility aspects of any future plans to train Headteachers. ○ AG suggested referring to the report as a guide to process, and was willing to repeat the training undertaken with the Schools Forum or answer queries via email. He will be holding conversations with Headteachers next week and training could be suggested here. ○ EF felt that a joined-up piece of work via Attain is needed around induction, involving AG/PH to discuss financial aspects. Other forums such as DSG Sub-Forums are available to implement this. Reports by other Local Authorities could also be considered, as they are more concise. ○ PL suggested incorporating this into the September meeting, when new members are introduced and trained. ○ AJ proposed a consultative group across Early Years settings. ○ PL flagged that the formulas are embedded but the process used to arrive at them is not reconsidered. This can be considered next year. 	