

Minutes (*Draft*)

Schools' Forum

Notes of meeting on **22 June 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)
Julia Waters (JW)	Secondary School rep (Ursuline)

In Attendance:

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (EF)	LBM CLLF - Assistant Director for Education and Early Help
Patricia Harvey (PH)	LBM CLLF – Finance
Patricia Kearney (PK)	LBM CLLF – Note taker

Apologies:

Hamish Dowlen (HD)	Secondary School Gov rep (Raynes Park High School)
Phyllis Sternberg (PS)	Academies rep (Beecholme)
Carla Chandler (CC)	PRU School rep (Melrose)
David Erridge (DE)	PRU Governor rep (Perseid School)
Lee Maillin (LM)	Secondary School rep (Harris Academy)
Allison Jones (AJ)	LBM CLLF – Early Years
Keith Shipman (KS)	LBM CLLF – School Inclusion
Andrew Good (AG)	LBM CLLF – Finance
Colette Levingston (CL)	LBM CLLF – Finance
Jayne Ward (JW)	LBM CLLF – Finance
Richard Ellis (RE)	LBM CLLF - Assistant Director - Strategy, Commissioning & Transformation

1.	Welcome and introductions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PL welcomed all attendees.
2.	Minutes from previous meeting
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The minutes from the last meeting were considered read and accepted. The following updates were noted. <p>Page 3 – Transfer between blocks JW asked for clarity on the amount of money transferred to SEN to try and reduce the deficit. PH confirmed the block transfer amount of £748,541, being the 0.5% plus a cash amount of £500,000</p>

	<p>Action: PK / EF to set up DSG Sub Group meetings across next year.</p>
3.	<p>Merton's DSG Outturn 2022/23</p> <p>PH shared headlines from the DSG Outturn Report for Financial Year 2022/23 and noted that this is being shared for information purposes and no decisions are required for Schools Forum members.</p> <p>The in-year deficit was £7.5million (overspend), this included the additional safety valve funding received in the amount of £6.7million.</p> <p>The total number of EHCPs continue to increase nationally and the number of new ECHCPs made in the calendar year has also continued to increase.</p> <p>The members discussed Table 1 and asked for clarity regarding the block transfer in the amount of £748,541 plus the cash amount of £500,000.</p> <p>Action: PH to add another column(s) reporting the block transfer for transparency. This update will be made for the new academic year.</p> <p>Page 3, Table 3 For clarity PH explained to the group, the figures with a minus in red with savings and the figures in black were overspends. The figure in the amount of £4,075,000 for the Special Schools includes the additional payments as part of the Safety Valve programme and the additional commissioning of the places. This is lagged on the High Needs Block where the local authority do not received the funding for the place funding until the subsequent year. It looks like an overspend but it is the lagging whereby we are catching up on the next year.</p> <p>The members discussed the overspends in Table 3 versus what was anticipated at the beginning of the year. PH informed the group the position was slightly better than we expected and due to this we received some additional funding in recognition of the work on the year 1 of the Safety Valve programme.</p> <p>The members discussed the saving made on EPS. PH explained this was an old budget line, coded elsewhere. For transparency it was recorded, it was a budget line where there was no expenditure coded against it in year.</p> <p>EF confirmed EPS are paid out of general funds, not DSG funding and should not be reported.</p> <p>PH talked through the blocks giving more detail on the overspends and underspends.</p> <p>Page 6, 2.12 Early Years block overspend PH explained this was not an overspend. This was a prior year adjustment, based on a formula where anticipated income didn't come in. PH explained accruals and prepayments and how it reports on the financial system.</p> <p>Action: PH to confirm the Early Years adjustment in July</p>

Members asked for further explanation of the retained items and what was included, they also enquired about a particular value in the Central Schools Service Block

Action:

PH to provide a break down of the Central Schools Services Block

Schools' Forum members were asked to note and comment on the DSG outturn position and note and comment on the cumulative deficit position. There were no comments, other than those referenced above.

Future Pressures

Table 4 highlights EHCP growth by age range.

PH noted that based on the SEN2 submission in 2023, the largest growth is in 11-15 age group.

Action:

DSG Sub Group to analyse the growth in EHCPs in the 11-15 age group.

LMS Balances

Attached for transparency

Comments:

Reserves have decreased by 60% within Special Schools.

The difference between primary and secondary quite stark, proportionally much greater than secondary.

Primary School balances decline by 41%

Secondary School balances decline by 14%

EF informed the group the number of schools looking to set deficit budgets and therefore seeking the local authority license has significantly increased. The decrease in reserves by primary schools has been particularly hit by falling roles and schools struggling to make classes of 30 and therefore generate that income.

The impact on Secondary Schools was considered partly responsible for the less significant reduction.

EF shared with the members changes to the School Place Planning Strategy and discussions with primary schools. They are finding more schools have willing to consider and undertake reductions of PAN. The falling roles are being particularly felt in the East of the borough, central Wimbledon is also facing similar issues. LBM is working with schools to meet the target of classes of 30. Target set at capacity is 5% nationally but Merton is well above that at around 10% - 12%.

EF updated the members that the Local Authority is having 1:1 meetings with all schools that are facing deficit budgets and working with them to improve their deficit position.

Schools' Forum members were asked to note and comment on Local Management of school balances 2022/23.

	<p>DSG allocations for 23/24 purely for information with regards to update Schools Forum members</p> <p>PH confirmed the LBM's High Needs allocation makes it challenging to meet the current demand on the local authority to ensure that every child has a suitable education provision to match their level or identified SEN. PH confirmed this is a national issue for the DfE on all local authorities on a Safety Valve programme.</p> <p>PH confirmed the allocations for the other blocks represent broadly what is the real cost of provision.</p> <p>Schools Forum were asked to note final DSG allocations. No additional comments were made.</p>
4.	DRAFT Scheme of Financing in Schools (refresh)
	<p>EF introduced this item, explaining this refresh has been produced very much in draft and there will be comments to be taken into account and amendments to be made. We are working on creating a more final document by the beginning of September.</p> <p>PH confirmed this document is the Financial Regulations and the relationship between Merton and its Schools. The current version is 2019 and will come out as a consultation to all members and governing bodies over the Summer and early Autumn for comments. This document will not be published on the Schools Forum Website as it is local agreement between the family of schools in Merton and the Local Authority.</p> <p>Action: PH to provide a summary of any amendments made prior to the consultation.</p>
5.	Any Other Business
	<p>Membership of the Group - EF</p> <p>Hamish has agreed to remain as Secondary Governor Representative until we can appoint a new member, but we may need to hold a vacancy if we can't appoint in the near future.</p> <p>EF thanked Julia Waters for her contribution to the group over many years.</p> <p>Adrian Laing has agreed to put himself forward as a Secondary Catholic Representative replacing Julia Waters who is retiring at the end of this term.</p> <p>Early years funding rate increase for 2023-24 - EF</p> <p>As you will be aware, DfE announced in the 2023 Spring Budget that we will be providing additional funding to increase the hourly funding rates for Early Years providers to deliver the existing Early Years entitlements for disadvantaged 2-year-olds and 3 and 4-year-olds from September 2023. They have announced £204 million of additional funding to local authorities in 2023 to 2024, rising to £288 million in 2024 to 2025.</p>

	<p>For 2023 to 2024, the intention is to allocate the additional £204 million to local authorities through a standalone top-up grant, instead of our normal route through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This is to help reduce complexity for local authorities in passing on the additional funding to providers mid-year. This will be known as the Early Years Supplementary Grant (EYSG). In setting the local funding rates for distributing EYSG to providers, the DfE will encourage local authorities to engage with early year providers about the additional funding, but local authorities will not be required to consult formally.</p> <p>We will shortly provide further details on the EYSG methodology and hourly funding rates from September 2023 for each local authority, ahead of the summer break.</p> <p>For 2024 to 2025, the additional £288m will be allocated to local authorities through the DSG. The DfE will provide final local authority hourly funding rates for 2024 to 2025 in Autumn 2023 in the normal way.</p> <p>PL thanked all members with particular thanks to Julia Waters and Hamish Dowlen for their significant support and service over the years.</p> <p>PL thanked Andrew Good, Pat Harvey and Elizabeth Fitzpatrick for their contribution, work and input over the past year.</p>
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