

# Minutes (*Draft*)

## Schools' Forum

Notes of meeting on 17 January 2024

### Members:

Paul Lufkin (PL)	Primary School rep (Wimbledon Park) - <b>Chair</b>
Fr Simon Peat (FSP)	Primary School Governor rep (St Mary's)
Martin Roughley (MR)	Primary School rep (Cranmer)
Emma Greer (EG)	Primary School rep (Pelham)
Steve Donegan (SD)	Primary School rep (Malmesbury) – <b>Vice Chair</b>
Adrian Laing (AL)	Secondary School rep (Wimbledon College)
Kirsten Taylor (KT)	Secondary School rep (Raynes Park High School)
Rachel Shephard-Walwyn (RSW)	PVI rep (Montessori Children's House)
Jacqueline Hyland (JH)	16-19 rep (Rutlish)

### In Attendance:

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (EF)	LBM CLLF – AD for Education and Early Help
Tom Procter (TP)	LBM CLLF – AD (Interim) Strategy, Commissioning & Partnerships
Allison Jones (AJ)	LBM CLLF – Head of Service
Andrew Good (AG)	LBM CLLF – Finance
Laura Byrnes (LB)	LBM CLLF – Strategic Lead
Patricia Kearney (PK)	LBM CLLF – Note taker
Collette Levingston (CL)	LBM CLLF – Finance
Jayne Ward (JW)	LBM CLLF – Finance

### Apologies:

Carla Chander (CC)	PRU School rep (Melrose)
Alun Evans (AE)	Academies rep (Benedict Primary)
Chris Roberts (CR)	Secondary School Governor rep (Ricards Lodge)

<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome and introductions – Paul Lufkin</b>
	PL welcomed everyone in-person and attending online.
<b>2</b>	<b>Minutes from previous meeting – Paul Lufkin</b>
	Actions from last minutes were reviewed and the minutes of the previous meeting were agreed for accuracy.
<b>3</b>	<b>Early Years Consultation Update – Allison Jones and Laura Byrnes</b>
	EF introduced this item reminding members early years was not included in the main consultation because the government were very behind on their consultation. We are now in position to consult with Primary Schools and PVIs in due to the delays from the DfE this year.

AJ highlighted the significant changes to childcare funding which will start to be implemented this financial year. Explaining our budgets are being indicatively amended to reflect this new funding regulation.

LB – shared a PPT presentation with the group summarising the key points and recommendations within the Merton’s Early Years DSG Funding Formula Proposal 2024/25

There are 9 recommendations list below from A – I for Schools Forum most of them are for noting with 3 that require approval.

**A. Note the London Borough of Merton’s Early Years block of the DSG 2024/25**

**B. Note the underlying principles that support the rationale and proposal for consultation for the funding formula across the age-related entitlements.**

LB explained the 95% is a minimum

**C. Approve the early years central retention budget of 5% so the LA can deliver its core statutory functions and support quality and inclusion across EY settings.**

**D. Comment on and agree the consultation content and timescales for the early years funding formula process for 24/25, including distribution.**

Proposing to remove the sparsity supplements, with the new entitlements this doesn’t seem necessary. This was a 0.60p supplement.

LB shared for illustrative only the proposed funding formula hourly rates for 24/25

**E. Agree the methodology for the value/budget setting for 24/25 Special educational needs inclusion fund (SENIF).**

**F. Note the expected in year additional reporting and the adjustments to the early years block of the DSG.**

**G. Note the proposal to consult on the new local SENIF across the age-related entitlements.**

**H. Note the consultation timescale with regards to the expected distribution of indicative budgets**

**I. Note for information and illustrative purposes only the DRAFT indicative budget calculated on the proposed funding formula – subject to consultation outcome**

**Schools Forum noted and agreed as a block all the recommendations.**

LB explained they have tried to keep the Contingency Fund as low as possible to pass through the maximum to providers.

**Action LB**

**6.10 in the consultation document refers to £17K which is different to £27K figure on the slides.**

RSW expressed concerns about the timescales and shared concerned colleagues.

EF acknowledged the concerns and explained the delayed has been due to the DfE.

4	<b>Presentation covering key points form the Report &amp; Consultation Responses – Andrew Good</b>
	<p>EF introduced this agenda item, explaining the papers for Item 4 cover the response to the consultation and our proposals, we also have 3 appendices, which includes the APT allocations for Schools. Very grateful to AG and CL for the work they have put into preparing these papers.</p> <p>EF explained since we issued the papers we have reviewed the weighting applied based on the responses submitted by schools in relation to Option A and Option B. Initially it appeared as if the responses indicated a favourable response to Option B, but since we have reviewed it seems much more closely matched and is indicating a more even split between Option A and Option B. Thank to AL for bringing this to our attention. When we come to look at the APT and schools allocation I will need to say those figures for schools will need to change in light of the fact we will need to move a lit bit towards Option A.</p> <p>EF explained the weighting is based on actual pupil numbers of those schools who voted. The numbers in Secondary Schools carry a higher percentage to make it fair based on pupil numbers.</p> <p>PL explained the purpose of this agenda item being the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding including Schools Funding Formula 2024/2025 and explained that Schools Forum members will be required to note recommendations and approve a number of decisions. PL handed over to AG to take us through the document.</p> <p>There were 9 Voting Members in person and online.</p> <p>AG – shared the document online and explained this year the report has been streamlined to make it easier to read. What we are presenting in terms of actual numbers for the individual allocations are based on the hybrid model rather than Option B, but we may want to tweak that a little bit further.</p> <p>The purpose of the report is to set allocations and approve the APT.</p> <p>Section 1.3 we are changing slightly after we have rebalanced Primary and Secondary AWPUs more in line with the consultation responses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All other factors are set at the minimum level.</li> <li>• No growth/falling rolls fund is available however a separate ‘growth’ fund of £532k has been designated specifically to mitigate the impact of the closure of Stanford Academy in September 2024.</li> <li>• MFG has been set at 0.14% rather than the 0.5% consulted on in order to balance the overall DSG.</li> </ul> <p>Table 1 is the main breakdown and to note the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant has been rolled into the main DSG grant.</p> <p>The group discussed the funding situation with Stanford (part of the PACE Academy Trust). AG explained we are funding them 5/12 up until their closure point and then we have a retained sum which will be paid to schools within the borough who accept those pupils. We are waiting for the DfE to confirm this.</p>

**Recommendation (a)**

Schools' Forum notes the DSG allocations for 2024/25 published on the 19th December 2023 and notes the actual amounts will be subject to change(s) during the financial year because of recoupment from High Needs Block and inter authority place changes (including as a result of Merton being a net exporter of children).

Schools Forum members note the DSG allocations.

**Schools Block**

Total Schools Block for 2024/25 is £156,218

AG talked through break down and comparison to last year.

**Decision (b)**

Schools' Forum approves the 'growth' fund allocation of £532k for 2024/25

For – 9

Against - 0

**Block Transfers**

PL referred to the consultation responses which unanimously supported Decision (c)

**Decision (c)**

Schools' Forum approves the transfer of £781k (0.5%) from the Schools' Block to the High Needs Block for 2024/25, following the consultation with schools, where 100% of respondents approved this transfer from the estimated schools block to the High Needs Block.

For - 9

Against - 0

The group discussed Decision (d) and the fact that this will go to the Secretary of State for approval and they looked at the consultation responses in parallel.

**Decision (d)**

Schools' Forum approves the dis-application request £500k from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in 2024/25

For – 9

Against - 0

**De-delegation**

AG explained for 2024/25 we are proposing £2,313m based on the categories presented in November.

Table 3 on Page 5 details the breakdown.

This is only a decision for mainstream Primary and Secondary Schools

PL, Fr SP, MR, EG, SD voting for Primary Schools

AL, KT and JH voting for Secondary Schools

RSW not eligible to vote as she represents PVI in early years only.

**Decision (e)**

Schools' Forum (maintained schools only) approves the de-delegation of budgets for 2024/25.

Primary Voting For – 5

Primary Voting Against – 0

Secondary Voting For – 3  
Secondary Voting Against - 0

This is only a voting decision for mainstream Primary and Secondary Schools  
Fr SP, PL, MR, EG SD voting for Primary Schools  
AL, KT and JH voting for Secondary Schools  
RSW not eligible to vote as she represents PVI in early years only.

The group reviewed the responses from the sectors in parallel and then voted line by line.

**Copyright and Licensing Agency**

Primary Voting for - 5  
Primary Voting against - 0  
Secondary Voting N/A recharged via DfE

**Catering equipment**

Primary Voting for - 5  
Primary Voting against - 0  
Secondary Voting N/A recharged via DfE

**Support & Challenge Programme**

Primary Voting for - 5  
Primary Voting against - 0  
Secondary Voting For – 3  
Secondary Voting Against - 0

**Attain**

Primary Voting for - 5  
Primary Voting against - 0  
Secondary Voting For – 3  
Secondary Voting Against - 0

**Parenting cover and public duties**

Primary Voting for - 5  
Primary Voting against - 0  
Secondary Voting For – 3  
Secondary Voting Against - 0

**Ethnic minorities and bilingual learners**

Primary Voting for - 5  
Primary Voting against - 0  
Secondary Voting For – 3  
Secondary Voting Against - 0

**Tree maintenance**

Primary Voting for - 5  
Primary Voting against - 0  
Secondary Voting For – 3  
Secondary Voting Against - 0

**VBS Behaviour Option 1**

Primary Voting for - 5  
Primary Voting against - 0  
Secondary Voting For – 3  
Secondary Voting Against - 0

**VBS Behaviour Option 2**

The group discussed this option before voting which is new for 24/25 in some detail before voting. This is an increase on the basic service offered to schools. There is also an enhanced strategic service offered under a SLA.

Primary Voting for - 4  
Primary Voting against - 0  
Secondary Voting For – 3  
Secondary Voting Against - 0

**School Improvement**

Primary Voting for - 5  
Primary Voting against - 0  
Secondary Voting For – 3  
Secondary Voting Against - 0

**School Attendance**

Primary Voting for - 5  
Primary Voting against - 0  
Secondary Voting For – 3  
Secondary Voting Against - 0

**School Improvement and Brokering**

Primary Voting for - 5  
Primary Voting against - 0  
Secondary Voting For – 3  
Secondary Voting Against - 0

**Local Authority statutory duties previously funded by the Education Service Grant (ESG)**

This would cover Admissions, School Improvement a number of these services.

**Decision (f)**

Schools' Forum approves the contribution to responsibilities that local authorities hold for maintained schools of £650k (previously funded by ESG).

For – 9  
Against - 0

**Individual Schools Budget share****Action – AG**

**Appendix 1 needs to be recalculated with the correct modelling and correct the discrepancies. MSAG is at least 60% / 70% of the increase which has been rolled in to the main DSG Grant.**

Noting with the revised APT the allocations will shift slightly.

	<p><b>Decision (g)</b>  School Forum approves the APT 2024/25 in accordance with the Consultation exercise held during November 2023 of school budgets 2024/25 and to note that this is subject to ESFA data validation and checking and may be subject to minor change(s). Final approved APT and any changes will be reported to School Forum in March.  For – 9  Against – 0</p> <p><b>Noting Schools Forum members were approving a hybrid / blended approach between Option A and Option B and the flexibility to move the MFG to smooth the numbers.</b></p> <p><b>Central Schools Services Block</b>  The group discussed historic funding from the ESG and AG talked through the breakdown.</p> <p><b>Decision (h)</b>  Schools Forum approves the Central Services School Block budgets for 2024/25.  For – 9  Against – 0</p> <p><b>High Needs Block</b>  AG talked through the High Needs Block and the narrative that went with the paper.  EF highlighted that the High Needs Block is being increased by 2% this year which is not what we were expecting and does meet the rising level of inflation.</p> <p><b>Recommendation (i)</b>  Schools' Forum to comment and note the budget setting of the High Needs Block for 2024/25  Schools Forum members note this recommendation.</p> <p><b>DSG Safety Valve</b></p> <p><b>Recommendation (j)</b>  Schools' Forum notes and comments on ongoing Safety Valve Programme.  Schools Forum members note this recommendation.</p>
5	<p><b>DSG Deficit Recovery - verbal update – Paul Lufkin / Tom Procter</b></p> <p>PL and TP gave an update from the DSG sub group. The key message being the 2% uplift which is causing enormous financial pressures on the safety valve agreement. Work is now being down to review the forecast based on 2% rather than 5%.</p>
6	<p><b>AOB – Paul Lufkin</b></p> <p>KT shared feedback on behalf of a colleague where they asked for extra time to submit the consultation response and were told this would not be possible after the deadline had passed. EF and AG both apologised on behalf of Merton and said this would not happen again in the future.</p> <p>This same colleague also had concerns about the support they receive setting budgets and forecasts.</p>

	<p>EF and AG both acknowledged this and AG offered support to all schools if they need any training with budgets.</p> <p>EG thanked the team for the clear explanation of the consultation process this year and also for streamlining the paperwork.</p> <p>The group thanked all those involved for the work that has been conducted to present the consultation in a an easier to understand and read consultation document.</p> <p><b>The next Schools' Forum meeting is 20 March 2024 @ 4pm</b></p>
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