 **Minutes *(Draft)***

**Schools Forum**

Notes of meeting on 22nd March 2022

**Members:**

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| Paul Lufkin (PL) | Primary School rep (Wimbledon Park) |
| Fiona Duffy (FD) | Primary School rep (Dundonald) |
| Steve Donegan (SD) | Primary School rep (Malmesbury) |
| Fr Simon Peat (FSP) | Primary Governor rep (St Mary’s) |
| Kirsten Heard (KH) | Secondary School rep (Raynes Park High School) |
| Carla Chandler (CC) | PVI School rep (Melrose) |
| Carole Cook (CC) | 14-19 rep (TRP Ltd) |

**In Attendance:**

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| Nick Wilson (NW) | LBM CSF - Interim Assistant Director (Safety Valve Programme) |
| Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (EF) | LBM CSF - Assistant Director for Education and Early Help |
| Patricia Harvey (PH) | LBM CSF – Finance |
| Andrew Good (AG) | LBM CSF – Finance |
| Colette Levingston (CL) | LBM CSF – Finance |
| Jayne Ward (JW) | LBM CSF – Finance |
| Robyn Northcott (RN) | LBM CSF – Note Taker |

**Apologies:**

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| Frieda Perry (FP) | Primary School rep (Hatfeild) |
| Hamish Dowlen (HD) | Secondary School Gov rep (Raynes Park High School) |
| Julia Waters (JW) | Secondary School rep (Ursuline) |
| Lee Mallin (LM) | Academies Governor rep (Harris Morden) |
| Phyllis Sternberg (PS) | Academies rep (Beecholme) |

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| **Item 1** | **Welcome and introduction** |
|  | PL welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that he is chairing today’s meeting as FP is unwell. |
| **Item 2** | **Minutes of previous meeting (13th January 2022)** |
|  | The minutes of the meeting held on 13th January were agreed for accuracy.  Actions from the previously meeting were confirmed as completed and updates are included in the updated DSG Funding Report. |
| **Item 3** | **Safety Valve update** |
|  | NW provided an update:  Merton have been successfully included in the Safety Valve Programme. The agreement has been signed and the formal announcement will be made on Thursday.  A further bid for £15 million has been submitted for capital works, with the intention to strengthen ARP provision. This bid formed part of the Safety Valve agreement and it is anticipated that this bid will be approved as a result. EF noted that Tom Procter has produced the bids in detail and if they are unsuccessful, the Local Authority would be following up with the DfE. |
| **Item 4** | **Dedicated Schools Grant update 2021-22 and 2022-23** |
|  | PH shared the updated **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) update 2021-22 and 2022-23 f**unding report which addresses queries raised at the last meeting. There are no decisions to be made by Schools Forum members.  There have been no changes to DSG allocations since the last meeting. If any changes are made, these would be brought back to Schools Forum Members for information.  It was previously advised that rates would be administered by the LA. However, notification of this acceptance was not submitted and as a result, schools will be provided with funding and will have to pay their rates bills as in previous years.  At the last meeting there was a query regarding agreement for tree maintenance as a de-delegated item. PH confirmed that this was agreed and approved by both primary and secondary phases. EF shared that Tom Procter is liaising with the new Head of Service responsible for tree maintenance and a response to JW’s query regarding capacity to provide this service is anticipated.  The Local Authority Funding Proforma (APT) has been agreed and approved since the last meeting.  PH noted that cabinet ratification of school budgets has to be sought as part of the process. As the APT was not approved by cabinet until 2nd March and the statutory deadline for issuing school budgets was 28th February, draft budgets were submitted to schools. PH noted that there were some IT issues when sharing the budgets and that some schools were unclear that these were in draft form. PH apologised for any confusion caused.  Final approved school budgets for 2022/23 will be re-distributed to include:   * Final approved SEN 2.5% allocations (more than 2.5% of EHCPs recorded on Autumn 2021 census). * Final ARP places and therapy recharges agreed with services. * Final special school budgets - work is currently being done around therapy recharges for 2022/23 * Supplementary grant allocation will be rolled into the DSG next year. There is a tool published which has been shared with schools.   PH noted that, as part of the move to the National Funding Formula, the local authority will no longer distribute 3 year budgets. However, for schools facing financial difficulties and in the process of a licensed deficit, these schools will be provided with a 3 year budget.  AG shared that this update has been circulated to all Headteachers and School Business Managers. A link has also been shared to the supplementary grant tool.  PL asked what the timeframe is for final budgets to be submitted. AG confirmed that the intention is to issue final budgets to schools by mid-April and schools are aware of this.  With regards to the DSG forecast, an overspend is anticipated of £12.6m. When added to the cumulative deficit, this is likely to result in an overall deficit of around £37.5m. Final year-end outturn and each DSG block will be reported to the June meeting.  PH responded to questions raised at the last meeting:  Six secondary schools submitted a response to the consultation.  No consultation responses were received from the Harris Academy Trust.  Consultation responses relating to the request to transfer 5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs block are confirmed in Table 4.3 of the report.  Consultation responses relating to the request for an additional £500k (for one year) from the Schools Block to the High Needs block are confirmed in Table 4.4 of the report.  Schools Forum members noted the updates. |
| **Item 5** | **Communications with schools** |
|  | AG provided an update:  There have been some disruptions in the Finance Team as a result of the pandemic and also a number of changes in personnel. AG is issuing a new Comms policy. ESFA updates are received once or twice a week, and AG is circulating these to all Headteachers and School Business Managers with an explanation of how the content of the email will affect schools.  AG noted that a termly briefing note is circulated, however this is quite technical. This will now be updated to include updates to general policy, Schools Forum information and general notices regarding school finance.  PH and AG would be willing to meet with cluster leads to answer particular questions if this would be useful. FD commented that this would be helpful and there is likely to be interest in this from schools.  PL asked if any of the ESFA emails are time sensitive. AG confirmed that he circulates the emails on the day they are received. PL asked if the subject line of the emails could be updated to “ESFA send-out from Merton” to alert Headteachers to the email.  FD asked if the updates could be included in the weekly Headteachers email to avoid being missed. EF agreed that if Headteachers are prioritising the weekly email, this could be helpful for AG to send some text to Rachel to include. |
| **Item 6** | **Any Other Business** |
|  | PL thanked everyone for attending and thanked the team at the Local Authority for their input into the meeting. |

Date of next meeting: Thursday 23rd June 2022, 4pm