

Minutes (*Draft*)

Schools Forum

Notes of meeting on 23rd June 2022

Members:

Frieda Perry (FP)	Primary School rep (Hatfeild)
Paul Lufkin (PL)	Primary School rep (Wimbledon Park)
Steve Donegan (SD)	Primary School rep (Malmesbury)
Kirsten Heard (KH)	Secondary School rep (Raynes Park High School)
Hamish Dowlen (HD)	Secondary School Gov rep (Raynes Park High School)
Julia Waters (JW)	Secondary School rep (Ursuline)

In Attendance:

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (EF)	LBM CSF - Assistant Director for Education and Early Help
Patricia Harvey (PH)	LBM CSF – Finance
Andrew Good (AG)	LBM CSF – Finance
Richard Ellis (RE)	LBM - CSF Assistant Director for Strategy, Commissioning and Transformation
Colette Levingston (CL)	LBM CSF – Finance
Jayne Ward (JW)	LBM CSF – Finance
Robyn Northcott (RN)	LBM CSF – Note Taker

Apologies:

Fr Simon Peat (FSP)	Primary Governor rep (St Mary's)
Phyllis Sternberg (PS)	Academies rep (Beechholme)
Fiona Duffy (FD)	Primary School rep (Dundonald)
Carla Chandler (CC)	PVI School rep (Melrose)
Lee Mallin (LM)	Academies Governor rep (Harris Morden)

1	Welcome and apologies
	FP welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted.
2	Minutes of previous meeting
	Minutes were agreed as an accurate reflection of the meeting held on 22 nd March 2022.
3	Outturn position of DSG 2021/22
	PH shared headlines from the DSG Outturn Report for Financial Year 2021/22 and noted that this is being shared for information purposes and no decisions are required for Schools Forum members. Table 1 - final published allocations which were published in December.

"Less Academy Funding" is an allocation that is deducted from the published allocations. The deduction from the High Needs Block relates to commissioned places in academy ARPs.

The High Needs Block is the main area of pressure, and the ongoing deficit is included for transparency. £11.6m was received in support of the Safety Valve programme resulting in a cumulative deficit on the DSG of £26.9m. PH noted that the DSG is a ring-fenced grant.

There are underspends on some blocks. The overall DSG reserve is the net effect of the 4 blocks. For audit purposes, there is a requirement to report on each of the blocks.

The main pressure on the High Needs Block relates to a lack of local specialist SEN placements which results in high expenditure on provision. Pressure on the High Needs Block is a national picture, with 100 Local Authorities reporting overspends on the DSG.

Table 3 outlines the individual blocks.

There is a slight overspend on the Schools Block - PH noted that business rates are lagged and funding is received in the next year.

There is an overspend on the Attain budget and an accrual has been put in place to offset this.

The High Needs Block was overspent by £14.9m, however other savings have brought this down to £13.5m. This relates to EHCPs.

Other Local Authority Income was £321k more than anticipated budget. This is difficult to monitor through the year and relates to out of borough schools.

There will be an increase in the ARP budget for 2022/23 due to the Safety Valve programme. This budget was overspent for 2021/22.

A one-off transfer of £650k was made from Schools Block to High Needs Block in support of increasing SEND costs and School Forum approved this January 2021.

There is national ongoing pressure with regards to Post-16 costs. This budget is overspent by £367k as a result of the change to statutory responsibility up to age 25. This funding is lagged and will be a pressure year on year.

There is an anticipated underspend on the Early Years block. The Early Years Block final allocation is based on January census and a possible clawback is anticipated. The overall Early Years Block underspend will be around £900k. There will be an updated report and final figure shared with Schools Forum in due course. January 2022 census information indicates a decline in take-up across 2,3 and 4 year olds.

FP queried why there is an overspend on the School Improvement budget. EF confirmed that this relates to the use of temporary staff to alleviate staffing pressures. The SLA does not cover the full service and this is also funded by general fund and the DSG.

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.

Future pressures:

Table 5 highlights EHCP growth by age range. PH noted that based on the SEN2 submission in January 2022, the largest growth is in 11-15 year olds.

	<p>PH noted that nationally, the highest trend is a primary need of ASD. Within Merton, the primary need is SLCN. In other Local Authorities, this is usually a second primary need associated with ASD.</p> <p>For 3.5, PH highlighted an error and that this should state 2021/22, not 2021/23.</p> <p>There is now a requirement to have an unusable DSG reserve - £13.5m will transfer to the unusable reserve.</p> <p>Local Management of Schools balances have decreased by £103k - attached Appendix A.</p> <p>Schools Forum members were asked to note and comment on Local Management of school balances 2021/22. There were no comments.</p> <p>PH advised that school balances allowed were 5% secondary and 8% for primaries, but regulations changed. Within the school balances, there may be commitments such as building work or planned expansions. FP queried how Merton manage schools with low balances. EF responded that there is not currently engagement with schools relating to this and it could be considered how this is managed by PH and AG's teams. JW suggested that governors are accountable for value for money and it would not be worth the time to follow up with those schools.</p> <p>Two additional grants were included as part of the allocations published in December 21:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools Supplementary Grant - Final allocations perschool were not received until April, and the additional supplementary funding to schools will be rolled into the DSG baseline for 2023/24. PH noted that there was a national Freedom of Information request regarding how Local Authorities were going to allocate this as there is no specific guidance on the HN element The additional funding is in support of the Health and Social Care Levy. This is distributed based on commissioned places across settings - attached as Appendix B for information. <p>DSG Allocations</p> <p>There have been no changes to the DSG allocations since publication in December 2021. This is based on Census data.</p> <p>Schools Forum were asked to note final DSG allocations. No additional comments were made.</p>
4	DSG Sub-Group minutes - 7th June 2022
	<p>EF shared that the Schools Forum DSG Sub-Group met on 7th June 2022. The group discussed the Safety Valve return which has now been submitted to the DfE with input from Headteachers included in this submission. As part of this, the group were informed of the actions being undertaken as part of the Safety Valve programme to address the deficit associated with the DSG.</p> <p>EF shared that headlines were taken from the 9 conditions to Secondary Headteachers today and will be taken to Primary Headteachers next week. FP highlighted the need for input and support from those working in schools, as well as from Local Authority officers. Primary Clusters have discussed and are keen to understand implications for their schools.</p> <p>EF shared that the next focus is the development of a Communication Strategy. Regular communication is already taking place at the SENCo Forum, Strategic Headteacher meetings and Schools Forum.</p>
5	Membership
	<p>FP is leaving Schools Forum after today's meeting and is stepping down as Chair. PL has been the Vice Chair and has volunteered to take over as Chair. All Schools Forum members agreed to this.</p>

	<p>If anyone would like to volunteer to take over from PL as Vice Chair, they can contact him directly.</p> <p>Fiona Duffy is also stepping down as a Primary representative.</p> <p>New members of the Schools Forum starting in September: Primary representative - Emma Greer, Pelham Primary representative, Martin Roughley, Cranmer</p> <p>EF noted that there were two vacancies for Primary representatives and two nominations were received. All Schools Forum members agreed.</p> <p>There is a vacancy for a 16-19 representative following Carole Cook's resignation. There have been no nominations at this stage - interested parties to contact RN.</p> <p>There is a requirement for a PVI representative and contact was made with all PVI settings via contacts in the Early Years Team. Rachael Shepard-Walwyn from Montessori House is the only nomination. All members agreed.</p>
6	Training
	<p>For the three new members, there will be training on the role of the Schools Forum, the type of reports and format of meetings. Existing members are welcome to join this training as a refresher and a date will be circulated.</p>
7	Any Other Business
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Paper consultation <p>There is a SEND Green Paper which is trying to address the underfunding and deficits that many Local Authorities are experiencing. The Local Authority will be responding to the consultation and can include input from others (to be shared with EF in the next week). The consultation is open for anyone to respond to if anyone would prefer to make their own response. The consultation response deadline is 22nd July.</p> <p>PH also shared that there is a consultation on the National Funding Formula which closes on 9th September. If anyone would like to contribute, input should be sent to PH directly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future meeting format <p>EF queried how Schools Forum members would like to proceed with regards to the format of future meetings. It was agreed that certain conversations are better in-person to allow more in-depth discussion (e.g. consultation documents and responses), while others are more easily accommodated online (e.g. information only items)</p> <p>It was agreed that a blended model would be the best approach, with the meeting format being agreed when the agenda is set depending on agenda items. In-person meetings will be held at Malmesbury Primary School.</p> <p>EF on behalf of the Schools Forum, thanked FP, and FD in her absence, for their contributions to Schools Forum and also to FP for chairing. PL also extended his thanks to FP.</p>

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 28th September 2022, 4pm