

Minutes of the Schools Forum Meeting

Meeting title:	Schools Forum Meeting	
Date/time	8 November 2023, 17.30-19.00	
Members:	<p><u>School Members</u> Kevin McDonnell (Special School Headteacher rep) Kevin Reynolds (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Robin Warren (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Sian Davies (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Lisa Neidich (Maintained Pri Governor rep) Sam Billington (Maintained Pri Governor rep) Andy English (Maintained Sec Headteacher rep) Farzana Chowdhury (Nursery School Headteacher rep) Richard Brown (PRU rep, Headteacher)</p>	<p><u>Academy Members</u> Phoebe Clapham (Governor rep)</p> <p><u>Alternative Provision</u> Anna Cain (Special Academy rep)</p> <p><u>Special School Members</u> Jo Clare (Special School rep)</p> <p><u>Non School Members</u> David Davies (Staff rep)</p>
Additional attendees:	<p>Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Cabinet member for Education, Young People & Children Social Care Cllr Caroline Woodley, Cabinet member for Families, Early Years & Play Jacquie Burke (Group Director, Children & Education) Paul Senior (Interim DoE & Inclusion, Hackney Education) Joe Wilson (AD Send and Inclusion) Jason Marantz (AD School Standards & Improvement) Donna Thomas (AD Early years, Early Help and Well-being) Nick Wilson (Head of SEND Delivering Better Value Programme) Vernon Stowbridge (Interim Director of Finance (C&Ed), Hackney Council) Sajeed Patni (Interim Head of Finance, Children & Education) Ophelia Carter (Head of Schools Finance) David Court (Interim AD School Estate Strategy) Kathryn Lloyd (Interim Head of Education Operations, Hackney Education) Ann Yiadom (Clerk to the Forum) Chris Scott (Group Accountant)</p> <p>Martin (Observer)</p>	
Apologies:	Sian Davies (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep), Anna Cain (Special Academy rep)	
Members Absent:		

	Item
1.	<p>Welcome and introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apologies above were noted. <p>New members were welcomed to the forum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kevin Reynolds - Maintained Primary Headteacher representative Sam Billington - Maintained Primary Governor representative Farzana Chowdhury - Nursery School Headteacher representative
2.	<p>Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Andy English appointed as Chair Lisa Neidich appointed as Vice Chair

<p>3.</p>	<p>Minutes of the last meeting held 05 July 2023 were reviewed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minutes were agreed and accepted by the forum members as accurate. <p>Action log</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action log was reviewed and it was noted that relevant actions were to be addressed during the course of the meeting. <p>Matters arising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written response - Reworked deficit reduction plan: A draft reworked deficit reduction plan is due to be submitted to the DfE at the end of December with view to present the actual plan to the forum at the next meeting <p>Action: Actual deficit reduction plan to be presented to the forum in the February meeting.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Membership and Terms of Reference (ToR) Update 2023/24 including roles and remit of Forum members</p> <p>Forum members took note of the membership and ToR update for 2023/14. No further comments were made</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Consultation on High Needs funding arrangements 2024/25</p> <p>The report addresses the Local Authority's (LA) consultation with the School Forum (SF) regarding pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Paragraph 4 outlines different funding strands.</p> <p>Operational guidance remains unchanged; the initial allocation of funding will be confirmed before Christmas. The report touches on arrangements for Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and briefly discusses budget pressures, including High Needs funding.</p> <p>Member Comment: Concerns about SF being misled (5.1 of the report). There has been a lack of a review of place funding in line with data trends, particularly in the case of New Regents, which has experienced a significant increase in pupil roll. Despite this surge, place funding remains static at 120. Requests clarity on unresolved mechanisms and emphasised the need for a review.</p> <p>Chair followed this by inquiring about how the existing funding arrangement would address rising costs and an increasing number of young people with Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs).</p> <p>SP acknowledges potential issues with wording and can change and clarify the relevant paragraph, noting the ongoing review of funding currently being done. The regular DfE meetings under the Delivering Better Value (DBV) program were also highlighted.</p> <p>Action: Review and reword paragraph 5.1 of the report.</p> <p>Member Comment: There has been an absence of Annual Reviews (AR) for PRU case funding, which has never been updated.</p> <p>Member Comment: Suggested rewording from 'are reviewed' to 'being reviewed,' emphasising the need for more discussion. Noted the alignment of SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) strategy and the potential misleading nature of the term 'PRU.' Highlighted the lack of review for place value of £10K particularly in ARP (Alternative Resource Provision).</p> <p>PS agrees with the sentiments expressed, noting that the £10K is not a local determination but acknowledges the need to review this and have further conversations around this.</p> <p>Member Comment: Requests for an update on the direction of travel, expressing historical SF concerns about spending on out-of-borough provision and the commitment to reduce it.</p>

	<p>Chair reiterated concerns about reducing the financial burden of out-of-borough provision in the absence of cost control.</p> <p>PS shared that the DBV program aims to build local capacity, reduce reliance on the independent sector, and is more comprehensive and welcomes the need for dedicated time to share the DBV and broader plan.</p> <p>Action: Share the DBV plan with the forum for a detailed review.</p> <p>Member comment: Suggestion to separate non-maintained and independent schools' costs from other maintained schools, aligning with the DBV strategy to ensure efficiency.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Approval of Central Schools Services Block 2024/25</p> <p>The LA seeks approval from forum members for the Central Schools Services Block for 2024/25, with final figures expected before Christmas.</p> <p>Chair inquired about specific efficiencies the LA aims to achieve to maintain service levels within budget constraints.</p> <p>CS explained that, as part of budget setting, they aim to realise savings, especially in historical commitments otherwise there would be the need to find alternative funding sources if savings couldn't be achieved.</p> <p>Chair queried how to secure these savings without compromising efficiency.</p> <p>CS acknowledged the inherent risk, considering it a controversial subject. Assured that colleagues are working to mitigate risks and sustain service quality.</p> <p>Member comment: Question around why section 3.4 allocations are capped, noting a higher level of funding if the cap were not in place.</p> <p>CS clarified that the cap isn't published but is common to ensure a minimum guarantee of funding.</p> <p>SF Members approved the Central Schools Services Block 2024/25 by a show of hands.</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Annual Report School Funding Formula and Schools Block funding arrangement 2024-25</p> <p>The LA seeks approval from the Schools Forum for proposals related to the DSG Schools Block and De-Delegation for 2024-25. Additionally, SF members are consulted on proposals related to the Schools Funding Formula 2024-25 and asked to note the consultation with schools and the outcome, as well as approve the growth policy.</p> <p>Mainstream School Additional Grants will be rolled into dedicated schools grants next year, similar to what happened with the supplementary grant. Teachers' pay additional grant will continue to be separate for now.</p> <p>Recent media focus on the National Funding Formula (NFF) for mainstream schools, where the DfE published incorrect rates were highlighted. Every mainstream school is on the minimum funding guarantee.</p> <p>Emphasis was made on the requirement of the LA to follow rules highlighted in the report concerning budget setting. Report addresses rates in the local funding formula not mirroring NFF.</p> <p>The AWPU rate is higher than the NFF rate, impacting funding allocation to individual schools. Looking at the proposed 0% Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) for flexibility in transferring funding.</p> <p>Member comment: SF has voted for a similar uplift to the high needs block for some years. Questions raised about the sustainability of this practice.</p>

	<p>Chair echoed concerns querying the LA's long-term strategies for block transfers to ensure financial sustainability while maintaining quality of provision.</p> <p>PS acknowledges frustration and concerns, attributes increasing demand for funding in SEND and high needs to reforms since 2014. Close to a £10 million funding gap among local authorities. DBV programme and policy reform are responses to the situation.</p> <p>Chair asked for details on trends and factors contributing to escalating SEND cost pressures beyond EHCP.</p> <p>PS attributes it to increased demand in EHCP, complexity, and other factors. Proposes a dedicated session on DBV to provide plans, proposals, and mitigations.</p> <p>Member Comment: Query whether the in-year decrease in the deficit in 2022/23 is too optimistic.</p> <p>CS expresses reason for optimism due to increased funding but warns against conclusions. Acknowledges it's not sustainable and emphasises the need for clear communication on the DBV plan's implementation.</p> <p>PS agrees it's not sustainable, stresses the need for the forum to have a clear line of sight on the work being done with DBV, and commits to sharing outcomes of conversations with the DfE regarding overseeing plan implementation.</p> <p>Action: Outcomes of conversations with the DfE regarding overseeing plan implementation to be shared with SF members.</p> <p>SF members were asked to vote on the below:</p> <p>Transfer of 0.5% from Schools Block to High Needs Block</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Approved <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Primary: 3 yes; 2 not present; 1 abstention; (1 vacant) ○ Secondary: 1 yes; (1 vacant) <p>All de-delegation items - Primary and Secondary Schools only (Excludes Academies, Special Schools, Nursery School, EY rep, 16-19 rep and Staff rep)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Approved <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Primary: 3 yes; 2 not present; 1 abstention; (1 vacant) ○ Secondary: 1 yes; (1 vacant) <p>Growth policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Approved <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Primary: 3 yes; 2 not present; 1 abstention; (1 vacant) ○ Secondary: 1 yes; (1 vacant)
<p>8.</p>	<p>Agreement of Final DSG Budget for 2023/24 (current year update)</p> <p>This agenda item serves as an information-only paper to establish the final DSG position for the current year, emphasising a £500k movement from the EY block in 22/23. The final adjustment will be executed at year-end but has been duly accrued for.</p> <p>Chair queried potential lobbying efforts to secure additional funding, given the national issue of underfunding in the high needs block.</p> <p>PS acknowledges the need for policy reform at national level. Anticipates that many LAs will face challenges, possibly falling into Section 114, and emphasises the expectation for policy reform.</p> <p>Chair further enquired about initiatives being developed by Hackney to increase efficiency and how these will impact SEND provision in the short and long term and would like this to be presented to school forum members.</p>

	<p>PS assures that actions are being taken, specifically about the commissioning of around 300 places across the board and outlines plans for the next phase.</p> <p>Action: Detailed initiatives aimed at enhancing efficiency and the anticipated impact on SEND provision in both the short and long term to be presented to Schools Forum</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>Member Comment: Request for a future discussion on the roll-out of Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) in the primary sector as LAs have noted a steep fall in applications for Free School Meals (FSM). Request for the LA to share its strategy at a future meeting as this will have financial implications for secondary schools.</p> <p>PS intends to share a paper, which is due to be presented at upcoming secondary and primary heads meeting, with SF members.</p> <p>Action: Paper regarding Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) for the primary and secondary heads meeting to be shared with School Forum members also.</p> <p>Member Comment: SF voted to de-delegate items, including money used for supply for facility times, which does not apply to academies and free schools, where there is a separate facilities arrangement in place. Negotiating with HE to persuade academies to contribute. Written confirmation received from several schools (Community Schools Trust, COLA, BSix, Olive Schools, Hackney New School); verbal agreement with Skinners and Northwold. Ongoing negotiation with Mossbourne Federation, but Clapton Girls and Bridge Academy have refused to pay in. In the past, SF wrote to all academies, requesting contributions and reassuring members to avoid free-rider principles. LA has instructed not to go into schools that refused to pay in during facility time, ensuring fairness for contributing schools. Suggestion to write to academies again to share the cost.</p> <p>Action: Reach out to academies to seek their financial contributions towards facilities arrangement</p>
	<p>Upcoming dates for 2023/24</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wed 7 Feb 2024 ● Wed 17 Apr 2024 ● Wed 19 June 2024
<p>Summary of actions agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Agenda item 4: Actual deficit reduction plan to be presented to the forum in the February meeting ● Agenda item 5: Review and reword paragraph 5.1 of the report ● Agenda item 5: Share the DBV plan with the forum for a detailed review ● Agenda item 7: Outcomes of conversations with the DfE regarding overseeing plan implementation to be shared with SF members ● Agenda item 8: Detailed initiatives aimed at enhancing efficiency and the anticipated impact on SEND provision in both the short and long term to be presented to Schools Forum ● Agenda item 9: Paper regarding Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) for the primary and secondary heads meeting to be shared with School Forum members also ● Agenda item 9: Reach out to academies to seek their financial contributions towards facilities arrangement 	