

Minutes of the Schools Forum Meeting

Meeting title:	Schools Forum Meeting	
Date/time	5 July 2023, 17.30-19.00	
Members:	<p><u>School Members</u> Kevin McDonnell (Special School Headteacher rep) Asarena Simon (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Robin Warren (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Sian Davies (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep) Lisa Neidich (Maintained Pri Governor rep) Andy English (Maintained Sec Headteacher rep) Lisa Clarke (Nursery School Headteacher rep) Richard Brown (PRU rep, Headteacher)</p>	<p><u>Academy Members</u> Claire Syms (Academy Principal rep) 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> Cathy Murphy (EY/PVI rep) David Davies (Staff rep)</p>
Additional attendees:	<p>Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Cabinet member for Education, Young People and Children Social Care Cllr Caroline Woodley, Cabinet member for Families, Early Years and Play Jacquie Burke (Group Director, Children and Education) Paul Senior (Interim DoE and Inclusion, Hackney Education) Jason Marantz (Interim Assistant Director, School Standards & Improvement) Donna Thomas (Head of Early years, Early Help and Well-being) Naeem Ahmed (Director of Finance (C&Ed), Hackney Council) Sajeed Patni (Interim Head of Finance, Children & Education) Ophelia Carter (Head of Schools Finance) Kathryn Lloyd (Interim Head of Education Operations, Hackney Education) Chris Scott, (Group Accountant, Children and Education Finance)</p> <p>Ann Yiadom (Clerk to the Forum)</p> <p>Chris Scott (Group Accountant, Observer)</p>	
Apologies:	Robin Warren (Maintained Pri Headteacher rep), Cathy Murphy (EY/PVI rep), Jo Clare (Special School rep), Kevin McDonnell (Special School Headteacher rep)	
Members Absent:	Richard Brown (PRU rep, Headteacher), Phoebe Clapham (Governor rep), David Davies (Staff rep)	

	Item
1.	<p>Welcome and introductions</p> <p>Sian Davies, Schools Forum Chair, commenced the meeting by welcoming attendees to the final Schools Forum meeting of the year, highlighting that all agenda items were for the Schools Forum members to note, and there were no items requiring decisions.</p> <p>Apologies were received from Robin Warren, Cathy Murphy and Jo Clare. Additionally, Claire Sym's resignation from Schools Forum was noted. The process for reappointing her position was discussed, and it was confirmed that the process would begin imminently.</p>

	<p>Lisa Clarke shared that she was stepping aside from her role rather than stepping down, explaining that it was a part of the arrangement where members take turns, and she had extended her tenure to cover an interim period. Farzana Chowdhury would be taking on the role from September 2023.</p> <p>The Chair expressed gratitude for the participation and input of all attendees, acknowledging the long school day and the effort to be present at the meeting.</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>2.1. Minutes of the last meeting held 01 February 2023</p> <p>The minutes of the previous Schools Forum meeting were taken as read and accurate.</p> <p>2.2. Action log</p> <p><u>2.2.1 Early years inclusion fund</u></p> <p>DT presented the Early Years Inclusion Fund report in response to a previous request for more comprehensive information regarding fund usage. The report provides detailed insights into the allocation and utilisation of funds to support children with emerging needs.</p> <p>The report primarily focused on the Schooling and Inclusion Block, specifically addressing the mechanisms through which schools and settings could access additional resources to support children with emerging needs. An allocation of just under £400,000 had been designated to the Early Years Inclusion Fund. The funding was categorised into different elements, each with varying rates, ranging from £2 to £10 per hour for three- and four-year-olds.</p> <p>The application process had transitioned from termly to monthly submissions as a means to streamline operations and enhance efficiency. Data on the number of applications received and the corresponding number of children funded in recent months were provided. The report further outlined the types of providers applying for funding, with a particular focus on nursery classes in maintained schools, private and community sector providers, and independent schools.</p> <p>It was noted that childminders appeared to be underrepresented in utilising the fund. DT stressed that the application process necessitated detailed information to evidence a child's needs and how the funds would be employed. This approach aimed to facilitate well-informed decision-making.</p> <p>Member comment: The number of applications that were denied by the panel are of concern and was there adequate support available to these settings?</p> <p>Response: The concern is recognised; DT pledges to provide feedback to the relevant team responsible for the paper. She emphasised the importance of ensuring that applications aligned with the fund's objectives and that settings were well-informed about the eligibility criteria. It was noted that settings had the right to challenge and request a review of decisions they deemed erroneous.</p> <p><u>2.2.2 Final cabinet report</u></p> <p>PS acknowledged the extensive content of the cabinet report and its significance. Specific attention was drawn to section 5.3 of the report. Sections 6.2 and 6.3 of the report were highlighted, clarifying that the costs identified are funded by the Council's general fund and do not impact the jurisdiction of the Schools Forum.</p> <p>The Chair raised a question about paragraph 6.2, which mentions that there will be a limited impact on the grant received at the borough level. The Chair inquired how the schools block will be affected in the future due to a decline in the number of students; with fewer children, there might be an impact on the overall funding for the Local Authority. The Chair also asked if there has been any modelling done to understand and anticipate these impacts.</p> <p>SP clarified that the direction of travel involved falling roles and decreasing funding per pupil due to decreased pupil numbers. However, in terms of the six schools closing, there was not expected to be a direct impact.</p> <p>PS added that the closure of schools would not exacerbate the existing impact on the system, where there was already a 22% MTC in the primary sector. Modelling would be conducted over the following years, with GLA</p>

	<p>modelling data available to assess the impact of children leaving the system. This modelling would not significantly change the reported situation.</p> <p>The chair further queried the modelling of the impact of continual falling rolls on the overall schools block, delegation levels, and the Schools Forum's role in this context.</p> <p>PS emphasised the importance of monitoring this aspect and suggested that it become a standing agenda item, which the Chair was in agreement with given that this long-term perspective would be essential for decision-making, considering the impact on top slices, delegations, and services.</p> <p>Action: Add review of modelling data to understand and anticipate impact of continual falling roll on schools block funding and delegation levels as a standing agenda on the forward plan</p> <p>The Chair noted that Appendix L - Equalities Assessment cannot be found. Action: Appendix L to be made available to members</p> <p>2.3. Matters arising</p> <p>N/A</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Schools' Contingency and Growth Fund Outturn 2022-23</p> <p>SP outlined that the Schools Contingency and Growth Fund saw an expenditure of just under £170,000 in the 2022-23 fiscal year. The report detailed the allocation of the fund, with additional specifics provided in Section 4 concerning the Growth Fund.</p> <p>The differences between the Growth Fund and the Contingency Fund were highlighted. The Growth Fund applied to all schools as a top slice, with the proposal suggesting that it would be transferred to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) reserve. In contrast, the Contingency Fund was applicable solely to maintained primary and secondary schools. It was noted that there was an underspend of £437,000 in the Contingency Fund, prompting further discussion.</p> <p>PS provided an explanation of the underspend in the Contingency Fund, which amounted to £437,000. This underspend was divided into two parts: £234,000 from the schools contingency element and £203,000 from the 40 schools element. Of this sum, £210,000 was designated to be carried forward to support schools currently undergoing partial or full closure programs, as they were expected to face additional costs in the coming months. This allocation aimed to provide a contingency to assist these schools during challenging periods. This allocation left £227,000 to be spent in the 2023-24 financial year, and two allocation options were presented:</p> <p>Option One: Distribute the remaining funds across all schools on a per-pupil basis. However, this option was considered less impactful as the amount per school might not have a significant effect due to the widespread distribution and varying pupil numbers.</p> <p>Option Two: Allocate the remaining funds on a case-by-case basis to schools experiencing falling rolls. Schools would be required to make a business case and apply for funding based on specified criteria. Education would provide an update on this allocation at the end of the 2023-24 financial year. This was the chosen option.</p> <p>The Chair sought clarification on whether the funds were intended for any school experiencing falling rolls or only the current schools in scope. It was confirmed that it was intended for any school facing falling rolls.</p> <p>Concerns were raised regarding whether the underspend would lead to a reduction in dedelegation for the next year. SP indicated that this matter would be considered as part of the budget-setting process, taking into account the reasons for the underspend and the forecast for the 2023-24 fiscal year.</p> <p>The Chair expressed the need for consistency in presenting financial data in reports and highlighted that detailed information about fund allocation to specific schools had been omitted from recent reports. The Chair requested that this approach be reviewed for future reports to ensure transparency and consistency.</p>

<p>4.</p>	<p>Schools' 2022-23 Closing Balances</p> <p>SP presented the annual report summarising the closing positions of maintained schools' balances for 2022-23. The report revealed a decrease in schools' balances from £16.7 million to £14.5 million, marking a decrease of £2.2 million. The revenue element also saw a decrease from £16.1 million to £12.4 million, a significant decrease of £3.7 million.</p> <p>The report provided a summary of school reserve balances, highlighting that the number of schools in deficit had increased from 11 to 13 at the end of 2022-23, with the majority being primary schools and one special school. A balance control mechanism was in place, with 16 schools falling within it, either at 5% for secondary schools or 8% for primary schools. Seven schools had balances that exceeded 12% for three consecutive years, potentially subjecting them to clawback.</p> <p>During the discussion, concerns were raised about the variation in the outturn for children's centres between 2021-22 and 2022-23, which showed a substantial increase. The reason for this increase was not immediately clear, but it was agreed that further analysis and clarification would be provided after the meeting.</p> <p>The chair asked about the implementation of the clawback mechanism for schools with substantial carry forwards, to which it was clarified that clawback had not been initiated in recent years. Schools had been asked for detailed plans on how they intended to reduce their surpluses, and ongoing reviews and support were provided. While clawback was an option, it had not been exercised recently.</p> <p>PS emphasised the need for transparency and fair criteria regarding clawback policies and suggested benchmarking with other local authorities to develop a more structured approach.</p> <p>Given that £1.8million is sitting with the PRUs, the chair further queried the current situation around ARP funding. Action: Provide clarity on the clawback mechanism for schools with substantial carry forwards and to deliver an update on the current status of ARP (Alternative Resource Provision) funding.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Consultations report</p> <p>No comments made</p>
<p>6.</p> <p>6.1</p> <p>6.2</p>	<p>Any other Business:</p> <p>Delivering Better Value</p> <p>NW provided information about the Delivering Better Value program, a government initiative aimed at addressing cumulative deficits in high-needs blocks within about 50 authorities in England. He explained that they had submitted a bid and received a positive response. However, during a meeting with other local authorities and the Department for Education (DfE), they were informed that the rules had changed. The DfE now required more work on mitigated areas and the deficit reduction plan for these high-needs blocks. As a result, they were given a new scope of work that needed to be completed by 17 July.</p> <p>NW shared that the DfE seemed surprised by the extent of the deficits, which were significantly higher than initially expected. This had led to changes in parameters, mitigations, and modelling. The deficit reduction plans are going to be reworked with a view to share these ahead of the next Schools Forum meeting. The DfE was expected to decide on the grant application, which aimed to assist with mitigating and managing their cumulative deficit, although the timeline for this decision was uncertain. Action: NW to share reworked deficit reduction plan with Schools Forum Members</p> <p>Raising Achievement - update</p> <p>JM provided an update on the Raising Achievement report in response to a request for data presented in February, which is for noting by the forum.</p> <p>For the upcoming year, the plan includes:</p>

<p>6.3</p> <p>6.4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reintroducing a grant offer for maintained secondary schools, with the data indicating the need for targeted support. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ £15,000 - £20,000 per project (one project per school) ○ Primary schools who want to participate in this offer will have to self fund it. ● Expanding training programs for primary schools, combining training with programs. ● Introducing an enrichment offer, addressing academic and holistic aspects. ● Offering introductory sessions on anti-racist approaches for schools. ● Focusing on specific target groups, such as Turkish, Kurdish, and Turkish Cypriot pupils and Black Caribbean pupils. <p>JM further mentioned the possibility of broadening the definition of target groups and including other vulnerable groups like traveller pupils.</p> <p>There were no questions or suggestions from the Schools Forum members, and JM's report was appreciated for its clarity.</p> <p>Schools Forum Membership / Attendance</p> <p>Concerns were raised about the low attendance of members at the meeting and the need to refresh the substitution policy to ensure better representation. It was suggested that efforts should also be made to recruit more governors to participate in the Schools Forum.</p> <p>Action: Substitution Policy to be reviewed and updated Action: Recruitment drive for more governor representatives.</p> <p>Sian Davies stepping down as Chair</p> <p>The current chair expressed her last meeting as chair and thanked the members for their participation. She encouraged finding a new chair for the upcoming year and offered to support the transition.</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Upcoming dates for 2023/24</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wed 8 Nov 2023 ● Wed 7 Feb 2024 ● Wed 17 Apr 2024 ● Wed 19 June 2024
<p>Summary of actions agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review of modelling data to understand and anticipate impact of continual falling roll on schools block funding and delegation levels as a standing agenda on the forward plan (SP) ● PRU balance and ARP funding to be added to the forward plan (SP) ● NW to share reworked deficit reduction plan with Schools Forum Members ● Refresh substitution policy to ensure members who send apologies send substitutes in their stead ● Recruitment drive for more governor representatives. 	