

**MINUTES OF THE OF THE SCHOOLS' FORUM**  
**HELD ON 25 June 2024**  
**VIRTUAL MS TEAMS MEETING**  
(10:00am to 12:00pm)

<b>Present:</b>	<b>Maintained Primary Representatives</b>	
	Scott Halliwell (SH (Co-Chair)	HT, Southwood Primary School
	Julie Philips (JP)	HT, Godwin Primary School
	Gill Massar (GM)	HT, William Bellamy primary School
	Richard November (RN)	HT, Valence Primary School
	Simon Abeledo (SA)	HT, Rush Green Primary School
	Junaida Bana (JB)	HT, Furze Infant School
	Sara Rider (SR)	HT, Monteagle Primary School
	<b>Maintained Secondary Representatives</b>	
	Tony Roe (TR)	HT, Barking Abbey School
	Lisa Keane (LK)	HT, Eastbury Community School
	<b>Maintained All-through (A/T)</b>	
	Russell Taylor	HT, Robert Clack School
	<b>Governor Representatives (1 pri &amp; 1 sec)</b>	
	Vacant	
	Vacant	
	<b>Academy &amp; Free Primary</b>	
	Lisa Shepherd (LS)	HT, Eastbury Primary School
	<b>Academy &amp; Free Secondary</b>	
	Andy Roberts (AR)	HT, Riverside School
	<b>Academy &amp; Free Schools (A/T)</b>	
	Clare Cross (CC)	HT, Sydney Russell School
	<b>Academy Special School Representative</b>	
	Roger Leighton (RL)	Chief Executive, Partnership Learning
	<b>Maintained Special Schools Representative</b>	
	Jo Long (JL)	HT, Trinity School
	<b>Maintained PRU Representative</b>	
	Cathy Stygal (CS)	HT, Mayesbrook Park School
	<b>Early Years Representative</b>	
	John Trow-Smith (JTS)	Early Years, Local Authority
	<b>Trade Union Representatives (shared role)</b>	
	Dominic Byrne (DB)	NUT
	John McGill (JMc)	NASUWT
	<b>Church of England Representative</b>	
	David Huntingford (DH)	HT, William Ford C of E Junior School
	<b>Catholic Representative</b>	
	Clare Cantle	HT, All Saints Catholic School
	<b>14-19 Representative</b>	
	Vacant	Principal, Barking and Dagenham College

**Also present:**

Jane Hargreaves (JH) – Commissioning Director, Education; Councillor Elizabeth Kangethe (CK) – Cabinet Member for Educational Attainment and School Improvement; Kofi Adu (KA) – Finance Manager, Local Authority Finance; Patricia Harvey (PH) – Senior Professional, High Needs Block; Amar Barot (AB) – Group Manager, Local Authority Finance and Investment, Local Authority Finance; Gurmit Kaur (GKa) – Group Accountant, Local Authority Finance; Florence Fadahunsi (FF) – Group Accountant, Local Authority Finance; Caroline Connolly (CCo) – Group Accountant, Local Authority Finance; Amrita Kaur (AK) – Group Accountant, Local Authority Finance; Charlotte Mortimer (CM) Local Authority Finance; Martin Nicholson (MN) – Virtual Headteacher of SEND; Rikke Damsgaard (RD) – Strategic Lead for Early Years and Childcare); Evan Hollows (EH) – Eastbrook School; Yolanda Cattle (YC) – Village Infant School; Kim Cerri (KC) – Riverside School; Tracey Whittington (TW) – Beam Primary School; Mairead Pryor (MP) – Warren Junior School; Grant Krog (GK) – The Leys; Tasha Roby (TR) – Pathways School; Chris Harrison (CH) George Carey School and Nichola Young (NY) – Local Authority Minute Clerk.

**Mr Roger Leighton chaired the meeting, Mr Scott Halliwell to chair the October 2024 meeting.**

1.0	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u></b></p> <p>Apologies were received from Ronan Fox.</p>																			
2.0	<p><b><u>DECLARATION OF INTEREST</u></b></p> <p>None.</p>																			
3.0	<p><b><u>MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING</u></b></p> <p>3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record.</p> <p><u>Update on previous actions</u></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="230 982 1425 1423"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="230 982 302 1062">No.</th> <th data-bbox="305 982 467 1062">Date of Meeting</th> <th data-bbox="470 982 597 1062">Item No</th> <th data-bbox="600 982 1237 1062">Action</th> <th data-bbox="1240 982 1425 1062">Owner</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="230 1066 302 1234">1</td> <td data-bbox="305 1066 467 1234">16 January 2024</td> <td data-bbox="470 1066 597 1234">Item 3.2</td> <td data-bbox="600 1066 1237 1234"> <p><b><u>Governor Representation</u></b> KA to arrange for Governor Services to organise a non-HT governor representative. – Governor Services to be chase with an update provided at the next meeting - <b>Ongoing</b></p> </td> <td data-bbox="1240 1066 1425 1234">Kofi Adu</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="230 1239 302 1423">2</td> <td data-bbox="305 1239 467 1423">16 January 2024</td> <td data-bbox="470 1239 597 1423">Item 3.3</td> <td data-bbox="600 1239 1237 1423"> <p><b><u>BADC Representative</u></b> A new substantive principal has started at Barking and Dagenham College. JH has not currently met the new principal but will make contact about SF representation. JH has made contact, and requested a BDC nominee - <b>Ongoing</b></p> </td> <td data-bbox="1240 1239 1425 1423">BDC</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				No.	Date of Meeting	Item No	Action	Owner	1	16 January 2024	Item 3.2	<p><b><u>Governor Representation</u></b> KA to arrange for Governor Services to organise a non-HT governor representative. – Governor Services to be chase with an update provided at the next meeting - <b>Ongoing</b></p>	Kofi Adu	2	16 January 2024	Item 3.3	<p><b><u>BADC Representative</u></b> A new substantive principal has started at Barking and Dagenham College. JH has not currently met the new principal but will make contact about SF representation. JH has made contact, and requested a BDC nominee - <b>Ongoing</b></p>	BDC	
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4.0	<p><b><u>REPORT FROM THE GROUP ACCOUNTANT – FINANCE</u></b></p> <p><b><u>1.0 DSG Outturn for 2023/24</u></b></p> <p>1.1 The DSG reserves at the end of the last academic year was £6.5m. There are already two calls on the reserves this year, Falling rolls at £351k and Growth Fund at £380k, which is a total of £730k. There is also a predicated overspend in the HNB of £4.1m. SF members were asked to keep these figures in mind as the meeting progresses.</p> <p>1.2 HTs feel it is import important to look across the entire HNB for further pressures, not just where savings can be made.</p> <p>1.3 There is an overspend in HNB, and a small underspend in Early Years which may be clawed back, so has therefore been earmarked.</p>																			

	2023/24 Budget	2023/24 Outturn	Surplus/ (Deficit) Outturn
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Schools Block – ISB	188,955	187,772	1,183
Central Block	2,162	2,162	0
High Needs Block	49,837	53,169	(3,332)
Early Years Block	23,174	23,143	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>264,128</b>	<b>266,246</b>	<b>(2,118)</b>
<b>DSG Surplus B/f</b>			<b>10,073</b>
<b>Revised DSG Reserve</b>			<b>7,955</b>
<b>Less EY clawback</b>			<b>(379)</b>
<b>23/24 DSG Reserve</b>			<b>7,576</b>
Of which:			
SFFD retained			(1,110)
<b>Net DSG Reserve</b>			<b>6,466</b>

- 1.4 LBBB are a few years behind other LAs who have significant overspends. It was acknowledged that there is not enough money in the system to deal with SEND spend.
- 1.5 Colleagues discussed the DfE's safety valve scheme and were advised that the scheme is not a bail out. LAs are forced to severely cut spending, the DSG will be top sliced and quarterly repayments will need to be made with evidence-based reporting and scrutiny around where savings have been made.
- 1.6 LBBB need to commence a recovery plan with planned savings. Members agreed that deliberate spending is not a good idea and would remove 'control' from the LA.
- 1.7 PH has an action from the HNWG to look at neighbouring boroughs to compare top-up rates, to see what is being done and what the end of year positions are.
- 1.8 With boroughs that have a deficit position, it is not the responsibility of the council to clear the deficit. There is a new law in effect which stipulates that schools be billed. The deficit needs to be managed within the DSG. Typically, there is a surplus within Early Years which bails out the DSG. A recovery plan needs to be produced before it's too late.

**Recommendation (i):** Schools Forum are requested to:

- a) Note the DSG outturn position for 2023/24.

**Noted**

## **2.0 Local Management of Schools (LMS Reserves)**

- 2.1 21 schools out of 41 schools reported an in-year deficit, the majority of which were primary.
- 2.2 HTs questioned why there was overspend on secondary capital expenses, what the projects were and why the overspend was not seen. KA confirmed that the £881k spend on capital was a planned use of underspend and explained that schools with underspend over a certain percentage must submit a plan on their planned use of reserves.
- 2.3 HTs suggested it may be useful to see the percentage of the actual budget of the reserves as some reserves look large. The recommended threshold of reserves is 5% of the total annual income for Secondary, and 8% for Primary.

2.4	It was acknowledged that school balances diminish significantly when on a safety valve.	
2.5	<p>Colleagues questioned how the DfE would view the school reserve balances table which shows £10m in reserves when High Need funding is short. KA advised that the government uses reserves to influence government policies and if reserves are not being spent then there can be penalties in another way, e.g. no eligibility for additional funding due to the level of reserves.</p> <p><b>Recommendation (ii):</b> Schools Forum are requested to note:</p> <p>a) The LMS reserve balances for schools for 2023/24</p> <p>b) The submission of 3-year recovery plans by schools in deficit and planned usage by schools whose reserves exceed 5% (Secondary) and 8% (Primary) of annual budget.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Noted</b></p>	
<b>3.0 High Needs Block (HNB) Outturn for 2023/24</b>		
3.1	This was discussed in depth at the HNWG. There is an overspend of £3.3m.	
3.2	A thorough review of OOB and non-maintained provisions has been undertaken with OOB provisions being visited for Q&A purposes. LAC places are looked after by virtual HTs and are Q&A'd. A detailed analysis of children has been undertaken and transitions have been looked at.	
3.3	The length of the commitments for children and young people in OOB and non-maintained provisions will be reported at the HNB.	<b>Action</b>
3.4	Initiatives in the table in section 3.1 refers to Education panels such as Rapid Response Group, this is an initiative that Secondary schools contribute to and is also subsidised by the local authority.	<b>PH &amp; MN</b>
3.5	It was confirmed that a new special school is planned for September 2025 as a strategy to bring high-cost placements back into the borough.	
3.6	313 children have been placed outside of LBBD, 57 of which attend settings outside of London, some of which are high cost. Data, annual reviews timings, and visits have been undertaken and the LA have details of all the young people, the exact costs per year and the OFSTED outcome of the setting. MN is happy to share reports.	
3.7	There are no additional costs associated with the 250 children attending mainstream OOB schools, other than top-up. The number of OOB children are not increasing, it is the cost of the placement that has increased significantly.	
3.8	Top-up applications have not gone up. Payments have gone up and there are more children receiving top-up but schools in LBBD schools, this is done via school audits rather than top-up applications. Schools only need to make top-up applications for children previously not identified or new children in the borough.	
3.9	£500k of capital has been put into Barking & Dagenham College to increase the capacity for high needs provision.	
3.10	HTs requested the report on OOB placements be separated into three categories of expenditure. The first being mainstream OOB top-up, the second, OOB maintained special schools and the third category of OOB non-maintained independent schools.	<b>Action MN</b>

<p>3.11 Secondary schools that buy into the AP membership raised concerns around the lack of provisions and have noted the increase in the number of suspensions and exclusions.</p> <p><b>Recommendation (iii):</b> Schools Forum are requested to:</p> <p>a) Note and comment on the 2023/24 High Needs outturn position.</p>	<b>Noted</b>
<p><b><u>4.0 High Needs Budget 2024/25</u></b></p>	
<p>4.1 The Local Authority are aware of strategic oversight within the 2024-25 budget setting and schools diminishing reserves.</p> <p>4.2 Growth in High Needs has been minimal and does not meet the expenditure.</p> <p>4.3 Appendix B which shows the increased budget and the analysis. The HNWG need to start looking at savings to offset the projected £4m overspend.</p> <p>4.4 PH is undertaking a benchmarking exercise with other local authorities, which is an action from the HNWG.</p> <p>4.5 In response to a question from HTs around the mechanism that will be used to produce options for in-year savings, at the last HNWG, MN suggested the production of an options papers that will be shared at the October forum for discussion. All spending will be looked at and options kept open. Two or three plans need to be produced to try and prevent a deficit position.</p> <p>4.6 HTs requested clarification around the Communication Speech and Language initiative spending. KA confirmed that the £1.2m covers all health initiatives within schools. This is not new and has been ongoing. S&amp;L, STEPS Initiative (Speech &amp; language within schools), and other health initiatives.</p> <p>4.7 It was acknowledged that pressures need to be looked at as well as savings. Initiatives are welcomed by schools, but should there be recharge mechanisms for some services if there is no budget? A breakdown is required for what each line is paying for. This will be covered in Martin's report that will be presented to SF in October.</p> <p><b>Recommendation (iv):</b> Schools' Forum are requested to:</p> <p>(a) Note and comment on the High Needs budget and forecast for 2024/25. (b) Comment on strategies or options to mitigate 2024/25 projected overspend.</p>	<b>Noted</b>
<p><b><u>5.0 Early Years (EY) Outturn</u></b></p>	
<p>5.1 There is an in-year underspend of £379k within Early Years which could be subject to clawback.</p> <p>5.2 Additional funding has been allocated to allow for more hours for two-year-olds and under twos. There has been a 30% increase in funding. 5% of the funding will be retained to meet LA support costs. It is expected that the funding will be fully spent. Any forecasted underspends will be brought to Forum for uplifts to be considered.</p> <p>5.2 JTS asked how the last three lines of spend in table 5.5, will look like on the ground and how success will be measured. RD responded that as much money will be passported to PVI's and nurse settings as possible, there will be spending on additional members of the team to administer this programme and support parents.</p>	

Quality support spend, especially around baby spaces and baby rooms. Not all spend has been committed and will be under constant review to ensure that provider and parental needs are supported.

5.3 Funding is based on census and the amount of take up. It was recommended that individual providers undertake campaigns to help increase uptake so that payments are received.

5.4 PH informed forum that other LAs are strategically modelling the implications of a reduction of the 5% to 3% should the government wish to introduce an introduction.

**Recommendation (v):** Schools' Forum are requested to:

- (a) Note the Early Years outturn position for 2023/24
- (b) Note and comment 2024/25 EY budget and forecast

**Noted**

**6.0 Central School Services Block (CSSB) Funding for 2024/25**

6.1 20% year on year reduction of historical elements.

Services	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Admission Service	648	671	691
Schools Forum	60	62	64
Copy right Licences	180	186	192
Statutory responsibilities	743	769	792
<b>Ongoing Commitments</b>	<b>1,631</b>	<b>1,688</b>	<b>1,738</b>
School Improvement	55	44	35
Schools Estates	77	62	50
School Games Organiser	26	21	17
Trewern outdoor education	106	85	68
Community Music Service	158	126	101
Advisory Teachers	170	136	109
<b>Historic Commitments</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>379</b>
<b>CSSB Budget</b>	<b>2,223</b>	<b>2,162</b>	<b>2,118</b>

**Recommendation (vi):** Schools' Forum are requested to:

- (a) Note the 2024/25 allocations for ongoing and historic responsibilities.

**Noted**

**7.0 Growth Funding for 2024/25**

7.1 The Growth Fund allocation is £1,182m, £1.562m is needed. SF are proposing that the short fall of £400k is met from the DSG reserves.

7.2 HTs requested that a geographic look in terms of schools with falling rolls be undertaken around this issue and asked whether this is this the best use of money.

7.3 KA responded, stating this is a significant comment. The LA needs to be compliant with the regulations set out in government policies around what makes schools eligible for growth.

7.4 Clarity is required from Andy Carr around having a geographic look at falling rolls and the growth fund.

7.5 HTs questioned the rationale behind the proposal to expand Robert Clack when

	<p>William Bellamy have falling Rolls issues. AC to be invited to the next meeting so this issue can be discussed further. This needs to be addressed from a planning issue as expansions and falling rolls are being funded at the same time.</p> <p>7.6 There was an action missed from the last Schools' Forum around the criteria for falling rolls. It was suggested that this be looked at as a percentage of a school PAN rather than a reduction of 10 students, which varies vastly from school to school. A working group to be created so that this can be addressed going forward.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Action</b></p> <p><b>Recommendation (vii):</b> Schools' Forum are requested to:</p> <p>(a) Note the expected shortfall in growth funding allocations for 2024/25.  (b) Approve the shortfall to be funded from DSG reserves</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Noted</b></p>	<b>KA</b>
	<p><b>8.0 <u>Falling Rolls Fund for 2024/25</u></b></p> <p><b>Recommendation (viii):</b> Schools' Forum are requested to:</p> <p>(a) Note the proposed distribution of the falling rolls budget of £351, 322 for 2024/25  (b) Approve the falling rolls costs to be funded from DSG reserves.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Noted and Approved</b></p>	
	<p><b>9.0 <u>Schools Facing Financial Difficulties (SFFD)</u></b></p> <p>9.1 To note.</p> <p>9.2 Vital to be left for schools who may be experiencing short-term issues.</p> <p><b>Recommendation (ix):</b> Schools' Forum are requested to note:</p> <p>(a) Total SFFD funds, loans outstanding and balance retained centrally.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Noted</b></p>	
	<p><b>10.0 <u>Mayor of London Free School Meals Grant</u></b></p> <p>10.1 To note.</p> <p><b>Recommendation (x):</b> Schools' Forum are requested to:</p> <p>(a) Note the extension of the Mayor of London's Free School Meal grant in 2024/25.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Noted</b></p>	
	<p><b>11.0 <u>Scheme for Financing Schools</u></b></p> <p>10.1 Consultation period ends on the 17 July 2024.</p> <p><b>Recommendation (xi):</b> Schools' Forum are requested to:</p> <p>(a) Note the consultation period for the scheme of financing schools: 18 June 2024 to 17 July 2024.</p>	
<b>5.0</b>	<p><b><u>Any Other Business</u></b></p> <p>None</p>	
<b>6.0</b>	<p><b><u>Date of Next Meeting</u></b></p> <p>TBC</p>	

<b>7.0</b>	<b>Action Log</b>				
	No.	Date of Meeting	Item No	Action	Owner
	<b>1</b>	<b>25 June 2024</b>	<b>Item 3.3</b>	<b><u>OOB Commitments</u></b> The length of the commitments for children and young people in OOB and non-maintained provisions will be reported at the HNB.	<b>Pat Harvey / Martin Nicholson</b>
	<b>2</b>	<b>25 June 2024</b>	<b>Item 3.10</b>	<b><u>OOB Placement Report</u></b> An OOB placements report be produced which contains three categories of expenditure. The first category being mainstream OOB top-up, the second being OOB maintained special schools and the third category of OOB non-maintained independent schools.	<b>Martin Nicholson</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>25 June 2024</b>	<b>Item 7.6</b>	<b><u>Falling Rolls Working Group</u></b> A new working group to be formed to look amending the criteria for falling rolls. It was suggested that this be looked at as a percentage of a school PAN rather than a reduction of 10 students, which can vary vastly.	<b>Kofi Adu</b>	