

# Schools Forum

## Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> February

**Members Present:**

Jolyon Roberts	Sue Lenihan
Gillian Larocque	Theresa Staunton
Fiona Robinson	Tyrone Myton
Markieu Hayden	Keran Currie
Maryssa Dako	Dave Harvey
Dermot Mooney	Kate Lanning
Chris Andrew	Julie Evans

**Observers Present:**

Shelley Davies	Jenny Aarons
Debbie Jones	Charles Quaye
Jeni Murphy	Denise Bushay
Cllr Amy Foster	Danny Bissex
Cllr Maria Gatland	Sarah Hunter
Kathy Roberts	Alaina Packer-Searle
Cllr Joseph lee	Dean Brewer
Jessica Henk	Stephen Hehir
Christine Lonsdale	

**Apologies:** Clare Cranham, Dan Bowden, Miriam Ananne-Sechere, Lindsay Pamphilon

**Chair:** Jolyon Roberts  
**Vice Chair:** Theresa Staunton

**Clerk:** Mori Bates

Item	Detail	Lead/Action
1.	<b>Minutes and actions from last meeting 6<sup>th</sup> November 2023.</b>	JR
	<p>Declarations of interest – none.</p> <p>Minutes, actions, and matters arising from last meeting 6<sup>th</sup> November 2023</p> <p>Summary of comments made in reference to the previous minutes, including a review of the actions:</p> <p>1.1 July: Enquiry about Southwark Diocesan representative – <b>ACTION COMPLETED</b> – Dermot Mooney will now attend Schools’ Forum as the Southwark Diocesan representative</p> <p>1.2 Oct: KR to compile data on the EHCP numbers in MNS and across the board, comparing details on the dashboard. <b>ACTION DISCHARGED</b></p> <p>1.3 As an update of the Key Decision Report (agenda item 4), JR and FR have been invited to meetings on the therapies of which they will engage with whilst the early stages of the contract drafting are underway.</p>	

	<p>1.4 Question 2 under the Key Decision Report related to the 38 therapist posts or FTE. SP to inform Forum whether the figure given is 38 FTE speech therapists. <b>ACTION CARRIED FORWARD</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Clerk also amended other errors with formatting and SPAG. Note made for the acronyms to be added to the pack;</li> <li>b) CllrMG queried if there was training on the DSG for which JR confirmed this can be picked up in the post-meet meeting with the suggestion from CA to add information on the DSG to the Headteachers' briefing.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>2.</b></p>	<p><b>Dedicated Schools Grant – 23/24 &amp; 24/25 Growth Budget</b></p>	<p>CQ</p>
	<p>2.1 CQ presented a paper on the growth budget, whereby the grant focuses on providing funding for growing schools.</p> <p>2.2 CQ directed Forum's attention to Table 2 which reflects the original agreement of Schools' Forum to use £689K to cover therapy invoices already incurred by schools. This is allowable under DfE guidance.</p> <p>2.3 The total shown on Table 3 has been reduced due to an expected reduction in children. The £304K specified will be using some of the growth budget to balance the AWPU rather than keeping money in the Growth Budget. Additionally, it was noted that we need to make the most of any potential outstanding budget, such as the predicted £39K which is in this pot but still remains to be allocated.</p> <p>2.4 The appendixes of the paper showed the trends of figures over recent years, adhering to the need to spend the growth budget efficiently and in the appropriate areas such as KS4 alternative provisions and the therapies.</p> <p>2.5 SD explained that with KS4 alternative provisions, it is for the children and young people who come into the borough in year 10 / 11 who may not be appropriately placed within a GCSE class. This group of young people is growing which is why the budget has grown and another provision is being brought on line.</p> <p>2.6 Having alternative provisions allows us to develop post-16 routes and in order to help colleges and providers, there are instalments of 15 pupils in order to cope with the capacity. In 22/23, £631K was allocated to KS4 pupils in alternative provisions. This is voted on each year and the proposal for £850K to be allocated for 24/25 as in the budget for 23/24. The chair suggested that when individual staff contracts are awarded the fact that the project is voted on annually is taken into account. Long term contracts for staff employed from this funding should not be awarded for this reason.</p> <p><b>Q1:</b> DH: In Table 3, the Therapies and Interventions figure is stated as £0 – why has it dropped to nothing?</p> <p><b>A1:</b> CQ: The growth money is not technically for the therapies. The DfE</p>	

	<p>agreed to allow us to claim for historic therapies that could be refunded back to the school. If we were to continue to pay the therapies in this way, there would be a consequential risk towards the schools' AWPU's. SD: This money is <i>in addition</i> to existing therapies funding.</p> <p>2.7 TS added that we need to make sure that the rates are correct in order to utilize the budget in the best way.</p> <p>2.8 The chair noted that the line 'Equipment/Environment (mainly for school's block schools presently accommodating children with AEN)' will need a methodology for distribution. <b>ACTION CQ &amp; SD</b></p> <p>2.9 Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Forum notes recommendation 1 and 2 of this paper</li> <li>b) Vote for Recommendation 3: Approve 24/25 Growth Budget after updating the DfE Authority Proforma Tool. <b>11 votes in favour; 1 vote against.</b></li> <li>c) Vote for Recommendation 4: Approve the budget allocated to KS4 in Table 2 to continue in 24/25. <b>12 votes in favour.</b></li> <li>d) Vote for Recommendation 5: Approve the use of potential outstanding balance on the Growth Budget (estimated at £39K) to support the outstanding therapy claims commissioned. <b>12 votes in favour.</b></li> </ul>	<b>CQ &amp; SD</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Overall DSG budget for 24/25 and Budget approval for CSSB and High Needs Block</b>	<b>CQ</b>
	<p>3.1 CQ presented the paper of which had aspects to note and vote. Table 1 showed the changes in the Schools' Block allocation across Primary and Secondary schools. Schools' Forum plays an important role in deciding the budget. The LA receives a Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) that is made up of two elements; 'Ongoing Responsibilities' and 'Historic Commitments'.</p> <p>3.2 Charles reiterated the need for the LA and Schools forum to seek protection from the secretary of state (DfE policy team) from the 20% cut from the historical commitments budget. There should also be consideration towards the ways that the LA can help and obtain protection for the schools within the borough that could be deemed as struggling.</p> <p>3.3 CQ informed Forum the HNB had increased by £2.408m for 2024-25, an increase of approximately 2.9% (from £82.566m to £84.974m).</p> <p>3.4 SD reiterated that the 'Safety Valve' mechanism is not to be treated as additional funds but rather a way to pay off the existing high needs deficit.</p> <p>3.5 It is important to note that we are on track to reach the targeted overspend of £725K set out for us by the DfE. Our current quarter three forecast figure is at £705K overspend.</p> <p><b>Q2: CllrAF: Looking at the HNB, how do you identify the High Needs pupils?</b></p>	

	<p><b>A2:</b> SD: Beyond census data, there are two ways of looking at it – either through school SEN support details or through EHCPs.</p> <p>3.6 Forum then reviewed Appendix A, analysing the increases behind the various provisions and services provided in school. For example, line 5 (Pre &amp; Post 16 Independent &amp; Non-Maintained Provision) there is an expected increase of £500K. KR explained that Croydon is a part of a wider group that is allowed to negotiate contracts and schemes relating to this. The data trend shows 7% more children so we are focusing on managing this as best as we can.</p> <p>3.7 Furthermore, it was stated that line 16, 'Cluster of Schools Project' is the Croydon Locality SEND Support (LSS).</p> <p>3.8 Forum were informed that Line 22, Primary PRU Intervention programme, was purely historic and so was kept within the appendix, but is incorporated into Line 10, Croydon Pupil Referral Units.</p> <p><b>Q3:</b> CA: How many children are covered under Line 19, Support for Inclusion &amp; Home Education?</p> <p><b>A3:</b> SD/CQ: It is about children and the support provided for this group. KR will circulate information requested around this – <b>ACTION KR</b></p> <p>3.9 Discussion started in Forum around the demand for out of borough children attending Croydon SEND schools. Whilst demand for our SEND schools is based on good reputation, this is something that has to be monitored so that we can remain within capacity with places for Croydon children. CllrMG confirmed there is significant work going on to understand out of borough children who attend Croydon schools and the cost to Croydon. Croydon are charged at a high rate for placements of our SEND children in other London borough provisions so it follows that we must reciprocate. It was commented that if Croydon is cheaper than other boroughs then there would be an influx of pupils wanting to attend in this borough.</p> <p>3.10 The members of Schools' Forum voiced disappointment in the recalculation and subsequent revisions in the DSG from the original amounts published by the DfE which had left schools with a far smaller increase than they had expected in the three year forecast.</p> <p>3.11 Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Forum notes recommendation 1 through to 4 of this paper;</li> <li>b) Schools' Forum confirmed to give support for the additional protection outlined in the paper;</li> <li>c) Vote for Recommendation 5: Approve the draft budget allocation for the Central School Services Block for 24/25. <b>12 votes in favour;</b></li> <li>d) Vote for Recommendation 6: Approve the indicative budget allocation for the High Needs Block for 24/25 as shown in Appendix A. <b>12 votes in favour.</b></li> </ul>	<b>KR</b>
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4.	<b>Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant Funding and Options for 24/25</b>	JM/DB
	<p>4.1 JM and DB jointly presented a paper for Early Years. Approval from Schools' Forum was requested in relation to the rates to pay the providers for the financial year 24/25 as well as confirmation for the proposed method of distribution for the MNS supplement.</p> <p>4.2 Following the EYWG, there was a recommendation for the rates outlined in Option 3. Table 1 shows the DSG providing a budget based on 38 weeks. J M had already queried this with the DfE as the calculations of the budget should have been based on 26 weeks as standard. JM confirmed that the calculations in the paper have been based on 26 weeks.</p> <p>4.3 Of the options provided for the rates, Option 1 is along the lines of what we are currently paying providers across the various age categories (3YO, D2YO, W2YO and 9MO). JM noted the impact each option's rates would have in comparison with the current year.</p> <p>4.4 To summarise the EYWG's recommendation of Option 3 was as follows: A 97% pass through rate, a 1.2% deprivation budget for 3&amp;4YO, a 1.2% D2YO uplift fund, a 1.3% SENIF and a 0.5% contingency fund.</p> <p>4.5 The paper included information on the MNS supplement as it needs to be decided on how best to distributed the money received from the DfE. There were two options for the method of distribution, and Forum received a recommendation for Option 2 from the working group.</p> <p><b>Q4:</b> TM: Regarding Option 3, what is the contingency budget and how does it work?</p> <p><b>A4:</b> JM: The contingency plan would be used to cover any unexpected spend and offer necessary support in these circumstance. These could be unprecedented changes so it would appear to be a sensible decision to have a contingency in place. Any unused contingency fund would then go to the providers.</p> <p>4.6 TS stated that DB, JM and their team have done a lot of extensive work on this paper alongside dealing with provider queries which is to be noted.</p> <p>4.7 There were also a couple of updates surrounding Early Years that TS and JM informed Forum of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) TS said that the top slice could only originally be taken from 3 &amp; 4YOs, but it has now been extended to cover other ages.</li> <li>b) JM explained that from Sept '23, for the term after a baby turns 9 months old, they can access 15 hours funding.</li> <li>c) There was also discussion from the DfE whereby the top slice would be reduced to 3%, although we are unsure of when this will be imposed.</li> </ol>	

	<p>4.8 Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Vote for Recommendation A: Agree the rate to be paid to early years providers in 24/25. All voting members were in agreement of the EYWG's recommendation of Option 3. <b>12 votes in favour of selecting Option 3.</b></li> <li>b) Forum noted Recommendations B and C</li> <li>c) Vote for Recommendation D: Agree the proposed option for the distribution of the MNS Supplement for 2024/25. All voting members were in agreement of the EYWG's recommendation of Option 2. <b>12 votes in favour of selecting Option 2.</b></li> <li>d) Forum noted Recommendation E</li> </ul>	
<b>5.</b>	<b>Financial Support for LAs supporting maintained schools in financial difficulty 23/24</b>	CQ
	<p>5.1 CQ presented the paper which described the support the LA provided to struggling schools from a new grant. Croydon's allocation of financial support was paid on 30<sup>th</sup> November with a grant of £264,529.05 ranking it 34<sup>th</sup> out of 38<sup>th</sup> LAs accessing this type of funding.</p> <p>5.2 Table 1 showed schools (anonymously) that are proposed to receive additional funding, alongside a comparison between them in terms of % of their budget that they are overspent</p> <p>5.3 SD reiterated that this is additional funding that we are aiming to share fairly amongst the financially struggling schools and will not mean that any existing budgets will be top sliced.</p> <p>5.4 Overall, each school selected will receive 10% of their individual total deficit.</p> <p>5.5 SF agreed to the distribution of these funds.</p>	
<b>6.</b>	<b>Update from Schools' Forum Working Groups</b>	
	<p>6.1 Updates were received from the working groups as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>Early Years block</b> – Both papers presented to Forum today were looked at across two separate EYWG meetings. It was commented that Primary schools with 2-4 year olds are not being represented in the working group.</li> <li>a) Schools Block. Meeting took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January</li> <li>b) High Needs. TS to be invited as repeat member to the HNWG</li> </ul>	
<b>7</b>	7.1 Membership and nominations will be reviewed in post-meet and voting on new members will be organized before the next scheduled Schools Forum.	

<b>8.</b>	<b>Any Other Business</b>	All
	8.1 A decision regarding a date for the March Forum to allow for the presentation of a therapies paper will be confirmed in the post-meet.	

Meeting Adjourned: 11:40am  
Date of next meeting: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2024  
F10, Town Hall

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