

Schools Forum

Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 6th March 2023

Members Present: Jolyon Roberts Chris Andrew
Fiona Robinson Julie Evans
Rob Veale Dan Bowden
Sue Lenihan Jenny Adamson
Markie Hayden Clare Cranham
Patrick Sheilds Theresa Staunton
Soumick Dey Dave Harvey

Observers Present: Shelley Davies Charles Quaye
Dave Phillips Kathy Roberts
Keran Currie Cllr Samir Dwesar
Debbie Jones

Apologies: Leonorie Fernandes, Roger Capham, Cllr Margaret Bird, Cllr Ian Parker, Lindsay Pamphilon, Josephine Copeland, Tyrone Myton, Kathy Roberts, Vicky Mitchell, Cllr Maria Gatland

Chair: Jolyon Roberts
Vice Chair: Theresa Staunton

Clerk: Darran Money

Item	Detail	Lead/Action
1.	<p>Minutes and actions from last meeting 6th February 2023.</p> <p>Declarations of interest – None.</p> <p>Minutes, actions, and matters arising from last meeting 6th February 2023.</p> <p>a) Southwark Diocesan representative – Vicky Mitchell tentatively named to fill vacancy, PS to confirm agreement with Diocese. Deferred to June 2023 meeting. ACTION</p> <p>b) Maintained Nursery Schools – SD met with MNS heads individually and collectively to seek agreement on preferred options to take forward to Cabinet. The MNS briefing paper is due to be presented at Cabinet in March 2023 and subsequently there will be a full consultation. SD made clear the Executive Mayor is the ultimate decision-maker of the preferred options. DH queried the decision-making process as the funding for MNS is provided through the DSG and therefore Forum should be</p>	<p>PS</p>

	involved. SD confirmed this is a 'key decision', which has to be presented to cabinet and then ultimately to the Executive Mayor.	
2.	<p>Early Years Funding Paper 23/24</p> <p>2.1 SD is to meet the MNS Headteachers to reduce the number of options being presented to cabinet as a Cabinet paper should have one, maximum two, option(s). SD has travelled outside of London to visit other LAs) and also other London LAs and this work will feed into the next collective meeting on MNS heads. Once the paper has passed through Cabinet we will move forward with consultation, which will involve the public, e.g. families, residents etc. Key to note also, each nursery school has different individual circumstances and needs and we will take this into consideration. Three schools are in deficit - additional funding will support this but is not a long-term solution.</p> <p>2.2 Pupil placement. The number of children at MNS continues to reduce, but we need to keep enough provision and strike the right balance. There are a number of nursery schools in other boroughs which are also in deficit; it is a challenging situation. DJ stated it is not an easy decision to balance. Mayor Perry is determined to do the right thing, and as such is benchmarking against a variety of information in order to reach the absolute right decision, this is a very extensive and robust decision making process underway, paper has been deferred to May Cabinet. SD to update at June's Schools' Forum. ACTION</p> <p>2.3 The Chair said that in relation to DH's comment earlier there is an argument that, because MNS are funded from DSG, a consensus should be reached with SF if at all possible. SD said she is happy to setup a separate meeting for SF members who would like to discuss the MNS paper and circumstances in more detail, please email the clerk/SD directly to arrange. ACTION</p>	<p>SD</p> <p>ALL</p>
3.	<p>High needs Indicative Budget Allocation 23/24</p> <p>3.1 CQ presented the paper and took the meeting through the various sections. He proposed to come to Appendix A, where actual allocations were given, at the end of the paper following an overview of the budget as a whole. The Chair agreed with this as Appendix A had created much comment both at steering group and then the High Needs working group that followed that.</p> <p>3,2 The budget this year for the High Need Block is set at £82.5M up from £72.5M in 2022-23. This includes a 'one off' payment of £3.6M which the local authority planned to distribute to the special schools in the borough as they have had years of a 'stand still' financial position.</p>	

<p>3.3 There is a negative adjustment to the gross figure as Croydon places 463 more children and young people with high needs in provisions outside the borough (i.e., 'exports') than they 'import'.</p> <p>3.4 CQ particularly drew Forum members attention to the section in his paper (section 5) about the importance of completing the October census properly in order to receive the correct funding for their schools. If the census is completed incorrectly there is no chance to redeem mistakes at a later date.</p> <p>3.5 A discussion then ensued about how the contents of Appendix A had been challenged, both at steering group and in the High Needs Working Group (HNWG) which had followed one another, in that order, in the previous week. The Chair explained that this paper, paper 3, had been presented for discussion at the steering group much later than he would normally have expected. In fact the steering group had only met on 1st March and the HNWG had met on the 2nd March preceding this meeting. Questions raised at steering group had then formed part of the agenda at HNWG, in fact members of Forum said those questions had dominated the agenda. FR said that those present felt that the e-mail from steering group should have been shared with all the members of that group. The Chair said that, within the tight time limits created, he believed that steering group was doing its job of oversight as efficiently as it could and if the meetings had not been delayed due to the teachers' strike there would have been more time for scrutiny. RV made the point that even with consideration of the teachers' strike the papers had been later than expected. On reflection for next year budget, these papers would need to be submitted by Feb next year. The dates of all SF related meeting should be checked to ensure they occur in the right order. HN working group, steering group, SF. ACTION</p> <p>3.6 A further discussion then took place on the mechanism for getting speech therapies delivered to schools via the additional SALT Locality commission. CQ undertook to look into this and allocate a cost code. ACTION</p> <p>3.7 KR gave more explanation on the points raised in the paper and plans to deliver an expanded SEN offer in the LA. ADA is expanding by 18 places this sept and St Nicks is expanding by 5 places. The LA is in discussion with schools regarding the expansion/creation of 2 more ELPs and this will bring additional cost.</p> <p>3.8 Discussion of Appendix A. Questions and answers:</p> <p>Q1 (MH): queried lines 21 & 25 being empty? A1 (SD): These are historical funding lines which will remain empty on this budget unless there is an agreement to add to these lines in the future.</p>	<p>Clerk</p> <p>CQ</p>
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Q2 (JR): There has never been a greater pressure on teaching special needs in mainstream schools - the bar is getting higher even to get to a meeting where EHCP can be allocated. Some children in mainstream schools are having specialist provisions made in mainstream schools as they are unable to access mainstream offer, therefore it seems incongruous that line 1 'EHCP Pupils: Croydon Mainstream Schools + Academies' is being cut. What is the thinking around this?

A2 (KR): The authority are looking at ELPS and establishing more provisions for those type of children and hope that the new settings will be online for Sept. They are addressing the issues and planning for 20 places ELPS for children with that level of ASD. JR the asked for more information about the funding of the ELPs places. KR responded that they were looking at 20 places in one provision and further places in another. Jr said that at line 2 the budget has risen by £150,000 which includes the two new settings? KR confirmed that at this stage of the planning this was where we were.

Q3 (JA) Would the LA be explaining more about its plans for changes in high needs provision at the next High Needs Working Group.

A3 (SD). The high needs budget is done the same way as school budget – do your indicative allocations, but know that during this year, things do shift about and will constantly look at budget. Looking to put additional funding in the locality SEND support for EY. Hoping that means we get that early intervention so that children are much more school ready as well as top end. KR said that the LA would be happy to share plans and new strategy, green paper (local offer) note assessment sides driving improvements, quality plans. She drew Forums' attention to the fact that for the assessment pathway the KPI target turnaround time is 20 weeks. In Feb we hit 100% meeting this timescale for the first time.

Q4 (JR): We see that independent provision out of borough has raised by half a million despite this being a key part of our improvement plan to keep these costs down?

A4 (KR): This reflects also children who live on the border and attend their SEN local school. The independent schools figure remains unchanged at £11.1M. Some children funded in this line attend their mainstream school, but this is postcode related.

3.9 The Chair explained that the main frustration this year has been the process adopted. The main work done by both the steering group and the HNWG is they are presented with a budget and appendix but this year the information relating to how these were decided by the presenting officers (meetings, data dashboard etc.) is not available. The process needs to be clear and transparent but the information on how decisions were arrived at that was given in the pre meet was not made clear in the paper. SD said the SEND dashboard is available to public and CQ clarified that there are guidance and directives from DFE as to how to spend the money, have no choice on how this should be spent. TS concluded that

	<p>these monies are ringfenced and the appendix lines should have reflected this (currently says total additional HS), it should really have said total for special schools. These lines should be indicated on the budget line.</p> <p>3.10 Following the steering group and HNWG, SD had prepared a briefing following the questions that were raised, happy to share this as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) <i>Who decided the hearing impairment team were getting another £81K?</i> This was pupil based funding that reflected the number of children accessing the provision. Also have allocation of funding for hearing impairment for Norbury Manor primary (decided on pupils' numbers) b) As part of the DfE SEND Green paper Improvement Plan the DfE is establishing an Alternative Provision Task Force to address management of placements and links to provision for SEND – aimed at reducing exclusions and placement breakdown. <p>3.11 SD stressed that this is an indicative budget and that if we get more children we will be given that funding because we have a statutory responsibility. Certain budget lines have no degree of discretion. Decisions are made based on the data on pupils in the borough, clear dashboard, also know that out of borough independent schools have a huge inflation, cost increasing as they can charge what they like. JR said the process described earlier and in previous years must be used for next year Table (1) workings of the allocation – top slicing, the bottom line is most significant 7.138 million. Why was any increase allocated and who decided on how it was to be distributed?</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Croydon Recovery Report - Update</p> <p>Deferred to next Schools' Forum meeting June 2023. ACTION</p>	<p>CQ</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Update from Schools Forum Work Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Early Years. Meeting had taken place but there were no minutes to distribute. Much of what was discussed though had been covered here today in the MNS item. The working group were still awaiting confirmation about how unallocated funds from 21/22 would be distributed. Any funding left will go to all schools' settings with pupils age 3-4 year providing EY provision b) Schools Block - meeting due to take place. c) High Needs – RV gave a brief update. <p>ACTION – to chase up minutes from the working groups</p>	<p>Clerk</p>

7.	Any Other Business None	
	Next meeting: 10th June 2023	

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