

Schools Forum

Minutes of meeting held on Monday 10th July 2023

Members Present:

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| Jolyon Roberts | Keran Currie |
| Markie Hayden | Dave Harvey |
| Julie Evans | Jenny Adamson |
| Theresa Staunton | Soumick Dey |
| Cllr Joseph Lee | Sue Lenihan |
| Rob Veale | Cllr Amy Foster |
| Fiona Robinson | Clare Cranham |
| Chris Andrew | Tyrone Myton |

Observers Present:

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| Kathy Roberts | Shelley Davies |
| Chris Bush | Cllr Maria Gatland |
| Charles Quaye | |

Apologies: Patrick Shields, Lindsay Pamphilon

Stepping down: Josephine Copeland, Leonore Fernandes, Cllr Ian Parker, Cllr Samir Dwesar, Jennifer Adamson

Chair: Jolyon Roberts
Vice Chair: Theresa Staunton

Clerk: Mori Bates

| Item | Detail | Lead/Action |
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| 1. | Minutes and actions from last meeting of 6th March 2023. | JR |
| | <p>Declarations of interest – none.</p> <p>Summary of comments and review of actions:</p> <p>1.1 Southwark Diocesan representative – Vicky Mitchell tentatively named to fill vacancy, PS to confirm agreement with Diocese. ACTION (amended to CA following resignation of Patrick Shields).</p> <p>1.2 Pupil placement - the number of children attending MNS continues to reduce, but there is a 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.</p> <p>1.3 Mayor Perry is resolute that the right decision is reached and is benchmarking against an extensive variety of information and the decision-making process is now underway. The paper has been deferred to May Cabinet. SD to update at June's Schools' Forum. ACTION – SD Update Complete.</p> | CA |

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| | <p>1.4 The Chair stated because MNS are funded from DSG, a consensus should be reached with Schools' Forum. SD responded that she is happy to set up a separate meeting for SF members who would like to discuss the MNS paper and circumstances in more detail. Any interest should be sent to SD directly. ACTION – complete.</p> <p>1.5 A further discussion took place on the mechanism for delivery of speech therapies to schools via the additional SALT Locality commission. CQ to investigate this and allocate a cost code. ACTION – Discharged.</p> <p>a) Clerk also amended other errors with formatting and SPAG.</p> <p>b) Clerk to also update the membership on minutes for future reference.</p> | |
| <p>2.</p> | <p>Maintained Nursery Schools – Update</p> | <p>SD</p> |
| | <p>2.1 SD provided an update on MNS and what had been decided following the meeting with cabinet, collating the following information together:</p> <p>2.2 Overall, there has been a reduction of the birth rate in Croydon. This has resulted in a surplus of places available within the locality, so it would be remiss to continually increase a budget where not all spaces are being filled although no final decision has been made on how best to proceed. It was agreed that there would be no consultation period in the Summer but instead to move for a period of consultation in the Autumn of 2023.</p> <p>2.3 As Croydon has five MNS, whereas neighboring localities have only one or none (Lambeth and Sutton respectively), it is vital to make sure that there is sufficient places available, especially when 65% of MNS sit with a deficit budget and this percentage is increasing. Such deficits can result in school closures, like the cases of St Andrew's or Virgo Fidelis where the resulting shortfall of funding had to be made up by the council.</p> <p>2.4 Originally, there were six options on the table before submission to the cabinet. This was considered too many and we have now arrived at a preferred option which will now undergo a period of consultation. There is a lot of interest in this but SF should be reassured that the chosen solution will be sustainable.</p> <p>2.5 SD will be meeting with each of the five MNS, having visited two already and another w/c 10th July.</p> <p>2.6 The attention is focused on creating a proposal of how the budget can work within the envelope and is open to suggestions.</p> | |

2.7 MG reiterated that this would be a thorough consultation and all suggestions are welcome. A number of headteachers have been in contact in relation to MNS and MG would be happy to meet with anyone who requests a meeting, in order to have an open and transparent conversation.

2.8 JR drew attention to the clauses marked 6.4 and 6.5 in the report that indicate the cumulative deficit is £560,750. Prior to 2019, the funding would have been around £700,000, allowing for £140,000 per MNS, which reaffirms the decrease in funding shown in table 2 (6.5. in the MNS report).

Q1: TS: During the consultation period, how much information about what the schools have done will be available? Chipstead Valley closed due to the end of the lease on the building. There is interest for information on the outcome of this closure, in particular, how has this affected the wider community?

A1: SD: There are laws on how MNS can operate. With Chipstead Valley, the school had capacity to open an additional nursery to accommodate the closure, but we are still looking for longer-term solutions.

Q2: DH: 2.2 in the report does not mention headteacher associations or Trade Unions, are they involved in the consultation?

A2: SD: It is a legal requirement in which certain steps must be followed as outlined in 9.1 and 9.2 of the report. These groups specifically may not have been stipulated as they will form part of large number of other groups that will be included.

Q3: RV: How long is the consultation period going to be? Have MPs had a view on this or are they a part of it?

A3: SD: We do not know how long the consultation period will be, there is potential for it to be around six weeks. Cllr MG confirmed MP involvement.

2.9 The map on page 17 of the report reflects positive feedback. RV stated it is helpful to identify deprived areas and the MNS locations.

2.10 TS stated that it would also be useful to have a map reflecting schools with nursery classes included, as these are also options as to where early years children can be placed.

2.11 KC agreed that the map is useful and shows many MNS are in deprived areas. Based on this, there is a need to be aware of how best to carry out the consultation, parents and carers engagement must be key. SD responded that we are experienced in consultations and will have contact with parents, carers, childminders, nurseries and many other stakeholders.

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| | <p>Q4: AF questions as follows; a) 1.10 on the independent review of finances – what are they aware of? b) what resources are they getting to promote the nurseries? c) in relation to the premises, are private providers a part of the consultation?</p> <p>A4: JR responded, SRMAs will be able to read through the information to show where providers can save money, which is also part of the remit of the schools’ forum. SD responded, SRMA will be able to review, and we will continue to maintain open and transparent ongoing discussions, including the report being shared with the five MNS settings.</p> <p>2.12 A discussion ensued re concern for children with SEN and a need to consider these children and make sure that they are provided for. It was noted that LSS is being rolled out across the EY sector and we have SEN available across all our provisions.</p> <p>Q5 JR: how is the SEN dashboard data captured and how many educational healthcare plans were issued? There is a need to focus our attention on children with EHCPs and/or where an EHCP is likely to be required, as soon as their education begins.</p> <p>A5 KR confirmed that is is possible to lift this data from the record which is beneficial. KR will compile data on the EHCP numbers in MNS comparing details on the dashboard. ACTION</p> <p>2.13 It was established an update of SEND in general is required, in particular Locality SEND Support for September’s SF. ACTION</p> <p>2.14 SENCO – it was affirmed MNS must have a SENCO and a teacher qualified in SEN, although in some schools, this can be the same person where budgets allow. The borough is working to support PVIs to access SENCO training.</p> <p>2.15 DH stated that terms used in Appendix 3 of the report should be the same throughout the report, reflecting protected categories as per the Equality Act 2010. Specifically, genders and pronouns should be in line with the Act.</p> | <p>KR</p> <p>KR</p> |
| <p>3.</p> | <p>DSG Outturn Report</p> | <p>CQ</p> |
| | <p>3.1 CQ presented the report titled, ‘Dedicated Schools Grant Outturn Report’, drawing Forum’s attention to specific points as listed below:</p> <p>3.2 The DSG grant allocation for Croydon is £401.4m, consisting of £225.8m for academies and £175.6m for the council to distribute accordingly.</p> | |

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| | <p>3.3 Table 1: There has been a drop of 20% in the Central Service Schools' block grant, to bear in mind going forward.</p> <p>3.4 Table 2: There has been an increase in expenditure for the Early Years Block. However, the DfE is due to issue a partial rebate. As a result of this, the accruals have not been captured in this table.</p> <p>3.5 Table 3: Safety Valve – an allocation of £10.96m is confirmed. SD added that this is to reduce the High Needs overspend accumulated over the last couple of years.</p> <p>3.6 Table 4: This table reflects the current position, SD stated that although it may look like an underspend, the money itself has already been allocated. The DSG do not require this table in the report, but it has been included for illustrative purposes.</p> <p>Q1 TM queried the £10.96m, specifically how long it will take before the overall figure is zero.</p> <p>A1 CQ explained that, as in 3.4 – Table 5, it is expected that the figure will reach zero by 2026/27.</p> | |
| <p>4.</p> | <p>Update from Schools' Forum Working Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Early Years b) Schools Block c) High Needs | <p>TS PS RV</p> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Early Years – TS stated the DfE has released funds as a grant which is available until March 2024. This grant will lead to an increase in the funding per hour for 2-year-olds by 3p and the MNS supplement by 21p. b) Schools' Block – deferred to next meeting. c) High Needs – RV stated a paper re therapies commissioning is underway. Croydon Locality SEND support has provided an update with positive feedback. | |
| <p>5.</p> | <p>Any Other Business</p> | <p>ALL</p> |
| | <p>5.1 Therapies Commissioning – Chris Bush provided a broad overview of current progress.</p> <p>5.2 Shelley Prince (Head of Commissioning & Procurement) to attend September's SF, to share and discuss proposals for the new contract.</p> | |

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| | <p>5.3 Contract extension – discussions underway to maintain the existing contract for a temporary period only to bridge the gap. JL and CB to liaise over the specification.</p> <p>5.4 JA updated the group that she will be retiring at the end of the Summer, and her successor will now replace her as representative at the SF. The Chair and the group extended best wishes for the future and gratitude for all JA has contributed over many years.</p> <p>5.5 The Chair closed the meeting by thanking all participants of the Schools' Forum this year for their time, effort, and dedication.</p> | |
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Date of next meeting: **Monday 2nd October 2023**

Final Draft