

**SCHOOLS FORUM**  
**VIRTUAL MEETING VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**  
**HELD ON 2 JULY 2024**

**PRESENT:**

Primary Maintained School Headteacher: Mrs H Gregory (Chair) and Mrs J Stanyard

Primary School Governor Representatives: Mr R Powner

Trade Union Representative: Mr L Russell

LA Representative: Councillor C Clark

Pupil Referral Unit: Mr T Keates

Observers: Councillor L Evans

**OFFICIALS:** Mr A Bryson – Chief Accountant  
Mr G Waller – Senior Accountant  
Mrs E Barrett - Secretary to the Forum  
Mrs V Housley – Service Lead Education and Wellbeing  
Miss E Smith – Strategic Lead Delivering Better Value

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr R Henderson, Mr E Huntington, Mr M Little, Mrs M McCarthy, Mrs L Oyston, Mrs R Richardson, Mrs L Spellman, Mr E Squire, Mrs A Swift and Mr C Wilkinson.

2. **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Members were invited to declare any personal or business interests they may have in any item included on the agenda.

No interests were declared.

3. **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING – 16 JANUARY 2024**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2024 be approved.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5. **SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS UPDATE**

The Scheme for Financing Schools paper had been circulated prior to the meeting. Andy Bryson explained that the purpose of the report is to seek approval from School's Fourn on an amendment to the SBC Scheme for Financing Schools that relates to maintained schools. The details of the changes are identified in the report.

It was noted that from 1 April 2024 the IFRS16 outlines the common leasing activities for maintained schools. The changes relate to financial leases and a change to wording around borrowing. The Secretary of State is waiving some approval rights, the link to the publication has been shared with members. It is noted that only maintained members are able to vote on this item. A show of hands was acceptable.

RESOLVED that Schools Forum note the changes in DfE guidance and approve the amendment to SBC's Scheme for Financing Schools relating to borrowing by schools as per the DfE directed revision in March 2024.

6. SCHOOLS BUDGET OUTTURN 2023/2024

A paper had been circulated prior to the meeting. This includes an overview of school's balances. There are two recommendations to consider: unused balances and the final DSG position for 2023 / 2024.

It is anticipated that the High Needs budget saving for 2023 / 2024 would be £1.26m, however due to increased demand on the high needs block the overall saving was £0.07m. This reduces the LA cumulative deficit down from £3.87m to £3.8m.

Appendix 1 provides the detailed financial information which includes the planned spend against the actual outturn for 2023 / 2024. There has been a significant overspend on agency placements and providers out of borough at £968k. A saving has been made of £853k on unused High Needs supplementary grant funding. £1m has been saved through a lower take up in Early Years. There remains a significant pressure on High Needs.

De-delegated Items

It is recommended that the net saving of £9.6k is utilised against the DSG deficit. This has previously been discussed with Schools Forum. This only relates to maintained members.

RESOLVED that the net saving of £9.6k is utilised against the DSG deficit.

School Balances

School balances have increased by £0.7m to £3.5m. Seven schools had excess balances and all surplus licences have been approved through the LA and Eddie Huntington. Variances are shown on the budget as requested. **Members questioned the de-delegated items for staff costs that are overspent.** This is a reflection on the increased case work, **it was asked if the costs would increase next year.** The costs have already been agreed for next year at similar levels to this year, this may be reviewed at the next budget setting as this is the first year there has been an overspend.

RESOLVED that members note the final position for 2023 / 2024.

7. DELIVERING BETTER VALUE (DBV) CABINET REPORT AND PROGRESS

Elisha Smith referred to the previously circulated DBV papers. The following was highlighted:

The original submission was in March 2024 with three projects aimed to reduce the deficit. In February 2024 the DfE asked the LA to revisit the position due to the overspend and increased deficit position. In April 2024 the report was sent to Cabinet with eight projects identified and a new deficit position.

It was previously reported that up to 2026 / 2027 the defect would run to £34.8m with a huge increase in EHCP's. If all children needed specialist provision, there was a risk that expensive out of borough placements would be needed.

The eight projects all support local SEN provision. There has been a good uptake from settings and three schools have been identified for expansion ready for September 2024.

St John the Baptist, Preston and Mill Lane primary schools. All Headteachers have been emailed to review the current EMS for phase 2 in September 2025, there will be some ARP's established in 2025.

Early Years is the biggest growth area with extensive CPD and extended childcare from September 2024. Earlier identification of needs is key. The LA are part way through a new CPD offer for schools starting in September 2024. £1m was allocated in March 2024 to deliver DBV. There will be a speech and language offer which will be free to schools and parents. All training is available to all LA employees.

There is a review of the EHCP process, case workers will attend earlier review meetings. SENDCO's are working together on reviews. A full review of alternative provision and specialist support services will be completed with the aim to reduce the numbers of permanent exclusions.

The High Needs banding review is on the agenda and is part of the DBV programme, this will come at the end of the programme. The Post 16 offer includes developing a hybrid offer to strengthen support. There needs to be a better local offer for post 18-year-olds who want to stay in expensive out of borough placements.

A SEN development group is being created which will investigate decision making in the first instance. A Principal Educational Psychologist role is needed, and this is being advertised. Recruitment of EP's and alternative options are being investigated.

Vanessa Housley explained that Sharon Bimson is the Business Co-Ordinator who is promoting the marketing of CPD. The High Needs banding meeting on 18 July 2024 will be postponed and reconvened in September 2024.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no further items of business to discuss.

9. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the next meeting of Schools Forum would be held on 8 October 2024 at 1.00 p.m.