



# City of Westminster

## Westminster Schools' Forum Meeting - Minutes Date and time of meeting: Monday 17th June 2024 at 4.45pm at Virtual via Teams

Representing	Name	Organisation	Attendance
<b>Primary Schools</b>	<b>6 Members</b>		
Primary Head	Lee Duffy (LD)	St Marys Bryanston Square CE Primary	Present
Primary Head	Darren Guttridge (DG)	Edward Wilson Primary	Present
Primary Head	Alix Ascough (AA)	All Souls CE Primary	Present
Primary Governor	Andrew Garwood-Watkins (AGW) <b>(Chair)</b>	St James and St John CE Primary	Present
Primary Governor	Carol Foyle (CF)	Queens Park Federation	Present
Primary Governor	Simon Mair (SM)	Edward Wilson Primary	Absent
<b>Secondary schools</b>	<b>1 Member</b>		
Secondary Head	Eugene Moriarty (EM)	St Augustine's CE High School	Present
<b>Academies</b>	<b>6 Members</b>		
Secondary Academy Principal	Richard Ardron (RA)	Marylebone Boys School	Present
Secondary Academy Principal	Peter Broughton (PB)	Westminster City School	Apologies
Secondary Academy Principal	Susanne Staab (SS)	The Greycoat Hospital School	Present
Secondary Academy Proprietor	Paul Wood (PW)	Westminster Academy	Present
Primary Academy Head	Claire Cleary (CC)	Gateway Academy	Apologies
Alternative Provision Academy Principal	Michelle Burgess-Allen (MBA)	Ormiston Beachcroft	Apologies
<b>Maintained Nursery Schools</b>	<b>1 member</b>		
Nursery Head	Liz Hillyard (LH)	Tachbrook Nursery School	Apologies
<b>Special Schools</b>	<b>1 member</b>		
Executive Headteacher	Noel Gibb (NG)	Westminster Special Schools Federation	Absent
Headteacher QEII Special School	<b>Represented by Claire Shepherd (CS)</b>	Westminster Special Schools Federation	Present
<b>Early Years (PVI)</b>	<b>1 member</b>		
PVI	John Trow-Smith (JTS)	LEYF	Present
<b>14-19 Representative</b>	<b>1 member</b>		
Secondary Head	Kathryn Pugh (KP)	The St Marylebone CofE School	Apologies
Director of Finance and Administration	<b>Represented by John Mcdonald (JMc)</b>	The St Marylebone CofE School	Present
<b>Officers in Attendance</b>			
Executive Director of Children's Services	Sarah Newman (SN)	Bi-Borough Children's Services	Apologies
Director of Education	Ian Heggs (IH)	Bi-Borough Children's Services	Apologies
Assistant Director of Education	Shelley Duffy (SD)	Bi-Borough Children's Services	Present
Assistant Director – SEN & Educational Psychology	Julie Ely (JE)	Bi-Borough Children's Services	Present
Lead Strategic Finance Manager	Anita Stokes (AST)	Bi-Borough Finance – Children's	Present

Head of Admissions and Access to Education	Wendy Anthony (WA)	Bi-Borough Children's Services	Present
Senior Finance Manager	Poonam Gagda (PG)	Bi-Borough Finance – Children's	Present
Finance Manager School Deficits	Estera Wojcik (EW)	Bi-Borough Finance - Children's	Present
Senior School Governance Adviser/Clerk	Jackie Saddington (JS)	Bi-Borough Children's Services Education	Present
School Standards Business and Finance Officer	Natalija Sorokina (NS)	Bi-Borough Children's Services Education	Present
<b>Observers</b>			
Cabinet member for Communities, Children and Public Protection	CLlr Aicha Less (AL)	Councillor	Present
Finance Manager RBKC Schools	Alison Prior (AP)	Bi-Borough Finance – Children's	Present

Item		Action
<b>1.</b>	<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>  Apologies were sent by Peter Broughton, Claire Cleary, Michelle Burgess-Allen, Liz Hillyard, Kathryn Pugh, Sarah Newman, Ian Heggs.	
<b>2.</b>	<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>  There were no declarations of interest.	
<b>3.</b>	<b>MEMBERSHIP</b>  JS reported that there had been no changes to the membership. However, several members terms of office were due to finish on 13 November 2024 and she would liaise with the various membership groups to confirm membership from that date.	
	<b>RESOLUTION: Noted.</b>	
<b>4.</b>	<b>MINUTES OF MEETINGS HELD ON 18 MARCH 2024</b>  The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2024 were approved.	
	<b>RESOLUTION: The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2024 were approved.</b>	
<b>5.</b>	<b>MATTERS ARISING</b>  There were no matters arising.	
	<b>RESOLUTION: Noted.</b>	
<b>6.</b>	<b>DSG OUTTURN AND SCHOOL BALANCES 2023/2024 INCLUDING PLANS FOR DSG SURPLUS</b>	

ASt presented the report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting. She highlighted Table 1 (DSG Outturn variances of £4.238m cumulative surplus) and 3.2 and Table 3 (DSG Reserve Proposed Allocations) of the report. Following a question as to why there was no line-by-line explanation as there was during the year, ASt agreed further detail could be provided in future outturn reports.

ASt was asked if the proposed allocation for school restructuring was sufficient and whether it should be reviewed annually. ASt advised that the figure was a best estimate and would be regularly reviewed.

A member suggested that more funding should be used for children and felt that the Schools Block had supported the High Needs block in the past and this should now be reciprocated. ASt agreed that the Schools Block had supported the High Needs block in 2022/2023, but this funding had subsequently been transferred back to the schools block/schools.

ASt was asked which budget lines benefitted children in Early Years. ASt explained that the final adjustments for Early Years were awaited from the DfE and once this had been received, any balance available will be allocated to Early Years providers.

The Chair asked ASt if there was anything in the allocations that would be nice to have, as opposed to essential to have and she advised there was not.

A member asked how tribunals were funded in the past. JE explained that there are currently additional costs for over 19's with two cases where parents are seeking residential care. However, the LA believe this is a social care need. Costs of £500k per student are not unusual. JE was asked if there was any comparable funding available from social care and she advised there was not. JE explained there was also a twelve-month delay in tribunal hearings taking place. She was asked where young people are going whilst waiting for a tribunal hearing and if this incurred additional costs. JE said she could not give details about cases as it could identify individuals but there were no additional costs unless tuition fees were required.

Some members queried whether allocating £500k was sufficient for reserves as it could be risky if individual placements could amount to £500k. With schools already in deficit and not able to cover costs of support staff or pay increases this was an additional risk.

ASt was asked if it was possible to ringfence the surplus for high needs. ASt explained that the underspend was a one off from 2022/23 and the LA was now much clearer on accruals, but she would continue to monitor the position in case anything was out of line and report back to the next Schools' Forum meeting.

	<p>It was suggested that the £450k* for 2024/25 allocated to the school restructuring budget could be redelegated back to schools and 2025/26 and 2026/27 reviewed in due course. ASt said that was acceptable and this was agreed.</p> <p><i>[Clerk's note: *this should be £350k to reflect the 2024/25 de-delegated amount for restructurings.]</i></p> <p>ASt was advised that there was a discrepancy in the figure under Total Proposed Allocations 2024/25 of £1.906m and £3.966m. It was agreed this should be £1.656m and £3.716m respectively. The summation error did not impact the total remaining DSG Surplus not to be allocated.</p> <p>ASt referred members to 4.3 and the appendix of the paper. She highlighted that there were two fewer schools with deficit balances compared to 31 March 2023. However, the total deficit balances had increased by £0.721m to £3.328m and currently 50% of schools had in-year deficits and were using reserves to balance budgets. The LA will have to submit an action plan to the DfE in due course. An update will be provided on the School Deficit Recovery Plan Position at the next meeting.</p>	
	<p><b>RESOLUTION:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>i) To note the DSG Carry Forward position outlined in sections 2 and 3 of the report.</b></li> <li><b>ii) To agree the allocation of the DSG surplus balance outlined at paragraph 3.2 of the report, with the proposed use of the surplus balance of the school restructuring budget of £450k to be reviewed for future years.</b></li> <li><b>iii) To note the level of schools balances, summary RAG ratings and deficit recovery plan position of schools in deficit.</b></li> <li><b>iv) To provide an update on the Recovery Plan Position to the next meeting.</b></li> </ul>	
<p><b>7.</b></p>	<p><b>UPDATE FROM THE ISOS SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING WORKING GROUP</b></p> <p>WA presented the report that had been circulated in advance of the meeting. She advised that the working group, a collective of officers, governors and school staff continued to meet. The picture was changing continually, although pupil numbers continue to fall and as of January 2024, the date of the last census, over-capacity stood at 25.9% in primaries and this would have been 30% if no action had been taken previously. Some discussions on amalgamations were taking place but needed to be handled sensitively.</p> <p>WA reported that the LA had lobbied the DfE to remove the requirement to consult on reducing PANS as there was already no need to consult if increasing PANS.</p>	

Members were referred to the Reception 2024 overview and the position outlined at 3.1. WA reported that Westminster was moving to where the LA needed to be to reduce capacity, although the needs of the LA and schools must be considered. A stringent analysis also needs to be undertaken to understand parental needs.

The financial position was outlined by ASt to members, who were reminded that Westminster was allocated £0.290m additional funding for schools in financial difficulty in 2023/24 and this has been carried forward into 2024/25 as part of the DSG. It was proposed that this funding is used to support those schools who are considering amalgamation in 2025 with any additional costs this leads to, as outlined under the Additional Lump Sum table at on page 3 of the report.

A member commented that it was right to support schools, whilst the amalgamation process was underway, so long as the schools have a plan. The Chair clarified that only the recipient school on amalgamation received additional funding to support with the transition. The Chair was asked if schools could be supported in the year before the amalgamation and the Chair advised that the Schools Forum cannot delegate funds for this situation as funds must be targeted and the LA carries the financial risk. Some members expressed their concern that children's education was suffering whilst deficits were being recouped.

WA was asked how many forms of entry still need to be reduced in the primary sector and advised 6-7FE needed to be removed by 2027, with 14.5FE having already been removed. On the basis of past forecasting having been very accurate she was of the view these figures were accurate.

The Chair reminded members that PAN reductions must be carried out on a strategic basis and if schools can't agree a deficit recovery plan, parental choice and travel distance may be affected.

ASt was asked what happened to debt when schools amalgamate. She explained that the debt of the closing school sat with the LA and the remaining school kept their own debt.

ASt was asked if the LA considers schools with projected deficits. ASt explained that the LA already offers support to schools with a predicted deficit but the LA can't ask for a deficit recovery plan when a school is not in deficit. If the Schools Forum wanted to make that request the LA could then do so. Some members suggested this could be done where schools were working on reducing their predicted budget deficit, making plans for the future and they could also be asked to provide monthly monitoring reports to the LA.

	<p>The Chair informed members that schools in this position were already getting significant support from the LA and PG confirmed the LA was supporting schools ragged amber or with reserves below £50k.</p> <p>DG stated he understood the support was well received by Headteachers and thanked officers whilst members also commented that it was important that care was taken in respect of risk and assessment messaging and WA agreed.</p>	
	<p><b>RESOLUTION:</b> i) <b>To agree the Isos Working Group recommendations to use the previously approved Isos risk assessment as a tool to support the work of identifying where further capacity can be removed; and seek to identify the total number of forms of entry required across Westminster in 2027 based on estimated pupil numbers.</b></p> <p>ii) <b>To agree the Isos Working Group recommendation to require LA-maintained schools without a licensed deficit recovery plan in place, to either review and seek agreement for a revised deficit recovery plan or look to develop an alternative plan regarding the future viability of their school with their governing body. This plan should then be shared with the local authority in the autumn term of this year.</b></p> <p>iii) <b>To agree the proposed allocation methodology of the funds for schools subject to amalgamation.</b></p>	
<p>8.</p>	<p><b>RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE HIGH NEEDS BLOCK REVIEW GROUP</b></p> <p>JE presented the report that had been circulated in advance of the meeting. She reminded members that it was important the LA achieved value for money and as a result they were looking at specialist provision.</p> <p>JE referred members to 2.4 of the report and explained that nationally, 30% of EHC plans are for autism. In WCC it is 43%. It may be that there has been a peak in demand but there is still worrying growth.</p> <p>Although £250k had been earmarked for Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Special School, work was still on-going and pending the outcome of a cost pressure review by officers, working with school staff.</p> <p>Paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9 outlined various schools and fee payments. JE explained that there was no national standardised approach to costs and the LA was working with other West London LAs. A member asked why these schools needed to be used and JE explained it was due to a lack of capacity within the LA and NHS.</p> <p>JE informed members she would be writing to The St Marylebone CE Bridge School governors to ask them to broaden their intake. AP provision is full and therefore the independent sector needs to be used.</p>	

	Members were informed that primary schools are finding it difficult dealing with medication needs due to a lack of staff and this needs to be monitored.	
	<p><b>RESOLUTION:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) To note the £250k set aside for the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee school review with proposals to come to the November Schools Forum.</li> <li>ii) To agree the recommendation for exceptional needs funding for pupils with diabetes and epilepsy.</li> <li>iii) To note the work of the High Needs Block Review Group (HNBRG).</li> <li>iv) To note the 2024/25 Teachers' pension employer contribution grant (TPECG) allocations for special schools and AP will total £319,397.</li> <li>v) To note the 2024/25 Teachers' pay additional grant (TPAG) allocations for special schools and AP will total £205,293.</li> <li>vi) To note the forward plan for the HNBRG.</li> </ul>	
9.	<p><b>PROPOSED CHANGES TO SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS</b></p> <p>PG presented the report that had been circulated in advance of the meeting. She highlighted the policy updates at section 2, namely sections 3.6, 2.1.2 and 3.2 along with the recommendations. There were no questions.</p>	
	<p><b>RESOLUTION:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) To review and approve the updated Scheme to be consulted on with all maintained schools, in line with 1.4 of the policy.</li> <li>ii) To note that the outcome of the consultation will be reflected in the next issue of the Scheme.</li> </ul>	
10.	<p><b>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</b></p> <p>ASt reminded members that in 2023 the Schools' Forum had previously set the percentage move to the National Funding Formula at 30% for 2024/2025 and 2025/26 with full NFF in 2026/27.</p>	
	<b>RESOLUTION: Noted.</b>	
11.	<p><b>DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS</b></p> <p>Monday 11 November 2024 – 4.45pm – Westminster City Hall  Monday 13 January 2025 – 4.45pm – Westminster City Hall  Monday 17 March 2025 – 4.45pm – Westminster City Hall  Monday 16 June 2025 – 4.45pm – Westminster City Hall</p> <p><b>The meeting closed at 5.50pm.</b></p>	

## ACTIONS

<b>Item 6</b>	<b>To provide an update on the School Deficit Recovery Plan Position to the next meeting.</b>	<b>AS/PG</b>
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