

## LEWISHAM SCHOOLS FORUM

### Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 11th July 2019

Membership (Quorum = 40% i.e. 9)    ✓ = present    ✕ =absent    a = apologies  
s = substitute

		Attendance				
Primary School Headteachers		4/10	6/12	17/01	11/07	Date of Appointment
Paul Moriarty	Good Shepherd	a	✓	✓	✓	Dec 2018
Manda George	Torridon Primary		✓	✓	✓	Dec 2018
Sharon Lynch	St William of York	✓	✓	✓	✓	Dec 2018
Keith Barr	Kender	✓	✓	✓	✓	Dec 2018
Matthew Ringham	Our Lady & St Philip Neri		✓	✓	✕	Dec 2018
Nursery School Headteacher						
Cathryn Kinsey	Clyde Nursery	✓	✓	✓	✓	Oct 2018
Secondary School Headteachers						
Naill Hand	Prendergast Ladywell				✓	July 2019
David Sheppard	Leathersellers Federation	✓	✓	✓	✓	June 2018
Mark Phillips	Deptford Green	✓	✕	✕	✓	Oct 2016
Clare Cassidy	Sedgehill	a	✓	a	✓	Dec 2017
Special School Headteacher						
Lynne Haines	Greenvale	✓	✓	✓	✓	Oct 2018
Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher						
Heather Johnston	Abbey Manor	✓	✓	✓	a	Dec 2017
Primary School Governors						
Rosamund Clarke	Perrymount	✓	✓	✓	✓	Dec 2018
Secondary & Special School Governors						
Pat Barber	Bonus Pastor			✓	✓	Dec 2018
Ruth Elliott	Watergate	✓	✓	a	✓	Mar 2019
Academies						

Dr Tesca Bennett	Haberdashers' Knights Academy	✓	x	✓	✓	Oct 2018
<b>14-19 Consortium Rep</b>						
Asfa Sohail	Lewisham Southwark College				a	Mar 2019
<b>Early Years - PVI</b>						
Dawn Nasser	Rose House Montessori	a	✓	✓	✓	Jan 2017
<b>Diocesan Authorities</b>						
Sara Sanbrook-Davies	Southwark Diocesan Board of Education	a	✓	✓	✓	Dec 2016
Yvonne Epale	Substitute – Education Commission – Catholic Diocese of Southwark	a	✓	✓	✓	Feb 2018

<b>Lynne Haines</b>	<b>Forum Chair</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	<b>Oct 2017</b>
<b>Keith Barr</b>	<b>Forum Vice-Chair</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	<b>Oct 2017</b>

<b>Also Present</b>	
Angela Scattergood	AD Education Services
Selwyn Thompson	Head of Financial Services
Mala Dadlani	Interim Group Finance Manager
Fiona Gavin	Estate Management & Contracts
Claudia Smith	LB Lewisham
Suhaib Saeed	LB Lewisham
Vaughan Williams	Clerk

### 1. Apologies and Acceptance of Apologies.

Apologies received from Asfa Sohail and Heather Johnson. Apologies accepted.

### 2. Declaration of Interests

None.

### 3. Draft Minutes of the Meeting – 17 January 2019

Agreed.

### 4. Matter Arising

Regarding the Schools Forum Action Summary and the Scheme of Delegation, Forum expressed concern that a report on the proposed updated scheme had been deferred given that it is a statutory document. The Interim Group Finance Manager advised that the deferral was a consequence of various considerations including recent DFE guidance which needs to be incorporated; outcomes of reports that will be discussed today and also the volume of statutory work required at present including closing accounts etc. The revised scheme would be made available for consideration at the Schools Forum meeting in October 2019.

### 5. Finance Work Plan

Forum were presented with a report to review the proposed schedule of future meeting dates and work programme as follow:

The agreed dates for Schools Forum in the financial year 2019/20 are:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Venue</b>
11 July 2019	Bonus Pastor School
17 October 2019	Rushey Green Primary School, SE6 2LA
12 December 2019	Civic Suite, Committee Room 3
16 January 2020	Civic Suite, Committee Room 2

Time: 16:30-18:30

The timing of the dates has been aligned to enable strategic direction with Schools' Forum with specific activity corresponding to key events throughout the year.

July	Updates on closure of accounts position and consideration of intelligence on budget planning.
October	Updates and consideration of any policy decisions. It is common for the Department for Education to publish data and announce any changes during the summer break.
December	Review any key discussions that impact upon and inform the setting of the 2020/21 schools' budget
January	Notification of the 2020/21 DSG settlement and agreement of the schools delegated budget share, including any de-delegation.

Forum currently has one operational sub-group, the High Needs sub group. This sub-group will continue to review the High Needs Block and meetings and work programme should be strategically planned to report to the main forum meetings.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Venue</b>
3rd July 2019 10:30:12:00	Civic Suite, Room 4
2 <sup>nd</sup> October 2019	Civic Suite
16 <sup>th</sup> December 2019	TBC
January 2020	TBC

## **Decision**

Although Forum agreed the proposed schedule of future meeting dates and work programme it was noted that additional ad hoc meetings can be requested as necessary.

### **6. Finance Support to Schools**

Forum were presented with a report which provided an update on the measures being taken to improve the financial support to schools which is appropriate for the challenges that schools are facing in the current difficult financial climate.

The Director of Financial Services (DFS) introduced the report by confirming the Council's commitment to strengthening the relationship with; and financial support to schools. This was particularly important given the recent loss of 2 key members of staff who had provided direct support to schools. The intention was to continue to build and develop a positive working relationship with schools.

The DFS also confirmed that whilst he was currently working with corporate HR, in the review of the wider Council finance function, he had extended the contract of the Interim Group Finance Manager for at least a further 12 months in order to provide stability during the transition period.

Reference was made to staff deployment table which illustrated the previous and current schools finance team staffing compliment showing the number of staff deployed on statutory and regulatory work and those supporting schools directly. The net effect showed that there had been an overall increase of 2.20 full-time equivalent staff deployed in the schools finance team with 2.30 FTE providing direct support to schools. The views and comments of Forum had been integral to building the new structure. Work was also being reviewed and streamlined to enable more frontline support to schools.

The intention moving forward was to maintain this staffing structure as long as a justifiable need for that level of finance support to schools remains. Forum noted that all but one school had been visited over the period April to June. Several schools had more than one visit and overall the feedback from the schools visits had been positive.

Forum also noted that whilst existing financial documents and templates were currently being used a review was scheduled to take place over the summer to revise and update them in order to improve the quality of financial information.

Means of communication would also be reviewed and Headteachers and School Business Managers would be consulted on the proposed changes.

The interim finance manager further asked Schools Forum to recognise the changes being made with a view to improving the support to schools. This is a journey and will take some time to embed.

### **Decision**

Forum agreed the following recommendation:

Note the staff deployment supporting schools, including additional support.

Acknowledge the limitations including financial constraints, deployment of staff to meet statutory and regulatory work.

Approve the changes in process to enable more staff time to be deployed in Schools.

Note the changes implemented since the January 2019 meeting of Schools Forum

Agree to receive regular updates at each of the Schools' Forum meetings throughout 2019/20.

### **7. School Kitchens Improvement**

Forum were presented with a report to agree a one off contribution to the school kitchen capital improvement programme of £250,000 from the catering surplus.

Forum noted that in May 2015 the Council entered into a school meal contract with Chartwells on behalf of schools for five years with the option to extend for a further two years subject to the necessary approvals. Schools were billed for the delivery of service at the same rate as the previous year in order to protect against a steep rise anticipated by the phased implementation of London Living Wage. Although a surplus of £3.2 million was created the intention is to fully utilise the surplus by 2022.

This surplus has been used to offset any pricing increase in the catering cost over the remaining term and a balance of approx. £1.8 million will remain at year end. Following the introduction of UIFSM in 2013 a grant of £743,182 was made available to improve school kitchens in order to accommodate the additional demand.

A further £250,000 was added from the surplus in 2016 in order to support a work required bring the budget to £993,000. There are 66 schools included in the catering contract and 62 of these subscribe to the kitchen maintenance element. A conditional survey of 50 school kitchens was carried out by KEG in May 2017. The remaining 12 were not evaluated due to their condition and standard.

The catering contract with Chartwells ends in May 2020 and whilst options are being considered for the future delivery of the service, kitchens will need to be handed on in good operational condition. If schools choose to exit the centralised arrangement kitchens will need to be returned at an acceptable standard. Following completion of

this year's programme, 37 schools will still require priority 1 and 2 work as detailed in the appendices (1) attached to the paper. Much of the priority 3 works will be included in annual maintenance already covered. At year end a budget overspend of £5,127 is anticipated. Having reviewed the remaining work required an estimated £250,000 is required to deliver the outstanding priority 1 and priority 2 items. Any budget not used will be returned to the schools catering account.

### **Decision**

Having discussed and voted on the proposal Forum agreed the following recommendation:

One off contribution to the school kitchen capital improvement programme of £250,000 from the catering surplus.

### **8. Schools Traded Services**

Forum received a presentation from the Services Manager Services for Schools which provided an update on the implementation and launch of SLA Online portal in January 2018, known as Lewisham Services for Schools, and the following development activities in 2018-19:

- Part time Project Manager employed as a shared skills and time resource to support the strategic development of the site.
- Successful Internal Audit, overall reassurance – Substantial
- Financial and academic SLA's launched for 2019/20 year.
- Resource area development – training to Services and Page Administrators.
- Governor module development – training for clerks.
- Formal processes and procedures development – guidance detailing roles and responsibilities of stakeholders.
- GDPR implementations – Privacy notice/Consent option.

Forum noted the number of schools purchasing SLA's, service providers and income generated which included an increase this year of £154,000 to date and that it was still possible for schools to buy back services where available including safeguarding which was available until October. Forum asked the Services Manager if he would explore the option of governors having access to the SLA portal so that it was possible to download the SLA brochure.

Forum further noted the next steps for the service as follows:

- Services have been asked to extend buy back period and follow up with schools who have not purchased their service this year to enquire why.
- Services charging schools in arears (Payroll and Energy Procurement) encouraged to and bill schools via the portal, so buy back and income can be captured on the site.
- Academic Year SLAs such as Education Business Partnership encouraged to use portal so all sales and billing can be recorded via the site.
- Safeguarding Academic Year SLA buy back period will continue until October 2019.
- NQT Academic Year Training SLA to go live in July 2019.

- New STORE tab and developments being launched 1 September 2019 – Lewisham Council team will be updating user guides and provide communications and support to schools prior to the launch of 2020-21 SLAs in January 2020.
- Ongoing requirement for individual services to review and QA their offer.

The Director of Education assured Forum that continuing to build positive relationships with schools and customer care were a high priority. Although the transition from Fronter to the SLA Online will take place over the summer the deadline for colleagues in schools to respond to any issues concerned with the new portal was the 19 July.

Forum noted that the reintroduction of the Estates Management SLA was currently under discussion and that a health & safety advice portal was being developed to include updated risk assessments.

The Interim Group Finance Manager confirmed that work was currently underway to streamline the year end process and closure of accounts. Ideally, all central charges/transactions would be invoiced/posted on a regular basis rather than in week 53. There had also been discussions about closing the accounts by the 21 March each year.

Forum noted the content of the Schools Traded Services presentation and associated discussion points.

## **9. High Needs Fund Budget 2019/20**

Forum received an update on the current pressures on the High Needs budget (HNB) for 2019-2020 and were provided with a detailed action plan to mitigate spend over the next three years.

Lewisham had experienced increasing pressure on the HNB in recent years which is similar to other local authorities across the country. Forum noted that there are a number of reasons that are specific to Lewisham this includes following:

September 2014 saw the introduction of reform to the process for identification of and provision for Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND). The age of eligibility for EHCP was also broadened from 5-18 years to 0-25 years. Since the reforms there has been a national rise in requests for Education and Health Needs Assessment (EHCNA) which has been particularly marked in most London boroughs.

Increase in the use of alternative education provision across the primary sector and request for additional support for children in school through the Fair Access Process. The use of out of borough provision for children with SEND, in particular those with Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH), Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN).

The growing increase in Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) in early years and children under five due to improved early identification and intervention across the sector. Forum noted details of the year on year increases in the number of children

with EHCP in Lewisham since 2015 and the overall percentage increase since between 2015 and 2019.

Forum further noted the details of how Lewisham's increase (43.3%) compares with other London authorities such as Lambeth, Southwark, Merton and Sutton that have similar increases whilst Newham and Enfield have experienced an increase of over 50% since 2015. The number of children with EHCPs as a percentage of the total pupil population (attending Lewisham schools), compared to national and London data. Lewisham's rate at 3.1% is the same as Inner London and slightly above London (3.0%) and national (2.9%). Lewisham has also had similar increases to London and national over recent years.

Forum considered the contents of the Mitigation Action Plan which detailed the work currently being undertaken to analyse data and provide a range of options aimed at reducing the overall spend from the HNB including out borough placements not including transport costs. Evidence of a growing increase, and the contributory factors, in the applications for the Early Years Inclusion Fund were also noted.

### **Decision**

Forum noted the actions of the Mitigation Action Plan as set out in the appendices attached to the committee report.

### **10. 2018/20 Final DSG & Schools Balances report**

Forum received a report which provided an update on the final 2018/19 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) position and schools balances including an update on 2019/20 DSG.

Forum noted a provisional minor underspend on the DSG of £1.2m representing 0.46% of the DSG. A final position will be known once the Department for Education (DfE) confirms the position for the Early Years Block. The Early Years block remains provisional until the point that DfE has confirmed Early Years census numbers. Forum had previously noted that the level of the Lewisham Early Years Inclusion Fund is very low compared to many other LAs. Taking Hackney and Greenwich as examples, the Early Years Inclusion Fund is in excess of £1m per annum. It is therefore recommended that any surplus balance Early Years block funds are targeted to the Early Years Inclusion Fund. This option will have the added benefit of supporting early identification and meeting of SEND for under 5s which could potentially support the High Needs Block.

Forum further noted the schools' balance detailed position and associated summary information including the number of schools that have reduced or increased balances and movement in total value between 2017/18 and 2018/19. Overall, the level of surpluses has increased and schools were invited to complete a return to enable any surplus to be captured to reflect commitments which totaled £6m based on returns from 28 schools.

Discussions with schools suggest that they are cautious about spending and are tending to hold resources to support them over the next few years. Key concerns impacting upon funding are arising from pupil number variations, teachers' pay, support staff pay, teachers' pensions, and other operational inflationary pressures.

Although the schools balances position for Lewisham has increased, on face value, from

£14m to £18m this figure needs to be taken with caution as it includes committed spend. Simply based on the 28 returns circa £6m is committed leaving £12m uncommitted. Although £12m as a % of total schools budget is equivalent to 6%, which is within the overall tolerance of reserve levels, further school by school level discussions need to take place together with the link to school improvement.

Forum were informed that the level of committed spend distorts the ability to assess a school's financial position and were asked to consider the principle of lodged funds; where the school's funds- if appropriately committed- are held as separate from uncommitted balances. The funds remain exclusively for the relevant school but enable a clearer picture of the school's individual longer term sustainability to be determined.

## **DSG 2019/20**

Forum noted the current 2019/20 DSG position which confirmed that whilst the Schools Block had been reduced, for recoupment, there had also been an overall reduction in High Needs Block of £32k to reflect additional places that are funded directly by the ESFA on behalf of Lewisham. Although both adjustments were intended to be a net neutral Forum noted that the final position on the Early Years Block is still awaited.

With regard to balances and schools exercising caution Forum commented that the late notification of budgets and delays in closing the accounts were factors. The Interim Group Finance Manager said that budget notification delays had resulted from the DfE not providing information in a timely fashion and that measures were being taken to streamline the year-end process. The scheme would be optional and that schools depositing committed funds would need to show evidence of spend against their nominated project/s. The introduction of the lodged fund scheme would strengthen the Council's position when discussing future funding arrangements with the DfE.

Whilst Forum agreed in principle to the introduction of a lodged fund scheme, to protect schools against the risk of carrying high surpluses, they required detailed proposals to be brought forward to include confirmation of where funds would be lodged and how they would be accounted for.

## **Recommendation**

Forum noted the contents of this report as follows:

Forum agreed in principle to the introduction of a schools' committed reserves management fund subject to detailed proposals to be brought forward.

Forum agreed to approve the transfer of any un-clawed funds from the Early Years block to Support Early Years Inclusion Fund.

## **11. Any Other Business.**

Term of Office for the Chair and Vice-Chair of Schools Forum. Further to a discussion regarding updating the terms of reference for Schools Forum, and the

length of the term of office for the Chair and Vice-Chair, a three year term was agreed. It was also agreed to include the term of office for all members of Forum to the attendance list.

#### **SCHOOLS FORUM ACTION SUMMARY**

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>ACTION TO BE TAKEN</b>	<b>OFFICER (S) RESPONSIBLE</b>	<b>OUTCOME/ CURRENT POSITION</b>
<b>Scheme of Delegation</b>	Report on the proposed scheme.	Mala Dadlani	For Oct 2019 forum.
<b>Forum 11 July 2019, Item 6 – Finance Support to Schools</b>	Financial support to schools.	Mala Dadlani	Update report for next Schools Forum meeting
<b>Forum 11 July 2019, Item 10 – 2018/19 Final DSG &amp; Schools Balances Report.</b>	In principle agreement to the introduction of lodged funds scheme.	Mala Dadlani	Detailed proposals for next Schools Forum meeting.