

PRESENT

Schools - Headteachers/Senior Staff: Sarah Bouette (St Thomas); Sue Hussey (St Clement and St James); Kevin Jackson (St Thomas More); David Sellens (Thomas Jones); Kathleen Williams (Servite); Other Schools: Maria Elena Arana (Chelsea Open Air Nursery and Children's Centre); Governors - Peter Bassett (Avondale Park); Simon Blanchflower (Thomas Jones) (*Chairman*); Gwynneth Flower (Our Lady of Victories); Academies - David Benson (Kensington Aldridge); Shamsur Rahman (*substitute for David Chappell*, Holland Park); Matt Williams (Chelsea Academy); Non-Schools - Cllr Husband; Kitty Mason (PVI Forum).

Also in attendance: Cllr Emma Will (Cabinet Member for Education and Libraries).

Officers in attendance - Alison Farmer (Assistant Director, SEN); Nick Grey (Group Accountant - Schools Direct; Andrew Tagg (Head of Resources); Gavin Wilson (Governance Administrator).

A1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr Keogh, Cllr Atkinson and Cllr Rutherford.

A2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

A3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 JANUARY 2016

The minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 14 January 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

(a) Minute A4 - School Organisation Strategy

It was reported that work was still being undertaken on the Strategy and it was therefore intended to present it at the Forum's meeting on 9 June.

Action: Mr Wharton

(b) Minute A6 - DSG 2015/16 Monitoring and Update

Mr Blanchflower reported that a methodology for the allocation of funding from balances had been agreed by the secondary schools. Mr Tagg added that, following the consultation which had been carried out, it had been agreed to adopt a lump sum allocation.

A4 DSG 2015/16 MONITORING

Mr Tagg said that the officers considered that, in order to make adequate provision for the transition to the national funding formula, the carry-forward was projected at £2.32 million.

RESOLVED: That the Forum note the report, particularly the key points contained in paragraph 4.1.

A5 SCHOOLS NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA – GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

Mr Tagg commented that the Government's six-week consultation period included the Easter period and did not allow a great deal of time for a response to be considered by schools and submitted to the DfE. He drew attention to the fact that the proposals did not adequately allow for factors peculiar to London to be taken into account; as a result, the Council – and London Councils and London Borough chief executives – would be making appropriate representations. Another significant factor was the funding reduction, which was estimated to be 4.8% over the three-year transition period (exclusive of inflation and factors such as pay increases etc) resulting in a loss of £280 per pupil in the Royal Borough, based on historic data. However, in the next financial year, schools were likely to see a smaller drop in funding than they might have been primed to anticipate.

Mr Tagg drew attention to the role of free school meals (FSM) in the DfE's model for the purposes of calculating deprivation. He stressed, therefore, the importance of achieving maximum levels of registration for FSM by the time of the October count. In order to assist in the process of achieving high levels of registration, the Council would be investing in additional assistance for schools; relevant information would be sent to schools shortly after Easter.

Responding to a question from Mr Blanchflower, Mr Tagg said that, regarding the two-year transitional period, it was presently not clear what flexibilities local authorities would have to operate with the minimum funding guarantee in place or through local funding formulae.

Responding to an enquiry from Mr Benson regarding the significance of mobility, Mr Tagg stressed that this was indeed a major factor for London local authorities and one which consultation responses definitely needed to address.

In response to an enquiry from Mr Benson concerning the implications for academies of the proposals in paragraph 5.15 of the consultation paper, Mr Tagg advised that the three academies in the borough, being in each case 'standalone', would see a reduction in funding, but this would not be as a result of top-slicing.

In response to an enquiry from Ms Hussey regarding the deprivation factor, Mr Tagg said that more details on flexibilities were expected in the DfE's next consultation paper. He advised that the Government was not keen on the continued use of IDACI, mainly due to its five-year cycle and the significant changes which had occurred between 2010-15.

As regards the issue of implications for schools which were finding it difficult to fill their rolls, Mr Tagg said that where schools were experiencing short or long-term decline, the local authority would in future be unable to offer support and schools would need to make an application for assistance direct to Government. However, in the interim period before the school-level NFF became fully operational, the Government would be expecting local authorities to address these issues.

Responding to Mr Blanchflower's enquiry regarding the flexibility to move spend across schools, early years and high needs blocks, and the Government's intention to re-baseline blocks to achieve alignment with the pattern of an individual authority's spending in 2016-17, Mr Tagg said that addressing the question of spending amounts in individual blocks was a very important early consideration for officers. It would be the intention to report in more detail on this area to the next meeting of the Forum.

Mr Blanchflower underlined that the consultation meetings with schools planned for 11 and 12 April were crucial, prior to the DfE consultation deadline for comments of 17 April. Mr Tagg said that the intention was to circulate a draft consultation response to schools by 5 April.

On the matter of the very recent announcement by the Government that all schools must become academies, Mr Tagg referred to the merit of starting to consider issues fairly soon and said that the Council would be developing a set of options (e.g. standalone, multi-academy trust) which might assist schools. If a local model was developed based on the outstanding reputation of local academies, it could be advantageous to seek DfE support to set up a pilot. It would be the intention to bring proposed options to the next meeting of the Forum. The Forum noted that, so far, there had only been a statement of intention from the Government, with no guidance issued.

On the Forum's behalf, Mr Blanchflower thanked Mr Tagg and the other officers for their work in developing a speedy response to the DfE consultation.

A6 FUNDING FOR TWO-YEAR-OLD GROWTH

The Forum was advised that the carry-forward was £117,500.

In response to an enquiry by Mr Bassett concerning how to achieve an increase in the number of participating families, Mr Tagg said that efforts to increase take-up had been made, and he referred to a report from London local authorities detailing their strategies to increase participation. He assured the Forum that the Council would continue to promote take-up by greater numbers of families. In this context, Ms Mason emphasised the importance of having enough providers sufficiently close to families. Following a request by Ms Arana, Mr Tagg said that a list of two-year-old providers would be made available.

Action: Mr Tagg

The Forum:

- (i) noted the projected position on the Two-Year-Old Project;
- (ii) approved the allocation of a further £100,000 of the budget to continue Transitional Support for Rising 3's.

A7 EARLY YEARS SINGLE FUNDING FORMULA 2016-17

Mr Tagg advised the Forum that, for the time being, the proposals outlined in the report were not being taken forward. The Government consultation paper on early years, which was expected after the Easter period, would contain relevant information regarding future funding. It would be the intention for this area to be considered in greater detail at the next meeting of the Forum.

The meeting ended at 5.51 p.m.

Chairman