

SCHOOLS FORUM

Thursday 13 July 2023

Present (virtually): Joolz Scarlett (Chair), Andrew Morrison, and Isabel Cooke

Officers (virtually): Laurence Ellis, Clive Haines, Louise Dutton and Tracey Anne Nevitt

Election of a Chair for the Duration of the Meeting

Joolz Scarlett proposed herself as Chair. Isabel Cooke seconded the proposal.

UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED: Joolz Scarlett to be Chair for the duration of the meeting.

Apologies for Absence

Forum members and officers introduced themselves.

Apologies were received from Chris Tomes, Vice-Chair.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 19th January 2023 be approved as a correct record.

Terms of Reference

Laurence Ellis, Democratic Services Officer, informed that the proposed amendments was related to changing the composition of the Forum membership.

(Andrew Morrison joined the meeting virtually at 2:09pm)

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: To approve the suggested amendments to School Forum's Terms of Reference.

When the Chair asked if there was any update on recruiting new members, Clive Haines, Deputy Director for Education (AfC), with the new membership composition approved, suggested to recruit with Democratic Services by requesting any interest in being a Forum member to each category of school. After this, the Forum would review the candidates and then nominated from there. The Chair agreed with the approach.

Clive Haines suggested to Laurence Ellis to get some candidates together for the next meeting on 16th November 2023. He also requested for Laurence Ellis to find or write an email on the role of a Forum member.

ACTION: Recruit candidates for Schools Forum for review at the next meeting on 16th November 2023.

Budget Outturn and School Balances 2022/23

Louise Dutton, Head of Finance (AfC), gave an overview of the report. She explained that the DSG (Dedicated Schools Grant) settlement for 2022 was £141 million with a retained value of £71.865 million in which AfC and the DfE (Department for Education) retained.

Louise Dutton then informed that the underspend at the end of 1st March 2023 was £941,000. Breaking this down, she stated that the Schools Block underspend was £496,000, partially related to an unspent growth funding; the Early Years Block underspend was £545,000 which was in relation to a reduction of up-taking pupil numbers in the Autumn term; and the High Needs Block overspend was £116,000, primarily due to Independent Special or Non-Maintained Schools. In addition, there was a slight underspend block of £15,000 on the Central School Services.

With the net underspend of £941,000, the Reserve Balance had reduced from a deficit of £2.047 million to £1.106 million.

Louise Dutton then informed that there was an underspend on de-delegation balances of £158,000. A decision had been made to refund the maintained schools £142,000 which would be paid out in 2023.

Louise Dutton then stated that as of 31st March 2023, the school balances were £2.894 million, which saw a reduction of £109,000. At the end of July 2023, there were seven schools in deficit and 27 schools in a surplus position.

Nursery Report LGO

Clive Haines explained that the report was presented to Schools Forum as a result of findings from a Local Government and Social Ombudsman report which stated that the local setting had not provided Fair Access to free placement where a top-up fee that had been applied due to an unclear invoicing. The report concluded that the Borough was at fault for not ensuring that the setting was issuing clear and transparent invoices. In response, the setting had introduced a new invoicing system which clearly illustrated the consumables and charge per hour. The next steps were for the Early Years Team to request invoicing from all providers to ensure consumables and hourly funding were separately listed as well as clear and transparent for parents going forward at the beginning of each term.

Clive Haines then stated that the Borough had made an apology to the parent, and then paid them £100 for the time and trouble of the complaint as well as 50% of the consumables charged since January 2021.

The report was presented to Schools Forum as a requirement from the Ombudsman. In addition, two public notices were published in local papers.

The Chair asked if the Borough were not previously monitoring nursery charges. Clive Haines replied that it did monitor the charges. He elaborated that the nursery had an automatic invoicing system which explained to parents when they joined at the beginning of each term on how the invoices was broken down against the system. However, it was not considered clear to parents.

Scheme for Financing Schools 2023/24

Louise Dutton stated that the item was related to maintained schools. There were some directive updates driven by the DfE while there were some changes which could be done locally. These changes included:

- Issue of the Statutory guidance changed from “issue 14” to “issue 15” (Paragraph 1.1).
- Income from the sale of assets – Further guidance on retention of funds from the sale of land assets (Paragraph 5.4).

Louise Dutton noted that the report says paragraph 7.4 on page 44 when it should be paragraph 5.4. She stated that this would be corrected before being published onto the website.

ACTION: Louise Dutton to correct the paragraph number on page 44 in the report.

The meeting, which began at 2.04 pm, finished at 2.21 pm

Chair.....

Date.....