

## Haringey Schools Forum Minutes

13 MARCH 2025 AT 16:00 HRS: VIRTUAL VIA TEAMS

School Members		
Headteachers		
Special (1)	Martin Doyle (Riverside)	
Nursery Schools (1)	(A)Sian McDermott (Rowland Hill)	
Primary (7)	(A)Mary Gardiner (West Green)	Kate Stevens (St Aidan VC)
	Hina Shah (Earlsmead)	Paul Murphy (Lancasterian) [leaves at 5pm]
	Ian Scotchbrook (South Harringay)	Linda Sarr (Risley Avenue)
	Bola Soneye-Thomas (Rokesly Junior School) [leaves at 5pm]	
Secondary (2)	Jo Davey (Fortismere)	Vacancy
Primary Academy (1)	(A)Luke Renwick (Brook House) long term substitute for Simon Knowles (LDBS Academies Trust)	
Secondary Academies (3)	(A)Michael McKenzie (Alexandra Park)	(A)Angela Wallace (Mulberry Woodside Academy)
	Vacancy	
Alternative Provision (1)	(A)Gerry Robinson (Executive Headteacher HLP)	
Governors		
Special (1)	(A)Phil Di Leo (The Vale)	
Nursery School (1)	Melian Mansfield (Pembury)	
Primary Maintained (7)	Vacancy	Dan Salem (Stroud Green Primary)
	(A)Oliver Simms (Alexandra Primary)	
	Helen Froggatt (St Aidan's VC)	(A)Jenny Thomas (Lordship Lane)
	Caroline Schloss (Alexandra Primary)	
Secondary Maintained (3)	Laurence Penn (Highgate Wood)	Vacancy
	Sylvia Dobie (Park View)	
Primary Academy (1)	Vacancy	
Secondary Academies (3)	Andrea Henry (Greig City Academy)	Vacancy
	Vacancy	
Alternative Provision (1)	Vacancy	
Non-School Members		
Non-Executive Councillor	(A)Cllr Ibrahim Ali	
Trade Union Representative	(A)Paul Renny	
Professional Association Representative	(A)Efe Kurtluoglu substitution for Ed Harlow	
Faith Schools	(A)Geraldine Gallagher	
CCCG Representative	Adam Beral substitution for Christine Bianchin	
Early Years Providers	Susan Tudor-Hart	
Independent member	Will Wawn [Chair]	
Observers		

None	
<b>Cabinet Member for CYPs</b>	
Cllr Zena Brabazon	
<b>Also Attending</b>	
Director of Children's Services	(A)Ann Graham
Assistant Director, Schools & Learning	Jane Edwards
Assistant Director, Commissioning & Programmes	(A)Caroline Brain
Assistant Director, Early Help, Prevention & SEND	Jackie Difolco
Head of Schools Finance	Neil Sinclair
Senior Finance Manager - Schools	Ali Muhammad
Chief Executive HEP	James Page
Lead for Governor Services (HEP)	(A)Anne Etchells
Clerk (HEP)	Corinne David

(A) Absent

## 1. CHAIR'S WELCOME

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

## 2. APOLOGIES, SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS, OBSERVERS AND FORUM MEMBERSHIP UPDATES

- 2.1 Apologies for Absence were received and noted from:  
Mary Gardiner (Headteacher: West Green)  
Sian McDermott (Headteacher: Rowland Hill)  
Oliver Simms (Governor: Alexandra Primary)  
Paul Renny (Trade Union representative)  
Cllr Ibrahim Ali  
Anne Graham (Director of Children's Services)  
Caroline Brain (Assistant Director, Commissioning & Programmes)
- 2.2 Substitution  
Adam Beral substitution for Christine Bianchin (CCCG Representative)

## 3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 3.1 No declaration of interests was made in respect of any of the agenda items.

## 4. MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

- 4.1 The minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 6 February 2025 were **AGREED** and **RATIFIED** as a correct record of the meeting.

### 4.2 Matters arising

- 4.2.1 Item 4.2.1 Vacancies on the School's Forum membership
- a) All members to continue recruitment through all avenues to appoint to vacant positions.
  - b) Will Wawn to follow up with Secondary Academies to try and recruit to vacancies.
  - c) For each block that had vacancies, elections to take place to select members to the Forum.
  - d) HEP to continue to email all Governors regarding Governor vacancies on Schools Forum. Governor Forum members to make request for members at relevant Chairs and Governor meetings.

All actions were noted as ongoing actions.

- 4.2.2 Item 4.2.2 Vice Chair Election  
Election of Vice -Chair to be undertaken at the July meeting.
- Action to be undertaken at the July meeting.
- 4.2.3 Item 8.7 Engagement of Health Services in supporting EHCP  
a) Schools to provide their experiences of engaging with Health for the EHCP review process to Jackie Difolco.
- b) Jackie Difolco to discuss with Health colleagues the challenges schools have experienced to engage with different services.
- Jackie Difolco had followed up with Health colleagues and provided feedback. The action was closed.
- 4.2.4 Item 8.8 Representation on the Safety Value Programme Board  
Jackie Difolco to arrange for early years representation on the Safety Valve Steering Group.
- Melian Mansfield had been invited to attend the Safety Value Programme Board. Action was closed.
- 4.2.5 Item 9.1 Schools in Financial Difficulty paper  
LA to circulate updated paper to schools for comment by end of next week.
- See item 6. Action was closed.

## **5. UPDATE FROM WORKING PARTIES**

- 5.1 No update was received from the Early Years Block working party. Noted that the working party will be next meeting in June.

- 5.2 No update was received from the High Needs Block Working Party.

**ACTION** An update on the future direction of the High Needs Block Working Party to be received at the next meeting.

- 5.3 No update was received from the Dedicated School Block working party.

## **6. SCHOOLS IN FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY UPDATE**

- 6.1 Neil Sinclair took Schools Forum through the paper titled 'Schools in Financial Difficulty Update'; the following was noted:
- a) The total balance for all schools combined has shifted from a surplus of £11.2m to a deficit of between £3.8m and £5.5m over the last 4 years.
  - b) At the end of quarter 3, 36 schools had a forecast deficit position with 28 in a forecast surplus position.
  - c) Of the 36 schools are facing deficits, 20 schools have sought licensed deficit loans or cash flow assistance.
  - d) Identified areas affecting financial stability were noted as: falling rolls, national pressures on funding SEND, Reduced income from school activities, inflection impact and rising staffing costs.
- 6.2 The School's Finance team have limited capacity and are unable to support all schools. The proposed strategy for supporting schools under the programme would be to support schools facing financial challenges, targeted assistance from experienced School Business Managers (SBMs) focuses on three key areas: Budget monitoring and forecasting; procurement practices; and restructuring support.

- 6.3 The proposal would also be to develop a schools targeted support programme, designed to allocate resources for financial oversight and restructuring in 57 schools. To deliver the programme a requested to de-delegate £150,000 from the Schools Block to increase the capacity of the School's Finance team.
- 6.4 The de-delegation would be for one year. Should the Targeted Support Programme be successful, consideration will be given to requesting a further de-delegation to cover an on-going programme. Any unspent funding at the end of the financial year will be returned to schools.
- 6.5 The Chair invited questions from School Forum members.
- 6.6 *Q: Has the number of schools requesting licence deficits increased?*  
A: There are fewer schools that have loans and the LA are steering schools to apply for a licence deficit, which provide schools with their recovery plan to a balanced position.
- 6.7 Members noted that personal allocated to support schools should receive strategic training; which will allow them to support with budgets and account reconciliation.
- 6.8 In advance of an audit; schools to receive a list of what is required for a successful financial audit.
- ACTION** Chair and Vanessa Bateman/ Minesh Jani to follow up regarding financial audit check list.
- 6.9 Members discussed opportunities as detailed within 6.4.4 and how centralised procurement could save money for schools including a review of the most easily achieved set of centralised procurement contracts across the entire estate of schools; for example: photocopying, computers, catering, cleaning. Officers recognised the challenges of aggregated procurement against an individual settings need. However, economies of scales were only achievable if significant numbers of schools agreed to narrow field of requirements within each identified area i.e. the same computers or photocopiers. Officers noted that areas and specifications would have to be explored and determined prior to any contract procurement exercise.
- 6.10 Members suggested a potential loan situation from school's forum which would be paid back once identified saving had been achieved. Officers noted that this action wouldn't be possible as it would be taking a loan against an overall deficit position. Officers further noted that the proposals, as detailed in the paper was to allow the Council to be proactive to support schools and prevent future significant school deficit positions.
- 6.11 *Q: Is there a benchmark of what a safe and effective staffing structure within a primary, secondary and special school has been undertaken?*  
A: some schools have undertaken restructures and have not come back to a balanced position. However, how far a school can go in terms of restructure will be a challenge. Some schools have undertaken a restructure which has stabilised their financial position. Officers are working with those schools to support them to achieve a balanced position.
- 6.12 *Q: Is there a forecast for the number of licence deficits applications the LA is expecting for 2025/26?*  
A: There are 36 schools in a deficit position, officers are also aware that some school currently in surplus are moving towards a deficit position. There is potential for the teams work load to increase. Officers will also need to monitor recovery plans to ensure schools finances move towards a balanced position. Ensuring that plans are realistic and all parties working together for budgets to move into a balanced position.

Noted that the DfE requirement is for schools to have a three-year recovery plan. Further noted that the Council supports plans that are realistic and moves schools into a balanced position.

6.13 *Q: Is the £150k de-delegation isn't agreed how will the service support schools?*

A: Schools are asking the school finance team for support now; where there is currently very limited capacity. If pressures increase with no further funding for the team, then school will have to find their own solution and capacity. The most vulnerable schools may not be able to afford to procure quality services.

6.14 Members commended the support currently provided by Finance Team with their limited resources and recognised the challenges schools faced trying source quality SBM / finance capacity if it was lacking within their own setting. Members echoed the requirement of multifaceted support (i.e. finance, HR, premises) provided at both junior and senior level which had both operational and strategic oversight.

6.15 Members applauded the contextual review of the issues facing schools and options to support schools. Members further noted that across the Haringey school estate there were examples of exempla SBM practice which could be deployed within the modelling. Officers noted Headteachers suggestions to increase capacity of SBMs; with positional of using those experienced SBM to develop and support newer SBMs.

6.16 Officers provided reassurances that there would be clear accountability for the spend of the money with reports back to Schools Forum.

6.17 *Q: How many Local Authorities across London are facing similar situations and is there any joint work/ discussions?*

A: We are aware of other LA's facing similar challenges, however there is no routine report that is published. There hasn't been any joint work, however they may be looking to also increase their capacity to be able to support schools in challenging financial circumstances.

6.18 *Q: Are those LA facing difficulty all joining together and lobbying the DfE?*

A: This is a national issue being faced with varies groups highlighting concerns to the DfE. Noted that the National funding formula has moved monies outside of urban areas to more rural areas.

**ACTION**      Chair to approach other London Chairs of Schools Forum regarding a joint approach to DfE on school funding levels.

6.19 *Q: How confident can we be that £150k will achieve the required intended?*

A: From Q2 to Q3 there was a shift in the deficits reported by some schools which means officers have low confidence in the figures being reported. A risk is the quarterly reporting; this needs to improve. There will be a range of measures to ensure impact, including: restructure support and minimum competency levels for SBMs.

6.20 *Q: Who would be providing the training to upskill staff? Have the gaps been identified?*

A: There is training planed and further is being developed. Officers have recognised that there are gaps in skills across schools. Ideally further sessions would be held; however, the Team does have capacity issues and pressures.

6.21 Members enquired if there was a set of guidance, based on current intelligence of percentage increases for areas such as inflation, utilities, staff pay awards, pupil numbers etc. Officers noted that information is circulated from Schools HR; with Finance assumptions also circulated.

6.22 Cllr Brabazon commended the paper noting that the £150k was aggregated procurement to allow every school opportunity to access support; which is more cost effective than individual schools sourcing their own support.

6.23 *Q: How confident are officers that they will be able to source good quality candidates?*

A: The LA would be reviewing a range of skills and people including those within Haringey SBM to provide a mixture of solutions. Potential external support and agency staff. Officers will be held accountable and unspent balances will be returned to schools.

6.24 Members discussed the extent the parent community were aware of the school funding crisis. The following sites were noted by members, which could be shared with their parent communities:

<https://schoolcuts.org.uk/>

<https://ifs.org.uk/publications/annual-report-education-spending-england-2024-25>

<https://ifs.org.uk/microsite/education-spending>

**ACTION**

- a) Cllr Brabazon to provide an update at the July meeting in regards to lobbying to DfE from other Lead Members.
- b) Cllr Brabazon and the Chair to review options of lobbying local Haringey MPs over school funding challenges

6.25 A member noted that they had consulted with other primary Headteachers where the main concerns were around: taking money from schools already in financial difficulty to pay for this, effectively pushing them further towards/into debt. Schools are already paying finance and HR SLAs with this as another cost. There is variability in support previously received by schools in financial difficulty from the finance team and a lack of clarity in terms of what the support will look like and how this will be different to, and more effective than, what is already in place.

6.26 *Q: Is there SLAs that schools in financial difficulty have to pay into?*

A: There is specific SLAs for some settings. Noted that there is a requirement under the new agreed scheme of financial delegation for Haringey, that schools that are in cash flow or deficit have to pay.

6.27 The Chair summarised the main points of discussion:

- a) The LA are presenting a request of de-delegation in total of £150k, equivalent to £7.15 per child.
- b) A proactive collaborative approach to support all schools.
- c) Involvement of schools to procure the right support.
- d) Reporting measures back to Schools Forum.

6.28 The Chair drew the Forum to a vote on the proposal noting the vote was only for primary and secondary maintained schools including foundation, VA and VC schools. Nursery schools, special schools and Academies cannot vote.

#### Primary Maintained Sector

Three members voted in favour of the proposal.

Six members voted against of the proposal.

There were no absentia votes.

#### Secondary Maintained Sector

Two members voted in favour of the proposal.  
One member voted against of the proposal.  
There were no absentia votes.

- 6.29 The Chair recommended that officers reviewed the potential de–delegation amount just from the secondary sector and if that would be sufficient to undertake the proposed work as detailed within the paper. Noted that there would be conversations with secondary schools only about what the support package provided with the funds.

**ACTION** Finance and LA officers to review with secondary schools the best avenue to proceed.

**7 SAFETY VALVE PROGRAMME**

- 7.1 Noted that a Safety Valve project update would be circulated to all parties along with the minutes from this meeting.

**ACTION** Clerk to circulate the project update presentation.

**8 PROPOSED MEETING DATES FOR 2024-2025**

- 8.1 The date for the next meeting was noted as Thursday 3 July 2024 at 4pm face to face.

**9 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

- 9.1 No urgent AOB items were received.

The Chair closed the meeting at 6pm.

## SUMMARY OF AGREED ACTIONS

Item	Action	Lead
4.2.1	<u>Vacancies on the School's Forum membership</u> a) All members to continue recruitment through all avenues to appoint to vacant positions.  b) Will Wawn to follow up with Secondary Academies to try and recruit to vacancies.  c) For each block that had vacancies, elections to take place to select members to the Forum.  d) HEP to continue to email all Governors regarding Governor vacancies on Schools Forum. Governor Forum members to make request for members at relevant Chairs and Governor meetings.	All  WW  All  HEP
4.2.2	<u>Vice Chair Election</u> Election of Vice -Chair to be undertaken at the July meeting.	Clerk/WW
5.2	An update on the future direction of the High Needs Block Working Party to be received at the next meeting.	Martin Doyle
6.8	Chair and Vanessa Bateman/ Minesh Jani to follow up regarding financial audit check list.	Chair and Vanessa Bateman
6.18	Chair to approach other London Chairs of Schools Forum regarding a joint approach to DfE on school funding levels.	Chair
6.24a	Cllr Brabazon to provide an update at the July meeting in regards to lobbying to DfE from other Lead Members	Cllr Brabazon
6.24b	Cllr Brabazon and the Chair to review options of lobbying local Haringey MPs over school funding challenges.	Cllr Brabazon & Chair
6.29	Finance and LA officers to review with secondary schools the best avenue to proceed.	Finance and LA officers & Secondary Schools