

SCHOOLS' FORUM

18 January 2024

Commenced: 10.00am

Terminated: 12.10pm

Present:	Karen Burns (Chair)	Primary Schools – Academies
	Susan Marsh	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Kirsty Rimmer	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Lisa Lockett	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Lisa Gallaher	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Steve Marsland	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	John Cooper	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Simon Brereton	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Gemma Patterson	Primary Schools - Academies
	Bev Oldham	Primary Schools - Academies
	Andrea Din	Secondary Schools – L/A Maintained
	David Waugh	Secondary Schools - Academies
	Pierre Coiffait	Special Schools – Academies
	Anthony Benedict	Pupil Referral Service
	Anne Morgan	Tameside Teachers' Consultative Committee
	Rebecca Woollam	Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent
	Elaine Horridge	Church of England Diocese
	Jerome Francis	Finance Business Partner
	Louisa Siddall	Senior Finance Manager
	Wendy Lees	Finance Manager
	Ashley Hughes	Director, Resources (S151 Officer)
	Allison Parkinson	Director, Children's Services
	Jo Pearson	Head of Education, Improvement and Partnerships

Apologies for absence:	Heather Farrell	Primary Schools- Academies
	Lisa Richards	16-19 Sector
	Joanne Lennon	Primary Schools- Academies
	Cllr Feeley	Executive Member
	Cllr North	Executive Member
	Jane Sowerby	Assistant Director, Education

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members of Schools' Forum.

23 MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting of the School's Forum, which was held on 28 November 2024

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of Schools' Forum, which was held on 28 November 2024 be approved as a correct record.

24 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) MONITORING UPDATE 2023-24

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Resources (S151 Officer) and Assistant Director of Education, which provided an update on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget position for the financial year 2023-24.

Members were made aware that there was a forecast surplus of £0.016m on the Schools Block, which related to unallocated growth of £0.018m. It was noted that this was slightly offset by academy conversion adjustments of £0.002m.

It was explained that the Central School Services Block was expected to be spent in full and that there was a forecast in-year deficit on the High Needs Block, expected to be £6.178m, which would reduce to £5.484m with the £0.694m transfer from the Schools Block.

In relation to the Early Years Block, Members were informed that there was a forecast surplus of £0.737m. It was suggested that this would be partially offset by a forecast deficit on the Early Years Supplementary Grant (EYSG) of £0.059m and noted that there would be a further adjustment following Spring term census data.

A reduction in participation rates for 3 to 4 years olds was noted and this was explained as being mainly due to the reducing birth rate. It was explained that Tameside was seeing a high level of take up (approx.. 97%). Estimates suggested that universal uptake was reducing but after a previous upwards shift in extended entitlement, there was an estimated reduction in uptake in the spring term.

Members noted that there had been a gradual increase in 2 year old participation and, as a result of this, revised estimates for the spring term, showed an increase in expected uptake and, therefore, an increase in the distribution of funding.

Members were made aware that the Early Years Supplementary Grant (EYSG) had been updated to reflect the actual distribution of funding for the Autumn term and estimated distribution, based on estimated participation, for the Spring Term.

With regard to the Early Years Teachers Pay Grant, Members were informed that the amount for Tameside was £0.070m. This allocation was based on part time equivalent (PTE) data from the January 2023 early years, schools and alternative provision censuses and there would be no adjustment to the allocation. It was explained that this was also subject to conditions of grant and it was to be determined how this funding will be allocated to providers

With regard to the High Needs forecast position, Members were made aware that the year-end forecast was showing an in-year deficit of £5.484m, this represented an adverse movement of £0.393m, when compared to the forecast position reported in November 2023.

It was explained that the Growth forecast had been updated and reviewed following the real time exercise for the autumn term and that there had been spend to date of £1.249m. A further £0.474m of Growth was also expected over the next 3 months to year-end. This was based on the assumption that the number of EHCPs being issued would continue at a similar level to the previous 9 months (an average of 45 per month).

Members were informed that the High Needs forecast also included £0.100m expenditure in relation to Children's Social Care (CSC) placements. It was noted that a review was underway ensure all partner contributions, including Health, Education and Social Care were applied fairly and in accordance with the specific individual placement requirements. It was further suggested that this may identify additional contributions required from the High Needs Block.

Members were provided with information about the closing position of the DSG reserve for 2022-23 and the estimated position as at 31 March 2024. It was noted that, if the 2023-24 projections materialised there would be a deficit of £8.100m on the DSG reserve. Members were assured that a deficit recovery plan had been developed and submitted to the DfE and that discussions were ongoing and the plan scrutinised as part of Stage 2 of the DBV programme. Members were advised that the DSG position would continue to be closely monitored and regular updates would be provided to Schools' Forum.

Discussion took place in relation to the assumptions surrounding the predicted growth in EHCPs and the continued costs in relation to out of borough placements. Members were assured that much of the focussed work being undertaken as part of the Delivering Better Value Programme looked to address these issues and that timeliness of EHCPs remained a high priority, alongside offering support for mainstream schools to be able to provide appropriate and effective provision.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted and supported

25 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) FUNDING FORMULA 2024-25

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Resources (S151 Officer) and Assistant Director of Education, which outlined the arrangements concerning DSG funding for 2024-25.

Members were made aware that the £283.251m provisional DSG settlement for 2024-25 was received on 19 December 2023 and noted that all DSG funding must be deployed to schools and/or pupils in accordance with the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2023. A detailed breakdown of the provisional settlement for each of the 4 blocks was provided, which provided a comparison with 2023-24 settlement figures.

It was noted that the Schools Block settlement was made up of the following elements of funding and that Tameside continued to use National Funding Formula (NFF) rates for allocation of Schools Block funding:

Element of Funding	Schools Block £m
Primary Funding (20,022 Pupils)	105.779
Secondary Funding (14,974.50) Pupils)	102.586
Premises Funding	4.480
Growth Funding	0.790
Total	213.636

Members were informed that PFI funding continued to be delegated to the relevant schools with the delegated figures based on historic factor funding and uplifted by RPIX of 10.4%. Following a review of affordability of PFI services, in 2022-23, it was explained that there was a reduction to the PFI Affordability Factor of £0.263m. However, due to significant inflationary increases over the last 12 months, the affordability had since been reviewed again and required this contribution to be reinstated at the inflated rate. This had resulted in £0.324m being added back into this factor. However, Members were made aware that, in 2024-25 the LA would continue to recover the full, delegated PFI Affordability factor as in previous years

It was explained that business rates were funded to the equivalent value of the business rates charge for 2024- 25. It was noted that this funding was estimated and would be removed from Tameside's allocations and retained by the DfE, who would pay this directly to Tameside MBC on behalf of all Tameside Schools and Academies.

Members were made aware that, in 2024-25 LAs would be able to set the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) between +0% and +0.5% per pupil. With this in mind, Members were reminded that, in the Schools Forum paper in November 2023, the proposals were to include a 0.5% MFG which is the rate at which MFG has been set. In addition, it was confirmed that, for 2024-25, there would be no gains cap as per the proposal in the November Schools Forum paper

Members noted that the estimated Growth Fund required in 2024-25 was £0.170m. It was explained that there was no implicit growth in 2024-25 as schools, which were previously 'new' now had all year groups occupied. Members acknowledged that final growth allocations to schools would be based on actual numbers, which would be taken from the October 2024 census (up to a maximum of the agreed growth pupil numbers).

The Growth Policy was explained and it was stated that, where a school had agreed planned growth, there should be a minimum of 5 or more pupils before growth funding is allocated, but a minimum level of funding of 15 pupils would be funded to ensure that the school would not face financial difficulty. It was further explained that, as the schools identified had agreed to take 10 additional pupils they would be funded for 15 pupils, if they take a minimum of 5 pupils. As the agreed growth was what the LA required, it was confirmed that, anything above 15 pupils, would not be funded from the growth fund.

In relation to the previously agreed transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, it was explained that, as a result of changes in pupil characteristics in the October 2023 census, more funding was required to support the Additional Educational Needs Factors. The total impact of this would be an increase of £1.519m.

Members were made aware that, prior to 2022-23 financial year, a review of the PFI schemes took place. As a result, the PFI affordability factor element of the DSG was reduced to ensure a large surplus was not remaining at the end of the schemes life. Following the high inflationary environment of the past 24 months the financial sustainability of the scheme had significantly reduced and it was, therefore, necessary to reverse the reduction in the PFI affordability factor.

As a result of this additional cost, Members were made aware that the cost of the proposed formula had increased and it would, therefore, not be possible to transfer 0.50% to the High Needs Block, as previously agreed. It was explained that, in order to afford this proposed funding formula, the transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block had now been reduced to 0.2%, £0.427m and noted that this would add to the significant pressure on the High Needs block, as there was an assumption that the 0.5% transfer of £1.068m would be actioned. Members noted that this equated to a reduction of £0.641m and, as a result, it was acknowledged that mainstream schools would need to continue to support high needs pupils, where possible

Members were reminded that the contingency budget had been established to support those schools facing a deficit budget position or to support the DSG against any future pressures, where schools were closing or were forced to convert to academy leaving a deficit balance. It was noted that the de-delegation rate for Contingency for 2024-25 remained at £5.81 per pupil and agreement was sought from both the Primary and Secondary sectors to de-delegate in 2024-25. Members were advised that, should both sectors choose to contribute, based on the October 2023 census data, this would result in the following contribution to Contingency:

- Mainstream Primary Maintained Schools - £0.058m
- Mainstream Secondary Maintained Schools - £0.035m

It was further noted that there had been no requests made to the contingency fund during 2023-24 and that this fund would be carried forward into 2024-25, less any approvals that may be agreed before year-end.

In relation to de-delegation for school improvement, Members were reminded that the School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant had ceased in the financial year 2022-23 and that,

last year schools chose to de-delegate funding at a rate of £12.78 per pupil. It was explained that the rate for 2024-25 would be £13.58.

Members were made aware that, since 2018, the model of School Improvement activity in Tameside had not been limited to maintained schools, with Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and support being available to any school that may need it. With this in mind, it was explained that the Council would liaise with academies and offer them the opportunity to buy into the School Improvement Service in order to ensure the ability to support the whole sector and retain equity, which had proved so successful in Tameside over the last years.

The potential benefits of de-delegating for school improvement were outlined and it was highlighted that all schools need to be part of the big picture and emphasised that Tameside's school improvement model was built on partnerships and relationships. It was further noted that strategy and priority setting was based on full engagement with the Tameside Primary Consortium, Tameside Association of Secondary Headteachers and Special Schools Sector Partnership.

In addition to supporting strategic and operational cohesion in the school system, it was also stated that the de-delegation was also intended to support the LA with its school improvement statutory duties and powers of intervention. This included:

- Ofsted engagement and liaison
- Annual categorisation process of primary schools
- Implementing Schools Causing Concern guidance
- Brokering and monitoring school-led improvement partnerships e.g. schools at risk of becoming inadequate or double RI
- Commissioning and facilitating support for RI, Inadequate and category 3 schools
- Data collection, management, and support outside of the data SLA
- Statutory monitoring of SATs/phonics screening and moderation at KS2 writing for primary schools.

Members were informed that, as in previous financial years, schools were expected to support safeguarding in the borough, by agreeing to make a contribution of £3.24 per pupil towards the cost of the TSCP (Tameside Safeguarding Children Partnership). All schools were asked to support the continuation of this arrangement in 2024-25, which equated to approximately £0.114m across all mainstream schools and £0.117m including special schools.

Members were advised that, where schools had opted into the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) for 2023-24, membership would continue on an ongoing basis and noted that, should a school choose to opt out of this arrangement, they would need to make their own risk protection arrangements. It was stated that the cost of RPA for 2024-25 would be £25 per pupil and that the LA would continue to treat this in the same way as de-delegation items and recover the cost from the relevant schools on this basis. Members were also advised that nursery numbers were included to calculate the charge for the primary sector, where applicable.

In relation to the High Needs Block, Members were made aware that, following the funding announcements in the summer, the provisional High Needs Block settlement for 2024-25 had now been updated with the following:

- Increase in pupil numbers used to calculate the basic entitlement factor, based on data from the January 2023 alternative provision (AP) census and October 2023 school census
- Update to the import/export adjustments following the outcomes of the place change exercise in November and queries from other LAs

It was also noted that there would be a further update to the Import and Export adjustments to reflect cross border movement of pupils living in one borough and accessing provision in another.

A detailed update on the updated High Needs settlement was provided for Members and it was noted that Tameside was seeing an increase in before academy recoupment of recoupment of £2.204m, or 6%. It was explained that this was the maximum 'like for like' allocation increase, which

in 2024-25 would be capped at 5 plus £0.357m due to an increase in pupil numbers in the special and Alternative Provision (AP) census data. However, it was noted that, following these increases, the funding available for 2024-25 remained significantly below current year expenditure, before any growth was factored in, which continued to contribute to the overall deficit on the DSG.

Detailed information in relation to the Minimum Funding Guarantee, additional funding, Teachers Pay Additional Grant and Teachers' Pension Grant was provided for members and a detailed overview of commissioned places for September 2024 was shared, which included Alternative Provision, Special Schools, Resource Bases and Further Education.

Members were provided with information relating to the current funding settlement for Early Years for both 2023-24 and 2024-25, along with an outline of the new entitlements for working parents, which would be introduced in phases.

It was noted that the rate the LA was funded for 3 and 4 year olds had increased by £0.25 from the combined rates of £5.37 (£5.06 DSG and £0.31 EYSG) to £5.62.

Members were also made aware that the rate the LA was funded for 2 year olds had increased by £0.53 from a combined rate of £7.43 (£5.73 DSG and £1.70 EYSG) to £7.96. It was further explained that this funding received for both disadvantaged 2 year olds and the new entitlement for working parents of 2 year olds was the same rate.

In relation to the Disability Access Fund (DAF), Members were made aware that the allocation rate had increased by £29, from a combined rate of £881 (£828 DSG and £53 EYSG) to £910. Similarly, the allocation rate for Early Years Pupil Premium had increased by £0.02 from a combined rate of £0.66 (£0.62 DSG and £0.04 EYSG) to £0.68 per hour per eligible pupil up to a maximum of 570 hours. It was noted that, previously, these allocations only related to 3 and 4 year olds but had now been extended to children 2 years old and under as part of the new entitlements.

It was suggested that consultation needed to be held with Early Years providers regarding the increased rates and new entitlements and, with this in mind, an additional meeting of Schools' Forum was proposed for 5 March 2024, in order to share further information on the funding arrangements for the LA and for providers.

Members approval was sought in order to centrally retain 5% (0.844m) of 3 and 4 year old funding (in line with operational guidance) and up to 5% of funding for children 2 years old and under (£0.582m based on the current settlement). It was stated that this would continue to support the services set out below, along with the additional administration requirements for the new entitlements:

- Early Education Funding Team – This fully supports the administration of Early Years funding, the annual costs associated with the Servelec IT system which is used to calculate and process the payments to Schools and Private, Voluntary and Independent providers.
- Family Information Services – This supports an Information Officer. This post provides advice, guidance and information to families wishing to access Children's services and was implemented to support the increased demands from the early years extended provision.
- Early Years Quality Improvement Team – This currently supports the work of the Quality Officers, specialist SEND Quality Officers and a School Advisor for Early Years. Support is primarily in relation to: signposting and promoting the standard 15 hours offer and extended 30 hours offer; Ofsted regulations and standards; practice development and training; safeguarding; and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities related support. The focus of the team going forward is now weighted heavily towards SEND and language development.
- SEN Team – funding support for an Early Years SEN Caseworker as specific support for SEN in early years.
- Social Emotional and Mental Health service – funding support for an Early Year Coordinator as specific support in early years.
- Sensory Support – funding support for a Hearing Impaired Teacher as specific support for Early Years.

- Making it REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy). This is aimed at supporting practitioners to build parents' knowledge and confidence so that they can support their children with early language and reading and writing and create a positive early home learning environment.

With regard to the Central School Services Block (CSSB), Members were informed that this brought together:

- Funding previously allocated through the retained duties element of the Education Services Grant (ESG)
- Funding for ongoing central functions such as admissions which were previously top sliced from the schools block
- Residual funding for historic commitments of which there are none for Tameside MBC.

It was noted that the total allocation for 2024-25 was £1.349m and that this was based on a per pupil element of £38.54 for ongoing duties (i.e. Admissions, Schools Forum, Copyright Licenses, former ESG duties).

Members were reminded that, in line with DSG operational guidance for 2024-25, the LA must formally request Schools' Forum approval for the central retention of funding for the following:

- School Admissions
- Servicing of Schools Forum
- Contribution to responsibilities that LAs hold for all schools (formally the retained duties element of the ESG)

Whilst it was acknowledged that the budgets for the above were still being worked on, the costs were currently estimated in excess of the £1.130m available.

A number of updates were also provided for Members of Forum. These included:

- **Pupil Premium – New Rates**
The new rates for 2024-25 were announced in December 2023.
- **Teachers Pay Additional Grant (TPAG)**
LAs would continue to receive a separate grant allocation to cover the additional pay award for teachers that was received for September to March 2024. The grant would continue as a separate grant in 2024-25 and from 2025-26 will be rolled into the schools and high needs national funding formulae.
- **Teachers Pension Grant**
As an outcome of the valuation of the Teachers Pension Scheme, the Government had announced superannuation rates for employers will increase from 23.68% to 28.68% in April 2024. The Government had stated additional funding will be made available to cover the increases in employer contributions in year.
- **Recovery Premium**
The Recovery premium was part of the package of funding to support pupils whose education has been impacted by COVID-19. The funding was initially set over 3 academic years and with 2023-24 being the final year the funding will cease in August 2024.
- **National Tutoring Programme (NTP)**
The NTP was a scheme that provided support to pupils affected by the disruption to their education as a result of COVID-19. The 2023-24 academic year was the fourth and final year of funding and funding allocations to schools will cease in August 2024.
- **PE and Sport**
The Government had confirmed that the Primary PE and Sport Premium would continue in 2024-25 academic year. Updated guidance and conditions of the grant had been published

to steer schools towards the effective uses of the premium. To improve accountability the DfE planned to introduce a new digital tool that would be available in summer 2024 with an expectation for schools to trial its use at the end of 2023-24 academic year. From 2024-25 academic year completion of the digital tool will be mandatory.

Discussion ensued in relation to various aspects of the report. It was noted that maintained schools were feeling increased financial pressures and that, whilst it was acknowledged that all schools, including academies needed to work collaboratively to benefit from school improvement, greater clarity was sought with regard to this being a fair and equitable offer. It was also acknowledged that schools were facing increasing pressures in terms of both financial and political uncertainty and noted that all decisions needed to be taken carefully and from a position of feeling fully informed. With this in mind, it was suggested that a review should be undertaken to look at the core offer for school improvement and how this may be enhanced and academy contribution considered. It was agreed that a task and finish group could be set up with a view to addressing this going forwards.

Questions in relation to centrally retained Early Years funding were raised, relating, in particular, to the uncertainty surrounding the extended entitlement offer and additional resourcing, which may be required. It was noted that this would be discussed in more detail at the next Early Years Working Group meeting and also during the next meeting of School's Forum in March.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the proposed funding formula for mainstream schools, as set out in Section 3, be approved. This will continue with national funding formula rates, sets MFG at 0.5%, has no gains cap and allows a transfer of 0.2% to the High Needs Block.**
- (ii) That the growth Fund, as outlined in Section 3, be approved.**
- (iii) That the transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, as outlined in Section 3, be approved.**
- (iv) That de-delegation of funding for Schools Contingency be rejected for the primary maintained sector.**
- (v) That members of the secondary maintained sector abstain from the vote on de-delegation of funding for Schools Contingency**
- (vi) That de-delegation of funding for School Improvement be rejected for the primary maintained sector**
- (vii) That members of the secondary maintained sector abstain from the vote on de-delegation of funding for School Improvement**
- (viii) That continued contribution to Tameside Safeguarding Children's Partnership, as outlined in Section 3, be approved.**
- (ix) That central retention of the Early Years funding, as outlined in Section 5, be approved.**
- (x) That the allocation of the Central Services Schools Block, as outlined in Section 6, be approved.**

26 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED

That the next meeting of The Schools Forum be held remotely on 5 March 2024 at 9.45am

CHAIR