

Manchester Schools Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2024

Forum Members Present: Andy Park, Iram Cheema, Anna Mullen, Lee Ormsby, Tony Daly, Helen Child, Antonio de Paola, Isabelle Qamar, Joshua Rowe, Cllr Reid, Gavin Shortall, Angela Stansfield

Also Present: Amanda Corcoran, Anne Summerfield, Paul Greenwood, Matthew Hoeksma, Vandhna Kohli, Nehal Ayub, Kate Lane, Helen Wright

Apologies: Cllr Bridges, Mike Cooke, Cathryn Baggaley, Amy Davenport, Hatim Kapacee, John Morgan, Amy Davenport and Colin Rigby

SF/24/03 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2024 were submitted for consideration as a correct record.

Iram Cheema noted their attendance at the meeting was not listed under Forum Members Present.

Decision

To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2024 as a correct record, subject to the above amendment.

SF/24/04 Teachers Pension Employer Contribution Grant 2024/25

The Forum considered a report of the Director of Education that reported that the Teachers' Pension Scheme had confirmed an increase in the employer contribution rate by 5% from 1 April 2024, as had been reported to Schools Forum in January 2024. The Department for Education (DfE) confirmed that additional funding was to be allocated to cover this increase via the 2024/25 Teachers' Pension Employer Contribution Grant (TPECG 24). The report summarised the allocation rates and methodology for this grant.

Schools Forum in January 2024 noted the announcement of a 5% increase in employer contribution rates to 28.6% effective from 1 April 2024. Department for Education (DfE) confirmed that mainstream and high needs settings would be provided additional grant funding to support them with this increase cost.

DfE had now published guidance and allocations for the Teachers' Pension Employer Contribution Grant (TPECG 24) which will be used to provide this funding to settings in 2024/25.

Schools Forum were invited to comment on the report. No comment was forthcoming.

Decision

To note the report.

SF/24/05 School Resources Management Advisors (SRMA) Deployments

The Forum considered a report of the Director of Education which provided information regarding the School Resource Management Advisors (SRMA). The SRMA is a free service provided by Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to provide independent tailored support and advice to schools in resources available, managing resources and recommending options of more efficient ways to deliver the best educational outcomes. In the financial year 2023/24, the Council used the SRMA service across several maintained schools. The report provided an overview of the SRMA service, use of the service in Manchester and outlined common themes.

SRMA are independent (not employed by ESFA) accredited experts that provide peer-to-peer advice to schools and academy trusts on their use of revenue and capital resources to deliver the best possible educational outcomes for pupils.

The Council has requested thirteen SRMA deployments in the financial year 2023/24. The requests were made after schools reported financial difficulties, including low balances and the effects of declining student numbers on future finances.

The process starts with an SRMA being assigned to a school and confirmation of no conflict of interest. All parties meet to agree timescale and expectations of the deployment. SRMA normally spends one day (maximum two days) with the school gathering information and gaining a greater understanding of any specific issues. Before the final report is issued, a draft report is prepared for discussion and factual review with the Council and school. Approximately six months later, a review is submitted to identify if any of the proposed recommendations were acted upon.

Forum members were invited to comment on the report. A member queried if the QA during the process was completed by an independent body or by the Council. It was noted that it is the DfE who check that the report is of an adequate standard, rather than challenging or changing the content.

It was also queried if the outcomes of the reports could be shared with all Manchester schools. This was confirmed as possible through the regular briefings that are sent out to schools, including in Chair of Governors briefings too.

Decision

To note the report.

SF/24/06 Dedicated Schools Forum Grant (DSG) and Schools Balances 2023/24 Outturn

The Forum considered a report of the Director of Education which stated that the provisional outturn for Manchester maintained schools was an overall surplus of £14.304m, which was a decrease of £1.876m or 11.6% in the total Schools Balances (Revenue & Capital) held compared to 2022/23.

The final position on the centrally retained element of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was £7.803m deficit which was an increase of £6.386m since 2022/23.

The report summarised the:

- Outturn position on school balances as of 31 March 2024.
- Final outturn position on the centrally retained DSG.

The report provided the 2023/24 provisional schools outturn and position of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The final position was to be confirmed once the Council's audited accounts had been completed. School's reported 2023/24 balances had reduced since 2022/23 by £1.876m. The 2023/24 DSG allocation after recoupment for academies and high needs was £352.714m, of which £307.173m (87.1%) was delegated to schools, £43.841m (12.4%) was retained centrally by the Council and £1.700m (0.5%) earmarked towards DSG recovery.

The Chair thanked Officers for their work in providing the report.

Decision

To note the report.

SF/24/07 Private Financial Initiative (PFI)

The Forum considered a report of the Director of Education that stated that Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schools are state school's buildings that are owned and managed by the private sector during a set contract. Under the PFI model, private companies funded the construction and maintenance of school buildings, operating under long-term contracts (usually spanning 25 years). Although the PFI model had since ceased, the aim was to provide schools with new facilities and improve educational standards.

Manchester had two PFI schools, one contract due to complete in March 2026 and the other in April 2032, at the end of the contract the buildings and operational responsibility will transfer to the school operator. In the case of these schools that would be the Academy Trusts. The report gave a summary on the local authority's (LA) preparation for the exit process of the PFI arrangements to ensure any financial risk is managed.

The basic idea of PFI arrangements, was that the private sector would fund the construction work, often new school builds, and would recoup their investment under a long-term contract (usually 25 years) to maintain the facilities. The intention was that schools would benefit from new modern facilities, maintained appropriately, and support with improve educational outcomes.

Nationally most PFI contracts are now entering the 'wind-down' phase, so will end in the next five to ten years. It is important that contract parties plan properly for the exit of those contacts. Preparation of the hand back process starts many years in advance of the actual expiry date. Manchester's' PFI contracts were at a different stage in this "wind-down" phase.

The Chair thanked Officer's for putting the report together at short notice following recent media interest in PFI's.

Decision

To note the report.