

TERMS OF REFERENCE

School Facing Financial Challenges (SFFC) Action Group

1. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GROUP

A 'School Facing Financial Challenges (SFFC) Action Group' (the Group) will be instigated by the Local Authority for any Voluntary Aided or Community schools highlighted as having significant immediate, or imminent, financial challenges within Waltham Forest.

The establishing of a SFFC Action Group forms part of the strategic approach within Waltham Forest to ensure that the Local Authority fulfils its duties to promote high standards of education and fair access to education for all children and young people living and learning within the borough.

Accountability and responsibility for the running of the school will remain at all times with the school leadership.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE GROUP

The aim of the Group is to protect the standards of education for all children and young people attending the school by supporting its financial sustainability.

Services within the Local Authority and the school for which a SFFC Action Group has been called will work together as strategic partners to co-operate, and to seek solutions, to resolve the issues highlighted that fall within the aims and objectives of the group.

The Group do not have decision making powers but will make recommendations to the schools Governing Body and to the Local Authority to support them both to fulfil their duties.

3. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

Members appointed to the Group will remain as members for the life of the group, which will be for as long as the school's financial difficulties remain. The Group will be Chaired by a member of the Education Directorate within the Local Authority.

3.1 The membership of the individuals holding the following positions is non-negotiable and members are required to attend all meetings:

- Chair of Governors
- Chair of the School's Governing Body Finance Committee
- Headteacher
- Schools Business Manager
- Education Business Effectiveness (which sits within the LA's Post 16 and School Operations Service)
- The School's Finance Accountant (from the LA's Education Finance team)

3.2 Depending on the nature of the issues faced by the school the following Council Officers may also be required as members or advisers to the Group:

- Head of Education Finance
- Assistant Director SEND
- Schools Asset Manager
- Head of Early Years

It is the members' responsibility to inform the Chair of the Group of any changes to membership and named substitutes.

Other Officers employed by the Local Authority who have a role in the strategic development of Education and schools, and associated services may be invited to attend to provide advice to the Group on professional issues such as: matters of procedure and advice; guidance on changes to Government guidance or policy; and to make recommendations.

4. MEETINGS AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE GROUP:

Meetings will be held either on the school site or online via Microsoft Teams. The decisions as to where to hold meetings shall ultimately lie with the Chair of the Group, however it is aimed to have at least two in person meetings a year.

The regularity of Group meeting will be set by the Chair and will be based on the priority level of the school issues, however it will be no less than once a term. Meetings will be for no longer than 2 hours.

Meetings will not take place during the first and last week of each term, unless in exceptional cases.

The responsibility for setting the agenda for the Group lies with the Chair. The Chair shall ensure that all matters falling within the remit of the Group are placed on an appropriate agenda for consideration by the Group at least 5 days in advance of the meeting.

Items for inclusion on the agenda for the Group (submitted by a member of the Group) must be submitted to the Chair of the Group not less than 10 working days before a scheduled meeting of the Group.

Actions agreed during meetings will be shared with the Group by the Education Business Effectiveness Team in the form of an Action Plan. Papers, agendas and the Action Plan will be circulated by the Education Business Effectiveness Team at least 5 working days before the meeting to which they relate.

Agreed actions must be completed within the agreed timeframe.

Appendix 1 provides the standard schedule of meetings, including proposed locations, agendas and required documentation. The agenda and papers may be added to if agreed by the Chair as per above.

Papers produced by the school must be provided to all members of the group at least 6 days prior to the meeting.

5. Quorum:-

SFFC meetings will only be able to go ahead if the following attendees are present from the core membership as set out in 3.1 above:

- three school members (one of which must be the Headteacher or the Chair of Governors)
And
- three members of the LA (one of which must be either the Assistant Director of Post 16 and School Operations or the Head of School Business Support).

6. Clerk to the Group:-

The Group will be clerked by an employee of the Council, in most cases this will be the named school link from the Education Business Support Service. The specific responsibilities of the Clerk will be to:-

- convene meetings of the Group;
- arrange accommodation for meetings;
- co-ordinate and act as secretariat to meetings, including recording actions agreed at meetings and updating the Action Plan;
- circulate and dispatch appropriate papers at least 5 days before the meeting;
- make and maintain a record of the Membership and all proceedings of the Group.

7. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Request for Information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000 will be handled in accordance with the Council's published procedures for dealing with such requests. Any Member of the Group receiving a request under the FOIA will be required to pass that request to the Chair of the Group within 24 hours of receipt of that request in order that the Education Support Service may deal with the request on behalf of the Group within the 20-working day time limit.

8. COMPLAINTS / DISPUTES

The Group is intended to be a collaborative, co-operative body. Problems and issues should normally be debated and resolved at the Group meetings.

However, if parties feel that these have not been resolved, the following process should be followed and records kept.

Stage 1: Complaints from member/s of the group or issues of non-compliance with the terms of reference will in the first instance, be referred in writing to the Chair of the Group. The parties who are in dispute will meet with the Chair of the Group who will investigate and attempt to reach satisfactory resolution through discussion with the representative/s concerned.

Stage 2: In the event of satisfactory resolution not being reached, the matter will be referred to the Director of Education for a final decision.

9. Local Code of Conduct for Members

All Members are expected to comply with the Nolan standards for Public Life which recognise that all appointed to work in local government and education are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources. The seven principles are:

- a. **Selflessness** – holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest
- b. **Integrity** – holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
- c. **Objectivity** – Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- d. **Accountability** – Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- e. **Openness** – Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
- f. **Honesty** – Holders of public office should be truthful.

- g. **Leadership** – Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Appendix 1 – Indicative Schedule of Meetings

Meeting	Focus of meeting	Location
Autumn Term 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Finance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarter 2 Report (paper – SBM) 5 Year Forecast (paper - SBM) Cashflow update (paper – SBM) Action Plan (paper – EBE) Ofsted Readiness / Governance Update Premises Priorities for year AOB 	Online via MS Teams, unless Chair decides face-to-face meeting required.
Autumn Term 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Finance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarter 2 Report (paper – SBM) 5 Year Forecast (paper - SBM) Cashflow update (paper – SBM) Action Plan (paper – EBE) Ofsted Readiness / Governance Update Premises Update AOB 	Online via MS Teams, unless Chair decides face-to-face meeting required.
Spring Term (one meeting only)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Finance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q3 Report (paper – SBM) 5 Year Forecast (paper – SBM) Cashflow Update (paper – SBM) Action Plan (paper – EBE) Ofsted Readiness / Governance Update Premises Update AOB 	Face-to-face, onsite at school
Summer Term 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Finance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2023/24 Year End Report (paper – SBM) 3-Year Forecast Update (paper – SBM) 2024/25 Budget (paper – SBM) Cashflow Update (paper – SBM) Action Plan (paper – EBE) Ofsted Readiness / Governance update <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SFVS Financial Risk Register Premises Update AOB 	Face-to-face, onsite at school
Summer Term 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Finance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2024/25 Budget (paper – SBM) 5 Year Forecast (paper – SBM) Cashflow Update (paper – SBM) Action Plan (paper – EBE) Ofsted Readiness / Governance Update Premises Update AOB 	Online via MS Teams, unless Chair decides face-to-face meeting required.