

Schools Forum Meeting

Held on Thursday 9th July 2020 via Microsoft Teams

MINUTES

Meeting opened: 1.30pm, Meeting closed 2.30pm

Members Present:

E.Ellis	Primary Representative
G.Hayes	Primary Representative
C.Williams	Primary Representative
J.Hassan	Primary Representative
T.Mingaud-Cunningham	Primary Governor
A.Birchall	Secondary Representative
H.Phillips	Secondary Representative
A.McGlown	Secondary Representative
A.Hardy	Secondary Governor
E.Loftus	Special Schools Representative
R.Lewis	Nursery School Representative
A.Isherwood	PRU Representative
M.Atkins	Union Representative
A. Pollard	Academy Representative

Observers:

K. Parkin	Authorised Observer
Cllr J. Bullen	Authorised Observer

In Attendance:

J.McDonald	Wigan Council – Finance
A.Meehan	Wigan Council – Finance
C.Pealing	Wigan Council – Assistant Director Education
L.Morgan	Wigan Council - Education
M.Larkin	Governor Services – Clerk

1. Welcome to new members and virtual meeting protocol

The Chair extended a warm welcome to Julie Hassan and Cathie Williams following their appointments as Primary Representatives to the Schools Forum.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

F.Quinlivan
T.Warren
P.McGee

3. Urgent Business

There were no items of any other business added to the agenda

4. Previous Minutes

It was agreed: the minutes from the forum meeting held on **5th March 2020** be approved as a true and correct record

There were no matters arising.

5. TTAPA Business Case

A report outlining the Three Towers Alternative Provision Academy business case to increase the top-up rate had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

The Headteacher of the TTAPA provided some additional information in relation to the request, highlighting that in previous years requests such as this had not been brought to the Forum for a decision. The last discussions held in relation to an increase to the top-up funding had taken place over two years ago to bring this inline with resourced provision – there had been no further increase since and the TTAPA could no longer continue to manage at the current level which could result in the provision offer changing.

Discussions had taken place between the LA and the Phil Rimmer (CEO of The Rowan Learning Trust)

Ms Peeling acknowledged that the LA recognised that funding for alternative provision did need to be revisited and that clarity was needed around the request being made by TTAPA for £225k and what this would be used for. The LA paid for the 193 provision places regardless if they were filled or not and there had been a struggle to reach a compromise on the additional top-up funding amount.

Mr McDonald added an offer had been made by the LA to pay the average increase for a secondary school as per the formula for the last 2 years – 2.5% and 4.15%. This would increase the top-up to £6,432. Research had taken place across other LA's and it was highlighted that some paid per place occupied.

The HT of the TTAPA reported per place occupancy had been looked in to and over the past three years this would have cost the authority £250k-£300k per year more. A compromise had been proposed by the Trust of £7224 in order to maintain the current offer.

Discussion took place around:

- all special schools having to change their offers due to funding issues
- consideration being given to more blended learning offers
- the possibility of using some of the DSG underspend
- the increase to staffing costs included in the business case – it was explained this did not include any additional staff, it did include percentage pay increases

and that in the ESFA report staffing was lean with a 1:9 average ratio and there were a significant number of students needing 1:1 support

- concern around the further pressure that could be placed on the High Needs Block and the increase to the deficit

Ms Pealing shared the reasons for this request being brought to Schools Forum and highlighted the ongoing work to look at future proposals for alternative provision.

The HT of TTAPA drew attention to the fact the provision was accommodated on a split site therefore incurring additional running costs – and that a considerable amount of time had been spent on these negotiations since January 2020 and dependent on the outcome consideration may have to be given to redundancy. A decision was requested at this meeting as the Trustees were due to meet the following day and any proposals would have to be considered by them for approval.

Suggestions were shared and discussed that would meet the anticipated deficit in the TTAPA budget for 2020-21.

Previous discussion within the Forum had agreed that a sub-committee would meet to consider the High Needs Block and changes to funding, it was noted the committee had not met during the summer term due to the COVID-19 crisis and a meeting would be arranged for the autumn term, the following Forum Members agreed to attend the sub-committee:

G.Hayes
R.Lewis
L.Loftus
A.Isherwood
A.Hardy
A.McGlown

Ms Pealing left the meeting at 2.05pm

The Chair proposed that a short-term solution for this year be put forward to Trustees this would be a lump sum payment from the DSG underspend of 232k. During the autumn term a working group would meet to give further consideration in order to put forward a further proposal to the Trust by December 2020.

Schools Forum members were in agreement with the above proposal. Mr Meehan was asked to organise a meeting of the subgroup early in September.

The HT of the TTAPA requested this proposal be put in writing to the CEO of the Trust.

6. DSG Underspend Report

A report had been circulated in advance of the meeting and it was noted that there would now be changes to the proposals for the DSG underspend due to the decision taken in the previous item.

Mr McDonald reported that there was an uncommitted balance of £0.755m and it was proposed there be £0.245m for maintained schools and £0.510m for all schools.

The options put forward in the report were:

Maintained Schools

1. To carry forward the £0.245m to be used to support maintained schools in financial difficulty.

All Schools

2. To retain £300k to support the high needs block in 2021/22 in line with the amount allocated in 2020/21
3. To increase the SEND support fund by £210k for 2020/21 (currently £0.150m a year) any underspend to be carried forward. Bids for SEND support have been more than the fund total in previous years

OR

4. To allocate the £0.510m via the funding formula

Following the earlier decision, it was suggested a rethink of option 3 be made.

The nursery school representative put forward a request for consideration to be given to some additional funding to be given to the two borough nursery schools in light of the fact that during the COVID-19 pandemic schools have been able to claim additional costs, nurseries had not been included in this. Both nursery schools had lost significant income during this time amounting to about £4,000 each.

Schools Forum members were in agreement that this request be considered.

The Chair proposed that in relation to maintained schools a carry forward of £0.245m to be used to support maintained schools in financial difficulty – that £232k be given to the TTAPA as a lump sum an amount be given to support the nurseries and the remaining amount to be retained to support the high needs block in 2021/22.

7. Permanent Exclusion Budget Adjustment

A report had been circulated in advance of the meeting, Mr Meehan explained that it is proposed that the value recovered from school budgets is amended to align with the provisions of the ESFA's guidance and include all pupil led factors along with the basic entitlement.

It was proposed that the values applied would be calculated based on the basic entitlement value plus an average of the other pupil led factors calculated by sector. Consultation with other neighboring authorities had found that other LA's apply an average in this way when calculating their budget deductions.

An example of the changes in comparison with the current values showed an average increase of £750, this would be pro-rated dependent on the timing of the exclusion.

A question was raised about why this would be a whole sector average opposed to being calculated on a school based average as the pupil led factors in all schools were different – it was acknowledged this could be an option for the Forum to decided upon.

It was noted this would generate additional income which would be place within the High Needs Block.

A question was raised about the additional money being ringfenced for a particular child which could be recouped when the child was placed back into a mainstream setting.

Further questions were asked about how much money had been raised over the past 12 months from these charges for permanent exclusions – Mr Meehan reported that it was approximately £450k which was inclusive of medical needs.

Forum members requested this be looked at in more detail and calculations be made on a school-based average.

A question was raised about a discussion held at the previous meeting and if any decision had been made with regard to recharging for KS2 places. Mr Meehan explained this had been agreed in principle at the previous meeting and would link to top-up funding, there was some concern this could exceed the charge made for permanent exclusions – **it was agreed this had not yet been resolved.**

8. Any Other Urgent Business

There were no items of any other business raised

9. Future Meeting Dates

A meeting schedule for the next academic year would be drafted by the Clerk and Chair and circulated to members.

The Chair thanked Forum Members for attending this virtual meeting.

There being no further business to discuss the meeting closed at 2.30pm