

Schools Forum Meeting

Held on Thursday 21st January 2021 via Microsoft Teams

Minutes

Meeting opened: 1.30pm

Members Present:

E.Ellis	Primary Representative
G.Hayes	Primary Representative
C.Williams	Primary Representative
J.Hassan	Primary Representative
F.Quinlivan	Primary Representative
T.Mingaud-Cunningham	Primary Governor
A.Birchall	Secondary Representative
H.Phillips	Secondary Representative
A.McGlown	Secondary Representative
A.Hardy	Secondary Governor
C.Taylor	Special Schools Representative in place of E.Loftus
M.Atkins	Union Representative
A.Pollard	Academy Representative
A.Isherwood	PRU Representative
R.Lewis	Nursery School Representative
P.McGhee	16-19yrs

Observers:

Cllr J Bullen	Authorised Observer
M.Wilkinson	Authorised Observer
K.Parkin	Authorised Observer

In Attendance:

J.McDonald	Wigan Council – Finance
A.Meehan	Wigan Council – Finance
C.Pealing	Wigan Council – Assistant Director Education
M.Larkin	Governor Services – Senior Professional Clerk

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from: E.Loftus

2. AGREEMENT OF ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS TO BE ADDED TO THE AGENDA

There were no items of any other business raised.

3. PREVIOUS MINUTES

It was agreed: the minutes from the forum meeting held on **19th November 2020** be approved as a true and correct record

There were no matters arising.

4. SCHOOLS FORMULA 2021/22

A report providing details of the DSG allocations for 2021/22 had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Mr Meehan highlighted:

- The LA remain responsible for determining the local schools funding formula model to be used to distribute final delegated budget allocations to individual schools. The LA process will gain political approval and subsequently notify maintained mainstream schools of their budget shares before 28/02/2021
- The total for 2021/22 is £228,766,725 which includes a formulaic allocation for growth - this was an increase from the previous year of £17m and includes protected schools block funding for the pay and pension grants totalling £9,879,446
- The pupil numbers for funding purposes have increased by 192, based on the October 2020 census data (a reduction of 213 pupils in the primary sector, but an increase of 405 pupils in the secondary sector)
- The minimum funding guarantee (MFG) for schools continues to provide protection and stability to school budgets and the LA have the flexibility to set a local MFG rate between 0.5% and 2.00% per pupil. In addition, in 2021/22 the formula includes mandatory minimum funding levels of £4,180 per pupil for primary schools and £5,415 for secondary schools.
- In November 2020, members agreed to a block transfer of £0.450m from the Schools Block to the High Needs block - it was also previously agreed that a further £0.300m be used from historical central DSG underspends to support the High Needs block in 2021/22, resulting in a total contribution of £0.750m
- Key principles for the funding formula had been agreed by Forum in November 2020 following recommendations from the Funding Formula sub-group – the NFF factors and associated values were adopted, as reported above approval of transfer of £0.450m to the High Needs Block and that affordability within the funding envelope would be achieved by reducing the MFG from the 2.00% if necessary
- Proposed school level allocations had been determined and provided as an appendix to the report – a further appendices provided a copy of the funding proforma which detailed factor values, eligibility proportions and the total funding allocated through each factor. To ensure affordability, the MFG had been set at 1.84% for 2021/22 this was in line with the prescribed parameters between 0.5% and 2.0%
- A detailed explanation of the comparisons for 2020/21 and 2021/22 shown in the appendices was provided

A member questioned if the figures for the pay and pension grant contributions be removed to allow for a clearer comparison.

Mr Meehan continued:

- The total growth funding allocation for 2021/22 was £1,120,626 - as in previous years, it was recommended that the full value of the allocation, was retained as a growth fund for 2021/22
- Any unspent growth funding remaining at year end would be reported to Schools Forum
- The Central School Services Block for 2021/22 was £818,719 - Forum approval was required each year to confirm the amounts for activities within the CSSB as detailed in the report

It was agreed:

- (1) That the funding formula and school block allocations as set out for 2021/22 be agreed
- (2) That the total growth fund for 2021/22 be agreed
- (3) That the allocation of the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) for Local Authority statutory duties be agreed

ACTION: Revised school block allocations to be circulated following the removal of the inclusion of pay and pension contribution figures

5. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK 2021/22

A report updating Forum members on the projected financial position of the High Needs Block for 2020/21 and the High Needs budget for 2021/22 had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Mr Meehan highlighted:

- Nationally the ESFA have awarded additional funding of £730m for the High Needs Block in 2021/22
- The funding floor to remain at 8.0%
- The limit on gains would be 12.0% per head of population compared to the baseline
- The High Needs allocation for Wigan was £39.8m (before any deductions by the ESFA in respect of academies and FE institutions). This was an increase of £4.9m from 20/21 - incorporated within this increase was the pay and pension grant allocations for special schools and AP, which amounts to approx. £0.75m
- The projected deficit had been revised since reported in October 2020 and the current forecasted deficit as at the end of 2020/21 was £3.867m and represented an in-year overspend of £0.952m
- Detailed analysis of the projections had been presented in the appendix to the report – it was noted key pressures had been discussed at previous Forum meetings
- In respect of the 2021/22 budget, it was recognised that even with increases in funding it would not be feasible to pay back the deficit in the next financial year. It was proposed that £1.93m of the deficit be re-paid in 2021/22, with the remaining deficit carried forward to 2022/23
- Two scenarios of the budget for 2021/22 had been presented in a further appendix to the report - the first reflected actual anticipated income and expenditure and the full deficit and was for information purposes only. The second was the one proposed one and incorporated the 50% re-charge for

the deficit and a reduction to independent school and post 16 budget lines to ensure that the overall budget ties back to the funding available

Discussion took place following the suggestions of separating the budget for alternative provision it was requested by a member and agreed that if done the AP providers would be listed.

It was agreed:

- (1) Members noted the financial pressures and projected deficit as set out in the appendix to the report
- (2) That the proposed budget as outlined in appendix 2 be agreed

6. DSG MANAGEMENT PLAN

A report providing Forum members with an update on the work undertaken on the DSG management plan had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

Mr Meehan reminded members of the requirement for LA's to have recovery plans in place were there had been an overall deficit on the DSG account at the end of the 2019-20 year, which would provide information as and when requested by the department about its plans for managing its DSG account in the 2020 to 2021 financial year and subsequently.

Projections around students with EHC plans for the periods from 2021/22 through to 2023/24 had been included in the report. These had been reviewed and revised where necessary in view of information from the Council's SEND team.

Financial forecasts had previously been provided to the Schools Forum High Needs sub-group in relation to the management plan. These had been updated to align with the 2020/21 projected out-turn and projected income and expenditure for 2021/22.

In developing the DSG management plan assumptions had been applied to the mitigated/unmitigated forecasts presented in the report.

Within the unmitigated forecast:

- Expenditure had been based on 2020/21 projections plus a % growth in each year as shown earlier in the report, inflationary values between 2% and 3% had also been applied where appropriate
- Income/Contributions included a contribution from the schools block in 2021/22 but with no further contribution in future years, as this was considered on a year-by-year basis

Within the mitigated forecast:

- The assumptions applied to the income and expenditure as outlined for the unmitigated position had been used as the starting point for the mitigated forecasts

- Where savings were expected to be generated these had been included in the mitigated position – an overview of updates to the workstreams was shared and it was noted some delays had occurred due to COVID-19

Q. Do you anticipate there will be further impact from COVID on the number of children with additional need?

A. It was explained that due to the ongoing situation with the pandemic there had not yet been an opportunity to fully assess the impact from COVID-19. It was anticipated there would be some impact but the extent of this was unknown.

Attention was drawn to the awareness of distinguishing between missed early development stages and special educational need and the importance of having robust recovery plans in place.

It was noted that:

The plan would be kept under review and updated on a regular basis, with feedback provided through the Schools Forum High Needs sub-group

7. EARLY YEARS BUDGET 2021/22

A report detailing the Early Years DSG allocation for 2021/22 had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Mr McDonald highlighted:

- The formula rate for Wigan was £4.38 for 20/21 and this had been increased to £4.44 for 2021/22. Funding for the most disadvantaged 2-year-olds would increase by 8p to £5.46
- Early Years pupil premium would remain the same
- Proposals detailed in the report recommended that the 3- and 4-year-old rate be increased to £4.14 from £4.10 across the sector and retain the current FSM and Deprivation rate. The balance (2p per hour) is to be retained to support the increasing demand for additional SEND support in early years (c£80k) as per the 20/21 agreement
- Local authorities were required to plan to pass-through 95% of their 3- and-4-year-old funding from the government to early years providers and based on increasing the rate to £4.14 this would be 97%
- In relation to the hourly rate for 2-year-old funding currently a top slice 10p was taken to help fund SEN support. It was proposed this would continue
- The disability access funding of £615 per child would remain unchanged from 2020-21
- Maintained Nursery Schools - The supplementary funding allocations for April 2021 to August 2021 are indicative and were conditional, the allocations for September 2021 to March 2022 were conditional: but may be subject to change and therefore were being treated as unconfirmed

It was agreed:

(1) That the rates proposed for both 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds, the retention for central services and the top slice of 10p from the 2-year-old funding to continue

8. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

No items of any other business had been raised

9. FUTURE MEETING DATES

18th March 2021 - all meetings will commence at 1.30pm

13th May 2021

24th June 2021

There being no further business to discuss the meeting closed at 2.15pm

Background documents (available for public inspection):

Appendices to the circulated briefing reports disclose important facts on which the reports are based and were relied upon in preparing the reports. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact the Forum Clerk

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