

## **Schools Forum**

Held on **Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2021 at 1.30pm** 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         |
| T.Mingaud-Cunningham | Primary Governor               |
| A.Birchall           | Secondary Representative       |
| H.Phillips           | Secondary Representative       |
| A.Hardy              | Secondary Governor             |
| E.Loftus             | Special Schools Representative |
| M.Atkins             | Union Representative           |
| R.Lewis              | Nursery School Representative  |
| P.McGhee             | 16-19yrs                       |
| A.McGlown            | Secondary Representative       |
| A.Pollard            | Academy Representative         |
| F.Quinlivan          | Primary Representative         |

#### **Observers:**

|               |                     |
|---------------|---------------------|
| Cllr J Bullen | Authorised Observer |
| M.Wilkinson   | Authorised Observer |
| K.Winnard     | Authorised Observer |

#### **In Attendance:**

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

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence had been received.

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

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

### 3. PREVIOUS MINUTES

**It was agreed:** the minutes from the forum meeting held on **18<sup>th</sup> March 2021** be approved as a true and correct record.

There were no matters arising.

### 4. DSG Outturn 2020-21

A report and appendices detailing the end of year position of the Schools budget and DSG for 2020-21 had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Mr Meehan highlighted:

- School balances had increased by £6.861m
- There had been a relatively small overspend on the Early Years block of £0.1m which related to an overspend on TIS funding
- The High Needs Block continued to carry a significant cumulative deficit of £3.521m, with the main pressures being due to increasing EHCP top up costs, increasing demand for Special School places and additional funding requirements due to the complexity of pupil needs, Alternative Provision costs due to the number of permanent exclusions and difficulties in finding suitable school places for those excluded, Post 16 provision costs and Independent school placements.
- The overall underspend in relation to centrally retained funding totalled £1.783m, this included growth, recouplement adjustment, contingency and miscellaneous central underspends
- The appendices detailed the individual school balances which showed an overall increase of £21.804m across all sectors, with 82 schools reporting an in-year surplus
- Two schools showed a deficit position totalling £0.132m
- The maintained nursery schools were facing significant pressures
- COVID related funding had totalled £2.030m
- It was expected that although balances had significantly increased over the past year, some of these balances would be offset by additional pressures during this next year
- Communication was ongoing with schools in relation to their spending plans for balances
- A decision had been taken in 2011 to suspend the balances control mechanism for excessive uncommitted balances as outlined in the Scheme for Financing Schools. In view of the significant in-year increase and the comparably high reserves of some schools compared with their budget allocations, views from Forum Members were welcomed on the use of any balances control mechanism
- A summary of the reserves held by Academies within the borough as reported within their year-end accounts dated 31<sup>st</sup> August 2019 and 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020 had been included

Forum Members suggested that they were in agreement with the LA seeking assurances as to how individual schools plan to use their balances, but they did feel this was not an appropriate time to make any decisions about the use of any balance

control mechanisms as this past year had been a unique situation. Concern was raised in regard to the projections for increasing numbers in Secondary Schools and a reduction in pupils in Primary Schools and the additional pressures this may cause.

**It was agreed:** that Forum Members noted the outturn position and level of balances.

## 5. Centrally Held Funds

A report and appendices providing a summary of the outcome of bids by Schools to the centrally held fund 2021/22 had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Mr Meehan highlighted:

- Centrally retained funds were available to support growth, disproportionate SEN and contingency in maintained schools
- Schools were required to submit a business case to the Schools Finance Team detailing the amount of funding required and were asked to provide supporting documentation
- Bids were assessed by Finance before submission to the Assistant Director of Education for approval
- The total value of received bids was £1.145m. The value of approved allocations was £0.703m. A further £0.065m had been ring fenced in relation to bids for which additional information and consideration is required before final approval could be granted
- Any unspent growth funding would be rolled forward into the year end balances – and Forum were responsible for making decisions on these balances
- It was likely that some schools may only apply in-year for supplementary funding, and due to the nature of the Contingency funding, additional bids may be received during the financial year due to unforeseen circumstances

**It was agreed:** Forum Members agreed

(1) to note the content of the report

(2) that any unspent growth funding be carried forward and the future use of the underspend to be determined in consultation with Schools Forum

## 6. DSG Underspend Options

A report and appendices summarising the underspends from 2020-21 had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Forum were asked to consider the following proposals:

- To carry forward the £0.160m to be used to support maintained schools in financial difficulty. It was noted this allocation was ringfenced to maintained schools
- To retain £0.500m as a contingency to support growth in future years. A more detailed piece of work would be undertaken with the LA admissions team to understand funding requirements to support the growth in the secondary sector. It was noted that the growth funding for 2021/22 had reduced by £0.284m

- That £0.250m be retained as a contingency to support schools with financial pressures arising specifically from falling rolls
- £0.500m be contributed to the High Needs block in 2022/23 this would reduce schools block contribution accordingly. In 2021/22 a £0.450m contribution was made from school block and £0.300m from DSG reserves (total of £0.750m).
- £0.250m be used to support with in-year pressures on the High Needs block (i.e. cost pressures arising as a result of COVID and further disproportionate SEN applications)
- £0.100m be used to support ongoing financial pressures in Maintained Nursery schools

Suggestions were raised and discussed around splitting the allocations as it was felt there was some disparity between the allocation for growth and contingency. Forum Members were reassured that as the position of rising numbers in Secondary Schools and reducing numbers in Primary Schools takes place adjustments would be made and Forum would be consulted.

Discussion took place around the projected increased numbers for Secondary Schools, Ms Pealing reported that adjustments would be made, and that further details would be shared at the next WASCL meeting. It was noted that the falling numbers in Primary Schools was already being experienced by some schools and consideration was being given to a five-year plan detailing school provision.

Questions were raised about the previously discussed plans for reducing the pressures on the HNB and where this was up to. It was reported that plans had been disrupted due to COVID-19, and additional pressures had occurred which had not been planned for, such as the additional year for some Post 16 students due to the education which had been missed over the past year and for the significant number of permanent exclusions which had taken place.

Members commented on the recognition that the LA were aware of the 'pinch-points' and that further clarity was needed about how the monies were being used in a preventative way as well as meeting some of the reactive need.

Forum were assured that work was ongoing and it was suggested that the sub-group meet early in the Autumn term to receive an update on the workstreams.

Further information would be provided to Forum around trends and projections.

**It was agreed:** that the proposed options be agreed for the use of 2020/21 centrally retained underspend.

## 7. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

Brief discussion took place around the circulated information from the F40 group in relation to the impact on the changes to the Pupil Premium calculations.

## 8. FUTURE MEETING DATES

24<sup>th</sup> June 2021 - all meetings will commence at 1.30pm

The Chair thanked Members for attending and the meeting closed at 2.20pm

***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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