

**MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM  
HELD ON FRIDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2021 AT 11.30AM  
VIA MS TEAMS DIGITAL PLATFORM**

**MINUTES**

**SCHOOLS MEMBERS**

**PRESENT**

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Rachel Lewis             | Nursery Headteacher                      |
| Gary Hayes               | Primary Headteacher                      |
| Julie Hassan             | Primary Headteacher                      |
| Wendy Hughes             | Primary Headteacher                      |
| Emily Ellis              | Primary Headteacher                      |
| Tracy Mingaud-Cunningham | Primary Governor ( <i>from 11.35am</i> ) |
| Alan Birchall            | Secondary Headteacher                    |
| Adrian Hardy             | Secondary Governor                       |
| Andy Pollard             | Academy Headteacher                      |
| Phil Rimmer              | PRU Headteacher proxy                    |

**NON SCHOOL MEMBERS**

**PRESENT**

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Sue Morris   | PVI Nursery Representative                         |
| Peter McGhee | 16-19 Partnership ( <i>from 11.40am</i> )          |
| Max Atkins   | Headteacher Representative ( <i>from 11.35am</i> ) |

**NOMINATED OBSERVERS**

**PRESENT**

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Cllr Jenny Bullen | Cabinet Member for CYP ( <i>from 11.35am</i> ) |
| Mike Wilkinson    | NASUWT   |

**IN ATTENDANCE**

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| Mark Rotherham | LA Finance – Strategic Finance Manager       |
| Anthony Meehan | LA Finance – Group Finance Manager (Schools) |
| Cath Pealing   | LA Education – Assistant Director            |
| Marie Collier  | Wigan Governor Services Clerk                |

**1. APOLOGIES AND CONSIDERATION OF CONSENT TO ABSENCE**

Apologies were **received** and **accepted** for Special School Headteacher Louise Curran and PRU Headteacher Anne Isherwood (Phil Rimmer attended as Miss Isherwood's proxy).

**2. URGENT/STRATEGIC ITEMS TO BE INCLUDED UNDER ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no items of AOB requested for consideration.

**3. PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The minutes from the Schools Forum meeting held on **14<sup>th</sup> October 2021** were **approved** as a correct record and **publication** was authorised.

#### 4. HIGH NEEDS RECOVERY PLAN AND HIGH NEEDS SUBGROUP FEEDBACK

Members **received** the November 2021 High Needs Recovery Plan (with appendices) which had been shared in advance.

The Chair invited LA Group Finance Manager, Anthony Meehan to provide a verbal overview.

- Summary of the report taken to the High Needs Subgroup on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2021 - included more information on current pressures being seen on High Needs Block, overview of ongoing actions from an LA perspective, information on draft Recovery Plan (condition of DSG to have plan in place in relation to High Needs deficit).
- Report brought to Schools Forum in October provided a detailed position in relation to pressures currently being faced by High Needs Block – projecting a deficit of £4.1m at the current year-end, increase from £3.5m in previous financial year.
- Charts now included showing growth over previous 5 years in some areas in terms of costs and numbers to demonstrate pressures.
- ECHPs – costs increased since 2017/18 from just under £3m to almost £5m.
- Significant increase in Post-16 cohort over previous couple of years – associated top-up funding.
- Growth in number of Independent school places – dramatic increase in cost per place over the previous 12 months (due to complexity of needs and market forces). 10% increase in cost per place.
- Invested £4m in revenue funding for increased Special School numbers over 4/5 years – capacity not keeping pace with demand for specialist provision, hence increasing number of commissioned places in Independent schools.
- Permanent exclusions (not included in October report) – there had been 18 at the point of writing the report (Autumn 1 term); the figure was now 29. The per week average was increasing.
- Impact on DSG and High Needs Block, also in turn had a knock-on effect on Council services and General Fund - significant increase in home to school transport costs and other support services, including SEND. 84% increase year on year in ECHP assessment requests.
- It was a requirement to have a Recovery Plan in place – the current plan had been drafted the previous year and the full impact of the pandemic and school closures had not been known.
- Recovery Plan had been redrafted – LA EBIU Team provided data projecting growth around ECHP numbers over the next five years (rolled forward year group data and used intelligence in respect of Early Years and data from SEND Team regarding number of requests). Information included in Appendix 1 of report.
- Appendix 2:
  - Unmitigated position – rolled forward projected growth and local knowledge including capacity in LA Special schools. Projecting £10m deficit by 2025/26.
  - Mitigated position – explored areas of potential savings. Hoping to bring spend in line with income by 2023/24 and gradually reduce deficit. Projected deficit reduced to £2.67m by 2025/26.
- Projections were based on the best information currently available, lots of unknowns regarding funding in particular (including spending review) – it was difficult to forecast with any great certainty. Tried to be prudent.
- There were 15 actions in the draft Recovery Plan taken to the Subgroup meeting, could be grouped into three main areas:

- Developing Resourced Provision – numbers had been increased by 22 extra places since Autumn 2019 and a further 14 places on the way as capital works completed. Plan to expand further. It was a key area in which to drive savings through cost avoidance by increasing in-Borough capacity.
- Commissioning arrangements and place planning:
  - 30-place SEMH provision (2/3 full)
  - Setting up an Alternative Provision framework
  - Independent Providers – potential volume agreements
- Support for inclusion – SEND support, EYAR funding, review of outreach offer, review of Local Offer and High Expectations for All document, reorganisation of SEND Team and building in QA into review of EHCPs.

Assistant Director, Cath Pealing advised that there was a need to review as demand increased – national picture.

**ACTION: Notes and appendices from the High Needs Subgroup to be circulated to Forum members.**

- Overview of subgroup feedback:
  - All 15 actions were discussed.
  - It was agreed that the summary report would be presented to full Schools Forum.
  - A request had been made for additional information regarding category of need and EHCPs split down by schools.
  - The subgroup asked for the current Recovery Plan to be streamlined into four or five key actions.
  - The group would be reconvened early in the Spring term to review extra information. Aim to get agreement on Recovery Plan, then would be taken to wider stakeholder groups.
- Next agenda item would look at Schools Block, an element of which would be the contribution to High Needs – information in this report was pertinent to that discussion.

Feedback from other High Needs subgroup members was invited.

A member of the subgroup commented that there was a real concern regarding the contribution request in light of pressures on schools, however, there was an understanding of the effects of the pandemic. The key actions in the plan needed focus. It had been discussed that there were quite a few Resourced Provision places currently available, and whilst it would not be favourable to be full in September or October with no flexibility later in the year, the places were being funded and could help with cost savings elsewhere. It was identified that there was a piece of work to be undertaken with Headteachers; some were fully aware of the paperwork requirements and which services to access, others were not. There was a request for briefing sessions regarding the available services.

**Question:** How have the numbers for the EHCP cost projections been derived? Are they based on straight statistical projections or detailed intelligence? Could Forum be presented with more detailed information regarding how the numbers have been projected as the numbers are the significant driver to the whole budgetary outlook?

**Answer:** (CP) They were calculated as a percentage, with projections taking account of the year group sizes. There will have also been other intelligence factored in, for example, the increase when children transition from primary to secondary. The methodology can be shared with the subgroup.

Assistant Director for Education, Cath Peeling advised that disapplication also needed to be reviewed when the team had capacity to do so.

Mrs Peeling confirmed that a Headteacher Conference was planned for the end of January, plus a full day SEND Conference for Headteachers and SENDCos focusing on the SEND Priority Plan and Pathway to ensure that Headteachers were clear on provision and processes.

Members **noted** the information included within the report and the verbal update. It was **agreed** that a further High Needs Subgroup meeting would be convened early in the Spring term.

**ACTION: Clerk to arrange date for a High Needs Subgroup January meeting (2-hour timeslot). Any other Forum members interested in joining the subgroup to contact the Clerk following the meeting.**

## 5. SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA 2022/23

Members **received** the Schools Block Funding Formula 2022/23 Report (with appendices) which had been shared in advance.

The Chair invited LA Group Finance Manager Anthony Meehan to provide a verbal overview.

- Agreement was needed regarding the principles for the Schools Block Funding Formula for 2022/23, prior to presentation and submission to the DfE in January 2022.
- Schools Forum agreed a move to the National Funding Formula in 2018 – LA was in a good position as moved to NFF early.
- Provisional allocation indicated a £5.6m increase (equates to 2.5% per pupil on average, dependent on demographic of school).
- Minimum funding guarantee essentially provides protection - local discretion to set between 5% and 2%.
- Permitted to transfer up to 0.5% from Schools Block to High Needs Block (or another block as appropriate) with agreement of Schools Forum - £1.1m in total.
- 2021/22 - £450,000 transferred to High Needs Block (plus £300,000 from earlier DSG underspends). £750,000 contribution in total.
- £500,000 ringfenced for 2022/23 from reserves – agreed in May 2021.
- Subgroup met on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2021 – modelled a range of scenarios for consideration by subgroup.
- Under current use of NFF – seen a 3% increase in basic per pupil entitlement values, a 2% increase in minimum funding levels, discretion to set minimum funding guarantee as covered earlier. Deprivation, low prior attainment, EAL (aligned with national at 3 years) and pupil mobility also factored into formula.
- School-led NFF factors:
  - All schools received lump sum (£118,000 in current year, increasing to £122,000)
  - Change in Business Rates delegation
- Growth allocation – £1.2m in current year, more information would be provided at the January Schools Forum meeting.
- De-delegations – approved at October Forum meeting.
- Funding Formula – 7/8 various scenarios modelled at subgroup, narrowed down to 4 proposals.

- Important to note figures only indicative – based on October 2020 Census data. Final allocations would be based on October 2021 Census data, with notification in December.
- Decisions were required regarding:
  - Whether to continue to apply the National Funding Formula (appendix 1 and factor values at appendix 2) – proposal to continue.
  - Model for allocating any surplus – proposal to increase AWPU (reflected differences in size of schools based on pupil numbers).
  - Amount of block transfer to High Needs (options of £0, £250,000 or £400,000) – proposal was for £250,000 block transfer (in addition to £500,000 from reserves). £750,000 in total, aligned with previous year.
  - How to make any block transfer affordable – proposal to adopt capping and scaling approach.

A member of the Funding Formula Subgroup advised that a robust and healthy discussion had taken place at the subgroup meeting. It had been suggested that in an ideal world, any contribution would be rejected, however, there was an agreed understanding for the requirement and subgroup members would support the £250,000 contribution. It was also agreed that it would be a retrograde step to move from use of the NFF. The capping and scaling model was considered a far more equitable way of deciding on the contribution level. This view was supported by other Forum members.

Members **noted** the information included within the report, plus verbal updates, and the following points were **agreed**.

Continued use of the National Funding Formula **agreed**.

Allocation of surplus funding **agreed**.

Block transfer of £250,000 from Schools Block to High Needs **agreed**.

Capping and scaling approach **agreed**.

A suggestion was made for the wording in future reports to be changed from ‘models’ to ‘considerations’ to clarify that separate decisions were required.

**Question:** The report referenced consultation with colleagues? What was the general consensus?

**Answer:** (Gary Hayes, Primary Headteacher/Funding Formula Subgroup Member) It was decided that the timescales between the subgroup meeting and this Forum meeting weren’t sufficient for the consultation, so the consultation will be undertaken now they have been agreed. Any points raised will be forwarded to LA Group Finance Manager, Anthony Meehan as soon as possible.

**Question:** What is the deadline for the final report to be submitted?

**Answer:** Friday, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2022.

A discussion was held regarding the timing of the next Schools Forum meeting (scheduled for 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022) and whether this was too close to the report deadline. It was **agreed** to retain the meeting date.

## 6. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of AOB for discussion.

## 7. FUTURE MEETING DATES

- Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022 at 1.30pm (virtual - MS Teams)
- Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2022 at 1.30pm (format TBC)
- Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2022 at 1.30pm (format TBC)
- Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022 at 1.30pm (format TBC)

The Chair thanked members for their attendance.

*The meeting **closed** at 12.20pm.*

### **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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