

**MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON THURSDAY 14TH OCTOBER 2021 AT 2PM
VIA MS TEAMS DIGITAL PLATFORM**

MINUTES

SCHOOLS MEMBERS

PRESENT

Gary Hayes	Primary Headteacher
Fiona Quinlivan	Primary Headteacher
Julie Hassan	Primary Headteacher
Wendy Hughes	Primary Headteacher
Emily Ellis	Primary Headteacher
Tracy Mingaud-Cunningham	Primary Governor
Alan Birchall	Secondary Headteacher
Andy McGlown	Secondary Headteacher
Adrian Hardy	Secondary Governor
Louise Curran	Special School Headteacher
Anne Isherwood	PRU Headteacher

NON SCHOOL MEMBERS

PRESENT

Sue Morris	PVI Nursery Representative
Peter McGhee	16-19 Partnership
Max Atkins	Headteacher Representative

NOMINATED OBSERVERS

PRESENT

Cllr Jenny Bullen	Cabinet Member for CYP
Karen Parkin	NEU
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
Emlyn Wright	LA Education – Service Lead
Marie Collier	Wigan Governor Services Clerk

*The meeting **started** at 2.10pm following technical issues with MS Teams.*

1. ELECTION OF THE 2021/22 CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

Advance nominations had been received as below:

Chair: Adrian Hardy

Vice Chair: Alan Birchall

Mr Hardy and Mr Birchall accepted the nominations.

Adrian Hardy was **elected** as Schools Forum Chair for 2021/22.

Alan Birchall was **elected** as Schools Forum Vice Chair for 2021/22.

2. APOLOGIES AND CONSIDERATION OF CONSENT TO ABSENCE

No apologies had been received.

The Chair welcomed new members; Primary Headteacher Wendy Hughes, Special School Headteacher Louise Curran and PVI Nursery Representative Sue Morris. Mark Rotherham was welcomed in place of John McDonald, who had moved to a new role within the Council. Members expressed their thanks for the support John had given over several years.

Members **noted** that a Secondary Headteacher vacancy remained.

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

There were no items of AOB requested for consideration.

4. PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes from the Schools Forum meeting held on **13th May 2021** were **approved** as a correct record and **publication** was authorised.

5. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK FINANCE UPDATE

Members **received** the October 2021 High Needs Finance Report (with appendix) which had been shared in advance and provided an update on the latest financial position for 2021/22 and outlined the position regarding recovery planning.

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

- The report circulated covered three sections; national update, regional update and local position.
- Current year outturn projections were included.
- National update:
 - Provisional funding allocations for Dedicated Schools Grant had been received.
 - High Needs Block – provisional funding information suggested increase of £3.9m for 2022/23. Similar increase to that in the current year. Gains cap of 11% next year (12% current year). Indication that cap reached, therefore provisional allocation reduced by at least £385,000.

Peter McGhee joined the meeting at 2.20pm.

- Significant national SEND review was ongoing. Initial plan to publish proposals in Spring 2021, however, not yet been forthcoming. Recognition that fundamental changes needed across the system which may result in a review of the funding formula for high needs. Would be very much dependent on outcome of wider SEND review.
- Regional position:
 - Group Finance Manager had written out to colleagues to gain an indication of other LA high needs positions comparable to Wigan's.

- Responses – cumulative deficit in excess of £110 million across GM Authorities. Wigan’s deficit compared favourably to some other LAs.
- Recently received an extensive GM benchmarking document – looking at various cohorts, finances and practices. Currently being reviewed by staff across LA – findings/data to be brought to future meetings.
- Local position:
 - Projections indicated an increase in the deficit – projecting cumulative deficit up to £4.1m, in-year increase of £600,000. Early to be producing projections, another six months to go, rapidly changing position, being monitored month on month.
 - Appendix 1 of report provided a breakdown by budget headings.
 - Key cost pressures:
 - Post-16 costs had increased significantly – approximately £900,000 from 2019/20 to current year’s projections. Considered to be largely linked to increase of 25% in cohort size – continuing learners (including missed education during the pandemic).
 - Independent School costs had continued to rise quite significantly – due to complexity of needs of pupils and demand for special places (both nationally and locally). Power in the market sat with the independent providers. Projecting an increase in outturn of £700,000 in Independent School spend.
 - Exponential growth in EHC Plans and associated top-up funding. 9% increase in number of EHC Plans from January 2020 to January 2021 (compared to 7% increase the previous year). Projected increase in costs of £1.2 million.
 - Early Years additional resources – increase in outturn of approximately £200,000. Number increased by 28%, value by 52% - indicated complexity of needs within the cohort.
 - Special School places and resource provision – 36 additional places commissioned since September 2021. Projected increase in outturn of £1.6m. Additional requests for extra funding also received due to complexity of need of pupils being placed at the schools. LA been working hard to commission additional resource provision places in mainstream schools. 22 extra places commissioned which came with additional cost pressure, however, was hoped would create savings elsewhere in the system in the longer term.
 - Alternative Provision – report presented to Forum the previous year to agree change to top-up funding. Change came into effect in September and equated to an increase of £169,000. Cost pressures in relation to tutoring costs.
 - Knock-on effect on LA Transport funding – growth in area and cost increases of around £750,000 over the last few years.
 - Projected cumulative deficit of £4.1m – DSG was ringfenced, therefore deficit rolled forward to be funded from future DSG funding or savings which could be generated.
 - Contribution of £750,000 into high needs in the current year (£450,000 from schools block and £300,000 from central DSG underspends in 2019/20). Further £250,000 contribution to high needs from 2020/21 underspends agreed in May 2021.
 - DSG recovery plan produced and agreed 18 months ago – recognition that plan now needed to be reviewed and updated. Projections made at that time now seemed unrealistic due to the unforeseen exponential growth in the area. Currently being reviewed with LA colleagues. To be taken to High Needs Subgroup meeting in November.

The Chair invited questions/comments.

A member drew Forum colleagues' attention to an issue with slipping back from colleges on the agreed process for non-EHC Plan Y11s moving into Post-16 for informal funding and additional support without the need to progress down the formal EHC Plan route. Communication from colleges had been received stating that EHC Plans should have been sought for the former Y11s. Considered that this could potentially result in an additional 40 EHC Plan applications for Y11 students per year. Flagging as concern as could have a significant impact on future funding.

The Post-16 Rep considered that above point would be the reality going forward. College had lost 20% of high needs funding in the previous academic year, at a point when commitment to the learners was already in place. Been made aware that only way of securing funding with any degree of certainty would be for students with EHC Plans.

The Assistant Director of Education stressed that a different approach was needed with much earlier conversations and agreements with regards to transition to post-16. There was an acknowledgement that this had not happened for the current year, however, needed to be put in place in future. A wider discussion was held regarding the purpose and process for EHC Plans.

A member highlighted that when an area was subsidised from the schools' block, only a proportion of schools were impacted due to mandatory minimum funding levels. The Assistant Director of Education acknowledged the concern and assured Forum that initial modelling plans were being considered to ensure a fairer system. The Chair suggested the modelling exercise looked at how many of the schools which benefited from the minimum funding level put pupils through for the support.

PRU Headteacher Anne Isherwood left the meeting at 2.35pm.

Members **noted** the information included within the report and **agreed** to convene a subgroup meeting to review the updated recovery plan and information in more detail.

High Needs Subgroup members were **agreed** as below:

Anthony Meehan, Charmaine Tarring, Gary Hayes, Andy McGlown, Adrian Hardy and Peter McGhee. Dean Trust Wigan Headteacher to be invited (suggested by Assistant Director of Education).

6. SCHOOLS BLOCK FUNDING FORMULA

Members **received** the Schools Block Funding Formula 2022/23 Report which had been shared in advance and provided a summary of the published information in respect of the funding formula for 2022/23 together with the LA level provisional allocations.

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

- For information – further to briefing circulated prior to summer.
- 2022/23 provisional funding allocations had been received in July – third year of DfE announced settlement from September 2019 - extra £2.3 billion. Now confirmed as £1.5 billion into schools block, £780 million into high needs block.
- There was no real change to the funding formula.
- The change in the date of the Ever6 Census gave rise to the Pupil Premium Grant issues the previous year.
- Operational change - Business Rates – no longer delegated, retained by the ESFA.

- Factors within formula increased by 3% or 2%.
- Mandatory minimum per pupil levels - 2% increase.
- LA free to set minimum funding guarantee between +0.5% and +2% - would be modelled through subgroup.
- Funding allocations currently based on October 2020 Census pupil on-roll numbers (to be updated in December with October 2021 Census on-roll numbers). Information on growth fund allocation also to be received in December. Provisional information - £5.6m increase (2.5% average increase per pupil dependent on school circumstances).
- Different scenarios were being modelled.
- Final allocation to be received in December - to be reviewed and presented to ESFA by the end of January 2022.

Members **noted** the information included within the report and **agreed** to convene a subgroup meeting to review the modelling of school allocations for 2022/23.

Funding Formula Subgroup members were **agreed** as below:

Anthony Meehan, Gary Hayes, Alan Birchall, Andy McGlown and Adrian Hardy.

7. DE-DELEGATION 2022/23

Members **received** the Maintained Schools De-delegation 2022/23 Report which had been shared in advance and provided information on proposals for de-delegation values for the financial year 2022/23 and sought approval of the proposed values from mainstream maintained school representatives.

The Chair invited LA Group Finance Manager Anthony Meehan to provide a verbal overview. The report was shared on screen.

- Responsibility of Schools Form to approve de-delegated services and associated values each year.
- Proposal for 2022/23 – to enable agreed values to be factored into modelling.
- De-delegation not an option for academies, special schools or nurseries – just related to mainstream maintained schools.
- There was an agreed 2.75% increase the previous year – reflected NJC offer in relation to pay increases.
- Similar principle applied for 2022/23 - proposal for a 1.75% increase (NJC offer not yet agreed) – with the exception of TESS (reviewed and recently agreed values – proposal to retain as was) and Contingency (no staffing costs).
- Members' attention was drawn to the table and commentary within the report – overall £21,309 cost.

The Chair invited comments from mainstream maintained school members.

No comments were put forward.

Members **noted** the information and mainstream maintained reps **approved** the proposed values for de-delegated services for 2022/23.

8. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of AOB for discussion.

9. FUTURE MEETING DATES

- Tuesday 2nd November 2021 at 2pm – Funding Formula Subgroup (St Peter’s High)
- Thursday 11th November 2021 at 10am – High Needs Subgroup (St Peter’s High)
- Friday 26th November 2021 at 1.30pm (MS Teams) (now 11.30)
- Thursday 20th January 2022 at 1.30pm (format TBC – perhaps blended)
- Thursday 17th March 2022 at 1.30pm (format TBC)
- Thursday 12th May 2022 at 1.30pm (format TBC)
- Thursday 23rd June 2022 at 1.30pm (format TBC)

The Chair thanked members for their attendance.

*The meeting **closed** at 2.55pm.*

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:

m.collier@wigan.gov.uk