

**MEETING OF WIGAN SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON THURSDAY 20TH OCTOBER 2022 AT 1.30PM
VIA MS TEAMS DIGITAL PLATFORM**

**MINUTES
(for approval at November 2022 meeting)**

Quorum: 40% (7) of the 16 current School/Non-School Members

The meeting was **quorate** at 13:35pm.

SCHOOLS MEMBERS

PRESENT

Gary Hayes	Primary Headteacher
Fiona Quinlivan	Primary Headteacher
Julie Hassan	Primary Headteacher
Wendy Hughes	Primary Headteacher
Lisa Hobden	Primary Headteacher
Alan Birchall	Secondary Headteacher
Adrian Hardy	Secondary Governor/Chair
Louise Curran	Special School Headteacher
Anne Isherwood	Alternative Provision Headteacher

NON SCHOOL MEMBERS

PRESENT

Max Atkins	Wigan NUT Teacher Representative
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NOMINATED OBSERVERS

PRESENT

Cllr Jenny Bullen	CYP Cabinet Member
Karen Parkin	NEU

IN ATTENDANCE

Mark Rotheram	LA Finance – Strategic Finance Manager
Anthony Meehan	LA Finance – Group Finance Manager (Schools)
Emlyn Wright	LA Education – Service Lead (attending for Cath Peeling)
Sue Brogan	Wigan Governor Services Clerk

Meeting started at 13.35pm and was quorate from the start.

Members were advised that the meeting was being recorded.

1. ELECTION OF THE 2022/23 SCHOOLS FORUM CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

Advance nominations had been received as below:

Chair: Mr Hardy

Vice Chair: Mr Birchall

Mr Hardy and Mr Birchall accepted the nominations.

Mr Hardy was **elected** as Schools Forum Chair for 2022/23.

Mr Birchall was **elected** as Schools Forum Vice Chair for 2022/23.

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

Apologies were **received** and **accepted** for the following Members/Observers:

- Mr McGhee (16-19 Partnership Representative)
- Mr Wilkinson (Nominated Observer – Wigan NASUWT)
- Mrs Pealing – Mr Wright was her representative
- Mrs Mingaud-Cunningham – had difficulty getting on-line access

The Chair welcomed Mrs Brogan as the Clerk for the meeting. Ms Hobden from St Patricks, Wigan was welcomed as a new member to the group.

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

There were no items of AOB requested for consideration.

4. **PREVIOUS MINUTES**

Minutes from the Schools Forum meeting held on 15th May 2022 and 22nd June 2022 were **approved** and **authorised** for publication.

Matters Arising

A discrepancy was raised between what had been proposed in the June meeting regarding the constitution and what was presented for discussion later in the meeting under Item 10. Clarification would be provided under Item 10.

Q. From the 12th June minutes, was there any further news on coverage from January to August on the supplementary grant?

A. It has been confirmed that it will be an 18 month grant for academies and 12 months grant for schools and will be rolled into funding moving forward.

5. **SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DE-DELEGATION 2023/24**

Members **received** the Maintained Schools School Improvement De-delegation 2023/24 Report which had been shared in advance of the meeting and provided information on the school improvement and brokerage grant. It also provided options regarding schools' improvement de-delegation.

The Chair invited Mr Wright to provide a verbal overview. The report was shared on screen.

- The Local Authority retained statutory responsibility for school improvement and would continue to do this until the schools' white paper recommendations around academisation, as they stood, were implemented.

- The statutory requirements of the Local Authority were clear in Section 2 of the report.
- Current funding arrangements were arranged through the supplementary income and monitoring grant which was supplemented by the council.
- DFE brought forward consultation to remove the Grant completely by April 2023.
- School forum previously agreed to de-delegate £100,000 for academic year 2022-2023 to cover the shortfall in the costs.
- By academic year 2023-2024 there would be a zero pot of money for schools' improvement for maintained schools in the borough.
- The rationale for the removal of the grant was to ensure that funding was fair and equal between maintained schools and academies.
- Three option models had been proposed in the report to allow Local Authorities to maintain their core functions alongside other statutory functions and school improvement requirements.
- Option B described the current arrangements.
- Option A was a reduced option with just the core functions.
- Option C included funding for an option to pay for school improvements for schools that did not have the ability to pay for themselves. Funding principles would be linked to this and not an automatic right.
- Appendix 1 outlined the amount of money that would be required to be de-delegated from each school to achieve each of the options.
- The DFE indicated that if we were unable to get an agreement from members then the Local Authority could go back to the Secretary of State to seek permission for the de-delegation.

ACTION: Members to consult with stakeholders in the system and to return to next School Forum ready to debate the options.

Mrs Hughes entered the room 13:46pm.

The Chair invited questions and comments from mainstream maintained school members.

- Q.** Consultation is the right thing to do, but you have the right to go back to the DFE if we don't come to an agreement, what are you looking for as a Local Authority? Presuming that this is option B or C?
- A.** Option C would allow us to operate in the same way as currently with a tighter application of criteria for funding support. We would like to think that the system works with 95% of schools at Good or Outstanding. Option A is bare minimum position.
- Q.** Within option C there are 2 different financial figures what is the difference between the two figures?
- A.** The lower figure would be a reduced school improvement budget and the higher would be closer to current funding levels.
- Q.** Is de-delegation only from maintained, do academies get this for nothing or are they paying elsewhere?
- A.** Academies would pay for services as needed. They would commission support through the schools' improvement services. The funding is for

maintained schools but as a Local Authority we wish to hold our family of schools together.

Q Would the overview of standards continue from the local authority in Option A?

A We would continue to do this in Option A and the justification for this would be that my (Mr Wright) role isn't funded through this mechanism and I have a responsibility for all schools. We would continue the monitoring and data desk top risk assessments and this would include academies.

6. DSG UNDERSPEND 2021/22

Members **received** the Central DSG Underspend 2021/22 Report, plus appendices, which had been circulated in advance. LA Group Finance Manager, Anthony Meehan, shared the report on screen and provided a verbal overview.

The report had been presented at the Schools Forum meeting in June but as the meeting was not quorate members were not able to approve the report but agreed it in principle.

- In May there was a £1.6 million underspend that required a consultation to take place.
- £1.4 million remained after agreement for certain fixed purposes.
- A proposal was made for £750,000 to be ringfenced for High Needs in 2023-2024 – this was required due to a reduction in funding and a significant growth in High Needs.
- £650,000 remained uncommitted and consultation was needed as necessary on the use of this fund.

Q. If there is underspend and money is needed for school improvement, why don't we use 50% of that pot for school improvement whilst schools are experiencing a crisis in funding?

A. That's a good point but it is a one-off pot of money and school improvement will be a recurring commitment and it would need revisiting again next year. Potentially there may be further risks that we may need a pot of money, for example schools in deficit, school closures, etc. Further consideration could be made if it needs more exploration.

Schools did not feel that they should be asked for more de-delegation money when there was money available from this underspent fund. It was stated that the underspend was for all schools and not just maintained schools and the additional de-delegation requested was from only maintained schools. It was felt that the underspend could be used for areas of core responsibility to make it applicable to all schools.

ACTION: Members to consult with stakeholders around possible use for the £650,000 pot of money for further discussion at the next meeting.

ACTION: Mr Wright and Mr Meehan to consider the proposal to use some of this underspend for some of the school improvement work.

7. SCHOOLS BLOCK FUNDING FORMULA 2023/24

Members **received** the Schools Block Funding Formula 2023/24 Report which had been shared in advance and provided a summary of the published information in respect of the funding formula for 2023/24 together with the LA level provisional allocations.

LA Group Finance Manager, Mr Meehan, shared the report on screen and provided a verbal overview.

- There was a continued push by the Government to implement a hard nationally funded formula (NFF) for schools.
- The report showed the summary to date, key elements and the next steps.
- Wigan had committed to align with NFF since 2018/19.
- Core schools funding would increase nationally by £1.5 billion in 2023/24 compared with the previous year (2022/23). £570 million related to an increase in the High Needs block, with the remainder allocated for mainstream school funding (£930m). This represented a 1.9% increase in funding through the schools NFF nationally.
- NFF rates for deprivation had increased by 4.3% whereas other factors had only minimal increases. In real terms this would mean that some schools would have a minimal increase in budget and schools with higher levels of deprivation a more noticeable increase in funds.
- The 2022/23 supplementary grant was to be rolled into the schools' core budgets in 2023/24 by way of adjustments to NFF factor values and baselines.
- The change which was proposed for 2022/23 regarding the centralisation of business rates for maintained schools, but later deferred, was still optional in 2023/24. There was still some local flexibility on this.
- Based on the indicative data Wigan had received a 2.04% increase in funding which equated to approximately £110 per pupil. This was the lowest that had been received for a few years.

Q. The second table is indicating that we are getting £6,203 per pupil which is more than the funding guarantee – is that right?

A. Some pupils attract more than the minimum.

- Following ESFA and political approval the Local Authority should be able to share maintained schools' budgets for 2023/24 by 28th February 2023.
- There was little local discretion on the funding formula considering we were now at NFF.

The following proposals were made:

- To continue to apply all NFF factors and values.
- To set the minimum funding guarantee at the maximum 0.5% if affordable within the funding envelope.

- To propose not to make any further contribution from the Schools Block to High Needs in 2023/24 as this was funded by the DSG underspend from 2021/22 by £0.75m.

It was recommended that Schools Forum note the information in relation to the 2023/24 funding formula outlined in the report and agree the proposals pending consultation with the wider sector.

Q. You hope to be able to keep to the minimum funding guarantee of 0.5% but in the past we have had a cap where you kept to the 0.5% and the funds were balanced by reducing the increase for schools above this level – is that right?

A. Yes - there are a few ways to make it affordable. One could be to adjust the minimum funding guarantee, another would be an option around capping and scaling gains. There is also an option around the growth pot but will only look at these options in January.

Q. What did we use in the end last year?

A. The capping and scaling approach was used to fund the contribution to High Needs.

Q. From recollection there would we have had some big winners and losers from the other methods?

A. Yes, that was right.

Q. Will there still be a top-up to ensure that all pupils are at the minimum funding level?

A. Yes, they will get top-up to minimum funding but we are only getting a 0.5% increase on those pupils which is disappointing.

No further comments were made.

8. DE-DELEGATION 2023/24

Members **received** the Maintained Schools De-delegation 2023/24 Report which had been shared in advance and provided information on proposals for de-delegation values for the financial year 2023/24 and sought approval of the proposed values from mainstream maintained school representatives.

LA Group Finance Manager, Anthony Meehan, shared the report on screen and provided a verbal overview

- De-delegation was not an option for academies, special schools and nurseries. It only applied to mainstream maintained schools.
- In 2022/23 a 1.75% increase was agreed in line with the employers offer for NJC staff pay increases.
- As a result of this years NJC pay award (range between 4% and 10%) an increase of 4% was proposed to de-delegation values for 2023/24.
- No uplift was proposed for the Contingency.

- Table 1 showed the changes to the budget
- Appendix 1 provided an indicative total de-delegation value by school based on October 2021 numbers on roll.
- Appendix 2 provided a summary of the types of costs which may be covered by the 'Staff Costs' and 'Education Functions' de-delegations.
- If a 4% increase was applied the total increase of de-delegations was £80,917

A recommendation was made for members to agree in principle and to consult with the Headteachers in the consortium on these proposed increases prior to the next meeting in November.

Members thought that asking for a 4% increase in de-delegation was too high considering that schools funding was only increasing by 2%. It was suggested that the Local Authority were trying to limit the impact of the pay award and were not fully covering the costs of the pay award with this increase in order to support schools.

The Chair summarised the feeling from the meeting that appeared to suggest that de-delegation increases should not go above 2% with cost reductions to be made by the Local Authority to meet the budget.

ACTION: Mr Meehan agreed to revisit the proposals and bring a further report back to the next meeting in November.

9. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK FINANCE UPDATE

Members **received** the High Needs Block Finance Update Report which had been shared in advance and provided information on the indicative High Needs funding for 2023/24 and the latest financial projections for 2022/23.

LA Group Finance Manager, Anthony Meehan, shared the report on screen and provided a verbal overview.

- Wigan received an overall increase of c.15% in 2022/23.
- In 2023/24 High Needs funding was to increase by £570m which equated to 6.3% nationally.
- The structure of the National Funding Formula in 2023/24 had not changed
- The formula included a gains cap of 7%. Based on the 22/23 provisional allocation the cap was reducing Wigan's funding by £0.640m.
- The 2023/24 provisional allocation represented an increase of around £2.9 million on 2022/23.
- Whilst funding continued to rise, the level of growth had reduced and it was anticipated that this trend would continue despite increasing demand.
- The conditions of grant for 2023/24 funding required Local Authorities to implement a 3% minimum funding guarantee comparing place and top up funding with 2021/22 baselines for special schools.
- Wigan had a significant cumulative High Needs deficit totalling £3.612m. The projected in-year underspend would reduce the cumulative High Needs deficit to around £3.1m.
- £2.3m of this deficit was generated in 2019/20.

- Appendix 1 of the report was the projected High Needs position at the end of the financial year, 2022/23. An in-year underspend was projected but an increase in expenditure of around 12.8% was expected.
- The projections were based on the best available information at the time with contingencies included.

The key pressures in respect of the High Needs block were:

- **Independent Schools** – The number of students placed in costly independent schools continued to increase year on year.
- **EHC plans / Mainstream Top up** - the total number of EHCP's showed a 13.8% increase..
- **Special Schools Places** – an increase in the number of special school places.
- **Post 16** – an area of growth where costs continued to increase
- **Transport Costs** – have increased by circa £1 million per year over the 5 year period.

Whilst it appeared that there would be an underspend in the year it was thought that the budget would continue to be a challenge. A management plan had been produced for the High Needs Sub-group to look at the data.

Q. Would the proposal be to have another meeting before the next school's forum meeting in November?

A. It would be useful if we could do before.

ACTION: **Mr Meehan to arrange a further High Needs Sub-group meeting with a view to presenting a further report to the Schools Forum in November.**

10. SCHOOLS FORUM CONSTITUTION

Members **received** the Schools Forum Constitution Report which had been shared in advance and provided an updated constitution to align with best practice and to review membership to ensure all sectors are adequately represented.

LA Group Finance Manager, Mr Meehan, shared the report on screen and provided a verbal overview.

- A self-assessment had already been completed considering best practice.
- It was agreed that the constitution needed a refresh and update
- The process for election was included in the appendix of the report
- Information on tenure was to be included and it was proposed that all appointments would be for one year.
- A process around non-attendance was included.
- Timescales for review were included.

Schools Forum was asked to approve the updated constitution included at Appendix 1.

- Current representations were also considered and suggestions made.

- There were a couple of vacancies in the secondary schools
- It was indicated that there may be a need for an academy representative in the primary sector.

It was raised by members that there was no provision for a replacement member if a colleague was unable to make a meeting and members needed to consider if they agreed with this as this had been practice previously. The Chair confirmed that the ability to send authorised substitutes with voting rights was included in the constitution.

Members could see the logic in cutting the maintained primary members numbers but that raised issues as it didn't reflect what had been agreed in previous minutes from June and could lead to difficulties if this was implemented with five school improvement consortia and only four maintained school members.

The Chair reminded those present that at the meeting in June there was a proposal to look in more detail regarding panel members. It was thought that the inclusion of a Primary Academy Headteacher on the School Forum would be an asset.

It was proposed that there should be 5 members to match the consortia but one of the members should be an Academy Headteacher. It was thought that this could be facilitated within current arrangements but could make agreeing representation more complicated.

It was thought that the secondary membership was suitable but was noted that there used to be one Academy representative for both the primary and secondary sector.

- Q.** When will this come into effect as currently we have 5 primary members who are all from maintained schools?
- A.** It will be next September unless there needs to be changes within the year – with colleagues finding out the views of their sector as needed.

Members were asked to seek feedback from the consortia, particularly around the primary membership. Membership could be tabled as a further agenda item later in the year.

ACTION: Members to consult with stakeholders regarding the proposal on representations.

11. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There was no additional business.

12. FUTURE MEETING DATES

Members **noted** the agreed meeting dates (all via MS Teams):

- Autumn 2 – Thursday 24th November 2022 at 1.30pm
- Spring 1 – Thursday 19th January 2023 at 1.30pm
- Spring 2 – Thursday 16th March 2023 at 1.30pm
- Summer 1 – Thursday 18th May 2023 at 1.30pm

- Summer 2 – Thursday 29th June 2023 at 1.30pm

The meeting closed at 14:44pm.

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 Schools Forum Clerk:

m.collier@wigan.gov.uk