

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

MINUTES

SCHOOLS MEMBERS

PRESENT

Gary Hayes	Primary Headteacher
Fiona Quinlivan	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
Anne Isherwood	PRU Headteacher

NON SCHOOL MEMBERS

PRESENT

Peter McGhee	16-19 Partnership
Max Atkins	Headteacher Representative

NOMINATED OBSERVERS

PRESENT

Cllr Jenny Bullen	Cabinet Member for CYP (<i>until 2.45pm</i>)
Karen Parkin	NEU

IN ATTENDANCE

Mark Rotheram	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 (Standards and Learning)
Charmaine Tarring	LA SEND – Interim Enhanced Service Manager (<i>until 2.35pm</i>)
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, PVI Nursery Representative Sue Morris and NASUWT Representative Mike Wilkinson.

Clerk's post-meeting note

Email apologies had also been **received** from Primary Headteacher Julie Hassan.

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 **26th November 2021** were **approved** as a correct record and **publication** was authorised.

4. SCHOOLS BLOCK FUNDING FORMULA 2022/23

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

The Chair invited LA Group Finance Manager, Anthony Meehan to talk Forum members through the item. Mr Meehan shared the report on screen and provided a verbal overview.

- Principles for the Schools Block Funding Formula for 2022/23 agreed at November meeting – now providing an update following final DSG allocations; information on school-level allocations, plus growth fund.
- Deadline for submission to the DfE was the following day.
- Political ratification being sought that evening at Cabinet.
- Figures to be finalised with LA mainstream, maintained schools by the end of February, following ESFA approval.
- Total 2022/23 DSG Schools Block allocation of almost £235m, including growth factor funding – increase per pupil of around 2.5%.
- Pupil numbers - increase of 92 pupils (reduction of 145 in primary sector, increase of 237 in secondary sector)
- Recapped on protections built into formula.
- Schools Block – ringfenced grant, however, permitted to transfer up to 0.5% from Schools Block to High Needs Block (or another block as appropriate) with agreement of Schools Forum. Agreed a provisional transfer of £250,000 to High Needs Block in November – looking to ratify that element of formula following member consultation with colleagues. Reminder to note that £500,000 from previous DSG underspend also being used to support High Needs Block in 2022/23.
- Recap on agreed principles for budget allocations.
- Value of funding received through NFF does not fully meet allocations – updated to reflect changes in pupil numbers, however, not reflective of any changes in pupil characteristics. Proposal to address shortfall was to use £273,000 of growth factor funding (of £895,000). Generally have an underspend in growth factor.
- Appendix 1 – school level allocations
- Appendix 2 – copy of proforma completed by LA
- De-delegations agreed at October and November meetings – to be revisited later in meeting under School Improvement Grant item.
- Central Schools Services Block referenced - £865,849 (inflationary increase).
- Supplementary Grant referenced – indicative LA allocation of £7m to be paid as separate grant in 2022/23 to support schools to offset additional cost pressures (no school level allocations yet released – methodology included within report).
- Appendix 1 shared on screen – members provided with explanation of data contained within report.

Questions invited.

Question: If it was not possible to use the growth fund to cover the NFF shortfall, would we have to increase the capping and scaling to make it affordable?

Answer: Yes. It was considered a fairer approach for all schools to adopt this approach. The growth factor is not ringfenced. We have also liaised with other LAs and they have adopted a similar approach. Not a growth in pupil numbers per se, but a growth in pupil characteristics. Not traditional growth, but growth all the same.

Members **noted** the information included within the report, plus verbal updates, and **approved** the following:

- Funding formula
- Schools Block allocation (including contribution of £0.250m to High Needs)
- Growth fund
- Allocation of Central School Services Block

The Supplementary Grant information was **noted**.

Question: With reference to the Supplementary Grant, will a model be available for School Business Managers this term?

Answer: Yes. We are currently working on indicative allocations and hoping to get an indicative figure out to School Business Managers of LA maintained schools for budget-setting.

5. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK UPDATE AND 2022/23 BUDGET

Members **received** the January 2022 High Needs Report (with appendices) which had been shared in advance.

The Chair invited LA Group Finance Manager, Anthony Meehan to talk Forum members through the item. Mr Meehan shared the report on screen and provided a verbal overview.

- Purpose of report two-fold; to provide an update on projected position and to seek approval for the 2022/23 High Needs budget.
- Recapped on reports taken to October and November Forum meetings.
- Total allocation of £43.9m before any ESFA deductions (£40.8m after deductions). Increase of just over £4m.
- Supplementary Funding also going through on High Needs Block designed to offset some of same cost pressures. £1.6m for Wigan.
- Current forecast showing cumulative deficit of around £4m. In-year overspend of £537,000.
- Appendix 1 shared on screen – position broken down by budget headings. Drew attention to Post-16 and Independent as areas most significantly overspent (budgets flexed down at budget-setting).
- Seeking approval of Forum to use an element of budget to fund a two-year fixed term post within SEND Team – referenced attached Business Case. SEND Interim Enhanced Service Manager to expand upon at the end of the report.
- 50% of deficit recharge built into budget – an attempt to reduce the deficit must be demonstrated to meet DSG conditions of grant.
- Appendix 2 shared on screen – detailed budget with rationale.
- Maintained Special School budgets – almost 50% of total High Needs spend. Proposing an uplift in top-up funding of 3% (1% previous year) in acknowledgement of additional costs.
- Post-16 – included 90% of projected spend to make affordable.
- EHC Plans – projected outturn plus element of growth included (SEND and EBIU data used)
- OOB – projected outturn used.
- Independent school provision – also scaled back to make affordable within funding envelope.

- Central Support Services – included £77,000 for SEND post (per year salary and on-costs).
- AP – 2.6% increase from September 2022 (in line with secondary school per pupil uplift).
- Supplementary Grant included as separate line.

Query from AP Headteacher, Anne Isherwood, regarding projections and actuals – suggestion of a £10,000 discrepancy. Mr Meehan explained that he had projected a small underspend on the transport costs. Decision taken to further discuss outside the meeting.

Question: Are Special schools receiving the Supplementary Grant in addition to the 3% uplift?

Answer: No, the Supplementary Grant is for Mainstream only.

Question: Are assumptions being made regarding the Supplementary Grant going forward?

Answer: We are anticipating that the Supplementary Grant will be rolled into the baseline.

Question: Is the Supplementary funding for High Needs in relation to SEND rather than the wider cost pressures? Concern that future cost pressures may not have been totally addressed.

Answer: They will face the same cost pressures. Conditions of Supplementary Grant have not yet been wholly prescriptive.

Mr Meehan advised Forum members that he had received an email recently from the ESFA which had advised not to expect this level of increase in funding on High Needs going forward. If that proved to be the case, it would be necessary to revisit the High Needs Recovery Plan.

Question: With reference to reducing Post-16 and Independent Schools allocations to 90% of projected spend, where does the remaining 10% come from?

Answer: Simply needs to balance within funding received, therefore projections have been reduced down but with knowledge of potential overspends if cost pressures cannot be controlled.

The Chair invited the LA SEND Interim Enhanced Service Manager, Charmaine Tarring to present the two-year fixed term post funding proposal.

Mrs Tarring presented the report on screen and provided a verbal overview.

- Two-year SEND Service Manager fixed-term post.
- Initial part of paper outlining the growth seen which has placed the service under increasing pressure.
- A 60% increase in the number of EHC Plans over the last ten years – projections showed that would continue to grow.
- 9% growth in EHC Plans between January 2020 – January 2021.
- 84% in number of needs assessment requests in the previous year (217 to 400).
- Peer review ongoing.
- Spike in number of tribunals (19 in previous 12 months).
- Members' attention drawn to the focus of the two-year fixed term Service Manager role – quality assurance including financial audit, review of team structure and SEND service and implementing changes, oversight of operational move from paper-based system to Liquid Logic, monitoring of commissioning activity. Would free up Service Lead to focus on key strategic priorities and drive reduction of deficit.
- Considered that two-year fixed term post would be sufficient.
- Cost avoidance highlighted, however, key figures in relation to resourced provision provided.

Questions were invited.

Assistant Director, Cath Pealing added comments in support of the request for the two-year fixed term Service Manager post, in respect of the prevention of further deficit. Mrs Pealing also confirmed that should the LA receive any funding following the SEND Review, the funds requested would be distributed back into the system.

Question: In relation to the capital works to improve resourced provision, where does the capital come from?

Answer: (CP) A specific allocation for SEND capital is currently received.

Question: Have we any indication of where the extra places will come from?

Answer: We have received the second round of expressions of interest. Currently being reviewed as we need to ensure the places are in the right geographical area for the right area of need.

Members **received** updated projections in respect of the 2021/22 High Needs Block outturn, **approved** the 2022/23 High Needs Block Budget and **approved** the funding of the two-year SEND Manager fixed term post.

6. EARLY YEARS DSG 2022/23

Members **received** the Early Years DSG Report which had been shared in advance.

The Chair invited LA Strategic Finance Manager, Mark Rotheram to talk Forum members through the item. Mr Rotheram shared the report on screen and provided a verbal overview.

- Report to update members on Early Years DSG allocation for 2022/23.
- Drew attention to revised rates.
- Proposals laid out in Table 1.

Members **noted** the information regarding the Early Years DSG for 2022/23 and **agreed** the proposed Early Years rates and level of central spend.

7. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT

The Chair invited Assistant Director, Cath Pealing and Service Lead, Emlyn Wright to provide a verbal overview.

- DfE consultation had taken place over the previous eight weeks regarding the removal of the School Improvement Monitoring and Brokerage Grant – outcome was the decision to remove the Grant.
- Phased removal – Grant would be reduced by 50% in 2022/23 and removed completely in 2023/24.

SEND Interim Enhanced Service Manager, Charmaine Tarring left the meeting at 2.35pm

- Members' attention drawn to the historical use of the Grant by the LA – wider ranging than the statutory functions. Used to support schools in most need and also to support Good/Outstanding schools to maintain or further improve.
- Functions via Consortia models throughout the Borough.
- Use of the Grant for such school improvement support had proved successful – borne out through recent Ofsted outcomes.

- Monetary terms – 50% reduction in 2022/23 equated to a £178,000 shortfall.
- Funding would allow current support offer for maintained sector to the end of the current 2021/22 academic year.
- Any de-delegation request would not be for full Grant amount, but likely spend of £100,000.

Mrs Pealing invited Mr Meehan to share modelling data. Mr Meehan shared the data on screen and provided a verbal overview.

- Modelling of £100,000 de-delegation – necessary to produce at pace due to the DfE consultation outcome.
- Equated to £3.29 per pupil in value.
- Example of one form entry primary – cost of £689.88.
- Example of large secondary – cost of £4,211.
- Average primary cost - £816.
- Average secondary cost - £3,473.
- Offer for the document to be circulated after meeting.

Mrs Pealing advised that the deadline for the approved budget submission was the following day. The ideal scenario would be to defer the decision on de-delegation until the end of the academic year, however, that would not be possible. Members' desire to communicate and consult with groups was acknowledged. However, the timescales had been extremely tight due to the timing of the DfE consultation.

Question: Does the decision only apply to maintained schools and not academies?

Answer: Yes. However, academies are also invited to opt in and contribute to the pot. The contributions would be double that of maintained schools in 2022/23, then the same going forward. A standard school improvement support offer and menu of additional support to be bought into needs to be devised.

Cabinet Member for CYP, Cllr Jenny Bullen left the meeting at 2.45pm.

Question: If the amount is included in the budget submission, how easy would it be to remove the de-delegation if schools do not support?

Answer: (AM) The ESFA have been asked for clarification on this matter and other issues relating to timescales.

Members **approved** the proposal to include £100,000 de-delegation in the budget submission to provide flexibility for the current year. Member consultation with consortia, etc, would take place regarding the need going forward with the opportunity for feedback to the Board.

ACTION: Assistant Director, Cath Pealing and Service Lead, Emlyn Wright to provide detailed supporting information for members to share with the system as appropriate.

8. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of AOB for discussion.

9. FUTURE MEETING DATES

- Monday 24th January 2022 at 11am – High Needs Subgroup (virtual - MS Teams)
- 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 3pm.*

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