

**Meeting of the Schools Forum**  
**Held on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2025 at 1.30pm**  
**via MS Teams Digital Platform**

**MINUTES**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>Organisation - School Members</b>	<b>Attended</b>
Rachel Lewis	Hindley Sure Start Nursery	Yes
Louise Curran	Rowan Tree Primary	Yes
Anne Isherwood	Three Towers Alternative Provision Academy	No
Tracy Mingaud-Cunningham	Primary Governor	Yes
Adrian Hardy	Secondary Governor	Yes
Gary Hayes	Orrell St James Primary	Yes
Ian McDermott	Atherton Sacred Heart	Yes
Julie Hassan	St Oswald's Catholic Primary	Yes
Matthew Boyle	Leigh St Thomas CE Primary School	Yes
Lisa Hobden	St Patrick's Catholic Primary School	Yes
Jude Norman	Outwood Academy	Yes
Andy McGlown	St. Peters RC High School	Yes
Martin Wood	The Deanery High School	No
Paul Davies	Fred Longworth High School	No
	<b>Organisation - Non School Members</b>	
Sue Morris	Care Love Learn Childcare Limited	Yes
Simon Lett	Winstanley College	Yes
Max Atkins	Wigan NEU	Yes
Need nominated member	Diocesan Representative	
	<b>Organisation- Nominated observers</b>	
Cllr Dane Anderton	Cabinet Member	Apologies
Chris Nestor	NEU	Yes
Mike Wilkinson	Wigan NASUWT	Yes
Karen Lewis	GMB	Yes
	<b>Organisation - In Attendance</b>	
Mark Rotheram (KR)	Wigan Council Finance – Strategic Finance Manager	Yes
Kirsten Reid (KR)	Wigan Council Finance – Group Finance Manager (Schools)	Yes
Cath Pealing (CP)	Assistant Service Director, Education	Yes
Jo Sullivan	Clerk to the Forum, Wigan Council Governor Services	Yes
Kellie Williams	Service Lead - SEND	Yes

**Quorum: 40% (8 of the 18 current School/Non-School Members)**

## 1. Election of Schools Forum Chair and Vice Chair

Nominations had been received in advance of the meeting:

**Chair nomination/s:** Adrian Hardy

**Vice Chair nomination/s:** Gary Hayes

Mr Hardy and Mr Hayes accepted the nominations.

Mr Hardy was **elected** as Schools Forum Chair for 2025/26.

Mr Hayes was **elected** as Schools Forum Vice Chair for 2025/26.

As this is the first meeting of the year and there are new representatives on the Forum, the Chair emphasised that their role is to circulate information to their respective groups and get feedback for our meetings. Members are free to circulate the agenda items in advance if this enables them to get a constructive dialogue underway.

## 2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Dane Anderton.

## 3. Agreement of Any Other Urgent Business to Be Added to the Agenda

The following business was raised for discussion:

- Meeting times

## 4. Previous Minutes

Members **confirmed** that the minutes from the Forum meeting held on **26<sup>th</sup> June 2025** were a correct record.

## 5. Central Supplementary Funding 2025/26

Members had received an **update** on the central supplementary funding approved for 2025/26 (which will be paid from centrally retained budgets) in advance of the meeting.

KR/MR highlighted:

- Details on how we quantify the growth funding for schools in the report.
- Growth funding is sourced from the Schools Block and set aside for maintained schools and academies before the schools' allocations for the year are calculated. Contingency funding is sourced from the maintained schools using de-delegated funds. This limits schools who were able to access and excluded academies.
- Guidance used was based on census and pupil numbers.
- Used for exceptional and unforeseen costs, financial difficulties and schools closing.
- Allocation £0.384m in line with Forum agreement in January 2025. £0.299m contingency.

- Value of bids significantly exceeded funds available, and we distributed an additional £775,000 (appendix 1 provided further details – KR shared bids data on screen).
- Both budgets were already over committed by £90,158.

**Q.** A school had been allocated £26,000 but no bid had been submitted. Could you explain why?

**A.** Thus had been due to a late entry from the Admissions Team.

*Chris Nestor (NEU) joined at 1:45pm.*

**Q.** Bid for £25k, allocated £29,082?

**A.** Secondary school asked for support for deficit support and paid them the value of the deficit which resulted in more money (timing issue).

**Q.** How would we cover the overspend?

**A.** There was had been some underspend retained on funds which would offset in the first instance. If not, it would need to come out of reserves which was currently supporting the wider deficit.

## 6. High Needs Block Report 2025/26

Members had received the projection of the 2025/26 High Needs Block out-turn position in advance of the meeting and **noted** the reduction in funding since the budget was approved in January.

MR talked through report:

- Since the agreement of the proposed High Needs Budget at Schools Forum on the 16/01/25 we have been notified that our High Needs allocation for 25/26 has reduced by £0.503m to a revised figure of £54,625,502. As such the High Needs Budget has had to be revised accordingly. The report also details the position of the high needs block as at the 31 August 2025 and sets out the estimated out-turn forecast based on the current spending and funds allocated by DfE, with a £31.2m overspend.
- It was of great concern that the projected spend continued with a significant upwards trajectory.
- The Council has so far managed the deficit cash position as a result of this overall DSG deficit position through utilising internal cash balances. However, the Council will need to borrow this financial year, and this will result in borrowing costs specifically attributed to the DSG position.
- The overspend could have been even greater without interventions.
- The DSG Management plan has been shared with a previous meeting of Schools Forum and the High Needs Subgroup. A summary of developments, since this was last reported to Forum in May 2025, are contained in Section 4 of this report, demonstrating that the overspend position would have been even greater without these interventions. In June 2025 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government announced a further extension of the statutory override to 31/03/2028, as part of a phased approach to SEND system reform. The DSG Statutory override allows Councils to manage their DSG deficits without breaching their statutory duty to maintain a balanced budget. At the current trajectory it is clear that the overall DSG deficit position by the 31/03/2028 would present a real financial sustainability challenge for the Council.

- Disproportionate funding ceased with effect from the 1 April 2025. This has achieved a recurrent saving of £350k.

Schools Forum noted the adjustments made to the original budget and reflected on the severe financial position facing the High Needs Block and committed to fully supporting the future formation of a High Needs working group.

CP – membership of high needs block group needs wider representation, and schools need to take more ownership of the high needs block plan.

Members were not shocked by the information presented and appreciated it was a team effort; however, it was equally if not harder for schools. Schools were being challenged to do more with less and it was challenging all around.

A Member commented that from an EYFS point of view, there were a number of parents really struggling who had transitioned to primary schools whose children could not attend for full hours as well as some needs not being met. Yet these children had been in nursery settings for 30 hours with little or no financial support. EYFS had been asked to meet the needs of these children with no additional support. This questioned why EYFS cope with children could if primary schools could not for more than 2 hours a day.

**Q.** What was the pupil teacher ratio in nursery?

**A.** 1 to 13 in maintained, 1 to 8 in a private setting. Younger children need a lot more adult support. The ratio was one teacher to 60 children with teaching assistant support.

Members agreed that ultimately the issue is communication. It was about addressing these issues together. Parents were dissatisfied with provision and schools were persistently dealing with complaints from parents.

Rachel Lewis was invited to join the high needs working group. Lisa Hobden volunteered to join the group.

Some of the issues were parental perception and pressure from parents wanting an EHCP as they want their child to have 1:1 support when school could meet some of their needs.

A Member commented that the situation was not unique to Wigan, and we were trying to be creative in the short term. We were hopeful of a more radical solution in the future. If we focus on plugging financial issues, we potentially create more issues for some schools where classes are made bigger and have staffing issues. We need to look at the whole system and the impact of any decisions we make.

CP agreed to share details of the high needs working group and ask for volunteers. We have to be realistic as what comes out in next budget will not be a ready set go for next year. We had a number of strategies in the future, but most would not be implemented until 12 to 18 months' time.

CP informed the Forum that for the last 10 years, schools have made a £4k permanent exclusion contribution. This had been challenged by a number of secondary Heads. Any change would potentially affect the top slice budget. This would need to be continued for this academic year, acknowledging that some Heads did not feel informed, and would be reviewed next year.

Member comment – WASCL had had a brief conversation and gathered feedback. This may need to happen across schools for this contribution. Legally Academy Trusts do not have to pay the contribution. CP felt it was morally unfair that some schools did not contribute.

Member comment – if a school or Trust decides to go down that route it throws into question the whole ethos of collaboration that we have built as a Council.

Member comment – some Trusts were operating across more than one Council.

Member comment – as a Governor I would be disappointed if a Headteacher said they would not be paying the contribution.

ACTION – Members were asked to put their names forward to attend a High Needs Block task group meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> November, at 13.00pm, format to be agreed (Teams or in person).

## **7. Forum Membership (constitution review attached)**

Members **agreed** the Forum Constitution and Membership for 2025-2027.

***ACTION – Clerk to write to academies to request nominations for representation.***

## **8. Any Other Urgent Business**

### Meeting dates

Members **agreed** to a time to change to 11:00am for future meetings.

## **9. Future Meeting Dates**

- Autumn 2 – Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2025 at 1.30pm
- HNB 5<sup>th</sup> November at 1pm to 2:30pm via Teams

The meeting closed at 2:23pm.

### **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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