

Meeting of the Schools Forum
Tuesday 26th November 2013 at 1.30 p.m. at The Investment Centre, Wigan

Members: A Hardy (Chair), P Dahlstrom, G Lloyd, G Hayes, L Fox, D. Wood, J Shanahan, R Halford, K. Pilkington, R Lewis, T Frost, P McGhee and A Wells.

LA Officers:

A. Goldsmith (Director, Children and Families)
K. Nelson (Head of Education Services)
M Rotheram (Strategic Finance Manager)
C. Myers (Group Finance Manager)
A. Taylor (Assistant Director, Resources)
F. Gore (Clerk)

Observers: T. Warren (Liverpool Archdiocese)
M. Atkins (N.U.T.)

1. Apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence were received from S. Darbyshire, D. Donaldson, V Birchall and S. Wilson.

2. Items for inclusion under AOB -

- **Pupil Referral Units – Premises Costs**

3. Minutes

It was agreed: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd October 2013 be approved as a true and correct record.

Matters Arising from the Minutes

3.1 Early Retirement/Redundancy Costs (Minute 8 refers).

Mr Rotheram reported that through the new funding formula there could not be any new commitments or increases to centrally funded termination of employment costs. Given that in 2012/13 there had been no centrally held provision for this, Wigan could not now set aside a provision as centrally retained expenditure within the new funding formula.

Section 37 of the Education Act 2002 stated that the default position was that premature retirement costs must be charged to the school's delegated budget, whilst redundancy costs must be charged to the Local Authority's budget. However there were situations in which exceptions to the default position could be taken and these would be consistently applied as per previous requests.

It was agreed: That the report be accepted.

4. Minutes of the meeting of the Schools Forum Primary Schools Representatives Group

It was agreed: That the minutes of the meeting of the above mentioned Group held on 17th October 2013 be received.

5. School Funding Formula 2014-15 –Update:

Further to Minute 7 of the last meeting the Forum received a report (circulated prior to the meeting) informing members that the draft pro-forma on the Wigan's proposed School Funding Formula 2014-15 had been returned to the Education Funding Agency. The Agency had subsequently confirmed that the submission appeared to meet the required criteria. A summary of the pro-forma was appended to the report.

As part of the review by the DFE of the 2013-14 Funding Formula further consideration had been given to the prior attainment measure used for secondary aged pupils which had significantly increased the number of eligible pupils to be funded. Mr Rotheram reminded members of the decision by the Forum to retain a prior attainment figure of £2,743 per secondary aged pupil, rather than maintain the same overall level of funding as for 2013/14. However the vast majority of other Authorities had taken the opposite approach and retained the same overall budget rather than the rate, which meant that Wigan's proposed rate of £2,743 per pupil was the 4th highest in the country.

Following on from this, concern had been raised that by having such an outlier rate for prior attainment could have implications if the National Funding Formula was allocated on an average national rate. As such a revised option was discussed reducing the amount per pupil to £1,908 which aimed to target resources to those in greatest need whilst recognising current and possible future national funding levels for prior attainment.

The report identified concerns raised by a number of Local Authorities and other groups at the potential within the primary sector for the new assessment criteria for prior attainment not to target the funding in the most effective way. Accordingly the DFE was now looking at the possibility of allowing Authorities to weight the new attainment cohort in the primary sector differently from the existing cohort.

The DFE had also acknowledged the concerns expressed by Local Authorities at the limitations of the formula factors in allowing them to target funding for those pupils with high level SEN or to schools which attracted a significant number of high needs SEN pupils. Revisions would be introduced in 2015-16 to address that issue and interim arrangements had been made to give Local Authorities increased discretion in the use of the High Needs Block.

It was agreed: (1) That the report be accepted and the secondary sector representatives be provided with funding models for prior attainment based on the allocation of £1,908, £1,126 and a suitable rate in between per secondary aged pupil.

(2) That the secondary sector representatives be asked to consult secondary Headteachers in the Borough on the above mentioned funding models and a recommendation on a preferred option be given to the Director for Children and Families for report to Cabinet.

- (3) That the final recommended School Funding Formula 2014-15 as agreed by Cabinet and submitted to the Education Funding Agency be reported to the next meeting of the Forum.

6. Review of School Cash Advances Policy

The Forum received a report (circulated prior to the meeting) on ways in which the security of school balances could be improved. This included a review of the current cash advances policy, including the termly percentage advanced to schools and recommendations on how to best manage cash balances to minimise risk.

Mr Taylor presented the report and explained the current arrangements and recommended changes to help achieve the desired aims identified above. He outlined the impact on schools, including a requirement that all cash held by a school would need to be transferred to a single current account.

Members asked a number of questions concerning the security of the cash sums held by the Authority and the ability of schools to gain immediate access to the balances they held.

It was agreed: That the proposed revisions now reported be approved and accordingly;

- (a) school bank account balances be “reckoned” in the Council’s overall daily Treasury Management function; and
- (b) from 2014-15 the annual net cheque book allocation be paid on the monthly percentage basis set out in the report.

7. Primary Sector Representation:

Mr Gore reported that under the present constitution there was provision for one academy school representative on the Forum (that being Mr R. Halford, Hawkley Hall High School). However following a change of status at her school one of the current primary school representatives (Sue Darbyshire, Headteacher at Platt Bridge Community School) was now the Headteacher of an academy.

He also reported that Mrs M. Kearsley (former Headteacher St Mary and St John RC Primary Wigan) had now left the Authority.

Members considered the present constitution of the Forum and were reminded that under The Schools Forums (England) Regulations 2012 primary schools, secondary schools and Academies must be broadly proportionately represented on the Forum, having regard to the total number of pupils registered at them. Members were informed that the current constitution met that requirement.

Members were keen to ensure that primary sector representation reflected all areas of the Borough and if possible should be linked to the 5 primary localities.

It was agreed: That the Primary Heads Executive be asked to agree two replacement representatives arising from the vacancies reported above and the Executive be asked to seek nominations from all localities as appropriate.

8. Any Other Business:

8.1 Pupil Referral Units – Premises Costs

Mrs Nelson reported that the PRU Management Committee, which was responsible for the closure of the current PRU provision and for taking forward the arrangements to establish an academy trust to manage future provision, had identified the need for capital investment in the designated site for the Secondary Sector PRU.

Mrs Nelson reminded members that the Forum had previously agreed that an under spend on the Centrally Retained element of the DSG of approx. £1.38M in 2012-13 would be distributed to schools on a per pupil basis. However a request had subsequently been made to utilize a proportion of this to address school building issues, which could include the new PRU arrangements. She reminded members that the PRUs operated for the benefit of all schools in the Borough and asked that consideration now be given to that money being used to meet the cost of the necessary building work.

Members asked a range of questions relating to the potential cost of the work required at the designated site; the potential for the future academy to access alternative funding sources; the existing and potential demands on the Council's Capital Maintenance Fund; the demands on the funds available from other schools and the types of projects that would be given priority if capital monies were available; and the principles to be adopted in the future for the re-allocation of funds should there be under spends in the DSG.

Mrs Nelson recognised the high level of demand from schools on the limited capital funding available and the competing demands for funding. A detailed condition survey was required in order to determine the scale of investment needed and the PRU Management Committee would consider this matter carefully before proceeding. If funding was needed the application would be assessed against the agreed criteria that established the priority projects to be funded from the Council's Capital Maintenance Fund.

Members were also informed that because the Academy Trust had not yet been established there was no opportunity to seek funding from academy capital building fund, which was already significantly oversubscribed. Also under Government directive any new school established (including a PRU) had now to be an academy (which could include Free School status).

It was agreed: (1) That a more detailed report be submitted to a future meeting on the capital resources needed to establish the Secondary PRU at the designated site.

(2) That in addition to (1) above information be presented to the Forum on where the above mentioned project would lie within the priority list of schemes to be funded through the Council's Capital Maintenance Fund.

9 Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 14 January 2014 at 1.30 p.m. at Progress House, Westwood, Wigan (members to note venue).

It being the last meeting before the Christmas holiday period the Chair wished everyone a happy and prosperous Christmas and New Year.

meeting closed at 2.40 p.m.