

Meeting of the Schools Forum
Thursday 13 March 2014 at 1.30 p.m. at The Investment Centre Wigan

Members: A Hardy (Chair), P Dahlstrom, J. Seddon, F. Quinlivan, D. Donaldson, V. Birchall, G Lloyd, G Hayes, L Fox, D. Wood, J Shanahan, R Halford, J. Holland and A Wells.

LA Officers:

A. Goldsmith (Director, Children and Families)
M Rotheram (Strategic Finance Manager)
C. Myers (Group Finance Manager)
C. Pealing (Service Manager - Education Improvement and Support)
F. Gore (Clerk)

Observers: M . Atkins (NUT)
C. Gore (UNISON)

1. Apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence were received from K. Pilkington, A. Isherwood, R Lewis, P McGhee and S. Wilson, T. Warren and Cllr S. Loudon.

2. Welcome to New Members:

The Chair on behalf of the Forum expressed a warm welcome to Janet Seddon (Primary School representative) Fiona Quinlivan (Primary School representative) John Holland (Governor representative) and Carl Gore (UNISON) who were attending their first meeting of the Forum.

The Chair also expressed his thanks to Tom Frost (former Governor representative) and Stuart Fenton (former UNISON representative) for their services to the Forum.

3. Items for inclusion under AOB -

- **Future Use of Children Looked After (CLA) Pupil premium Plus.**
- **Rewards and Attendance Scheme for Teachers.**

4. Minutes

It was agreed: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2014 be approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising from the Minutes

None.

5. School Funding Formula (SFF) 2014-15 Update:

Further to Minute 4 of the last meeting Mr Rotheram presented a report (circulated) confirming that following submission of the SFF Pro-forma the Education Funding Agency had confirmed it met the necessary criteria. Accordingly maintained schools had been notified of their 2014-

15 budgets by the deadline date of 28 February. As yet no confirmation had been received with regard to the High Needs Block and therefore the final Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2014-15 had not yet been confirmed. Mr Rotheram reported as follows:

A. Schools Block:

Appendix A to the report gave a comparison of allocations via the Schools Block for 2014-15 and comparative figures for 2013-14.. This showed an overall reduction in the pre-recoupment DSG of £323,411, mainly due to reduced pupil numbers.

Appendix B to the report gave details of Schools Block Funding for each school for 2014-15, including adjustments to reflect the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG). The MFG would ensure any reduction in individual school budgets would not exceed 1.5%. The de-delegated budget figures, detailed in the appendices, did not include any top-up from the High Needs Block.

Further to the sign-off of the SFF Pro-forma the EFA had notified Authorities that on a national level the data on secondary prior attainment now included teacher assessment scores in English reading as well as English writing and to in order ensure Local Authorities were fully compliant with the current regulations a general disapplication to this regulation would be made.

Any school wishing to access transitional contingency funding would be required to submit a business case to the Assistant Director Education who would consider a range of factors in determining the applications.

As part of the return to the EFA the Authority had been required to detail the formula agreed with schools to distribute any additional funding (other than top-up funding) from the High Needs Budget, outside the main funding formula. Details of the initial qualifying criteria were reported and members were reminded that any allocations required the approval of the Assistant Director Education and would be reported to the Forum on an annual basis.

It was possible that due to delays the National Funding Formula would not be in place for April 2015 as originally planned.

Members asked the following questions and officers responded as shown:

Q how did Wigan compare in relation to other Authorities with regard to prior attainment allocations?

A final allocations had not been received therefore it was impossible to assess the national picture. The EFA had issued an indicative 2015/16 minimum funding level for secondary prior attainment of £1,961. Wigan's figure for 2014/15 stood at £1,288 (compared to £2,744 in 2013-14)

Q what were the implications of this for Wigan?

A that could only be fully assessed when the final allocations were known at local and national level.

Q could the underspend from 2013-14 be used to support prior attainment allocations?

A there was a projected underspend of £1.3M of which £600,000 had been earmarked for transitional relief; it was now unlikely there would be a call on the underspend to fund any shortfall in Early Years or High Needs. However the Local Authority was now facing a potential significant call on its budget to fund redundancies in schools arising as a consequence of reduced pupil numbers.

Q it had been understood that redundancy costs would have to be charged to the LA budget (minute 3.1 of November 2013 refers)?

A there were situations in which exceptions to the default position could be taken and the level of demand on the LA in order for schools to make the required staff reductions in the timescale required would represent such an exceptional circumstance.

Q how would schools be invited to bid for transitional relief?

A a pro-forma would be issued shortly and it could be that termly deadlines were set, an agreed process would be reported to schools to ensure equitable arrangements were in place.

B. High Needs Block;

The outcome of the planned places submission was still awaited; when known the budget allocations for special schools and resourced provision would be finalised. An academy order would be issued by the DFE for the Pupil Referral Unit and the 2014-15 budget would be finalised by 31st March 2014.

C. Early Years Block;

There was a projected underspend on the Early Years Block of £90,000 (above any underspend on the trajectory funding required to be carried forward to 2014-15).

Appendix C to the report gave the MFG calculation for Nursery Units and based on the January 2014 census data the budget requirement for the Early years Block for 2014-15 had identified additional funding of £176,000. However there remained a funding gap of £30,00 which would be met from under spends in the Early years Block in 2013-14.

A member reported that anomalies had been identified with regard to MFG arrangements for academies and further work was on-going to identify the reasons for this.

It was agreed: That the report be accepted.

6. Charging Policy and Remissions Policy:

Mrs Goldsmith presented a report (circulated) informing members that the DFE had issued advice on proposed changes to the current Charging and Remissions Policies. A copy of the advice from the DFE was also circulated in which it was recommended that two separate policies be established by schools.

The effect of the changes were as follows:

- No charge could be made for training for members of the school workforce.
- A charge could be made for vocal or instrumental tuition provided individually or to a group of two or more pupils if the tuition is provided at the request of a pupil's parents.
- No charge could be made for a Looked After child in respect of music tuition or if the teaching is either an essential part of the national curriculum or is provided under the first access to the Key Stage 2 Instrumental and Vocal Tuition Programme.
- There had been a lifting on the prohibition on schools charging for early years provision in limited circumstances.
- An additional paragraph had been added in respect of voluntary contributions.
- A separate Remissions Policy had been created and the information has been expanded upon.

A. Charging policy

A recommended Charging Policy was circulated which, subject to approval, would be recommended to schools for adoption. The main changes from previous arrangements were that::

- Schools could choose their own charging rate per hour/session however the rate must be reasonable and in line with the actual costs.
- Where parents paid for early years provision, it was advised that schools entered into an agreement with the family to ensure all costs were transparent. Such agreements should last until the child reached compulsory school age or was admitted to reception class.

Admissions:

- school's must ensure that children entitled to free early years provision took priority over children wishing to pay for a place.
- if a school had vacant places, schools could charge for early years provision in the following circumstances:
 - a. if the child was classed as a rising three (but was not eligible for two year old funding)
 - b. If the child wanted to access more hours than the 15 hours per week free entitlement.

(Note: 'rising threes' are children who are registered pupils at a school and have not reached the age of three, but will do so before the end of their first term at school. Children who are rising threes may count as three- year –olds for the purpose of registration and provision for children of this age does not require registration where it is made directly by a school)

It was agreed: That the model Charging Policy be endorsed.

B. Remissions Policy

A recommended Remissions Policy was circulated which, subject to approval, would be recommended to schools for adoption. The main changes were that a separate Remissions Policy had now been created as it was previously included in the Charging Policy. The information had been expanded on.

It was agreed: That the model Remissions Policy be endorsed.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 Future Use of Children Looked After (CLA) Pupil Premium Plus.

Mrs Pealing presented a report (circulated at the meeting) informing members that the DFE had recently published a document "Pupil Premium 2014-15: Conditions of Grant" explaining changes the way in which the Pupil Premium grant for Children Looked After (CLA) would be administered. From 1st April 2014 the Virtual School Head would be responsible for retaining, distributing and monitoring the Pupil Premium Plus for CLA. In addition all pupils in care for one day or more would be eligible for the premium and pupils would receive funding from the first day they entered care. Funding in 2014-15 would increase to £1,900 per pupil.

The report gave details of the number of CLA pupils of school age in Wigan and the number presently placed in Wigan schools. Current projections were that there would be a total grant of approx. £636,5000.

The report set out the current allocation and spending arrangements for CLA; the levels of attainment and progress achieved by CLA; the allocation of grant and spend on CLA; the current arrangements for the funding of the Virtual Schools Team (VST) and the identified gaps in both primary and secondary provision.

It was now proposed that from 1st April 2014 each school in the Borough receive £1,000 per CLA per annum and the residual amount of grant available for CLA be used to establish additional posts within the VST and enhance the current support services and contingency budget (details of which were given in full within the report).

Members asked the following questions and Mrs Pealing responded as shown:

Q what was the breakdown in CLA pupils by sector?

A approx 200 in primary and 135 in secondary education

Q what would happen if a CLA was only in school for a short period of time

A the grant would "follow" the pupil – based on the latest census data which was collected quarterly by the DFE; schools would receive a proportion of the grant aligned to the length of time the child was at the school. There would be an end of year reconciliation

Q how many children were in care at any one time

A the numbers varied but approx 335 children were in long term care.

Q how would this help address the issue of social workers seeking to direct schools in how the PP grant was spent on a CLA?

A it would allow the Virtual School Head to have a greater say in how the grant was used and would support the Headteacher in that decision making.

Q how would the VSH engage with schools in deciding how best to use the school's grant?

A The VST would advise schools based on the individual's Personal Education Plan.

Q what would the role of the HLTAs be, particularly given the likely demands on their time?

A that would depend on the individual needs of the CLA

Q where would accountability for outcomes lie, would it be the school of the VST?

A there was dual accountability, Ofsted would inspect schools and the LA to assess their effectiveness in delivering improved outcomes for CLA.

Members generally welcomed the proposal and asked that the LA provide schools with examples of good practice in supporting CLA. It was also believed this would help schools with low numbers of CLA or who only had CLA for short periods of time. It was also pointed out that the recruitment timetable would suggest there could be an underspend in 2014-15 and therefore there could be potential to recruit to additional posts?

A member identified the need to build in some long-term sustainability and Mrs Pealing suggested that whilst a 2 year programme would be advantageous in recruiting the right staff the LA would need to be mindful that any changes in the funding arrangements could mean the staffing costs falling solely to the LA.

It was agreed: That the proposal as now reported be approved.

7.2 Rewards and Recognition Scheme for Schools.

A member referred to discussions at WASCLE the previous day at the potential financial implications of the proposed staff rewards and recognition scheme. It had been agreed that the Authority consider the possibility of uncoupling the long-service element of the scheme from the attendance element.

It was agreed: That HR be asked to look at the above mentioned proposal and report to a future meeting of WASCLE.

8 Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 6 May 2014 at 1.30 p.m. at Progress House, Wigan (members to note venue).

meeting closed at 2.50 p.m.