

# WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday, 26 September 2023

**Present:** A Whiteley (Chair)

## Schools Group

E Ball	J McDonald
K Ball	J Merry
H Barker	S Ralph
L Jones	A Whiteley
K Kennedy	C Wynn Green
M Loftus	

## Non Schools Group

M Farrelly
J Proctor

## In Attendance

S Ashley	S Harper
J Backhouse	Cllr S Powell-Wilde
A Brown	S White
Cllr C Cooke	A Varughese

## 26 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from:

- Shaun Allen – Primary Governor.
- Geraldine Fraser – Academy rep.
- Mark Bellamy – Academy Rep.
- Nicky Prance – PVI Early Years Providers.
- Simon Davies - PVI Early Years Providers.
- Chris Mervyn - Primary Headteacher.
- Simon Goodwin - Secondary Headteacher.

## 27 ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

Nominations for the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Schools Forum for the academic year 2023-24 were invited.

Moved by Moira Loftus, seconded by Sue Ralph, Adrian Whiteley was nominated for the position of Chair. As no further nominations were received, Adrian Whiteley was elected Chair unopposed.

Moved by Adrian Whiteley, seconded by John McDonald, Moira Loftus was nominated for the position of Vice Chair. As no further nominations were received, Moira Loftus was elected Vice Chair unopposed.

**Resolved – That**

**Adrian Whiteley be appointed Chair of the Wirral Schools Forum for the academic year 2023-24.**

**Moira Loftus be appointed Vice-Chair of the Wirral Schools Forum for the academic year 2023-24.**

**28 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 JUNE 2023**

It was noted that Cllr Sue Powell-Wilde was attendance at the meeting of meeting of the Schools Forum on 13 June 2023. With that amendment, it was:

**Resolved – That the minutes be approved as an accurate record.**

**29 MATTERS ARISING**

No matters were raised.

**30 EARLY YEARS WORKING GROUP UPDATE**

Sarah Harper, Early Years Operations Manager, presented a report providing an update on the Early Year Working Group. Outcomes of the recent Early Years Working Group meeting on 14 September 2023 were highlighted, including a request from the National Day Nursery Association rep to the Local Authority to review the discretionary business rate relief policy. An update on the take up of early years free funding entitlements was also set out, which remained slightly below pre-pandemic levels but were steadily improving. It was noted that a project group had been established to implement the government's expansion to early years entitlement funding. The Forum were also provided statistics relating to childcare sufficiency across the borough, notified of changes to the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF), and provided figures relating to the Quality Training and Practice Improvement of Early years Providers, 97.16% of which were judged to be good or above.

Members of the Forum discussed the expansion of Early years entitlement funding and how increased capacity would be needed to meet the extended provision. The Assistant Director for Education clarified that work was being undertaken to assess the extra capacity needed to meet the changes through the project group and this would be reported at a future meeting of the Forum.

**Resolved – That the report be noted.**

**31 SCHOOL BALANCES CLAWBACK MECHANISM CONSULTATION**

James Backhouse, Assistant Director for Education, presented a report which recommended that the Schools Forum conducted a consultation in relation to the

clawback mechanism for Wirral Maintained Schools. It was outlined that schools balances position for Wirral maintained schools was historically high in comparison to pre-covid levels and that some schools on Wirral had significantly high revenue budgets. It was noted that many local authorities had a clawback mechanism in place to address excessive balances where they occurred, and that Department for Education (DFE) guidelines stated that it was good practice for primary schools to have a balance of 8%, and Secondary Schools 5%. The Assistant Director outlined that a consultation would run from Thursday 28th September until Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> November, and an overview of the questions to be asked were set out. It was noted that a full report would be brought to the November meeting of the Forum containing outcomes of the consultation, pending approval.

In the discussion, Members discussed potential reasons behind schools holding high revenue reserves and the work the Local authority was doing to gather information in these instances. In addition, Forum Members sought clarity on how any clawback mechanism would operate in practice. Members also queried the implications of Schools transferring to academies and the transfer of balances in such instances. The Assistant Director of Education set out a briefing note explaining the transfer of balances from maintained schools moving to academies would be shared.

**Resolved (6:0) – That**

- 1. The Report be noted; and**
- 2. The Consultation process as outlined in the report be agreed.**

**32 2023-24 NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA FOR SCHOOLS**

Asako Brown, Senior Finance Business Partner, presented a report which updated the Forum on the funding announcements for 2024-25 and the consultation process for mainstream Primary and Secondary schools. The report set out the provisional gross National Funding Formula (NFF) allocations for Wirral. Changes to the provisional allocations for the Schools Block, High Needs Block and Central Services Block were highlighted. It was noted that that the 2023-24 Mainstream Schools Additional grant (MSAG) was to be rolled into the schools NFF for 2024-25. In relation to the High Needs Block, it was noted that provisional funding identified an increase in gross funding of £2.56m(4.23%) which was a lower percentage uplift compared with the previous years.

**Resolved – That**

- 1. The report be noted**
- 2. The Schools Forum support the disapplication requests to be submitted to the Department for Education for:**
  - a. Birkenhead High School Academy (12:0:1 Abstention)**
  - b. Church Road (13:0)**

**33 GROWTH & FALLING ROLLS FUND**

Asako Brown, Senior Finance Business Partner, presented a report outlining options for the Falling Rolls and Growth Fund for 2023-24. The report recommend that the 2023-24 Falling Rolls and Growth Fund was carried forward to 2024-25 as the value was deemed too low to distribute to multiple schools as useful individual allocations. It was noted that this was permitted under the DfE Schools Forum Operational Guide.

**Resolved – That**

- 1. 2023-24 Falling Rolls and Growth Fund to be carried forward to 2024-25. (13:0).**
- 2. The Future Focus as set out in section 4.0 of the report be noted.**

**34 BUDGET MONITORING 2023-2024**

Asako Brown, Senior Finance Business Partner, presented a report which provided an overview of school budget variations for the current year 2023-24 schools budget. It was reported that overall the schools budget was forecast to overspend by £4.98m, which was attributed to pressure in the High Needs block. It was noted that the pressures within the High Needs Block reflected the national picture, and that the Local Authority was participating in the Department For Education Delivering Better Value programme.

**Resolved – That the financial position of the Schools Budget for 2023-24 be noted.**

**35 BUDGET MONITORING PACKAGE FOR SCHOOLS - VERBAL UPDATE**

Sue Ashley, Traded Services Manager, provided Forum Members with a verbal update on the Budget Monitoring package for schools. It was reported that the Local Authority were undertaking an exercise to consider the use of a new IT system in relation to School finances. Work was being carried out to identify software that would provide a suitable back-office system for the Local Authority, whilst allowing schools the ability to run scenarios that could highlight effects on budgets e.g. staffing changes.

It was noted that the Traded Services Manager was in contact with the procurement department on options. A future report would be provided to Forum on progress including costs for maintained schools, but it was affirmed that the Local Authority would be looking to absorb the costs of the initial set up of any new IT system.

**Resolved – That the update be noted.**

**36 DELIVERING BETTER VALUE - VERBAL UPDATE**

James Backhouse, Assistant Director for Education, provided Forum Members with a verbal update on the Local Authorities participation in the Department for Education (DfE) Delivering Better Value in SEND programme. It was reported that the programme aimed to support local authorities improve delivery of SEND services for

children and young people whilst working towards financial sustainability. The Local Authority began participation of Phase 1 of the programme in June 2023 with the goal of addressing the challenges found within the High Needs Block deficit. Phase 1, was a diagnostic stage delivered with Newton Europe and CIPFA, involving an evidence based and data-driven deep-dive to understand the reasons behind the challenges in the High Needs Block and to identify steps going forward. Next stages of the programme included implementation of outcomes of the diagnostic stage. It was noted that the programme would ultimately culminate in a Business application to the DfE to release grant funding, alongside the development of a deficit management plan with the DfE.

**Resolved - That the update be noted.**

**37 WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP**

Anju Varughese, Finance Business Partner provided an update on the membership of the Schools Forum. An overview of the current membership by group was outlined. It was noted that 3 vacancies remained for a Primary Governor, 16-19 representative and Academy representative.

Since the last update, The Forum had gained 5 New Members: Kate Ball (Headteacher representative), Luci Jones (Academy representative), Carys Wynn-Green (Academy representative), Michael Farrelly (Teacher representative), Holly Barker (Special Headteacher).

**Resolved – That**

- 1. The report be noted; and**
- 2. The membership split between primary, secondary and academy group be monitored closely as schools continue to convert to academy.**

**38 WORKPLAN**

Anju Varughese, Finance business partner, presented the Schools Forum Workplan for members consideration.

**Resolved – That the workplan be noted.**

**39 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Forum reaffirmed its preference to continue meeting Face to Face and requested that the Clerk would make arrangements for this going forward.