

# WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday, 21 November 2023

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	Whitely (Chair)	
	Councillors	Kennedy Mervyn S Davies Loftus Proctor Allen Waring	Prescott Ball Barker Ball Jones Farrelly Jackson
<u>Apologies</u>		Prance McDonald	Merry

## 40 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that he intended to move Item 9, Schools Admissions Update to the to go first and everything else to follow in the order already laid out in the agenda, Members were happy with this amendment to the running order.

Apologies had been received from:

- Sue Ralph - Primary Headteacher (substituted by Elaine McGunigall).
- Julie Merry - Primary Governor.
- John McDonald - Primary Headteacher.
- Nicky Prance - Non-Schools Group.
- Sue Powell-Wilde – Councillor.
- Kathy Hodson – Councillor.
- Chris Cooke – Councillor.

## 41 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2023

It was noted that Kate Ball – Primary Headteacher, had attended the meeting of 26 September 2023.

It was noted that recommendation 2b. of Minute 32 should read Church Drive and not Church Road.

With those amendments, it was:

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

42 **EDSENTIAL UPDATE**

Ian McGrady, Managing Director of Edsential, presented a report which summarised how Edsential was fulfilling its mission as a Community Interest Company, in partnership with schools over the past year. He gave rundown of the increased demand, and provision of the Holiday Activity and Food programme, with an additional 1523 children taking part in the programme in Summer 2023 compared to Winter 2022.

The report also showcased some service delivery highlights which included a programme that allowed young musicians to take part in the first live performances and the Edsential Conway Centre winning the Best Residential Experience 2023 at the School Travel Awards.

The report noted the difficulties that inflation had caused for Edsential in terms of the cost of food, staff, energy and transport and stated that despite the challenges faced, the company intended to try and keep any price increases as low as possible.

Members of the Forum queried if places for the Holiday Activity and Food programme had been commissioned for the following year and were informed that places were booked up until Christmas 2023, with applications able to be made for Spring 2024 after this.

Members discussed how they could support the programme and whether food costs per meal would be available to schools earlier than they were the previous year. They were informed that Edsential would provide any information on its services if required and assured Members that food costs would available sooner than last year, with the aim to share those costs with schools and the Forum by January 2024.

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

43 **DE-DELEGATED BUDGET FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SUPPORT AND BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT UPDATE**

James Backhouse, Assistant Director, Education, presented a report which gave an update on the services delivered from the Behaviour Support and School Improvement functions funded by de-delegated school budgets. The report noted the local authority's responsibility to have regard to the Schools Causing Concern statutory guidance and stated that the school improvement strategy for Wirral schools was fully embedded and further development was under way.

Members of the Forum requested an impact report at a future Forum meeting showing actions taken and the results of those actions. James Backhouse agreed that a feedback report would be brought to the Forum in due course.

**Resolved –**

**1. That the developments in relation to the strategic use of de-delegated budgets to support school improvement and behaviour support be noted; and**

**2. That a further update in relation to de-delegated budgets be received by the Schools Forum in six months' time.**

44 **DE-DELEGATED BUDGETS - CONTINGENCY, SPECIAL STAFF, AND INSURANCE COSTS**

Asako Brown, Senior Finance Business Partner, presented a report which summarised the current provision for contingency, special staff, and insurance costs that are funded by de-delegated budget from Wirral's maintained primary and secondary schools.

Members of the Forum discussed shared parental maternity leave and were informed that it was covered within the Special Staff Costs within the report. James Backhouse noted that he would seek clarity from Human Resources on the specifics of the scheme.

Members queried where funds would go if budgets were not spent at the end of the financial year and was informed that the money was part of the Delegated Schools Grant Funding and so was not ringfenced in any way.

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

45 **DE-DELEGATED BUDGETS - LIBRARY SERVICE**

James Backhouse, Assistant Director Education, presented a report that gave an update on the recent changes to the Schools' Library Service and the service plans for the future. The report noted that the Schools Library Service was a de-delegated service, mainly for Primary Schools, although other schools can access services on request. Academies had the opportunity to buy back into the service. The report gave further budget information, summarised the 2023-24 service priorities and gave staffing details. It was noted that 2024 would mark 50 years of Wirral Schools Library Service.

Members of the Forum requested that their thanks should be passed to Louise Rice and Catherine McNally of the Wirral School's Service and that some form of celebration should be made to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the service.

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

46 **NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA 2024-25 FUNDING UPDATE (DSG)**

Asako Brown, Senior Finance Business Partner, presented a report that provided the Forum with an update of the 2024-25 Schools Block funding following the government announcement of the changes in the DSG National Funding Formula in October 2023. The report sought the view of Members on how any spare capacity within the funding available should be allocated following the feedback from the consultation with schools on the 2024-25 funding. The outcome of the consultation and the decision of the Schools Forum would then be considered in the budget recommendations presented to the February 2024 meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee.

Members discussed their concerns at the lack of clarity of information, noting that planning services and providing details of staffing and placements was difficult when schools did not know the level of funding they would receive. Officers shared the frustration and stated that they would share any information they received from the Department for Education regarding funding as soon as they received it.

**Resolved –**

**1. That the report be noted.**

**2. That the proposal to include +0.5% Minimum Funding Guarantee within Wirral formula in 2024-25 be agreed (10:0 – 1 abstention).**

**3. That the proposal to a falling rolls/growth fund from any spare capacity within the 2024-25 school allocation be agreed (9:1 – 1 Abstention).**

47 **SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS UPDATE**

Sally Gibbs, PO School Admissions Place and Plan, presented a report providing a brief outline of Mainstream Admissions during the 2021-2022 admission year. The report noted that over 3,300 applications for primary school (Foundation 2) and 3,600 applications for secondary school (Year 7) were received for September 2022.

Members of the forum discussed the potential of increased costs and where the additional funding would come from, officers noted that the admissions budget would come from Central Support Funding and that there was an expected uplift into 2024-25 which would cover the increased costs.

Members queried whether a geographical analysis had taken place and what support was available to help parents apply for a school. Officers noted that geographical analysis had been undertaken in the past and it showed that the areas with the highest levels of deprivation had the highest frequency of non-application for children that still required a place at a school. The School Portal system shows who has applied and lists of children that have a nursery place but have not made an application for a primary school can be shared with the nurseries/schools and officers will call the schools a few days before the application deadline to make them aware that no applications have been received for specific children.

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

#### 48 **NEW BUDGET MONITORING SYSTEM FOR SCHOOLS**

Asako Brown, Senior Finance Business Partner, presented a report that set out the requirements under the Scheme for Financing Schools, to provide budget setting, budget monitoring and 3-year projections throughout the financial year. Headteachers had requested, through Wirral Schools Forum, to consider alternatives to the current process for budget monitoring to allow more control, particularly when considering the effects of staffing changes on budget projections.

The report noted that a business case for a new budget monitoring system for schools had been presented to the Change Advisory Board on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2023 with the aim for implementation of the new system by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

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

#### 49 **HIGH NEEDS WORKING GROUP - VERBAL UPDATE**

James Backhouse, Assistant Director Education, gave a verbal update on the High Needs Working Group.

#### 50 **CLAWBACK CONSULTATION UPDATE**

James Backhouse, Assistant Director Education, presented a report outlining the feedback to schools' forum in relation to the surplus clawback consultation that was conducted from 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023 until 9<sup>th</sup> November 2023 in relation to a clawback mechanism for Wirral Maintained Schools.

The report noted that on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2023, the Wirral Schools Forum approved that the consultation should take place to capture feedback in relation to the questions that were outlined in the report, it was outlined that the schools balances position for Wirral maintained schools was still historically high in comparison to pre-covid levels and that some schools on

Wirral had significantly high revenue budgets. Following the approval at schools' forum the consultation questions were circulated, and the report gave an overview of the responses. The consultation had received 13 responses from Wirral Schools.

It was noted that many other local authorities do have a clawback mechanism in place to address excessive balances where they occur. An excessive balance would be one that is higher than the Department of Education (DfE) good practice guidance. Wirral currently does not have a mechanism in place. DfE guidelines state it is good practice for primary, nursery and special schools to have a balance reserve of 8%, for secondary schools this would be 5%.

It was noted that only members of the Forum from maintained and special schools were eligible to vote on the recommendations in this report.

#### **Resolved –**

- 1. That the commencement of a clawback mechanism for Wirral Maintained Schools be agreed (6:2)**
- 2. That the time period that the clawback will be calculated over 3 years. (Note the options were: A. 4 years, B. 3 Years or C. 2 years. Votes were as follows: A=1 / B=4 / C=3)**
- 3. That the relevant forum members agreed to meet again regarding schools identified for the clawback mechanism.**

#### 51 **WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP**

James Backhouse, Assistant Director Education, presented a report describing the current representation of the Forum and membership changes. The report noted that there were 5 vacancies and 2 representatives whose term of office was due to end at the end of 2023.

James Backhouse noted that no nominations had been received for the 16-19 sector vacancy and would appreciate a nomination as soon as possible.

The Chair noted there was need to look at the maintained sector for representatives.

#### **Resolved –**

- 1. That the report be noted.**

**2. That it be noted that as schools continue to convert to academies, the membership split between primary, secondary and academy will need to be monitored closely.**

52 **WORKPLAN**

James Backhouse, Assistant Director Education, noted that he would like to book an additional meeting of the Forum in March 2024 and would look for a suitable Tuesday then.

**Resolved – That the Work Plan be noted.**

53 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chair requested that the next meeting of the Forum be held at an alternative location as the he felt that the Assembly Room in Birkenhead Town Hall was not suitable.

Kathryn Kennedy, Head Teacher of Ganneys Meadow Nursery School, volunteered the use of her school for the next meeting.