

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday, 30 June 2020

Present: Adrian Whiteley (Chair)

Schools Group

L Ayling	T Kelly
M Bellamy	E McGunigall (Deputy)
R Bridges	R Mahoney
K Brown	M Morris
J Bush	Cllr Norbury
G Fraser	D Spencer
C Hughes	J Weise
H Johnson	

Non-Schools Group

S Bennett	N Prance
S Davies	S Ralph
G Edwards	A Ryecroft
L Krimou (Deputy)	

In Attendance:

S Allen	T Ghosh
S Ashley	S Robinson
A Bellingham	S Talbot
C Fenlon	C Thomson
S Harvey	

Apologies:

L Davidson	E Morris
E Longbone	E Neal
N Lightwing	I Harris

Protocols of the Virtual meeting

- Remain on mute unless requested to speak
- Raise 'hand' to ask a question, or ask a question in the chat section
- Use Chat to vote as not everyone has the hand symbol.

667 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15TH JANUARY 2020**

The minutes from the meeting were accepted as a true record.

668 **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

669 EARLY YEARS UPDATE

Carol Fenlon updated Forum on the Early Years Working Group discussions, particularly in light of Covid19 response: -

- Government agreed 2,3 & 4 year old funding would continue to be paid, with payments being made earlier than usual.
- There has been a small number of double funding where key worker children had to move settings where original setting was closed.
- 68% of providers are now open, providing sufficient places for children.
- A Childcare Response Exceptional Circumstance Grant scheme has provided 60 settings with financial support.

The report also highlighted a number of ongoing items:-

- Vulnerable 2 year olds will be a priority for September as numbers have fallen during the summer term due to Covid19.
- A consultation is due in the autumn with proposals on early years rates for April 2021.
- Inclusive Practice Fund requests have been reduced and will not be paid in full if children have not been attending during the summer term.
- Changes are being made to the Transition process in light of Covid19 with a multi -agency approach to the process.

The Early Years team are still waiting for guidance on the summer holiday period and will consider how to manage funding available for vulnerable children during this time.

Resolved

Forum noted the report.

670 HIGH NEEDS - CLARE MOUNT SCHOOL PLACES

Tarun Ghosh advised the Forum of the request from Clare Mount Specialist Sports College to increase pupil numbers by 10 from September 2020. Numbers have continued to rise over the years and as the school is currently over its current admission numbers the 10 places will be permanent if agreed. There has been a shift in the profile of the school from mild to moderate learning difficulties to SEMH needs.

As part of the Budget Report in January 2020 resources were made available for 40 places. These were identified to support increased places in Special Schools during the financial year, instead of using the high needs contingency budget. The additional Clare Mount places will be taken from this resource. Special School places are generally taken up by need, but parental choice has been high for Clare Mount. Due to the increased capacity of the school a double

mobile will be added to the site. This is short term, but work has started to review of the capital estate for special schools in the long term.

Forum raised its concerns in relation to the ongoing affordability of the plan and asked for a clarification of the strategy. The plan should consider the balance between mainstream support & specialist school support. An alternative to additional places at special schools may be children going to independent special schools which are far more costly. Consideration also needs to be given to an affordable solution due to the DSG overspend highlighted in a later report.

Tarun thanked the headteacher, governors and staff of Clare Mount School for helping him to understand the school profile and the excellent service they provide.

Resolved

1. Forum Agreed an increase of 10 places for Clare Mount specialist Sports College from Sept 2020 to a total of 226 places
2. Forum agreed 226 base funding per place from September 2020 plus banding per pupil for Clare Mount
3. Forum agreed that the 10 additional places be included in the High Needs place change notification process in November 2020

671 **HIGH NEEDS - FOXFIELD PLACES**

Tarun Ghosh advised the Forum of the request from the LA to provide an additional 6 places (amended to 7) at Foxfield from September 2020, specifically for Year 7 pupils. Their numbers are increasing in the longer term as pupils increase from their feeder schools. This will require further consideration as the year 7 cohort moves through the school due to lack of places by 2022.

Meadowside has a similar profile of pupils, which has a small capacity at Meadowside. Where a school meets the needs of a child it is then that parental preference then comes into play. These pupils are the most vulnerable in Wirral with complex needs.

These places will be met from the resource of 40 places identified in the Clare Mount School paper above.

Tarun thanked the head teacher for providing an understanding of the profile of the children and the service the school provides to meet their needs.

Resolved

4. Forum agreed an increase of 7 places for Foxfield School from September 2020 to a total of 147 places.
5. Forum agreed 147 base funding per place from September 2020 plus banding per pupil for Foxfield.
6. Forum agreed that the 7 additional places be included in the High Needs place change notification process in November 2020.

672 SCHOOLS BUDGET OUTTURN 2019-20

Adrian Bellingham outlined the year end position for the 2019-20 Schools Budget which is still subject to audit and is therefore provisional. There is an overspend of £1.2m which is an improvement from the January prediction.

Main variances identified:-

- £5.639m underspend due to Bebington High conversion to academy, which is offset by a reduction in the DSG.
- £226k overspend due to increase of de-delegated maternity costs.
- £1.495m overspend in the high needs block due to an increase in the number and complexity of cases.
- Early Years underspend £499k due to the lower uptake of 3&4 year old than expected and an underspend of Disability Access Fund (DAF) requests.

DAF is to be spent on specific principles and it is proposed that a total of £114.3k is ringfenced from this and previous years underspend is ringfenced along with £67k 2019-20 early years activity costs not met until 2020-21 budget.

The remainder of the underspend for Early Years block offsets the overall year end DSG balance. Work is being done by the Early Years working group to improve uptake.

As the deficit of £1.2m for 2019-20 is less than 1% a recovery plan does not have to be formally submitted to the ESFA, but a recovery plan is required to show how the deficit will be recovered.

Resolved

1. Forum noted the report
2. Forum agreed the £245,305 DSG is ringfenced to DAF £178k & EY late charges £67k
3. Agreed High need working group is to meet before the next Forum meeting to discuss the Council's deficit recovery plan to be arranged by Tarun Ghosh (Head of SEN and Inclusion).

673 SCHOOL BUDGET 2020-21 UPDATE

Adrian Bellingham outlined the Schools Budget for 2020-21, which was agreed by Council in March 2020.

£1.7m has been re-allocated in respect of de-delegated budgets from schools. The growth and Falling rolls fund of £466k will be made available for allocation.

The in-year DSG surplus of £644k will be used to offset the High Needs deficit from 2019-20, so the DSG reserve is expected to be a deficit of £0.6m

Resolved

Forum noted the report

674 GROWTH AND FALLING ROLLS FUND 2020-21

Shaun Allen advised Forum members of the proposed criteria for the growth fund and falling rolls fund.

This fund came about because NNF elements were adopted for the Wirral Formula along with the maximum MFG of 1.84% and no schools were then capped to cover this cost. It was agreed that the remaining funds of £466k would be held in a Growth Fund and Falling Rolls Fund.

The proposed criteria of the funds were submitted to DfE as provisional in January and are detailed in Agenda item 8.

Due to regulation separate funds have been proposed as the LA are required to report on them separately. Where funds above the budgeted amount are required, this will offset against the overall DSG position. Where a fund underspends this may be carried forward to the following funding period.

Forum members questioned some of the proposed criteria, some of which needs to be checked against the regulation. The decision can be deferred to the September meeting so that Members can review the criteria with further data being brought to the September meeting.

Resolved

7. Forum noted the report.

8. Schools Forum agreed to defer a decision on the Growth Fund criteria to the September Meeting.

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675 SCHOOL BALANCES AS AT 31ST MARCH 2020 AND DEFICIT BUDGETS

Sue Ashley confirmed that the school balances as at 31st March 2020 were £7.9m as at 31st March 2019, a reduction of £750k since last year.

School budget projections continue to show a downward trend in school balances as costs continue to rise and uncertainty continues around grant funding and the added complication this year of Covid 19.

If no action is taken 63 schools indicate a deficit budget by March 2022. Headteachers and School Finance Staff continue to work together to reduce costs where possible.

A Forum member requested a review of the protected funding for nursery schools to ensure it is allocated appropriately to all nursery schools.

Forum members requested a report to be presented at Schools Forum in autumn term to highlight the financial impact of Covid-19 on school budgets.

Resolved

Forum noted the report and will continue to monitor school balances

676 **SCHOOLS FORUM REGULATION UPDATE**

This document was provided to show the change in regulation to enable virtual Schools Forum Meetings until March 2020-21. This was covered first on the agenda for clarity.

677 **WORKPLAN**

The workplan was provided for information.

The date and time of the next meeting is **Tuesday 29th September 2020**. This will be a virtual meeting unless restrictions on social distancing are lifted.

Suggested dates for future meetings

Tuesday 10th November 2020

Tuesday 19th January 2021 (dependent on APT return)

Tuesday 11th May 2021

Tuesday 29th June 2021

High Needs working Group – date to be arranged.

678 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.