

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday, 24 November 2020

Present: Adrian Whiteley (Chair)

Schools Group

L Ayling	T Kelly
M Bellamy	R Mahoney
J Bush	M Morris
L Davidson	Cllr Norbury
S Elliot	A Ramsden
G Fraser	D Spencer
S Goodwin	J Weise
H Johnson	

Non-Schools Group

S Bennett	A Ryecroft
S Ralph	N Prance

In Attendance:

S Ashley	J Levenson
C Brown	I McGrady
Cllr Clements	S Robinson
K Frost	C Thomson
T Ghosh	

Apologies: S Higginson E Morris
C Hughes K Takashima

692 **PROTOCOL FOR VIRTUAL MEETING**

- This is a public meeting
- The meeting is recorded for minute taking purposes only
- 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.

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693 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29TH SEPTEMBER 2020**

Item 7 Growth and Falling rolls Fund 2020-21 had an addition after the forum meeting as follows:-

Please Note: since the Forum meeting it has been confirmed that the falling rolls fund is available only for schools judged good or outstanding at their last Ofsted inspection.

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

694 **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

695 **ALTERNATIVE PROVISION UPDATE**

Jan Levenson briefed Forum on the progress of the alternative provision services since the closure of Emslie Morgan Academy. Key highlights of the report are

- Reduction of exclusions compared to previous 12 months (taking into consideration effects of Covid)
- Expansion of Schools commissioned offer. 3 new services started this year, with another due to start in January.
- Primary provision will increase with a pilot Wrap for yrs 4,5 & 6. Significant success stories reduced no of NEAT will be lower comparisons.
- Re-intergration of KS3 exclusions is 77%

There are a number of success stories from the Progress Schools pilot, reducing the number of NEAT pupils from previous years. Forum members expressed their thanks to Jan Levenson and recognised the success of the pilot.

Resolved

Forum noted the report

696 **EDSENTIAL CIC UPDATE**

Ian McGrady briefed the Forum on Edsential's activities during this difficult year. They received £1.8m grant funding from DfE for Pilot for Holiday Activity and Food Programme for Wirral, Cheshire West & Halton, working with 160 community groups to deliver the programme.

During this Covid period Edsential have transitioned & adapted all their services to continue supporting schools, through catering, cleaning, music and online

tuition. This included turning a Residential Centre in Cheshire into accommodation for emergency residential care for Wirral vulnerable children. Edsential's Residential centres have been closed since March and are unlikely to re-open until next Easter.

The effect of Covid-19 on Edsential has left them with a loss of £2m over this financial year, but they are confident this can be dealt with over a long period of time without affecting their day to day business.

Ian McGrady thanked all the schools for all their continued support over this difficult time.

Forum expressed its gratitude to Edsential staff for their work and support over this difficult time.

Resolved

Forum noted the report.

697 BUDGET MONITORING 2020-21 UPDATE

Christine Thomson updated Forum on the budget position and the updated variations since the last meeting. A net deficit of £1.4m is forecast due to pressures in the High Needs Budget, this includes the £600k underspend brought forward when the budget was set. The deficit from 2019-20 of £1.3m brings the overall expected DSG deficit £2.7m at the end of 2020-21 financial year. This is a slight improvement of £300k since the September meeting. A DSG Deficit Management Plan is currently being developed.

Budget variations are as follows: -

- Early Year budget is expected to balance, but due to Covid-19 the DfE have adjusted the funding mechanism, to ensure Early Years providers were not disadvantaged. There is no indication at present that the change in the funding mechanism will fully cover this cost.
- There are expected underspends on Early Years central budget, Schools Forum budget and insurances.
- Expected overspend of £1.9m, in the High Needs Budget, with all areas overspending due to high demand, except for Support for Sen due to staff vacancies.

Resolved

Forum noted the report

698 DSG DEFICIT MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Christine Thomson highlighted the high needs deficit this year of £1.4m, which if no action is taken will recur in future years. The DfE require LAs to produce a deficit plan within a 3-year period, although they will consider a 5-year plan.

Wirral's preference is to spread savings over the maximum period of 5 years, using the first 3 years to recover the in deficits. The DfE have provided a planning tool for LAs to complete. Once other LAs have completed the tool then benchmarking data will be available to compare with other LAs.

To date there have been a number of meetings with stakeholders to both review and contribute to the development of proposals. The 13 proposals in appendix 1 are to be reviewed, based on financial savings of 3, 5, 10 and 20%.

Appendix 2 shows the actual High Needs spend for the 2019-20 financial year.

Consideration needs to be given to the actions required to achieve these savings and what the impact would be to reduce spend.

Townfield base is currently having difficulties and there are concerns that cuts may cause closure. It was noted that this is a regional provision. Further information is going

Forum members confirmed that primary, secondary and special headteachers will issue statements to the Director for Children, Families & Schools concerning the 13 proposals in appendix 3.

The concerns of the Forum members are

- The proposals are currently financial based with percentage cuts
- Savings should come from the strategy and forward planning rather than financial needs.
- Each proposal needs to be analysed and reviewed based on the impact of funding to children
- Out of Brough spend continues to increase and consideration is required to shape Wirral special schools to meet the needs of those children, so they do not go out of borough.
- review how the central staff could be better used to provide support to schools at a lower cost.

The Premier Advisory Group carried out a review of High Needs Provision in Wirral. The proposals were presented to Council in December 2019. In consultation with elected members the Council made the decision not to take up the recommendations at that time due to insufficient consultation with a number of key stakeholders. Concerning the Kingsway proposal, it was felt that didn't take into account of additional needs of pupils. On the wider subject of high needs places in special and mainstream schools the council is in discussions & does intend to consult. The Leadership do recognise the challenge of high needs places in Wirral and meetings with senior colleagues have been set up to develop plans going forward. There were concerns about the pressing timeline if actions aren't taken up as soon as possible.

Schools Forum members recognised the urgency required to deal with this situation and if plans are delayed, savings in future years will be more hard hitting. It will be difficult to recommend a budget to committee in January while issues around the High Needs deficit remain unresolved.

Resolved

Forum noted the report

699 FUNDING FORMULA CONSULTATION OUTCOME

Christine Thomson updated Forum on the results of the Schools Funding Formula Consultation. The consultation asked schools to consider the level of Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) set at .5%, 1.25% & 2.5% and if any headroom was available what should it be used for.

The results of the consultation (30% response rate) was that 1.25% was most favourable with 53% of responses choosing this option. 55% of responders opted for a growth and/or falling rolls with any excess headroom funding. These recommendations will be considered at the February 2021 meeting of the Policy and Resources committee.

Resolved

- Forum noted the report
- Schools Forum agreed favourably with the proposal to include a +1.25% MFG within Wirral's funding formula for 2021-22 based on consultation feedback.
- Schools Forum agreed favourably to the proposal to allocate any spare capacity within the 2021-22 funding to a falling roll and/or a growth fund based on consultation feedback.

700 GROWTH AND FALLING ROLLS FUND

Christine Thomson provided Forum with an updated proposal of the growth and Falling Rolls Fund, which was put forward by Secondary Headteachers as follows:-

- The fund does not need to be separated into growth and falling roll, simply address issues around change in pupil population
- Allocations should be based on the past 3-year pupil number data and figures should be pupil numbers not percentages.
- Rationale should be based on helping schools in difficulty because of pupil number change, not other factors
- The Schools Forum should see the detail and the proposed allocation before agreeing spend and all spend should be allocated within the year if possible.

Based on information already provided 33 schools could benefit from the fund. The process put forward required schools to apply for the fund and to justify why they met the criteria, with LA officers reviewing the forms. After some discussion Forum Members agreed that the process should not be based on subjectivity, but if schools met the criteria funding would be allocated based on a purely mathematical basis.

Resolved

- Forum noted the report
- Forum agreed that the growth and falling rolls fund would be one fund, based on 3-year pupil number changes (not percentage growth or fall), with allocations being reported back to the January meeting before it is transferred to the benefitting schools.

701 SCHOOLS COST OF COVID-19 SURVEY

Sue Ashley updated Forum of the outcome of the survey of actual cost of Covid that Forum members requested. The survey that was sent to all Wirral schools including Academies is detailed in appendix 1.

There were 64 responses and the table 1 shows the split between school phases. Table 2 shows the total cost of £2.5m split into a variety of headings. The biggest cost to schools has been the loss of income, for such things as before /after school clubs & rental of sports fields etc. Table 3 identifies the income received so far for exceptional needs and furlough of staff. This is 14% of the overall expenditure.

Forum members requested that this information be shared with senior management of the Council and to be used to inform the DfE of the actual cost of Covid to schools.

resolved

Forum noted the report

702 FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY CHANGES APRIL 2020-21

Sue Ashley informed Forum members of some changes going forward to strengthen the transparency of financial arrangements in maintained schools in line with academies.

Some of the recommendations are already completed by Wirral schools, including providing 3 year projections.

New actions for schools are:-

- From 1st Jan 2021 schools must publish salaries over £100k on schools website
- Schools are to provide a link to the DfEs benchmarking website for schools instead of schools publishing their CFR data.
- By 31st March 2022 schools will be required append Related Party Transactions to the SFVS returns

Resolved
Forum noted the report

703 **SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS UPDATE**

Sue Ashley informed Schools Forum of the directed changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools, with amendments to section 2.3.4 - 3-year budget forecasts and 4.5.1 - Planning for deficit budgets. There was also an additional section 4.17 Fraud to be added to the scheme.

Resolved
Forum noted the report

Please note: it was identified after the meeting that the Fraud section was already incorporated into the Scheme in section 2.6.4 Financial Irregularities and Fraud, so did not need to be added as a new section.

704 **WORKPLAN**

The workplan was provided for information.

Tuesday 19th January 2021 (dependent on APT return)
Tuesday 11th May 2021
Tuesday 29th June 2021

705 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.