



## Wirral Schools Forum

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Tuesday, 11 May 2021</b>
<b>Time:</b>	<b>4.00 p.m.</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>on Microsoft Teams - Online</b>

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## AGENDA

### 1. PROTOCOL FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

- 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.

### 2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19TH JANUARY 2021 (Pages 1 - 8)

### 3. MATTERS ARISING

### 4. HOME EDUCATION SERVICE - REVIEW OF CHARGING POLICY (Pages 9 - 12)

### 5. EARLY YEARS WORKING GROUP UPDATE (Pages 13 - 18)

### 6. DE-DELEGATION - SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT / BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT (Pages 19 - 26)

### 7. DSG MANAGEMENT PLAN (Pages 27 - 42)

8. **SCHOOLS BUDGET PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2020-21 (Pages 43 - 50)**
9. **SCHOOLS BUDGET UPDATE 2021-22 (Pages 51 - 54)**
10. **SCHOOL BALANCES AS AT 31/03/2021 AND DEFICIT BUDGETS REVIEW (Pages 55 - 60)**
11. **CHANGE TO SCHOOLS FORUM OPERATIONAL AND GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE (Pages 61 - 90)**
12. **WORK PLAN (Pages 91 - 92)**
13. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

## WIRRAL SCHOOLS' FORUM

19<sup>th</sup> January 2021

### MINUTES

**Present:** Adrian Whiteley (Chair)

#### Schools Group

L Ayling	H Johnson
J Bush	J Merry
L Davidson	E Morris
S Elliot	M Morris
G Fraser	A Ramsden
S Goodwin	D Spencer
C Hughes	J Weise
E Johnson (substitute)	R Wood

#### Non-Schools Group

S Davies	A Rycroft
S Ralph	

#### In Attendance:

Y Allen	S Gibbs
S Ashley	C McNally
S Bellerby	S Prytherch
P Boyce	L Rice
C Fenlon	S Robinson
K Frost	A Snow
T Ghosh	C Thomson

#### **Apologies:**

M Bellamy	N Prance
Cllr Clements	K Takashima
I Harris	Cllr Usher
Cllr Norbury	A Waller

#### 1. Protocols of the Virtual meeting

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## **2. Minutes from the Meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

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

## **3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **4. Energy Update**

Andrew Snow updated Forum on the procurement of electricity and gas on behalf of schools through the Crown Commercial Service (CCS). A copy of the updated report has been uploaded on the Wirral Website and a copy will be sent out with the minutes.

Provision of Gas moved from Corona to Total Gas & Power in April 2020. Electricity will be transferred from British Gas to EDF on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021. The process of clearing issues started in the summer so should be a smoother transition for schools. If School don't transfer by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 the unit cost could increase by 56% rise. There will be a reduction in costs due to the changes in contracts.

The additional cost of purchasing electricity from renewable sources for 2021-22 to enable the council to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030 will be met by the Council's Climate Emergency Budget.

The Council will endeavour to apply for incentives corporately, including schools, where it is deemed practical.

### Resolved

Forum noted the report

## **5. Wirral Traded Services Update**

Stuart Bellerby provided updates on the Schools Traded Services for the 2020-21 Financial Year, highlighting 4 additional services that came on board. Most services have continued to provide support to schools though out the Covid pandemic.

Overall income for 2020-21 is just under £4m. 3 services have had a significant drop in Income, 1 due to a reduction in service due to schools moving to cashless system and 2 due to external competition.

Financial Analysis has been undertaken and most services are breaking even. Due to Commercial in Confidence and the sensitivity of providing this data in a public meeting a sub-group can be arranged to provide the information to Forum members.

Forum members highlighted their concerns of the effect Council savings would have on traded services provision to schools. As most services are breaking even the Council wouldn't make savings by reducing these services.

The Virtual Launch event is this Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> January and will be recorded for those who can't make it.

### Resolved

Forum noted the report.

## **6. Early Years Working Group**

Carol Fenlon briefed Forum on the discussions at the recent Early Years Working Group.

- All Early Years (EY) central staffing posts have now been filled.
- Covid-19 has disrupted uptake of places, although recovery in autumn term of 2,3 &4 yr olds is positive and in line with national figures. Only extended hours have a slower recovery rate. Public Health have been a key partner in providing reassurances to the sector with regular updates. To ensure they are working within safe Covid practices.
- DfE enabled LA's to pay Autumn Term 2020 allocations at Autumn 2019 levels where this funding was higher.
- There are headcount issues for Spring Term 2020 as early years providers are open, but numbers are lower than expected due to parents keeping children at home. New DfE guidance has been issued since the report was published which allows providers include pupils not in attendance as long as there is an available place and a signed agreement for the child.
- The EY SEND Team is now staffed to full capacity and continue to work with, schools, providers and families to ensure early identification of need. The Team are now responding to need where children have not been at a provision for some time.
- The EY SEND Team are providing training and support to upskill and enable practitioner in this area.

The Forum offered their support, including the offer to lobby on the Early Years behalf, during the difficult circumstances that Covid-19 has brought.

### Resolved

Forum noted the report

## **7. Library Services Update**

Catherine McNally updated Forum on the Schools' Library Service (SLS) provided mainly to primary schools through de-delegation. They are now part of Wirral Traded Services and offer additional chargeable services to secondary schools, academy schools and a premium service to primary schools. The SLS has continued to provide services during Covid-19, by changing their service provision, such as a Click & Collect service and provision of books to families over the summer holidays whilst public libraries remained closed.

### Resolved

Forum noted the report

## **8. Contingency, Special Staff Costs and Insurance**

Christine Thomson outlined the purpose and use of Contingency, Special Staff costs and Insurance budgets. These budgets are currently de-delegated.

## Resolved

Forum noted the report

### **9. Falling Rolls and Growth Fund 2020-21**

Christine Thomson provided the Forum with details of how the Falling Rolls and Growth Fund has been allocated based on criteria agreed at the November Forum Meeting. There were 2 adjustments required to ensure pupil numbers were consistent.

Appendix 1 identifies 23 schools receiving a share of the £466k funds and this will now be allocated before the end of the financial year. As the funds were allocated based on the process set out by Schools' Forum and is based on actual pupil numbers from a number of October census, there is no expectation that there will be any appeals on the allocations.

The falling rolls and growth fund criteria and DfE regulation will be reviewed at a future meeting if there is a fund in 2021-22.

The Chair thanked Christine Thomson for all the work she has done to provide this information.

## Resolved

- Forum noted the report and views from members

### **10. 2021-22 Schools Budget**

Christine Thomson outlined the Schools Budget for 2021-22 highlighting the following, budget changes for 2021-22

- £1m increase for pupil numbers on roll
- £7.8m increase to cover the increase in the per pupil value of the NFF elements and minimum per pupil funding .
- Increase in special school places due to continued increased demand.
- £10.3m is TPG & TPECG now incorporated into the DSG for mainstream and special schools.
- Early Years hourly rates paid to Local Authorities will increase by £0.08 for 2 year olds and £0.06 for 3&4 Year olds.
- A net increase of £2.5m in a number of High Need budget areas due to continued high demand.
- Increase in PFI affordability Gap £212k due to inflation will be met by the council.
- A 20% reduction of historic costs to combined budgets within the schools block will be offset by the increase in current costs in that block.
- There is estimated spare capacity of £2.7m, mainly from the high needs block, which is recommended to be a contribution to reserves to offset the current high needs expected deficit at the end of this financial year.
- Minimum levels of per pupil funding have been set for 2021-22 at £5,415 for Secondary pupils and £4180 per primary pupils.
- The MFG for 2021-22 must be set between +0.5% and +2.0%

### Resolved

1. Forum views were sought on the Schools Budget for 2021-22
2. Forum agreed the net increase in the current cost element of the Central School Services block to be used to off-set the reduction in historic cost element.
3. Forum agreed the transfer of the surplus High Needs funding for 2021-22 to the DSG reserve to offset the deficit position.
4. The School Budget will be referred to the Policy and Recourses Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

### **11. De-Delegation of Services 2021-22**

The following budgets can be de-delegated: Contingency, Special Staff Costs (including TU facility time), School Library Service, Insurance, Behaviour Support, School Improvement and former ESG Costs.

There are no changes to the rates for any services this year, just a small adjustment between primary contingency & behaviour support for vulnerable children.

Only Schools Forum members, in their relevant phase, can decide if these areas should be taken out of the formula budget before it is allocated to schools.

Forum members requested more information on the School Improvement and Behaviour Support areas of de-delegation as there is no information explaining what these services provide or impact reports to highlight the difference they make. There was no information available at this meeting but it was agreed that reports would be provided to the May meeting to include what services are provided under School Improvement and Behaviour Support and their impact.

Clarification will also be provided within the School Improvement and Behaviour Support reports concerning Academies receiving these services and if they are, whether they are being charged for them as they do not contribute to de-delegation.

Forum members were concerned about making decisions at this point, and would have preferred to defer the response, however, a decision is required to finalise the 2021-22 mainstream budgets. There was a discussion about de-delegating the costs to August to ensure salaries can be met and the services reviewed.

### Resolved

1. The Primary Forum Representatives agreed to de-delegate each of the following budgets for the financial year 2021-22:-
  - Contingency
  - Special Staff Costs including Trade Union Facilities time
  - School Library Service
  - Insurance

The Primary Forum Representatives only agreed to de-delegate 5/12 of the School Improvement and Behaviour Support services, to enable the department to provide reports to the May meeting which will include what services are provided by these areas and the impact of them.

2. Primary Forum Representatives agreed a contribution to former ESG costs for General Duties of £369,416
3. The Secondary Forum Representative agreed to de-delegate each of the following budgets for the financial year 2020-21:-
  - Contingency
  - Special Staff Costs including Trade Union Facilities time

The Secondary Forum Representative only agreed to de-delegate 5/12 of the School Improvement and Behaviour Support services, to enable the department to provide reports to the May meeting which will include what services are provided by these areas and the impact of them.

4. Secondary Forum Representatives agreed a contribution to former ESG costs for General Duties of £58,470.
5. Special Schools Forum Representatives agreed a contribution to former ESG costs for General Duties of £72,114.

## **12. Funding Formula 2021-22 Update**

Christine Thomson sought views from the Forum concerning a change to the agreed level of Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) of 1.25% if there is a significant capacity within the funding once the formula has been applied. Where this capacity is more than £0.5m then the MFG could increase as long as there is no capping. This would provide schools with as much additional funding as possible, whilst leaving a smaller amount in a falling rolls/growth fund.

### Resolved

Forum noted the report and Forum's views were sought and in general agreed with the principle of this change if required.

## **13. School Balances Update**

Sue Ashley updated Forum on school balances and projections based on Period 6 monitoring. The expected balances at Period 6 monitoring have improved since budget setting by £1.2m. Budgets were set with caution due to Covid-19 and the lack of clarity around future funding, and as clarity has been provided the position shows an improved position.

Overall balances continue to show a downward trend over the next 3 years, and if no action is taken the number of schools moving into deficit will continue to increase. The LA continues to support schools to enable them to make difficult decisions to ensure budgets remain in credit, or they can move back into a credit position.

### Resolved

Forum noted the report

## **14. Budget Monitoring 2020-21**

Christine Thomson advised the Forum on the expected position and variations regarding the Schools Budget in the current financial year. The forecast is to overspend by £1.1m due to pressures in the high needs block, which is an improvement of £300k since last reported.

Appendix 2 identifies the forecast under/overspends on the DSG.

Resolved

Forum noted the report

### **15. DSG Deficit Management Plan**

Christine Thomson updated Forum on the actions being taken to develop the DSG Management plan, which was a requirement of the DfE because the DSG was in deficit. The confirmed high needs DSG for 2021-22 covers current spending levels and growth of £1.2m and leaves enough to cover the current expected deficit at the end of March 2021.

Whilst this leaves the LA in a better position it is still necessary to review services to ensure they are sustainable going forward. The plan will continue to be developed going forward and will be moved to a co-production phase. This will include all stakeholders that were involved in the engagement and participation stage. Work is expected to be completed in March with a view to return a report to the May Forum meeting.

Resolved

Forum noted the report

### **16. Forum Membership**

Sue Ashley updated Forum on the current Forum Membership. There are 3 academy vacancies at present, although requests for representatives have been circulated twice. There are a further 3 academy vacancies due in August. Although there is no regulation to ensure there are a mix of primary and secondary representation Forum members appreciate the need to keep a good balance.

Resolved

Forum noted the report

### **17. Workplan**

The workplan was provided for information.

Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021

### **18. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

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## WIRRAL COUNCIL

### WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021

#### REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

#### Update on the Change to Funding for Wirral Home and Continuing Education Service

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### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Home and Continuing Education Service is an Alternative Provision for Children and Young people who are unable to attend school due to medical needs (It is not currently listed as part of Wirral's' Guild of Alternative Education) It also forms part of Wirral's statutory responsibility/ duty to provide a suitable education for children who cannot attend school because of their medical needs <sup>2</sup> 1 in10 school children will suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder<sup>1</sup> which is reflected in the referrals to the service (approximately 90% are through CAMHS).

This report summarises the aim of the service and highlights both a future review and some proposed changes to the current funding/charges for schools. The Service is being managed on an interim basis (previous headteacher retired in October) until the end of this academic year. (31<sup>st</sup> August) It also highlights the effect of Covid-19 on the pupils within the service provision.

### 2. BACKGROUND

The Home and Continuing Education Service aims to respond to the changing needs of Wirral's children who cannot attend school for physical or mental health reasons by:

- Providing a suitable education for the children of Wirral who have medical needs that prevent them from attending school by ensuring that: they make the best educational progress that their health needs allows and that they achieve outcomes that allow them to access the most suitable pathway to preparation for Life.
- Providing sufficient hours of continuing education in line with statutory guidance; the equivalent of full-time or for the number of hours the child's health condition allows. "Full-time education" is not defined in law, but it should equate to what the pupil would normally have in school – for example, for pupils in Key Stage 4 full-time education in a school would usually be 25 hours a week. When education is delivered via one-to-one tuition it is not, necessarily, expected to be 25 hours a week.<sup>2</sup> One to one teaching is, by its nature, more intense than class teaching.
- Developing a multiagency graduated response for children with medical needs that enables access to a suitable education in the most appropriate setting for that child,

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<sup>1</sup> Future in Mind: Promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people's mental health and wellbeing NHS England DoH 2015 Chapter 3 page 25

<sup>2</sup> Ensuring a Good Education for Children who cannot attend school because of health needs. May 2013 DFE-00307-2013 page 4

e.g. 1:1 teaching, small group teaching, part or full time within a mainstream or special school. The overarching aim is that the child should be as fully included in the education process as their health condition allows.

### **3. Changes to the Service**

The Service is being managed on an interim basis and has encompassed the management of the Medical and Physical Needs Advisory Teacher within the service delivery. This has allowed for a more graduated response to supporting schools include pupils with medical Needs.

The two teams were managed by the Interim Service Lead from October half term 2019, this was instructed and overseen by the Assistant Director of Education at the time.

Both the Medical and Physical Needs Advisory Teacher and the HCES team are subject to an ongoing review by the Head of SEND and Inclusion.

The Service will be operating from The HCES Base at Hilbre and some teaching will be delivered at Pilgrim Street which allows easier access for families and increased links with Youth Service/teams.

Staff have had just had (February 2021) the roll out of the Council Agile Working Kit and there has been a whole service ICT Improvement programme to response to the demands of On-line Learning.

Some enrichment activities being available in 2021/22 are being proposed in order to help prepare the pupils to move on successfully .This development will rely upon the year 11 Pupil Premium being received.

### **4. The Effects of Covid-19 on the Service**

The recent pandemic has led to a small decline in referrals to the service, but an increased amount of year 12 pupils than usual. This is likely to be the case next year due to the limited work around transition, because of the pandemic.

There are currently 102 pupils receiving provision in comparison with 80 at this point last year. There are 15 year 12 pupils. This increase in the number of older pupils receiving a service is more significant than the overall number in terms of the effect of COVID since they are currently without funding. There are 24 year 11 pupils.

### **5. Budget Position 2020-21 and 2021-22**

In 2020-21 the budget position indicates an overspend of £100k and this reflects the financial resources to cover the service. There is no increase proposed for the 2021-22 budget.

As part of the review the service are planning to increase the £80 per week charge to schools for pupils who attend the service for more than 12 weeks. **The proposal is to increase this to £125 per week from April 2021.**

This will mean an annual total cost to schools of £4,875 (apart from the pupil's first year which will cost £3,375 as the first 12 weeks are free). **Which is below AWPU rate.** Based on income received in 2019-20 financial year of £42k this will increase income for the Home Education Service by approx. £13,500.

This will not apply to year 11 pupils where it has been previously agreed that the AWPU will be transferred from the schools. This will continue for those pupils who are agreed will transfer to the AP census. Schools will need to pay the standard weekly rate for those pupils who do not transfer to the AP census on January 21<sup>st</sup>.

#### **6. Request for the year 11's Pupil Premium to be transferred with the Pupil to HCES from September 2021**

Schools are also being asked to agree transfer of the PP (£955) adhering to the principle of funding following the pupil.

This will be used to develop enrichment activities which will be essential to help the year 11 pupils make successful transitions, particularly after the Lockdown periods.

#### **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Forum note the report and the increase to charges with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 at the rate described above.

If the Forum wishes to express any views in relation to this increase, they are invited to inform the Local Authority.

**Julie Hudson**

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**WIRRAL COUNCIL  
SCHOOLS FORUM 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021  
REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND  
EDUCATION SERVICES  
EARLY YEARS WORKING GROUP UPDATE**

## **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to update Wirral's School Forum of discussions at the recent Early Years working group, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, inclusive of service updates.

## **2.0 Early Years Budget Central Costs.**

**2.1** At the closure of 2020/21 there is an underspend of £290,400 in the Early Years budget, of which is being requested as a carry-forward into 2021/22 in these specific areas;

- Central Costs = £62,087 (**see 2.2**)
- Early Years funding element = £182,963 (**see 3.1**)
- Disability Access Fund = £45,350 (**see 5.5**)

**2.2** The £62,087 in the central costs, in the main accumulated from vacant posts earlier in the year which are now filled. Therefore, it is requested the underspend be approved in **principle** to be carried forward for use in 2021/22, subject to the final DfE grant funding allocation in July 21. The spend plan is for activities which due to Covid disruptions were delayed in procuring by year end.

- **“Future Proofing Your Business”** - Business support training = £17,705
- **Disability Max Cards** – to raise awareness and increase take up of the Disability Access Fund (DAF) = £6,000
- **Wirral Invitation to Play (WITP)** outdoor play community project = £1,500
- **Total = £25,205**

**2.2** It is further proposed the remainder, £36,882 will extend the contract of an existing additional Portage worker post for a further year, to maintain current \*3.7FTE from 2.7FTE, given the high demand on this service area (**see table below**). It is known that where children's additional needs are identified earlier, generally under 2 years, and receive the Portage interventions in the home parents are more confident in their child's developing needs and thereafter it supports smoother transitions to settings/schools.

### 3.0. Universal 2, 3 + 4 early years free entitlements & 30 hours extended (EYFE).

3.1 In addition to the above proposed request the underspend of £182,963, is being requested to carry forward, again in *principle*, to be used in 2021/22 for the proposed activities.

- Promotional campaign for take of 2-year funding offer.
- School Ready Parents Campaign
- Build further capacity within EY’s SEND, both in LA team and with partners
- Transition Pathway development
- Implementation of new Early Years Foundation Stage reforms
- Commission early communication/language interventions

3.2 Whilst there continues to be a positive upturn of take up of funded placements across most areas the 2-year take is still struggling to return to the 93% success of 2018/19. Like previous “lockdowns” the January 2021 “lockdown” once again saw parents of this age group hesitate in taking up their child’s nursery places. Anecdotally parents’ anxieties of contracting the Covid virus, feel they are too young to be exposed to the current situation and some preferring to wait until their child starts school to reduce number of settings their child will go to. It is suggested a “School Readiness Parent Campaign” be delivered across the Summer months to improve confidences of parents.

3.3 Promotions for the 2-year funding offer directly with parents is embedded through Children Centre activities. It is hoped that now small group delivery has resumed, in April 2021 in line with the Government’s roadmap, this will support the take up across Wirral. It is well reported where children who are eligible to take up the 2YOF and do so benefit from this early intervention on their school readiness journey and school transition.

Table below highlights current 2 year take up on Wirral.

<b>Take up of Wirral’s 2-year free funding offer 2020/21</b>				
<b>No. of children</b>	<b>Wirral</b>	<b>Wallasey</b>	<b>Birkenhead</b>	<b>S&amp;W</b>
2-year funding (overall)	914 / 1293 = 70.69%	288 / 405 = 71.11%	385 / 549 = 70.13%	241 / 339 = 71.09%

**2YOF take-up: Wirral Actual 70.69%**

Drop of 2.71% vs Autumn Term 2020 (Nat. Ave 69% - Jan 2020)

**3&4 YOF Universal: Wirral Actual 98.39%**

increase of 9.19% vs Autumn Term 2020(Nat. Ave 93% - Jan 2020)

### **3&4 YOF Extended: Wirral (estimate) 87.98%**

**3.4** The Wirral 3&4 YOF extended is showing that of the children who currently have a code, 87.98% of them took up some extended funding. To add, the figure for the number of children with a code is run live so there is not a figure from headcount, hence it is an estimate rather than actual. Early Years settings inform on a steady rise in the take up of the extended offer however not all additional 15 hours are maximised, and the suggested Parent Campaign would also seek to consult with parents to further understand their childcare arrangements. This would also support the continued development of Wirral's Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) processes.

### **4.0 EYFE Funding Arrangements.**

**4.1** The usual process for calculating early years funding is based on the census in Spring 21 and Spring 22.

DfE have decided that in addition to the Spring 21 census there should be a summer census in May 21. The intention is that the spring 21 and summer 21 census will be averaged, and this will be used to calculate the 21/22 early years funding. The May census will not result in any changes for early years providers because Wirral have a summer headcount in May already.

Summer 21 headcount census will be issued 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

Summer 21 headcount date is Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

### **5.0. Early Years SEND Updates**

**5.1** As anticipated there has been a significant rise in the numbers of children that on return to their nursery/early years setting during recent Covid19 months have been identified as needing additional support. In the main this has been due to delayed or regressed communication/language development, social emotional and physical development delay.

Table below outlines the current activity within the Early Years SEND team.

<b>EARLY YEARS SEND TEAM</b>				
<b>No. of children</b>	<b>Wirral</b>	<b>Wallasey</b>	<b>Birkenhead</b>	<b>S&amp;W</b>
Supported by Portage worker (*3.7FTE)	63	11	32	20
Awaiting allocation to Portage worker	52	N/A	N/A	N/A
Supported by SEND Officer	259	70	84	105

Inclusive Practice Funding	183	92	56	35
Disability Access Fund	29	N/A	N/A	N/A
Requesting EHC assessment	44	14	19	11

**5.2** In addition there are currently 23 children confirmed in a school entry deferral for September 2021, of which 4 children have SEND.

**5.3** Transition planning for September is underway with a new LA process being introduced this year, with an EY's SEND, Education and 0-19 Community Health Trust panel to review both the resource and financial needs for each child as they move settings.

**5.4** The Inclusive Practice Fund has been fully spent this year, 2020/21 and reported an overspend of £812 which was anticipated given the increased demand. As highlighted earlier in the report the carry forward of 2020/21 Early Years budget underspends would take the pressure of the IPF budget for 21/22 and enable transition funding to be applied where required.

**5.5** There had been an accumulative underspend on the Disability Access Fund (DAF) over recent years, totalling £176k. In March 2021, an application process was deployed for early years settings to access this underspend where an additional reasonable adjustment to environment, resources or staff knowledge was demonstrated to meet the needs of SEN/D children in attendance. As a result, 59 settings have been awarded funds to enhance sensory areas both indoors/outdoors, improved ground surfaces for access to outdoor play, sensory processing resources and inclusive changing/care stations. It is requested to continue to ring-fence the DAF underspend of £45.350 for further discretionary application processes in 21/22.

## **6.0. Workforce Development**

**6.1 EYFS reforms:** A series of training sessions for all Early Years providers have taken place over the last two weeks entitled 'EYFS reforms 'An Overview'. The new Statutory Framework comes into effect from September 2021 and the training provided information and advice around the aims of the reforms, the changes which will impact on early years practice, supportive documentation, and key messages. Approximately 200 practitioners attended the training and feedback has been good with many reporting feeling more informed and ready to face the changes. There are further CPD sessions to address specific areas within the new framework which have been identified as areas of need: Curriculum / Curriculum planning / Effective Outdoor provision / Child Development / Assessment.

**6.2 Wirral Invitation to Play (WITP):** Since March 2020 when the government announced lockdown, the children on Wirral have been living in a very different way. Some children have not had access to outdoor spaces, play parks have been closed, schools and early years settings were operating at a limited capacity for key worker and vulnerable children only, playing outdoors had to take a back seat to staying safe. For many children their wellbeing, speech and language development and their physical development have consequently been affected. The WITP project has been created to provide opportunities to play, communicate and move when out and about on Wirral. The prompt boards will be instantly recognisable through the 'Play Pack' logo, containing a range of simple prompts to enhance the parent/child time, through communication and play.

Funding the project has been through collaborations with the Foundation Years Trust, Children Centre advisory boards and a small administration amount, £1.500, being sought through the central early years budget.

**6.3 Digital Training Platform:** After an unavoidable delay the new digital online training platform, being developed by the Early Years Quality Improvement and Training Team, will now go live in the summer term. This web page is for all early years setting years on the Wirral. This will act as a single point of access for keeping up to date with the latest information both local and national, download templates, access resources, use of the interactive training calendar to see what is on and book and access e-learning.

Settings will have an account and that will enable managers to view and plan CPD according to their requirements. Log in details will be emailed to all providers before the launch of the platform.

**6.4 Wirral's Communication and Language Pathway:** The launch of the Wirral Communication and Language pathway is underway. This has been developed in partnership with the Wirral 0-19 Team and NHS Foundation Trust. The pathway is for anyone who has an interest in or works with our youngest children and their families. It is guidance and information on how to support a child's speech and language development and identify any concerns in a timely manner whilst also guiding parents to understand how to support their child. The pathway details a child's journey from pre-birth, 0-1 years, 1-2 years, and 2-3 years.

Pathway booklets and associated parent leaflet. for those with a child 17-19 months, is being distributed to all settings/schools currently.

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

**7.1 To carry forward the underspend, in principle, of £245,050 for purposes as outlined in sections 2.2 and 3.1.**

**7.2 To continue to protect and ring-fence any underspend within the Disability Access Fund as a carry forward, as outlined in section 5.5.**

**7.3 Forum to note the report.**

**Simone White – Director of Children, Families and Education**

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## WIRRAL COUNCIL

### SCHOOLS FORUM – 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021

#### REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

#### DE-DELEGATION 2021-22 BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Forum on the services delivered from the Behaviour Support and School Improvement functions funded by de-delegated school budgets.

### 2.0 BACKGROUND, KEY ISSUES AND OUTCOMES

- 2.1 The report attached in Appendix 1 outlines the background, key issues and outcomes.

### 3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the Schools Forum note the report in Appendix 1.
- 3.2 That Primary Forum Representatives agree to contribute the remaining 7/12ths funding from school budgets for:
- 3.2.1.a Behaviour Support, and
  - 3.2.1.b School Improvement
- 3.3 That Secondary Forum Representatives agree to contribute the remaining 7/12ths funding from school budgets for:
- 3.3.1.a Behaviour Support, and
  - 3.3.1.b School Improvement

**Simone White**

**Director of Children, Families and Education**

## Appendix 1

### Response to Wirral's School Forum: Behaviour support and School improvement

#### Rationale

The Schools Forum (19 January 2021) did not agree to de-delegate:

- funding for behaviour support
- £150K in relation to school improvement.

In terms of behaviour support, schools were concerned that academies were getting support for free.

In terms of school improvement, concerns were raised about transparency of decisions and the impact of spend.

#### Aim

- In terms of behaviour support, to provide Schools Forum with clarity about:
  - the intended and actual impact of this work to date
  - whether or not the support provided to academies is chargeable.
  
- In terms of school improvement, to provide Schools Forum with clarity about:
  - what the service provides and its impact
  - clarification about whether academies were in receipt of these services and whether they are being charged for them as they do not contribute to de-delegation.

### Part 1: Behaviour support

#### Context

At its meeting on 19 January 2021, the Schools Forum decided to de-delegate from the dedicated support grant (DSG) 5/12ths of funding to assist the LA in behaviour support. To release the remaining 7/12ths, the Forum requested information relating to:

- the intended and actual impact of this work to date
- whether or not the support provided to academies is chargeable.

#### Purpose and impact of the de-delegated funding in relation to behaviour support

In order to meet its [statutory duties](#) and [additional guidance in these pandemic times](#), the role of the inclusion strategy manager (ISM) is to serve all locally authority maintained schools across the primary, secondary and specialist sectors, including academies.

The picture of exclusions on Wirral was stark: the local authority had a disproportionately high number of permanent exclusions, the rate of which had been on an upward trajectory for a number of years. The prime aim of behaviour support through the ISM was to reduce this number and keep vulnerable pupils in their settings where possible. The table in Fig 1, particularly the data for 2019/20, demonstrates how active challenge and engagement with schools by supporting them to manage pupils at risk of exclusion has had a positive impact on the lives of vulnerable pupils: in short, permanent exclusions reduced markedly.

**Fig 1 Permanent Exclusion Data**

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Primary	1	3	0	1
Secondary	43	52	17	3
Special	3	1	0	0
Total	47	56	17	4

Please note: the data for 2020/21 represents exclusions up to and including December 2020 and not beyond.

The ISM role has two distinct and defined aspects to its function: operational and strategic.

The operational element includes providing immediate responses to schools for pupils who they deem to be at risk of permanent exclusion and providing help and support to prevent this from happening, as well as challenging headteachers to rescind permanent exclusions that have already been actioned.

The day-to-day response to schools is constant and varied and includes:

- attending meetings with headteachers, pastoral leads and/or SENDCOs to provide advice and signpost support
- providing funding opportunities for schools to help them to best meet the child's needs with the aim of maintaining them in the mainstream environment (*please note, funding is only allocated to local authority maintained schools and excludes academies. Where funding is drawn down from the Vulnerable Children's budget, this is only allocated to local maintained primary schools*)
- attending multi-agency meetings
- working collaboratively with colleagues in health, social care and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) team to promote a person-centred approach to supporting the child
- liaising with alternative settings, WRAP, Utopia and Evolve for example, in conjunction with the lead for alternative provision
- working alongside the local authority officer in charge of managed moves to highlight pupils at risk who may require this provision.

This list is not exhaustive.

On receipt of permanent exclusion paperwork being submitted to the local authority, the ISM makes direct contact with the headteacher of the school involved and provides an appropriate level of both challenge and support with the aim of the exclusion being rescinded in favour of an alternative pathway for the child. This may involve bespoke packages of learning, respite via enrolment in an alternative provision or requesting the school explore the possibility of a managed move. Exclusions are counted as rescinded regardless of whether paperwork has been formally submitted or not.

To clarify, the number of permanent exclusions rescinded through the work of the ISM is represented below:

**Fig 2 Rescinded Exclusions**

	2019/20	2020/21
Primary	7	1
Secondary	17	3
Total	24	4

In addition to the operational side of the ISM role, the other important facet is the strategic direction towards inclusion. Data informs us that most pupils who are permanently excluded have a social, emotional or mental health (SEMH) need. Given the disparity between how schools could meet the needs of these pupils, the following work was undertaken to support schools.

- Establishing focus groups for behaviour to ‘troubleshoot’ the main concerns. These have been well attended by headteachers and local authority representatives and have resulted in constructive discussions on how to collectively tackle the growing concerns for pupils demonstrating challenging, violent, and aggressive behaviour in schools. These meetings highlighted the need for further training for staff in schools. An example of how such need is being addressed may be found in the section below relating to the partnership with the University of Chester. These meetings have also strengthened collaboration between schools and the local authority and improved understanding of the holistic approach needed across Wirral.
- Linking external agencies and local authority partners in health, social care and SEND. This has resulted in increased shared responsibility in, for example, ensuring that when a child at risk is highlighted there is a greater willingness from all agencies to engage in trying to improve outcomes for the child.
- Recognising the potential negative impact the global pandemic would have on vulnerable pupils being able to manage a positive reintegration back into school, a ‘reintegration panel’ was created with attendees from myriad agencies to discuss individual cases submitted by schools and to signpost support and advice. This panel was recognised as a model of good practice nationally during Covid-19; a synopsis of which was submitted to the DfE.
- The ISM continuing to highlight the need for more in depth training to support schools to manage pupils with SEMH, particularly to try to foster an ethos of attachment awareness and trauma informed practice.
- Encouraging schools to move away from heavily punitive/sanction led behaviour policies in favour of positive behaviour systems and relationship policies. As a result, more schools have adopted the Pivotal approach to behaviour management. Restorative justice is increasingly used as an alternative to detention and exclusion.
- The reintroduction of Safer Schools’ Police Officers was a direct result of the bid submitted by the ISM in partnership with Merseyside Police. Feedback from schools has highlighted that having a police officer available to manage early intervention has been beneficial in preventing pupils from being excluded.
- Collaborative working with Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership and engaging with colleagues in similar roles in neighbouring authorities led to shared good practice and opportunities for fully funded initiatives, The Prince’s Trust for example.
- Building a partnership with the University of Chester to address the issues with attachment/trauma/adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) as outlined above. The university is delivering a programme of training and audits with schools to help improve their knowledge and understanding. The programme is split into three distinct areas.

1. A universal training offer for trauma informed practice/ACEs/attachment for up to 5000 staff in Wirral schools covering a large percentage of the workforce who have direct contact with pupils.
2. A pilot programme for 25 schools to be audited by professional colleagues from the university and findings published in a report, giving the school an understanding of where they are on the pathway to becoming truly trauma informed.
3. Participation on the PG Cert in Trauma/Attachment/ACEs for 15 colleagues as a group including professionals from both schools and the local authority; the aim being a cohort of people able to share their more in-depth knowledge and expertise with other professionals.

This partnership is underway and feedback thus far has been positive, particularly with regards to participants reflecting on practice in their own settings. The next stage of the partnership is due to commence in the summer term 2021. The impact of this will be measured after completion of the programme and the findings will be shared.

In summary, the data supplies clear evidence that the behaviour support function provided through the role of ISM has reduced the number of pupils permanently excluded from school.

Going forward, the intended impact of this work is to continue to:

- provide opportunities for schools as outlined above
- ensure collaborative partnerships and positive working relationships result in a wholehearted inclusive approach to meeting the needs pupils with SEMH
- keep numbers of permanent exclusions low.

## **Part 2: School improvement**

### Context

At its meeting on 19 January 2021, the Schools Forum decided to de-delegate from the DSG 5/12ths of funding to assist the LA in its school improvement function. To release the remaining 7/12ths, the Forum requested information relating to:

- what the service provides and its impact
- clarification about whether academies were in receipt of these services and whether they are being charged for them as they do not contribute to de-delegation.

### Purpose of the de-delegated funding to support the school improvement function

The funding for school improvement via de-delegation supports the LA in meeting its statutory obligations in this area plus offer additional support to Wirral schools. Specifically, the following roles are re-charged to the de-delegated funding:

- Funding of Head of School Effectiveness (100%)
- SEND and School Improvement Officer (40%)
- School Improvement Admin Manager (20%)
- Conflict Resolution Officer (20%).

In the case of the three posts which are not funded 100% by re-charging to DSG de-delegation, the additional resource to fund these posts comes from the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokerage Grant provided by the DfE. The full and partial funding of these posts from the DSG de-delegation allows:

- a) the LA to meet its statutory functions in relation to school improvement
- b) the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokerage Grant to be utilised to focus on specific support, the use of Wirral System Leaders for example in schools not yet Ofsted 'good'.

The statutory functions of a LA in relation to school improvement as indicated by [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/335723/ESG\\_AnnexA\\_reformatted.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335723/ESG_AnnexA_reformatted.pdf) are:

- moderating the teacher assessments carried out at the end of key stage 1 by schools (in reading, writing and mathematics) in at least 25% of maintained schools each school year and ensure that every school will be subject to moderation at least once every four years;
- appointing a person to complete the assessment moderations who has recent experience of provision of the National Curriculum in primary schools;
- having equivalent duties in respect of key stage 2.

In addition, there is the duty to:

- set up and carry out moderation arrangements in the Early Years in accordance with [2021 Early years foundation stage assessment and reporting arrangements \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335723/ESG_AnnexA_reformatted.pdf)
- monitor the administration of the phonics screening check in accordance with [Key stage 2 tests and phonics screening check: monitoring visits - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335723/ESG_AnnexA_reformatted.pdf)

There is also the responsibility to have regard to the [Schools Causing Concern statutory guidance](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335723/ESG_AnnexA_reformatted.pdf). This guidance is clear: a LA must exercise its education functions with a view to promoting high standards. Acting as champions of high standards of education across their schools, LAs should:

- understand the performance of maintained schools in their area, using data as a starting point to identify any that are underperforming, while working with them to explore ways to support progress;
- work closely with the relevant RSC, diocese and other local partners to ensure schools receive the support they need to improve;
- where underperformance has been recognised in a maintained school, proactively work with the relevant RSC, combining local and regional expertise to ensure the right approach, including sending warning notices and using intervention powers where this will improve leadership and standards; and
- encourage good and outstanding maintained schools to take responsibility for their own improvement; support other schools; and enable other schools to access the support they need to improve.

The aforementioned School Improvement Monitoring & Brokering Grant is provided to LAs to assist them in fulfilling these responsibilities.

The guidance is also clear that: 'LAs should focus their activity on the schools they maintain rather than academies which are accountable to the Secretary of State. However, should a local authority have any concerns about an academy's standards, leadership or governance, they should raise these directly with the relevant RSC.'

In relation to academies, to report any concerns it might have about individual academies to the RSC, the LA must be familiar with the strengths and weaknesses in those organisations. As such, the de-delegated funding from the DSG to fund/partially fund the posts above ensures that the LA can carry out this role. However, while funded from a different source, academies which are part of a trust are not entitled to Wirral System Leader support. This is because individual academy trusts are responsible for school improvement in their organisations. It is

acknowledged that, overtime, a few standalone academies – those not part of a wider trust – have benefited from advice and support from LA officers. This will continue as such a relationship helps the LA in its knowledge of all the schools in the borough. Where standalone academies have received funding from the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokerage Grant allocated to Wirral, this will be reviewed going forwards in order that the LA can focus on its key priority: the schools which it maintains. However, it must be noted that if a maintained school is judged to be inadequate, while academisation will be the outcome, the LA will retain responsibility for facilitating academisation plus school improvement activity until the school converts.

#### Impact of previous funding allocated to school improvement via DSG de-delegation

Clearly, some aspects of statutory work have not been undertaken because of the impact of the pandemic, key stage 1 moderation for example. Nevertheless, the de-delegated funding from the DSG has allowed the LA to meet its statutory functions in relation to school improvement through providing the key personnel whose roles are re-charged to the fully funded/partially funded aspects to, for example:

- scrutinise school data and outcomes and identify areas of need for continuing professional development (CPD) and/or Wirral System Leader focus
- organise and lead the S2S partnership board and locality boards
- ensure the school banding system identifies accurately schools in need of help and support, and those which can provide it
- use the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokerage Grant to deploy Wirral System Leaders according to need
- provide one to one advice and support
- report to elected members.

In 'normal' times, personnel provide support to maintained schools during Ofsted inspections through discussions with inspectors and attendance at feedback. This has continued now inspections are currently being scheduled.

As a result of the above, the LA knows its schools well. The knowledge and experience of the key personnel ensures that there are few surprises in terms of inspection outcomes (currently, 105 of its schools are rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted and none are inadequate).

A key success of this knowledge and experience has been the proven ability, even in these challenging times, to provide key additionality, that is help, support and challenge beyond what is statutory, to act quickly and effectively when help is needed. An example of this has included supporting the continuation of leadership in a special school.

Further examples of additionality, impossible without the de-delegated funding, include:

- engagement with local Teaching School Hub and Mathematics and English Hubs, brokering support and maximising opportunities for access
- support to schools to help them through the impact of the pandemic, including coordinating the LA's response to positive covid cases, free school meals, PPE, digital devices and remote learning
- the collation of pupil views to help schools understand the current and potential ongoing impact of the pandemic from the point of view of children and young people
- understanding and reporting the impact of Covid-19 in all schools including academies and independent schools – the government has expected this of LAs.

As the Schools Forum is aware, a key pressure on the DSG has been the rise in the number and complexity of cases in terms of high needs. The LA has used de-delegated funding to help

address these pressures through the streamlining and handling of complaints with regards to SEND in a timely fashion.

#### Intended impact of delegated spend 2021/22

The provision of the remaining 7/12<sup>th</sup> of funding will enable the LA to meet the following objectives.

- To continue to fulfil statutory duties as outlined above.
- Based on research, including the EEF, provide CPD focused on reducing gaps in language and literacy exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic.
- Improve outcomes in mathematics, particularly with regards to transition and problem solving.

To meet these objectives, the LA intends to:

- coordinate a coherent CPD offer for teachers and pilot groups of schools across key stages and phases of education, taking account of the current effects of the pandemic and developing outward facing research communities which reflect a self-improving system
- provide a universal offer for Early Years, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, and to support transition arrangements into secondary schools, to close gaps caused by the impact of Covid-19 on children's language and literacy
- provide CPD for maintained secondary schools in developing problem solving skills and ensuring that high levels of mathematical language are used
- focus its support on maintained schools which:
  - have been judged by Ofsted to require improvement (RI) in successive inspections
  - are at risk of declining from their previous inspection grade.

The intended impact of the work funded through de-delegation is that:

- standards attained by pupils in LA maintained schools improve across all key stages as demonstrated by EYFS, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and GCSE/vocational outcomes
- pupils make good progress from their starting points as demonstrated by improving nationally recognised progress measures
- gaps diminish in pupils' learning in language and literacy exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19 as demonstrated by success against the outcomes identified in the offer of support
- pupils in maintained secondary schools use problem solving skills and correct mathematical language increasingly well as demonstrated by success against the outcomes identified in the offer of support
- the LA continues:
  - to know, help, support, and challenge well its maintained schools
  - to know of the effectiveness of schools it does not maintain, academies for example, and work with their trustees/MATs to ensure Wirral pupils achieve well from their starting points

as demonstrated by:

- maintained schools judged as RI in successive inspections improving to good or, if judged to be RI again, have key judgement grades which improve
- maintained schools not declining from their current judgement in their next inspection.

## **WIRRAL COUNCIL**

**SCHOOLS FORUM – 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION**

**DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) MANAGEMENT PLAN**

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### **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Forum on Wirral's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan.

### **2.0 UPDATE REPORT**

2.1 The full draft plan is attached in Appendix A.

### **3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 That the Schools Forum note the draft plan in Appendix A.

**Simone White**

**Director of Children, Families and Education**

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## Appendix A

### CONFIDENTIAL

## Wirral Local Authority Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan – an opportunity to give your thoughts

### Contents

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Page 10:	Monitoring and reporting arrangements
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Appendix 2:	Opportunities to meet online with the Strategic Adviser and LA colleagues to respond to the questions and/or ask questions

### Circulation

Chairs of the:

- Schools Forum
- Wirral Special Headteachers Association (WiSpHA)
- Primary Headteachers Consultative Group (PHCG), including the Consultant Primary Headteacher
- Wirral Association of Secondary Headteachers (WASH)
- Parent Carer Participation Wirral (PCPW)

Wirral also engages with other parent/carers organisations such as those listed below. These organisations are also invited to join in with the co-production of the DSG Management Plan.

- The Positivitree
- Wirral MENCAP
- Creating Careers
- ADDvanced Solutions
- Safer Families for Children
- Healthwatch -
- WIRED
- Koala NW
- Next Chapter
- The Sensory Shack
- The HIVE
- Creative Youth Development Parent/Carers
- CAMHS engagement groups

Young people representatives

- SEND Youth Engagement Officer
- SEND Youth Voice Group

- Home Education service pupils
- SENCO Locality Board Chairs

Director of Children's Services and Assistant Directors

Heads of Services funded/part funded by the DSG

The Council's Finance team

Chair of the Council's Children's Committee

## **Introduction**

1. Page 64 of the 'Agenda Pack' for the meeting of the Wirral Schools Forum on 19 January 2021, stated that the local authority's (LA) ambition is to work in a way which ensures that local leaders in education participate fully through co-production in the DSG Management Plan and therefore co-own the process.
2. By operating in such a way, the LA will ensure that there is a consensus of professional opinion on outcomes to be achieved. It is important, though, at this point to make clear who will contribute to this professional opinion. For the purpose of this work, we mean those included in the circulation list above and the organisations they represent.
3. It was agreed that Mark Williams, Strategic Adviser, would convene a workshop approach to co-produce proposals. This paper and its proposals are the next stage of activity following the review of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) undertaken by him from December 2020 to early February 2021.
4. The original intention was that the period of co-production would be completed by the end of March 2021. However, the period of co-production will now begin in the Summer term of 2021 and fall into two phases: review and action planning. The delay was to allow for the best channels for communication and participation to be found. Participants were asked for their views about such channels in April 2021.
5. Following the receipt of views with regards to communication and participation, the following modes will be deployed for this work:
  - requesting written responses to the questions asked below and found in Appendix 1
  - providing opportunities to meet with the Strategic Adviser and LA colleagues on online platforms such as Teams to respond to the questions and/or ask questions – details may be found in Appendix 2.

To be clear: participants are not required to submit written responses and attend an online meeting unless they wish too. All responses, no matter how they are presented, will be considered.

6. Given that DSG spend has already been considered for the financial year 2021/22, this work is intended to support decision making in the financial years 2022/23 and beyond.

## **Context of this work in relation to the review of the DSG undertaken by the Strategic Adviser**

7. At the time of the review, the cumulative deficit of the DGS was forecast to be in the region of £2.7 million. The purpose of that review was to help Wirral's leaders make sense of the DSG spend. In particular:
  - what capacity did they have to spend from now and to the end of the (2020/21 financial) year?
  - where any money not yet spent or committed in this financial year is
  - understand if the way in which we organise our DSG spend is compliant with requirements
  - is it the same or different in other LAs?
  - to suggest recommendations going forwards.

### **The following is a summary of the report's responses to the points above.**

8. Despite more favourable funding being allocated, there is no capacity to spend in addition to what was already been agreed. The report therefore recommended that budget holders are clear that only previously agreed spend can occur up to the end of the financial year. It was not easy to answer where any money not spent was. This is because, for example, the Early Years Block spend is directly related to the number of nursery places taken up and reliant on data such as headcounts. Wirral will not have final figures confirmed until after the spring term 2021.
9. In terms of its use of the DSG, Wirral is compliant. However, current practice could be improved with more transparency of decision making and more robust follow up, to ensure that success criteria are set and met. The recommendations of the report seek to address these vulnerabilities.
10. Challenges relating to the DSG are not new and not faced by Wirral alone. A generally common factor in where challenges are most acute is the pressure on the High Needs Block of the DSG. This is the case in Wirral. Other LAs in the North West have sought to meet such challenges through reviewing provision and its impact and engaging stakeholders in collaborative working so that there is open and honest discussion about how inclusive practice really is. This is the approach Wirral wishes to take. Some LAs have gone down the road of taking from the Schools Block of the DSG to support areas where there are deficits. Where this has been done, the rationale has been because practice has not been inclusive. This is not the approach Wirral wishes to take as it believes strong inclusion is the way forward.
11. The review made the following recommendations.
  - ❖ To provide clarity to all stakeholders and ensure confidence in the process is high, LA leaders should:
    - a) pause the current work around proposals to reduce the DSG deficit, particularly in the High Needs block, to identify:
      - what is statutory and what is part of the LA's strategy for SEND
      - full details of which budget lines are included in the DSG review
      - a three-year history that includes the planned budget for each line and how spending has increased year on year

- a clear explanation for why each line has needed to increase year and year
- a clear rationale to why some aspects are considered and why others are not
- b) share these findings with partners and stakeholders
- c) create and share with partners and stakeholders a clear timeframe for the co-production of any resulting action plan, including when it will be finalised and become effective.

*The process was paused and responses to the questions raised above in (a) were circulated on 8 March 2021 to the Chairs of the Schools Forum, WiSpHA, PHCG, WASH and PCPW. In addition, the next steps which resulted from the response to (a) have been included below. These next steps are:*

- *Where concerns are raised about increased spending, this should be captured and reported as appropriate and this information should be included in any future High Needs/DSG reviews.*
- *In any future review*
  - *make clear the rationale to why any statutory areas are to be considered and how, if savings were to be made, how such statutory responsibilities would still be met*
  - *as well as identifying areas where savings could be made, provide the actual reasons why and how they can be achieved and include the potential impact on children as well as staffing and service.*
- ❖ As part of any wider review of all services which make up the DSG, undertake a thorough evaluation of the High Needs provision in Wirral. In doing so, LA leaders should:
  - ensure all partners and stakeholders are clear on the following:
    - the review is focused on seeking best value through inclusion
    - their views will be sought
    - the review's findings will be published
  - having the needs of pupils at its heart, ask openly and honestly:
    - what is essential?
    - what could we do differently?
    - is there anything which can be stopped/reduced?
  - on completion of the review, create through co-production with partners and stakeholders an action plan shared widely which:
    - makes clear the LA's strategy for High Needs, including the local offer
    - identifies and makes effective use of known expertise within the LA to underpin the success of provision
    - identifies clear and measurable success criteria focused on outcomes for pupils and expertise of school-based colleagues
    - identifies clear timescales for actions to be completed
    - identifies the key personnel responsible for actions
    - identifies those responsible for evaluating the success of the plan
    - identifies how senior leaders, Schools Forum, PCPW, wider partners, and elected members will be reported to.

*The scoping and timescale below indicate how this recommendation is to be achieved. However, whereas the third bullet highlights co-production in terms of creating an action plan, it is planned that co-production begins earlier so partners are part of the review itself. This will enable all partners to contribute to the key questions of, having the needs of pupils at our heart: what is essential, what could we do differently, and is there anything which can be stopped/reduced?*

A further recommendation was that to ensure clarity, financial accountability, and that any funding has best chance of success in achieving its intended purpose, LA leaders should:

- agree with partners and stakeholders, via fora for example, criteria for releasing funding across services and schools
- ensure all decisions relating to distribution of funds from budget holders are:
  - ✓ agreed only when written cases with justified rationale meet the published criteria
  - ✓ have clear plans that are measurable and driven by success criteria focused on outcomes for pupils and expertise of staff
  - ✓ are reviewed regularly to ensure impact is evident and value for money is achieved
  - ✓ recorded in writing
- report progress and impact to elected members.

*As with all recommendations, this has been accepted by the LA and is being put into operation currently.*

**Why, given the more favourable funding for 2021/22, is there a need for a DSG management plan?**

12. The rationale for undertaking a DSG management plan is five-fold in nature:

- There is no guarantee that future funding agreements will be as favourable. Whatever the level of funding, it is vital that the LA manages its resources well and within agreed budgets.
- The challenges faced by Wirral in recent years, particularly with regards to the High Needs block, have not gone away. If not addressed, there is the potential that future cumulative deficits will become unmanageable with the impact being most acutely felt by the children and young people of Wirral.
- The impact of the pandemic, particularly through the 'lockdowns' which have taken place, continues to become increasingly apparent in terms of lost learning and mental health. It is therefore essential that the LA's provision makes up for the time lost for learning and social development and mitigates the emerging effects of the pandemic. The LA is clear that it intends that the provision for children and young people with SEND will be in a 'better, different place' coming out of the pandemic.
- The challenges faced by the LA are not just centred on the pandemic and the pressures on the High Needs block. Low pupil numbers in some parts of the borough are a concern. If not reviewed to find good, local solutions, there is the potential that some schools will struggle to provide the quality of education they would want to.
- The LA already provides a wide range of services to meet its statutory responsibilities and to provide what may be termed as additionality. This does not mean that 'additionalities' should be seen as 'nice to have'; on the contrary, they have been provided to assist schools to meet the needs

of their pupils. It is right, though, that all provision is reviewed to ascertain what impact it has had on:

- the outcomes for children and young people, particularly in terms of their learning and personal development
- the skills and abilities of adults to meet the needs of their pupils.

### **What are the LA's responsibilities and what is its current strategy?**

13. LAs, including Wirral, have numerous statutory powers and responsibilities which may be found [here](#). In carrying out these duties, LAs, Wirral included, must have regard to the [Schools Causing Concern statutory guidance](#) which is clear that a LA must exercise its education functions with a view to promoting high standards. As well as funding from the DSG, LAs are provided with the DfE's School Improvement Monitoring & Brokering Grant to assist them in fulfilling responsibilities in relation to school improvement.

14. In terms of High Needs, the following are statutory:

- Children and Families Act 2014
- Equality Act 2010
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice.

15. To help it deliver its statutory responsibilities, Wirral has developed its own strategic priorities which now follow.

1: Improve the quality of provision and outcomes for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

2: Ensure early identification of special education needs and high-quality intervention particularly for children and young people exhibiting social, emotional, and mental health needs.

3: Further develop effective transition from one education phase/setting including preparing for adulthood pathway.

4: To further develop participation, engagement and coproduction with children, young people, parents and carers.

### **What does the DSG fund?**

16. As in other LAs, the DSG funds several blocks in Wirral:

- Schools
- Central School Costs
- High Needs
- Early Years

An overview of what was in Wirral's blocks in 2020/21 now follows.

- Schools: Primary; Secondary; Growth fund; Falling rolls fund
- Central School Costs: Admissions; School redundancy costs; licences and subscriptions; Schools Forum; Contribution to combined budgets; Retained duties (the former Education Service Grant (ESG) for example)
- High Needs: Special Schools excluding de-delegation; Wirral Hospitals School; SEN bases; Sixth form/Further Education; Statements; SEN Top-ups; High Needs Contingency; Independent Special Schools; Home tuition; Support for SEN, Special School transport, Contribution to DSG reserve (High Needs)
- Early Years: Early Years providers, Early Years Central costs, Early Years inclusion.

17. In addition, the Schools Forum can de-delegate funds. In 2020/21 this included the following:

- Library service
- Insurances
- School specific contingencies
- Special staff costs
- Behaviour support
- School improvement
- Retained duties (the former ESG for example)

### **Scoping and timescales**

18. In order that the LA's intention that the provision for children and young people with SEND will be in a 'better, different place' coming out of the pandemic, and building on the overarching strategic priorities identified in (14) above, Children, Families and Education Leaders have identified the following emerging priorities for supporting children and young people with SEND.

- Develop a more inclusive culture in which the needs of children, young people and their families are identified, assessed, and met as far as possible within their local community.
- Help to set outcomes that are measured by their impact on how well the child or young person is prepared for adulthood.
- Ensure sufficiency in the system, including in schools, to provide a high-quality offer of emotional health and well-being support for children and young people with SEND.
- Understand the impact of transitions, such as between children's and adults' services, and work to provide children and young people (CYP) with the right support, in the right place, at the right time.
- Continue to make the loudest and most important voice, the voice of the child or young person.

19. The following actions therefore seek to gain the views of a wide of partners in order that LA leaders may formulate a plan that:

- seeks best value through inclusion
- makes clear the LA's strategy, including for High Needs and the local offer
- identifies and makes effective use of known expertise within the LA to underpin the success of provision
- identifies clear and measurable success criteria focused on outcomes for pupils and expertise of school-based colleagues
- identifies clear timescales for actions to be completed
- identifies the key personnel responsible for actions
- identifies those responsible for evaluating the success of the plan
- identifies how senior leaders in the LA, Schools Forum, elected members, and wider partners will be reported to.

20. Gaining the views of the wide range of partners – stakeholders – identified above is the essential element of this co-production work. Of course, this does not mean it will be possible to incorporate the contributions of everyone into the plan.

However, every view will be considered to see whether a consensus of professional opinion can be attained.

Key dates	Focus of co-production	Partners/stakeholders	Responsibility
13 April 2021	Information relating to preferred channels of communication sought from each stakeholder group as indicated in the circulation list.	Responses invited from all partners/stakeholders in distribution list above	Strategic Adviser/SEND Participation Manager
29 April 2021	Responses received by Strategic Adviser	Partners/stakeholders to submit contributions by 29 April 2021	Partners/stakeholders
30 April 2021	Channels of communication finalised		Strategic Adviser
4-18 May 2021	<p>This document (Wirral Local Authority: Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan: Rationale, Scoping and Timescales) publicised through those channels</p> <p>Through the channels of communication agreed, responses are requested to the following questions:  <b>Looking at the DSG as a whole and especially the High Needs Block</b>  <i>1. Having the needs of pupils at our heart, and considering the LA's duties and strategic priorities, discuss:</i>  <i>-what is going well</i>  <i>-what has not gone well</i>  <i>-what is essential</i>  <i>-what could we do differently</i>  <i>-is there anything which can be stopped/reduced.</i></p> <p><i>2. Going forwards, again having the needs of pupils at the heart of our thinking, discuss:</i>  <i>-what do we mean about being inclusive in Wirral and what does this look like?</i>  <i>-what do we want provision and outcomes for children and young people to look like in Wirral?</i>  <i>-how can we meet the emerging priorities for supporting children and young people with SEND of:</i></p>	<p>Responses invited from all partners/stakeholders in distribution list above</p> <p>Partners/stakeholders to submit contributions by 18 May 2021</p>	<p>Strategic Adviser/SEND Participation Manager</p> <p>Partners/stakeholders</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Develop a more inclusive culture in which the needs of children, young people and their families are identified, assessed, and met as far as possible within their local community.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Help to set outcomes that are measured by their impact on how well the child or young person is prepared for adulthood.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Ensure sufficiency in the system, including in schools, to provide a high-quality offer of emotional health and well-being support for children and young people with SEND.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Understand the impact of transitions, such as between children's and adults' services, and work to provide CYP with the right support, in the right place, at the right time.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Continue to make the loudest and most important voice, the voice of the child or young person.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>3. Can we agree a consensus of professional opinion?</i></p> <p>Responses received will help inform the basis of a draft action plan.</p>		
<b>By 11 June 2021</b>	<p>Paper drafted outlining</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) the outcome of the contributions above</li> <li>b) a draft action plan based on (18) above having considered the contributions above</li> </ol> <p>Paper covering a) and b) circulated</p>	<p>Strategic adviser to draft in consultation with the Assistant Director (Education) and the Head of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion</p> <p>Responses invited from all partners/stakeholders in distribution list above</p>	<p>Strategic Adviser/ Assistant Director (Education)/ Head of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion</p> <p>Strategic Adviser/SEND Participation Manager</p>
<b>By 25 June 2021</b>	<p>Feedback on the Action Plan to be received by Strategic Adviser</p>	<p>Partners/stakeholders to submit contributions by 25 June 2021</p>	<p>Partners/stakeholders</p>
<b>By 9 July 2021</b>	<p>Action Plan amended considering comments/feedback received</p> <p>Action Plan distributed throughout the LA</p>	<p>Strategic Adviser, in consultation with the Assistant Director (Education) and the Head of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion, to consider</p>	<p>Strategic Adviser/ Assistant Director (Education)/ Head of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion</p>

		responses – amendments made as necessary	
<b>From 11 July 2021</b>	Begin implementation of action plans		

### **Monitoring and reporting arrangements**

21. The Strategic Adviser will provide updates on progress:
- fortnightly to the DCS and Assistant Director (Education)
  - at each Schools Forum as required
  - to wider partners by invitation.

**Mark Williams, Strategic Adviser**  
**30 April 2021**

Draft

## Appendix 1: Response form to questions relating to Wirral Local Authority's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan

Your feedback and views are welcomed and valued.

Looking at the DSG as a whole and especially the High Needs Block, please respond to the questions below and return this form via email to Colleen Halpin at [colleenhalpin@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:colleenhalpin@wirral.gov.uk) by Tuesday 18 May.

Question	Response
<p>1. Having the needs of pupils at our heart, and considering the LA's duties and strategic priorities, what do you think</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-is going well</li> <li>-has not gone well</li> <li>-is essential</li> <li>-could we do differently</li> <li>-can be stopped or reduced?</li> </ul>	
<p>2. Going forwards, again having the needs of pupils at the heart of our thinking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-what do we mean about being inclusive in Wirral and what does this look like?</li> <li>-what do we want provision and outcomes for children and young people to look like in Wirral?</li> <li>-how can we meet the emerging priorities for supporting children and young people with SEND of:</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop a more inclusive culture in which the needs of children, young people and their families are identified, assessed, and met as far as possible within their local community.</li> <li>▪ Help to set outcomes that are measured by their impact on how well the child or young person is prepared for adulthood.</li> <li>▪ Ensure sufficiency in the system, including in schools, to provide a high-quality offer of emotional health and well-being support for children and young people with SEND.</li> <li>▪ Understand the impact of transitions, such as between</li> </ul>	

<p>children’s and adults’ services, and work to provide CYP with the right support, in the right place, at the right time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue to make the loudest and most important voice, the voice of the child or young person?</li> </ul>	
<p>Any other comments you would like to make?</p>	

**Name:**

**Organisation:**

Thank you. As outlined above, your responses will help inform the basis of a draft action plan.

Draft

## Appendix 2: Opportunities to meet online with the Strategic Adviser and LA colleagues to respond to the questions and/or ask questions

The following dates and times are offered. If you wish to join in, please indicate which are best suited to you and return this form to Colleen Halpin at [colleenhalpin@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:colleenhalpin@wirral.gov.uk) at least two working days before each date.

**Name:**

**Organisation:**

Date/time	Your preference – please indicate
Wednesday 12 May: 0800-0930	
Wednesday 12 May: 1000-1130	
Wednesday 12 May: 1230-1400	
Wednesday 12 May: 1430-1600	
Wednesday 12 May: 1830-2000	
Tuesday 18 May: 0800-0930	
Tuesday 18 May: 1000-1130	
Tuesday 18 May: 1230-1400	
Tuesday 18 May: 1430-1600	
Tuesday 18 May: 1830-2000	

These online sessions are 'drop in'. Please do not feel you need to attend for the full 90 minutes.

Organisations may, of course, express a preference to meet together.

While every effort will be made to accommodate references, these cannot be guaranteed.

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## WIRRAL COUNCIL

### SCHOOLS FORUM – 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021

### REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

### SCHOOLS BUDGET OUTTURN REPORT 2020-21

#### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the year end position for the 2020-21 Schools Budget. At this time, the accounts are provisional and subject to audit.
- 1.2 Overall the schools budget has overspent by £414k which is mainly due to pressure in the High Needs Block. This reflects an improvement of £644k since the Quarter 3 position reported at the January 2021 meeting of the Forum and which is mainly attributable to Early Years (£361k) and High Needs (£258k).
- 1.3 The table attached at Appendix 1 compares the detailed Schools Budget with the spend for the year. The reasons for the main variations and comments on specific budget areas are included in section 3.0 below. The Budget and Outturn for each block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is summarised below.

	2020-21 Budget	2020-21 Spend	2020-21 Variation Under/(Over) spend
	£	£	£
Schools Block	108,514,030	108,514,030	0
Schools de-delegated	1,667,400	1,614,886	52,514
Central School Services Block	3,386,900	3,347,986	38,914
High Needs Block	40,148,900	41,522,002	(1,373,102)
Early Years Block	21,208,000	20,645,739	562,261
DSG	(174,321,430)	(173,982,451)	(338,979)
<b>Total before contribution to reserve</b>	<b>603,800</b>	<b>1,662,192</b>	<b>(1,058,392)</b>
Contribution to reserves (High Needs)	643,900	0	643,900
<b>Total after contribution to reserve</b>	<b>1,247,700</b>	<b>1,662,192</b>	<b>(414,492)</b>
High Needs allocated	40,148,900	41,522,002	(1,373,102)
Contribution to reserves (High Needs)	643,900	0	643,900
<b>Net total for High Needs Block</b>	<b>40,792,800</b>	<b>41,522,002</b>	<b>(729,202)</b>

- 1.4 At the beginning of 2020-21 the cumulative DSG reserve opened with a deficit balance of £1.264k. The in-year deficit of £414k means that the total deficit balance to be carried forward into 2021-22 is £1.678k.

#### 2.0 REVISED 2020-21 BUDGET

- 2.1 Since the Quarter 3 budget report was presented at the January 2021 meeting of the Forum, the budget has been updated to reflect the conversion to academy of

Brackenwood Junior school which was effective from 1 January 2021. The effect of this is to reduce both the Primary School and DSG income budgets by £224,970. There has been no change to the overall budget which remains at £1,247,400.

### 3.0 SCHOOLS BLOCK

#### 3.1 Schools – balanced

Individual school balances have been carried forward to 2021-22 in the designated schools reserve thus delivering an in-year balanced position.

#### 3.2 Schools de-delegated - School Specific Contingency - £82,011 favorable

The purpose of this budget is to meet exceptional and unforeseen costs, which would be unreasonable to expect the schools and governing bodies to bear. As such these costs can significantly fluctuate year on year and are summarised in the table below.

	2020-21 Budget £	2020-21 Spend £	2020-21 Variation Under/(Over) spend £
<b><u>Primary and Secondary schools</u></b>			
Business rates variations	26,100	(17,559)	43,659
School support	40,000	1,648	38,352
<b><u>Special schools</u></b>			
School support	1,800	5,711	(3,911)
Special school buy-back	(155,300)	(155,000)	(300)
Special school balance redistributed	153,500	149,289	4,211
<b>Total</b>	<b>66,100</b>	<b>(15,911)</b>	<b>82,011</b>

Business rates activity reflects the difference between the expected charges that are levied after the schools budgets have been set. Overall, the actual position reflected a net reduction in business rates of £17.6k and this has generated an underspend of £43.7k.

The underspend of £38.4k for School support is mainly due to the balance of the Vulnerable Children budget where activity has transferred to the Behaviour Support function. The budget of £35k will transfer across in 2021-22.

#### 3.3 Schools de-delegated - Special Staff Costs - £53,990 adverse

There was a £54k overspend on Special Staff costs as shown in the table below:

	2020-21 Budget £	2020-21 Spend £	2020-21 Variation Under/(Over) spend £
Maternity, Paternity & Other Staff Costs	578,929	632,919	(53,990)
TU Facilities	115,571	115,571	0
Insurances & Recharges	6,900	6,900	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>701,400</b>	<b>755,390</b>	<b>(53,990)</b>

The overspend is due to the excess volume of maternity/paternity pay. These costs can significantly fluctuate year on year.

### 3.4 Schools Block DSG - £338,979 adverse

The shortfall in grant income compared to budget relates to Early Years funding. The final Early Years grant is dependent upon the Spring census process and the outcome of this is not confirmed until after the financial year end. It is usual for this process to result in an adjustment to the grant income thus an accounting transaction is processed to reflect the expected change.

In 2019-20, the expected change to the grant was overstated by £167k and this has generated a shortfall in grant income for 2020-21. In addition, indications are that the Spring 2021 census process will result in a reduction of £172k resulting in a total grant income shortfall of £339k compared to budget.

## 4.0 CENTRAL SCHOOLS SERVICES BLOCK

### 4.1 Central Schools Services block - £38,914 favourable

Overall, the Central Schools Services Block is underspent by £39k which is mainly due to a short-term part-time vacancy in the Admissions Team (£23k) and the Schools Forum budget which has not been utilised (£10k).

### 4.2 Contribution to Combined Budgets – balanced

These contributions support services that would otherwise fall outside of the schools budget. The contributions combine with other council resources for the educational benefit of children. For 2020-21, the total contribution reduced by £175,100 from £875,600 to £700,500.

The £700.5k 2020-21 budget was utilised across the following areas:

	<b>Budget</b>
	<b>£</b>
School Improvement	264,000
Discretionary Rate Relief Top Up	85,300
LCSB contribution	24,000
Governors Forum	1,800
PFI Support Team	49,400
PFI CLC	54,800
Looked after Children Education Services	112,400
School Intervention	108,800
<b>Total</b>	<b>700,500</b>

## 5.0 EARLY YEARS BLOCK

5.1 The overall position on the Early Years block when compared to budget was an underspend of £562,261. Due to the funding mechanism for early years, budget does not reflect actual grant income thus it is more appropriate to review early years financial performance against the expected grant income for the year. In addition, the spend for 2020-21 includes £67k relating to the prior year and it was agreed at the June 2020 Forum that this could be off-set against DSG reserve. After adjusting for these two factors, the early years underspend for 2020-21 was £290,400 as summarised in the table below. Note that the £290,400 underspend is indicative at

this time and is subject to confirmation once the final grant allocation for 2020-21 is published.

	2020-21 Grant £	2020-21 Spend £	2020-21 Variation Under/(Over) spend £	2020-21 Variation Under/(Over) spend £
2 year-olds	2,929,250	2,677,983	251,267	
3/4 year-olds (Universal)	10,695,480	10,412,955	282,525	
3/4 year-olds (Extended)	5,468,450	5,074,833	393,617	
	19,093,180	18,165,771	927,409	170,586
Autumn top-ups	0	756,823	(756,823)	
Pupil premium	195,383	202,671	(7,288)	(7,288)
Disability Access Fund	94,095	48,745	45,350	45,350
MNS Protection	517,615	497,138	20,477	20,477
Central Costs	518,700	456,613	62,087	62,087
Inclusive Practice Fund	450,000	450,812	(812)	(812)
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,868,973</b>	<b>20,578,573</b>	<b>290,400</b>	<b>290,400</b>

## 5.2 Payments to providers - £170,586 favourable

The actual number of hours taken up across 2-year-old and 3 & 4-year-old provision was significantly less than expected due mainly to the impact of COVID-19 on attendance. This has generated a gross underspend of £927k. To minimise the negative impact of COVID-19 on providers, the Department of Education (DfE) advised Local Authorities to maintain the usual level of operating income to providers for the Autumn term where possible. To comply with this, top-up payments were made to providers at a total cost of £757k. Following this action, a net underspend up £171k against the grant income remains.

## 5.3 Disability Access Fund – £45,350 favourable

There was an underspend on the fund of £45.4k which is mainly due to slippage in spend plans. The DfE expect authorities to spend any additional funding over and above DAF actually paid out in 2020-21 on services in line with the principles and aims of DAF. It is therefore proposed that the £45.4k unspent DAF funding is spent on further initiatives to support the purpose of DAF, such as training and equipment, in addition to the total £178.1k surplus brought forward from 2019-20.

## 5.5 Early Years Central Budget - £62,087 favourable

The underspend is due to staff vacancies that occurred during the year. Staff vacancies have now been filled thus it is not expected that there will be an underspend in 2021-22.

## 5.6 Early Years carry-forward £245,050

As identified in the Early Years Working Group Report, it is requested that the unspent grant, net of the DAF underspend, which is ringfenced, be carried forward into 2021-22 to fund specific planned activity.

## 6.0 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK

### 6.1 Special School Places - £300,894 favourable

The 2020-21 budget includes growth of 40 places which were expected to be fully allocated to schools. Of these 40 places, 23 have been allocated part way through the financial year and 17 were unallocated at the end of the financial year. This has generated an underspend of £300k for 2020-21.

## 6.2 Special Education Needs Statements (excluding Early Years) - £678,974 adverse

Pressure on this budget has continued throughout the year resulting in an overspend of £679k.

The majority of the overspend relates to:

- specialist personal support (£215k) – this budget provides flexibility in providing specific additional support to what is usually available from the settings and is designed to secure the outcomes in the child or young person’s Education, Health and Care Plan. There has been no change to this budget since 2018-19 although demand has increased. The 2021-22 budget has been increased to reflect expected demand.
- units of resource – there has been a growth in plans during the year and although demand slowed after the Summer term overspends of £125k for Secondary pupils and £330k for Primary pupils has been generated.

## 6.3 Special Education Needs Top Ups - £487,626 adverse

The overall position on top-ups was an overspend of £487.6k which is summarised as follows:

	2020-21 Budget	2020-21 Spend	2020-21 Variation Under/(Over) spend
	£	£	£
Top Ups for Maintained Special Schools	8,427,900	8,405,470	22,430
Top Ups for Resourced provision	1,048,600	1,031,410	17,190
Alternative provision	1,318,200	1,127,000	191,200
FE and 6 <sup>TH</sup> Form Top Ups	1,683,200	2,009,444	(326,244)
Additional Nursing Support	159,900	147,503	12,397
Exceptional Needs	782,000	1,186,599	(404,599)
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,419,800</b>	<b>13,907,426</b>	<b>(487,626)</b>

Alternative Provision top-ups budget was underspent by £191.2k due to demand being less than expected. In 2019-20 this budget was overspent by £515k resulting in a significant increase in the budget. Whilst the budget was underspent at the end of 2020-21, spend was £277k higher than the previous year thus reflecting the expected increase in demand.

FE and 6<sup>TH</sup> Form Top Ups was overspent by £326.2k due which is mainly due to an increase in places.

Exceptional Needs was overspent by £404.6k due to the growth in applications since September 2020.

## 6.4 High Needs Contingency - £65,379 favourable

This budget funds the 90% Notional SEN Guarantee, where mainstream schools are compensated if their element 2 costs exceed 90% of their notional SEN allocation plus any unforeseen circumstances. As such costs can differ significantly year on year.

#### **6.5 Independent Special Schools - £1,033,806 adverse**

The budget was based on 105 places, but demand increased throughout the year reaching 136 and this has generated an overspend against budget of £1,034k. The increased level of demand is expected to continue into 2021-22 thus the budget has been increased by £1m.

#### **6.6 Home Tuition - £17,949 adverse**

The £18k overspend reflects an improvement on the Quarter 3 position reported at the January 2021 meeting of the Forum and which is mainly attributable to an increase in ad-hoc recharges. A proposal to increase the charges for this service is included as a separate item on the agenda.

#### **6.7 Support for SEN - £487,227 favourable**

The underspend of £487k reflects an increase on the on the Quarter 3 position reported at the January 2021 meeting. At Quarter 3 an underspend of £256k was reported which was mainly due to staff vacancies in the Clinical Psychologists and Communications Differences teams. Since then, the underspend has increased by a further £231k which is mainly due to:

- further staffing cost savings including release of a pension liability that had been set aside for a potential increase in employers costs that has now been deferred to the next Triennial review of the pension fund (£114k)
- net surplus on transfer of funding between schools for excluded/out of borough pupils (£50k)
- net gain from contributions to/from other sources (£66k)

### **7.0 UPDATE ON SPECIFIC RESERVES**

7.1 The 2020-21 budget included a planned surplus of £644k in the High Needs Block that was to be carried forward into the reserve at the end of the financial year. Due to pressure on the High Needs Block, an overspend of £729.2k has been generated. This has been partially off-set by a net underspend in other areas thus generating a net deficit for the year of £414.5k. This will be carried forward into the DSG reserve resulting in a total deficit of £1.678m to be carried forward into 2021-22.

7.2 The Council continues to develop its deficit recovery strategy and an update on this is included as a separate item on the agenda.

7.3 Whilst the overall DSG reserve to be carried forward to 2021-22 is in deficit by £1.678m, this includes a cumulative surplus of £223.5k in respect of the Early Years Disability Access Fund and £245.1k in relation to unspent Early Years grant.

### **8.0 CONCLUSION**

8.1 The overspend of £414,492 generated in 2020-21 has resulted in an overall DSG reserve deficit of £1,678,988 at 31 March 2021.

## **9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 That the Forum notes the report and the financial position of the Schools Budget for 2020-21.
- 9.2 That, subject to confirmation of the final grant allocation for 2020-21, £468,540 of DSG for 2021-22 be ring-fenced as follows:

Disability Access Fund underspend	£223,490
Early Years unspent grant	£245,050 (to be confirmed)

**Simone White**

**Director of Children, Families and Education**

## Appendix 1 - Budget Variations 2020-21

	2020-21 Budget £	2020-21 Spend £	2020-21 Variation Under/(Over) spend £
<b>Individual Schools Budget</b>			
Primary	82,755,030	82,755,030	0
Secondary	25,293,000	25,293,000	0
Special	11,368,300	11,067,406	300,894
Wirral Hospitals School	1,354,300	1,354,300	0
SEN Bases	962,200	971,259	(9,059)
Sixth Form/Further Education	36,000	36,000	0
Early Years	20,239,300	19,738,314	500,986
Growth and Falling Rolls Fund	466,000	466,000	0
<b>Individual Schools Budget Total</b>	<b>142,474,130</b>	<b>141,681,309</b>	<b>792,821</b>
<b>Central School Costs</b>			
Early Years	518,700	456,613	62,087
Admissions	372,200	349,155	23,045
School Redundancy Costs	81,000	75,731	5,269
Licenses and subscriptions	244,900	244,900	0
Schools Forum	10,600	0	10,600
Contribution to combined budgets	700,500	700,500	0
PFI Affordability Gap	1,247,700	1,247,700	0
Retained duties (ex-ESG)	730,000	730,000	0
<b>Costs delegated to/de-delegated from schools</b>			
Library Service	188,200	188,200	0
Insurances	25,600	10,931	14,669
School Specific contingencies	66,100	(15,911)	82,011
Special Staff Costs	701,400	755,390	(53,990)
Behaviour Support	107,000	97,176	9,824
School Improvement	150,700	150,700	0
Retained duties (ex-ESG)	504,800	504,800	0
<b>High Needs Pupils</b>			
Statements	6,237,000	6,915,974	(678,974)
SEN top-ups	13,419,800	13,907,426	(487,626)
High Needs contingency	360,000	294,621	65,379
Independent Special Schools	4,134,000	5,167,806	(1,033,806)
Home Tuition	400,500	418,449	(17,949)
Support for SEN	2,192,200	1,704,973	487,227
Special School Transport	58,200	58,200	0
<b>Non-delegated school costs Total</b>	<b>32,451,100</b>	<b>33,963,333</b>	<b>(1,512,233)</b>
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>174,925,230</b>	<b>175,644,643</b>	<b>(719,413)</b>
<b>Funding</b>			
Dedicated School Grant	(174,321,430)	(173,982,451)	(338,979)
Contribution to DSG Reserve (High Needs)	643,900	0	643,900
<b>Funding Total</b>	<b>(173,677,530)</b>	<b>(173,982,451)</b>	<b>304,921</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1,247,700</b>	<b>1,662,192</b>	<b>(414,492)</b>

## WIRRAL COUNCIL

### SCHOOLS FORUM – 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021

### REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

### SCHOOLS 2021-22 BUDGET UPDATE

---

#### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Schools Budget for 2021-22 for changes that have been made since it was reported to Schools Forum on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

#### 2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The Schools Budget for 2021-22 covers Early Years, Maintained Schools, Academies, colleges, and providers and reflects the following views and formula proposals agreed at the January 2021 meeting:

- A Minimum Funding Guarantee of 1.25% for Wirral mainstream schools
- The continuing Contributions to Combined Budgets should be £700,500
- The surplus High Needs funding of £2,683,100 is transferred to the DSG reserve
- Headroom in schools funding after applying the National Funding Formula (NFF) to be transferred to a falling rolls/growth fund

The Schools Budget for 2021-22 was agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and by Council at its meeting of 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2020.

#### 2.2 DSG Reserve

Whilst the 2021-22 budget reflects an in-year surplus of £2,683,100 to contribute to the High Needs deficit, the actual deficit brought forward at 31 March 2021 is £1,678,988. This means that the DSG reserve is expected to be in surplus by around £1m at the end of 2021-22.

#### 3.0 BUDGET CHANGES

- 3.1 The following changes have been made to the budget since that presented at the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021 meeting of the Forum:
- Academy recouplement – this change has reduced both the Individual Schools Budget and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) by £111,694,700
  - De-delegation – this change has transferred funding of £1,559,500 from Individual School Budgets to the de-delegated block
  - Falling rolls/growth fund – headroom of £152,900 has been identified following the application of the NFF

- Teachers Pay Grant (TPG) and Teachers Pension Employer Contributions Grant (TPECG) – re-analysis of £22,300 between Home Tuition service and Support for SEN

The table attached in Appendix 1 compares the original and revised 2021-22 budgets.

#### **4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 That the Schools Forum note this report.

**Simone White**

**Director of Children, Families and Education**

**Appendix 1 - Schools Budget 2021-22**

	<b>2021-22 Proposed Budget - January 2021 £</b>	<b>2021-22 Revised Budget - May 2021 £</b>
<b>Individual Schools Budget</b>		
Primary	116,038,300	96,052,500
Secondary	114,251,500	20,896,100
Special	12,622,600	12,549,800
Wirral Hospitals School	1,412,000	1,407,200
SEN Bases	958,000	969,700
Sixth Form/Further Education	36,000	36,000
Early Years	20,675,500	20,675,500
Growth and Falling Rolls Fund	0	152,900
<b>Individual Schools Budget Total</b>	<b>265,993,900</b>	<b>152,739,700</b>
<b>Central School Costs</b>		
Early Years	518,700	518,700
Admissions	380,000	380,000
School Redundancy Costs	81,000	81,000
Licenses and subscriptions	243,800	243,800
Schools Forum	10,600	10,600
Contingency	7,600	7,600
Contribution to combined budgets	700,500	700,500
PFI Affordability Gap	1,459,600	1,459,600
Retained duties (ex-ESG)	730,000	730,000
<b>Costs delegated to/de-delegated from schools</b>		
Library Service	0	185,100
Insurances	0	25,100
School Specific contingencies	0	31,100
Special Staff Costs	0	696,000
Behaviour Support	0	58,000
School Improvement	0	62,300
Retained duties (ex-ESG)	0	501,900
<b>High Needs Pupils</b>		
Statements	6,528,300	6,528,300
SEN top-ups	14,722,100	14,722,100
High Needs contingency	400,000	400,000
Independent Special Schools	5,120,000	5,120,000
Home Tuition	400,500	422,700
Support for SEN	2,132,200	2,110,000
Special School Transport	58,200	58,200
<b>Non-school and school delegated Total</b>	<b>33,493,100</b>	<b>35,052,600</b>
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>299,487,000</b>	<b>187,792,300</b>
<b>Funding</b>		
Dedicated School Grant	(300,710,700)	(189,016,000)
Contribution to DSG Reserve (High Needs)	2,683,100	2,683,100
<b>Funding Total</b>	<b>(298,027,600)</b>	<b>(186,332,900)</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1,459,400</b>	<b>1,459,400</b>

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## WIRRAL COUNCIL

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021

### REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

#### Delegated School Balances as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 and Deficit Budgets Review

---

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report advises the Forum of the level of school balances as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, the increase in balances and actions required for schools with a deficit budget.

#### 1. School Balances

School balances at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 have increased to £13.5m. This is a significant increase of £5.5m from the previous year after one academy conversion during 2020-21 has been excluded from the balances.

School Phase (no of schools)	31.3.2020 Balances £	31.3.2021 Balances £	Difference £	Change
Nursery (3)	340,638	289,332	-51,306	Reduction
Primary (77)	6,388,909	11,141,744	4,752,835	Increase
Secondary (4)	-352,809	115,295	468,104	Increase
Special (11)	1,506,892	1,934,152	427,260	Increase
<b>Total (95)</b>	<b>7,883,630</b>	<b>13,480,523</b>	<b>5,596,893</b>	<b>Increase</b>
Academy Conversions (1)	39,784			
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,923,414</b>			

The average school balance for a primary school has increased to £144,698 compared to £82,419 in 2019-20. The overall secondary school balance is now in a net surplus position, however 2 out of the 4 schools remain in a deficit position.

There was one primary school academy conversion in 2020-21.

#### 2. Deficit Budgets

There are 11 schools that have ended the financial year with a deficit balance (compared to 21 in 2019-20). This is made up of 1 nursery school, 6 primary schools, 2 secondary schools and 2 special schools.

- There are 3 new schools with a deficit budget, who will be required to set a balanced budget or agree a licenced deficit plan with the LA.
- There are 2 schools working through Licenced Deficit agreements. The LA will continue to work with these schools to bring them back into balance within the agreed time. If this is not the case, they may move to a Notice of Concern.
- There are 2 schools who are working with the LA to agree Licenced Deficit plans, and these will be closely monitored at budget setting.

- 2 schools remain in a Notice of Concern category. These will be monitored closely along with those schools who were in this category last year but have balanced their budget this year due to reduced spending during the Covid Period.
- There are 2 schools who regularly finish the year with a deficit budget but set a balanced budget each year. These will be closely monitored to ensure the deficit does not increase.

### 3. Increase in Balances

The main reasons for the increase in balances are given below and are summarised in the following table.

School Phase	Classification	2020-21 Total Expenditure & Income £	2019-20 Total Expenditure & Income £	Difference between yrs. £
Primary Schools	E1 Employees	95,280,800	92,592,679	2,688,121
	E2 Premises	5,815,205	5,248,793	566,412
	E3 Supplies	9,344,585	11,044,678	-1,700,093
	E4 Services	1,055,936	2,389,880	-1,333,944
	E5 SLAs Internal & External	5,551,008	6,256,769	-705,761
	E6 Other Expenditure	263,983	271,527	-7,544
	I1 Grants and DSG funding	-117,970,460	-110,226,680	-7,743,781
	I1 Other Income	-10,482,800	-13,966,555	3,483,755
<b>Primary Schools Total</b>		<b>-11,141,743</b>	<b>-6,388,909</b>	<b>-4,752,835</b>
Secondary Schools	E1 Employees	17,766,775	17,010,214	756,560
	E2 Premises	1,005,235	1,154,089	-148,854
	E3 Supplies	2,549,098	3,033,192	-484,094
	E4 Services	1,195,403	1,204,001	-8,597
	E5 SLAs Internal & External	337,939	334,228	3,711
	E6 Other Expenditure	224,942	110,744	114,197
	I1 Grants and DSG funding	-21,902,504	-20,140,618	-1,761,886
	I1 Other Income	-1,292,183	-2,353,046	1,060,863
<b>Secondary Schools Total</b>		<b>-115,295</b>	<b>-115,295</b>	<b>352,804</b>
Special Schools	E1 Employees	21,422,248	20,929,055	493,193
	E2 Premises	991,490	847,680	143,810
	E3 Supplies	1,148,629	1,227,601	-78,972
	E4 Services	197,907	410,952	-213,045
	E5 SLAs Internal & External	727,211	797,551	-70,340
	E6 Other Expenditure	147,149	228,280	-81,131
	I1 Grants and DSG funding	-23,508,223	-22,417,172	-1,091,051
	I1 Other Income	-3,060,564	-3,530,840	470,276
<b>Special Schools Total</b>		<b>-1,934,154</b>	<b>-1,934,154</b>	<b>-1,506,892</b>
Nursery Schools	E1 Employees	1,688,159	1,838,203	-150,044
	E2 Premises	156,215	124,948	31,267
	E3 Supplies	91,452	119,589	-28,138
	E4 Services	10,509	22,095	-11,587
	E5 SLAs Internal & External	67,931	76,586	-8,655
	E6 Other Expenditure	610	2,127	-1,517
	I1 Grants and DSG funding	-1,749,395	-1,784,307	34,913
	I1 Other Income	-554,813	-739,879	185,066
<b>Nursery Schools Total</b>		<b>-289,332</b>	<b>-289,332</b>	<b>-340,638</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>-13,480,524</b>	<b>-7,883,634</b>	<b>-5,596,890</b>

## **Employees**

Primary, secondary and special schools have increased employee costs of £3.9m in 2020-21, mainly due to pay awards and the full year effect of the increased Teachers Pension employers contributions since September 2019. Due to the overall increase in costs this summary does not identify the reduction of £1m for Agency staff during 2020-21. Where schools had signed up to long term agency staff these agreements were honoured. This saving was made from ad hoc agency supply not being required. Only nursery schools made overall savings on staffing, with £85k saving in agency staff as well as various small savings in other areas adding up to a further £65k.

## **Premises**

Repair and Maintenance costs increased overall by £830k. Within the Primary sector, early years capital spend during 2020-21 accounts for £352k, other R&M spend varies between schools. Cleaning costs have increased overall by £275k due to covid, however, utility costs including water have reduced in all phases by £569k.

## **Supplies**

For 2020-21 savings of £2.3m over all phases have been made in this area, this includes significant savings in the following areas: -

- £648 saving from food costs for schools who manage their own catering costs.
- £545k saving made from not purchasing professional services to support schools.
- £329k saving made from not having swimming lessons (primary only).
- £209k saving from not using external PE instructors (usually covered from PE grant).
- £190k reduction of photocopying costs.
- £164k reduction of educational equipment (only secondary schools spent more in this area compared to previous year).

However, as expected there was an increase in costs for IT and Communications of £395k due to home schooling requirements.

## **Services**

Savings for educational courses of £512k for Primary and Special phases were made, whereas Secondary schools spent an additional £83k in this area. £1.1m reduction of costs for school trips would be expected as no trips took place during Covid restrictions, but this will be offset by a reduction of parental income. There were no significant changes for nursery schools in this area.

## **Service Level Agreements – Internal and External**

Only Primary and Special Schools made significant savings in this area. Most of the reduction was from meals provided by Edsential, who claimed UIFSM funding and costs to cover food and staffing where schools were still providing meals to key worker children.

## **Other Expenditure**

The additional costs here are not significant.

## Grants and DSG Funding

This is significantly higher in all areas at £10.5m, except for nursery classes. There are a number of reasons for this increase: -

- Additional formula funding of £4.6m in 2020-21 for primary and secondary schools, where the minimum funding guarantee was set at 1.84%, and some schools received minimum per pupil funding of £3,750 per primary pupil and £5,000 for secondary school pupils. Some of this will have been used to offset pay awards and price increases.
- Increase of £2.1m for the full year effect of TPECG in 2020-21, to offset full year cost of salaries mentioned earlier.
- Covid funding/grants approx. £2m – including Exceptional Costs (£680k) to cover additional covid costs, catch up funding (£1.3m) and academic mentors (£25k).

## Other Income

All school phases have made significant losses in this area, £5.2m in total. This is due to the reduction from income: -

- £1m from parental contributions for such things as nursery charges (not funded), trips and before/after school clubs
- £965k from pupil meals, adult meals and provision of milk
- miscellaneous income £753k
- £470k from room hire, including playing fields and sports barns.
- £333k from contributions from school fund
- mentoring and teacher release income of £226k

## 4. Monitoring School Balances 2021-22 and 2022-23

Projections from the Period 9 review in February indicated that school balances would reduce significantly over the next 2 years, as illustrated below. Balances are projected to reduce by £2.2m in 2021-22 and £2.8m in 2021-22.

Balances as at	Period 9	Actual
31/03/2021	£9.9m	£13.5m
31/03/2022	£7.7m	To be confirmed
31/03/2023	£4.9m	To be confirmed

However, the actual position for March 2021 is £3.6m better than anticipated at Period 9 monitoring. The position for the next 2 years will be clearer after budget setting in July.

The period 9 estimates took into consideration the 2021-22 budget allocations for mainstream schools,

- where the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) was set at +1.25%.
- Teachers Pension Grant (TPG) & Teachers Pension Employers Contribution Grant (TPECG) were included in the pupil entitlement elements of the NFF formula at an additional rate of £180 per pupil for primary schools and £265 for secondary schools.
- a minimum per pupil funding level of £4,180 in primary and £5,415 in secondary, both including an additional amount for the TPG & TPECG.

As stated above many schools have made savings in a number of areas of their budget due to reduced spending when schools were closed or not running at full capacity during Covid 19 disruptions over the last 12 months.

Period 9 estimates confirm continuing difficulties for schools over the medium term, with 37 (out of 95) schools indicating a deficit position in 2022-23 if no action is taken to make savings.

#### **5. Action Taken to Date**

- There have been meetings with some schools and governors to review and consider the financial position going forward.
- Where schools are reviewing staffing levels this is, in a number of cases, leading to consideration of redundancies.
- LMS and HR continue to work with schools to balance budgets and plan any reduction in staff numbers or hours.
- Briefings and discussions with headteachers and school finance staff.
- School Bursar support working with Headteacher and governors to provide more detailed projections.

#### **6. Future Action**

- Ensure schools who cannot set a balanced budget agree a licenced deficit plan with the LA before Governors sign off the budget. Schools will be required to demonstrate how the budget will come back into balance within 3 years (4 years in exceptional circumstances).
- Where agreement cannot be reached a Notice of Concern will be issued, requiring an immediate action plan to be agreed by governors.
- Review Schools projections completed as part of the budget setting process. Contact schools who are likely to move into a deficit position in 2022-23 and discuss any remedial actions to prevent this from happening.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the Forum notes the report.
2. That schools' balances continue to be monitored.

**Simone White**  
**Director of Children, Families and Education**

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## **WIRRAL COUNCIL**

### **SCHOOLS FORUM – 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

#### **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION**

##### **Update to the Schools Forum Operational and Good Practice Guide March 2021**

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### **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Forum on the most recent update on how Schools Forum meetings can be held.

### **2.0 Updated Guidance**

- 2.1 The most recent Schools Forum Operational and Good Practice Guidance is attached, updated in March 2021.  
Section 7 on the attached document has been updated to make permanent provisions to enable Schools Forum meetings to be held remotely. This includes (but is not limited to) telephone conferencing, video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming. Where schools forum decides to hold a public meeting by remote means only, the Forum should provide support or make alternative arrangements so that any interested parties who do not have telephone or online access can attend virtual meetings.

### **3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 That the Schools Forum notes the change.

**Simone White**

**Director of Children, Families and Education**

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Education & Skills  
Funding Agency

# Schools Forum

Operational and good practice guide

March 2021

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## Introduction

1. This guide is designed to provide local authority officers and schools forum elected members with advice and information on good practice in relation to the operation of schools forums.
2. It is organised in two sections:
  - section 1 provides information on the constitutional and organisational requirements for schools forums
  - section 2 covers a number of key aspects of the operation of schools forums at local level, drawing on good practice from a number of schools forums
3. GOV.UK contains details of all the announcements, documents and other information relating to school funding and schools forums, including the National funding formula (NFF) The website also has a range of useful links to other sites that may be of relevance to schools forum members.
4. A short [guide to the schools forum for schools and academies](#), which may be helpful to stakeholders and the wider school family, is available on GOV.UK.
5. If you have any queries about the operation of schools forums please contact Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) using the [ESFA enquiry form](#).

# Section 1 – schools forum regulations: constitution and procedural issues

## Regulations

6. [National regulations](#)<sup>1</sup> govern the composition, constitution and procedures of schools forums. Local authorities can provide schools forum members with a copy of these regulations or alternatively they can be accessed at:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/2261/contents>.

7. The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2021 amended The Schools Forums (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 to make permanent provisions to enable schools forums meetings to be held remotely. This includes (but is not limited to) telephone conferencing, video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming. Where a schools forum decides to hold a public meeting by remote means only, the forum should provide support or make alternative arrangements so that any interested parties who do not have telephone or online access can attend virtual meetings.

## Schools forum powers

8. Schools forums generally have a consultative role. However, there are situations in which they have decision making powers. The respective roles of schools forums, local authorities and the DfE are summarised in [schools forum powers and responsibilities](#). The overarching areas on which schools forums make decisions on local authority proposals are:

- de-delegation from mainstream maintained schools budgets (separate approval will be required by the primary and secondary phase members of schools forum), for prescribed services to be provided centrally
- to create a fund for significant pupil growth in order to support the local authority's duty for place planning (basic need), including pre-opening and diseconomy of scale costs, and agree the criteria for maintained schools and academies to access this fund
- to create a fund for falling rolls for good or outstanding schools if the schools' surplus capacity is likely to be needed within the next three years to meet rising pupil numbers and agree the criteria for maintained schools and academies to access this fund

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<sup>1</sup> Schools Forums (England) Regulations 2012 (S.I. 2012/2261) (as amended)

- agreeing other centrally retained budgets, including for local authority statutory responsibilities (where these relate to maintained schools only, voting is by the primary, secondary, special and PRU members of schools forum)
- funding for central early years expenditure, which may include funding for checking eligibility of pupils for an early years place, the early years pupil premium and/or free school meals
- authorising a reduction in the schools budget in order to fund a deficit arising in central expenditure, or from de-delegated services, which is to be carried forward from a previous funding period in the 2018 to 2019 funding year the schools block is ring-fenced. Local authorities require schools forum approval in order to move up to 0.5% from the schools block to other blocks
- in each of these cases, the local authority can appeal to the Secretary of State if the schools forum rejects its proposal.

9. Local authorities should be aware that the provisions of the [Local Government Act 2000](#) restrict the delegation of local authority decisions to Cabinet, a member of Cabinet, a Committee of Cabinet or an officer of the Council, which would not include schools forums. As a result the local authority cannot delegate its decision making powers to schools forum, for example, decisions on the funding formula.

10. Regulations state that the local authority must consult the schools forum annually in connection with various schools budget functions, namely:

- amendments to the school funding formula, for which the voting is restricted by the exclusion of non-schools members except for PVI representatives
- arrangements for the education of pupils with special educational needs in particular the places to be commissioned by the local authority and schools and the arrangements for paying top-up funding
- arrangements for the use of pupil referral units and the education of children otherwise than at school, in particular the places to be commissioned by the local authority and schools and the arrangements for paying top-up funding
- arrangements for early years provision
- administrative arrangements for the allocation of central government grants paid to schools via the local authority
- There's no specific definition of these consultation requirements over and above the wording in the regulations. It's a matter for the local authority to decide on the appropriate level of detail it needs to generate a sufficiently informed response from schools forum.

11. Consultation must also take place when a local authority is proposing a contract for supplies and services which is to be funded from the Schools Budget and is in excess of the EU procurement thresholds. The consultation must cover the terms of the contract at least one month prior to the issue of invitations to tender.

12. The schools forum has the responsibility of informing the governing bodies of all schools maintained by the local authority of the results of any consultations carried out by the local authority relating to the issues in paragraphs 12 and 13 above.

13. Local authorities will need to discuss with the schools forum any proposals that they intend to put to the Secretary of State to:

- vary the MFG
- use exceptional factors
- vary pupil numbers (Secretary of State approval is no longer required for increases relating to changes in admission limits or reorganisations)
- allow additional categories of, or spending on, central budgets
- amend the sparsity factor
- vary the lump sum for amalgamating schools
- vary the protection for special schools and special academies
- move up to 0.5% from the schools block, where the schools forum do not agree, or move more than 0.5% from the schools block

Proposals will then need to be considered by the Secretary of State.

## Membership

14. The Schools Forums Regulations provide a framework for the appointment of members, but allow a considerable degree of discretion in order to accommodate local priorities and practice. A quick guide to the [structure of the schools forums](#) is available.

15. There is no maximum or minimum size of a schools forum. Authorities will wish to take various issues into account in deciding the actual size, including the need to have full representation for various types of school, and the local authority's policy on representation of non-schools members. However, care should be taken to keep the schools forum to a reasonable size to ensure that it does not become too unwieldy.

16. Types of member: schools forums must have 'schools members', 'academies member(s)' if there is at least one academy in the local authority's area and 'non-schools members'. Schools and academies members together must number at least two-thirds of the total membership of the schools forum and the balance between maintained primary, maintained secondary and academies members must be broadly proportionate to the pupil numbers in each category, so the structure of Forum should be regularly reviewed, we would suggest good practice is to review the membership as a standing agenda item at each meeting. Academies members must represent mainstream academies and, if there are any in the local authority area, special academies and alternative provision academies. There is no requirement for academies members to represent specific primary and secondary phases, but it may be encouraged to ensure representation remains broadly proportionate to pupil numbers. Academy members must be separately elected and designated from maintained school representatives, please see paragraph 28.

17. Schools forum members will need the skills and competencies to manage Forum business (as detailed in [school forum powers and responsibilities](#)) and to take a strategic view across the whole education estate whilst acting as representative of the group that has elected them. Furthermore, they should be easily contactable and pro-active in raising the profile of issues and communicating decisions, and the reasons behind them, effectively. Good practice for schools forums would be to offer training to new or existing members who may benefit from this.

## Term of office

18. The term of office for each schools member and academies member should be stipulated by the local authority at the time of appointment. Such stipulation should follow published rules and be applied in a consistent manner between members. They need not have identical terms – there may be a case for varied terms so that there is continuity of experience rather than there being a complete change in the membership at a single point. The term of office should not be of a length that would hinder the requirement for the structure of the schools forum to mirror the type of provision in light of the pace of academy conversions. Examples of how this may work include:

- holding vacancies until the schools forum structure is reviewed providing that this does not mean holding vacancies for an unreasonable length of time, for example, we would expect this vacancy to be filled for the following term
- increasing the size of the schools forum temporarily to appoint additional academy members, then deleting schools member posts at the end of a term of office or when a vacancy arises
- considering continuity of service; where an academy conversion affects the school of a current schools member, would academies consider appointing that person as an academies member

19. The length of term of office for non-schools members is at the discretion of the local authority. Schools and academies must be informed, within a month of the appointment of any non-schools member, of the name of the member and the name of the body that that member represents.

20. As well as the term of office coming to an end, a member ceases to be a member of the Schools Forum if he or she resigns from the schools forum or no longer occupies the office by which he or she became eligible for election, selection or appointment to the schools forum. For example;

- a secondary schools member must stand down if their school converts to an academy
- a schools member representing community primary school governors who is no longer a governor of a community primary school in the relevant local authority must cease to hold office on the schools forum even if they remain a governor of a school represented by another group or sub-group
- other situations in which membership of the schools forum ends are if a member gives notice in writing to the local authority and, in the case of a non-schools member, the member is replaced by the local authority, for example at the request of the body which the member represents

## Schools members

21. Schools members represent specified phases or types of maintained schools within the local authority. As a minimum, schools forums must contain representatives of two groups of schools: primary and secondary schools, unless there are no primary or secondary schools maintained by the local authority. Middle schools and all through schools are treated according to their deemed status.

22. Where a local authority maintains one or more special schools the schools forum must have at least one schools member from that sector. The same applies to nursery schools and pupil referral units (PRUs).

23. The local authority then has discretion to divide the groups referred to in paragraph 16 and 17 into one or more of the following sub-groups:

- headteachers or headteachers' representatives in each group
- governors in each group
- headteachers or headteachers representatives and governors in each group
- representatives of a particular school category, for example, voluntary aided

24. Headteachers can be represented by other senior members of staff within their school. Governors can include interim executive members of an interim executive board. The sub-groups do not have to be of equal size; for example, there

may be more representatives of headteachers of primary schools than governors of such schools, or vice versa. The membership structure of the schools forum should ensure there is sufficient representation of each type of schools member in each group to ensure that debate within the schools forum is balanced and representative. As a minimum, there must be at least one representative of headteachers and one representative of governors among the schools members.

25. Whatever the membership structure of schools members on a schools forum, the important issue is that it should reflect most effectively the profile of education provision across the local authority to ensure that there is not an in-built bias towards any one phase or group.

## **Election and nomination of schools members**

26. The relevant group or sub-group is probably best placed to determine how their schools members should be elected.

27. It's good practice for those who draw up the scheme to ensure that a vacancy amongst a represented group would be filled by a nominee elected according to a process that has been determined by all those represented in that group, for example, community primary school headteachers, or secondary school governors, ensuring that everyone represented has had the opportunity to stand for election and/or vote in such an election. The process must be restricted to the group in question; a headteachers phase group could only vote as a whole for headteacher members if the voting excluded academies, as academies members form a separate group.

28. It's not appropriate for a single person to be elected to represent more than one group or sub-group concurrently, for instance, if they were a governor at a primary and secondary school. They can stand for election from either group but can be appointed to represent only one of those groups.

29. The purpose of ensuring that each group or sub-group is responsible for their election process is to guarantee that there is a transparent and representative process by which members of schools forums are nominated to represent their constituents.

30. Appropriate support to each group or sub-group to manage their election processes should be offered by the clerk of a schools forum, or the committee/democratic services of a local authority. This may just include the provision of advice but may also consist of providing administrative support in actually running the elections themselves.

31. As a minimum, we would recommend that the clerk of a schools forum make a record of the process by which the relevant schools within each group and sub-group elect their nominees to the schools forum and be able to advise the Chair

of the schools forum and local authority on action that needs to be taken, where necessary, to seek new nominees.

32. In determining the process by which elections should be operated it is perfectly legitimate for a local authority to devise, in consultation with their schools forum, a model scheme for the relevant schools within a group or sub-group to consider and be invited to adopt. However, such a model scheme cannot be imposed on that body of schools: adaptations and/or alternative schemes may be adopted. A single scheme need not be adopted universally.

33. Care should be taken to ensure that every eligible member of a group or sub-group has an opportunity to be involved in the determination of their group's election process, is given the opportunity to stand for election if they choose to do so, and is involved in the election of their representative(s).

34. It would not be compliant with the regulations for the steering committee or Chair of a 'parent' group simply to make a nomination to represent their group or sub-group on a schools forum. Schools members must be elected, subject to paragraph 39 below.

35. The local authority may set a date by which the election should take place and must appoint the schools member if the election has not taken place by that date. The person appointed should be a member of the relevant group.

36. We would recommend that any scheme takes into account a number of factors:

- the process for collecting names of those wishing to stand for election
- the timescale for notifying all constituents of the election and those standing
- the arrangements for dispatching and receiving ballots
- the arrangements for counting and publicising the results
- any arrangements for unusual circumstances such as only one candidate standing in an election
- whether existing members can stand for re-election

37. In the event of a tie between two or more candidates, then the local authority must appoint the schools member instead. The local authority may decide to appoint someone else rather than one of the candidates and might wish to take into account the experience or expertise of the individuals, and the balance between the different types of school represented on the schools forum.

## Election and nomination of academies members

38. Academies members must be elected by the proprietor bodies of the academies in the local authority's area, and they are probably best placed to determine the process. Academies members are there to represent the proprietor bodies of academies and are, therefore, not necessarily restricted to principals, senior staff or governors. The same factors should be taken into account as for the election of schools members, set out in paragraphs 28 to 39. For the avoidance of doubt, Free Schools, University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools are classed as academies for this purpose. There is no distinction between sponsored and converter academies.

39. There are three sub-groups for academy members: mainstream academies, special academies and alternative provision academies and it is for the proprietors of academies within each of these sub-groups to elect their representatives. It is not appropriate, therefore, for headteacher phase groups to determine representation unless the academy proprietors have agreed and even then the voting would need to exclude maintained school representatives. There is no requirement for academies members to be split into primary and secondary sub-groups. However, local authorities may wish to encourage academies to consider the pupil proportions across all academies when electing their representatives.

40. Where there is only one academy in a sub-group in the local authority's area, then their proprietor body must select the person who will represent them.

41. It is possible that a single person be appointed as an academies member to more than one schools forum, for example if an academy chain is located across multiple local authorities, providing they are elected on each occasion in accordance with the agreed election process for each separate schools forum.

42. As with schools members, the local authority may set a date by which the election should take place and must appoint an academies member if the election does not take place by that date, or if an election results in a tie between two or more candidates.

## Non-schools members

43. Non-schools members may number no more than a third of a schools forum's total membership (excluding observers, see paragraph 58). A representative of providers of 16-19 education must be elected from those providers. This includes those in the FE sector (FE and sixth form colleges) and other post-school institutions that specialise in special education needs (SPNs), where 20% or more of their students reside in the local authority's area. As with academies the providers are probably best placed to determine the election process.

44. The local authority must appoint at least one person to represent early years providers from the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector. Early years

PVI settings need to be represented because funding for the free entitlement for three and four year olds and eligible two year olds comes from the Dedicated Schools Grant, and all settings are funded through the Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF).

45. Before appointing additional non-schools members to the schools forum, the local authority must consider whether the Church of England and Roman Catholic dioceses situated in the local authority's area; and, where there are schools or academies in the area with a different religious character, the appropriate faith group, should be represented on the schools forum. If diocesan authorities nominate members for appointment as non-schools members they may wish to consider what type of representative would be most appropriate, schools-based such as a headteacher or governor, or someone linked more generally with the diocese, for example a member of the education board.

46. It's also good practice for local authorities to ensure that the needs and interests of all the pupils in the local authority are adequately represented by the members of a schools forum. The interests of pupils in maintained schools can be represented by schools members. Some pupils in a local authority, however, are not in maintained schools but instead are educated in hospitals, independent special schools and non-maintained special schools. Certain types of non-schools members can play an important role in representing the interests of these groups of pupils. They can also play a role in representing the interests and views of the services that support those groups of vulnerable and at risk pupils who nevertheless are on the roll of maintained schools, such as looked after children and children with special educational needs.

47. The purpose of non-schools members is also to bring greater breadth of discussion to schools forum meetings and ensure that stakeholders and partners other than schools are represented. Organisations which typically provide non-schools members are trades unions, professional associations and representatives of youth groups. Parent groups could also be considered. However, as there are clearly limited numbers of non-schools members able to be on a schools forum, care should be taken to ensure that an appropriate representation from wider stakeholders is achieved.

## Other membership issues

48. There are three restrictions placed on who can be a non-schools member of a schools forum. The local authority cannot appoint:

- an elected member of the local authority who is appointed to the executive of that local authority (a lead member/portfolio holder) ('executive members')
- the Director of Children's Services or any officer employed or engaged to work under the management of the Director of Children's Services, and who does not

directly provide education to children (or manage those who do) ('relevant officer' (a) and (b))

- other officers with a specific role in management of and/or who advise on funding for schools ('relevant officer' part (c))

49. Schools forums have the power to approve a limited range of proposals from their local authority: the restrictions ensure that there is no conflict of interest between the proposing body (the local authority) and the approving body (the schools forum).

50. However, non-executive elected members and those officers who are employed in their capacity as headteachers or teachers and those who directly manage a service which provides education to individual children and/or advice to schools on, for example, learning and behavioural matters are eligible to be members of schools forums.

51. In the case of non-executive elected members, they may be a schools member (by virtue of them being a school governor), an academies member or a non-schools member. As a non-schools member they may be well placed to fulfil the broader overview and scrutiny role they have within the local authority in general.

52. However, the inclusion of non-executive elected members and certain officers is not a requirement. Many schools forums do not have such members on them and it is for each local authority and schools forum to consider how best to ensure the right balance of school and non-school representation on the schools forum, taking into account their local circumstances and preferences.

## **The role of executive elected members**

53. A schools forum needs to ensure that there are systems in place for executive members of the Council to be aware of its views on specific issues and, in particular, any decisions it takes in relation to the Schools Budget and individual budget shares.

54. Executive members with responsibility for education/children's services or resources of the local authority are able to participate in schools forum meetings. By doing so such elected members are able to contribute to the discussion and receive first-hand the views of the schools forum: it is clearly good practice for this to be the case and the regulations provide the right for executive members to attend and speak at schools forum meetings. However, there is no requirement for this to happen so at the very least there should be clear channels of communication between the schools forum and executive members. Communication may also be assisted if schools forum members attended relevant Cabinet meetings as members of the public, for example, when the funding formula is decided.

## Recording the composition of schools forums

55. Each local authority must make a written record of the composition of its schools forum detailing the numbers of schools members and by which group or sub-group they were elected, the number of academies members and the number of non-schools members, their terms of office, how they were chosen and whom they represent. This record should also indicate the term of office for schools and academies members. It would be helpful if this were published on the schools forum website so schools and wider stakeholders can easily find who their representatives are.

## Observers

56. The Regulations provide that the Secretary of State can appoint an observer to attend and speak at schools forum meetings, for example a representative from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). This allows a conduit for national policy to be discussed at a local level and provide access for schools forum to an additional support mechanism, for example, where there are highly complex issues to resolve.

## Participation of local authority officers at meetings

57. Only specific officers can speak at meetings of the schools forum. These officers are:

- Director of Children's Services or their representative
- Chief Financial Officer or their representative
- any person invited by the schools forum to provide financial or technical advice
- any person presenting a paper to the schools forum but their ability to speak is limited to the paper that they are presenting

58. In the majority of cases schools forums are supported by a specific officer. In the course of their work, however, schools forums will be required to consider a whole range of issues and they may consider it appropriate that other officers attend for specific items of business. Where this is the case, the local authority should meet the schools forum's requests as far as possible. It is best practice to record attendance at meetings as well as membership to ensure elected members are attending and contributing to discussions.

## Procedures

59. Many procedural matters are not prescribed in the regulations and are at the discretion either of the local authority or the schools forum itself. However, there are requirements in the regulations relating to:

- **Quorum:** A meeting is only quorate if 40% of the total membership is present (this excludes any observers, and it is 40% of the current membership excluding vacancies). If a meeting is inquorate it can proceed but it cannot legally take decisions (election of a Chair, or a decision relating to funding conferred by the funding regulations). An inquorate meeting can respond to local authority consultation, and give views to the local authority. It would normally be good practice for the local authority to take account of such 'unofficial' views, but it's not legally obliged to do so. In practice, the arrangements for meetings should be made to reduce the chance of a problem with the quorum. The quorum stipulation is in the regulations to help ensure the legitimacy of decisions
- **Election of a Chair:** Under the Regulations, if the position of Chair falls vacant the schools forum must decide how long the term of office of the next Chair will be. This can be for any period, but the schools forum should consider carefully whether a period exceeding two years is sensible. A long period will also cause problems if the member elected as Chair has a term of office as a member which comes to an end before their term of office as Chair ends. The schools forum must elect a Chair from amongst its own members, so it is not possible to elect an independent Chair. In addition any elected member of the local authority or officer of the local authority who is a member of a schools forum may not hold the office of Chair. Schools forums can also appoint to a position of vice Chair to provide cover if the Chair is absent or the post vacant
- **Voting procedures:** The Regulations provide that a schools forum may determine its own voting procedures save that voting on:
  - the funding formula is limited to schools members, academies members and PVI representatives
  - de-delegation is limited to the specific primary and secondary phase of maintained schools members
  - retaining funding for statutory duties relating to maintained schools only is limited to maintained primary, secondary, special and PRU members
- **The powers which schools forums:** have to take decisions on a range of funding matters increase the importance of clear procedures, for example, decisions are made on a simple majority or the threshold to be met if higher. These procedures should take account of any use of working groups by the schools forum, for example a decision might be taken by voting to accept and adopt a report by a working group (see paragraph 65). As part of any voting

procedure there should be clarity in the procedures for recording the outcome of a vote, and any resolutions a schools forum makes in relation to any vote taken

- **Substitutes:** the local authority must make arrangements to enable substitutes to attend and vote (where appropriate) at schools forum meetings. This applies to schools members, academies members and non-schools members. The arrangements must be decided in consultation with schools forum members
- **Defects and vacancies:** The Regulations provide that proceedings of the schools forum are not invalidated by defects in the election or appointment of any member, or the appointment of the Chair. Nor does the existence of any vacancy on the schools forum invalidate proceedings (see paragraph 61 on quorum)
- **Timing:** schools forums must meet at least four times a year
- **Meeting:** schools forums can meet remotely. This includes (but is not limited to) telephone conferencing, video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming.

60. Where the regulations make no provision on a procedural matter, local discretion should be exercised. It is for the local authority to decide how far it wishes to establish rules for the schools forum to follow, in the form of standing orders. While it is entitled to do so, it is of course good practice to allow the schools forum to set its own rules so far as possible.

## Public access

61. Schools forums are more than just consultative bodies. They also have an important role to play in approving certain proposals from their local authority and are therefore involved in the decision making process surrounding the use of public money at local level. As a result schools forums are required to be open to the public. Furthermore papers, agendas and minutes must be publicly available well in advance of each meeting. It's good practice that notification that the schools forum is a public meeting is included on the website and papers are published at least a week in advance. Local authorities should ensure that the websites are accessible and easy to find.

62. Some schools forums already operate very much along the lines of a local authority committee. This is perfectly legitimate and will provide a consistent framework for the running of meetings that are open to the public, and the publishing of papers and agendas well in advance of the meeting and minutes published promptly as required under Regulation 8(13) of the Schools Forum Regulations 2012.

63. Local authorities should ensure that their schools forum clerk's contact details are published on their website and that it is clear to interested parties how they can attend the meeting remotely.

## Working groups

64. It's open to a schools forum to set up working groups of members to discuss specific issues, and to produce draft advice and decisions for the schools forum itself to consider. The groups can also include wider representation, for example, an early years reference group can represent all the different types of provider to consider the detail of the early years single funding formula. The reference group would then be able to give its considered view on the local authority's proposals to the schools forum. The schools forum should not delegate actual decisions or the finalisation of advice to a working group, as this may have the effect of excluding legitimate points of view. These have proved effective for larger local authorities; examples of some working groups are for high needs and early years.

## Urgent business

65. It's good practice for the local authority to agree with its schools forum an urgency procedure to be followed when there is a genuine business need for a decision or formal view to be expressed by the schools forum, before the next scheduled meeting. The local authority may of course call an unscheduled meeting; but it may also wish to put in place alternative arrangements such as clearance by email correspondence or some other means. Such instances should be avoided so far as possible but are legitimate provided all members of the schools forum have an opportunity to participate, the logistics provide a reasonable opportunity for consideration and the local authority policy on data security is not compromised.

66. It's not legal for the Chair to take a decision on behalf of the schools forum, no matter how urgent the matter in question; but a schools forum may wish to put in place a procedure for the Chair to give the local authority a view on an urgent issue.

## Resources of the schools forum

67. The costs of a schools forum fall in the Central School Services Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

68. It's legitimate to charge the running costs of schools forums to this budget including any agreed and reasonable expenses for members attending meetings, the costs of producing and distributing papers and costs room hire and refreshments and for clerking of meetings. Beyond these costs some schools forums have a budget of their own to use for activities such as commissioning research or other reports.

## Section 2 – effective schools forums

### Introduction

69. As the previous section outlined, local authorities have responsibility for establishing schools forums. They also have an ongoing responsibility to provide them with appropriate support, information and guidance in carrying out their functions and responsibilities.

70. The following outlines some aspects of what local authorities and schools forums should consider in ensuring that their schools forums are as effective as possible. The pace of academy conversions in particular means that this significant sector must be properly represented and feel that it is able to play a meaningful part in the discussions of the schools forum.

71. Central to the effectiveness or otherwise of a schools forum will be the relationship between it and its local authority. The local authority will have a significant influence on this: the support it provides; the resources it devotes and the weight it gives to the views of schools forums all contribute to the nature of the relationship. There are therefore a number of characteristics of this relationship that are particularly important:

- partnership: having a shared understanding of the priorities, issues and concerns of schools, academies and the local authority
- effective support: the business of the schools forum is supported by the local authority in an efficient and professional manner
- openness: it's important that a schools forum feels it is receiving open, honest and objective advice from its local authority
- responsiveness: local authorities should as far as possible be responsive to requests from their schools forums and their members. Schools forums themselves should also be aware of the resource implications of their requests
- strategic view: members of schools forum should consider the needs of the whole of the educational community, rather than using their position on a schools forum to advance their own sectional or specific interests
- challenge and scrutiny: schools forums may be asked to agree to proposals from their local authority that will have an effect on all schools and academies in the local area. The extent to which schools forums can scrutinise and challenge such proposals is an important aspect of their effectiveness

72. The characteristics identified above are just some of the aspects that will contribute to an effective schools forum. The following provides more detail on some of the specific issues that local authorities and schools forums may wish to consider in thinking about their own arrangements.

## Induction of new members

73. When new members join the schools forum appropriate induction materials should be provided. These might include material relating to the operation of the schools forum together with background information about the local and national school funding arrangements. Typically they might comprise:

- the constitution of the schools forum
- a list of members including contact details and their terms of office
- any locally agreed terms of reference explaining the relationship between the schools forum and the local authority
- copies of minutes of previous meetings
- the programme of schools forum meetings for the year
- the local schools forum web address

74. This Operational and Good Practice Guide, suitably supplemented by local material, should also be provided to new members on their appointment.

75. Where there is sufficient turnover of schools forum members in any particular year the local authority may wish to organise a one-off induction event to brief new members. Such an event would usefully include an outline of the role of the schools forum and the national funding arrangements for schools and local authorities. It might also include an explanation of the local funding formula and any proposals for review. The opportunity could also be taken to explain the main reporting requirements for school and local authority expenditure.

## Training

76. Ideally schools forum members should be able to use some of the budget set aside for schools forum running costs for accessing relevant training activities. Some training will be provided by officers of the local authority but members may wish to attend national or regional events, the costs of which, where necessary, can be supported from the schools forum budget. Local and national bodies have a key role to play in developing the competencies of forum members.

77. Training will need to be provided in response to any changes in the role of the schools forum and national developments in respect of school funding, to ensure that members can be fully effective when detailed discussions are taking place.

## Agenda setting

78. The process by which the agenda for a meeting or cycle of meetings is set is in many respects one of the key determinants of the effectiveness or otherwise of a schools forum.

79. The frequency and timing of meetings of the schools forum should be agreed in advance of each financial or academic year; these should take into consideration deadlines for the local authority such as disapplication requests and the submission of the authority proforma tool (APT). It's good practice to publish the dates of meetings on the schools forum website. In drawing up this cycle of meetings, in consultation with the schools forum, the local authority should provide a clear overview of the key consultative and decision-making points in the school funding cycle. These will be drawn from a combination of national and local information and should inform the basic agenda items that each meeting needs to cover. For instance meetings will need to be scheduled at appropriate points to enable the schools forum to consider the outcomes of local consultations and national announcements.

80. Although the business of schools forums must be open and transparent, it is recognised that from time to time items of a confidential nature will need to be discussed. It's recommended that authorities apply the same principles that they apply to Council or Cabinet meetings when judging an item to be confidential and adopt similar practices for dealing with those reports in the meeting, for example placing them together at the end of the agenda.

## Preparation for a schools forum meeting

81. It's vital that the schools forum is transparent, open and has clear communication lines to all of the members that are represented. This ensures the wider school family are aware of the business discussed, the impact on their setting and the reasons for the decisions.

82. The vast majority of a schools forum's business will be transacted on the basis of prepared papers. It is therefore important that these are concise, informative and produced in a timely and consistent manner. Recommendations should be clearly set out at the beginning of each report. It's also helpful if the front of the report confirms whether the report is for information or decision and who is eligible to vote where relevant.

83. It's good practice for the schools forum and local authority to agree a standard for papers. It is usual for papers to be dispatched at least one week prior to the meeting at which they will be discussed to allow members to consider them and if necessary canvass views from the group they are representing. Papers should be published on the local authority's website at this time to enable representations to be made to schools forum members.

84. Consistency in the presentation of papers also contributes to the effectiveness of meetings: it helps set the tone of meetings, facilitate the engagement of all members and signal the importance the local authority attaches to the work of the schools forum. Ideally such a standard should be agreed between the schools forum and local authority. The publishing of papers as a single pdf file is helpful as it saves time and avoids accessing multiple documents both in advance of, and during, the meeting. An Executive Summary of the reports can provide schools forum members and members of the public with an overview of the agenda and the decisions required.

85. The publishing of papers on a publicly available website well in advance of the meeting ensures that all interested parties are able to access papers. Some schools forums ensure that each represented group meets in the days immediately prior to the schools forum meeting to ensure the agenda is discussed and schools forum members are properly briefed by the group they represent. Although on occasions it's inevitable that schools forums will receive late, or tabled reports it does create some difficulty for members as they will not have been able to seek the views of those they represent.

86. Schools forums can consider adopting a flexible arrangement for time immediately prior to the meeting. For example it could be used for training of new members, or as a drop-in session for members to ask items of clarification, or for members to meet without officers to discuss the agenda.

## **Chairing the schools forum**

87. The Chair of a schools forum plays a key role in setting the tone, pace and overall dynamic of the schools forum. They should provide an environment within which all members are able to contribute fully to discussions and guide the schools forum to making well informed decisions.

88. The relationship between the Chair and the local authority is therefore vital. The Chair should be very clear on the substance of the agenda items, understand the issues involved and the decisions and/or actions that need to be taken in respect of School Forum business. It's good practice for there to be a pre-meeting between the senior officer of the local authority supporting the schools forum and the Chair of the schools forum to ensure that all the issues are clearly understood.

89. Equally, the Chair has the responsibility of representing the views of the schools forum back to the local authority: for instance, they should, where appropriate, take the initiative to make suggestions for improvements to the way the business is conducted, and, in exceptional cases and with support of the members of the schools forum take the view that they do not have sufficient information on which to base a decision and ask that an item is deferred until further information is available. However, in doing so, the Chair and schools forum should be fully aware of the consequences of deferral.

90. The independence of the schools forum is paramount. Enhancing the role of Chair to a paid position, rather than the reimbursement of reasonable expenses, could blur the lines of independence. Similarly, if the Chair undertakes significant work for the local authority in another capacity, for example as an external consultant, they could be viewed as equivalent to an officer of the local authority.

91. Local authorities could consider if sharing contact details of the schools forum Chair with neighbouring authorities would be helpful for peer support and improving networking opportunities.

## Clerking the schools forum

92. Clerking of a schools forum should be seen as more than just writing a note of the meeting. A good clerk provides an invaluable link between the members of the schools forum, the Chair and the local authority. It's a role often undertaken by an employee of the local authority though we would recommend consideration is given to the use of an independent clerk.

93. Clerks should manage the logistics of the meeting in terms of ensuring dispatch of papers and producing a note from the meeting. In considering the style of meeting notes consideration should be given to making them intelligible enough for non-attendees to get a sense of the discussion as well as clearly indicating the conclusion and action agreed in relation to each agenda item. Verbatim reports of a schools forum's discussion, however, are unlikely to be very useful. Schools forums may consider whether a simple action log should be maintained by the clerk to ensure all action points agreed are followed up.

94. Beyond this a good clerk can:

- provide the route by which schools forum members can access further information and co-ordinate communication to schools forum members outside of the formal meeting cycle
- respond to any queries about the business of the schools forum from headteachers, governors and others who are not on the schools forum themselves
- be responsible for ensuring contact details of all members are up to date
- maintain the list of members on the schools forum and advise on membership issues in general
- assist with the co-ordination of nomination or election processes run by the constituent groups
- keep the schools forum website up to date, for example by posting latest minutes and papers

- monitor, on a regular basis, the schools forum and general schools funding pages on the GOV.UK website; and arrange for the distribution of any relevant DfE information to schools forum members
- if appropriate, provide technical advice in relation to the schools forum regulations and in relation to the operation of a schools forum's local constitution
- organise, operate and record any voting activity of the schools forum in line with the provisions of its local constitution

95. Not all of these tasks may be able to be undertaken by the schools forum clerk. However, each one is important and there should be arrangements in place to ensure they are discharged adequately.

## Good practice for schools forum meetings

96. Schools forums should ensure there is a clear debate of all agenda items. Whilst sub-group meetings are valuable in working through detailed issues, schools forums should consider that the level of debate held at the schools forum meeting and recorded in the minutes will be the official reflection of the level of challenge and discussion on each issue.

97. The use of nameplates for schools forum members also showing which group they are representing can be helpful to members of the public and presenters of papers. In addition the use of coloured cards or coloured nameplates can be helpful when specific members of a schools forum are eligible to vote on specific items, for example, voting on de-delegation or changes to the funding formula.

98. Consultations with the schools forum are a key responsibility of a local authority, ranging from the funding formula to the letting of contracts. Each consultation will be different and depend on the subject being consulted on, but local authorities should consider the following factors as good practice for effective consultation:

- plan and consult early
- allow reasonable timescales for response (as Forum members may need to consult the groups they represent)
- an open and honest approach
- fully inclusive
- allow for ongoing dialogue
- provide feedback

- clear communications

## Meeting notes and recording of decisions

99. A vital part of the effective operation of a schools forum is to ensure that an accurate record of the meeting is taken. This must include the clear recording of votes where there are contrary views. Recommendations to, and decisions of, schools forums must be clearly set out.

100. Notes or minutes of each schools forum meeting should be produced and published on the local authority website as soon after the meeting as possible to enable members and others to see the outcome of any discussions and decisions and/or votes. It is good practice to formally agree the accuracy of the note and minutes at a subsequent meeting but the publication of the draft minutes should not be delayed as a result. We would recommend that a log of the decisions is published within three working days of the meeting, and the draft minutes within 10 working days so that interested parties can access them and consult on them, if necessary, before the next meeting.

101. In order to provide clarity about representation at each meeting, it is good practice for the minutes to record the group and/ or subgroup that each member represents against their name.

## Communication

102. Communication to the wider educational community of the discussions and debates of, and decisions made by, the schools forum is fundamental to their effective operation. The more schools and other stakeholders know about the proceedings of the schools forum, the more their work will be an important and central part of the context of local educational funding. This is particularly important given the decision making role that the schools forum has. Local authorities should consider the operational differences between the types of stakeholders and plan their communications accordingly. For example ensuring effective communications across the PVI sector may be more difficult than with schools, which are more likely to have existing channels of communication for example, headteacher meetings.

103. Each schools forum should therefore be clear what its channels of communication are. It is fundamental that each member of schools forum represents the views of the group or sub-group that they represent and that all those with an interest in funding work together to ensure that their views are taken into account. Therefore communications directly between members and those they represent is essential; professional associations and phase groups could be suitable channels. This will ensure that schools forum members have an ongoing dialogue with the constituents of their group or sub-group and are therefore well able to represent their

views at schools forum meetings. However, the schools forum should also consider additional communication processes. These could include:

- drawing schools' attention to the fact that all its agendas minutes and papers are publicly available on the local authority's website (this should include the publication of formula consultation documents)
- an annual report on the proceedings of the schools forum
- attendance by the Chair, or other schools forum member, at other relevant consultative or management groups such as any capital working group; or senior management meetings of the Children's Services Department
- a brief email to all schools, early years providers and other stakeholders after each schools forum meeting informing them of the discussions and decisions with a link to the full papers and minutes for further information
- a schools forum newsletter can be a less formal and more interesting way of communicating forum business and raising the profile of the schools forum and its members

## News updates

104. Most, but not all, members of the schools forum will already be in receipt of regular information on school funding matters from the local authority and DfE. Other schools forum members should be copied into such information flows so that they can be kept abreast of developments between meetings.

105. Many local authorities have already established dedicated schools forum websites on which they post key information for schools forum members and other interested parties and updated on a regular basis.



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## WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM – 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021 WORK PLAN

Meeting Date	29 <sup>th</sup> June 2021	September 2021	November 2021	January 2022	May 2022
		Elect chair & vice chair			
Budget	Update on School Balances and Reserves School Budget Monitoring Schools Budget provisional outturn 20-21	Budget monitoring Q2 Update on School budgets/balances Growth & Falling Rolls Report if fund continues		Budget Monitoring Schools Budget 21-22 De-delegation of budgets Update on School budgets/balances Growth & Falling Rolls Fund	Schools Budget update 2021-22 Update on School budgets/balances
Consultation	2022-23 School Funding Arrangements if new info out	2022-23 National Funding Formula for Schools, High Needs and Early Years	National Funding Formula Update for 2022-23		
DfE Regs & guidelines	DfE Operational Guide if updated School Finance Regs Schools Forum Constitution	School Forum Membership DfE Operational Guide if updated School Finance Regs	School Forum Membership Scheme for Financing Schools updates	Forum Membership	DfE Operational Guide if updated School Finance Regs voting rights)
Working Groups	High Needs Early Years	High Needs Early Years	School Formula High Needs	High Needs Early Years	High Needs update Early Years update
Other	Traded Services Update LACES /LAC PP	Alternative Provision School Admissions	De-delegated services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contingency</li> <li>• Special Staff Costs</li> <li>• Library Service</li> <li>• Insurance</li> </ul> Edsential Update Alternative Provision	Wirral Traded Services Update Sensory Support Service Update ? Energy update Wirral	Home Tuition Update

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