

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday, 14 June 2022

Present:

Adrian Whiteley (Chair)
John Weise (Vice-Chair)

Schools Group:

Charlotte Scott
Emma Johnson
Helen Johnson
John Bush
John McDonald
Julie Merry
Kathryn Kennedy
Margaret Morris
Mark Bellamy
Moirra Loftus
Simon Goodwin
Sue Ralph

Non-Schools Group:

Anne Rycroft
Gill Harris
Jessica Trigg
Joanne Proctor

In Attendance:

Asako Brown
Carol Fenlon
Frances Whiting
Gill Harris
James Backhouse
Julie Hudson
Kate Frost
Katy Bird
Sally Gibbs
Simone White
Sue Ashley
Trish Lewis

1 **WELCOME AND PROTOCOL FOR VIRTUAL MEETING**

The Chair introduced the meeting and welcomed members and attendees. Apologies had been received from Mike Kilbride, Chris Mervyn, Brian

McGregor, Geraldine Fraser and Lisa Ayling. The Chair set out the protocol for the meeting and expected conduct for virtual meetings.

2 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18TH JANUARY 2022**

Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting of Schools forum meeting held on 18th January 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

3 **MATTERS ARISING**

No matters were raised.

4 **LACES AND LAC PUPIL PREMIUM**

Trish Lewis provided the Forum with an update on the work of the Looked After Children Education Services (LACES) Team and the Looked After Children Pupil Premium.

A breakdown of the current staffing arrangements in the LACES team was provided, alongside how the team is funded, partially through Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) and other grants. Within this, additional funding secured for the year 21-22 was set out. Further detail was provided on the PP+ side on the budget, and it was noted how out of the total PP+ per child, £410 is allocated to the Wirral Virtual School, whilst the remaining £2000 went to the schools. The Forum were pointed towards tables in the report, which provided a breakdown of how schools were using this funding, and a breakdown of how the Top Slice funding is used by the Virtual School.

A number of positive impacts of the LACES arrangements were noted, including a 98% completion rate of Personal Education Plans (PEPs).

An outline of how Recovery Funding has been utilised through management by Ranstad was also provided, whilst it was set out how School-Led Tuition funding had not yet been utilised due to a number of factors, but that LACES were working with partners to find creative ways to utilise this funding.

Trish Lewis concluded by setting out how there was sufficient funding in reserve to allow for the appointment of two Band H members of staff to ease capacity issues within the existing Team.

In the ensuing discussion, further clarity was provided on a number of topics queried by members including:

- The advertisement of vacancies as fixed-term positions.
- The potential clawback of grant funding if it is not used.
- How PP+ is circulated to schools and the timings of this.
- How the Local Authority (LA) compared to other LA's regarding caseload and numbers of Education Progress Officers (EPOs).

An updated report would be brought back to the School's Forum in January providing the information requested within the recommendations.

Resolved – That

- 1. The Forum noted the report**
- 2. Further information be provided by schools as to how they are using PP+ particularly in relation to 'other'.**
- 3. Further investigation of the impact of the spending of PP+ be provided.**

5 WIRRAL HOME AND CONTINUING EDUCATION SERVICE

Julie Hudson provided a summary on the work of the Wirral Home and Continuing Education Service over the past year.

The Forum were reminded of the primary aims of the Service as set out in the report. Members learned that there had been a climb in referrals from September this year, particularly from children within Year 7 and 8, which was attributed to circumstances relating to the transition to secondary school from primary, and the mental health impacts of this.

A number of changes to the Service were set out, including that the Service was in the process of moving to a new venue in Pilgrim Street, which it was hoped would facilitate supporting families in a more holistic way. In addition, following a Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) directive, changes had been brought in to the eligibility criteria for the service, which had removed the requirement for referrals to be supported by medical support from a consultant or senior CAMHS practitioner on an interim basis, with this support being widened to other medical teams (such as GPs) to avoid delays.

Details of the service's budget position were set out, with members noting that following an overspend in the previous year, the 2021-22 budget came in line with the allocated amount.

Following an open-vote to all forum members, the following was agreed by unanimously:

Resolved – That

- 1. The transfer of Age-Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) funding in Year 11 be replaced by the continued weekly charging system for all year groups as of the 1st September 2022.**
- 2. The transfer of Pupil Premium where appropriate be continued.**

6 EARLY YEARS WORKING GROUP UPDATE

Carol Fenlon provided an update on the work of the Early Years Working Group. Providing an overview of some of the key highlights within the report, it was noted that:

- There had been an increase of early years free funding entitlements across all take-ups, however this still remained slightly below pre-pandemic levels.
- Providers had been experiencing issues with recruitment and retention of staff across Wirral, however there was a national context behind this, and the Workforce Development Group had been developing activities to promote early years as a career option.
- There was continued pressure on the Early Years SEND provision outlined, noting the pressures of SEND officers supporting over 400 children, the pressures on the Inclusive Practice Fund (IPF), and the work being done to address these. For example, additional funding available for early years children with high level needs/complex needs and on the Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) pathway had been identified.
- There had been positive engagement with the Quality, Training and Practice Improvement Plan.

Members placed on record their praise for the service's work under continued pressures. In the ensuing discussion, clarity was provided on the perceived low early years uptake in Wallasey, and the work with other joined up services on improving uptake in low areas.

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

7 **WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP**

Frances Whiting provided an update on the membership of the Schools Forum. An overview of the current membership by group was outlined. Three vacancies in the Academy Group were noted, and members learned that since November, Kathryn Kennedy, Headteacher of Ganneys Meadow Nursery School, had been appointed as the Nursery representative, whilst Mike Kilbride had been appointed to the 16-19 Provider post and the table in the report would be amended accordingly.

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

8 **HIGH NEEDS WORKING GROUP UPDATE**

James Backhouse provided an overview of the work of the High Needs Working Group that met on the 8th March 2022 and the 10th May 2022, with a specific focus on the ongoing pressures in relation to the High Needs block and demands on Special School places. The report covered two main parts:

the base commissioning process, and budget forecasting for the High Needs block.

The Base commissioning process was highlighted in further detail, with a rationale provided for wanting to secure additional base provision relating to EHCP numbers, specifically relating to Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). It was noted that following the conclusion of the process, four schools had been successful in being awarded bases for the next academic year:

- St John Plessington Catholic College – 12 place ASC provision
- Egremont Primary School – 30 place SEMH provision (15 KS1 and 15 KS2)
- Riverside Primary School – 8 place SEMH/ASC provision
- Ganney's Meadow Maintained Nursery School – 12 place ASC/CLD provision.

Based on the additional base provision, the impact on the projected provision within Mainstream, Base Provision and Special Schools was set out, noting an anticipated increase in numbers within schools of 170 places, and that SEND colleagues were working with colleagues to make sure the additional capacity requested would be achievable and schools have the space available to support this extra demand.

In light of changes set out within the projected numbers used for budgeting purposes in relation to special school places, an updated forecast for the DSG budget over a 4-year period was provided, with the key implication being that the forecast position is 680K worse by 2025-2026, the deficit max position was £2.66m at the end of the 23/24 financial year, noting that the forecast then indicated an improving picture.

In the ensuing discussion, clarity was provided to members on the further work by commissioners to underpin the updated provisions in preparation for budget-setting next year, and the number of children on EHCPs in comparison to the national average, whilst an action was also agreed to organise a meeting of the High Needs Working Group in September.

Resolved – That

- 1. The report be noted.**
- 2. An additional report be brought to the Schools Forum in November from the High Needs Working Group.**

9 2022-23 BUDGET UPDATE REPORT

Asako Brown provided an update of the Schools Budget for the year 22/23. Members were informed of changes that had been made to the budget since it was last presented to the Forum in January 2022, including:

- Academy recoupage, reducing both the Individual Schools Budget and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) by £119,052,232.
- De-delegation, transferring funding of £1,819,643 from Individual School Budgets to the de-delegated block.
- Falling rolls/growth fund, identifying headroom of £131,378 following the application of the National Funding Formula (NFF).
- Early Years allocation had been split into Individual Schools Budget and Central Schools Cost.
- Re-analysis of staff budget of £58,564 from Home Tuition service and Support for Special Educational Needs (SEN).

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

10 **2021-22 OUTTURN REPORT**

Asako Brown provided the outline of the year end position for the year 21/22 school budget. It was noted that the accounts within the report were still provisional at this stage until the completion of the External Audit. Some of the highlights of the account set out to the Forum were as followed:

- Overall the school budget for the year had been overspent by £11k, which was an improvement of £308k since the position reported at the November 2021 meeting of the Forum.
- Areas of pressures included the High Needs Block, Special Educational Needs Statements and Top Ups, High Needs Contingency, and Independent Special Schools.
- The 2021-22 budget included a planned surplus of £2,683k in the High Needs Block that was to be carried forward into the reserve at the end of the financial year.
- The overspend of £11,041 generated in 2021-22 has resulted in an overall Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) reserve deficit of £1,690,030 at 31 March 2022.

In the ensuing discussion, members noted that the Local Authority were performing slightly better than anticipated, and clarity was provided that the External Audit was anticipated to be completed in the winter, although a definitive date could not be provided at this time

Resolved – That

- 1. The report and the financial position of the Schools Budget for 2021-22 be noted, subject to the confirmation of the final grant allocation for 2020-21.**
- 2. The DSG for 2021-22 includes a cumulative surplus of £120,608 of ring-fenced Early Years Disability Access Fund.**

11 **SCHOOL BALANCES UPDATE**

Sue Ashley provided the Forum with an update on the School Balances as of the 31st March 2022. The Forum were informed that as of this date, School Balances totalled £16.3 million, an increase of £2.8m from the previous year. It was noted that although the balances were high, there were 12 schools that ended the year with a financial deficit. It was noted that two of the 12 schools in this category were expected to set balanced budgets, six schools had or were working towards agreed licenced deficit plans, and four schools had a notice of concern, with the Local Authority continuing to work with those to manage their position. The action taken to date to support schools in budget setting were outlined, alongside actions going forward.

In the ensuing discussion, it was noted by members that the overall held balance was the highest for several years, and the factors behind growing balances were discussed, with further work that is needed to be done to understand why balances are growing was set out.

It was agreed that schools were to be contacted to better understand the underlying factors behind growing balances.

Resolved – That

- 1. The report be noted**
- 2. School balances are continued to be monitored.**

12 WORKPLAN

Members were provided with an overview of the Wirral School Forum's workplan for the upcoming academic year, including the dates of the meetings for the next year.

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

13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other matters were raised.