

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Thursday, 6 October 2022

Present: Adrian Whiteley (Chair)

Schools Group

Lisa Ayling	Kathryn Kennedy
Mark Bellamy	Amanda Lamkin
John Bush	John McDonald
Geraldine Fraser	Margaret Morris
Simon Goodwin	Sue Ralph
Emma Johnson	John Weise (Vice-Chair)

Non - Schools Group

Gill Harris
Nicky Prance
Joanne Proctor

In Attendance

Sue Ashley	Kate Frost
James Backhouse	Sally Gibbs
Asako Brown	Sarah Harper
Cllr Chris Cooke	Sheila Robinson
Joe D'Henin (Clerk)	Frances Whiting
Michael Fitzsimmons	

1 **WELCOME AND PROTOCOL FOR VIRTUAL MEETING**

The Clerk introduced the meeting and welcomed members and attendees. Apologies had been received from Julie Merry, Helen Johnson, Andy Ramsden, Anna Turnbull, Jess Trigg, Moira Loftus, Geraldine Fraser, Cllr Helen Collinson and Simone White. Amanda Lamkin was deputising for Chris Mervyn. The Clerk set out the protocol for the meeting and expected conduct for virtual meetings.

2 **ELECTION OF CHAIR & VICE-CHAIR**

Before the meeting proceeded, the Clerk invited members of the Schools Forum to appoint a Chair and Vice-Chair for the next academic year. Adrian Whiteley was nominated by John Weise to be appointed as Chair. As no other nominations were forthcoming, Adrian Whiteley was appointed Chair unopposed.

John Weise was nominated by Adrian Whiteley to be appointed Vice-Chair. As no other nominations were forthcoming, John Weise was appointed Vice-Chair unopposed.

Resolved – That

- 1. Adrian Whiteley be appointed Chair of the Wirral Schools Forum for the academic year 2022-23.**
- 2. John Weise be appointed Vice-Chair of the Wirral Schools Forum for the academic year 2022-23.**

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14TH JUNE 2022

Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting of Schools forum meeting held on 14 June 2022 be agreed as an accurate record.

4 MATTERS ARISING

No matters were raised.

5 SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

Sally Gibbs presented to the Schools Forum an annual report outlining details of Mainstream School Admissions completed during the 2020-2021 Academic year. Members of the Forum were presented with figures in relation to the allocation of places in all primary and secondary schools by preference, and the number and outcomes of appeals. It was noted that the number of appeals and the outcomes of hearings were similar to previous years. The Forum were also provided with an outline of the updated Schools Admissions Code. This included changes to the following areas: In year transfers, Fair access protocol, Looked After Children, Published Admission Number. The Forum were also asked to note data presented relating to overseas applications and applications from refugees. The Forum were also informed of the overall School Admissions budget in 2022-23.

Members of the Forum queried the expanded definition of Children Looked After outside of England under the new admissions code, where it was clarified that under the definition, the inclusion of children 'who are or appear to have been in a state of care outside of England and have been adopted' as Children Looked After, meant that in practical terms Local authorities were granted greater judgement on the evidence produced by parents for proof of adoption. Members also discussed the data relating to overseas applications and refugees, including the reasons behind why there was a far greater primary intake in the 'other' category than secondary intake, and the work being done to compare this data with local authorities on a city region level.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

6 EARLY YEARS WORKING GROUP UPDATE

Sarah Harper provided the Forum with an update on the work of the Early Years Working Group, including Early Years service and performance updates. An outline of the take up of early years free entitlements (EYFE) was provided, which was noted to be slightly below pre-pandemic levels. Work being done to address this was discussed. Members of the Forum were informed of childcare sufficiency statistics in the borough and a breakdown of number of providers by type of childcare was provided. It was noted that staffing issues remained, leading to a capping of places in some circumstances, but overall there appeared to be sufficient places available across the borough, although not necessarily to meet requests of parents for specific days/sessions.

Members queried the sufficiency of childcare provision during school holidays as an area the Local authority should be looking to address, and it was agreed that this would be explored further outside of the meeting, and would be discussed at the next meeting of the Early Years Working Group.

The Chair of the Forum also placed on record his thanks to Carol Fenlon, former early years head of service, who had recently left the authority.

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. It was noted that there were currently 5 vacancies, 1 representative whose term of office came to an end in September and 1 whose term was due to expire by the end of the calendar year. Members were informed that expressions of interest had been sent out requesting nominations for all the current vacancies, with a deadline of 21st October 2022 for nominations to be received.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

8 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) FUNDING FOR 2023-24 AND LOCAL FUNDING FORMULA CONSULTATION

Asako Brown presented the Forum with an update on funding announcements for 2023-24, and the consultation process for mainstream Primary and Secondary schools. Provisional gross funding allocations for Wirral based on

pupil numbers in the October 2021 census were outlined, and it was noted that this would mean increased funding for Wirral overall.

The Forum were presented with an outline of Direct Funding Formula Department for Education (DFE) consultation which launched in July 2021, with the response published in March 22. The DFE confirmed that it was to move forward with its plans to implement a direct National Funding Formula (NFF), whereby funding would be allocated directly to schools based on a single national formula, without further adjustment through local formulae. The timeline for a transition to a direct NFF was set out. It was noted that Wirral had mirrored NFF for the past 4 years and that the proposal would have little or no negative impact on Wirral schools. Members were presented with detail on how the proposals would specifically impact the Schools Block, High Needs Block, and Central Services Block, including an outline of the schools block consultation for setting a minimum funding guarantee (MFG) in 2023-24.

Members queried several aspects of the report, including:

- The sustainability of the high needs block expenditure projections at 18.33% for 22-23.
- The impact of inflationary pressures and pay rises.
- The timeline for detail on Early years funding, where it was agreed that as soon as the information is received, an early year working group meeting would be scheduled to discuss.
- The binary decision between 0.0% and 0.5% for the setting of the MFG for 22-23.

It was agreed that the consultation would be circulated through the Wirral Association of Secondary Headteachers (WASH) and the primary and secondary school groups.

Resolved – That

1. The report be noted; and

2. Plans for the consultation process with schools be noted and the outcomes be reported to the November meeting of the Schools Forum.

9 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT, MONITORING AND BROKERAGE GRANT - REQUEST FOR CONSULTATION FOR DE-DELEGATION

James Backhouse presented to the Forum proposals on the consultation process in respect of the de-delegation of funding to mitigate the reduction in the School Improvement, Monitoring and Brokerage Grant (SIMBG) funding received by Wirral Council. It was outlined how the grant was to be reduced by 50% in 2022-23, before being removed completely for 2023-24. To mitigate against the loss of funding, members were presented with models for the De-Delegation which were to go to consultation: a tiered funding model and a per

pupil model. The funding implications of each model were set out to members. A consultation would be sent out to schools on the 10th October 2022 with views being sought on their preferred model.

Resolved – That

1. The report be noted; and

2. The plans for a consultation process with schools be noted and the outcomes be reported at the next Schools Forum meeting in November.

10 **SCHOOLS BUDGET VARIATIONS 2022-23**

Asako Brown provided the Forum with an overview of the anticipated variations for the current year 2022-23 schools' budget. Members were informed that overall the schools budget was forecast to overspend by £1.904 million, an increase in the overspend figure report in June 22, and it was explained that this was largely down to pressures in the High Needs Block. A summary of the outturn position and reasons behind overspend by block was provided, including a detailed breakdown of variations within each block. In particular, the factors behind the overspend within the High Need Block were explained to the Forum: Additional units of resource funding required to address the increase in Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments and clearing existing backlogs in assessments; and Cost of out of borough special school provision due to increases in demand.

Members expressed concern that current levels of overspend were unsustainable, whilst also stating concern at the number of SEN and EHCP cases being addressed by the independent sector. It was affirmed that the Forum believed each case needed to be examined and kept within Wirral schools.

It was agreed that a High Needs Working Group would be scheduled to meet before the next meeting of the Schools Forum, and that some anonymised EHCPs could be brought to the meeting for review.

Resolved – That the report and the forecast financial position of the Schools Budget for 2022-23 be noted.

11 **SCHOOL BALANCES UPDATE**

Sue Ashley provided the Forum with an update on the current and projected financial position for schools. It was noted that conditions remained challenging due to inflationary pressures. Members were provided with an outline of Actual Balances at March 22, Expected Balances at March 23, and Expected Balances at March 24, all of which were broken down by school category. Members were cautioned that the figures provided did not take into

consideration changes to pay award estimates since budget setting for support staff and teachers, as new settlements were being discussed.

It was noted that there were 3 schools with licenced deficits and agreed budget plans, with a further 3 schools who had moved back into a credit position this year. 4 schools were to be issued with a Notice of Concern. Members were pointed towards Table 2 of the report, showing the estimated number of schools in deficit for 2024.

A summary of the action taken to date was provided, alongside steps to be taken going forward.

The Forum noted the huge challenges balances will be placed under when new pay awards were taken into account, and it was agreed that updated information of the affect of pay awards would be reported at the next meeting of the Forum in November.

Resolved – That

- 1. The report be noted; and**
- 2. School budgets continue to be monitored.**

12 GROWTH & FALLING ROLLS FUND

Asako Brown presented a report proposing options relating to how the falling rolls and growth fund is distributed for 2022-23. As the value of the falling roll and growth fund for 2021-22 was significantly less than the value of the preceding year, to explore more effective use of the fund, several potential criteria for allocation were identified. The options contained within the report were presented to members. It was recommended to members of the Forum that Option B should be adopted as the basis for distributing the 2022-23 Falling Rolls and Growth Fund, as was chosen for 2021-22, as this option aimed to target the significant impact of falling rolls and growth whilst allocating funding on a basis to support its effective use.

Resolved – That

- 1. Option B be adopted as the basis for distributing the 2022-23 Falling Rolls and Growth Fund; and**
- 2. The future focus as set out in 4.0 of the report be noted.**

13 WORKPLAN

Members were provided with an overview of the Wirral School Forum's workplan for the next meetings.

Resolved – That the workplan be noted.

14 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Future Meetings

The Chair proposed that the next meeting of the Schools Forum would meet in person. After a consensus was reached, it was resolved that the clerk would make arrangements for the next meeting to be held at Wallasey Town Hall, with an agreed start time of 5pm.