

WIRRAL SCHOOLS' FORUM

3 JULY 2012

MINUTES

Present

R. Longster (Chair)

Schools Group

A Baird	M Jackson
M Brown	D Kitchin
E Cogan	M Kophamel
B Cummings	C Mann
S Dainty	J Owens
P Dixon	S Peach
K Frost	S Wall
N Greathead	J Weise
C Hughes	G Zsapka
L Ireland	

Non-Schools Group

J Kenny	S McNamara
B McGregor	M Potter
D McDonald	N Reilly

In Attendance

P Ashcroft	M Lightburn
J Bevan	M Parkinson
S Blevins	A Roberts
Cllr W Clements	C Warburton

Apologies

S Ashley	S Davies
I Cubbin	C Penn

Andrew Roberts updated members on the current situation in Wirral Council. David Armstrong has written to all schools explaining that he is now the acting Chief Executive and that Julia Hassall is acting Director of Children's Services (DCS). This is a short term arrangement until a new Chief Executive is appointed.

Mark Parkinson updated members on interim arrangements following his departure at the end of July, responsibilities will be shared amongst the four Strategic Service Managers. A request has been sent today for 2 headteacher secondments for the next academic year, one for schools improvement in primary schools and one for SEN.

1 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted as a true record.

2 Matters Arising

All matters arising are covered on the agenda.

3 Welfare Benefits Changes and Implications

Andrew Roberts delivered his report on changes to the benefits system and the impact on free school meals. He outlined the effect already seen by changes in Wirral to the administration of free school meals, and reported that whilst the FSM figure fluctuates regularly, it now seems to have settled at around 9,600. The new Universal Credit system will not be able to be directly linked to free school meals, but the DfE recognise the importance of FSM and are working to resolve the issues with the change in the welfare system.

4 Hospital School Presentation

Derek Kitchin gave a presentation on the work of Wirral Hospitals' School and Home Education Service (copies of slides attached). He outlined the main services covered, the challenges that pupils face and the outcomes that the school delivers.

5 Consultation Papers – Changes to the Local Funding Formula and Funding High Needs Pupils

Andrew Roberts summarised the consultation document included in the papers. The consultation has been sent out to all schools for a response by the end of term. A working party of the Schools' Forum was formed to respond to the national DfE consultation and also to consider local changes. The papers are included in this meeting are for awareness, the Forum is not being asked at this point to make any decisions.

The timescales for the consultation are tight because local authorities are required to submit their new formulae to the DfE by the end of October.

The main areas of change are:

- a simplified formula
- a single lump sum
- the removal of a separate grants element (grants were mainstreamed a couple of years ago)
- delegation of central budgets

The DfE are insisting that these changes are made. The MFG is seen as the mechanism to provide stability.

This is an evolving area of work and the DfE are still making changes. The consultation papers have been released this term because Wirral want to give schools enough time to consider the changes. Further changes by the DfE at the end of last week include:

- 6 bands for IDACI instead of the original 5
- Increasing the upper limit for the lump sum to £200,000
- Changes to the MFG calculation

New information will be sent out to schools.

In response to questions raised by members, Andrew Roberts confirmed that:

- he had met with headteachers and held question and answer sessions.
- a new consultation question would be circulated to schools about making the formula affordable and whether schools would prefer a capping or scaling approach.
- the situation for 2015 is not yet clear. There will be a new national formula for local authorities, but the DfE may choose to either keep the local formulae or calculate individual budgets for schools. The decisions will not be taken in the near future and therefore cannot inform decisions on the current consultation.
- the full consultation papers and appendices are available to download from Wescom

Paul Ashcroft outlined the consultation on the changes to the SEN funding system. The DfE intend to change the high needs funding system entirely. Statemented children will be funded in the same way regardless of where they attend. The new system must be in place by 2014, with transitional arrangements for 2013 only. The new system will be £10,000 per place plus a local top-up per pupil. The 'plus' element will be locally determined and schools will be consulted on this – it is likely to be complicated.

Andre Baird acknowledged that the new system had its merits in providing equality of funding, but also raised a number of concerns:

- Special Schools cannot de-delegate budgets such as Maternity costs. Although they can pool voluntarily amongst special schools, this is not as economical as pooling across all schools
- Clare Mount received specialist school funding which will not be protected for as long as in mainstream schools. This is not fair or consistent. Andrew Roberts confirmed that the money would stay in the high needs sector, and that he would need to look at how this was distributed.

- The monthly adjustments to top up funding for places gives schools no security in budgets or planning
- Special schools are not in control of their own admissions, and therefore cannot influence the amount of funding they received under a place plus system

Elaine Cogan thanked Andrew Roberts and his team for trying to maintain stability in budgets, particularly at a time of cuts in post-16 funding.

6 Places in Specialist Provision

Paul Ashcroft presented his paper on places in specialist SEN provision. The paper outlined the proposed changes to place numbers and the reasons behind these. The LA needs to negotiate place changes with the EFA this summer to take effect in the April 2013 budgets. Most of these changes are included in the High Needs Formula consultation document.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Forum noted and agreed the proposals in the funding consultation about future places in specialist provision:
 - (a) to reduce the number of places at Foxfield from 138 to 133 from April 2013
 - (b) to reduce the number of places at The Lyndale from 45 to 40 from April 2013
 - (c) to increase the number of places at Gilbrook from 50 to 55 in September 2012 using the money from the closure of Brookdale base
 - (d) to increase the number of places at Elleray Park School from 75 to 80 from April 2013
 - (e) to close the moderate learning difficulties base at Rock Ferry from April 2013
- (ii) That the Forum supports the LA moving these proposals forward through Cabinet and with the EFA, unless the outcome of the funding consultation determines otherwise
- (iii) That Gilbrook School is commissioned to provide education from the 6th day of either a fixed-term or permanent exclusion from September 2012.

7 Gilbrook Base and Outreach

Paul Ashcroft summarised his paper on the evaluation of Gilbrook School's outreach service. The service aims to work with colleagues in primary schools to support the management of children with challenging behaviour in their own schools and to enable pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties to be supported in their mainstream schools. The service has been shown to be effective and well received by primary schools.

Resolved:

That the Forum noted the report.

8 WASP Update

Andrew Roberts gave an update on progress towards a delegated budget for WASP. WASP must have a delegated budget by April 2013. A management committee has been established and new operating procedures will be modelled this year. Good progress is being made towards the April 2013 deadline.

Resolved:

That the Forum noted and approved the arrangements made to implement a delegated budget at WASP.

9 Schools Budget Outturn 2011-12

Andrew Roberts presented the provisional outturn figures for 2011-12. The figures are broadly the same as those reported in January and the use of reserves has been previously agreed.

Resolved:

That the Forum noted the report

10 School Balances as at 31st March 2012

Andrew Roberts gave a report on school balances. The trend towards increased balances continues, both in Wirral and in other local authorities. Schools were offered a note of caution in

having rising levels of uncommitted expenditure at a time when the local authority faces significant reductions.

An error was noted in the summarised balances in section one of the report. A revised table is included below:

1. Summarised Balances

School balances have increased to £11.8m at 31st March 2012. This represents a year on year increase of £2.4m (25%) when Academies are excluded.

	2010/11 Balances	2011/12 Balances	Increase
Nursery	£309,967	£334,601	£24,634
Primary	£5,100,764	£5,764,859	£664,095
Secondary	£2,516,513	£4,044,911	£1,528,398
Special	£1,449,940	£1,623,242	£173,302
Total	£9,377,184	£11,767,613	£2,390,429
Academy Conversions	2,262,960		
Total	£11,640,144		

Amended table from agenda item 10.

Andre Baird commented that schools are cautious at a time of changes to the way they are funded and don't want to risk looking to the LA to support deficit budgets in the future.

Neville Reilly commented that the secondary school balances appear high at a time when staff are being made redundant, and was interested to know which schools had large balances and why. Reserves should be for a rainy day to avoid redundancies.

Elaine Cogan reminded members that the MFG applies to pre-16 budgets only, and that secondary schools with 6th forms needed to plan for falling post-16 budgets.

Derek Kitchin commented that the requirement on schools to pick up 25% of redundancy costs means that schools need to plan ahead so that they don't fall into a cycle of redundancies. The reason the cap on balances was removed was to allow schools to prepare for the transition in funding as part of a long-term plan.

11 School Redundancies Update

Sue Blevins gave a verbal report on school redundancies:

- The amount spent on redundancies has gone down this year but is likely to go up again next year
- There has been a significant increase in the number of schools with 6th forms with budget difficulties
- 9 schools lost a total of 46 non-teaching staff through 21 voluntary redundancies and 25 compulsory redundancies
- 5 schools lost a total of 16 teaching staff through 14 voluntary redundancies and 2 compulsory redundancies
- The total cost of redundancies is:
Total LA Cost (75%) £395,000
Total School Cost (25%) £126,500
This is for maintained schools only and does not include academies

12 Final DSG Calculation and Central Limit

Andrew Roberts withdrew this item from the agenda. The report was to cover two items, the breach of the central limit and the final DSG Settlement for 2012-13. An error has been identified

in the Early Years Census amounting to £1.5million. The LA is currently discussing the position with the DfE.

This report will be presented in September when the outcome of discussions should be known.

13 Forum Membership

Andrew Roberts explained changes required to Forum membership from September based on pupil numbers. There is significant turnover in the membership and the Forum is seeking nominations.

Ken Frost commented that there is a lack of awareness amongst governors about what is involved in being on the Forum, and therefore it is difficult to get nominations. He requested a short explanation be sent out so that governors could make informed nominations. Andrew Roberts will include an explanation with the letter requesting nominations.

Mike Potter will step down as the 16-19 representative and will seek a replacement.

Sandra Wall will retire at the end of this year so there will be a vacancy for another secondary governor representative.

14 Best Practice Review of the Role of Schools' Forums – Executive Summary

Andrew Roberts gave a summary of the best practice review of schools' forums. The recommendations include:

- Improved training
- Reviewing the remit and roles of working groups
- Better communication
- LA briefings

Andrew Roberts advised that briefing sessions had been held with heads groups prior to the main Schools Forum meeting. WASH confirmed that this was helpful in giving members the opportunity to discuss agenda items and feed their views forward.

The Chair asked members to look at the recommendations and bring forward their ideas. Andrew Roberts advised that the Forum has a budget of £10,000 for these activities.

15 Draft Schools Forum Regulations

Andrew Roberts summarised the DfEs proposed changes to the Schools Forums regulations, and advised that the changes would need to be in place by January 2013 when voting on the formula changes takes place.

Mike Potter expressed concern around item 3, and felt that the 14-19 representative may have a view on the funding formula which they would want to be heard.

Resolved (with 1 against and 3 abstentions):

That in exceptional circumstances the Forum should be able to allow representatives other than schools, academy and PVI members to vote on the funding formula.

Andrew Roberts will feed this view back to the EFA.

16 Work Plan

The Forum work plan was summarised.

Dates for future meetings are:

Tuesday 25th September 2012

Wednesday 23rd January 2013

Wednesday 10th April 2013

17 Any Other Business

The Chair thanked Mark Parkinson on behalf of the Forum for his contributions and support. The Chair thanked the governor representatives who will leave the Forum at the end of the academic year for their contributions.