

WIRRAL SCHOOLS' FORUM

29th September 2020

MINUTES

Present: Adrian Whiteley (Chair)

Schools Group

L Ayling	R Mahoney
M Bellamy	E Morris
J Bush	M Morris
L Davidson	Cllr Norbury
S Goodwin	L Prescott (Deputy)
C Hughes	D Spencer
H Johnson	K Takashima
T Kelly	J Weise
E McGunigall (Deputy)	

Non-Schools Group

S Davies	N Prance
G Edwards	S Ralph
L Krimou (Deputy)	A Ryecroft

In Attendance:

S Ashley	T Ghosh
Cllr Clements	S Prytherch
J Forsey	S Talbot
C Fenlon	C Thomson
K Frost	

Apologies:

S Bennett	E Longbone
I Harris	A Ramsden
N Lightwing	

Protocols of the Virtual meeting

- 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.

1. Election of Chair & Vice Chair

Adrian Whitely was elected as Chair and John Weise was elected as Vice Chair for the 2020-21 academic year.

2. Minutes from the Meeting held on 30th June 2020

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

3. Matters Arising

At the June Meeting Forum members requested a report to be presented at Schools Forum in autumn term to highlight the financial impact of Covid-19 on school budgets. It was agreed that a survey to identify all Covid-19 Costs would be sent to all Wirral Headteachers and responses would be reported back to the November meeting. This is to include all costs schools have incurred, not just the costs they have been able to claim back costs for.

4. Home Tuition Service Update

Jackie Forsey updated the Forum on the service provided by the Home Tuition service. The pupil numbers continue to rise. A correction was made to the total pupil numbers for 2019-20 figures from 122 to 180.

Due to the continued pressures on the budget the staffing structure has not taken place, although there have been some small reductions in staffing costs. When the headteacher retires in October a review of the service will be carried out.

Discussions are ongoing with the LA to increase the charge to schools from April 2021 for pupils who remain at the Service for more than 12 weeks.

Groups of pupils have continued to meet at the base during the summer term. Learning Mentors and TAs have worked with pupils to enable successful transition to college.

The Chair thanked Jackie Forsey for her work with the Home Tuition Service.

Resolved

Forum noted the report

5. Early Years Working Group Update

Carol Fenlon provided an update to Forum from the Early Years Working Group:

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- The current uptake of 3 & 4-year old funded places is 84%.
- The uptake of 2 yr old funded places fell in the summer term as they were not categorised within the 'vulnerable' cohort. Autumn Term uptake is 69% and rising (86% in autumn 2019). Early Years Team are targeting eligible parents.
- There are sufficient early years places within Wirral, but there were 6 closures during Covid-19.

- IPF panel sat in August to review 20 referrals. The Panel paused during the summer term to give the team time to identify whether children were in settings or not during the summer, cases will be reviewed. There is likely to be a strain on this budget as a further 30 referrals have been received this term. The funding can support on average 150 children per annum.
- DAF is reliant on families meeting the criteria and claiming the Disability Living Allowance grant. The data exchange of children with complex needs, under 5, from 0-19 Health Services is enabling better targeting to support parents make this claim and subsequently enable childcare providers to claim DAF.
- Early Years Free entitlement consultation will be launched during the autumn term, which aims to identify is a minimum hourly rate of £4.00 is achievable within the constraints of the funding.

The Chair congratulated the Early Years team on the recognition from the National Day Nurseries Association of their good practice on managing the pandemic during the summer term.

Resolved

Forum noted the report.

6. Schools Budget Monitoring Update 2020-21

Christine Thomson updated Forum on the budget position and variations during the year.

A net deficit of £1.7m. is forecast due to pressures in the High Needs Budget. The deficit from 2019-20 of £1.3m brings the overall DSG deficit to £3m at the end of 2020-21 financial year. A DSG Deficit Management Plan is currently being developed.

The budget has been updated to reflect the Academy recoupment, the Early Years allocations and to identify the growth and falling rolls funds separately. These changes have had a net nil effect on the predicted outturn.

Budget variations are as follows: -

- Early Year budget is expected to balance, but due to Covid-19 the DfE have adjusted the funding mechanism, to ensure Early Years providers were not disadvantaged. There is no indication at present that the change in the funding mechanism will fully cover this cost.
- There are expected underspends on Early Years staffing budget, Schools Forum budget and insurances
- Expected overspend of £2.1m, with all areas overspending due to high demand, except for Support for Sen due to staff vacancies.

Concern was raised about the Independent Special Schools overspend of £931k which is higher than normal. This is due to an increased demand in places.

DSG Deficit Recovery plan is being developed with Stakeholders having already attended meetings. A clear update of the proposals will be provided to the November Forum before consultation.

High needs working group to be arranged before next Forum meeting to discuss the financial elements of the DSG Deficit Recovery Plan. Operational elements will follow. Members requested that there would be enough time to take this back to their cluster meetings (WASH, WiSpHA, and PHCG) before the next Forum Meeting.

The next Forum meeting will be moved to 24th November to allow time for this. Cluster meetings may also need to be re-scheduled. A timeline will be provided with the minutes.

Resolved

Forum noted the report

7. Growth and Falling Rolls Fund 2020-21

Christine Thomson provided further information to Forum on the Growth & Falling Rolls criteria proposed at the June meeting:

- The criteria are set within the DfE guidelines and recommendations.
- Separate funds were identified to enable specific criteria for each fund.
- 6.5% threshold was used based on modelling data which compared 2018/19 pupil numbers with 2019/20 pupil numbers.

The table in section 3 provided further information if this percentage threshold was reduced. These are indicative values as we do not have current year data. This identified that the costs increased, but the change in number of schools eligible was negligible, they just received more funding.

A further recommendation was to include a ceiling of £50k for each fund.

There is no requirement that states that

- the funds have to be on a percentage basis
- the funds have to be the same size, although an overspend of one fund can be offset by the underspend of the other.
- the falling rolls fund has to be based on good or outstanding Ofsted rating.

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

Forum asked for time for some further discussion within clusters to query before agreeing the criteria for the allocation of the fund: -

- Which gives a more realistic view on financial challenge, percentages or numbers of children?
- Which gives a better view of the need, one year's growth / shrinkage or school's 3/5 year trends?

- Why should falling rolls fund only be restricted to good/outstanding Ofsted rating i s this ethically correct in our context?
- Should the funds be of the same value?

Resolved

Forum noted the report

Further information to be provided to Headteacher clusters to inform the LA of their preferred criteria, with a further report to be presented at the November Forum Meeting.

8. 2021-22 Funding Formula Consultation

Christine Thomson updated Forum on funding announcements for 2021-22 and the consultation process for mainstream schools and academies.

The DfE's announcement in July 2020 included the minimum funding levels for 2021-22, updated IDACI data, TPG & TPECG rolled into the NFF and the freedom to set the MFG between +0.5% & +2%.

The consultation will seek the views of schools on: -

- Setting the MFG at +0.5%, +1.25% or 2%. Capping may be required for the higher the MFG is set.
- Usage of any funding available after the formula has been applied.

Forum members would prefer modelling of the formula to aid their responses to the consultation. This will be indicative as it will be based on 2019-20 pupil data.

Resolved

Forum noted the report

Forum agreed that associated charges for the consultation can be charged to the Schools Forum budget.

9. Update on School Balances and Deficit Position

Sue Ashley confirmed that the school balances as at 31st March 2020 were £7.9m. At budget setting schools provide 3-year projections, which tend to be on the conservative side. There continues to be a general downward trend going forward with an overall deficit in March 2022 if no action is taken. Figures will be reviewed after period 6 monitoring.

There are currently 6 schools working through a licenced deficit and 6 schools in a notice of concern.

Due to additional funding this year there are fewer primary schools going into deficit by March 2022, but challenges still remain for special schools.

Schools are continually reviewing their income and spend, although Covid-19 has made it difficult this year.

On a positive note additional funding in the DSG for 2021-22 funding period should ease the pressures for some schools going forward.

Resolved

Forum noted the report and will continue to monitor school balances

10. Schools Forum Membership Update

Sue Ashley updated Forum on the current membership of the Forum. There are 3 new members, 3 vacancies to be filled, along with a further 3 due to become vacant before the end of the year. A full list of the membership was included for reference.

Resolved

Forum noted the report

11. Operational Guidance for Schools Forums

The operational guidance is for noting.

12. Workplan

The workplan was provided for information.

Tuesday 24th November 2020 confirmed (**Note date change**)

Tuesday 19th January 2021 (dependent on APT return)

Tuesday 11th May 2021

Tuesday 29th June 2021

HT Cluster meetings to be adjusted accordingly to fit in with the High Needs Working group, formula consultation and growth and falling rolls fund modelling and views, to enable reports can be tabled at the November meeting

13. Any Other Business

There was no other business.