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WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday, 17 January 2023

Present: Adrian Whiteley (Chair)

Schools Group

Shaun Allen
Lisa Ayling
Mark Bellamy
Geraldine Fraser
Simon Goodwin
Kathryn Kennedy
Chris Mervyn
Margaret Morris
Sue Ralph
Andy Ramsden
Shaun Allen
John Weise

Non-Schools Group

Gill Harris
Brian McGregor
Nicky Prance
Joanne Proctor
Anne Rycroft

In Attendance

Yaqub Allen
Sue Ashley
James Backhouse
Katy Bird
Sue Blevins
Asako Brown
Cllr Helen Collinson
Cllr Chris Cooke
Kate Frost
Sally Gibbs
Sarah Harper
Julie Hudson
Catherine McNally
Andrew Snow
Anju Varughese
Simone White
Frances Whiting
Cllr Vida Wilson

1 **WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting. It was agreed that the order to the published agenda would be amended, with Item 10 being considered before item 8.

Apologies had been received from Tony Norbury, Moira Loftus and Julie Merry.

2 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 NOVEMBER 2022**

The clerk acknowledged due to a technical issue with the merge, a number of present attendees were omitted from the minutes of the last meeting. With the amendments to correct this it was:

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Schools Forum held on 22 November 2022 be agreed as an accurate record.

3 **MATTERS ARISING**

No matters were raised.

4 **HOME CONTINUING AND EDUCATION SERVICE (HCES) UPDATE**

Julie Hudson, Teacher: Schools Psychology, provided the Forum with an update on the work of the Wirral Home and Continuing Education Service (HCES), which delivered alternative provision for children who were unable to attend school due to health needs. The report summarised the aims of HCES, the current venue, the effects of school closures during the pandemic, changes to policy and eligibility criteria, and the current budget position and proposed financial changes.

After a discussion on proposed changes, it was:

Resolved (Unanimously) – That

- 1. The report be noted**
- 2. The Transfer of Pupil Premium where appropriate for all pupils be agreed; and**
- 3. The weekly charge for Year 11 pupils be increased from £125 to £140 per week.**

5 **ENERGY UPDATE WIRRAL**

Andrew Snow, Energy Conservation Engineer, provided the Forum with an update on the procurement of electricity and natural gas on behalf of schools, alongside suggested budget changes for the 2023/24 financial year. Developments within energy markets were outlined, where it was noted that the last 12 months had been a period of extreme price volatility following the Russian Invasion of Ukraine. In line with the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) Framework Agreement, the Forum were provided with anticipated 2023/24 Unit Prices, based on data as of November 2022, whilst several uncertainties in projecting future costs were outlined. The following changes to expenditure were suggested as precautionary provisions to take account of the increased prices anticipated for 2022/23. The suggestions were made using the most recent information available:

- Increase provision for natural gas supplied by TGP by 103.29%.
- Increase provision for electricity supplied by EdF by 61.78%.

Members of the Forum discussed the impact of energy price rises for schools not involved in the CCS Framework agreement, and the eligibility criteria of the Government Energy Bill Relief Scheme.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

6 SCHOOL LIBRARY SERVICE

Catherine McNally, Schools Librarian, provided the Forum with an overview of the services provided and the future services planned by the Schools Library Service (SLS). The complete budget and additional income generated by the service were highlighted, and it was noted that Funding from the Schools' Forum provided £185,100 at a cost of £8.78 per primary school pupil from maintained schools. Providing a summary of the current service, it was noted that with the closure of public libraries in Wirral, the service had seen an increase in requests with issues now above pre-covid levels. As a result, a number of initiatives to meet the demand had been brought into practice. A summary of current staffing levels were also outlined to the Forum.

Members discussed possible future budgets challenges for the service as more schools converted into academies. Proactive steps to promote buy-in from academies were considered.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

7 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 remained 3 academy vacancies, and a 16-19 representative vacancy due to receiving no response for new representatives at the last request sent out. It was reported that 2 nominations had been received for the Special Governor representative post, meaning an election had been undertaken with a closing date of 20 January 2023.

In the discussion, it was noted that there had been expressions of interest for a number of the vacancies at recent meeting of School Heads, and this would be taken forward by officers.

8 SCHOOLS BUDGET 2023-24 AND 3-YEAR FORECAST

Asako Brown, Senior Finance Business Partner, introduced a report which sought Forum Members views on the proposed Schools Budget for the financial year 2023-24, which totalled £337.017m for Early Years, Maintained Schools, Academies, colleges, and providers. In addition, the forecasts for the following three financial years were outlined to Forum which were used to inform planning the future impact of current decisions. Table 1 of the report provided a breakdown of the 2023-24 budget, and future year forecasts, by each of the funding blocks, Members were informed that the Schools Budget and advice from the Forum was to be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee at its budget meeting on 15th February 2023.

In the discussion, members expressed their concern regarding the reduction of historic commitments within the Central Schools Services block by 20%. In addition, Members expressed that the 6.52% increase of Dedicated Schools Grant was insufficient given the current level of inflation.

Resolved (6:0:2 abstentions) – That

- 1. In accordance with ESFA guidelines, the reduced contributions to Combined Budgets of £0.536m in 2023-24 be agreed for:**
 - **School Improvement**
 - **Local Safeguarding Children’s Board**
 - **School Intervention**
 - **PFI Support**
 - **PFI CLC**
 - **Looked after Children Education Services**
 - **Business Rates, and**
 - **Governors Forum**
- 2. The Schools Budget and views of the Schools Forum be referred to the budget meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee on 15 February 2023.**

9 DE-DELEGATION OF SCHOOL BUDGETS

Yaqub Allen, Principal Information Officer for Schools, introduced a report which sought Members approval on proposals for de-delegation of a number of services to schools, where there was a preference to continue a central service. De-delegation was proposed for the following budgets:

- Contingency
- Special Staff Costs
- School Library Service
- Insurance
- Behaviour Support
- School Improvement
- Former Education Services Grant (ESG) General Duties
- The School Improvement and Monitoring and Brokerage Grant (SIMBG)

Following a discussion, Members representing Special Schools agreed to defer a decision on the Officer recommendation 7 in the report, relating to Special School Forum representatives agreeing a contribution to replace SIMBG costs of £23,200, until after the next meeting of the Wirral Special Schools and Resourced Provision (WISPA), where further information would be provided. Due to budget reporting deadlines and as per the provision for urgent business in the Schools Forum best practice guidance, a decision would be delivered via email correspondence by Special School Representatives following that meeting.

Resolved – That

- 1. The following budgets be agreed for De-delegation by Primary Forum representatives for the financial year 2023-24:**

- a. Contingency (6:0)
 - b. Special Staff Costs, including TU Facilities Time (6:0)
 - c. School Library Service (6:0)
 - d. Insurance (6:0)
 - e. School Improvement (6:0)
 - f. Behaviour support (6:0)
2. A contribution of £347,208 to former Education Services Grant costs be agreed by Primary Forum representatives. (6:0)
 3. The following budgets be agreed for De-delegation by Secondary Forum representatives for the financial year 2023-24:
 - a. Contingency (1:0)
 - b. Special Staff Costs, including TU Facilities Time (1:0)
 - c. School Improvement (1:0)
 - d. Behaviour support (1:0)
 4. A contribution of £347,208 to former Education Services Grant costs be agreed by Secondary Forum representatives. (1:0)
 5. A contribution of £347,208 to former Education Services Grant costs be agreed by Special School Forum representatives. (2:0)
 6. As per DfE guidance, a contribution to replace SIMBG costs of £23,000 be agreed by Primary and Secondary representatives (7:0).

10 SCHOOLS BUDGET VARIATIONS 2022-23

Asako Brown, Senior Finance Business Partner, updated the Forum on the anticipated variations for the current year 2022-23 schools budget. It was reported that the overall schools budget was forecast to overspend by £3.777 million, which was mainly due to pressure in the High Needs Block, meaning an increase in overspend of £0.402m from the position reported to the Forum in November 2022. The Forecast budget variations were outlined with commentary by specific budget area and were summarised below:

- Special Schools £166K adverse
- SEN Bases £135K favourable
- Early Years £15k adverse
- Schools Block de-delegated £17.7k favourable
- Central School Costs £48.4K favourable
- Special Education Needs - Additional resources £1.032m adverse
- Special Education Needs – Top Ups £567k Adverse
- Independent Special Schools £1.512m adverse
- Support for SEN £47k favourable
- Dedicated Schools Grant £34k favourable

In the discussion, the Assistant Director for Education affirmed that work was being undertaken on High Needs financial modelling with the DfE and CIPFA, with the aim of delivering a better value programme.

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

11 **WORKPLAN**

Resolved – That the workplan be noted.

12 **SCHOOLS BLOCK ALLOCATION 2023-24**

Asako Brown introduced a report which presented options relating to proposed changes in the funding rates in the funding formula to address the gap in the Schools Block funding within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Members were informed that a shortfall of £0.147m had arisen in DSG block funding and funding required for individual schools when applying the National Funding Formula rate, which was explained as largely down to changes in pupil characteristics. 4 proposed options to address the shortfall were presented as followed:

Option A	To remove the reception uplift. Wirral's school budget is calculated with the pupil number count for schools in the January census if they are higher than October census, however this is not a part of the NFF and will be removed when DfE introduces the direct NFF.
Option B	To reduce the formula value for all pupil-led factors. In 2023-24 the DfE allows local authorities to have flexibility to set this factor value within 2.5% of the NFF factor value.
Option C	To reduce the lump sum factor value for all schools. The lump sum is a school led factor and each school receives the same value irrespective of its size or phase.
Option D	To reduce the Basic Entitlement per pupil funding rates – the reductions of the rate for the Primary and Secondary will be determined separately considering each area's growth and gap.

Officers recommended that Option A was the most appropriate approach, as it moved the formula closer to the National Funding Formula, and therefore would lead to a smoother transition to the direct NFF.

Members of the Forum discussed in detail the implications of proceeding with option A.

Resolved (10:0:1 Abstention) – That Option A be adopted to address the shortfall in the Schools Block DSG funding.