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## WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday, 1 October 2024

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	M Loftus (Chair)	
	Councillors	A Gaunt Prescott Ralph McDonald Ball Mervyn M Farrelly N Prance	S Allen Barker Kennedy Ball Bellamy S Davies N Turner J Whisker

### 21 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Nominations for the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Schools Forum for the academic year 2024-25 were invited.

Moved by Moira Loftus, Seconded by Mark Bellamy Moira Loftus was nominated to the position of Chair. As no further nominations were received, Moira Loftus was elected Chair unopposed.

Moved by Moira Loftus, seconded by Jane Whisker, Andrea Gaunt was nominated for the position of Vice Chair. As no further nominations were received, Andrea Gaunt was elected Vice Chair unopposed.

### 22 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies had been received from:

Joanne Proctor, Louise Ellis, Sue Blevins, Chris Wright (Nicky Tuner substituted), Luci Jones and Councillor Vida Wilson.

### MINUTES

**Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2024 be approved as an accurate record.**

### 24 MAINSTREAM SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

The Assistant Director for Education presented the report on behalf of the Director for Children, Family and Education. The report provided a brief outline of Mainstream Admissions during the most recently fully completed 2022-2023 admission year.

The report explained that the statutory roles of the Mainstream Admissions team included the administration and allocation of places in all primary and secondary schools and represented the Council in school place appeals.

For entry to primary/secondary schools in September 2023 there were over 3,200 applications for primary school (Foundation 2) and 3,700 for secondary schools (Year 7). The team co-ordinated admission to schools with all own admission authority schools within Wirral and other admission authorities in England.

The report noted that the team also produced statements, and presented appeals on behalf of community and voluntary controlled schools. They also administered the grammar school selection tests for four grammar schools on Wirral, with approximately 1,900 tested each year.

The team also processed approximately 2,000 in-year transfers between and in and out of Wirral schools.

Members discussed the reported figures and queried the figure for Software and Third Party costs. The Principal Officer, School Admissions noted that the costs were for a new IT system which contributed to the Corporate Spend and this was incorporated into the Councils' Digital Strategy.

**Resolved – That the report be noted**

## 25 **DELIVERING BETTER VALUE UPDATE - QUARTER 1**

James Backhouse / Elizabeth Hartley presented a report on behalf of the Director for Children, Family and Education. The report notified members of the School's Forum of the actions taken in quarter one since the commencement of the Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme commenced in April 2024. The report and attachments gave an overview of the programme plan until the end of the next academic year and the risk register linked to the programme.

The attachments linked to the report had already been submitted to the Department for Education in July 2024 as part of the quarterly reporting mechanism required as part of the grant conditions linked to the DBV programme.

In addition to the delivery programme and risk register, a refreshed terms of reference had been attached. This included additional representation from health representatives to make sure the expectation of the graduated approach being linked significantly in supporting the referrals to health.

Members asked about work on the flight path for children.

The Assistant Director for Education responded that work had given real clarity for what was needed to be done. He noted that secondary education was more of a challenge but was heartened by two schools that he had been working with this year. He intended to widen this work out to other schools and noted that the vast majority of schools would need resource provision. Currently the service was developing provision in primary schools and would then look to do the same in Key Stage Two.

The Chair noted the importance of keeping provision joined up when children move from one provision to another.

The Assistant Director for Education responded that work was being undertaken to ensure that provision was more joined up. Concerns for this would be addressed via the Education Access Board.

Members queried the number of EHCPs in Wirral compared to the figures across the country, they asked if the number of EHCP's was likely to go down.

The Assistant Director for Education stated that there was a gap in EHCPs between Wirral and the national average of approximately 1.5%. Wirral was working to ensure the Graduated Approach was used as early as possible. Once the numbers of EHCPs plateaued, the service could then start work on reducing numbers.

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

## 26 **SCHOOLS BUDGET VARIATIONS 2024-25**

The Finance Manager presented a report on behalf of the Director for Children, Family and Education. The purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the anticipated variations for the current year 2024-25 schools budget.

The report informed the School's Forum that the schools budget was forecast to overspend by £12.798m which was mainly due to pressure in the High Needs Block.

The 2023-24 financial year closed with a Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) reserve cumulative deficit position of £12.989m. The current forecast outturn position meant that the year-end addition to reserve balance would be £12.798m thus delivering a cumulative £25,787m deficit position at the end of 2024-25.

The report noted that the schools block and the de-delegated budget had been adjusted to reflect changes due to a school academy conversion in September 2024. The Early Years (EY) budget had been adjusted to match the revised DSG EY block allocation announced in July 24 based on January 24 census. The DSG Grant Income had been reduced by the corresponding amount.

The Finance Manager noted that paragraph 4 of the report showed an incorrect figure and that the correct figure was £12.798m.

The Assistant Director for Education noted that there had been a question at the last School's Forum about overspend and explained that this had now been included within the report.

He noted that the number of places available in Special Schools would hit a ceiling with a saturation point of 1700 pupils and the Department for Education unlikely to give further provision.

The Chair queried if work needed to be done to ensure that children in Special Schools were the correct children to be there.

The Assistant Director for Education agreed that work need to be done to assure that the right children were in the right schools.

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

27 **DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT FUNDING FOR 2025-26 AND FUNDING CONSULTATION**

The Finance Manager presented a report on behalf of the Director for Children, Family and Education. The report provided an overview of the funding consultations which were likely to be required to be undertaken in respect of the use of the 2025-26 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budgets to determine the budgets for schools and special schools for the 2025-26 financial year.

This report sought views of the forum in respect of the Schools Block funding and High Needs block funding within the 2025-26 DSG.

The report noted that under normal circumstances, the Department for Education (DfE) provided information in late July each year on indicative funding levels and funding formula changes for the DSG Schools Block, High Needs Block and Central School Services Block for the following financial year.

The date of the provision of the 2025-26 DSG funding information was uncertain due to the General Election on the 4 July 2024. The most recent correspondence from the DfE indicated that the announcement would be following the budget announcement on 30th October 2024.

It was anticipated that the local decision-making process, and associated consultation with stakeholders, would continue to be required for the 2025-26 funding determination process.

Members queried when the consultation would begin and whether there would be any guidance sent out to Head Teachers.

The Finance Manager responded that the consultation was due to begin the following day with agreement from the Forum and that guidance would be sent out.

The Assistant Director for Education noted that he had offered to speak to all Primary clusters to go over the notional SEN budget element of the consultation and would do the same for Secondary Head Teachers.

Members suggested video conferencing for the training to ensure the most engagement.

Members queried whether costs for the split site funding could come from the Higher Needs Block.

The Assistant Director for Education said it could and suggested deferring the fourth recommendation on the report to the following School's Forum meeting, which Members agreed to.

**Resolved – That**

1. **The report be noted.**
2. **The plans for the consultation process with schools be approved, and that the outcome would be reported to the November meeting. (15:0:2)**
3. **The disapplication request to be submitted to the Department for Education be supported. (11:0:1)**
4. **The split site formula within the High Block funding be deferred to the next meeting of the Schools' Forum.**

## 28 **2024-25 FALLING ROLLS AND GROWTH FUND**

The Finance Manager presented a report on behalf of the Director for Children, Family and Education. The purpose of the report was to propose the option for the falling rolls and growth fund in 2024-25.

The report noted that the Growth and falling rolls fund guidance: 2024 to 2025 published by the Department for Education (DfE) had been updated in August 24.

The guidance stated that the growth fund could only be used to:

- support growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet basic need.
- support additional classes needed to meet the infant class size regulation.
- meet the revenue cost of new schools.

From 2024 to 2025 local authorities would need to provide growth funding where a school or academy had agreed with the local authority to provide an extra class to meet basic need in the area (either as a bulge class or as an ongoing commitment).

It explained that the growth fund must not be used to support:

- schools in financial difficulty
- general growth due to popularity

The falling rolls funding should be distributed where school capacity data 2022 (SCAP) showed that school places will be required in the subsequent three to five year and the requirement that schools must be Ofsted rated 'good' or 'outstanding' to be eligible for falling rolls funding would no longer apply from the 2024 to 2025 financial year.

The criteria for both funds should contain clear objective trigger points for qualification and a clear formula for calculating allocations with these criteria applying to all schools on the same basis.

The value of the falling rolls and growth fund for 2024-25 was reported at the July 2024 meeting as £186k which included £19k carry forward from 2023-24 as agreed at the September 2023 Forum meeting. The value of the fund was currently determined by the 'headroom' in the Schools Block allocation of the Dedicated

Schools Grant (DSG) after the funding formula had been applied. Following consultation with schools in October 2023, it was agreed that the 2024-25 funding formula would include a +0.5% minimum funding guarantee (MFG) to secure the widest possible distribution of the allocation directly to schools.

**Resolved (11:0:5) – That Option B, as the basis for distributing the 2024-25 Falling Rolls and Growth Fund be agreed as taking a cautious measure for an uncertainty with the 2025-26 Falling Rolls and Growth Fund.**

## 29 **FORUM MEMBERSHIP REVIEW**

The Senior Accountant presented a report on behalf of the Director for Children, Family and Education. The report described the current representation of the Forum and membership changes.

The report noted that there were 6 vacancies:

- 1x 16-19 provider
- 1x Secondary Representative
- 1x PVI Representative
- 1x Primary Headteacher
- 2x Academy Representatives

It also reported that there had been one new member since the previous report in July: Andrea Gaunt, Headteacher of Upton Hall School, as the Academy Representative.

The Assistant Director of Education noted that there was a need for a Secondary Maintained Member on the Forum.

The Chair also raised whether a member was needed from the Church of England.

The Assistant Director of Education stated that he would send an email to the diocese.

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

## 30 **SCHOOLS FORUM WORK PLAN**

The Chair presented the Schools' Forum work plan.

**Resolved – That the work plan be noted.**