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WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Wednesday 21 January 2009

Present:

R Longster (Chair)

Schools Group

A Baird

J Weise

I Cubbin

P Sheridan

S Dainty

B Cummings

I Davies-Foo

B Renshaw

K Frost

S Wall

A Hardy

G Zsapka

Non-schools Group

S Davies

D McDonald

P Hogan

G Peters

J Kenny

N Reilly

In attendance:

Councillor

S Clarke

Apologies:

V. MacDonald

S Hyden

M Bevan

J Levenson

N Dymont

Cllr F Doyle

M Kophamel

14 **APOLOGIES**

As above.

15 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Resolved – That the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 8 October 2008, be accepted as a correct record.

16 **MATTERS ARISING**

The Chair reported that there had been two recent meetings of the Early Years Working Group. However, it was understood that some legal and statutory guidance was due to be published in April, and it was hoped that a further report back could be made in more detail after that.

17 **CHAIR'S CORRESPONDENCE**

None submitted.

18 **USE OF INCLUSION FUNDS**

Because Gordon Lester was unwell, this matter was deferred until the next meeting.

SCHOOLS FUNDING 2009/10 - CONSULTATION

The Director of Children's Services outlined the Schools Budget for 2009/10 and described the financial changes to be considered by the Forum and the Cabinet. Andrew Roberts, Principal Manager (Finance), explained that it would be the second year of a national three-year funding period for schools (2008-2011). In 2008/09 decisions had been taken about levels of funding based on the government's stated priorities, which were:

- ensuring that all children make good progress
- early intervention, especially with regard to SEN
- support for specific groups at risk of poor outcomes
- ensuring school workforce skills

In 2009/10 the funding that Wirral would receive provided for an increase of 3.9% per pupil, of which 0.8% was for government priorities.

The initial budget for 2009/10 calculated the available Headroom money to be allocated in the Schools Budget as £2,178,000 (Headroom was the difference between Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and the budget required to continue funding schools at their current level, after allowing for inflation, unavoidable cost pressures and the Minimum Funding Guarantee). Headroom had been allocated in the budget as follows:

	£
Deprivation funding to narrow the gap	1,933,000
Secondary education inclusion bases	75,000
Increase in Statement value (Year 2)	170,000

Deprivation funding had already been delegated to schools and included in indicative budgets over the three-year period.

It was not intended that half-way through the 2008-2011 funding settlement there should be any significant changes to the levels of planned funding for schools. The Local Funding Formula was fixed over the period to give all schools allocations that were certain and clear, with most changes being for movements in January pupil numbers only. Some other changes to central costs were, however, required and they were described in part 4 of the report.

He referred in particular to the continuing pressures on budgets for special educational needs, where initial estimates had identified a further growth requirement in excess of £500,000, mainly the result of charges by other local authorities for SEN placements outside Wirral. However, spending targets had been agreed that would limit the increase required in 2009/10 to £250,000: that would be met from a reduction in the SEN Plan budget (£150,000), a reduction in schools contingency (£100,000) and reduced pressure on independent special school budgets, following changes to school places to be implemented at Clare Mount in September 2009 and 2010. There were also a number of budget reductions to be implemented in relation to the Behaviour Improvement team, insurance costs, deletion of unfilled SEN posts and matching funding for Harnessing Technology.

In relation to insurance costs, the Forum was advised that to date schools had to a greater or lesser extent been subsidised, and the intention was to ensure that each school bore the cost of its own risks. That was likely to result in an average increase

of 35%. The cost to each school was currently being calculated – it would be phased in to assist those facing the larger increases.

The Forum voted on the three recommendations in the Director's report (see below). Following the vote the Forum considered the responses to the Director's consultation letter, particularly in respect of:

The Observatory School – additional places.

Excess balances – adoption of an arrangement based on that operated by Lancashire County Council.

In response to members' queries, officers stated that funding for extended schools would not be included in the calculations; and the provision set aside for single status pay ought to be contained within the 5% or 8% tolerances (in that it amounted to a small proportion of the total balances). However, Betty Renshaw was concerned that some schools faced a disproportionate increase (in one case £120,000) – David Armstrong undertook to look into that matter.

John Weise sought assurances about capital projects for which funding had been reserved – if a scheme could not be implemented, would the money be lost? David Armstrong assured the Forum that the capital programme was closely monitored, particularly with a view to preventing unnecessary delays. He kept in regular touch with headteachers on the matter. There was little danger of schemes falling out of the programme as they were rigorously examined before they were included. Ultimately it was elected members that decided the capital programme.

Resolved -

(1) (12:0, with two abstentions) That the proposed Schools Budget for 2009/10 and the level of central costs be supported.

(2) (17:0) That a schools contingency under-spend of up to £200,000 be carried forward if available to meet part of the increase in schools insurance as set out in paragraph 3.7 of the Director's report.

(3) (18:0) That the Schools Budget and views of the Schools Forum be referred to the budget meeting of the Cabinet on 23 February 2009.

(4) (18:0) That the proposal to increase the number of places at The Observatory School with effect from September 2009 be supported.

(5) (16:0, with one abstention) That the revised arrangement for controlling excess school balances be endorsed.

20 SPECIAL SCHOOL AND BASE PROVISION AND WIRRAL OUT-OF-AUTHORITY PLACEMENTS - BRIEFING PAPER

Further to Minute 6(2) (8/10/08), the Director of Children's Services submitted a comprehensive list showing the provision for special educational needs in Wirral. Provision was made through thirteen schools, including Wirral Hospital School and the Pupil Referral Unit (WASP); primary bases for pupils with difficulties and secondary bases, and through out-of-area independent or non-maintained special school placements. Peter Edmondson, Head of Branch (Participation and Inclusion),

explained that the level of provision varied widely across the country, but Wirral had more places than most. He referred in particular to out-of-borough placements, where numbers had been reduced from 126 in 2004 to 93 in December 2008. A number of projects and programmes were coming forward in the near future, including a review of provision for complex learning difficulties, developing more choice in mainstream schools and reducing the number of pupils' statements.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

21 **DEVELOPING PROVISION FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN MAINSTREAM AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS**

Peter Edmondson reported on progress in the development of resourced provision within secondary mainstream schools for young people with special educational needs. He also described the implications of that development for Wirral's secondary school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties (Clare Mount) – the school and officers of the Department were working together to respond to that and to broaden the provision that the school made. He explained that a total of 40 places had been made available in four schools – Wallasey, Oldershaw, Hilbre, and Bebington – and, after a steady start, momentum for filling the places was increasing. The current indication was that an additional 5 places at Wallasey and Bebington Schools might be needed, which would require additional funding of £22,256 per school. That could be met from the £75,000 provision earmarked within 2009/10 Headroom money for expanding EIB secondary provision.

With the consequent reduction in demand for places at Clare Mount, he was speaking with the Headteacher and Governors with regard to their taking pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. Some of those might otherwise go to West Kirby Residential School, which was expensive, and it would therefore be necessary to put some investment into Clare Mount. The proposed funding for Clare Mount was a sum of £30,000 from the Standards Fund, to be allocated to the school in April 2009, to be used for appointing new staff. In addition, £80,000 of capital funding had been identified to make building adaptations.

He proposed to report back if there was further demand at those mainstream schools, or any new schools, both on the funding implications and on the impact on the special sector.

Resolved –

(1) That the positive progress being made in opening up the secondary resourced provision be noted.

(2) That the Forum supports the increase in funding to two of the four secondary mainstream schools offering SEN resource provision, enabling the schools each to provide five additional pupil places, with both schools receiving an additional £22,256 for the period September 2009 to March 2010.

(3) That the proposed allocation of funding to effect the necessary changes at Clare Mount School be approved.

22 **MINIMUM FUNDING GUARANTEE - BASELINE CHANGES**

Moira Curran reported upon the need for changes in the calculation of minimum funding guarantee for 2009/10 in respect of a number of schools affected by changes in EIB provision and in their planned admission numbers. For some of those schools there would also be changes in the MFG for 2010/11.

Resolved – That the changes in MFG in respect of the schools on the list submitted be approved.

23 SCHOOL MEALS CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

David Armstrong reported in connection with a request by the DCSF that Schools Forums be consulted on the allocation of capital funding for improvements to school kitchens. There was a limited amount of funding left from previous programmes, but bids had been submitted by the Diocese of Shrewsbury in respect of Upton Hall and in respect of replacement of the Horsa building at Overchurch Infant School. DCSF funding would have to be matched locally.

Resolved – That the proposed allocation of funding to the two schools be approved.

24 SCHOOL BALANCES

David Armstrong reported that the total of school balances at 31 March 2008 had been £8,798,546 of non-Standards Fund monies (an increase of £1.597m over 2006/07) and £3,135,032 of Standards Fund monies (an increase of £354,676). Of those sums, £1.4m across all schools had been identified as excess balances. Enquiries had been made of schools, and it had been ascertained that approximately £700,000 was required for contributions to capital expenditure; £600,000 for school rolls and £100,000 for ICT replacement. Proposals not accepted amounted to £28,050, made up as follows:

Brentwood:	£3,761
Millfields	£1,497
Observatory School	£22,792

It was noted that Standards Fund money did not form part of the excess calculations.

Resolved – That, in view of the sums involved, any decision on how the deductions of excess balances are to be utilised be deferred until the end of the current funding period in 2010/11.

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