

**Meeting of the Schools Forum  
Held on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at 1.30pm  
via MS Teams Digital Platform**

**MINUTES**

**(for approval at Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023 meeting)**

**Quorum: 40% (8 of the 18 current School/Non-School Members)**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>Organisation - School Members</b>	<b>Attended</b>
Rachel Lewis	Hindley Sure Start Nursery	Apologies
Louise Curran	Rowan Tree Primary	Yes
Anne Isherwood	Three Towers Alternative Provision Academy	Yes
Tracy Mingaud-Cunningham	Primary Governor	Yes
Adrian Hardy	Secondary Governor (Chair)	Yes
Gary Hayes	Orrell St James Primary	Yes
Fiona Quinlivan	Howe Bridge St Michael's Primary	Yes
Julie Hassan	St Oswald's Catholic Primary	Yes
Wendy Hughes	Golborne All Saints Catholic Primary	Yes
Lisa Hobden	St Patrick's Catholic Primary	Yes
Alan Birchall	Byrchall High	Yes
Andy McGlown	St. Peters RC High School	Yes
Martin Wood	The Deanery High School	Apologies
Paul Davies	Fred Longworth High School	Yes
	<b>Organisation - Non School Members</b>	
Sue Morris	Care Love Learn Childcare Limited	No
Peter McGhee	St John Rigby College	Yes
Max Atkins	Wigan NEU	Yes
Chris Williams	Liverpool Archdiocese	No
	<b>Organisation- Nominated observers</b>	
Cllr Jenny Bullen	Cabinet Member	Yes
Karen Parkin	NEU	Yes
Mike Wilkinson	Wigan NASUWT	Yes
Vacancy	Unison	
	<b>Organisation - In Attendance</b>	
Mark Rotheram	LA Finance – Strategic Finance Manager	Yes
Anthony Meehan	LA Finance – Group Finance Manager (Schools)	Yes
Cath Pealing	Assistant Service Director, Education	Yes
Sue Brogan	Clerk, Wigan Council Governor Services	Yes

*Meeting started at 13:32 pm and was quorate from the start.*

Members were advised that the meeting was being recorded.

## 1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and accepted for the following Members/Observers:

- Martin Wood
- Rachel Lewis

The following Members/Observers were not in attendance:

- Chris Williams (Diocesan Representative)
- Sue Morris (PVI Representative)

## 2 Agreement of Any Other Urgent Business to Be Added to the Agenda

There were no items of AOB requested for consideration.

## 3 Previous Minutes

The minutes from the Forum meeting held on 24th November 2022 were **accepted** as a true and accurate record and were approved for publication.

There were no matters arising.

## 4 Schools Block Funding Formula 2023/24

Mr Meehan shared the **School Funding Formula 2023/24** report on the screen which provided details of the DSG allocations for 2023/24 and details of the allocation per school.

He reminded members that they were still under a transition period regarding National Funding Formula (NFF) and that there was still some local discretion. However, Wigan had made the decision to mirror NFF in 2018/19.

Mr Meehan was looking for agreement from the Forum around the budget formula but explained that ultimate approval sat with the LA in gaining political approval. Once the approvals had been agreed the figures would be submitted to the ESFA who needed to agree the formulas prior to budget set information being sent out to maintained schools by the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023.

The final published allocation for 2023/24 was an increase of approximately £5.7m on Wigan's 2022 actual allocation (circa 2% increase per pupil). The pupil numbers for funding purposes had increased by 44 (a reduction of 236 pupils in the primary sector, but an increase of 280 pupils in the secondary sector).

He explained that some protections were built into the formula and these included: -

- Minimum funding guarantee
- Mandatory minimum funding levels

This year Forum members made the decision to transfer some underspend from the previous year into the high needs block 2023/24 rather than contributing from the schools block due to the financial challenges that schools are facing.

He reminded Forum members of the principles that would be used. Listed below was a summary of the key principles agreed at the meeting:

- The NFF factors and associated values (including the Area Cost Adjustment) should be adopted.
- The Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) should be maintained at the maximum 0.5%.
- If the NFF was found not to be affordable within the funding envelope, proposals would be brought to this meeting for consideration to balance the position to the overall available funding.

Forum members were advised if the funding was short it would be brought back to this meeting to discuss further. That was the case and Mr Meehan had suggested three options and was looking for a decision from the Forum.

Briefly the options to make it affordable were): -

**Option 1** – This option applied all NFF factors and values, leaving a gap in funding of £0.783m. This proposed to use the growth factor funding to cover the gap, which would leave only £0.205m in the growth fund.

This year £450,000 had been spent. This option would not leave sufficient for the growth fund so would ask for it to be topped up using the DGS underspend from the previous year to make a £500,000 growth fund pot. It was hoped that this would be sufficient.

**Option 2** – This option applied all NFF factors and values, however, capping and scaling of gains would then be applied to reduce overall allocations so that they could be met within the initial funding envelope (excluding any growth funding). Under this option all the growth factor would then be ring fenced as a growth fund, totalling £0.988m.

**Option 3** – This option was a hybrid and again applied all NFF factors and values, however, used both cap and scaling and growth factor funding to ensure affordability.

Mr Meehan was looking for decision and steer from Forum for the preferred option.

In terms of the growth factor Wigan was receiving £987,000 but ultimately the growth fund established would be decided by the option chosen.

### **Central Schools Services Block**

The report outlined the small increase in this budget and highlighted which statutory duties the budget is used to pay for.

### **Mainstream School additional Grant**

Some information on this supplementary grant was included in the report – this was in addition to schools' core budget allocation.

The grant is to be paid in two instalments in 2023/24 (April to August and September to March). In recognition of Academy funding cycles, they will receive a further allocation for April to August 2024.

Mr Meehan then shared the appendix - **School Block DSG 2023/24** where he modelled all the different options. For information he explained that he had rolled schools supplementary grant into this but had deducted business rates as they were excluded from the school budget allocation.

The graph was colour coded as follows: -

- Yellow position showed option 1
- Green position showed option 2
- Blue position showed option 3 - with less from cap and scale and more from growth factor.

Questions and comments were invited from Forum members.

Forum members thought that schools would choose option 1 or 3 due to current financial pressures. Disappointment was raised that the additional grant only topped up even more around free school meals as this did not have any bearing on cost of staff or other costs, but it was recognised that this was a central Government issue.

**Q.** Are we expecting given the uplift from the spending statement in December was for 2 years, that for planning purposes it will look similar for next year?

**A.** My interpretation of it is that it is putting money in to maintain the funding levels from 2023/24 in the following financial year, 2024/25. The grant from this year will be rolled into core budgets for next year, but then we will not see the similar growth next year. We will get the usual growth in the schools block but without the additional grant. What the statement says is that money is being put in now to uplift funding this year but to also uplift core budgets for next year to include the grants.

**Q.** Was capping and scaling used last year?

**A.** Yes, the budget was out by about £200,000 and was topped up using the growth factor to achieve NFF. We also needed to contribute to High Needs Block and we used capping and scaling to achieve this.

**Q.** Is it a cumulative scaling applied on top of what they were last year?

**A.** No, any previous capping and scaling would sit separately.

Comments were made that as we were broadly trying to work to NFF preference would be option 1 but option 3 as a compromise. Other members would be in favour of option 1 if it didn't risk not being able to meet growth.

**Q.** Will £500,000 meet growth demands?

**A.** A conversation has been had with school organisation staff and their view was that growth would be similar this year. Year to date spending is £450,000. Hopefully this will be enough or a

small shortfall that we could draw down from reserves using the 2021/22 underspend. There are other risks such as falling rolls that also need to be considered.

Option 1 seemed to be the option that was favoured to support current inflationary pressures as this met NFF with approximately £500,000 growth fund. The underspend from previous year would be able to support this but would be unlikely to do so in the future. Significant growth in deprivation is evident but due to the lag in funding the funding is not flowing through as quickly as needed.

Councillor Bullen was asked for comment but was happy with the decision.

Panel members **agreed** option 1 for Schools Block Funding.

Total Growth fund in the region of £500,000 was **agreed** with £205,000 from the Schools Block and £295,000 from reserves.

**Q.** In terms of calculating the additional grant from the figures per pupil, is there anything we don't know apart from adding up the numbers of KS2, KS3, KS4 and FSM6?

**A.** Maintained schools have received an indicative figure and this has been sent to the School Business Manager for budget setting purposes. For academies there is a calculator on the website.

Central School Services Block was **agreed** in line with inflation.

Mr Meehan was thanked for his clear report.

## 5 High Needs Block Update and 2023/24 Budget

Mr Meehan shared the **Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs Block Budget report January 2023** on the screen which provided an update to Schools Forum on the projected financial position of the High Needs block for 2022/23 and the High Needs budget for 2023/24.

He aimed to pull out the key points from the report. The main points being: -

- Approx £570m additional funding granted nationally.
- £400m was allocated nationally as part of High needs additional grant.
- High needs NFF had broadly the same factors as currently.
- The funding floor increased to 5% prior to the High Needs Additional grant.
- The limit on gains was 7% compared to baseline and this is prior to additional funding being applied through the High Needs additional grant.

- Total High Needs allocation was £50.79m (and £47.49M after deductions) an 11 % increase from 2022/23.
- High Needs funding block was for 0–24 year old pupils with High Needs and includes pre and post 16 places detailed in the report.
- A significant deficit remained on this block of funding £3.612 M brought forward from 2021/22.
- 2022/23 Quarter figures suggested an underspend of £0.419m which would reduce the deficit.
- There had been an increase in spending of around 13% compared to the previous financial year.
- It was noted that the budgets for Post 16 Funding and Independent School Provision were reduced from the actual projected spend for this year (2022/23) to balance the overall budget with the funding available.
- The 2023/24 High Needs operational guidance required all LAs to apply a 3% minimum funding guarantee (MFG) to funding for special school places compared to 2021/22 baselines.
- Wigan applied a 3% uplift in 2022/23 on top up funding only but more will be required to meet MFG in full, which is applied against both place and top up funding baselines from 2021/22.
- A further 3.4% was required to be passed through in additional funding for special schools and alternative provision academies.

Mrs Pealing was invited to outline the proposals for additional investment in the two Engagement Centre's to support the establishment of two EBSA (Emotional Based School Avoidance) groups. The detailed proposal was in the Emotionally Based School Avoidance Support report that members had sight of prior to the meeting.

The LA had already been working with Mrs Deb Wood at the Engagement Centre to find solutions. They had been working on a programme to engage with the persistent or severely absent pupils to turn them around and get them back into school. This had been successful.

This proposal was based on some conversations that Mrs Woods had with schools and was to provide some more intensive support for those with welfare support needs. Mrs Pealing was honest and was unsure of the benefits at this stage but appreciated that it was an area where there were increasing issues and it was a different approach and something that may work. The Centres had done the approach with a couple of children, and it had been successful. The intention was to employ staff for 2 years to work on the programme targeting SEMH non-attenders. The costings were available and there would be set criteria to be eligible. She wanted forum members to consider if this was a wise investment.

**Q.** Is this for secondary pupils or primary pupils or a mix?

**A.** Both

**Q.** Highest number of pupils is 16 per term, would those children be there for 1 term and re-integrated back into school?

**A.** The intention is that they return to school unless their needs are higher, when a conversation and negotiation would need to take place. It should be time limited. The Engagement Centres are not a registered provision and therefore this cannot be the pupils only provision. Their schools must work with them part time too.

**Q.** Does 4 days a week fit in with regulations?

**A.** As far as we are aware it does. I don't think it is the intention that they will be there for 4 days, just 2. The offer in option 2 is that it will be available for 4 days, but it will be for different pupils accessing 2 days a week each and the 3<sup>rd</sup> day is in school/home intervention.

Mrs Pealing explained the different permutations as detailed in the report.

Forum members believed that it was really needed and seemed largely in favor.

**Q.** What provision would be put in place for pupils with an EHCP or LAC as they wouldn't be able to attend an unregistered Centre?

**A.** As long as they are not there full time, and this was not their only provision in line with regulations, they would be able to attend

**Q.** Will this be made clear to outside agencies?

**A.** Only schools will be able to refer in as they will be paying and will remain responsible. It is the provision to refer to before medical needs provision.

**Q.** Can you afford option 2?

**A.** The proposal is that it will come out of High Needs and from schools. Provision has been made for option 2 in the budget.

Schools expressed that they were feeling the real pressure on school's post pandemic and needed as much capacity as possible. Members were reassured that Mrs Pealing would not dismiss Y11's from the provision but would check it out with Mrs Woods.

Forum members felt that the provision was needed and that a 2-year pilot may help schools get back to normal. It was recommended that it should be picked up as part of the planning in the High Needs subgroup.

It was **agreed** that Option 2 should be progressed, and this was already in the budget.

Mrs Pealing thanked colleagues.

Mr Meehan then moved onto section 4.5 of the report and highlighted the appendix 4 contained the detailed proposed budget for 2023/24 with narrative. It was thought that the budgets were realistic but challenging and had been set with a £550,000 contribution to the historic deficit.

He then gave an update on the High needs Recovery Planning position and explained that they had met as a subgroup. Appendix 5 of this report was a summary of the progress report on the actions which were presented and at Appendix 6 were the financial projections.

These reports showed that even after mitigation projections were still showing in-year deficits as growth in funding reduced to just 3% year on year from 24/25. He highlighted that there were still some actions and workstreams that could be explored to create further efficiencies as detailed in the report.

A working group would be formed with other LA colleagues to have another look at the plan.

## **Recommendations**

6.1 Financial pressures and projected deficit as set out in Appendix 1 was **noted**

6.2 The proposal regarding ESBA groups at the Engagement Centres was **considered** and **agreed**.

6.3 The proposed budget was **agreed**.

6.4 The information presented regarding the recovery plan was **noted**.

The Chair hoped that the budget would be more achievable this year as seemed more realistic than in previous years.

**Q.** Reading the papers, the deficit reduces in 2023-24 and then rises again? Is that correct?

**A.** Yes, that is because the Growth in High Needs funding will drop year on year to 3% as advised by the ESFA and it will be more difficult to contribute to the deficit given the level of growth in demand.

**Q.** That presumably is a national problem?

**A.** Yes, as funding drops off it will become more of a challenge.

The Chair thanked Anthony for his contribution.

## **6 Early Years DSG 2023/24**

Mr Rotheram shared the report **Early Years Funding Formula 2023/24** on the screen which was to update Schools Forum on the Early Years DSG allocation for 2023/24

He shared the main points of the report:

- The formula rate for Wigan was £4.61 per hour for 22/23 and this had been increased to £4.90 per hour for 2023/24.
- An amount of £0.06 per hour was included to cover funding previously allocated through the Teachers Pay and Pension Grants (TPPG)
- This amount more than covered the amount previously allocated.
- Funding for the most disadvantaged 2-year olds had increased from £5.67 to £5.73.
- Pupil Premium had increased from 60p to 62p per hour
- It was recommended that all the 29p increase should be passed through to the 3- and 4-year-old rate.
- There was to be no increase to support central services.
- It was proposed that the LA would continue to top slice 10p from the hourly rate from 2-year-old funding to help fund the continued year on year increase in SEN support.
- Disability access funding had increased from £800 to £828 per child.
- For maintained nurseries the indicative allocation for Wigan for April 2023 to March 2024 was £324,467 (22/23 indicative allocation £195,643) this was good news for Wigan.
- Contained within the grant was funding for the TPPG which was allocated separately previously.

**Q.** Regarding the double funding of the TPPG for maintained nursery schools, Is there a similar process in place so that maintained nursery classes are not double funded.

**A.** This will be avoided by following the guidance we received to ensure that this double funding doesn't happen. This guidance should have been included in the report.

Schools Forum **noted** the information on the EY DSG for 2023/24 and **agreed** the proposed early years rates and level of central spend.

## **7 Any Other Urgent Business**

No AOB items identified for inclusion.

The Chair took the opportunity to welcome two new members to the Forum, Martin Wood and Paul Davies.

As the next meeting proposed was on a NEU strike day a decision was made to change the meeting to 1.30pm on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March.

## **8 Future Meeting Dates**

Members **noted** the agreed meeting dates (all via MS Teams):

- Spring 2 – Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023 at 1.30pm
- Summer 1 – Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023 at 1.30pm
- Summer 2 – Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2023 at 1.30pm

*Meeting ended at 14:27pm.*

### **Background documents (available for public inspection):**

Appendices to the circulated briefing reports disclose important facts on which the reports are based and were relied upon in preparing the reports. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy, please contact the Forum Clerk [m.collier@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:m.collier@wigan.gov.uk).