

**Meeting of the Schools' Forum
Held on Thursday 18th May 2023 at 1.30pm
via MS Teams Digital Platform**

MINUTES

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

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

Meeting started at 13:33 pm and was not quorate at the start.

Members were advised that the meeting was being recorded. Anthony Meehan was changing roles within the Local Authority, and this would be his last meeting. Anthony was thanked for his work over the years and members wished him well in his new role. Kirsten Reid would be his successor and was welcomed to the Forum.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received and accepted from:

Julie Hassan – St Oswald's Catholic Primary School
Fiona Quinlivan – St Michael's CE Primary School
Wendy Hughes – Golborne All Saints Catholic Primary School
Peter McGhee – St John Rigby Sixth Form College
Cllr Jenny Bullen – Cabinet Member
P Davies – Fred Longworth High School
Andy McGlown – St Peter's Catholic High School

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

No other business was raised.

3. **Previous Minutes**

Forum Members **confirmed** that the minutes from the Schools' Forum meeting held on **19th January 2023** were a correct record.

4. **High Needs Budget Revision**

Forum Members had received the high needs budget revision in advance of the meeting. Anthony Meehan highlighted that:

- There had been some pressures on the special school budget and adjustments had been made.
- When the original budget was set in January 2023 a contribution to the High Needs deficit of £550,000 was included. At this time the budgets set were felt to be realistic but challenging. Transition and the Y7 intake had informed us that we needed more places in special schools. We have worked with SEND colleagues and would be providing a further 47 places from September.
- The cumulative financial impact of the changes was approximately £625,000 (after budgeted contingency) in 2023/24. As a result, it was necessary to adjust the budget in order to support the additional costs. It will no longer be possible to make the £550,000 contribution to the High Needs deficit. This contribution had been reduced to £100,000 with the remaining £450,000 being used to support the additional Special School costs. This left a cost pressure of £175,000, however, this may potentially be mitigated through underspends in other areas of High Needs and the budget would be kept under review.

Forum Members **noted** the financial pressures and the adjustment made to the original budget.

5. Scheme For Financing Schools

Forum Members had received a report detailing the minor updates to the local scheme in advance of meeting.

The updates required Forum approval; however, the meeting was not quorate so the information was noted and would be approved at the next meeting. There were some small updates to reflect minor changes made by DfE to guidance.

ACTION – Scheme for Financing Schools updates/approval to be included on next agenda.

6. 2022/23 DSG and School Balances Out-turn

Forum Members had received the DSG, and school balances out-turn in advance of the meeting.

DSG:

- Decreased by £2.4 million across all sectors.
- Overspend and underspend had been detailed in the report.
- Reduced high needs deficit to just over £3 million.

Mr Meehan highlighted that it was important to note that overall funding had increased by around 14%.

The overall underspend in relation to centrally retained funding (including growth fund), totalled **-£0.351m**. In summary, the underspends were as follows:

- Growth Funding - £0.180m.
- NNDR adjustments in-year - £0.074m.
- Miscellaneous central underspends - £0.097m (e.g., Schools Forum, TU/Staff Costs de-delegation out-turn, other misc. spend/income).

School balances:

A summary of school balances had been detailed in the report. Mr Meehan highlighted that:

- Nursery and primary – there had been a reduction of £2 million in balances, 17.6% decrease.
- Secondary £84k, 1.3% decrease.
- Special £229k, 9.9% decrease.

The overall position was £18.2 million as at 31st March 2023.

62 maintained schools had an in-year overspend in 2023/2024. 9 schools were reporting a cumulative deficit – £258k in total.

Academy balances had not yet been published on Companies House at time of writing the reports.

Forum Members noted the DSG and school balances out-turn.

Q. 6 schools had an in-year underspend in excess of £100k. Was there a reason for this?

A. Energy costs and rising costs had impacted on budgets. Pay awards and the impact of them were additional budget pressures. Funding was based around the autumn census, so additional grant funding was not available to meet increased pupil numbers. In-year pressure was anticipated again for schools this year.

Q. Was the deficit for some schools a trend year on year?

A. It was very hard to compare like for like with school budgets. Different schools had different needs and budget pressures and varied ability to take immediate corrective action to balance their budgets.

Q. 65% overspend. Did all these schools set projected positive out-turns in first instance?

A. This overspend could be from reserves ring-fenced and committed spend. We could do an exercise around this comparison.

A Member commented that this may not be a bad thing that overall school balances had reduced. Funding should be used to support pupils in schools now. Also, this could deter future grant funding if balances were large. Members also noted that it was concerning that some schools had gone into deficit and others were forecast to go into deficit in the coming year.

7. 2023/24 Central Supplementary Funding

Forum Members had received the 2023/2024 central supplementary funding report in advance of the meeting, detailing applications for funding and what the Local Authority had awarded to schools.

Centrally retained funds were available to support the areas below:

- Growth
- Disproportionate SEN
- Contingency (maintained only)

Schools were asked for a business case and additional information to support funding bids.

In total, the Local Authority received/awarded:

- £2 million in total bids
- £920k approved allocations (more detail in appendix 1 of report)
- £500k growth fund
- £291k – contingency
- £350k – SEND

Overall, there had been an underspend on growth and contingency.

Q. Was 40% based on last year's SEND – and had specified averages changed and if so, how much?

A. 40% was the same as last year. Specified averages had gone up – Mr Meehan will look at this and include a note in minutes.

NOTE FOR THE MINUTES:

In follow up to the above question about disproportionate SEND thresholds, these were as follows:

22/23 – Primary 3.5%, Secondary 2.5%

23/24 – Primary 3.9%, Secondary 3.1%

Q. What happened to the £500k underspend on growth fund?

A. Reported as an underspend at year end. The Local Authority would consult with the Forum on how we could use this underspend. Formed part of centrally retained reserves.

Q. Did the figure include asking one of schools to increase numbers on roll?

A. No so this was subject to change.

8. Any Other Urgent Business

No other business had been raised. On behalf of Schools' Forum, the Chair thanked Anthony Meehan for all the work he had done around school funding and training provided via Governor Services.

9. Future Meeting Dates

- Summer 2 – Thursday 29th June 2023 at 1.30pm.

The meeting closed at 14:12pm.

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

j.sullivan@wigan.gov.uk.