

Attendance

Members of the Schools' Forum

Karen Preston (Chair)	Academies Sector Representative
Stephen Smith (Vice Chair)	Primary Sector Governor Representative
Daryl Asbury (v)	Academies Sector Representative
Louisa Craig (v)	Academies Sector Representative
Ben Davis	Academies Sector Representative
Trisha James (v)	Primary Sector Governor Representative
Samantha Kemp-Marshall	Early Years (PVI Sector) Representative
Susan Lacey	Nursery Sector Head Teacher Representative
Carroll McNally (v)	Non-School Member Diocesan Schools Representative
Bhaksho Raj (v)	Academies Sector Representative
Zoe Rollinson (v)	Primary Sector Headteacher Representative
Graham Tate (v)	Academies Sector Representative
Lucia Jayne Turner (v)	Nursery Sector Governor Representative
Samantha Walker (v)	Primary Sector Headteacher Representative
Sarah Whittington	Special School Sector Head Teacher Representative
Phil Williams (v)	Academies Sector Representative

Observer Status

Councillor Chris Burden (v)	Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Bill Hague	Head of Business and Support Services

In Attendance

James Barlow (v)	Finance Business Partner
Shelley Humphries	Democratic Services Officer
Terry Shaw (v)	Finance Manager

Item No. *Title*

- Welcome and Introductions**
The Chair welcomed new Schools' Forum member, Samantha Kemp-Marshall representing the Early Years (PVI) Sector and Councillor Christopher Burden as an observer representing City of Wolverhampton Council as Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Work.
- Apologies**
Apologies were received from Schools' Forum members Lisa-Anne Westwood, Kirsty Banks, Rachael Brown and Ian Browne.

Apologies were also received from Brenda Wile and Emma Bennett.

3 **Declaration of Interest or Confidentiality**

There were no declarations of interest or confidentiality.

4 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting - 17 February 2022**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of 17 February 2022 be approved as a correct record.

5 **Matters Arising**

In respect of minute 9, clarification was requested in terms of Disability Access Funding (DAF). It was noted that an application had been submitted by one setting expecting the increased rate of £800.00 (effective since April 2022) however only £615.00 was received. It was agreed that Sarah Reynolds, Head of SEN Early Identification and Support and Bill Hague, Head of School Business and Support Services would investigate this and provide clarification outside of the meeting.

In respect of minute 12, it was confirmed that the report detailing final proposals for the Early Years underspend had been deferred until September 2022 pending further information and the maintained nursery supplement would be included. In response to a query around further engagement on the options for the underspend, it was noted that Council officers were still analysing data on pupil numbers and updates would be provided once a stable picture was formed. It was acknowledged that monies should be used solely for the purpose of improving early years education.

In terms of the maintained nursery supplement, internal proposals were being finalised for the Authority to distribute funds through Schools' Forum once it had been determined how to apportion. It was anticipated payments could be made to settings by the start of the September term, subject to appropriate communication via Schools' Forum reporting.

Concerns were raised around the number of out of City placements and how to reduce them. It was noted that the rationale around these placements was often complex, however assurances were offered that it was a last resort option and agreed only if it was the most suitable solution for the child.

Resolved:

That Sarah Reynolds, Head of SEN Early Identification and Support and Bill Hague, Head of School Business and Support Services would investigate and provide clarification around the Disability Access Funding query outside of the meeting.

6 **Schools' Forum Membership 2021- 2022 Update**

Bill Hague, Head of School Business and Support Services presented the Schools' Forum Membership 2021- 2022 Update.

It was reported that work was ongoing to fill vacancies and it was projected that a Secondary Head Representative would be identified by the next meeting.

It was noted that Viv Bunce had expressed an interest in the Special School Governor vacancy which would be confirmed in due course.

Over the summer months, pupil numbers would be examined to determine the balance for Schools' Forum for the next academic year.

Resolved:

That the Schools' Forum Membership 2021- 2022 Update be received.

7 **Schools' Forum Forward Plan 2022 - 2023**

Bill Hague, Head of School Business and Support Services presented the Schools' Forum Forward Plan 2021 – 2022 and highlighted future agenda items. It was noted it had been updated to include dates for the full academic year.

In addition to the items within the published report, it was agreed that a paper linked to the Exploitation Hub be presented on the subject of knife crime within the City. It was acknowledged that regardless of the ask for funding, it would form an invaluable discussion and a relevant paper had already been prepared by Rachel King, Head of Service Specialist Support.

It was queried whether the Supplementary Grant Spending would be included in High Needs Block Funding and it was agreed that Bill Hague would update on this once confirmed.

Schools' Forum members were invited to suggest any items they wished to receive at future meetings by contacting either Bill Hague, Head of School Business and Support Services or Shelley Humphries, Democratic Services Officer.

Resolved:

1. That a paper related to knife crime prepared by Rachel King, Head of Service Specialist Support be presented at a future meeting of Schools' Forum.
2. That Supplementary Grant Spending be confirmed by Bill Hague, Head of School Business and Support Services.

8 **Dedicated Schools Grant Outturn 2021-2022**

Terry Shaw, Finance Manager presented the Dedicated Schools Grant Outturn 2021-2022 report and highlighted key points.

The report sought to inform Members of the Schools' Forum of the latest 2021 – 2022 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation published by the Department for Education and the final expenditure against the DSG in 2021-2022.

Attention was drawn to the High Needs Block and it was noted that although the overspend was not ideal, it was minimal when compared to statistical neighbours.

Resolved:

1. That members of Schools' Forum note the latest 2021-2022 DSG allocation published by the Department for Education.
2. That members of Schools' Forum receive the report on the final out turn against the DSG in 2021-2022.

9 **Surplus and Deficit Budget Monitoring**

Terry Shaw, Finance Manager presented the Surplus and Deficit Budget Monitoring report and highlighted key points. The report provided Members of Schools' Forum

with an update on the Local Authority processes of monitoring schools having or forecasting a deficit balance and schools carrying excess surplus balances. Also noted were the balances held within Wolverhampton maintained schools as of 31 March 2022.

It was highlighted that there had been no clawback of surplus monies recently although that did remain a possibility.

It was reported that schools had now submitted plans spanning from 2022 - 2025. Four schools had been identified as holding deficit balances for 2021 – 2022, however one of these was anticipated to move into a surplus balance by 2022 - 2023. It was noted that numbers of schools holding deficit balances were predicted to increase across all sectors by 2024 - 2025, but it was acknowledged these were worst-case projections only and allowed time to make required changes.

It was highlighted that since the report was published, the school with a projected deficit balance in excess of £500,000 had set plans in motion to reduce this across 2022 – 2023.

It was reported that there were no immediate plans to claw back any of the surplus balances that had been identified, although further discussions with schools holding these would take place following submission of feedback. This prompted a concern raised in respect of the feedback form return deadline which was not felt to be attainable. It was agreed the finance team would be consulted so a revised date could be settled and communicated to schools.

Concerns around negative public perception of excess balances were allayed by the assurance that robust plans were in place for utilising monies to positively impact the schools holding these balances. It was noted that rising energy costs and the cost of living were likely to impact upon how surpluses might be spent. It was also acknowledged that school closures, staff fluctuations and recruiting issues caused by COVID had influenced spending in unexpected ways, for example setting aside funds for new staff then being unable to appoint.

In response to a query around monitoring trends and forecasting, it was noted many plans were based on worst-case scenarios to allow for unexpected occurrences as well as being influenced by uncertainty around long-term Government funding and figures often looked more positive towards year-end.

Officers pledged to continue working with schools in order to maintain budget monitoring mechanisms and provide realistic forecasting.

The opportunity was taken to acknowledge the supportive contributions of Terry Shaw, Finance Manager who would shortly be leaving the Authority for a new role and thanks were extended on behalf of the Authority and Schools Forum members.

Resolved:

1. That Officers consult with the Finance Team and a revised date for return of budget monitoring feedback forms would be communicated to schools.
2. That members of Schools' Forum note the level of balances in maintained schools as at 31 March 2022.

3. That members of Schools' Forum note the approach to challenging schools around the level of their balances and their plans for those resources.
4. That members of Schools' Forum note the monitoring and reporting methodology.

10 **High Needs Sub-Group Update**

In the capacity of Chair of the High Needs Sub-Group, Sarah Whittington provided a verbal update on work undertaken by the group.

It was reported that the Supplementary Grant Formula had been under discussion at local authority level and would be distributed to special schools and resource bases. £1.8 million had been set aside for this purpose.

A deficit was reported for the High Needs Block but it was anticipated that this would be cleared for 2023 – 2023. A steep rise in costs had severely impacted special schools and resources bases.

Workstreams around the Matrix Banding Review had temporarily stalled awaiting clarity around the Green Paper and national matrix banding. Matrix banding assessments were being carried out however with special schools and providers by Helen Bakewell and Debbie Beasley around needs of individual children.

It was reported that High Needs Sub-Group had considered the High Needs Block Additional Dedicated Schools Grant Funding 2022-2023 briefing note outlining three options for High Needs Block DSG Funding allocations and agreed upon the third option: to uplift the matrix banding on an individual level in schools by 3.5 %. It was noted that budget setting in special schools had proved challenging without first knowing the allocations beforehand. It was agreed that Schools' Forum would support this proposal on the proviso that a report be submitted to the September meeting to clarify what was agreed. The High Needs Block Additional Dedicated Schools Grant Funding 2022-2023 briefing note would be shared with Schools' Forum. It was also agreed that the uplift in the matrix be communicated to all schools for budgeting purposes.

It was reported that a decision had been made to retire the Education Health and Care (EHC) Hub system as it had not proved to be user friendly or cost effective. An exit strategy had been formed with an initial cost of £36,000 for the first year to recruit staff to extract all records from the system; this would be cost neutral each year and schools would be updated once completed.

Resolved:

1. That members of Schools' Forum would support the proposal to uplift the matrix banding on the proviso that a report be submitted to the September 2022 meeting for formal approval.
2. That the High Needs Block Additional Dedicated Schools Grant Funding 2022-2023 briefing note presented to the High Needs Funding Subgroup would be shared with Schools' Forum.
3. That details on the matrix uplift would be communicated to all schools for budgeting purposes.

11

Any Other Business

Following a discussion on the hybrid format of the meeting, it was felt that the online element allowed those who would otherwise have not been able to travel to attend, whilst face to face engagement encouraged a more open discussion. It was suggested that a fully virtual format would benefit meetings with lighter agendas to avoid members travelling in only to leave shortly after. It was agreed that the September meeting would be hybrid and to review at the end of each meeting to agree the format of the next one.

Resolved:

That the September meeting of Schools' Forum would be in a hybrid format and to review at the end of each meeting to agree the format of the next one.

12

Dates for future meetings

- 29 September 2022
- 01 December 2022
- 19 January 2023
- 16 February 2023
- 29 June 2023 (TBC)