

Attendance

Members of the Schools' Forum

Karen Preston (Chair)	Academies Sector Representative
Susan Lacey (Vice Chair)	Nursery Sector Headteacher Representative
Kirsty Banks	Academies Sector Representative
Rachael Brown	Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher Representative
Vivienne Bunce	Special School Sector Governor Representative
Bhaksho Raj	Academies Sector Representative
Graham Tate	Academies Sector Representative
Lisa Thompson	Non-School Member Diocesan Schools Representative
Lucia Jayne Turner	Nursery Sector Governor Representative
Samantha Walker	Primary Sector Headteacher Representative
Sarah Whittington	Special School Sector Head Teacher Representative
Phil Williams	Academies Sector Representative

Observer Status

Bill Hague	Head of School Business and Support Services
Councillor Christopher Burden	Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

In Attendance

James Barlow	Finance Business Partner
Shelley Humphries	Democratic Services Officer
David Kirby	Service Manager - School Organisation and Support
Shekera Lodge	School Organisation Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Welcome and Introductions**

2 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Schools' Forum members Stephen Smith, Zoe Rollinson, Kate Charles, Ben Davis, Lisa-Anne Westwood, Gary Gentle, Stephen Blower and Samantha Kemp-Marshall.

Apologies were also received from Brenda Wile and Helen Bakewell.

3 **Declaration of Interest or Confidentiality**

There were no declarations of interest or confidentiality.

4 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting - 29 September 2022**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of 29 September 2022 be approved as a correct record.

5 **Matters Arising**

In respect of minute 11, members were assured that, as agreed at the previous meeting, work was underway to establish the Early Years Sub-group, along with a Terms of Reference.

A request was made for the increased High Needs Matrix figures to be shared with individual schools; it was noted by James Barlow, Finance Business Partner that this would be actioned shortly.

The Chair moved to take item 10 as part of Matters Arising and James Barlow, Finance Business Partner presented the Maintained Nursery Supplement Update, highlighting salient points. The report responded to a query raised at the previous meeting and detailed the use of annual surpluses in the Maintained Nursery Supplement (MNS) of the Early Years Block of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). An overview was provided around how the surplus had come about and how it had been agreed at Schools' Forum to utilise the money by allocating it to maintained nurseries; allocations were outlined within the report.

Thanks were extended for the transparency of the content of the report however concerns were raised around budget planning, the uncertainty of monies to be made available by government, and the timeliness with which this was communicated to authorities.

To assist with budget planning, James Barlow, Finance Business Partner offered to examine calculations using pupil roll numbers (once these were made available following the January census) and incorporate this into the Early Years Block Funding report for February 2023.

It was suggested that once the Early Years Sub-group was established, consideration would be given to how this group could have oversight of how monies

were apportioned direct to schools and to explore a methodology to maintain a 'buffer zone.'

Resolved:

1. That High Needs Matrix funding increases be shared with individual schools via email.
2. That a forecast of potential surpluses be explored by the Finance Team using pupil roll census numbers to be included in the February Early Years Block Funding report.

6 **Schools' Forum Membership and Attendance Update**

Bill Hague, Head of School Business and Support Services presented the Schools' Forum Membership and Attendance Update. It had been requested at the last meeting to record attendance as well as membership and thanks were extended to the meeting Clerk for drawing the information together in a table.

It was noted that Stephen Blower had volunteered to take on the Secondary Sector Headteacher Substitute role, although sent his apologies for this evening's meeting. It was also noted that Peter Merry would be contacted for discussions around attendance from City of Wolverhampton College and steps were being taken to fill other remaining vacancies.

Resolved:

That the Schools' Forum Membership and Attendance 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 2022 - 2023 and highlighted future agenda items.

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:

That the Schools' Forum Forward Plan 2022 - 2023 be noted.

8 **Growth Fund Update**

David Kirby, Service Manager - School Organisation and Support presented the Growth Fund Update report and highlighted key points. The report provided an update on the deployment of the 2021–2022 Financial Year Growth Fund payment and outlined estimated Growth Fund allocations in 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 Financial Year.

It was noted that a declining birth rate had been reported in Wolverhampton which would potentially have an impact on pupil roll numbers and growth. It was acknowledged that pupils moving to Wolverhampton schools from out of City in-year could also affect forecasting. It was considered that this emerging trend may need plans put in place to support schools in the long term, therefore it would be helpful to explore the potential impact of the declining birth rates as a future agenda item. It was reported that Falling Rolls funds had been introduced by some schools' Forums in previous years.

Resolved:

To add an agenda item on exploring the potential impact of the declining birth rates to the Forward Plan.

9 **2023-2024 National Funding Formula Provisional Allocations and Update on Budget Setting**

James Barlow, Finance Business Partner presented the 2023-2024 National Funding Formula Provisional Allocations and Update on Budget Setting report, highlighting salient points. The report provided Schools' Forum Members with the indicative allocations and the process for setting budgets funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in 2023-2024.

It was noted that forecasts showed there was not as much growth fund to carry forward into 2023 – 2024 as in previous years. Depending on growth fund allocations which were due to be announced in December, it would not be clear until then if any excess funding would be available for 2023 – 2024.

The DSG Allocation consultation was highlighted, following which options would be formulated which would then be brought to Forum in January 2023 for a decision to recommend to Cabinet.

Resolved:

That Schools' Forum note the indicative allocations and the process for setting budgets funded by the DSG in 2023-2024.

10 **Maintained Nursery Supplement Update**

This item was taken at Matters Arising.

11 **Update on the Impact of the Education MASH Officer - (To follow)**

Bill Hague, Head of School Business and Support Services delivered the presentation providing the Update on the Impact of the Education MASH Officer. The presentation outlined that since the approval of a dedicated school officer within the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was gained in January 2019, data had been gathered to understand the impact the role had made. Funded through the Central Services Block of the DSG, the postholder's role was to work in close partnership with schools advising on threshold issues, processes and acting as a communication link between schools and MASH 24.

It was reported that this had resulted in strengthened positive communication and understanding between the Authority and schools and had provided a welcome source of advice, support and information for schools and families.

It was therefore proposed to make the post permanent and for the funding of the post to be reviewed, with funding options being presented to Schools' Forum in January 2023. Possible suggestions were to fund through school contributions, continued use of Central Services Schools Block or hybrid funding models, although a range of solutions would be considered.

The proposals were welcomed and members of Schools' Forum who had dealt with the MASH Officer commended any interactions with them as having been positive.

Members reported that the Officer was considered a valuable source of information which was conveyed in a timely manner and demonstrated a well-rounded understanding from a school viewpoint.

Resolved:

That proposals for the permanent appointment of a dedicated Education MASH Officer and subsequent funding options be presented to Schools' Forum for approval in January 2023.

12 **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. The Sub-group met last on 18 November 2022 where James Barlow, Finance Business Partner had provided a financial update for quarter two. It had been forecast that there may be a slight overspend in terms of the High Needs Block, however Wolverhampton was not considered an outlier in this respect when compared with other authorities. The efforts of the Finance team were recognised in obtaining and analysing funding information.

It was reported that the Hub had now ceased and Senstart completely appointed to, however the capacity challenge in migrating Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) paperwork to the new system was ongoing. It was expected that the new portal would go live in March or April of 2023.

It was noted that Mai Gibbons, Senior Commissioning Officer (SEND) had visited all special schools and settings in the City to inform commissioning places for September 2023. It had been highlighted that there had been an unprecedented request for special school places and resource classes within schools and it was being explored how to approach this to support individual settings. Bill Hague noted that there had been some requests made around providing additional spaces within schools and work was ongoing to explore how to provide this.

Thanks were extended to the High Needs Sub-group for work carried out.

Resolved:

That the High Needs Sub-Group Update be received

13 **Any Other Business**

Councillor Chris Burden, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills formally introduced himself to Schools' Forum and invited Members to approach him with any queries and concerns they may have during or outside of formal meetings.

14 **Dates for future meetings**

Resolved:

That the next meeting of Schools' Forum take place on 19 January 2023 and would be hybrid.

The Chair thanked everyone for their participation and wished all a Merry Christmas before closing the meeting at 17:08.