

City of Wolverhampton Council

SCHOOLS' FORUM

Date	29 February 2024
Report title	Growth Fund Update
Contact Officer	Bill Hague – Head of School Business and Support
Contact	01902 55100/ bill.hague@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Summary

On 25 January 2024, a Growth Fund update was presented to Schools' Forum. This included the potential 2024-2025 Growth Fund allocation and importantly referenced the significant in-year demand. Discussions with the Department for Education (DfE) around the increased demand in Wolverhampton have subsequently taken place resulting in the DfE advising that support for growing schools should be facilitated through the use of existing Growth Funding.

Decision

Members of Schools' Forum are asked to:

1. Note the requirement for the broader use of Growth Fund for growing schools that are required to cater for in-year demand.
2. To approve the outline process for supporting growing schools.
3. Approve that a full review of the mechanism for Growth Fund is undertaken, to be overseen by a working group of Schools' Forum Members.
4. Approve as an interim measure that a discretionary element be built into the current arrangements.

Schedule of Background Papers

- Schools' Forum (25 January 2024)
- Schools' Forum (9 October 2014) Establishment of a Growth Fund to Support Expanding Schools

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Schools' Forum first agreed to the establishment of a Wolverhampton Growth Fund on 9 October 2014. In line with this agreement, a Growth Fund has been subsequently retained and deployed.
- 1.2 Growth funding is provided within local authorities' schools block DSG allocations. For 2024 to 2025, it will be calculated using the same methodology as previous year which was introduced for the 2019 to 2020 financial year, based on the growth in pupil numbers between the October 2022 and October 2023 censuses.
- 1.3 Experience has shown that Growth Fund provision is essential to expanding schools as the admission of significant numbers of additional pupils has clear revenue budget implications for the schools concerned (funding is based upon numbers on roll recorded within the preceding autumn term School Census). Without such provision expanding schools would face a likely shortfall in revenue funding until funding allocations reflect actual numbers on roll.
- 1.4 City schools currently qualify for funding through the Growth Fund in the following circumstances:
 - The school or academy has agreed with the Local Authority (LA) to permanently increase its admission limit to meet basic need.
 - The school or academy has agreed with the LA to provide a bulge class to meet basic need.
 - The school or academy has agreed with the LA to expand in-year to meet basic need.
- 1.5 Growth Funds may not be used to support either schools in financial difficulty or to meet the strategic aspirations of schools or trusts who wish to expand to meet their local objectives. This is as per ESFA guidance: "...The growth fund can only be used to:
 - support growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet basic need
 - support additional classes needed to meet the infant class size regulation
 - meet the revenue cost of new schools.
- 1.6 The number of available places for the Local Authority to access has reduced due to an Academy Trust placing a cap on any new admissions into one of its undersubscribed schools and also deciding not to participate in co-ordination of in-year admissions. This has led to the LA being unable to allocate children to the school where the parental preference has been unable to be met.

2.0 In year Growth

- 2.1 The City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) has a statutory duty to ensure sufficient school places are available across the City and must introduce additional places when they are required.
- 2.2 CWC pupil projections at point of entry to a school (i.e., Reception/Year 7) have a high level of accuracy (over 99%). However there has been a significant increase in the number of families arriving in the city that require a school place, that could not have been predicted and far exceeds previous levels of in year growth that was factored into

CWC pupil projections. This was referenced and discussed further at the Schools' Forum meeting on 25 January 2024.

Increase in demand appears to be based on different factors. There have been a number of Government asylum schemes, and more recently there has been a recruitment drive by the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust that has seen a significant increase in families arriving in City from Nigeria. However, it can also be linked to OFSTED judgements, housing schemes and employment in the City.

3.0 Supporting Growing Schools

- 3.1 The Council recognises that effective planning, particularly in the secondary phase, is further complicated when undersubscribed schools are asked to support unanticipated growth during the school year.
- 3.2 In order to utilise resources effectively, schools plan for an intake of pupils based on their Year 7 allocations and by factoring in an amount of in year growth. Due to circumstances beyond the Council's control (as per paragraph 2.2) the level of available surplus places in the City has dramatically reduced. This places additional pressure on previously undersubscribed schools that have planned for a smaller number of pupils on roll.
- 3.3 Rapid increases in pupil numbers post October Census leads to a delay in the receiving of pupil funding. This places an additional burden on schools' financial resources and increases the risk of a negative impact on performance and the ability to deliver the curriculum effectively.
- 3.4 Following discussions with representatives from the DfE, the Council is advised that supporting in year growth should be facilitated through the use of existing school/Academy/Trust funds including reserves, and through the use of Growth Funding.
- 3.5 It is proposed that a full review of the mechanism for growth funding is undertaken, to be overseen by a working group of Schools' Forum Members and that as an interim measure a discretionary element will need to be built into the current arrangements.
- 3.6 Any application for the discretionary element will need to be accompanied with a business case that contains but is not limited to:
 - the financial ask and what it will fund
 - details of the overall level of growth within the school
 - evidence of how school is organised and resourced
 - how the Academy Trust is contributing to supporting the situation through use of reserves etc.
- 3.7 Any applications for the discretionary element of the growth fund will be assessed for affordability in terms of the overall requirements for growth funding in the City.
- 3.8 Any application to the discretionary element will need an approval process. It will be the responsibility of the Deputy Director for Education or the Director for Children's Services to consider and give final approval to any applications. Any application made for discretionary growth funding will initially be considered by officers from the local authority

and a panel of Schools' Forum members, who will make recommendations to help inform any final decisions.

- 3.9 This policy is intended to support schools to grow, and to help avoid the practice of imposing a cap on new admissions. This policy is not intended for use by schools that have already imposed a cap on their Published Admission Number (PAN).
- 3.10 It is a requirement that schools participate in the City of Wolverhampton Council in-year co-ordination of school admissions to be eligible to apply for the discretionary element of growth funding, including the acceptance of applications where the school has not been expressed as a preference.