

Attendance

Members of the Schools' Forum

Barry Bond (Chair)	Special School Sector Governor Representative
Karen Preston (Vice Chair)	Academies Sector Representative
Ben Davis	Academies Sector Representative
Jon Dovey	Primary Sector Governor Representative
Trisha James	Primary Sector Governor Substitute
Susan Lacey	Nursery Sector Headteacher Representative
Jeremy Parkes	Academies Sector Representative
Stephen Smith	Primary Sector Governor Representative
Samantha Walker	Primary Sector Headteacher Representative
Sarah Whittington	Special School Sector Headteacher Representative
Phil Williams	Academies Sector Representative

In attendance

James Barlow	Senior Accounting Officer
Debra Boniface	Finance Manager
Councillor Dr. Michael Hardacre	Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Bill Hague	Head of School Planning and Resources
Shelley Humphries	Democratic Services Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 Welcome and Introductions

2 Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

Before the meeting proceeded, members of Schools' Forum were invited to elect a new Chair and Vice Chair of Schools' Forum.

Following nominations and elections, it was agreed that Barry Bond and Karen Preston be elected as Chair and Vice Chair respectively. All members of Schools' Forum agreed to these elections.

Resolved:

1. That Barry Bond continue as Chair of Schools' Forum.
2. That Karen Preston be named as Vice-Chair of Schools' Forum.

3 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Schools' Forum members Zoe Rollinson, Louisa Craig, Lisa Thompson and Ian Browne. Apologies were also received from City of Wolverhampton Council employees Emma Bennett and Meredith Teasdale.

4 **Declaration of Interest or Confidentiality**

There were no declarations of interest or confidentiality.

5 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting - 4 July 2019**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of 4 July 2019 be approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

1. That Stephen Smith's status be corrected to Representative of Schools' Forum rather than Substitute.
2. Minute 8, paragraph 5 be corrected to read as follows: It was clarified that there were tight processes in place to ensure that a deficit balance didn't continue to grow prior to a school's conversion to an academy.

6 **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

7 **Schools' Forum Membership 2019 - 2020**

Shelley Humphries, Democratic Services Officer provided a verbal update on the Schools' Forum Membership 2019 – 2020.

It was noted that, since the Schools' Forum Membership 2019 – 2020 had been published, the Forum had welcomed a new representative of the Academies Sector and a Headteacher Substitute for the Primary Sector.

It was reported that some vacancies still existed in the membership, although steps were being taken to fill them.

It was noted that Lynne Law had stepped down from Schools' Forum as representative of the Academies Sector. The Chair of Schools' Forum took the opportunity to extend thanks on behalf of Schools' Forum members for all her work with the Forum and contributions to meetings. The Chair's personal thanks were also recorded.

Resolved:

1. That the current Schools' Forum Membership 2019 – 2020 be noted.
2. That thanks be extended to Lynne Law on behalf of Schools' Forum.

8 **Schools' Forum Constitution 2019**

Bill Hague, Head of School Organisation presented the Schools' Forum Constitution 2019 for approval. It was reported that the Schools' Forum Constitution had been reviewed over the summer, although there had been few changes made.

It was clarified that it had been proposed that the structure of the primary sector would consist of three Headteachers and two Governors where previously it had been balanced the opposite way.

Resolved:

1. That it be noted that there are no changes required to the makeup of Schools' Forum.
2. That the recommendation to revise the primary sector representation to be made up of three Headteacher representative and two Governor representatives be agreed.
3. That the Schools' Forum Constitution 2019 be adopted by Schools' Forum.

9 **Schools' Forum Forward Plan 2019 - 2020**

Bill Hague, Head of School Organisation presented the Schools' Forum Forward Plan 2019 – 2020 for noting.

Schools' Forum members were invited to suggest any items they wished to receive at Schools' Forum. It was requested that any suggestions be sent to the clerk of Schools' Forum or Bill Hague, Head of School Organisation.

Resolved:

1. That the Schools' Forum Forward Plan 2019 – 2020 be noted.
2. That any suggestions for items for discussion at Schools' Forum be sent to the clerk of Schools' Forum, Shelley Humphries, Democratic Services Officer or Bill Hague, Head of School Organisation.

10 **Feedback from High Needs Sub-Group**

It was reported by the Chair of the High Needs Sub-group that the sub-group had met regularly over the past 12 months. It was stated that the Terms of Reference for this sub-group would be presented at a future Schools' Forum meeting for approval. It was also noted that a smaller sub-group existed which had been working on matrix and banding for pupils and carried out set tasks each month.

It was agreed that further updates would be provided at future Schools' Forum meetings.

Resolved:

1. That the Terms of Reference for the High Needs Sub-group be presented at a future Schools' Forum meeting for approval.
2. That updates on the progress of the High Needs Sub-group be provided at future Schools' Forum meetings.

11 **Surplus and Deficit Budget Monitoring Report**

Debra Boniface, Finance Manager presented the Surplus and Deficit Budget Monitoring Report and highlighted salient points. The report provided an update to members of Schools' Forum on the current Local Authority processes of monitoring schools that either had or had forecast a deficit balance; and schools that carried excess surplus balances.

The report made the proposal that the processes of monitoring of excess surplus balances, capital balances and deficit recoveries be streamlined to enable more

robust challenge and to mitigate the risk to the Local Authority. The timetable in the attached appendix provided a detailed outline of the proposed changes to the reporting and monitoring processes for approval.

It was proposed that the level of scrutiny be increased on those schools forecasting a deficit position, and holding expired capital balances, and greater transparency offered on the process that followed.

The remit had been widened from schools reporting their intended use of surplus balances and new reporting format will be combined to show both existing and new balances, as well as capital balances in a single template.

It was noted that the information within the report provided the current status of Wolverhampton schools and a revised forecast would be available by the end of the month.

In response to a query on the purpose of the arbitration panel process, it was clarified that the process was only for schools who held a surplus balance and was designed to determine if a school had robust proposals to spend the excess money or if clawback was deemed necessary.

It was queried why one particular area had gone from a surplus balance to a deficit balance however assurances were given from officers that this matter was being investigated. It was noted that forecasts often erred on the side of caution and it was possible that the figures may have been overly pessimistic. It was agreed that an update would be provided after October for further clarification.

The report was welcomed as it was beneficial to gain a deeper understanding of the balances held by schools and to challenge why schools held either a surplus or deficit. It was reported that Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services had been particularly interested in this matter and keen to monitor its progress.

A concern was raised in respect of the One system as some discrepancies in pupil records had been reported. It was agreed that this would be explored further by officers.

In response to a query regarding special educational needs SEN funding, it was noted that the Authority appreciated that there was a delay in some funding as the payment schedule of certain grants is determined by when the Authority receive the grant notification from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

Concerns had been raised in respect of a lag in schools receiving funding for children who were already in attendance at the school. It was noted that this was a complex situation. It was clarified that, in some situations, once a school was named following a tribunal, the child would have to attend that school later and the funding may be delayed until after they had started.

Resolved:

1. That the undertakings of the Schools at Financial Risk (SFR) group (formerly Schools Under Notice of Concern or SUNC) be noted.
2. That the proposed revisions to the monitoring and reporting methodology be agreed.

3. That an investigation be conducted by officers into the discrepancies within the One system.

12 **Devolved Formula Capital Balances**

Debra Boniface, Finance Manager presented the Devolved Formula Capital Balances report. The report informed Members of the Schools' Forum of the requirement to spend Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) within the prescribed timeframe and provided a breakdown of the balances held within Wolverhampton maintained schools as at 31 August 2019.

It was highlighted that there were fewer schools continually carrying unspent balances, which was an improvement on last year.

It was acknowledged that nursery schools had experienced difficulties in spending the DFC allocations in the same way as other schools. It was clarified that it was permissible to hold on to the accumulated funds with the proviso that the school could satisfy the Department for Education (DfE) that a suitable plan was in place to spend the money.

It was noted that there had been some delays in the figures provided within the information, which was a result of the invoices having been received later than expected. It was agreed that updates could be included as part of future Surplus and Deficit Budget Monitoring reports.

Resolved:

1. That the DFC balances held in schools at 31 August 2019 be noted.
2. That updates on DCF balances would be provided with Surplus and Deficit Budget Monitoring updates.

13 **National Funding Formula Update**

Debra Boniface, Finance Manager provided a verbal update on the National Funding Formula and what this meant for schools. It was reported that information on the National Funding Formula (NFF) had been released for 2020 – 2021 and the formula would be the same as in previous years. It was clarified that the formula was set by central government but administered by the local authority.

It was reported that minimum funding per primary school pupil was to rise from £3,500 to £3,750 in 2020-2021 and to £4,000 in 2021-2022 and that the minimum funding per secondary school pupil was to rise from £4,800 to £5,000 in 2020–2021. However, schools are advised to take this announcement with caution since, due to the high level of deprivation funding, the majority of schools in Wolverhampton already received this level of funding, with only one primary school and one secondary school gaining funding through this factor in 2019-2020.

In respect of the minimum funding guarantee (MFG), it was noted that in 2019-2020, the maximum permissible rate was 0.5% (from a range of -1.5% to +0.5%). For 2020-2021, the permissible range is from +0.5% to +1.84%.

It was noted that the operational guide for the High Needs Block had been released and, whilst the methodology of distributing funds to institutions remained unchanged at £10,000 per place plus funding for individual needs through the local matrix funding, there was to be an underlying increase of 8% in the funds made available to

Local Authorities in 2020-2021. It was reported that this increase was calculated from the 2019-2020 population and was to be capped so that no authority has an overall gain of more than 17%.

It was noted that there had been no further news on the early years block. In respect of the duplication of recorded pupils reported at the last meeting of Schools' Forum, it was clarified that there would be some clawback of the surplus funds and this year's funding figures had been adjusted accordingly to account for this.

In response to a query on whether there would be any supplementary funding for nursery schools, it was clarified that Councillors had been lobbying Central Government in respect of the spending review.

It was reported that there had been a meeting for a special educational needs (SEN) call for evidence attended by representatives from the Department for Education (DfE), Adrian Leach, Head of SEND at City of Wolverhampton Council, parents and carers. It was felt that the DfE had taken note of concerns and issues raised. One issue, in particular, was noted as the proposal to review notional SEN budgets for mainstream schools as the funds were not ringfenced. This recommended that the SEN budgets in mainstream schools should be fixed rather than notional, and that schools may be expected to report on the use of the SEN budget (in a similar way to Pupil Premium). There had been a reported increase in the use of the high needs block and the number of children with SEN in mainstream schools. It was also reported that the SEN Code of Practice had been undergoing a review and would be published next year.

In response to a query on whether an influx of schools who stood to lose from the implementation of the NFF, it was stated that it was not anticipated at this stage that any schools were likely to lose, as most of the NFF factors were already being used in Wolverhampton.

In response to a query on the discrepancy of the funding of business rates between nursery and mainstream schools, it was noted that this was an optional factor in the mainstream funding formula but is applied by every Authority. It was explained that the allocation of money did not change and would not affect the amount distributed if another factor was applied. This factor is not available in the Early Years Funding Formula and it was felt by providers that it was unfair that nursery schools potentially stood to lose out as the early years block could not apply for this factor. It was noted that the only schools exempt from business rates were Special Schools and PRUs, and that academy schools were not paid rates through the funding formula but were able to claim back business rates from the Government.

Resolved:

That the update on the National Funding Formula be received.

14

Any Other Business

Concerns were raised in respect of school meal purchasing however it was requested that enquiries on provision of school meals be addressed with Bill Hague, Head of School Organisation outside of the meeting.

In response to a query from a member of Schools' Forum regarding the school representative in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub MASH which was agreed by

Schools' Forum on 17 January 2019, a brief update was provided. It was noted that the Authority had been unable to appoint on the initial round of recruitment, however further interviews had recently taken place and discussions had been held with the candidate's school around terms and conditions. It was agreed that a further update on the progress of the appointment would be provided at the next meeting of Schools' Forum.

A concern was raised around young adults leaving education with no qualifications and how this could be addressed. It was reported that information on pupil outcomes from last academic year was in the process of being collated and would be provided at the next meeting of Schools' Forum.

It was reported that a review of Wolverhampton special schools was underway and that a consultation was open for responses until 11 October 2019.

In her absence, it was reported that Meredith Teasdale, Director of Education would be leaving City of Wolverhampton Council in the near future. The Chair took the opportunity to record his thanks to Meredith on behalf of Schools' Forum for her support over the years. The impact she had made around the City was noted and the Chair wished her well in her new role.

Resolved:

1. That Bill Hague, Head of School Organisation address enquiries on provision of school meals outside of Schools' Forum.
2. That a further update on the progress of the appointment would be provided at the next meeting of Schools' Forum.
3. That information on pupil outcomes from last academic year would be provided at the next meeting of Schools' Forum.
4. That thanks be extended to Meredith Teasdale, Director of Education on behalf of Schools' Forum.

The Chair closed the meeting at 17:20.