

Attendance

Members of the Schools' Forum

Barry Bond (Chair)	Special School Sector Governor Representative
Karen Preston (Vice Chair)	Academies Sector Representative
Rachael Brown	Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher Representative
Louisa Craig	Academies Sector Representative
Ben Davis	Academies Sector Representative
Claire Foster	Nursery Sector Substitute
Gary Gentle	Diocesan Representative Substitute
Trisha James	Primary Sector Governor Substitute
James Ludlow	Secondary Sector Headteacher Representative
Carroll McNally	Non-School Member Diocesan Schools Representative
Bhaksho Raj	Academies Sector Representative
Zoe Rollinson	Primary Sector Headteacher Representative
Stephen Smith	Primary Sector Governor Representative
Graham Tate	Academies Sector Representative
Lisa Thompson	Primary Sector Headteacher Representative
Lucia Jayne Turner	Nursery Sector Governor Representative
Lisa-Anne Westwood	Academies Sector Representative
Sarah Whittington	Special School Sector Head Teacher Representative
Phil Williams	Academies Sector Representative

Observer Status

Emma Bennett	Director of Children's Services
Councillor Dr Michael Hardacre	Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Bill Hague	Head of Business and Support Services

In Attendance

James Barlow	Senior Accounting Officer
Shelley Humphries	Democratic Services Officer
Terry Shaw	Finance Manager

Item No. *Title*

1 **Welcome and Introductions**

2 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Daryl Asbury, Ian Browne, Susan Lacey and Samantha Walker.

3 **Declaration of Interest or Confidentiality**

There were no declarations of interest or confidentiality.

4 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting - 27 February 2020**

Resolved:

That the minutes from the meeting of 27 February be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5 **Matters Arising**

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

6 **Schools' Forum Membership 2020 - 2021**

Bill Hague, Head of School Organisation presented the Schools' Forum Membership 2020 – 2021 report and highlighted vacancies. It was noted that some changes to the balance of members in the primary sector had been suggested, subject to the Constitution being approved.

It was also proposed that Lisa Thompson be named as a representative from the Diocesan Schools, subject to approval from the Diocese and Lorraine Dawney was nominated as the potential Special School Substitute.

Resolved:

That the Schools' Forum Membership 2020 – 2021 be noted.

7 **Schools' Forum Forward Plan 2020 - 2021**

Bill Hague, Head of School Organisation presented the School's Forum Forward Plan 2020 – 2021 for noting and gave an overview of 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 Organisation or Shelley Humphries, Democratic Services Officer.

Resolved:

That the Schools' Forum Forward Plan 2020 – 2021 be noted.

8 **Draft Schools' Forum Constitution 2020**

Bill Hague, Head of School Organisation presented the Draft Schools' Forum Constitution 2020 which covered the academic year 2020 – 2021. The Schools' Forum Constitution is reviewed annually and presented for approval at the first meeting of each academic year.

It was reported that a review of membership had also been undertaken and changes had been proposed to the makeup of the Forum. This was due to a shift in the balance of pupils following the academisation of St. Patrick's Catholic Primary School and St. Anthony's Catholic Primary School.

It was agreed that there be two Headteacher representatives and two Governor representatives from the primary sector to ensure balance between the two.

Resolved:

1. That members of Schools' Forum note that there were changes required to the makeup of Schools' Forum.
2. That members of Schools' Forum agree to the revision of the primary sector representation to be made up of two Headteacher representatives and two Governor representatives.
3. That the draft Schools' Forum Constitution 2020 be approved and adopted by Schools' Forum for the academic year 2020 – 2021.

9 **Budget Monitoring and School Balances Report**

Terry Shaw, Finance Manager presented the Budget Monitoring and School Balances report and highlighted salient points. The report provided an update for Forum members on the work currently being undertaken in relation to maintained schools having or predicted to have deficit balances and with those that are carrying excess surplus balances.

The report outlined the monitoring processes followed by the Local Authority for potential deficit balances as well as the desktop monitoring and Licensed Deficit applications.

The report highlighted that the Scheme for Financing Schools provided an option for the clawback of excess surplus balances and provided an overview of the arbitration panel process. Any balances clawed back would then be redistributed to schools through a School Improvement bid process.

It was noted that Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) grant was introduced in 2000-2001 with the aim of allowing schools to target capital funding at their own capital priorities, which included ICT. A breakdown of allocation calculations was provided and grant terms set out. It was noted that

It was proposed that the current reporting processes combined the balances together. It was outlined that if no changes were made, this method of reporting would result in skewed figures and no underspend being reported to the ESFA for 2020 – 2021 as the low balances held by some schools masked the higher balances for others.

It was noted although the Local Authority were not permitted to claw back DFC funds from the schools that retained expired balances, the individual balances were reported to the Department for Education via the Consistent Financial Reporting framework, high levels of underspend may come to the attention of the ESFA who were able to claw back the excess balances.

Resolved:

1. That Schools' Forum note the undertakings of the Schools at Financial Risk (SFR) group (formerly Schools Under Notice of Concern).
2. That Schools' Forum agree the proposed changes to the monitoring and reporting methodology.
3. That Schools' Forum note the Devolved Formula Capital balances held in schools at 31 August 2020.

10 **Dedicated Schools Grant Outturn**

James Barlow, Finance Business Partner presented the Dedicate Schools Grant Outturn report and highlighted salient points. The report outlined the final expenditure against the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in 2019-2020.

It was reported that the City of Wolverhampton's initial allocation was £248.29 million detailed over the main funding blocks. Over the course of 2019-2020, the DSG has been updated to reflect initial changes in the levels of participation across the early years sector and changes as a consequence of the academisation process. The final 2019-2020 DSG allocation updated as at July 2020 was £247.51 million.

The report also provided a breakdown of the allocations for each block with the additional information:

It was noted that in 2019-2020, Schools' Forum agreed the transfer of £0.96 million (0.5%) from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in to alleviate the funding pressures created by additional demand in the High Needs Block. It was reported that the carried forward balance related to an underspend on the budget for growth funding and it would be utilised to support growth needs in future years.

The underspend in the Central Schools Services Block had been due to the delay in appointing to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Officer post which meant there had been £40,000 carried forward into 2020 – 2021.

It was highlighted that an amendment had been made to the information in the report. As detailed in previous reports to Schools' Forum it was identified that some errors had been made when submitting data to Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) upon which previous Early Years Block grants were calculated. This was reported to the ESFA and they determined the amount required to recoup as outlined in the table within the report. This meant that there was still a substantial underspend from previous years however Schools' Forum members were assured that work was currently underway to ensure this funding was utilised.

Resolved:

1. That Schools' Forum note the final DSG allocation for 2019-2020 as published by the Department for Education.
2. That the report on the final out turn against the Dedicated Schools Grant in 2019-2020 be received.

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Facilities Time Allocations

Bill Hague, Head of School Organisation presented the Facilities Time Allocations report and highlighted key points. It was outlined that legislation had provided for payments to be made to carry out various functions, for example paid time off for union representatives to carry out trade union duties or to accompany a worker to a disciplinary or grievance hearing. It was noted that a pooled funding arrangement for these provisions was in place in Wolverhampton and subscriptions were collected from participating schools for this purpose which was facilitated by ConnectEd.

Payments were normally made to individuals for carrying out these duties and this arrangement has been in place since it was agreed at Schools' Forum in January 2016. There had been no review requested since then.

It was acknowledged that these arrangements only included teaching unions and there was no provision for members of non-teaching unions who were actively working in schools. It was noted that it was drawing towards the time of year when reviews on other delegations would be taking place therefore it seemed prudent to review the existing arrangements around facilities time allocations as well. It was proposed that the new arrangements considered including allocations for members of the non-teaching unions.

Schools Forum agreed for the review to be undertaken in partnerships with the trade unions and ConnectEd and it was agreed that initial feedback would be provided at the next meeting of Schools' Forum in December 2020.

Resolved:

1. That members of Schools' Forum agree to a review of facilities time arrangements taking place.
2. That the request for schools and academies to contribute to non-teaching union costs be noted.

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High Needs Sub-Group Update

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

It was reported that a Penn Hall Residential Working Group had been established to complete a number of workstreams in relation to the funding and sustainability. Reports had been collated into a funding modelling report by Steven Larking, Commissioning Manager, which was scheduled to be presented at the next meeting of Schools' Forum on 3 December 2020. There was currently £170,000 running costs for the establishment and this would be reviewed as part of the process.

Extensive work was being undertaken on the Matrix Review. The descriptors had been completed and there had been consultation engagement with focus groups which included special headteachers, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), Early Years Service, Educational Psychology Team, SENSTART and the City of Wolverhampton College. Information on how to contribute to the consultation had also been cascaded via the bulletin.

It was reported that Sandy Lisle, Service Manager SEND Assessment and Planning and SENSTART would be leading on a random sampling of 100 education, health and care plans (EHCPs) to examine how descriptors fitted with current plans. This work had been delayed slightly due to a review however a group would meet in December to undertake this work.

The Sub-group had also been working with Terry Shaw, Finance Manager using the budget monitoring to allow for more accurate forecasting. There had been a system support and transformation which had included plans to appoint a Systems Manager to oversee the system for the EHCPs and a SEND Funding and a Finance Manager. The Hub would be reviewed over a 12-month period.

It was noted that Steven Larking, Commissioning Manager had also been involved in the Sufficiency Analysis for which school numbers had been reviewed and consultations on SEND placements had taken place with headteachers via the Commission Meetings. These had been completed in early October and would be covered at the next meeting of Schools' Forum.

The efforts and hard work of the High Needs Sub-Group were commended.

Resolved:

That the High Needs Sub-Group Update be noted.

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Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

Barry Bond announced that he would be stepping down from Schools' Forum as a member and as the Chair. He acknowledged that he had been involved with Schools' Forum since the very beginning and it had been a big decision to leave, however his personal circumstances had changed over the last few months. It was noted how Schools' Forum had also changed over the years with the academisation programme and that many changes were foreseen to come.

He expressed how privileged he felt to have worked with members of Schools' Forum throughout the years and that the aim had always been to ensure that the children and young people of Wolverhampton got the very best out of their education and everything that went along with it.

Sincere thanks were extended for the support from all those he had worked with and who had been involved with Schools' Forum over the years and he expressed how they would all be missed.

Thanks were extended to Barry Bond for his contributions and Councillor Dr Michael Hardacre added that Schools' Forum had been in the capable hands of an excellent Chair who had children at the heart of all he does.

Members of Schools' Forum were then invited to elect a new Chair and Vice Chair of Schools' Forum.

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

Resolved:

1. That Karen Preston be appointed as Chair of Schools' Forum.
2. That Stephen Smith be appointed as Vice-Chair of Schools' Forum.

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Other Urgent Business

Councillor Dr. Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills wished to record his thanks as part of the partnership that educated the young people of Wolverhampton across all forums and institutions. Tribute was paid to the strength of this partnership and thanks offered to all for creating a safe and secure environment for them to return to. He also offered his thanks and support to the efforts of all schools, headteachers, teachers, teaching assistants, SENCos and other school staff especially for managing the return to school under such difficult circumstances. It was acknowledged that attendance figures had been positive and the work being done had been over and above what was expected.

Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services stated that there had been a lot of engagement with schools throughout the City to manage the COVID-19 situation in schools therefore she had also arranged an engagement session with the Chairs of Governors to update them on where the Authority was from an epidemiology perspective but also to share thanks to headteachers and leaders for all their hard work over this first term back since lockdown. The challenges faced around dealing with COVID cases as well as teaching were acknowledged and thanks were recorded for the efforts to tackle these challenges.

The incoming Chair requested that a message be sent on behalf of Schools' Forum to all Staff and Governors for all they had done and continued to do throughout these challenging times.

The Chair closed the meeting at 17:05

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Dates for future meetings

- 3 December 2020
- 14 January 2021
- 25 February 2021