

Attendance

Members of the Schools' Forum

Karen Preston (Chair)	Academies Sector Representative
Daryl Asbury	Academies Sector Representative
Kirsty Banks	Academies Sector Representative
Rachael Brown	Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher Representative
Louisa Craig	Academies Sector Representative
Ben Davis	Academies Sector Representative
Trisha James	Primary Sector Governor Representative
Susan Lacey	Nursery Sector Head Teacher Representative
Carroll McNally	Non-School Member Diocesan Schools Representative
Graham Tate	Academies Sector Representative
Lisa Thompson	Diocesan Schools Representative
Lucia Jayne Turner	Nursery Sector Governor Representative
Samantha Walker	Primary Sector Headteacher Representative
Lisa-Anne Westwood	Academies Sector Representative
Sarah Whittington	Special School Sector Head Teacher Representative
Phil Williams	Academies Sector Representative

Observer Status

Helen Bakewell	Head of Service Inclusion and Empowerment
Bill Hague	Head of Business and Support Services
Councillor Dr Michael Hardacre	Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Work

In Attendance

James Barlow	Finance Business Partner
Shelley Humphries	Democratic Services Officer
Terry Shaw	Finance Manager
John Wood	Lead Commissioner for SEND

Item No. *Title*

1 **Welcome and Introductions**

2 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Schools' Forum members Stephen Smith, Bhaksho Raj, Zoe Rollinson and Linda Campbell. Apologies were also received from Brenda Wile.

3 **Declaration of Interest or Confidentiality**

There were no declarations of interest or confidentiality.

4 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting - 20 January 2022**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of 20 January 2022 be approved as a correct record.

5 **Matters Arising**

Minute 8

In respect of the offer from Councillor Dr Michael Hardacre to contact the Department for Education regarding timeliness of information needed by schools, it was noted that a letter was being carefully drafted to ensure the message was relayed in a sensitive manner.

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 PVI nominations had been received and an update would be provided once appointments had been made. ConnectEd had been consulted in respect of other vacancies.

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 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 2020 – 2021 be noted.

8 **High Needs Block Funding 2022 - 2023**

Terry Shaw, Finance Manager presented the High Needs Block Funding 2022 – 2023 report and highlighted salient points. The report provided an update on the High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2022-2023 and sought approval to allocate the funding in accordance with the guidance issued by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Thanks were extended for the timely turnaround of the paper and reporting to the High Needs Sub-group for consideration. It was acknowledged that details of the overspend had been provided within the report, which also reflected the main concerns around the increase in places. It was noted that budget monitoring challenges often arose as school budget agreements for high needs places were typically informed by previous census figures and not current data. It was hoped that the appointment of the Finance Operator would continue the positive impact on data monitoring and budget planning going forward.

It was felt that communication between Finance and School Business and Support Services had improved in recent years and it was reported that future work was set

to involve the Insight and Performance team to further improve timely data analysis and planning.

It was highlighted that a sub-group of the High Needs Sub-group had been established to focus on Matrix banding and would be discussed in more detail in agenda item 13.

Resolved:

1. That Schools' Forum note the anticipated settlement for 2022-2023.
2. That Schools' Forum approve the allocation of High Needs expenditure for 2022-2023.
3. That Schools' Forum note the matrix bands for 2022-2023.
4. That Schools' Forum approve a total per place contribution for maintained Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and Special Schools to support the delivery of local authority retained education functions previously funded by Education Services Grant.

9 **Early Years Block Funding 2022 - 2023**

Terry Shaw, Finance Manager presented the Early Years Block Funding report and highlighted salient points. The report provided a summary of the Early Years funding block of the Dedicated Schools Grant, as illustrated in the Dedicated schools grant (DSG): 2022 to 2023 announcement made by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) in December 2021.

Thanks were extended for the transparency of figures for the hourly rate for maintained nursery schools.

A concern was raised centred around indicative allocations for maintained nursery schools' supplementary funding. It was noted that out-turns from the past three years presented actual amounts that were lower than indicative amounts. A request was made for clarification as this appeared to show an unused underspend.

Bill Hague, Head of School Business and Support Services and Finance Officers acknowledged the discrepancy and agreed to examine figures over the period to formalise an answer within an Early Years surplus balance report for the next meeting. It was clarified that the figures referenced in the query were separate to the Early Years Block underspend and acknowledged that any surplus found was to be used solely for the benefit of maintained nursery schools.

Resolved:

1. That the proposed use of the Early Years Block grant for 2022-2023 be agreed.
2. That clarification be provided on underspend in maintained nursery schools' supplementary funding.

10 **Central Services Block Funding 2022 - 2023**

Terry Shaw, Finance Manager presented the Central Services Block Funding 2022 – 2023 report and highlighted key points. The report provided an update on the Central Schools Services block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Services and sought approval for a list of items that the Local Authority managed centrally on the behalf of schools and academies.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum agree the individual lines of the proposed budget allocation of the Central Schools Services Block for 2022-2023.

11 **Schools Block Funding 2022 - 2023**

Terry Shaw, Finance Manager presented the Schools Block Funding 2022 – 2023 report and highlighted key points. The report provided an update on the Schools' Block of the Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG) 2022-2023, following Forum agreement to apply the national funding formula, in accordance with the guidance issued by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

It was confirmed that the funding figures were the same as agreed the January meeting of Schools' Forum, it had been expressed as Education Functions instead of de-delegations as government terminology had changed.

It was reiterated that the Schools' Block had been calculated to be affordable with no capping and minimum funding guarantee of 2% as recommended by ESFA. It was noted that Wolverhampton schools were in a good position having moved to the national funding formula some time ago.

Resolved:

That the individual schools' budget settlement for 2022-2023 be noted.

12 **Early Years Funding - Options for Future Use of Underspend**

Bill Hague delivered the Early Years Funding - Options for Future Use of Underspend presentation.

It was reported that the out-turn for 2020 – 2021 identified an underspend of £2.36 million which the Department for Education (DfE) were not planning to recoup. A workshop including officers from Early Years and Schools' Forum members had taken place to formulate plans to maximise the use of this underspend to benefit the Early Years sector.

The presentation outlined the prevailing issues in the Early Years sector, which included reduction in take-up of early years places, which could be attributed to factors such as COVID, Britain's departure from the EU or cultural differences (for example, in some cultures, children did not join mainstream education until the age of seven).

Inconsistency of availability for 2-year-old settings and places across the City and recruitment and retention of staff also presented challenges.

The two main proposals for the use of the underspend included:

1. Universal promotion of the Early Years Offer in Wolverhampton
2. Early Years Improvement Fund

The first proposal outlined the appointment of a Communications / Marketing Officer and a Sufficiency Officer over a two-year period to lead campaigns promoting the Early Years offer and provide support to all providers across the City, which included attracting quality staff with the promotion of career opportunities in the sector. The second included the creation of a fund to support specific projects aimed at providing

new or improved facilities or learning projects focused on physical skills or communication and language skills.

It was suggested that a blended approach of strategic long-term oversight as well as the provision of the immediate support needed for the current cohort.

Concerns had arisen around the impact of COVID and a lack of school readiness and the impact on children's speech, language and social skills caused by periods of isolation during lockdown at an early stage of development. It was also thought that the reduction of children attending nursery over the pandemic may have contributed to delays identifying special educational needs early on, with a consequential effect of delayed funding for support once children were in school.

Support for parents was called for, particularly around preparing their children for school and it was noted that there had been no COVID recovery funding for early years settings.

It was also suggested that additional funding could be attracted from other sources to bolster training and development in the sector.

It was acknowledged that funding benefitted the children best when passported directly to settings and members expressed appreciation for the pass-through rate offered within Wolverhampton. It was also recognised that planning and appropriate intervention early on may negate pressure further down the line.

Thanks were extended to everyone who had contributed and it was agreed that proposals would be further developed and formalised to present to a future meeting of Schools Forum for approval.

Resolved:

1. That the presentation on the Early Years Funding - Options for Future Use of Underspend be received.
2. That formalised proposals for the use of the Early Years Underspend would be presented to Schools Forum for approval.

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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.

It was reported that the High Needs Sub-Group Terms of Reference had been reviewed and updated to reflect new membership, responsibilities, frequency and work schedule.

It was noted that Penn Hall residential was no longer included in the budget plan because of the lack of financial viability and discussions were currently ongoing with Brenda Wile, Bill Hague and the school to establish a way forward.

Out of City and independent places were currently under review which included further education, custodial, mainstream, independent and special school places. The latter two made up more than a quarter of the budget therefore work was ongoing to gradually reduce out of City placements where possible. Commissioned places had been agreed for September 2022.

A Matrix Sub-group had also been established which would be meeting next on 10 March 2022. The last meeting had focused on modelling for matrix banding.

It was reported that a number of issues had been identified around funding particularly around top-up funding and special schools' reliance on additionality funding as well as methods of recording data to inform the annual review process on matrix banding.

It was suggested that top-up banding could be set in advance each financial year and modelling had been explored using an existing school, the Essex model and other modelling methodology.

It was proposed that this exploratory work continued, perhaps using a school with a stable cohort, to establish a system ready for the next financial year to avoid placement breakdowns and reduce the need for additionality funding.

It was requested that thanks be extended to all members of the High Needs Sub-Group on behalf of Schools' Forum.

Resolved:

1. That the exploration of different matrix banding models for the 2022 – 2023 financial year be supported by Schools' Forum, subject to further consultation with City of Wolverhampton Council Officers.
2. That the Chair of the High Needs Sub-Group relay thanks to all Sub-Group members on behalf of Schools' Forum.

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Dates for future meetings

It was noted that the dates for future meetings had been scheduled for:

- 30 June 2022 (tbc)
- 29 September 2022
- 01 December 2022
- 19 January 2023
- 16 February 2023.

Confirmation of the June date would be relayed in due course. The Chair wished all a safe half-term and issued a reminder in respect of Storm Eunice warnings.

The Chair closed the meeting at 17:22.