



Schools' Forum

Minutes - 4 July 2019

Attendance

Members of the Schools' Forum

Barry Bond (Chair)	Special School Sector Governor Representative
Stephen Smith	Primary Sector Governor Substitute
Louisa Craig	Academies Sector Representative
Ben Davis	Academies Sector Representative
Claire Foster	Nursery Sector Headteacher Substitute
Raymond Green	Primary Sector Governor Representative
Trisha James	Primary Sector Governor Substitute
Lynne Law	Academies Sector Representative
James Ludlow	Secondary Sector Headteacher Representative
Karen Preston	Academies Sector Representative
Graham Tate	Academies Sector Representative
Samantha Walker	Primary Sector Headteacher Substitute
Phil Williams	Academies Sector Representative

In Attendance

James Barlow	Finance Business Partner
Debra Boniface	Finance Manager
Bill Hague	Head of School Organisation
Councillor Dr Michael Hardacre	Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Shelley Humphries	Democratic Services Officer
Meredith Teasdale	Director of Education

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 Welcome and Introductions

2 Apologies

Apologies were received from Zoe Rollinson, Matthew Welton, Ian Moore, Jon Dovey, Jeremy Parkes, Sarah Whittington, Susan Lacey and David Lewis.

3 **Declaration of Interest or Confidentiality**

There were no declarations of interest or confidentiality.

4 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting - 25 February 2019**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of 25 February 2019 be approved 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**

Bill Hague, Head of Schools Organisation provided a verbal update on Schools' Forum Membership. It was noted that a number of terms were ending and it was reported that steps were being taken to fill any resulting vacancies.

It was noted that Raymond Green MBE would not be continuing as a Primary Sector School Governor Representative and that it was intended to have two representatives for this sector rather than three.

It was also highlighted that Arthur Thompson, Pupil Referral Unit Representative and Matthew Welton, Academies Sector Representative would be stepping down from their roles.

The Chair took the opportunity to offer thanks to these members on behalf of Schools' Forum for their contribution and participation during their respective terms.

The Chair also welcomed the new Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Councillor Dr Michael Hardacre to the meeting as an observer.

Resolved:

That the update on Schools' Forum Membership status be received.

7 **Schools' Forum Forward Plan 2018 - 2020**

Bill Hague, Head of Schools Organisation presented the Schools' Forum Forward Plan 2018 – 2020. It was outlined that this covered the period for 2018 – 2020 and members were invited to request agenda items in addition to the items already listed.

Resolved:

That the Schools' Forum Forward Plan 2018 – 2020 be noted.

8 **Individual School Balances 2018 - 2019**

Debra Boniface, Finance Manager presented the Individual School Balances 2018 – 2019 report and highlighted key points. The report provided a breakdown of the levels of balances held by maintained schools as at 31 March 2019 and sought to inform Schools' Forum of the challenges around schools holding high balances.

It was clarified that schools holding high excess balances for five or more years were challenged by the Council and required to provide plans on how that money would be allocated. If the plans were considered to be robust, they would be tracked and desktop monitored by Local Authority officers. If the plans required more information,

the plans would be discussed further with the head teacher of the school. If considered appropriate, the matter would then be presented to the Arbitration Panel with a possible view to clawing back the unallocated funds.

It was noted that deficit balances were also monitored very closely by a sub-group known as Schools in Financial Risk (SFR). The report provided information on the schools holding a deficit balance and outlined the current status of each case and steps taken to manage it.

It was clarified that there were tight processes in place to ensure that a deficit balance didn't continue to grow following a school's conversion to an academy. It was reported that a dedicated finance team had been established to provide desktop monitoring to track progress.

It was noted that the data contained within Appendix 1 showed the balance for each Wolverhampton school over a period of three academic years. It was clarified that the figures represented was pre-consistent financial reporting (CFR) validated data.

It was clarified that a system wide approach had been adopted to curb growing deficits. It was noted that early warning was key and the Authority had made great progress into working and communicating with schools to mitigate risks.

It was noted that the DfE had introduced the Local Authority Analysis (LAA) Tool which they use to assign a category to each maintained school from A to G. The DfE raise challenge to the LA for any school falling into the F or G category.

It was confirmed that it had been F and G ratings that had triggered the recent SRMA visits, although the LA had had the final decision on which schools were selected.

In response to a query regarding schools with challenging budgets, it was confirmed that support was offered by the Authority.

In response to a query in respect of correlation between capping and the funding formula, it was outlined that a link had not been found as yet but as it was too early in the introduction of changes to the funding formula and the complexity of the formula meant that this was difficult to map as yet.

Resolved:

1. That the level of balances in maintained schools as at 31 March 2019 be noted.
2. That the approach to challenging schools around their level of balances and their plans for those resources be noted.
3. That the recommendation for Schools' Forum to receive regular updates on the progress and actions agreed with schools be agreed.

Dedicated Schools Grant Out-turn 2018 - 2019

Debra Boniface, Finance Manager presented the Dedicated Schools Grant Out-turn 2018 – 2019 report and highlighted salient points. The report outlined the final expenditure against the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in 2018 – 2019.

It was reported that the City of Wolverhampton's initial allocation was £237.46 million and, following the adjustments, £238.26 million was the revised allocation. The report

provided a breakdown of the funding allocated to each funding block and the basis of the calculations.

It was noted that challenges had arisen in tracking children placed into schools outside the City by other local authorities as Wolverhampton was not always informed immediately. Forum members were assured however that inroads had been made to improve the tracking process.

It was reported that an error had been discovered where a number of Early Years pupils had been recorded twice on the census. This had resulted in the Early Years Block mistakenly being over-funded for the extra numbers recorded. The error had been reported immediately to the ESFA and a recommended course of action was awaited. It was noted that an element of claw-back was anticipated.

In response to a query regarding supplementary funding for nursery schools and if the £2.83 rate received per child would be maintained into 2020, it was outlined that it would not be known until the next spending review. The rate would continue until further notice and further information would be provided as soon as it became available.

Resolved:

1. That the final DSG allocation for 2018 – 2019 as published by the Department for Education be noted.
2. That the report on the final outturn against the DSG in 2018 – 2019 be received.

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Any Other Business

Meredith Teasdale, Director of Education thanked the Forum members and for their work over the year.

Thanks were also extended to Bill Hague, Head of School Organisation and City of Wolverhampton Council Officers for their support.

Councillor Dr Michael Hardacre offered his support to Schools' Forum.

The Chair wished all a good summer break and closed the meeting at 16:50.

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Dates for future meetings:

- 3 October 2019
- 5 December 2019
- 27 February 2020