

Warrington Schools Forum
Minutes – 10 October 2023 (via Teams)

Membership

Membership with differentiated voting rights ~ Total Membership of 28, of whom 22 are entitled to vote on funding formula issues										
Sector Representation (22)	Appointed by the Council following election by:	Member	Dates and Attendance							
			11 October 2022	17 January 2023	21 March 2023	20 June 2023	10 October 2023			
Maintained Nursery School Senior Staff (1)	Primary Headteachers Group	Marcia Atherton	A	P	P	P	P			
Special School Staff (1)	Special School Headteachers Group	Lucinda Duffy	P	P	P	P	P			
Special School Governor (1)	Governors Forum	Hazel Coen	P	P	P	A	P			
PRU (1)	PRU Management Board	Lindsay Regan	A	A	A	A	X			
Academy – all phases (9) Agreed this should be: (5 secondary including UTC) (4 primary)	Academy Schools (secondary)	Gwyn Williams	P	P	P	P	A			
		Vacant	-	-	-	-	-			
		John Carlin	A	P	P	P	P			
		Christian Wilcocks	P	P	A	A	S			
	Academy Schools (primary)	Gary Cunningham CHAIR - Schools Forum	P	P	P	P	P			
		Paula Warding	A	A	A	P	A			
		Cath Cooke	P	P	P	P	P			
		Craig Burgess	P	P	P	A	P			
	UTC	Chris Hatherall	A	P	A	A	P			
Maintained Primary School Sector (6)	WAPH and Governors Forum	Siobhan Bentley	P	A	P	A	P			
		Kathryn Berry	A	A	P	P	P			
		Zoe Jones	A	P	P	P	P			
		Ian Moss	A	P	P	A	A			
		Janet Lazarus Governor	P	P	P	A	X			
		Donna Kendal Governor	A	P	A	A	P			
Maintained Secondary School Sector (2)	WASCL	Chris Hunt	P	P	A	A	S			
		Ed McGlinchey	P	P	A	A	A			
Private Voluntary and Independent Providers (1)	PVI Providers Forum	Kelda Willians	P	A	A	A	X			

Representing	Member	Dates and Attendance							
		11 October 2022	17 January 2023	21 March 2023	20 June 2023	10 October 2023			
Non-Schools Members (6)									
Anglican Diocese (1)	Jane Griffiths	A	A	A	X	X			
Roman Catholic Diocese (1)	Vacant	A	A	A	X	-			
16-19 Institutions (1)	Damian McGuire	P	P	P	P	P			
Parent Governor (1)	Vacant	-	-	-	-	-			
NEU (Trades Union)	Lucie Humphreys	P	P	P	P	P			
NASUWT (Trades Union)	Laura Watson	P	A	P	P	P			

Representing		11 October 2022	17 January 2023	21 March 2023	20 June 2023	10 October 2023			
		Warrington Borough Council							
Director, Early Help, Education and SEND	Paula Worthington	P	A	P	P	A			
Head of Service – Quality Education and Learning	Louise Atkin	A	P	P	P	P			
Finance Manager	Vacant	S	P	P	P	-			
Senior Accountant (Schools)	Garry Bradbury	P	P	P	P	P			
Executive Member for Children and Young People's Services	Cllr Sarah Hall	A	A	A	A	A			

Key:

P ~ Present

A ~ Apologies

X ~ Absent with no apologies

C ~ Meeting cancelled

S ~ Substitute

- ~ Vacancy

O ~ Observer

Presenting item:

Kellie Williams for item 3

Mark Sarjent for item 4

Substitute:

Jo Hewson (Omega MAT) – attending on behalf of Christian Wilcocks

Matt Lamble (Deputy Headteacher) – attending on behalf of Chris Hunt

Minutes:

Lou Drummond

1. Apologies and Welcome

The chairperson, Gary Cunningham, welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising (from 20 June 2023)

The minutes were accepted as a true record and the following was noted.

The only action from the last meeting was from item four and was in regards to emailing schools with a surplus; Garry advised that he did this the morning after the meeting and made the point to those schools who breached the alert level that when we scrutinise schools we urge them to consider their contexts of the balance they were posting and what the reasons were for it. It also needs to be considered what the balances over the years would be. Garry has asked each school to spare a moment with their governing body to consider this.

3. High Needs update

This report is presented to brief Schools Forum on the findings of the SEND Sufficiency work and the recommendations to increase SEND provision, in particular those which require financial investment.

Kellie advised that in regards to the SEND sufficiency work, a significant piece of work has been completed to review the demand coming through around children with special educational needs and those with disabilities. There continues to be an increase in the number of children being provided with SEN support and those with an EHCP plan. It is clear in the report that the numbers have significantly increased but are still below the national average; our numbers are increasing but not at the rate of other local authorities. We have an 11.4% increase in SEN compared to the 13% national average increase and 4% increase in EHCPs compared to the 4.3% national average increase. We have also seen a decline proportionately of young people being educated in mainstream provision. The numbers of children supported are up from 727 to 786 but what has happened is proportionally things have come down from over 60% to 40% which is around the national average, whereas previously we have been way above for children with SEN being educated in mainstream schools. We don't have a similar rate of special school places and we are seeing a rise year on year for children that need a place in a special school or a designated provision, and it is likely that we will become increasingly dependent on external provisions. We are extending the offer for Woolston Learning Village to create more spaces from Reception to Year 11, which will increase the numbers of children on site. The ASD free school is planned to open in September 2025 and there are investments planned around the Peace Centre. As part of the work we need to get further works in place so that these are ready for September 2024. Mainstream school is the default setting for children with SEN and we are seeing an increase in parental requests for mainstream provision and threats of a tribunal in cases where we are unable to accommodate this. We need to increase specialist nursery places and there is a proposal in this paper to do that, as well as establish more designated provision places and also review the sites of specialist schools. We would also like to establish an exceptional provision which would enable us to accommodate children who need places in September 2024.

Marcia asked about the specialist nursery places and whether this relates to Sandy Lane; it was confirmed that it does, and Louise advised that there is a meeting in place to discuss this further.

Lucinda said that we are all aware of the difficulties with the ASD school and given that the guidance has changed, are we still confident that the financial benefits mean it is still feasible; Louise advised that we have been working with the DfE on this and have been prevented from moving forward at present. Kellie said that the 56 places are built into our sufficiency so we need those places. We currently have 106 children travelling out of area for school and 70% of those children have an ASD need.

Gary said that Paragraph 4.1 refers to needing support, but he feels this should read as support and challenge instead. Item 4 refers to Chaigeley and that they can accommodate 75 children; they only have 45 in place at the moment so if we can increase that and make sure as many Warrington children attend there as possible to increase our SEMH offer then this would be beneficial. There are also plans to increase Fox Wood to 125 children. It was queried whether there is any space in Green Lane on the second floor, and if there is, is any of it being used; Louise feels that we need to go and look at it again and work with the school to see how we can use and be more creative with this space.

Donna offered her support to the work being done as designated provisions are struggling with the extra children they are taking, so if we can get additional provision then this would be very welcomed.

It is recommended that Schools Forum members:

- (a) Note the impact on the High Needs Block and capital budgets as set out in Appendix 1. **Noted**

4. Growth Criteria

This report is presented to brief Schools Forum on the agreed criteria for allocating Growth Addition Funding.

Mark went through the principle and noted that WBC receive an uplift depending on pupil numbers. Previously it has been referred to that we receive growth funding, which isn't strictly true, there is an element of the pot left over and we are looking at ways to allocate this funding out. Although this is currently showing as growth between 2021-22, there is no guarantee that there will be anything left at the end of other years. The first thing that was discussed is that quite a lot of schools are requesting funding for their growth and we cannot accommodate them all. At the sub group it was discussed who we would make this funding available for and agreed that it won't be made available to special schools, nurseries or post 16 provisions. To clarify the reasoning behind this, it is because the headroom contingency is based purely on the schools block and not the funding for those settings and it is therefore appropriate not to include them. Growth must be sufficient in the school and they need to have taken on a number of additional children in order to be eligible. The fund allocation is being treated as a one year fund so if the fund is available in future years we will look at it again. Gary feels that a lot of thought has gone into those principles.

The first criteria to be eligible is that the school has to have an agreed expansion, going beyond an additional PAN that was sent and increase the capacity of the school. When talking about places in a school we have to be clear that we are only talking about an increase in pupil numbers and not about filling vacant places. Some schools that were previously vacant are now seeing increase in demand but are not going above their numbers; it was discussed that that is part of being a school. Schools that operate a lower PAN won't be excluded from this funding but each case will be looked at on an individual basis.

It is recommended that Schools Forum members:

- (a) Agree with the criteria set out in this report to allocate funding. **Agreed**
- (b) Delegate consideration of applications for Growth Funding to the sub-group of Schools Forum members and LA Officers to report back to School Forum members. **Agreed**
- (c) Note the risks which could impact funding. **Noted**

CONFIDENTIAL Part 2 Growth Addition 2022/23

Paragraph numbers here relate to the numbers in the confidential part 2 report.

It is recommended that Schools Forum members agree to the recommended projects considered by the Schools Forum sub-group. Louise noted that this was a really tight working group and there were representatives from all types of schools present.

Recommended for approval:

School named in paragraph 8.1 – Schools Forum approved the funding proposal.

School named in paragraph 8.2 – Schools Forum approved the funding proposal.

School named in paragraph 8.3 – Schools Forum approved the funding proposal.

School named in paragraph 8.4:

- (i) Recommendation 1 – Schools Forum approved the funding proposal.
- (ii) Recommendation 2 – Schools Forum approved the funding proposal.
- (iii) Recommendation 3 – Schools Forum approved the funding proposal.

School named in paragraph 8.5 – Schools Forum approved the funding proposal.

School named in paragraph 8.6 – Schools Forum approved the funding proposal.

Recommended for rejection:

School named in paragraph 9.1 – Schools Forum rejected the funding proposal.

School named in paragraph 9.2 – Schools Forum rejected the funding proposal.

School named in paragraph 9.3 – Schools Forum rejected the funding proposal.

5. Schools and Early Years Funding Update

Garry Bradbury presented his report to the forum.

Garry advised that he will be discussing the early and high needs block; under normal circumstances we have notifications of what the funding settlement is going to be for the forthcoming year in July. We have had some early indications of what the high needs block funding is looking like for 2024/2025, and that it is going to be 4.4% higher than last year, around £1.4 million. Any increases are welcomed but in comparison with the increase this year (which was 6%) and previous years (which were 10% and 11%) it is much lower this time. The increases in the last few years have been helpful in reducing the high needs deficit but we did feel it was a temporary victory and we will have to convene a meeting of officers after Christmas to discuss how to use the high needs block. The report Louise and Kellie have submitted will feed into this meeting. We will observe the process, come to some decisions and report back to schools forum once this meeting has taken place.

In terms of the early years block we don't tend to get any announcements in July however we did this time, one of which was the increase of the hourly rate from September 2023 and the paper outlines the early years funding we are expecting. We are still on the national minimum funding rate but there is an increase in the early years pupil premium rate; those increases will be passed onto settings in their entirety. They haven't said whether that funding will become the baseline for future years as we would hope that it doesn't decrease the year after.

The schools block is normally announced in July with an expression of how each local authority will be funded for the forthcoming financial year; it is a figure published as a unit rate for all primary school aged children and for all secondary school aged children, and we use these figures to calculate our budget for the year. Late on Friday it was announced that there was £370 million too much in the figures. This meant that both rates, and the formula values, had to be reduced. Doing the calculations, based on current data, the hit for Warrington is in the region of £1.5 million. What this essentially means is that every primary school aged child will be funded £45 lower and every secondary school aged child will be funded £53 lower. On current data, as a general guide, that works out that every primary school on average will be getting £11,600 less and each secondary school will receive £54,500 less than initially thought. Garry said that this feels a bit doom laden but it is still an increase. What we originally thought would be a 2% increase is actually more like 1.5% increase on last year. This leaves us with some work to do as there are a number of schools we work with that have funding figures from July which are not accurate. What hasn't changed is the fundamental issues, and when the data is updated for the October census and when get the data in absolute terms for schools block, implementing these figures will leave us with either a surplus or a shortfall. Garry wanted to remind Schools Forum that if we have a shortfall we will have to cut our cloth accordingly, which will likely mean either moving or reducing the formula value, or putting some capping and scaling on it to make the funding fit. When have a surplus remaining and the growth related addition that Mark referred to, if we have a surplus then we need to decide what to do with it i.e. do we reapply it to the funding formula or do we carry it forward. This will be discussed further in the January meeting when the budget is set for the next year and we can discuss it face to face. Gary said with regards to recommendation (ii) below, we set a bit of a precedent with that last year. Gary suggested that if there are any ridiculous suggestions going forward in January then we will have to have a fuller discussion, but there is no point deliberating these now.

Recommendation:

- (i) That Schools Forum members note the contents of this report. **Noted**
- (ii) Schools Forum should consider giving a steer to the Authority on how:
 - (a) To reduce the cost of the local funding formula, if the actual settlement makes a full implementation of NFF unaffordable; or

(b) To utilise remaining headroom funding in the Schools Block settlement, if a surplus remains after implementation of NFF with the new October data

For ii (a) and (b) Forum recognised a precedent had been set if there is a funding surplus and the situation will be discussed further at the January meeting.

6. Academy Conversion Charges

This report has been provided to forum members initially for information so it can be taken away and considered and this item will be included on the agenda of the meeting in January 2024 for discussion.

Louise advised that the paper was written taking into account feedback from Schools Forum members following a meeting in March 2023. There is a lot of background information about what actions will be undertaken to facilitate a conversion. This includes the latest published costs which were from 2018, but these will have risen due to inflation. There are some comments on other changes to charges in other local authorities, which have been accommodated to include a flat rate fee. The first report asked for recommendations for a flat fee and on 21 March 2023 it was agreed that the local authority should not absorb all the fees. Page two reminds schools about cost implications and how the workload will be recorded and costs that are incurred. This is a move away from a flat fee and is looking at a fee that considers workload and time implications. What this points to is that although there are similar sized schools, there are often large differences in time and workload. In the report it does mention a minimum and a maximum charge of £6,000 and £10,000. Louise asked that all members read the information and this will be discussed further in January 2024.

Gary reiterated this and asked everyone to please read and prepare any questions in advance of the next meeting.

Damian advised that there is one school that may perhaps go through a conversion prior to January. Craig pointed out that the report does say it could exceed £10,000 so members need to be aware of that.

7. AOB

There was nothing raised under AOB today.

8. Meeting schedule for 2024

All dates are Tuesdays at 4:30pm–6:30pm via Teams (unless stated otherwise):

- 16 January 2024 to be face to face starting at 5:15pm – venue to be confirmed
- 19 March 2024
- 18 June 2024
- 8 October 2024

The chairperson thanked everyone for attending and the meeting was closed.

Date and time of next meeting is Tuesday 16 January 2024 at 5:15pm–7:00pm, venue to be confirmed.