

Warrington Schools Forum

Minutes – 16 January 2024 (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	16 January 2024	19 March 2024	18 June 2024
Maintained Nursery School Senior Staff (1)	Primary Headteachers Group	Marcia Atherton	A	P	P	P	P	P		
Special School Staff (1)	Special School Headteachers Group	Lucinda Duffy	P	P	P	P	P	P		
Special School Governor (1)	Governors Forum	Hazel Coen	P	P	P	A	P	P		
PRU (1)	PRU Management Board	Lindsay Regan	A	A	A	A	X	A		
Academy – all phases (9) Agreed this should be: (5 secondary including UTC) (4 primary)	Academy Schools (secondary)	Gwyn Williams	P	P	P	P	A	P		
		Vacant	-	-	-	-	-	-		
		John Carlin	A	P	P	P	P	P		
		Christian Wilcocks	P	P	A	A	S	P		
	Academy Schools (primary)	Gary Cunningham CHAIR - Schools Forum	P	P	P	P	P	P		
		Vacant	A	A	A	P	A	-		
		Cath Cooke	P	P	P	P	P	P		
		Craig Burgess	P	P	P	A	P	P		
	UTC	Chris Hatherall	A	P	A	A	P	A		
	Maintained Primary School Sector (6)	WAPH and Governors Forum	Siobhan Bentley	P	A	P	A	P	P	
Kathryn Berry			A	A	P	P	P	P		
Vacant			A	P	P	P	P	-		
Ian Moss			A	P	P	A	A	P		
Janet Lazarus Governor			P	P	P	A	X	P		
Donna Kendal Governor			A	P	A	A	P	P		
Maintained Secondary School Sector (2)	WASCL	Chris Hunt	P	P	A	A	S	P		
		Ed McGlinchey	P	P	A	A	A	A		
Private Voluntary and Independent Providers (1)	PVI Providers Forum	Kelda Willians	P	A	A	A	X	A		

Representing Non-Schools Members (6)	Member	Dates and Attendance							
		11 October 2022	17 January 2023	21 March 2023	20 June 2023	10 October 2023	16 January 2024	19 March 2024	18 June 2024
Anglican Diocese (1)	Jane Griffiths	A	A	A	X	X	P		
Roman Catholic Diocese (1)	Vacant	A	A	A	X	-	-		
16-19 Institutions (1)	Damian McGuire	P	P	P	P	P	P		
Parent Governor (1)	Vacant	-	-	-	-	-	-		
NEU (Trades Union)	Lucie Humphreys	P	P	P	P	P	P		
NASUWT (Trades Union)	Laura Watson	P	A	P	P	P	P		

Representing Warrington Borough Council		11 October 2022	17 January 2023	21 March 2023	20 June 2023	10 October 2023	16 January 2024	19 March 2024	18 June 2024
Director of Education and Community Services (Deputy DCS)	Paula Worthington	P	A	P	P	A	P		
Head of Service – Quality Education and Learning	Louise Atkin	A	P	P	P	P	P		
Finance Manager	Janet Davies (from Jan 2024)	S	P	P	P	-	P		
Senior Accountant (Schools)	Garry Bradbury	P	P	P	P	P	P		
Executive Member for Children and Young People’s Services	CLlr Sarah Hall	A	A	A	A	A	A		

Key:

P ~ Present

S ~ Substitute

A ~ Apologies

- ~ Vacancy

X ~ Absent with no apologies

O ~ Observer

C ~ Meeting cancelled

Presenting item:

Adam Kellock for item 3

Helen Fleming for item 4

Stephen McNulty for item 5

Felicity Wisken for item 6

Ellen Parry for item 7

Louisa Archer Hill for item 9

Shelley Gerrard for item 9

Observer:

Emma Norman (Senior Accountant)

Minutes:

Gill Sykes

1. Apologies and Welcome

The chairperson, Gary Cunningham, welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted. It had been planned for this to be a face to face meeting but due to concerns with the weather it was felt to be the right decision to change it to a Teams meeting.

With regards to Schools Forum membership:

- Zoe Jones has stepped down as a maintained primary school rep.
- Paula Warding has stepped down as an academy primary school rep.

Gary noted he will contact Paula to discuss membership. Garry Bradbury shared that he had provided information for Paula about the proportionality of members following the October census and we will be able to refresh this following the January census. Current membership is balanced based on numbers.

The chair informed that this is Garry Bradbury's last Schools Forum as he is moving to a different role and he thanked Garry for his sesquipedalian wit and said he will be missed. Emma Norman has taken over from Garry Bradbury and is attending today as an observer. Janet Davies is the Finance Manager and has replaced James Campbell.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising (from 10 October 2023)

The minutes were accepted as a true record with the following amendment noted:

- Page 4: The second paragraph regarding the growth criteria says the contingency is not available to special schools, nurseries and post 16, which makes it sound like the decision is made on a whim. The minutes need to clarify that the reasoning 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.

Action: Gill to amend the minutes to reflect the clarification above.

Matters arising – no items were noted.

3. Democratic Services admissions appeals

Adam Kellock gave a verbal update to the forum and explained the role of democratic services, which has responsibility for the school appeals process. The following key points were shared:

- Although democratic services are within the council they are not connected to the admissions team and provide an independent service as required by law.
- When an appeal is received democratic services administrate with schools and parents, convene an appropriately constituted panel in accordance with code and legislation. All appeals are face to face, with the panel coming from a group of independent members with no connections to school or the local authority. Noted that clerks and panel members have to be trained every two years.
- One member of the panel may be a former teacher or governor and another will have no background in education, they would be the lay member. A clerk will attend to take notes and provide panel with clarification on the law around what they can and can't do in appeals. The clerk doesn't contribute to any decisions made. It is our responsibility to convey decisions in writing to all parties.
- Once an appeal has been heard there is no right to appeal further, although it can be taken to the local government ombudsman if it was felt that the appeals process had not been followed.
- The main area of work is around secondary transfers although there can be appeals at any time. Since the pandemic appeals work has increased considerably. In year transfer appeals have increased, there used to be one appeal for month but since September 2023 there has been two each week.
- Democratic services also provide support for school exclusion appeals, they are a lot less common than the admission appeals. We would source the panel for that, specific legal guidance and a solicitor to assist.
- Academies are charged case by case, and maintained are based on the forms of entry. The service proposes to continue with the standard increase for the coming year.

Questions/comments:

- Gary C noted there is frustration with in year admissions when outcomes are sent to the school. It would be helpful if there was someone to speak to for an explanation to the school leader, not just the family, to understand why a decision has been made. Adam noted that schools are sent a decision letter and there is always a named clerk. At the moment the clerk is covering maternity leave, when she returns Adam will ask

her, where we are able to, to speak to headteachers and give feedback. There is only a small amount of feedback we can give as we are independent. We cannot advise how to make a case strong but can say what panel didn't give consideration to.

- Craig B noted he had attended a few appeals and is aware of an appeal panel where it was stated the school wanted was good at SEND and the other wasn't. This can't be a default option. Adam noted that panel members receive training from an appeals specialist solicitor every two years. With specific reasoning or an opinion that a school is good at SEND and the other is not, the panel can give weighting on certain things. Some to follow class size legislation and the panel has scope to make a decision and words in guidance will be balance prejudice cause to school and appellant. If a school is good at SEND and current school not meeting needs, if felt the school could accommodate will weight up. The outcome letter will try to pick out the salient and key points around what the panel focused on and any weighting up. The letters are prepared on a specific template which has been through the ombudsman and says what panel gave weighting to.
- Craig B expressed concern that the wording in the letter could set a dangerous precedent. If have that approach in Warrington where some schools are doing what they should be doing, need to include all schools and support them. Adam agreed to follow up on this concern.

4. Trade Union Facilities Time

Helen Fleming presented her report to the forum to request that the maintained school sector commits to de-delegation for the purposes of teacher trade union facility time in the 2024/25 financial year at the rate calculated. Participating academies are requested to contribute at the same rate. The cost of pooled trade union facilities time is subject to yearly analysis and is more reflective. There has been an increased this year, the main reasons being unanticipated in-year costs regarding a trades union colleague, a retrospective pay increase and an increase in membership of NASUWT. The figure is £4.64 per pupil. We recommend that the overspend is carried forward, the £4.64 will clear the overspend and put us in an even position and will account for salaries moving forward in the next 12 months. Noted that this is the first time we have had to make an increase.

Questions/comments:

- Garry queried point 3.4 and 4.2 which refer to underspend, this should be overspend.
- The chair referred to the current level of voluntary contributions and asked about those that don't contribute, what arrangements do they make. Helen noted that for trade union support they would not have it within the allocated time we pay for, it would be outside that time.
- Lucie Humphreys noted that if they are not paying facilities time they would go to regional and there are additional costs for regions. They would only have access to early or late meetings.
- Laura Watson echoed Lucie's comments that it would be a very inconvenient time for a meeting with very limited support offered to school and would be redirected to regional for anything more than one meeting.
- Hazel asked if all maintained schools were members of the union and if teachers have to go to regional office if maintained and academies opted out. Helen noted that no-one is excluded, facilities time is open for academies and maintained. There are a couple of schools that have not participated with the arrangement and they make their own provision. They wouldn't be using trade union time being paid for as part of this arrangement and would be directed to regional. It is likely it would be an early morning or late meeting if they were not part of the pooled arrangement.

Garry clarified for Hazel that what we are asking for today is a decision on de-delegation for this purpose, signing up all the maintained schools to be part of this collective arrangement. If the maintained reps agree tonight it binds all the maintained schools to be part of the agreement.

Chris Hunt advised that secondary maintained agreed to this de-delegation.

The chair asked if the maintained sector agreed and their silence was taken as acceptance.

Recommendations:

- (i) Schools Forum are requested to agree to carry forward the predicted 23/24 overspend spend into 24/25 in order that the deficit can be eliminated. **Agreed**
- (ii) Taking into account the overspend, it is therefore proposed that Schools Forum agree on behalf of the maintained school sector to de-delegate £4.64 per pupil for the purposes of teacher trade union facility time in 2024/25. Participating academies are asked to contribute at the same rate. **Agreed**

- (iii) This rate will apply only to those schools that have supported and contributed to the shared facilities time arrangements in the 2023/24 financial year. **Noted**

5. SLA Update

Stephen McNulty presented his report to the forum giving an update on SLA buyback. To provide an overview of the trading relationship between WBC and schools, looking at buyback this year compared to the previous year and analysis to highlight any growth areas or areas of concern. Key points included the following:

- There are a couple of services not included, school meals are paid for directly by parents and FSM eligibility, buyback of building services is also not included. There is to be a review into the school meals service around academy schools and how it is charged back to academies. Looking at the review starting in February and giving academy schools 6-7 weeks to feed back.
- Stephen also wanted to highlight SLAs, the new 3 year SLAs started in 2023 with maintained schools starting year 1 of 3 on 1 April 2023 and academy schools starting on 1 September 2023. Not all SLAs are 3 year contracts, there was feedback that 3 year contracts didn't work in some cases so these were changed to 1 year contracts to suit the schools. Warrington Life give advice and support to schools and is bought in on a bespoke manner.
- The SLA price rise each year is in line with CPI, which is 4% this year, anything more triggers a consultation with schools. Maintained schools buy back combined for 2022/23 was £3.6m and for 2023/24 £3.7m so far with buyback for ad hoc services to be included. The reason for the slight increase will be the 4% and a couple of services have taken on more contracts with maintained schools so a higher buyback rate this year.
- In 2023/24 there has been two academy conversions, there are now 40/92 academy schools in Warrington. The total combined revenue for 2022/23 was £2.2m and 2023/24 is nearly exactly the same £2.2m although there is a longer period for ad hoc services from January to the end of August which will be classed as 2023/24 contracts.
- There were four services with a reduction/increase of more than £10k a year.
 - (i) Attendance and suspensions: 28% increase in buyback. This relates to the extended offer around the DfE working together to improve school attendance.
 - (ii) Insurance: 8% reduction this year. This applies to maintained schools only and is as reported to Schools Forum last year and relates to RPA (risk protection arrangement) and can buy back into that.
 - (iii) Commercial waste: 173% increase. £44k from maintained and academy schools. WBC invested in new bin lorries and opened up the offer to schools and we have seen a lot of schools move across.
 - (iv) Safeguarding children in education team: 38% increase, a £55k year on year increase. This is a new service offer to schools with gold, silver and bronze offers. Buyback on the new gold service has been really high.
- There are currently 54 council services trading with schools. There is no intention of ceasing or reducing any services provided to schools and academies without consulting them.
- My School Services has had a number of enhancements and there will be more updates in the next 12 months. The council continues to invest in the portal at no cost to schools and will continue to feed back developments to make improvements to the system.

There were no questions from forum members and the chair commented this was a positive report. The chair suggested that an annual questionnaire could be a better way of asking for general feedback rather than waiting for an email. Stephen acknowledged this was a good point to raise.

Recommendations:

Schools Forum is asked to:

- (i) Note the progress being made to provide sustainable services that offer schools value for money and consistent levels of service. **Noted**
- (ii) Recognise that the council is an important provider, commissioner and participant in the Warrington education system. **Noted**
- (iii) Encourage colleagues to feedback their views on both SLA's and council services in order to help shape the future of traded services. This can be by contacting the services direct or via Stephen McNulty (Traded Services Business Manager): smcnulty@warrington.gov.uk / 01925 442682. **Noted**

6. Academy Conversion Charges

Louise Atkin gave context to the paper and clarified that this paper was rewritten in response to queries from Schools Forum members before summer 2023. This is the amended paper which was provided in autumn ready for discussion at this January meeting and highlights the work for local authority officers when schools opt to convert to an academy. The previous paper had considered a flat rate fee which forum members didn't think was fair. The paper was rewritten so that conversions can be considered on a case by case basis rather than a flat fee. To achieve a conversion specific fee officers have been asked to record their time spent and any other costs, so this can be used to calculate a total cost towards the end of the conversion process. It needs to be a system to meet the possible demand, ensuring the work is carried out in a reasonable timescale and allow the local authority to deliver its other services. Louise noted there have been some queries received by email around legal and HR functions and we will be responding to those individually to the trusts who raised them. Louise added there are various fees being charged across different authorities.

Felicity noted the paper originally looked at a fixed fee and the amended paper looks at using a timesheet based model, which would provide a fair and transparent way to calculate a conversion specific cost. Using the timesheets an invoice will be created towards the end of the conversion and will also specify what tasks officers have completed or will be required to carry out to facilitate the conversion. This process is currently on trial with three schools that are in the process of converting and the local authority will review the process within the next 24 months. We are endeavouring to be as transparent as we can be, we will keep costs as reasonable as possible, this process is not financially beneficial for the local authority it is just to cover costs incurred. If a number of schools opt to convert to academy in a short space of time we would need to outsource resources, in order to ensure the work is undertaken within a reasonable timescale, and this would be included in the costs.

Questions/comments:

- Damian noted there were no discussions about the mechanism being transparent. From their Trust's experiences they feel the majority of work is undertaken by the school converting and the local authority passes back a lot for HR around gathering of information. It feels quite low for the local authority. The £25k grant doesn't cover the total costs of conversion and could be soaked up by the local authority, the timesheet won't show how the hours are built up. Paula acknowledged the comments from Damian need due consideration.
- Felicity noted it was difficult to say if schools or the council carry out more work in the conversion process. From contact with various services it may be surprising to learn just how much work the academy process entails for the local authority, and that as a further step towards transparency the council will detail tasks officers have been required to carry out to facilitate the process.
- Louise noted there is no intention to make a profit on this. It is different for every school converting and we will keep schools informed about costs incurred. There are three schools going through the process at the moment and are working with us on that.
- Craig noted that the increased transparency may raise awareness of tasks being carried out in the background, recommending the local authority is careful during this process as the academy will become a customer for SLAs. Acknowledge that the local authority needs to cover costs but we want academies to keep a relationship with the council. SLAs are a successful way of working and we don't want an antagonistic approach and academies walking away.
- Hazel felt that using a timesheet is a fair way forward due to the many different types of schools which can present different challenges during the conversion process, adding that addressing land and property issues can incur a lot of costs when dealing with solicitors and asset managers and looking at history. Having the timesheet will account for costs and seems the best way forward. Hazel informed that she supports the recommendations of this report and the approach being adopted.
- Paula noted that the DfE are contacting local authorities about academy conversions and significant impact on officer time and the council budget. All local authorities have been asked to provide information and when the DfE have provided feedback from this piece of work we can bring that back here. It might be interesting to look at as a comparator and if we have managed to pitch the right level.
- The chair noted that if a number of VA schools convert at the same time the local authority may have to outsource and they need to make sure it is at a competitive rate and value for money. The local authority is commissioning it but they are not the ones paying for it.

- Damian noted that when using public funds try to get value for money, but with the current proposal there is no way of knowing we are achieving value for money. Costs being presented towards the end is not helpful, there should be an earlier approach. From experience of commercial businesses we find solicitors can take longer to get things finished and the number of hours could be built up in excess of what they should be. Damian raised concern with timesheets around how you can assure the number of hours assigned to work is true hours.
- Louise responded that as a local authority, officers are experienced in dealing with public funds. There is an understanding that if required to outsource work, we will always be fair with this. The local authority is not trying to make a profit in any way and want to make sure we can deliver reasonably any school conversion within the timescale people want them to happen and we need resource to do that. At the moment this is the fairest and most transparent way to establish a cost. We will keep a watching brief on all the conversions and if there is anything further to do we will come back to Schools Forum.
- Kathryn Berry asked if this charge is only being brought in now. We already have 40 academies, were they charged? Felicity explained there have been some charges in the past, however they have been inconsistent and the new process aims to ensure fairness.
- Christian shared that he is happy to feed back on their experience of the conversion process they are going through at the moment, reporting that the mechanism of working closely with the local authority is working well. Christian asked how much pressure can be placed on the DfE to review the conversion grant and whether it may be worth Trusts raising this collectively with the DfE.
- Paula reiterated that the DfE are doing work regionally to look at the grant, asking local authorities to submit information. It was raised in the region that the grant had not been raised accordingly. It is a slow process for the DfE to realise they need to raise the grant amount. Damian informed that the grant has never been raised since 2011, it has always been £25k.
- The chair referred to 2.4 in the report regarding whether the grant goes to the school or the trust and asked if there were any comments. The application process changed in September and schools are asked where the grant should go. Felicity noted that every conversion is different as is every school and trust, schools can claim the grant or opt for the trust to receive it. In terms of receipt of payment for the local authority's work, we are adopting a flexible approach, so the school's governors can opt for the cost to be taken from the final balance at the point of conversion, alternatively if the trust is to pay the fee the Trust will be required to confirm this, the value noted within the CTA (Commercial Transfer Agreement) and an invoice can be issued to the Trust.

Recommendations:

Schools Forum is asked to note:

- (i) The change in approach to charge for costs incurred by the local authority in order that the conversion process can be managed efficiently and effectively in support of the school's decision to convert. **Noted**
- (ii) The revised proposal to operate a school specific non-negotiable cost recovery model by capturing the hours and costs of supporting the transfer, instead of the flat-rate sum of £10,000 initially proposed. This approach will increase the time and cost associated with facilitating conversions. **Noted**
- (iii) The minimum charge is envisaged to be in the region of £6,000, however the charge may exceed £10,000. In order to ensure adequate resources are devoted, enabling the work to be undertaken within a reasonable timeframe, additional costs could be incurred should there be a need to outsource tasks associated with the conversion. **Noted**
- (iv) That failure to agree payment of the charge prior to conversion could result in delaying completion of the conversion process. **Noted**
- (v) That in the event a conversion is deferred for any reason, and costs have already been incurred by the local authority, reasonable charges will still apply. **Noted**
- (vi) The way in which the charge is calculated will be reviewed on an annual basis, with consideration being given to any change in circumstance, for example inflation or deflation in the specific areas of work. **Noted**

7. Proposed de-delegation for school improvement activities

Ellen Parry presented her report to inform Schools Forum about the government's removal of the School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant and to seek Schools Forum approval for de-delegation of funding from schools' budget shares to cover the removal of the grant for both maintained primary and secondary phases.

Since 2017 the DfE awarded local authorities the School Improvement Monitoring and Broker Grant to fulfil school improvement functions. A consultation was held to remove the grant and bring school improvement in line with academies. The grant reduced to 50% in 2022/23 and ended in April 2023. Due to careful management, the local authority has been able to continue to support maintained schools since the grant ended in April 2023, but this will not be able to continue in future financial years as there are no other sources of funding to support this activity. We are now proposing to de-delegate school improvement from 1 April 2024 and this will include the critical incident SLA. The amount has been determined based on pupil numbers from the October 2023 school census. £3 for April to August 2024 and then £7 from September 2024 to March 2025, individual school figures are in Appendix 4 to the report. We are asking maintained reps to decide if they agree to de-delegate for their phase. It was noted that the local authority can request Secretary of State approval if agreement is not reached, but we prefer to go through Schools Forum. A charge will apply to special schools but this is not part of this decision and will be discussed separately with the special schools.

Garry informed that the de-delegation model process isn't able to make a rate change through the middle of the financial year. The amounts will therefore translate to an average of £5.33.

Questions/comments:

- Hazel queried the NOR for Green Lane School and asked how this applies where the headteacher has an annual review and reps from the local authority review their performance. Louise noted that for special schools the local authority pays for a school improvement partner termly (Ian Simm), which helps to reassure us that the special schools are meeting schools performance and are not a SCC (School Causing Concern). This is a significant piece of school improvement work. The local authority has a statutory duty to support schools causing concern.
- Hazel acknowledged seeing the value of school improvement to keep schools on track. Louise noted that the report says that school improvement is not just about SCC it is the earliest intervention and being reassured that standards are good enough in each school.
- Lucinda referred to the work Ian Simm is doing with special schools and expressed reassurance about the local authority outsourcing work as this is a prime example of fantastic outsourcing.

The chair asked if the primary and secondary maintained sector agreed with the proposed de-delegation. Chris Hunt confirmed agreement from the secondary sector. There was agreement from the primary sector.

Recommendations:

Schools Forum is asked to:

- (i) Note the proposal outlined in section 3. **Noted**
- (ii) Support the proposal for de-delegation of funding from maintained schools' budget shares to cover the removal of the School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant for both maintained Primary and Secondary Phases. **Agreed**

8. DSG Settlement and Schools' Funding 2024/25

Garry Bradbury presented his report to the forum and noted we discuss annually the policy to implement NFF and how it applies to Warrington and the overall schools block. October looked likely to implement NFF by using the growth addition as done in previous years. By use of 60% of the growth addition we will be able to implement NFF and as a result we will end up with unallocated £444k compared with £728k in current financial year. In context it was on the backdrop of growth addition of £1.5m whereas growth addition is a little over £1m. The application of NFF is explained at 2.2 in the report and Appendix 1 shows individual school by school the effect of the NFF allocation. This is purely the schools block allocation not the entirety of what schools will receive in revenue funding. On the schools block an additional grant element will be coming in during the course of the year - the teachers' pay grant to issue out to schools. The schedule of what schools will receive is in the funding pack sent out towards the end of February. The discussion for forum members is twofold, first a steer from Schools Forum about what they want to do with the remaining £444k headroom and secondly for the maintained reps to use their judgement of the remaining de-delegations.

Questions/comments:

- Hazel noted that last year she felt Green Lane and some services were underfunded in a number of areas and not covering costs with staffing. Hazel asked if this could be prioritised and taken into consideration this year. Garry noted this is something officers discuss during the HN block allocation as special schools are funded from HN. This report is dealing with mainstream schools and academies, and it is not just Green Lane wanting increased funding. If HN dips below inflation there will be pressures on multiple fronts with SEND but that is not part of this particular report.
- The chair noted that £444k is not a huge amount and from the four options (at 3.3 in the report) he would prefer option 1. Hazel seconded that.
- Damian noted that one of the other proposals that was put forward was to put it back in growth funding. The chair noted that we looked at growth funding and kept a proportion back to use for this financial year. Garry noted the £728k alluded to an early decision last time to allocate on a case by case basis increasing capacity at schools. As Damian said all was not committed from that current allocation and there is £248k remaining which will be available for a similar purpose in the next financial year. One of the options after transferring to the HN block is to earmark some of the £444k to the £248k for in-year expansion and growth.
- Gwyn shared that he would put it back to the growth fund as there is huge pressure on schools and more schools are being asked to go more over PAN. Don't think schools should have to be in the position to take more students without more money. The other options would spread the money too thinly. Gwyn noted he would argue strongly for the growth fund.
- Garry informed that if it is in the HN block it puts it in local authority control with Schools Forum agreement and gives us the opportunity to continue the panel assessing the various developments with individual schools and by established criteria. Moving to the HN block gives us control and the ability to target the money more forensically and separately.
- Louise noted that the Growth Addition Meeting planned for early January was postponed as James Bancroft wasn't able to attend. This meeting will be rearranged for before the February half term.
- Craig noted that Green Lane and Fox Wood are at capacity and over capacity at DPs. There is likely to be an increase in schools trying to support children in mainstream and then may face massive shortfalls. Craig noted he was not saying it shouldn't go to the growth fund, but there is a huge number of children going to mainstream who would have gone to a DP or special school. There are lots of schools struggling with children with significant needs and it is likely to be worse in September when more go into the mainstream sector.
- Hazel referred to the considerable pressures on Green Lane. The chair noted that we need to be mindful of other special schools not just Green Lane. Hazel felt that it needs careful consideration and allocation of funding for the children with special needs with all special schools being considered rather than existing growth for academies who will get funding for the next year.
- John Carlin reiterated the point Gary made about a number of settings facing pressures. It is not an exclusive issue. If we have young people with SEND and need additional services it is exacerbated without the growth funding as well.

Garry made an observation to conclude with before forum members make a decision. All the scenarios are deserving and would like to vent some of the HN pressure and maintain capacity. The highlight is that this is headroom within the schools block so there is a certain symmetry about using it for school funding when there is a capacity issue at mainstream schools rather than using it for SEND needs. In an ideal world the HN block would cover and we shouldn't be in position of using school funding to cover SEND.

The chair noted that today it is for Schools Forum to consider if the headroom is transferred to the HN block. Decisions about where to spend, and if this is growth addition will be brought back to Schools Forum.

Schools Forum members agreed that the headroom funding should be transferred into the HN block.

Chris Hunt confirmed that secondary maintained agreed with the de-delegations.
The primary sector confirmed they agreed with the de-delegations.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Schools Forum members representing mainstream schools:

- (i) Note the contents of the report. **Noted**
- (ii) Recommend an appropriate use of the allocation of headroom funding, and consequently the composition of the Warrington mainstream schools' funding formula for 2024/25. **Forum agreed to transfer the headroom funding into the HN block.**
- (iii) For maintained sector representatives, agree de-delegations, where appropriate, for the various services discussed in section 4.5. **Agreed**

9. Early Years

Louisa Archer Hill gave a verbal update to the forum. There was a meeting of the single funding formula group on Thursday of last week for the proposed rate of EY funding. The following key points were noted:

- We now have three funding rates. Roll out of the new entitlement from April 2024 for eligible families with children under 2y at £10, 2y at £7.53, 3y-4y £5.50 and a deprivation supplement of 10p. Maintained NS protection at £4.64 and DAF increase at £910.
- The same amount as last year (£235K) has been requested from the HN budget to help maintain functions of the EY SEND team. SENDIF applications have increased significantly during this period.
- As part of the consultation around EY SEND, a review during the summer looked at processes, the current funding model and consulted with PVI providers with a plan to update the model within the next financial year. It was felt the current model was not supporting children needing L3 funding. We are requesting less for L2 children but with an increase for those with more complex needs.
- We are looking at introducing an additional early access transitional fund for those children not known at settings before. It will be a one off payment while they begin the graduated approach.
- The roll out of the new entitlement means parents can apply for codes from 2 January 2024. There have been a few hiccups with HMRC with verification codes but we have contingency plans for bulk uploading codes and hope a patch from Capita will resolve the issues.
- Operational guidance was published on 2 January 2024 and parental agreements will reflect the changes, including support for the local authority for wraparound and childcare expansion and additional funding in April. There is a capital grant funding available of £455k and 80% needs to go to support wraparound and 20% to wraparound EY entitlement.

The chair noted that the rates seem quite promising and asked what the feeling is in the sector. Louisa noted that they would always like a bit more but are more than happy as they are grateful of the support they receive. We looked at our functions and we are passing 98.77% of the grant coming in and only keeping hold of what we need to do work in the local authority. We have not taken the 5% we are allowed to take. The majority of funds are being kept for SEND provision in EY.

Marcia informed she was at the same meeting with Louisa and it was gratefully received along with the work the EY team do around SEND. The sector is struggling with EY children with SEND and work around changing the funding rate for EY SENDIF has been helpful as the early access transition fund also means a setting can take children they were not aware of. The vast majority of times when children arrive they are now able to take up the entitlement.

10. AOB

- Hazel referred to connection issues she had during the October meeting which meant she was unable to comment on agenda item 3 of that meeting. Paula noted she will pick up with the chair. Noted that Hazel joined today's meeting by phone and then also rejoined via Teams.

11. Meeting schedule for 2024

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

- 19 March 2024
- 18 June 2024
- 8 October 2024

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