

Warrington Schools Forum

Minutes – 20 June 2023 (via Teams)

Draft to be confirmed October 2023

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

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				
Roman Catholic Diocese (1)	Chris Williams	A	A	A	X				
16-19 Institutions (1)	Damian McGuire	P	P	P	P				
Parent Governor (1)	Vacant	-	-	-	-				
NEU (Trades Union)	Lucie Humphreys	P	P	P	P				
NASUWT (Trades Union)	Laura Watson	P	A	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				
Head of Service – Quality Education and Learning	Louise Atkin	A	P	P	P				
Finance Manager	James Campbell	S	P	P	P				
Senior Accountant (Schools)	Garry Bradbury	P	P	P	P				
Executive Member for Children and Young People's Services	Cllr Sarah Hall	A	A	A	A				

Key:

P ~ Present

S ~ Substitute

A ~ Apologies

- ~ Vacancy

X ~ Absent with no apologies

O ~ Observer

C ~ Meeting cancelled

Minutes:

Gill Sykes

1. Apologies and Welcome

The chairperson, Gary Cunningham, welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that apologies would be recorded in the minutes. Due to the number of apologies the chair asked if the meeting was quorate and it was confirmed that it was quorate.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising (from 21 March 2023)

The minutes were accepted as a true record and there was one amendment to be made.

- Item 7 had a heading of designated schools grant budget and this should be dedicated schools grant budget. This amendment will be made to the final version of the minutes.

The following was noted from the minutes:

- Page 3 – Membership: Actions completed and diocese reminded they are a rep and part of Schools Forum.
- Page 3 – Membership: Zoe noted that her school converted to an academy and she could therefore no longer be a rep for maintained schools. The chair noted it had been agreed previously that rather than reconsider membership at each meeting it would be looked at after the October census to see if it is still reflective of all sectors. Zoe would therefore remain as the rep until that time.
- Page 4 - Costs for academy conversion: At the last meeting forum did not agree with the £10K charge and other work was to be undertaken. The chair asked if there was an update on this. Louise noted there was no further action to bring to Schools Forum at this point and an update can be brought at a later date if agreeable with Paula.
- Page 7 - Update on Growth Addition Fund: A working party has met twice to discuss the £728K, which is a very small proportion of overall schools funding and can't be spread too far. Talked about moving from the principle of funding purely on numbers and looking at the issues of places in schools and occupancy criteria. A proposal document on how to implement criteria is still in draft and not yet ready to share with Schools Forum. There are a couple more meetings in the diary and we should be ready to come back to the October Schools Forum to look at how it might work. The chair noted that lots of people had volunteered to be on the working party, but it needed to be a smaller group. Some people did offer their services but it needed to reflect the primary and secondary sectors where the money came from (and where it will be applied). That is why with regards to special it would not be right to have a rep for the working party from that sector.

3. DSG and Education outturns

Garry Bradbury presented his report to the forum to notify of the confirmed outturn position for DSG allocations for 2022/23. To show where we finished with DSG and high needs expenditure and how it fits into the overall education position and how education fits into the overall directorate position.

DSG position:

- The headline underspend of £727K is similar to last year when we finished with a similar size of surplus which allowed us to more or less eliminate the DSG deficit built up over the previous two or three years.
- The £727K shouldn't be mistaken with the £728K we are working with for the growth addition. It is entirely coincidental that the figures are similar. The £727K is underspend for 2022/23 and the £728K is the unallocated headroom from 2023/24.
- We were always likely to slightly underspend DSG. We allocated priorities for 2022/23 before we closed the previous financial year. We were looking at needing £500K in-year to eliminate the deficit but had been able to eliminate virtually all of it at the end of 2021/22, and therefore did not need to call on resources for this. This meant we had c. £500K DSG unspoken for.
- Section 2 of the report shows the £727K underspend in different ways across types of activity and across the reporting structure.
- There is a slight EY underspend of £31K. We are now back to a position where the numbers of EY throughput is increasing again and received a retrospective funding increase of £42K.

Education position:

- Overall there was a marginal underspend of £6K for Education/SEND and for Families and Wellbeing is in the mix alongside large overspends on children's and adult's social care. These overspends are not a surprise as there are massive pressures in social care in Warrington and across the nation.

- We continue to look at DP funding models, Sandy Lane, some special school funding, developing the Peace Centre for Post 19 provision and the transport review. We have already put some additional capacity in the EP service and an audit report on the Sensory Team shows that capacity is needed there. The DSG underspend will help to support some of this.
- Part of the forward planning is to keep some money to have flex in the system to meet ever increasing demand. Increases in SEND and complexity of need and provision needed for children. The tribunal agenda is growing and we can be directed into high cost placements for pupils.
- We would like to prioritise everything but there are so many interdependencies and we may get to a point where we can only prioritise some of them. The challenge may also be if we need to start to look at services to cut and staff to cut.
- A detailed report will be brought to forum with a detailed plan for the DSG underspend so Schools Forum can be comfortable where the money is attributed to.

Recommendation:

- (i) Schools Forum is asked to note the 2022/23 outturn position for DSG, and that this underspend will be brought forward to be an available funding resource for 2023/24. **NOTED**
- (ii) Maintained school representatives are asked to note that no additional balances are due to be returned in respect of de-delegated services. **NOTED**

4. School Balances

Garry Bradbury presented his report to the forum which is to notify members of the final individual balances for maintained schools as at the end of the 2022/23 financial year. This is the position for maintained schools as academy schools are outside this process.

There is a fair year-on-year comparison as there were no in-year conversions to academy, although the headline balances are mixed. The overall aggregate amount remaining in school balances hardly changed from last year to this year. An aggregate of £9m and reduced by £10K. Lots of individual school balances decreased and a smaller number increased. Overall there has been no material change in the aggregate value of balances, however, from one year to the next the school budgets have increased, so in percentage terms the amount of balances retained has reduced by almost a full percentage point (-0.9%). If balances were at the same proportionate level as last year the £9m would be £10m. We have finished the financial year with six schools with an accumulated deficit and these schools have all sought approval from the authority to set a licensed deficit for this financial year. Two other schools didn't finish with a deficit but are projected to go in deficit this financial year. There is a process in place for following up the action plan with those schools asking for a licensed deficit to try to retrieve the situation over a reasonable timeframe.

Schools with surpluses are judged against the traditional terms of reasonable balances and what is 'excessive' from the audit commission (by percentage). There are a number of schools with a surplus excess of more than 8% of funding (primary) and 5% of funding (secondary). There were 23 primaries last year and 18 primaries this year.

In June 2018 Schools Forum agreed to set aside its formal balance challenge so there is no question of anything being clawed back for balances above the threshold. We continue to urge the schools going over the percentages to have a dialogue in school with the leadership team and governors about why they have a surplus above the threshold and if there are any lessons to be learned, or any changes of practice in order to spend one year's money on the children in that year. Acknowledged that schools have to consider the trends in funding and keep contingencies for that, but for those schools with larger balances it may be that more should be spent on current intakes rather than retain for future, but that is for the schools to investigate.

Paula met with one diocese to talk about MATs and posed a question around schools with deficit budgets or moving towards deficit budgets to find out the diocese thinking in terms of support. Also, what the DfE as part of developing the MAT agenda might be thinking for schools in deficit or near to deficit budget. Paula noted that this goes back to the point about diocese reps needing to attend Schools Forum so they are sighted on the financial challenge schools find themselves in.

In response to recommendation (ii) the chair noted that every school will be evaluating their closing balances internally and suggested that Garry could make a direct approach and email those schools with balances above the norm to alert them. We have previously relied on Schools Forum reporting back to schools in question.

Action: Garry Bradbury to email those schools with a surplus excess of more than 8% of funding (primary) and 5% of funding (secondary) to recommend that they evaluate internally their closing 2022/23 balances.

Recommendation:

- (i) Schools Forum members are asked to note the level of maintained school balances recorded at the end of 2022/23. **NOTED**
- (ii) Schools Forum members representing WAPH and WASCL are asked to consider whether to recommend that schools evaluate internally their closing 2022/23 balances. **SEE NOTE ABOVE**

5. Transport review update

Paula Worthington informed forum members that a full scale review of transport is being undertaken. The transport budget is overspent, there is increasing demand on the budget and transport has not been reviewed for some time. Paula explained that she has responsibility for the transport budget but delivery sits in another directorate. She commissioned a colleague to carry out work in relation to the Peace Centre and the service model and they are working with another colleague to look at transport.

The review involves speaking to colleagues about how transport and the fleet offer works and includes the following:

- Looking at the detail around bus passes and talking to parents about paying for transport.
- Looking at the fleet around special schools and what other schools have.
- They have talked to adult social care about the fleet taking people to day care that is used in a certain part of the day.
- How decisions are made about routes and the eligibility of routes.
- Post 16 eligibility. We were in a position where all Post 16 automatically received transport and this is not in line with current legislation and policies. We worked with the local government ombudsmen office around changes to the policy to reach a clear position. We will look to do the same with pre 16 once the transport review is concluded.
- Detailed work is being completed around escorts and passenger assistants. A number of children are recommended to have a passenger assistant on transport and sometimes the children and young people are not comfortable that someone sits next to them on the journey to school or education setting.
- Other local authorities have been approached in order to look at their transport offer and compare authorities both neighbouring and across the country. Every authority is struggling with the transport system and some hire companies are giving up their contracts. These hire companies previously transported SEND children but they can earn much more by becoming a delivery driver.

The draft report should be ready in the next couple of weeks and could come to full forum to consider the initial report and the implications and then a smaller working group could be established to explore the detail, agree action and feedback to forum. There will be detail in the report to work through which will require us to make some fundamental decisions about our offer to children and young people.

We are in the run up to election year and recommendations will have to be socialised with our politicians so they are comfortable with any changes that need to be made. The chair noted that the length and complexity of the final report will dictate whether this is discussed at full forum or if we need a small group to consider first and then feedback to forum.

6. AOB

Suggested dates for Schools Forum 2024, all Tuesdays at 4.30 – 6.30 pm via Teams (unless stated otherwise):

- 16 January 2024 to be face to face starting at 5.15 pm – 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 10 October 2023 at 4.30 – 6.30 pm via Teams