



Walsall Council

ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an annual report of the work of the Forum covering the period 21 September, 2021 to 9 March, 2022.

**Date of
meeting**

2.0 Election of Chair and Vice Chair for the 2021/2022 academic year

- 2.1 Mr Max Vlahakis was appointed Chair of Schools Forum and Mr A. Seager was appointed Vice Chair of Schools Forum for the 2021/2022 academic year 21.09.21

3.0 School Music Service 2022/23

- 3.1 Schools Forum granted £38,000 music funding to Walsall Music Education Hub & Service in 2022/23 in line with previous years. 21.09.21

4.0 High Needs Funding Formula 2022/23

- 4.1 The Forum recommend the proposed local high needs funding formula to Cabinet, to seek approval and agreement to implement the proposed model from 1 April 2022. 09.03.22

5.0 High Needs Funding Working Group

- 5.1 The Forum received an update on progress made by the High Needs Funding Working Group, including the main areas of focus and an indicative timetable. 09.03.22

6.0 Proposed Early Years Funding Formula for two, three and four year olds

- 6.1 The Forum considered the proposed early years funding formula. 09.03.22

The Technical Accounting, Treasury Management & Education Finance Manager provided responses to a number of questions that had been submitted in advance. He stated that the Council recognised the funding challenges of providers so passed on 95% of funding that was received directly to them. He reported the hourly payment rises and noted that there were 8 maintained nurseries. At the request of Forum Members it was agreed to forward detailed answers to these questions via email.

Members discussed challenges with funding in the sector that affected its financial sustainability.

Schools Forum recommended that the proposed 2022/23 Early Years Funding Formula be agreed and forwarded for Cabinet for approval.

7.0 School Improvement Grant (SIG) and Local Authority School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering (LAMB) Grant Changes

- 7.1 Changes to SIG and LAMB grants were considered. It was noted that the Department for Education had removed Council funding for schools causing concern. This would affect school budgets. A solution where schools could delegate a grant to the Council to fund this important work was to be sought. 09.03.22

Schools Forum agreed that this matter should be considered at a special meeting of Schools Forum in April, 2022, the next scheduled meeting of Schools Forum and the Primary Heads Group.

8.0 Maintained Schools De-delegation

- 8.1 A copy of a joint letter from the NAHT, National Education Union and ASCL regarding the de-delegation of funding for supply cover costs, including for trade union facilities time was submitted and noted. 21.09.21
- 8.2 Schools Forum members representatives from maintained Primary Schools and maintained Secondary Schools considered and voted upon the de-delegation recommendations. 12.10.21

9.0 Proposed Mainstream School Local Funding Formula 2022/23

- 9.1 Schools Forum endorsed the recommended local funding formula to distribute funding to mainstream schools and academies within Walsall for 2022/23 incorporating an allowance for inflation. It noted that once the final Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations for 2022/23 had been issued, a further report would be presented. The recommendations from the report would be reported to Cabinet on to seek their approval. 12.10.21

10.0 Final Mainstream School Local Funding Formula 2022/23

- 10.1 Schools Forum endorsed and recommended the local funding formula, including the changes to funding factor values set out within the report to the Director of Children's Services, the portfolio holder for Education and Skills, and the ESFA. Schools Forum also recommended that the working group be re established when the outcome of government consultation had been received. 18.01.22

11.0 Central Expenditure Budgets for 2022/23

- 11.1 Schools Forum were advised and approved the basis for the central expenditure for the 2022/23 financial year. 18.01.22

12.0 Schools Forum Membership

12.1 No changes were made during the period 21 September, 2021 to 9 March, 2022.

13.0 SEND Improvement Programme Updates

13.1 The Schools Forum received a report on the progress being made against the actions in the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) document ahead of re-inspection. 21.09.21

13.2 The Forum received an update noting in particular that:- 07.12.21

- Measures had been introduced to improve the timeliness of ECHP plans including a recovery plan which would run until March, 2022 and include a 'deep dive' to better understand pressure points in the system;
- The formation of the SEND team into four areas to work on the annual review backlog:-
 - Statutory assessment recovery team
 - Review recovery team
 - Commissioning and placements recovery team
 - Tribunals and liaison team
- Whilst steps were being taken to address this in terms of process and systems as outlined, support was also required from schools, including the timely submission of paperwork and she urged all Forum Members to relay this to representative agencies and partners.

13.3 The Forum considered a report on the SEND Local Area Improvement Programme and EHCP's. Detailed discussion took place summarised below:- 18.01.22

- Assurances were given that the goal of achieving 60% of EHCP's in January, 2022 being issued within 20 weeks was achievable and sustainable in the longer term.
- A new Quality Assurance framework had also been established based on EHC journeys which went much deeper than previous frameworks.
- The Specialist Provision Review Group was due to commence again week commencing 24th January, 2022 and timetabled to meet every 3 weeks thereafter, special school places and demand formed part of its remit.
- The Local Offer would come as part of Milestone 5 which was part of the transformation stage.
- The need to ensure that the Educational Psychologist Team were fully resourced and the opportunity to explore opportunities of working with Academies in terms of future provision.
- The need for a review of the process for F4 forms.
- There were was a backlog of circa 1000 and a part of that are

children that haven't had review papers sent from school. Without this paperwork, a review cannot start. This process needed to be reviewed as some Local Authorities don't have review papers.

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| 13.4 | The Forum considered SEND and EHCP performance and discussed concerns regarding the quality assessment of documents and the role of the Local Area Improvement Board in overseeing and challenging plans. | 09.03.22 |
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14.0 **EHCP Timelines and Performance**

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| 14.1 | The Forum received a report on the current position regarding EHCP timeliness and performance, which highlighted the mitigating actions being taken to reduce backlogs and areas of improvement. It was reported that an increase in demand for EHCPs was anticipated because of the pandemic, and whilst additional resource had been approved, the number of applications had exceeded expectation and had an impact on the backlog. This was a nationwide issue, affecting other local authorities, but an appropriate response was being made and Walsall's situation had improved. Communication with the SEND team was discussed with a commitment to explore how accessibility and communication could be improved. | 21.09.21 |
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15.0 **Review of Maintained Schools Balances 2020/21**

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| 15.1 | Members were provided with a summary of balances held by maintained schools at 31 March 2021 as reported to the DfE under consistent financial reporting regulations. Following a query raised, it was confirmed that academies individually or when part of an academy trust set their own surplus policies and determined their balance control mechanisms. In addition, it was explained that whilst the long-term trend had been for a reduction in reserves, during the last year there had been a slight increase due to uncertainties arising from the pandemic. However, having tracked back to 2013/14 no review of the Local Authority's current balance control mechanism was deemed necessary at this point. | 12.10.21 |
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16.0 **Review of Dedicated Schools Grant – Update on 2021/22 Forecast Position**

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| 16.1 | Schools Forum were advised of the DSG forecast outturn position for 2021/22. Taking account of previous decisions by the Forum to allocate/utilise a large proportion of the surplus, the overall balance would continue to be regularly reviewed. | 12.10.21 |
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17.0 **Correspondence**

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| 17.1 | The Forum received and noted correspondence as follows:- | 07.12.21 |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter of 11 November 2021 to Minister for Schools Standards from Chair of Walsall Association of Secondary Head teachers. • Letter of 16 November 2021 to Minister of Schools Standards from Walsall Council. | |

- Letter of 2 December 2021 from Minister for Schools Standards

18.0 **Procurement**

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| 18.1 | Schools Forum's role and responsibilities, including being consulted on and providing a view on some contracts was explained and debated. | 21.09.21 |
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19.0 **Local Government Pension Scheme Current Service Pension Costs: Introduction of an annual reconciliation Process**

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| 19.1 | The Forum received a report on the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), which had introduced a reconciliation process for current service pension costs at the end of each financial year, effective from 2020/21 and noted that this change brought the risk of additional charges being introduced for schools, and the report provided the Forum with information in this respect. | 12.10.21 |
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20.0 **Special Provision Work and Action Plan**

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| 20.1 | An update on the action plan was considered and noted. | 09.03.22 |
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21.0 **Recommendation**

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| 21.1 | That Schools Forum notes the report. |
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