

Schools Forum

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday, 22 June 2021 at 4.00 pm

Digital Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Held in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulation 2020; and conducted according to the Council's Standing Orders for Remote Meetings and those set out in the Council's Constitution.

Schools Forum Members Present:

Mr M. Vlahakis (Chair)	–	Primary Head Teacher
Dr A. Bruton (Vice Chair)	–	Secondary Academy Head Teacher
Ms J. Barr	–	Special School Governor
Mrs N. Boys	–	Primary Head Teacher
Mr C. Bury	–	Alternative Provision School Principal
Mr S. Davies	–	Primary Head Teacher
Mr B. Downie	–	Secondary Academy Head Teacher
Mrs C. Fraser	–	Special School Head Teacher
Mrs C. Draper	–	Primary Head Teacher
Mrs L. Foster	–	Primary Governor
Mr M. Fox	–	Primary Governor
Mrs J. Garrett	–	Primary Head Teacher
Mrs H. Keenan	–	Secondary Academy Head Teacher
Mr M. Moody	–	Primary Academy Representative
Mr A. Seager	–	Secondary Academy Head Teacher
Mrs M. Sheehy	–	Primary Head Teacher
Mrs M. Turley	–	Nursery Head Teacher
Councillor C. Towe	–	Portfolio Holder, Education and Skills (Observer)
Ms S. Guy	–	National Education Union (Observer)
Mr A. Orlik	–	C of E Diocese (Observer)

Officers Present:

Mr L. Haynes – Deputy Head of Finance – Corporate
Mrs S. Kelly – Director of Access & Inclusion
Ms J. Jones – Group Manager, Children's Services
Mr N. Perks – Quality Assurance Team Manager
Ms T. Pyatt – Head of Inclusion
Mr R. Walley – Tech Acc, Treasury Management & Education Finance Manager
Mr A. Webley – SEND Team Manager
Mr M. Williams – ICT Programme & Project Officer
Dr P. Fantom – Democratic Services Officer

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1. 22.06.21	<p>Welcome</p> <p>The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and explaining the rules of procedure and legal context in which the meeting was being held. He also directed members of the public viewing the meeting to the papers, which could be found on the Council's Committee Management Information System (CMIS) webpage.</p> <p>Members confirmed they could both see and hear the proceedings.</p> <p>The Chair reported that Mrs B. Mycock, formerly of the Democratic Services team, had now left the Local Authority to take up a position in the NHS. The Chair noted that Mrs Mycock had been the Clerk to the Schools Forum for a number of years, expressed his thanks for her service and best wishes in her new venture.</p>	
2. 22.03.21	<p>Apologies</p> <p>Apologies had been received on behalf of Mr I. Baker and Mrs S. Rowe.</p>	
3. 22.06.21	<p>Minutes – 9 March 2021</p> <p>The Clerk put the recommendation to the vote by way of a roll call of Forum members and it was:</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <p>That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2021, a copy having been previously circulated to each Member of Schools Forum, be approved and signed as a true record.</p>	To note
4. 22.06.21	<p>Matters Arising from the Minutes of 9 March 2021</p> <p>There were no matters arising from the minutes.</p>	
5. 22.06.21	<p>Late Item/s (urgent) to be introduced by the Chair</p> <p>There were no late items.</p>	
6. 22.06.21	<p>Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)</p> <p>The Forum noted that there were no items for consideration in the private session.</p>	

<p>7. 22.06.21</p>	<p>Appointment of PVI Representative</p> <p>The Forum received a report concerning the appointment of an Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent PVI provider, in accordance with the <i>Schools Forum (England) Regulations 2012</i> (see annexed).</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <p>That Schools Forum note the appointment of Tim Hopkins, Strategic Development Manager of Humpty Dumpty Day Nurseries and Pre-Schools Ltd.</p>	<p>To note</p>
<p>8. 22.06.21</p>	<p>SEND Improvement Programme Update</p> <p>The Forum received a report on the progress continuing to be made against the actions outlined in the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) document and the identified risks being managed (see annexed).</p> <p>It was noted that a number of outstanding red actions were to be completed during the next month, thereby reducing the outstanding actions significantly, with 149 (81 per cent) of the actions from the WSoA being completed, completed/ embedded or closed. In preparation for re-inspection, work was being undertaken to ensure that the actions and improvements made were evidenced.</p> <p>The Chair requested that in order to better see the progress being made, future reports should provide a link to the actual actions being referred to in the WSoA. Members requested that an updated version of the WSoA document should be circulated and Mr Webley agreed to circulate this outside of the meeting.</p> <p>Further to a question regarding the SEND team's priorities, Mr Webley the importance was for SEND children to have good outcomes, with inclusive approaches for all schools and access to the right provision. Ms Pyatt added that a specialist provision review was being undertaken and that members of the Forum sat on the review's reference group. This review was to ensure that provision was in line with the inclusion strategy and the SEND strategy.</p> <p>A Member referred to the issued raised in the meeting of the secondary head teachers on the previous day concerning capacity and communication with the SEND team. In response, Mrs Kelly discussed the operational delivery of the SEND team and that arrangements would be made for the SEND team to come out and meet with schools and chairs to listen to the issues. She also noted that there had been a</p>	<p>AW to circulate updated WSoA document</p>

	<p>change to the telephony system that had caused some communication difficulties. An update to the WSoA progress would be provided via the head teachers virtual updates. It was pointed out that the backlog of EHCPs had been significantly cleared and the SEND team was now looking at the management of capacity and pressures. Any concerns should be raised directly with Ms Pyatt and Mr Webley.</p> <p>In relation to the assessment places for pupils with SEND coming into the Borough, the Chair noted that in Walsall there were no assessment places currently and asked what was being done to make that happen. In response, Mr Webley stated that it was part of the SEND team's developmental work currently, that there were plans and, furthermore, that this could be incorporated into the specialist provision review.</p> <p>A Member requested that rather than feeding back from 18 or 19 schools, a meeting be arranged before the end of term with as many secondary head teachers attending as possible to discuss the on-the-ground issues. Ms Pyatt was more than willing to meet and work together with schools but also noted that steps were currently being taken to recruit to the SEND caseworker team due to the significant increases to caseloads because of the clearing of the backlog. In terms of increasing placements, she added that the specialist provision review would consider options and models for further development. The Chair requested that meetings be arranged with both the primary heads and secondary heads for then this would allow the participation of as many head teachers as possible.</p> <p>The Vice-Chair enquired how many EHCP assessments are assessed and what proportions are granted and rejected, respectively. Mr Webley stated that when there had been an investigation of some of the historical cases, it was evident that there had not been much scrutiny of the assessment. He indicated that the proportion was presently still approximately 50 per cent. Early identification had improved but where there were complex then that led to an EHCP as well. Later in the discussion, Mrs Kelly noted that in 2020 the percentage of assessments that were rejected was 14.8 per cent. When compared with other West Midlands local authorities, this was the lowest in the region. Where an assessment had been made but no EHCP issued, the percentage was 4.4 per cent, which was also one of the lowest rates in the region.</p> <p>The Vice-Chair requested clarification that EHCP assessment involved a panel from the Local Authority interacting with a school's SENCO. Mr Webley pointed out that assessment could work in a number of ways. A panel was attended by education professionals and SEND casework officers;</p>	<p>TP/AW to arrange meetings</p>
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	<p>however, the bulk of information was feed in via a school's SENCO, or assessment could be at the request of parents. In relation to an example reported by the Vice-Chair, it was agreed that this should be discussed outside the meeting.</p> <p>Mrs Kelly emphasised the importance of conversations taking place in the appropriate place, given the terms of reference and remit of the Schools Forum, which was not an operational forum. The Chair agreed that there were specific arrangements for operational matters and questions, but highlighted the difficulties of getting officers together in one place, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <p>That the report be noted.</p>	To note
<p>9. 22.06.21</p>	<p>EHCP Timeliness and Performance Update</p> <p>The Forum received was 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 (see annexed).</p> <p>The Chair noted that nationally, in 2020 only 58 per cent of reports were completed within the 20-week deadline. He was pleased to note that Walsall was now achieving a completion rate of 77 per cent, but he enquired whether this was sustainable. In response, Mr Webley stated that this was the target and the aim of the team and he expected such performance to be continued.</p> <p>Members acknowledged the improvement but were also concerned that a spike in the rate of assessments would be likely to occur during the next twelve months. They further enquired, in terms of the current position of 755 outstanding annual reviews that were being processed, how did that compare with what the norm should be and what had happened historically? Mr Webley stated that around 100 of these reviews were from 2019 whereas due to Covid-19 the contact with schools/colleges and parents had probably been hindered. He referred to the report, which stressed that these pupils were a priority and would be chased up. Ms Pyatt also pointed out that there had been a 23 per cent increased in the requests to assess, and this was a substantial increase for Walsall when compared to a national increase of 10 per cent.</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <p>That the report be noted.</p>	To note

<p>10. 22.06.21</p>	<p>Mainstream Schools Local Funding Formula Review</p> <p>The Forum received a report that sought to identify recommended actions to support the development of a mainstream funding formula for 2022/23 (see annexed).</p> <p>The Chair pointed out that members were needed to join a working group established to contribute to the development of the schools local funding formula for 2022/21. This group would meet once before the end of the summer term and once in the autumn term, and its recommendations would be presented to the Schools Forum and to the Cabinet in October. He emphasised the importance of representation on the group of members from primary and secondary schools, together with early years.</p> <p>A member noted that it would have been helpful had the Black Country figures been provided, as it was important to understand why Walsall was behind other Black Country areas in terms of the funding factor primary: secondary weighting, with the rate being 1:1.24 (reduced from 1:1.25 in 2018) whereas Wolverhampton was 1:1.36 and Stoke-on-Trent was 1:1.29.</p> <p>Mr Walley advised that the review for the 2019/20 financial year had taken place in October 2018, after which a number of changes had been implemented. Progress toward the National Funding Formula (NFF) had slowed since that point, however, as majority of the additional funding since then had been allocated to increased numbers of children rather than further moves toward the NFF. The aim of the proposed working group would be to understand and report on options to move Walsall further toward the NFF values in preparation for a hard implementation by the DfE.</p> <p>The Chair reminded the Forum of the process carried out in 2018 in order to arrive at the agreed level of 1.24. The Vice-Chair also pointed out that the discussion had been in terms of attempting to prevent schools from losing too much. However, she had recently become aware of the extent to which Walsall's secondary schools were losing out when compared with those in other local authority areas, and felt this to be an issue the working group should consider. Other members referred to the disadvantage to Walsall children, who were being funded at a rate 11 per cent below that in Wolverhampton, and that this would worsen when the transition had been made from a 'soft' to a 'hard; national funding formula.</p> <p>The Chair informed the Forum that in 2018, the officers had been requested to measure and compare against other local</p>	
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	<p>authorities and that, as well as the ratios, the amount of funding per child in both primary and secondary schools had been considered.</p> <p>Mr Haynes noted that the report as presented had set out that there had been a number of conversations over time since the 'soft' national funding formula had been brought in. This had provided local authorities and schools forums with the opportunity to set their own priorities rather than adhering to a 'hard' national funding formula approach. Furthermore, Walsall's priorities had been concerned with balancing the movement of schools towards the national funding formula over time, so that they were ready when the 'hard' formula was fully implemented, whilst ensuring that the minimum number of schools experienced a reduction year-on-year.</p> <p>Mr Haynes also referred to paragraph 4.4 of the report, and informed the Forum that over the last two years additional funding had gone into funding increased pupil numbers. In previous years the decision had been made to keep the lump sum at £175k per school, and with the funding received via the national funding formula being £117,800 per school, this had meant that an additional lump sum funding £57,200 of funding had to be provided for each Walsall primary and secondary school but with more primary schools in Walsall this does affect the overall split of funding between the two phases of schools.</p> <p>Further comments by members of the Forum were made concerning the impact of the lump sum on small, one-form entry primary schools, and the impact of an increase from a ratio of 1:1.25 to 1:1.29 for secondary schools, especially when compared with schools in other Black Country local authority areas.</p> <p>A number of members indicated that they would wish to become members of the working group, including the Chair and Vice-Chair, Mr Downie, Mrs Keenan, Mr Seager, and the Chair requested that any others interested in joining should email Mr Haynes directly.</p> <p>Further to an enquiry regarding the timescales in which Walsall would be aligned to the national funding formula, the Chair advised that this remained under consideration by the DfE. Mr Haynes reiterated, adding that in terms of setting a local funding formula the working group should consider what the local priorities were and the options to be considered to meet these priorities. This was normally agreed at the Forum's October meeting, to allow time for formal consultation before being brought back to the Forum's December meeting and the Cabinet for final agreement.</p>	
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	<p>Resolved:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That a working group be established to contribute to the development of the Schools Local Funding Formula for 2022/23; 2. That the working group arrange to meet in the summer term and autumn term in order to make recommendations to the October meeting of the Schools Forum 	Working group meetings to be set up
11. 22.06.21	<p>Early Years Central Funding</p> <p>The Forum received an update report regarding the £500k retained central budget for Early Years duties, which was presented following a request made at the last meeting of the Forum (see annexed).</p> <p>The report noted that each year the DfE allocated DSG Early Years funding based on the number of children that the Local Authority funded for year 2, 3 and 4 places and the DfE expected that up to 5 per cent of funding should be retained to provide a central service to deliver statutory Early Years duties. Currently, Walsall Council retained 2.28 per cent of the overall Early Years block, resulting in a higher hourly rate to providers.</p> <p>Mr Haynes advised that the proposed central DSG budgets were presented to the Forum's meetings in January each year, and that in January 2021 the Forum had approved the current £500k central DSG budget and Early Year's services were using that budget in the current financial year.</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <p>That the Early Years team continue to deliver the Local Authority's statutory duties in respect of the continuation of Early Help 0-5 support to children and families.</p>	To note
12. 22.06.21	<p>School Ready Budget Update</p> <p>The Forum received the annual update report concerning investment into the School Ready Budget (see annexed).</p> <p>The report provided evidential information to demonstrate to the Forum how the £250,000 fund allocated for School Ready improvement continued to be utilised well in order to deliver improved School Ready outcomes for children by the age of five years. In Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Ofsted grading, this remained at nearly 4 per cent above the national average. For inspected Early Years schools' provision, 93.1</p>	

	<p>per cent had been judged to be good or outstanding, and this compared to an 88.6 per cent national average. For private, voluntary or independent (PVI) settings, 96.9 per cent had been rated as good or outstanding, which compared with a 96 per cent national average.</p> <p>The Chair requested that future reports should indicate whether the Forum was to note or to vote on the recommendations as it was considered that the wording of the recommendation needed to be clearer.</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <p>That Schools Forum confirmed it was content with the plans for 2021/22.</p>	To note
<p>13. 22.06.21</p>	<p>One Source – School Epayslips</p> <p>The Forum received a verbal update from Mrs Kelly regarding the movement away from paper payslips and the introduction of electronic payslips. She advised that the Authority would be working with schools to implement this for all teaching and school staff from January 2022 and that information would be provided to Head teacher briefings and sessions were to be arranged for September 2021.</p> <p>Mr Williams added that he would provide the relevant email address to the Forum so that anyone wishing to sign up for Epayslips early would be able to do so.</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <p>That the verbal report be noted.</p>	To note
<p>14. 22.06.21</p>	<p>Annual Report</p> <p>A copy of the Annual Report of the Democratic Services Officer, covering the period 23 September 2020 to 9 March 2021, was submitted (see annexed).</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <p>That the Annual Report be noted.</p>	To note
<p>15. 22.06.21</p>	<p>Dates of Future Meetings</p> <p>The report of the Democratic Services Officer was submitted (see annexed).</p> <p>The Clerk put the recommendation to the vote by way of a roll call of Forum members.</p>	

	<p>Resolved:</p> <p>That Schools Forum agreed to hold its meetings for the 2021/22 academic year on the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuesday, 21 September 2021 • Tuesday, 12 October 2021 • Tuesday, 9 December 2021 • Tuesday, 18 January 2022 • Tuesday, 8 March 2022 • Tuesday, 21 June 2022 • Special meetings to be arranged, if required. 	
<p>16. 22.06.21</p>	<p>Forward Plan</p> <p>A copy of the Forward Plan was submitted (see annexed).</p> <p>Mr Haynes reported that the feedback derived from the meetings to be arranged by Mr Webley would be used to inform the High Needs Funding Formula for future years, and he noted that the final report was scheduled for March 2022.</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <p>That the Forward Plan be noted.</p>	<p>To note</p>
<p>17. 22.06.21</p>	<p>Late Items</p> <p>There were no late items for consideration.</p>	
<p>18. 22.06.21</p>	<p>Correspondence</p> <p>There were no items of correspondence.</p>	
	<p>Date and Time of next meeting</p> <p>The next meeting of Schools Forum is scheduled for Tuesday, 21 September 2021, commencing at 4.00 pm.</p>	

The meeting terminated at 4.58 pm.

Signed

Date: