



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

West Northamptonshire Schools Forum

Minutes of a meeting of the West Northamptonshire Schools Forum held at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCujrRO-y6RzkN6zPQ-xNAtA> on Tuesday 6 July 2021 at 2.00 pm.

Present

Peter French (Church of England) PF - Chair
Jon Lake (maintained primary) JL
Rachel Hutchinson (Early Years PVI) RH
Cath Kitchen (academy alternative provision) CK
Karen Lewis (academy special) KL
Iain Massey (academy) IM
Hayley Walker (Early Years PVI) HW
Paul Wheeler (academy) PW

Substitute Members: Annabel Moore (academy) AM

Also Present: Councillor Fiona Baker, Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education
Councillor Louisa Fowler, Assistant Cabinet Member for Education
Councillor Daniel Lister, Assistant Cabinet Member for Education
Francis McGoldrick (Department for Education) FM

Apologies for Absence: Lyndsey Barnett (maintained nursery)
Lee Hughes (academy)
Nikki Lamond (academy)

Officers Beth Baines (Senior Finance Business Partner) BB
James Edmunds (Democratic Services Assistant Manager) JE
Cathi Hadley (Executive Director - Children's Services) CH
Paul Hanson (Democratic Services Manager) PH - Secretary
Kathryn Holton (Committee Officer) KH
Vicky Wheatley (Apprenticeships & Qualifications Manager) VW
Emily Taylor (Strategic Finance Business Partner) ET

1. Apologies for absence and Forum Membership Changes

Apologies for absence were received from Lyndsey Barnett, Lee Hughes (Annabel Moore attended as substitute) and Nikki Lamond.

There were no changes to Forum membership and filling the 3 academy vacancies and the 2 maintained primary vacancies was being discussed with the WNC Assistant Director for Education.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

3. **Election of Chair**

The Secretary explained that as the first Schools Forum (SF) meeting for West Northamptonshire Council (WNC), a new chair needed to be elected. CK nominated PF and this was seconded by RH with all in favour.

RESOLVED:

That Peter French be elected as Chair of West Northamptonshire Schools Forum for the forthcoming year.

4. **Election of Vice-Chair**

It was proposed that the election of vice-chair be decided at the October 2021 meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the election of Vice-Chair be held over until the next meeting.

5. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 16 March 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

6. **2021-22 DSG Budgets and Monitoring**

BB introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

- A new format for presenting budget monitoring for 2021/22 was being used. This was separated into the 4 funding blocks to make it clearer.
- There were no significant variances at present, although pressures on High Needs and Early Years Inclusion budgets were forecast.
- High Needs overspends were a national issue. WNC was in a better position than many other local authorities (LAs) and was working to bring the budget to a balanced position.
- The local budget to be devolved to schools was £129m.
- Recommendations from the Society of County Treasurers' (SCT) survey were being presented to government:
 - Alignment of SEND and funding policy with consistent application nationally.
 - Reviewing the effect of the current Ofsted system which doesn't incentivise schools to take responsibility for the needs of all children as they are not accountable for those they permanently exclude.

- Capping of independent school fees and review parental option of school choices to prevent high cost places being preferred choice when mainstream special schools can meet the need at a fraction of the cost.

CK noted that some of the recommendations of SCT were expected in the delayed SEND consultation outcome.

PW pointed out that SEND and High Needs funding were constant issues for Schools Forum and asked how many places were available in WNC, how many places were required and what the shortfall was. BB agreed to provide this for the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

That Schools Forum noted the report.

7. **Schools 2020-21 Outturn Report (+ DSG if available)**

BB introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

Schools Balances Report

- Individual schools balances for WNC totalled £9.9m at end of 2020/21 (£7.9m 2019/20) across 73 maintained schools. £4.5m was committed and £4.5m uncommitted.
- 4 schools were in deficit at the end of 2021/22 (also 4 in 2019/20) with a total deficit value of £180k (£80k in 2019/20)
- Schools Forum decides on maintained school balance control mechanism. Previous NCC policy was that excess uncommitted balances above 8% would be clawed back. Proposed that this continues but with an increase to 10% due to Covid and grant funding provided towards the end of 2020/2. A vote would be needed for this. JL as the sole maintained schools representative agreed to the increase.
- Overall maintained schools balances have increased between the end of 2019/20 and 2020-21 by £2m. Increases in committed revenue of £1.7m and uncommitted revenue of £0.5m with decreases in capital of £0.01m and community focussed grant.
- Academies report year end position and reserves at year end through their statement of accounts.
- Academy balances information currently being worked on. The 21 academies in WNC reported an unrestricted balance of £3.78m. 13 increased unrestricted reserves balances between 2019/20 and 2020/21, one remained the same and 7 decreased. All except one were within £50k, so not large compared with their budgets.
- There are 24 academy trusts which cover 326 academies. Not all of these are in WNC so difficult to compare. Unrestricted reserves total £40.5m and only two decreased between 2019/20 and 2020/21.
- 4 maintained schools (6%) were in deficit at the end of 2020/21. The total value increased by £0.1m to £0.18m. The Authority is working with schools on financial recovery plans.
- Of 184 schools in WNC, 111 (60%) are academies and 73 are maintained schools.

DSG Outturn

- There was an overspend of £3.66m which was 0.5% and an unfavourable movement of £40k from the position reported in March 2021.
- The deficit will be financed by £2.734m planned contribution from the 2020-21 DSG budget and growth fund recoupment refund from 2017-18 and the remaining £32m from 2021-22 High Needs budgets of WNC and NNC.
- The net position at the end of 2020-21 is an overall DSG surplus of £6.1m. There is therefore no requirement from the DfE for a deficit recovery plan.
- Addressing high needs pressures remains the highest priority within the DSG.
- JL asked whether the long-standing school support and effectiveness budget could be spent in a positive way in the next year to support schools. This was noted by BB.
- PF had received complimentary reports from a school Bursar about the support received from the schools financial advisers.
- In respect of the annual deficit, PF questioned what plans were in place to ensure this did not run out. BB advised that this would be addressed at the next meeting.
- CH emphasised that management of budgets and high needs placements was a high priority. RH suggested that Early Years providers could give an idea of high needs placement numbers, which CH welcomed.

RESOLVED:

1. That Schools Forum noted the reports.
2. That Schools Forum agreed a control of 10% of budget on uncommitted balances brought forward for maintained schools.

8. **2021-22 Grant and DSG Funding Announcements Update**

BB reported that the good practice guide required SF to inform maintained schools on when central government grants would be paid. The report therefore listed the main grants devolved to schools, together with a table showing when payments would be due.

- Final adjustments to Early Years Funding blocks would be received in July.
- A change to the calculation of the final part of 2020-21 Early Years Grant was announced in March
- The financial impact of Covid and comparison to DSG Early Years block funding allocations on 2020-21 year would be finalised when received and brought back to SF.

RESOLVED:

That Schools Forum noted the report.

9. **Early Years Single Funding Formula**

This item was withdrawn from the agenda before the meeting.

10. **Scheme for Financing Schools**

BB outlined the report and explained that WNC needed to adopt and publish a Scheme for Financing Schools. SF approval was needed where a scheme was to be changed. WNC were proposing to adopt the DfE scheme, which applied to all schools maintained by WNC.

RESOLVED:

That Schools Forum noted the report and approved the Scheme for Financing Schools.

11. **Schools Apprenticeship Levy Update**

VW introduced the report with the aim of enabling schools to maximise the apprenticeship levy available to them. A third (25 out of 62) schools were engaged and there were 47 members of school staff as apprentices in West Northamptonshire. The government were paying £3k per person until the end of September 2021. She encouraged schools to consider where apprenticeships could support schools the most.

PW asked whether this support was available to academies and asked to discuss further with VW.

It was suggested that information be sent to school bursars and chairs of governors rather than just to head teachers.

RESOLVED:

That Schools Forum noted the report.

12. **Remote Meetings (The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2021)**

The Secretary explained that legislation now allowed SF to continue to hold remote meetings on a permanent basis. Streaming to YouTube would still be required to ensure meetings were accessible to the public. Attendance had been good at remote meetings, and there were also cost and environmental benefits.

After discussion, members agreed that there were benefits to holding meetings remotely, but it would also be helpful to hold at least one meeting in person each year. This would help with engagement and confidence, particularly for new members.

RESOLVED:

1. That Schools Forum noted the report.

2. That Schools Forum would continue to meet remotely, but with at least one face-to-face meeting each year – the first of which would be the October 2021 meeting.

13. **Schools Forum Plan**

The Secretary invited Schools Forum to note the plan of items for future meetings.

RESOLVED:

That Schools Forum noted the report.

The meeting closed at 3.30 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____