

**Meeting of the Schools Forum
Held on Thursday 26th June 2025 at 1.30pm
via MS Teams Digital Platform**

Minutes

NAME	Organisation - School Members	Attended
Rachel Lewis	Hindley Sure Start Nursery	No
Louise Curran	Rowan Tree Primary	Apologies
Anne Isherwood	Three Towers Alternative Provision Academy	Yes
Tracy Mingaud-Cunningham	Primary Governor	Yes
Adrian Hardy	Secondary Governor	Yes
Gary Hayes	Orrell St James Primary	Yes
Fiona Quinlivan	Howe Bridge St Michael's Primary	Yes
Julie Hassan	St Oswald's Catholic Primary	Yes
Matthew Boyle	Leigh St Thomas CE Primary School	Yes
Lisa Hobden	St Patrick's Catholic Primary School	Yes
Alan Birchall	Byrchall High (Chair)	Yes
Andy McGlown	St. Peters RC High School	No
Martin Wood	The Deanery High School	No
Paul Davies	Fred Longworth High School	No
	Organisation - Non School Members	
Sue Morris	Care Love Learn Childcare Limited	No
Peter McGhee	St John Rigby College	Yes
Max Atkins	Wigan NEU	Yes
Need nominated member	Diocesan Representative	
	Organisation- Nominated observers	
Cllr Dane Anderton	Cabinet Member	Yes
Karen Parkin	NEU	Yes
Mike Wilkinson	Wigan NASUWT	Yes
Mark Clayton	GMB	Apologies
	Organisation - In Attendance	
Mark Rotheram (KR)	Wigan Council Finance – Strategic Finance Manager	Yes
Kirsten Reid (KR)	Wigan Council Finance – Group Finance Manager (Schools)	Yes
Cath Pealing (CP)	Assistant Service Director, Education	Yes
Jo Sullivan	Clerk to the Forum, Wigan Council Governor Services	Yes

Quorum: 40% (8 of the 18 current School/Non-School Members)

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received and accepted from Louise Curran and Mark Clayton.

The Chair reported that Cllr Bullen had been replaced as the Cabinet nominated Member by Cllr Dane Anderton. Cllr Anderton was welcomed to the School's Forum. There would also be a new Post 16 representative, Simon Lett from Winstanley College from September 2025 as Peter McGhee was retiring.

2. **Agreement of Any Other Urgent Business to Be Added to the Agenda**

The following item was raised for discussion:

- Exceptional funding questions for disproportionate SEND funding.

3. **Previous Minutes**

Members **confirmed** that the minutes from the Forum meeting held on **15th May 2025** were a correct record.

4. **Permanent exclusion contributions 2025/26**

Members had received a paper on the updated permanent exclusion contribution for 2025/26 in advance of the meeting.

CP highlighted that the value of the contribution currently amounted to a one-off £4,000 for each pupil permanently removed off roll and referred to alternative provision. This was the equivalent amount proposed by the DFE to be allocated should a permanent exclusion review be held. The amount was a contribution towards the cost of alternative provision if the child should not return to the school

Q. If a looked after child (CLA) was withdrawn, and not excluded, how would schools be charged?

A. We had moved to not withdrawing CLA.

A Member commented that there was a subtle shift in the language around top-slicing of budgets and that some schools were really struggling financially.

Q. How much did the PEX contributions raise?

A. £550k but this was all spent on reviews.

Q. If the School's Forum approved the contribution, did all schools have to pay?

A. Yes, if agreed at the School's Forum.

Feedback from some consortia Headteachers was that a lot of money was spent from school budgets on the route to exclusion. The PEX contribution was supported but this consortia of Headteachers wanted this noted.

Members **agreed** the £4,000 PEX contribution for 2025-26.

5. High Needs Block Update and 2025/26 Budget

MR provided an update on the high needs block and 2025-26 budget:

- Since Schools Forum approved the High Needs Budget in January 2025 the DfE had updated Wigan's high needs allocation which has resulted in a reduction in funding of £88,667 mainly due to a change in imported and exported pupil numbers.
- On a more positive note, operational guidance issued in March 2025 confirmed that the 2025-26 core school budget grant will now also include funding to support high needs providers with increases to their national insurance contributions from April 2025. The additional funding will be paid through to Wigan Council in September 2025 to pass on.
- In addition, further to the pay award being confirmed an additional enhancement to the 25/26 Core Schools budget grant has been announced to help high needs providers with the cost of the teachers and other staff 2025 pay award. The additional funding will be paid through to Wigan Council in October 2025 to pass on.
- The Finance Team will now work on the budget over summer and provide an update at the next meeting.

6. 2024/25 DSG and School Balances Out-turn

Matthew Boyle joined the meeting at 1:50pm.

Members had received the 2024-25 DSG out-turn in advance of the meeting.

KR highlighted:

- There was an increased overall deficit due to the increase in high needs, £9.7m deficit.
- The statutory override had been extended until 2027-28, alongside that the Government would be looking at an overall review of SEND funding.
- Overall school balances had been detailed in appendix 1 of the report. Some schools continued to be in deficit but lots of hard work had been done by schools to reduce these deficits.
- Ten schools had a year-end deficit. All but 3 of the initial 14 schools contacting the finance team were able to turn their potential deficits around. This was mostly due to the additional funding provided to schools by the DfE. Five of the schools with year-end deficits did not report with a potential deficit at the start of the year.

The overall position and high needs out-turn had been detailed in the report. There had been a few variations since the last report in December 2024:

Maintained and Special (including Outreach):

- Increased cost of top ups estimated based on make-up of cohorts in specials schools. The number of places provided had increased from 1030 to 1068. This meant an increase from £9.889m to £10.459m on places. There was also pressure on the budget due to the changes in the support needed by the cohorts arriving in September. Last year top ups were

£11.083m but this year they are £12.093m. The budget had been updated to take in account the reduced funding.

Post 16:

- Estimated based on 5/12ths of AY contracts + 7/12ths of AY 24/25 contracts. There were 423 learners in 2023/24 of which the numbers had continued to increase from 156 to 247. The overall number of learners had now increased to 453 as young people had requested places at the start of the new academic year. The average place cost had increased by 14%. There was no additional information to update the forecast.

EHCPs:

- Costs had increased as the additional funding requests had been paid to schools £1.065m. We had reviewed the forecast of payments to academies as we had located double counting of the initial payments. This was due to payments of the initial transfer to schools being made over the year and not all at the start of April 2024.

Out of borough recoupment:

- Costs included claims by schools where pupils were exported for funding going back to 2022/23. The number of pupils exported exceeded the number of pupils imported and this was reflected in the overall cost to Wigan Council. The imports and exports were reviewed by SEND colleagues in September to confirm the accuracy of the information held by finance. Regular reporting of changes to the pupil numbers and funding had been agreed with SEND colleagues to keep the forecast updated.

Independent school provision:

- Forecast fees in the year were £13.7m. A SEND review of services had been provided by the ISS and had reduced costs as placements were changed in the year. The total cost of £12.856m was offset against income received from grants re: alternative provision funding and changes to placements.

KR reported that variances to December 2024 and the out-turn position were not significant. There had been some underspend in central areas and on trade union facilities time. We were looking into this with HR to check if the same number of trade union representatives were supporting schools.

Q. Claw back – was there any reason we would not claw back from school balances?

A. This was something we had brought to Forum in the past which had not been supported. Some schools had higher balances than others and we would need to understand what the utilisation would be. Further consideration would be needed by Forum in the future.

A Member commented that if there were challenging financial times for schools but there would need to be nuance to any claw back as there could be genuine reasons for some schools to hold balances.

Q. Could some of these balances be offset to the high needs block?

A. We would need to gather information from schools. Would need to check if we could legally claw back and offset to the high needs block.

The Finance Team would produce a briefing note to inform claw back discussion in a future meeting.

KR confirmed that schools had worked very hard indeed to maintain balances and were excellent in managing their budgets, but some schools were now coming to the end of their reserves.

7. 2025/26 Central Supplementary Funding

MR provided a verbal update on 2025-26 central supplementary funding:

- A delay in the completion of the 24/25 final accounts process had had a direct impact on the approval of central supplementary funding.
- Requests from schools had been received and the process would be finalised by the end of next week. Schools would be informed of decisions, and final numbers would be reported at the next meeting.

8. Any Other Urgent Business

Q. Could schools still bid for disproportionate SEND?

A. This had been discontinued due to the overspend on the high needs block.

Q. Had this been agreed at Forum?

A. Yes in January 2025.

A Member commented that several schools were concerned with the high number of EHCPs and had been reliant on this funding.

CP replied that we needed to ensure we were funding EHCPs correctly and not using money elsewhere with supplementary funding. We would review EHCPs in these cases.

CP informed the Forum that Wigan Council knew there was not enough funding and worked with schools to support where possible. Any schools struggling should be contacting the Wigan Council SEND Team.

The Chair thanked Peter McGhee and Alan Birchall for their work supporting colleagues and Forum over the years. Mr McGhee and Mr Birchall will be retiring at the end of this term. Members wished them both a long and happy retirement.

9. Future Meeting Dates

Members **agreed** the next meeting dates for the 2025/26 academic year.

The meeting closed at 2:25pm.

Background documents (available for public inspection):

Appendices to the circulated briefing reports disclose important facts on which the reports are based and were relied upon in preparing the reports. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy, please contact the Forum Clerk

j.sullivan@wigan.gov.uk.