

Warrington Schools Forum

Minutes – 8 October 2024 (via Teams)

Draft to be confirmed January 2025

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						Tenure (2 years)	
			8 October 2024	3 December 2024	14 January 2025	18 March 2025	17 June 2025	14 October 2025		
Maintained Nursery School Senior Staff (1)	Primary Headteachers Group	Marcia Atherton	P						Oct 2026	
Special School Staff (1)	Special School Headteachers Group	Lucinda Duffy	P						Oct 2026	
Special School Governor (1)	Governors Forum	Hazel Coen	P						Oct 2026	
PRU (1)	PRU Management Board	Lindsay Regan	X						Oct 2026	
Academy – all phases (10) Agreed at Schools Forum on 08/10/2024 this should be: (5 secondary including UTC) (5 primary)	Academy Schools (secondary)	Gwyn Williams	P						Oct 2026	
		John Carlin	A						Oct 2026	
		Christian Wilcocks	A						Oct 2026	
		Emma Mills	A						Oct 2026	
	UTC	Chris Hatherall	P						Oct 2026	
	Academy Schools (primary)	Gary Cunningham CHAIR - Schools Forum	P							June 2025
		Jane Rooney	P							Oct 2026
		Sarah Morris	P							Oct 2026
		Jason Heatley	A							Oct 2026
		Vacant	-							
Maintained Primary School Sector (5)	WAPH and Governors Forum	Siobhan Bentley	X						Oct 2026	
		Andy Hayes	P						Oct 2026	
		Helen Graham	P						Oct 2026	
		Stephen Latham	P						Oct 2026	
		Vacant – Governor	-							
Maintained Secondary School Sector (2)	WASCL	Chris Hunt	P						Oct 2026	
		Vacant	-							
Private Voluntary and Independent Providers (1)	PVI Providers Forum	Vacant	-							

Representing Non-Schools Members (6)	Member	Dates and Attendance						Tenure (2 years)
		8 October 2024	3 December 2024	14 January 2025	18 March 2025	17 June 2025	14 October 2025	
Anglican Diocese (1)	Jane Griffiths	X						Oct 2026
Roman Catholic Diocese (1)	Vacant	-						
16-19 Institutions (1)	Damian McGuire	P						Oct 2026
Parent Governor (1)	Vacant	-						
NEU (Trades Union)	Lucie Humphreys	P						Oct 2026
NASUWT (Trades Union)	Laura Watson	P						Oct 2026

Representing Warrington Borough Council	Member	Dates and Attendance						
		8 October 2024	3 December 2024	14 January 2025	18 March 2025	17 June 2025	14 October 2025	
Director of Children’s Services	Amanda Perraton	A						
Head of Service – Quality Education and Learning	Louise Atkin	P						
Finance Manager	Janet Davies	P						
Senior Accountant (Schools)	Emma Norman	P						

Key:

P ~ Present

S ~ Substitute

A ~ Apologies

- ~ Vacancy

X ~ Absent with no apologies

O ~ Observer

C ~ Meeting cancelled

Presenting item:

Ellen Parry for item 5 (b)

Mark Sarjent for item 6

Also in attendance:

Professor Steven Broomhead MBE (CEO Warrington Borough Council)

Minutes:

Gill Sykes

1. Apologies and Welcome

Louise Atkin welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted. She explained that the chairperson, Gary Cunningham was on Jury service and would join the meeting as soon as possible. Louise welcomed Professor Steven Broomhead MBE (CEO of Warrington Borough Council) to the meeting who was attending as an observer.

On behalf of Schools Forum Louise expressed thanks to those members who have stepped down. They were thanked for their contribution and giving up time to support the Schools Forum agenda. This included Craig Burgess, Ian Moss, Ed McGlinchey and Donna Kendal. New members of the forum were welcomed and included Helen Graham (Cherry Tree), Jason Heatley (Burtonwood) and Stephen Latham (Birchwood CE).

2. Minutes and Matters Arising (from 18 June 2024)

The minutes were accepted as a true record and the following was noted:

- Page 5 mentioned transport costs, this is something to be aware of and to consider in the local offer, considerable local investment has been made to place children in Warrington rather than out of borough and in external placements.

Gary Cunningham arrived at this point and took over chairing the meeting. He mentioned that he has offered to hold a brief meeting after half term with new members to give an overview of how Schools Forum works. Gary noted he will put something together and agree this with Louise.

3. Membership and Schools Forum Constitution review

Emma Norman presented her report to update Schools Forum on current membership requirements and the vacancies we have. Membership should be representative of the demographic of schools within the borough, so it is fairly reflected in the forum's decision-making powers. During the 2023/24 academic year six schools have converted to an academy. Taking this into consideration it would change sector representation to reduce maintained primary reps by one and increase academy primary reps by one.

There have also been some changes to DfE guidance which had not been implemented into our constitution. The Warrington Schools Forum constitution has been updated based on these changes and is presented to Schools Forum to review and implement.

Questions/Comments:

- Hazel Cohen asked if the primary rep vacancies would be for a headteacher or a governor. Emma confirmed that the primary academy vacancy is for a headteacher, and the primary maintained vacancy is for a governor. Hazel asked if forum were happy for her to find out if anyone was interested at the next Governors Forum meeting in December. Forum agreed for Hazel to follow up with Governors Forum for a primary maintained governor rep.
- Hazel noted we have been without a Roman Catholic Diocesan rep for some time. Gary noted we will have to pick this up directly with the diocese.
Action: Louise Atkin to contact the Roman Catholic Diocese to discuss a rep for Schools Forum.
- Gary commented that he had looked at the different academy MATs and they all appear to be representative at Schools Forum.
Action: Gary and Louise to look at any other vacancies and contact some of the trusts and schools to see if anyone wants to join Schools Forum.

- Emma reminded that we have not yet identified a vice chair for Schools Forum. We have had a vice chair previously and we do need to appoint a vice chair. If anyone is interested in being vice chair please get in touch with Gary, Louise or Emma.

Recommendations:

- (i) Recommendation 1: Agree to have the 10 Academy representatives split into 5 primary and 5 secondary representatives to reflect the increasing number of primary academies across the borough. **AGREED**
- (ii) Recommendation 2: Review and implement the updated Schools Forum Constitution document. **AGREED**

4. Funding Update / Extraordinary meeting request / Deficit Procedures

Emma Norman presented her report to the forum to update Schools Forum on the current situation regarding schools funding 2025/26 and the Core School Budget Grant and in response to the updates request an extraordinary meeting in Autumn Term 2 on Tuesday 3 December 2024.

At the end of July, the ESFA reported that DSG budgets for 2025/26 were still to be agreed, and an update last week was that the NFF formula is not changing but not confirmed until after the budget on 30 October. Normally we would have indicative figures about the schools block and HN block to discuss at this meeting but we need to request an extraordinary meeting of Schools Forum to look at indicative figures in December. A core school budget grant was announced in July, being given to schools to fully fund the 5.5% increase on teacher salaries. On Wednesday last week allocations were sent, and for the maintained sector this is coming out to you in the period 7 report. For academy schools that information is available on the DfE website.

In previous years the maintained schools' deficit procedures have been quite informal, working with the finance adviser agreeing plans and making decisions on finances. Some schools have worked extensively to turn around their budget position, others have seen the position worsen. It is prudent for formalised processes to be put in place to support school finances and to hold schools and governors to account. The deficit recovery procedure and intervention process documents (appendices to the report) are still in draft form for maintained schools to provide any feedback to the Senior Accountant. Emma noted there is also an interim document showing what the measures could look like if it was not for a full financial year.

Questions/Comments:

- Louise shared that this has been tabled at WAPH and will be tabled at governors meeting. Reminder given that it is just for maintained schools and was written to support schools more and to keep governors more informed and was requested by school governor leaders.
- Andy Hayes noted that in paragraph 5.2 of the procedure, it mentions involvement of a school's ASIA. Andy felt this was essential not a preference and noted that some of the areas being suggested to be cut aren't physically realistic in running a school. Andy mentioned it was a good idea to have the joined-up thinking.
- Mark Sarjent noted that part of the recovery plan is using accurate forecasting of pupil numbers. Mark suggested giving the school organisation email address to request accurate figures to help prepare the action plan.
- Hazel noted this was for maintained schools and asked what happens with the academies. Emma noted that it is the ESFA that would challenge the academies. Gary informed that Mark meets with academies and gives information about birth rates and place planning, but it is for the trust to sort out financial difficulties rather than the local authority.

Recommendations:

- (i) Recommendation 1: Note the updates in Section 2 & 3 of the report. **NOTED**
- (ii) Recommendation 2: Agree the date for the extraordinary meeting. **AGREED - 3 December**
- (iii) Recommendation 3: Maintained schools review the attached appendices for deficit budget management and provide any feedback to the Senior Accountant. **NOTED**

Subsequent to today's Schools Forum meeting (8 October) it was agreed to cancel the proposed extraordinary meeting with the following explanation: Following the Chancellor's budget announcement on 30 October 2024 the DfE have provided further information that we will not receive any DSG allocation information until the end of November. Due to the further delay on the expected receipt of the DSG allocation information and the requirement for the LA to review the information before providing updates to schools we feel that it is prudent to cancel the meeting scheduled for 3 December 2024, and discuss in full the DSG allocations, at the January meeting where this is already on the agenda in preparation of the submission of the APT to the DfE.

5. High Needs Update

(a) Allocation of HN funding block for 2024/2025

Louise Atkin presented her report to the forum which gives an update on pressures on the HN block. As with other local authorities there is increased pressures on balancing the budget and we have been successful in that. To scrutinise the detail in budget codes we have recruited a manager and a placement finding officer, both sit under James Bancroft and will continue to prioritise the scrutiny of those budgets on independent and out of borough places.

The second part of paper gives the current position and demand for EHCPs. There has been a significant rise in EHCPs from 1,610 in 2018 to over 2000 this year. Partly due to a rise in the number of pupils referred in who are 0-5 years. We are seeing a rise in those numbers partly due to the success of the EY team in identifying needs earlier. In Warrington there has been a drive to increase specialist places at Fox Wood and Green Lane, with significant capital investment supporting schools. Also, for schools with a DP we have looked at expansion to try and keep as many pupils in Warrington as we can, it is better for them to mix with their peers and is not just a financial reason. We have accommodated 247 more children in mainstream provision compared to last year. This is still below national average of 52.7%, we are at 50.87% and our figure is expected to rise. Louise thanked colleagues for their support in mainstream provision.

The overall spend on specialist budgets has increased significantly since last year. The Educated Other Than at School (EOTAS) budget has always had a small amount dedicated to it but there is now a 50% increase in spaces. There is a new EOTAS team to support children back into specialist education and Ellen is doing significant work managing finances. Looking at reducing EOTAS and investing in the reengagement centre for those absent from schools, emotionally based social avoidance, with £132K to support staffing arrangements there. There has been significant investment in Fox Wood, and we now have Fox Cubs, an 8-place setting based at Sandy Lane. There is a new reception class at Green Lane, and an ASD extraordinary provision for 16 pupils in the place of not having the ASD free school. We hope the ASD free school will come into place in 2026. There are plans to move the 6th form provision into the Peace Centre to secure more placements within Warrington.

Questions/Comments:

- Gary referred to item 4.3 of the report and the £300K being put aside for supporting mainstream schools. Gary asked how schools will be identified. Louise noted that Ellen's paper on the notional SEN budget in mainstream schools goes into more detail. We have a working party of headteachers

and SENCOs to identify who the money should be allocated to. Louise noted that one of the pieces of work Ellen is involved with is around K-coded pupils and funding to support them.

Recommendations:

- (i) Note the increased spend in the High Needs Budget.
- (ii) Support the proposal for any surplus in the DSG Schools Block funding to be committed to SEND proposals identified.
- (iii) Have consideration of the impact changes may have on the High Needs Block. There may be a temporary negative impact as funding is reinvested locally. The impact of this should lessen as funding starts to transfer back into the High Needs block as placements in the independent sector are reduced.
- (iv) Note that the council will work with all stakeholders; SENDIASS, WarrPAC, parents / carers and with WAPH, WASCL, school leaders and governors to share the progress of projects.

Responses to the above recommendations were not noted at the meeting and will therefore be confirmed at the next Schools Forum meeting in January 2025.

(b) The notional SEN budget in mainstream schools

Ellen Parry presented her report to the forum to share information about the notional SEN budget for schools in Warrington and to seek Schools Forum approval for the development of a system of exceptional funding for children categorised as SEN Support to supplement school's notional SEN budgets to support more children to have their needs met in mainstream schools.

The SEN budget identified is to guide schools on spend for SEN and to use best endeavours to secure provision for children. It is not determined by the number of SEN children on roll, it comes from a formula factor agreed locally. To determine what SEN notional funding will be most local authorities make calculations using a combination of funding from the basic entitlement factor, the deprivation factors, and the low prior attainment factors in the local funding formula.

We are below national average for identified SEN support and that is increasing year on year. Within primary schools the percentage of children on SEN support ranges from 4.37% to 26.01% and within Secondary from 9.02% to 17.56%. Sometimes there is a mismatch between schools in the same local areas, some may have more SEN support than others, each school uses their own criteria about who to put on SEN support. The proposal is to identify criteria to support us to give additional funding to those schools with a lot of SEN where the funding does not match up. The DfE has given local authorities permission to do this with appropriate criteria in place and to not drive-up misidentification.

This academic year £300K has been identified, and we hope it will keep children in mainstream and therefore show a reduction of children going into specialist placements. If the pilot is successful, we may be able to continue. Appendix 2 shows a list of all schools, funding and the number of children from the October 2023 census on SEN support. In some cases, once £6K has been taken for each EHCP, there is not much SEN notional funding left for those children K-coded and they are the ones we want to prioritise.

We already have the WAPH working party and Gwyn Williams has volunteered to be a rep for the secondary sector. This panel will consider appropriate criteria and explore which schools to allocate funding to. Ellen asked for feedback and if forum members felt there was anything else to consider.

Questions/Comments:

- Gary asked what the timescales are. Ellen noted the next meeting is on 13 November 2024 and will look at clarifying the criteria. It will depend on availability as to whether the panel can start

awarding funding before Christmas. To access the funding schools will be expected to produce an end of year statement to show what the impact is.

- Hazel referred to the last two columns on Appendix 2 and noted that schools with only a small number of SEN children appear to be getting quite sizeable sums. Hazel noted some schools appear to have additional funding and queried if this is reflective of children's actual needs.
- Emma explained that the notional budget is from the school block of funding, it isn't extra funding based on SEN. This is the expectation put in place before any EHCP is applied for. The £6K is part of the notional SEN budget and needs to be shown on provision mapping before applying for an EHCP. It is part of the block all schools have.
- Ellen noted the funding is not based on the number of children in school with SEN, there are lots of other factors and that is why some schools are struggling more than others. Hazel agreed it was right to top those schools up to do what was best for the children and noted her query was more around the fine detail to make sure the money is going where it is needed.
- Gary shared that Schools Forum can be reassured that there will be a working party to quality assure where the funding is allocated.
- Ellen noted that once the panel is established it will be good for SENCOs to be more involved. Louise shared that there is a model based in another local authority which includes SENCOs, and it works well. Gary felt that SENCOs would be welcomed on the panel.

Recommendations:

- (i) Note the proposal outlined in section 5 of the report. **NOTED**
- (ii) Support the proposal. **AGREED**
- (iii) Identify a small group to work with the local authority to review the proposed criteria for accessing the funding. **COMPLETED**
- (iv) Identify two Headteachers or SENCOs to represent schools on the decision-making panel. **Gwyn has volunteered from the secondary sector and the working group will ask for another volunteer to attend the panel.**

6. Growth Addition Fund Update

Mark Sarjent presented his report to the forum to give an update. He explained there was an error in the report at point 2.3 where it stated the growth addition fund had not been increased, but £401K had been added: It should read: The decision to reserve funding for future years was in case there was no more funding available in future years. Schools Forum have allocated an additional £401,000 to the reserve amount of £242,558, rolling forward £643,558 GAF balance.

Mark shared that during the last academic year one project did not proceed, and the money was clawed back into the pot. At the last growth addition meeting three potential projects were outlined but none are proceeding. From a consultation on secondary for 2026 there are some projects coming forward. The sub-group will consider these from the current fund and bring back any recommendations for 2026 to a future Schools Forum.

In Mark's absence the sub-group was led by James Bancroft and discussed a change to Criteria C. We have been utilising the growth addition fund for a year now and it was suggested Criteria C is strengthened. The new proposed wording for Criteria C is being brought to Schools Forum for adoption and is as follows: An expansion or additional places will be 10% or more total places or per year group offered, depending on type of expansion, resulting in the need for additional staffing costs, most likely a teacher, or as agreed with the School Organisation Team.

Questions/Comments:

- Gary asked if there is a date for the next sub-group meeting. Mark informed that we currently don't have a date, but it will be arranged.

- Louise asked if we are comfortable with the same representatives on the working party. Gary shared that he has not heard anything negative, and people are willing to attend.

Recommendation:

- (i) For Schools Forum to consider the proposed changes to Criteria C and agree to amend the wording to reflect that. **AGREED**

7. **AOB** – no items were brought forward to discuss.

8. **Meeting schedule**

All dates are Tuesdays at 4:30pm–6:30pm via Teams except January at 5.15 – 7.00 pm

- 14 January 2025 (face to face)
- 18 March 2025
- 17 June 2025
- 14 October 2025

The chairperson thanked everyone for attending and the meeting was closed.

DRAFT