

Schools Forum

MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING HELD ON 15 OCTOBER 2020 VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS MEETING

Present:

Neil Baker (Chairman), Nikki Barnett, Aileen Bates, Andy Bridewell, Rebecca Carson, Mark Cawley, Michelle Chilcott, Sam Churchill, John Hawkins, Cllr Ross Henning, Mel Jacob, Georgina Keily-Theobald, Lisa Percy (Vice-Chair), John Proctor, Giles Pugh, Graham Shore, Trudy Srawley, Fergus Stewart, David Whewell, Catriona Williamson and Lynn Yendle

Also Present:

Cllr Jane Davies (Portfolio Holder, Education and SEND), Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager), Gemma Donnelly (Head of LA Stakeholder Engagement – ESFA), Alison Enever (Head of Special School Transformation), Helean Hughes (Director – Education and Skills), Cllr Laura Mayes (Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Skills), Cate Mullen (Head of Inclusion & SEND), Lisa Pullin (Democratic Services Officer), Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children and Education)

24 Election of Chair

Resolved:

The Forum agreed to appoint Neil Baker as Chair of Schools Forum for 2020/21.

25 Election of Vice Chair

Resolved:

The Forum agreed to appoint Lisa Percy as Vice Chair of Schools Forum for 2020/21.

26 Apologies and Changes to Membership

Apologies were received from the following Forum members: Jon Hamp (Lynn Yendle in his place), Denise Lloyd and Nigel Roper.

Apologies were also received from the following Wiltshire Council Officers – Helen Jones (Director – Commissioning) and Lucy Townsend (Interim Corporate Director – People).

Membership changes

Georgina (George) Keily-Theobald who is the new maintained special school representative, (replacing Phil Cook) was welcomed to the Forum.

27 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

It was highlighted that there was a transposing error on page 4 of the minutes of the last meeting. Under minute number 16 (Dedicated Schools Budget – Provisional Outturn Budget Monitoring 2019/20) the first key point to be amended to read as below:

Provisional outturn for the financial year 2019/20 – overall overspend was just over £9M. This was essentially an overspend on High Needs coupled with an underspend on school's block, which was largely due to the growth fund. The early years block overspend was due to a larger take up of the scheme than we had funding for.

Resolved:

That the Chairman sign the minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2020 subject to the agreed changes above being made.

28 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair made the following announcements:

Review of Membership

The Clerk had contacted PHF, WASSH and WGA to ask them to confirm their representatives for Schools Forum for this year. There was one change from WASSH to swap over the maintained special school representative as highlighted earlier in the meeting. PHF did not wish to make any changes. WGA have been reminded that there is still a vacancy for a Primary School Governor. (The Head of Governor Services is in contact with the WGA to arrange for the vacancy to be filled.)

On 30 September 2020, Grant Davis carried out a review of the proportion/membership of Schools Forum. He has looked at the October 2019 census information and updated it for academy conversions since the census was taken. He has concluded that at the present time he would not suggest a change in membership and would look to review this again in the new year, once a verified copy of the October 2020 census information is available. It is anticipated that the most probable change which would take place is that there is a move to the Primary School ratio from 4:2 for maintained schools to academies, to a ratio of 3:3. An update will be provided for the Forum's meeting on 21 January 2021.

Admissions Appeals – Charging Update

The survey to ascertain schools' interest in purchasing the local authority admissions appeals was extended to take account of COVID workloads in schools.

A number of schools had responded to the survey and there was no indication from interest received to date that resources at the local authority would need to be extended. If schools subsequently wish to purchase this service it is possible that the team will be unable to fulfil this however, they are committed to working flexibly to support as many schools as possible. A full update report would be shared at Schools Forum at the December meeting.

Local governance procedure is that charging for a new service requires a Cabinet Member decision. This is a legal process with timelines associated. It has therefore been decided to charge at current rates for the rest of this financial year whilst that decision is ratified. The majority of appeals will need to be heard in the next financial year when the new rates will apply to all schools.

Comfort break

As the Agenda was quite lengthy it was agreed that a 5-minute comfort break would be factored in at an appropriate point.

29 **Declaration of Interests**

There were no interests declared.

30 **Updates from Working Groups**

The Forum noted the update received by way of the minutes of the meeting of the School Funding and SEN working group held on 5 October 2020. There were no questions arising.

The Forum noted the update received by way of the minutes of the meetings of the Early Years Reference Group meetings held on 10 and 24 June, 15 July, 10 and 30 September.

It was noted that the date on the minutes of 30 September should be amended to read 30 September (not 10 September).

An early year's representative asked if the DfE adjustment of £539k which wrote off the overspend in the 2019/20 year was credited into the early years budget for 2020/21. Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children and Education) reported that she would respond to that as part of her budget monitoring update in Agenda item 9.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the minutes of the joint meeting of the School Funding and SEN working group held on 5 October 2020 and the Early Years Reference group meetings held on 10 and 24 June, 15 July, 10 and 30 September 2020, subject to the minor amendments of the meeting date on the minutes of 30 September 2020.

31 **Schools Revenue Surplus and Deficit Balances 2019/20**

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) referred to the report which presented the position of revenue balances for Wiltshire maintained schools as at 31 March 2020 and identified those schools in surplus and deficit. Grant highlighted the following:

- The number of LA maintained schools had decreased from 140 to 130 between 31 March 2019 and 31 March 2020 with 5 schools converting to the Equa MAT on 1 April 2019 and 5 more schools converting to academies during the 2019/20 financial year;
- Last year at this time it was reported that the value of surpluses was £10.29 million and 16 schools were in deficit to a value of £3.668 million;
- Surplus balances for primary schools dropped from £9.268 million in 2018/19 to £8.611 million in 2019/20. The Special Schools deficit balance dropped from £80k to £47k;
- Appendix 1 to the report detailed the revenue surplus and deficit balances for individual schools. Local Authorities can be asked to provide further information to the DfE if they have
 - i) At least 3 schools that have had a surplus of 15% or more for the last 5 years of at least £10k;
 - ii) Schools that have had a deficit of 2.5% or more for the last 4 years and the individual deficit is at least £10k each year
- Appendices 3 and 4 showed that an investigation may be triggered by the DfE as 8 schools have held revenue balances of 15% or more and 5 schools have held deficit balances of more than 2.5% and £10k for the last 4 years;
- The net revenue balance of £6.44 million in 2019/20 had decreased by 2.78% from the 2018/19 balance of £6.62 million; and
- The number of schools in deficit had increased from 16 in 2018/19 to 20 in 2019/20 but the overall gross value of the deficit has decreased. The number of schools in surplus had decreased from 124 to 110 and the overall gross value of the surplus had decreased.

A Forum member asked Gemma Donnelly (ESFA) her if she was aware of what an investigation from the DfE would entail? Gemma reported that she was not

involved in that area of work, but she anticipated that it would trigger a letter to ascertain why there were surplus balances as schools should be spending their allocated budgets. They would wish to know if there was plans for spend and if that was the reasons why balances were being held. Similarly, for deficit schools the DfE would like to have discussions for recovery/management action plans.

It was reported that Grant Davis and his team work very closely with School Effectiveness and any schools that are struggling with their budgets to ensure a combined approach. Grant reported that the revenue funding news to be shared later in the meeting would help schools.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the report.

32 **Dedicated Schools Budget - Budget Monitoring 2020/21**

Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children and Education) referred to the budget monitoring report as at 31 August 2020 that was circulated with the Agenda. Marie highlighted the following:

- An overspend of £8.618 million was currently projected against the overall DSG budget;
- Covid had created uncertainty around early years and settings were expected to step up and for the first part of the summer terms, to open up only for children of key workers, those that were vulnerable (Social Worker involvement) and those that had an EHCP. Locally it was agreed that open settings would be paid at 100% with additional incentive payments of £100 per child per week to fund the additional costs of PPE and cleaning. Closed settings were paid at 80%. A hardship fund was set up for closed settings who evidenced financial hardship due to Covid – luckily the take up for that wasn't huge;
- From 1 June it was expected that all settings would be open, and payments continued at 100% for open and 80% for closed settings. Broadly the same number of children are currently in setting as were in Autumn 2019, however dual placements were not currently recommended, and some settings have above average reduced hours and some increased hours. Obviously, the children in settings require funding at the usual rate in order for them to staff appropriately. For some providers seeing a temporary dip, support payments were being made at current hourly rates;
- The LA has a duty of sufficiency for the early years sector and was working closely with providers to provide the support that they were able to within the terms and conditions of the grant funding;

- Due to the uncertainty no variance was forecast on the budgets for free entitlement for 15- and 30-hours childcare, however the modelling included a contingency sum. Officers did not want to fully allocate the budget to have it taken away as the variance next year;
- The high needs budgets are projected to overspend by £11.003 million – the biggest areas of overspend are the Independent Special School packages, NPA's and top ups;
- Whilst the number of EHCP's had increased, there had been a slight dip because of Covid with the increase being 11% compared to 12% last year. 4,289 EHCP's are forecast by the end of the financial year;
- The DSG reserve brought forward of £11.350 million is increased by the positive early years block adjustment of £0.539 million. The forecast overspend would take the reserve into a deficit position of £19.429. This is a major financial risk which is highlighted on the LA's risk register;
- The impact of Covid on the LA's finances is significant and a significant overspend on the Council's general position is anticipated at the end of the financial year; and
- From 2018/19 the DfE have tightened the rules around deficits and require a report from the LA to explain their plans for bringing the DSG account back into balance. With effect from 2020/21 the DfE during expanded the requirements around deficits and these would be outlined later in the meeting, but there was more of an acceptance that there would need to be a longer-term plan for recovery.

An early year's representative reported that he had written to Emily Arch (Senior Policy Advisor – DfE) expressing concern at the future years sustainability of the early years sector across the county, copying in Wiltshire MP's but had not had a response yet.

The Chair asked if there were any known local Schools with increased financial pressures because of Covid. Grant Davis responded that a number of schools had reduced some costs as they had not had to incur supply teaching costs, overtime etc, whilst others did have additional costs relating to PPE and enhanced cleaning. Since the September return to school some had expressed concern about the costs of PPE and sanitisers etc with there being no offsetting saving and those who have staff who are pregnant who are not able to be teaching in classes and there was no additional funding for those circumstances. Grant highlighted that the F40 group were continuing to work to address funding pressures.

Helean Hughes (Director – Education & Skills) reported that from the weekly updates they receive from the DfE they are keen to hear about Schools feeling pressures. It was suggested that Schools Forum members should consider any schools that they were aware of facing pressures and ask for clear details/case

studies of real events that have impacted on a school to submit to the DfE, e.g. deep cleaning costs incurred in the event of Covid cases and additional staffing needs etc. It was agreed that Grant Davis would send a communication via Rightchoice to ask Schools to share their experiences of additional costs.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the budget monitoring position at the end of August 2020 alongside the reports later on the agenda focussing on the high needs block recovery working group, the changes in DfE recovery planning requirements around the DSG deficit and the School Revenue Funding 2021/22.

33 Update from High Needs Working Group and Individual Savings Plans

Helean Hughes (Director of Education and Skills) referred to the report contained in Agenda Supplement 1 which updated the Forum on behalf of the High Needs Working Group who were addressing the budget pressures within the high needs budget. Helean highlighted the following:

- The Working Group had last met in early September and were due to meet again on 12 November 2020;
- The Council's SEND Inclusion Strategy for 2020/2023 was co-produced and was agreed by the Health and Wellbeing Board in September 2020 and included 6 priority areas. The Inclusion and SEND implementation plan had been developed with partners to address the priorities and the SEND Board would be monitoring the progress of the plan;
- Alison Enever was appointed as Head of Special Schools Transformation in March 2020 and Cate Mullen was appointed as new Head of Inclusion and SEND in September 2020;
- ISOS (consultants) continue to work with the LA and a Strategic Lead had been appointed;
- 97 additional resource base and Special School places were achieved in 2019/20 and 66 places to be added during 2020/21. The free school application was successful in Salisbury and £33 million was approved by Cabinet to provide the System of Excellence which included the creation of the North Wiltshire Special School;
- The number of EHCP's continued to increase and the high needs block was forecast to overspend at £11 million;
- The long term 10-year high needs recovery plan (which assumed a £5 million increase in funding year on year) showed that the movement on the DSG reserve would not start to shift until the latter end of the 10-year period; and

- The High Needs Working Group would be overseeing the implementation and impact of the financial recovery plan. A number of planned initiatives had been delayed due to Covid, but most were now back up and running

Councillor Jane Davies referred to the list of Local Authorities with deficits (Wiltshire being 66th on the list) and asked Gemma Donnelly (DfE) what plans were in place to address this and when they might happen. Gemma responded that the party line was that they were aware that the high needs issues were massive and that it was a ministerial priority and that was shown by the increased funding that was received this year but there were no promises as yet if that were to continue. The issue was not going away and was on the radar of the ministers and the Secretary of State. There was currently a spending review going on and the Department were in talks with the Treasury to ascertain their envelope of funding before this could be passed down to LA's and then schools. High needs were already on the agenda and then Covid hit and they were aware that schools were having additional costs and the DfE would be gathering evidence of that. Although they could not guarantee the £5 million funding, there was no appetite within the department for the funding to be reduced although there were obviously demands from other departments because of Covid and that should be borne in mind. The High Needs spending review was delayed slightly because of Covid but the green paper should be out this side of Christmas. They had submitted a bid for High Needs capital and had good evidence to support that.

The Chair reported that it was continually hard to report an overspend on the High Needs block when in reality it was underfunded in the first place and that 50% of the pot related to historic spend and not current need. And previously that the budget had been based on children aged 5 -16 and then moved from 0 to 25. He felt that it was hard for the Director of Education & Skills to manage such a tricky budget that was underfunded rather than a mismanagement of the budget.

Helean reported that she was glad to hear from Gemma about the bid for capital for high needs and asked how that might be accessed/allocated. Gemma confirmed that this was currently being considered by the Department as to the best process for this.

Councillor Laura Mayes asked if the DfE acknowledged the level of work that Wiltshire were doing to try and make systemic change and improvements to SEND. Gemma confirmed that the DfE were aware of this and following her discussions with Officers prior to the meeting she noted that the authority had a good grasp of its pressures and had a good handle on that. This was appreciated by the Department.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the update report on the high needs' budgets.

34 High Needs Funding 2021/22

Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children and Education) referred to the report which outlined the content of the DfE’s operational guidance on High Needs funding for the 2021/22 year. Marie highlighted the following:

- Updates to funding rates are usually announced late in the autumn but it was good to receive news of the allocation in July this year and this was an uplift of £5.5 million which was really welcomed;
- The DfE had also confirmed that they have a limited budget to support those LA’s with the largest proportional deficits – Wiltshire had been assessed as being 66th on the list and for this year the top 6 LA’s were receiving support. We hope that the additional funding would help with the historic deficit and that will be ongoing and that we may move up the list to receive further support; and
- Any LA with an overall deficit on its DSG reserve at the end of the 2019/20 financial year must present a plan to the DfE for managing their future DSG spend, moving away from the expectation that there should be a balanced position within 3 years;
- The DfE had designed a management plan template to help LA’s develop evidence based and strategic plans covering the provision available for children and young people with SEND. This was a good tool to manage the issues and would be shared at the next meeting of the Forum and regularly thereafter.

The Chair asked if the list of LA’s that were in deficit was a published document as he would be interested to find out about the other LA’s on the list to find out if they were local to Wiltshire and may be in a position to share any experiences/knowledge. Gemma Donnelly (DfE) confirmed that the document was not currently published as it was currently based on the draft LA’s accounts – the final accounts were pushed back because of Covid.

The Chair felt that the deficit list reemphasised that high needs is underfunded if the deficits to the DSG are because of high needs and that we are amongst many others LA’s in the same position and it would be useful to know who they are to see if there could be some learning from statistical neighbours etc as to why they are in the position they are in. Gemma reported that the management plan that had been referred to earlier would contain the details of statistical and geographic neighbours so that should be useful for your focus and see who you might partner with and show you were you sit with your outliers.

Gemma reported that there were also a number of LA’s working well within high needs budgets and some having surpluses but accepted that it is harder to turn around a position of deficit than to continue to maintain a surplus budget.

The Chair responded that he felt it still comes down to the original point that it is “the size of the tanker (ours was very small in the first place) and to then have

to take extra load means it is much harder to sail". He would still push it back and felt that it would be useful to find out from those LA's that do have surplus balances to see if their percentage of spend against their income and their needs maybe we could learn from them.

Gemma confirmed that her department were looking at that and that it is not always about a financial thing – as she could see from Wiltshire's recovery plan it has been acknowledged that it is also about culture and systemic change within the authority.

Marie reported that the F40 group had circulated a questionnaire and other authorities were continuing to collate information and so there would be other "unofficial data" which could inform some of our planning whilst we wait for the information to be shared by the DfE.

Marie reported that during the very useful meeting held with Gemma she highlighted that we may want to consider the marketing of the LA's provision in a positive way and speaking to adults who had previously used our own special school provision, but overall it was reassuring to hear that Gemma thought that we were taking the right actions/making the right approaches.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the report.

35 **Special School Update**

Alison Enever (Head of Special School Transformation) gave an update on Special Schools and highlighted the following:

- North Wiltshire School had opened as a single school operating over the three existing sites of Rowdeford, Larkrise and St Nicholas on 1st September. A permanent name would be selected through engagement with pupils, staff, parents and carers and governors, and was expected to be announced by Christmas;
- Sean McKeown started on 1st September as Interim Executive Headteacher and was providing leadership and capacity to support the transformation work;
- The Full Governing Board had been formed for the new school and begun to meet;
- A series of co-production workshops to develop a design for the new build on the Rowde site was underway. Workshops were being attended by parents and carers, staff and governors and were being delivered in partnership with Willmott Dixon, the main construction partner for the new build project;

- Co-design work was also taking place with pupils, being supported by school staff, and the content of this is mirroring the co-production workshops;
- There was a continual focus on keeping people informed and engaged on the programme with a programme update alternating monthly with a full stakeholder newsletter;
- They were continuing to work closely with colleagues in Education to take forward the work on the System of Excellence to deliver an even stronger and inclusion-focused offer across both special schools and mainstream for children with SEND, in line with the SEND Inclusion Strategy; and
- They were working in partnership with Reach South Academy Trust and the Department for Education to support a feasibility study to assess the potential of the UTC building on Wilton Road, Salisbury, as the site of the new SEND free school for south Wiltshire.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the update on Special Schools.

A brief comfort break was held between 3.10pm and 3.15pm.

36 **School Revenue Funding 2021/22**

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) referred to the report which sought to update the Forum on the content of the DfE's operational guidance on School Revenue funding for the 2021/22 year. Grant highlighted the following:

- The operational guidance for school revenue funding would normally be announced in the autumn/winter but this year the funding proposal for 2020/21 was received at the end of July which provides Schools Forum and the schools with a greater lead in period of making strategic decisions. The DfE had confirmed their commitment to move to a "hard" National Funding Formula (NFF) in the future but no date is confirmed yet;
- Indicative figures (based on the October 2019 census) were shared showing the anticipated DSG allocations going into 2021/22. It was noted that the schools block and high needs block would receive an uplift of 3.4% and 10.66% respectively and the central block would receive a slight reduction. The early years settlement had not yet been received;
- The Teachers Pay and Pension grants would cease to be paid as separate grants at the end of the 2020/21 year but would be built into the core baseline funding for schools. The good news is that we had

expected the Teachers Pay Grant to cease at the end of the 2020/21 year;

- Overall, there would be roughly a 4% uplift in the LA's funding for the overall DSG next year;
- The AWPU rates would be increased by £180 for primary and £265 for secondary schools in recognition of the ceasing of the Teachers Pay and Pension Grants;
- The minimum per pupil funding levels would be set at £4,180 in primary and £5,415 in secondary schools;
- There would be a 3% increase in the school's formula core pupil and school led factors;
- Premises factors would be funded at the LA level without inflationary increases;
- The IDACI funding had been refreshed;
- There would be an increase in the maximum primary sparsity funding for primary schools from £26k to £45k. All schools should see an increase in their core funding by at least 2%. It was not yet known what the growth funding would look like this year, but protection was being put in place such that no LA should lose out on this because of a drop in growth in their areas;
- Based on the DSG Schools block allocation indication received, less the growth fund and any transfer to other blocks, Officers believe that the allocation should be fully affordable to fund our schools. De-delegation would be discussed later in the meeting;
- Schools Forum would need to consider this year the introduction of the Mobility Factor – last year it was agreed that this would not be introduced, and it freed up £571k that was used to transfer to the high needs block. It was felt at that time that many of the schools affected by the mobility factor were of a service nature and the MOD's have their own Education Support Fund to access and that was one of the key reasons why this was not implemented previously;
- The DfE were increasing the funding available through Sparsity and would be reviewing their support for small rural schools with a consultation out later in the year which would be shared with the Forum;
- The Split site allowance question would be dealt with in a separate report later in the meeting;

- Under the latest guidance we will still be able to transfer up to 0.5% of the school's block allocation to other blocks and historically the LA had done that, and Schools Forum would be asked to consider that at a future meeting;
- These questions were being posed now to allow time for any members to make any observations, raise questions before the points are considered at the School Funding Working Group and Schools Forum meetings in December 2020;

A Secondary School representative asked if the Teachers Pay and Pension grants would remain visible (on a separate line) within the funding to ensure schools can see that it is there. Grant Davis responded that it this amount would not be shown separately as the DfE had decided to include it in the baseline figures, but they had checked that it was included. However, this was good news as it was assumed that this grant would not continue beyond this year. The decision to include it as part of the AWPU per pupil funding ensured the funding would be baselined and continued for all future years.

A Special School representative asked about the Teachers Pay and Pension grants to Special Schools and how they would be reflected in their funding. Grant Davis reported that they were awaiting clarification from the DfE as to how this should be paid but confirmed that they would receive a £660 per place uplift as part of this payment.

The diocesan representative wished to make Schools Forum aware that there was a predominance of small rural schools in Wiltshire/Dorset so for those schools the sparsity factor was a big issue. Nationally there are about 33% of small rural schools – the South West figure was 52% factor. There was a key risk around the small rural schools and keeping that education to a good standard, so it was urged for forum members and their groups to look out for the consultation when it was issued and to respond as appropriate.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the report.

37

Annual Schools Consultation - Delegation of Central Expenditure 2021/22
Transfer of Schools Block to High Needs Block

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) referred to the report which sought to brief Schools Forum about the proposed consultation to schools and to agree the questions to be sent out to schools. Grant highlighted the following:

- De-delegation of a limited number of budgets/services was available to maintained schools only and they would be consulted on their views/wishes for the following to be retained centrally;
 - i) Free School Meal Eligibility Service

- ii) Licences (Access Budget Planning (formerly called HCSS))
 - iii) Trade Union Facilities costs
 - iv) Maternity costs
 - v) Ethnic Minority Achievement Service
 - vi) Travellers Education Service
 - vii) Behaviour Support Service.
- The results of the consultation would then be brought back to Schools Forum for a decision to be made by the maintained schools' representatives.
 - There were a number of options available to the voting representatives. If the consensus is for the LA to de-delegate the above services then they would retain a level of funding and provide the service centrally for the schools and this would also guarantee a level of service;
 - Appendix 1 lists the questions that will form part of the consultation – this is a simple form that asks if each service should be delegated or retain centrally for the LA to provide;
 - Appendix 2 letter sets out a letter received from Trade Unions who have written to the LA to pass on to their Schools Forums their request that you continue to support de-delegation;

A maintained primary school representative asked if it would be possible to include on the consultation form the value of budgets available so that schools could assess if they were not looking to delegate the service what effect that would have on their individual budgets and a figure to show what percentage of a schools budget share was given to the de-delegate services. Grant confirmed that this information could be included.

- Last year the Forum had agreed to transfer £2 million (0.7%) from the Schools block to the high needs block but this disapplication request was denied by the Secretary of State who agreed to a 0.5% or £1.465 million transfer;
- As highlighted earlier there was an increase in funding coming through from schools funding and the high needs block which sees £700 million of funding for high needs of which Wiltshire's share will be £5.5 million. Our DSG reserve is in a deficit position as we move forward, currently showing as £11.3 million and likely to move upwards;
- There will need to be a discussion on Schools views on transferring the funding across from the school's block to help with high needs and there were a range of options set out in the questionnaire in Appendix 3. The per pupil values of any proposed transfer had been included. If the DfE were consistent that they would only allow a transfer of up to 0.5% then that would equate to a value of £21.90 per pupil;

- The consultation would give schools the opportunity to express their views and suggest any other ideas to fill the funding gap for high needs;

A secondary academy representative suggested that there could be an indication of what a transfer would mean for the high needs deficit over time e.g. if all things remained the same then a transfer of for example 0.5% would mean that the deficit would be addressed in x number of years. For schools a transfer would be affecting their budgets but if they could see what a difference it may make it may be better understood. what a difference it would make – it means that at this rate in 5 years at this rate in 10 years.

Marie Taylor reported that in the high needs recovery plan they had assumed a 0.5% transfer based on the decision taken by the Secretary of State last year to not go above this percentage and it was assumed that this approach would continue. Also, to remember is that when the NFF hard formula is implemented Officers believe that the LA would lose the ability to transfer between blocks – at present there is a lot unknown. However, Marie felt it would be possible to include information about the impact on the high needs block in future years within the questionnaire.

The Chair asked for clarification – if 100% of schools agreed to a £2 million transfer between blocks – then he assumed that would not be agreed by the Secretary of State. Grant responded that the authority would need to have a very compelling argument for it to transfer above the 0.5% as in the last financial year only two LA's did transfer above 0.5%. Unless they LA could show that all schools in Wiltshire were supporting a higher transfer it would be quite tricky to argue. It was probably more about sending the message that we would want the 0.5% being added to the high needs budget as there were funding issues there so that they had that clear message from us.

The Chair felt that having an option to support more than a 0.5% transfer was not really within the schools' gift but that it would show if there was significant support in Wiltshire for a bigger transfer.

Marie Taylor clarified that if schools voted against a higher transfer then the Secretary of State would definitely not support a disapplication request and even with schools support last year the application was still not approved. The questionnaire would be sent out to schools after half term.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum:

- i) Agree the consultation questions for maintained schools around delegation/de-delegation of budgets for central services within the schools' block as set out in Appendix 1, subject to the inclusion of values of delegation as requested.**
- ii) Agree the consultation questions for all schools around setting the 2021/22 Schools Budget as set out in Appendix 3, subject to the**

inclusion of detail of the impacts of the high needs deficit in future years.

38 Split Site Funding Allowance 2021-22

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) referred to the report which sought to update Schools Forum on the split site allowance for schools in Wiltshire. Grant highlighted the following:

- The use of a split site allowance for mainstream schools was an optional factor and was used to support a single school operating over two separate sites;
- The current criteria for schools in receipt of a split site allowance was agreed by Schools Forum in December 2017;
- There were currently 6 primary and no secondaries operating over a split site in Wiltshire;
- The current level of funding was set at £65,000 for primary and £100,000 for secondary schools. Following the introduction of the NFF the differentiation between primary and secondary lump sum allowances was removed with both being funded at £110,000;
- The difference between the split site allowance and the lump sum for primary schools used to be £20,000 (£85k lump sum and £65k split site allowance). The split site funding equated to 76.5% of the lump sum;
- Following the introduction of the NFF, the lump sum increased to £110,000 and the difference between the lump sum and split site allowance increased to £45,000 (for 2021-22 will be £52,800 less than the lump sum). Aligning the split site allowance to the lump sum, based upon the NFF lump sum for 2021-22, would increase the split site allowance to £90,000. Keeping the split site allowance aligned to the lump sum would ensure that the allowance keeps pace with NFF movements;
- The difference between the lump sum and the split site allowance acts as a disincentive to small schools when considering their future structuring options as the loss of the lump sum overshadows the additional split site funding which would be received
- The DfE fund Wiltshire on the basis of the funding awarded to schools so the impact of uplifting the split site allowance has a neutral impact upon Wiltshire's funding;
- The approach of other LA's varied and some applied a model of a basic lump sum and an amount per pupil put this was more complicated and did not necessarily reflect the true additional costs;

- Schools Forum were being asked to consider retaining the status quo or agreeing to align the split site allowances at 76.5% of the lump sum value.

A Special School Governor representative asked what this meant for Special Schools, especially as the new North Wiltshire School was spread over 3 sites. Grant Davis reported that this allowance was only in relation to mainstream schools and they were not able to give out a split site allowance for special schools. Instead, a top-up rate which reflects the additional costs of the school is applied.

The diocesan representative felt that this was a positive step and his view was that the Forum should support the increase to 76.5% allowance as the schools affected are small rural schools that do have cost pressures and as reported earlier this would be funded and so it was a neutral cost implication for the LA.

The Chair reported that this conclusion was echoed by the Members at the School Funding Working Group and he felt that it was important to follow the sentiments of that group and agree to align the split site allowance to the lump sum value.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum agree to align the split site allowances at 76.5% of the lump sum value.

39 Update on Covid - Exceptional Payments and Catch-up Monies

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) gave a verbal update on exceptional payments and catch up monies related to Covid. Grant highlighted the following:

- For schools that had incurred exceptional costs due to Covid between March and July 2020 the DfE had now paid out for claims for premises costs, free school meal costs and additional cleaning costs;
- Claims which included “other costs” outside of the categories above were still being considered by the DfE and the outcomes were awaited. There was also pressure on the DfE to put in funding for the autumn term too;
- The DfE were also looking to open a window of time for claims to be made for additional costs that were incurred at the time (March to July 2020);
- In respect of the Coronavirus Catch-Up Premium, a £1 billion funding package had been allocated for the 2020/21 academic year with £650 million being allocated to schools and £350 million for the National Tutoring Programme;

- The payments for the school's allocations would be made in 3 tranches (autumn/spring and summer terms) and would be a total of £80 per pupil for mainstream schools and £240 per place for special schools; and
- Academies should receive their payments direct from the DfE and for maintained schools this would be passed on as soon it was received by the LA.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the update on Covid payments and catch up monies.

40 **F40 Update**

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) referred to the report which sought to update the Forum on the work of the f40 group. Grant highlighted the following:

- A copy of the letter sent by the f40 group collectively to the DfE on the impact of Covid on school and education funding was included in the agenda. The letter highlighted that the existing issues were exacerbated, sought clarity of guidance around costs that could be reclaimed, gave details of additional costs for which they felt additional financial support should be offered, highlighted additional teaching costs, the loss of income for schools who lost their private income streams, sought further information on the Catch-up grant and asked about support/discretion for the September return to school. It was felt that this was a really good letter that clearly set out the evidence for its concerns.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the f40 update.

41 **Confirmation of Dates for Future Meetings**

The Forum noted that the future meetings would be held on:

10 December 2020
21 January 2021
11 March 2021.

42 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 1.30 - 4.20 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Lisa Pullin, Tel 01225 713015 or email committee@wiltshire.gov.uk of Democratic Services

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