

Schools Forum
School Funding and SEN Working Group
13th March 2020

Minutes

Present: Marie Taylor (Chair), (Finance, local authority (LA)), Grant Davis (Finance, LA), Neil Baker (Christchurch), John Hawkins (Teacher / Governor rep), Catriona Williamson (Mere), Andy Bridewell (Ludgershall Castle) Judith Westcott (Childrens Commissioning LA), Matt Look (Childrens Commissioning LA), Phil Cook (Larkrise), Matt Sambrook (Exeter House / Secondee HT to the LA)

Apologies: Lisa Percy (Hardenhuish), Sam Churchill (Hilmarton), Gary Binstead (Childrens Commissioning LA) Helean Hughes (Director LA) Rebecca Carson (Woodford Valley)

1	<p><i>Minutes from previous meeting</i> The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed.</p>	
2.	<p>Matters Arising There were no matters arising</p>	
3.	<p>Schools Budget Update 2020-21</p> <p>Grant Davis took the group through the key changes of the schools budget for 2020-21; Good news for 2020-21 for Wiltshire, FSM6 fully funded unlike previous years' compromises to part fund. Minimum per pupil funding level – the mandatory minimum, 49 schools gain. GD pointed out that Hampshire could not afford the level and had to apply to the Secretary of State for a disapplication</p> <p>At this point the group had an animated discussion around the report later in the agenda on DfE legislative changes and the implications for Wiltshire.</p> <p>Minimum funding Guarantee – set as a positive 0.5% - 2020-21 – 1.84% as affordable in the formula, for the first time ever, no capping required Growth – high due to the military, a gross increase any reductions are ignored NB asked would the LA consider a reduction to funding for 2, 3- & 4-year olds. MT confirmed it could be reluctantly considered however, the guidance is not clear as it currently stands and legal advice would need to be taken. NB asked whether an academy can set up a resource base without the LA requiring one. GD confirmed the LA would need to be consulted if funding was sought however schools are free to set up with existing funding so support their own pupils. JW confirmed the LA is actively trying to develop RBs with links to special schools. RB places are all allocated through SEN panel.</p>	

4.	<p>Schools Budget Update 2021- EY, HN & CSS Blocks</p> <p>Marie Taylor took the group through the report. Although Schools Forum agreed a transfer of 0.7% in the January meeting, this was not approved by the SoS and so the Chair & Deputy were engaged in off line discussions to agree the best way forward and avoids calling an extraordinary Schools Forum. It is our understanding that only 2 local authorities disapplication's were approved under exceptional circumstances. The Chair & Deputy agreed that the most pragmatic and straightforward approach was for the difference of £0.599m to be added to the growth fund to be available to re-allocate in future years. The group were happy with this approach. The pro-active approach taken around the growth fund will allow flexibility and assist with future years budget setting.</p> <p>High Needs Block. The pressures on the HNB and lower value transfer from SB mean that a balanced HNB budget is not affordable within the increased level of DSG for 2020-21. The three strands of work; inclusive practice, place planning and numerous projects to reduce demand and pressure lead by the HNB working group will be key in achieving a balanced position moving forward.</p> <p>The Early Years block – the 8p for 2-year olds was fully passported however the increase to the 3- & 4-years olds was not affordable. This will be reviewed in the autumn and will take into account the new accounting legislation around DSG deficit reserve.</p> <p>The CSSB despite being reduced by the DfE, central costs are kept to a minimum and a transfer of £0.184m to the HNB possible.</p>	
3	<p>Budget Monitoring for the period to 28th February 2020</p> <p>MT shared her report with the group. The forecast overspend for 19/20 is £8.150m.</p> <p>Highlights: This comprises £1.049m early years – based on higher than budgeted FTE of 2, 3&4-year olds, higher take up of the EY ISF and the DfE's negative in year adjustment of £0.359m.</p> <p>The HNB forecast overspend is £7.356m – again, based on higher numbers of EHCPs and levels of support requested. This forecast will continue to increase if requests continue to be received at the current rates. (12% growth in a rolling year.) The pressures on the HNB continue and the HNB working group will be prioritising demand management, savings projects, commissioning and spend controls.</p> <p>Schools block and CSSB are showing forecast underspends of £0.189 million and £0.067 million respectively. The Virtual HT has taken recovery actions to maximise external grant and underspend DSG.</p> <p>Of major concern is the impact of this on the DSG deficit reserve balance which is held in the local authority's balance sheet. The reserve balance is now forecast to be £10.416m.</p> <p>This overspend needs to be considered moving forward in conjunction with the DfE change in legislation to carry forward DSG overspends to Schools Budgets in future years.</p>	

4	<p>Legislative change to accounting for DSG Clarifying the Specific Grant and Ring-fenced Status of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) from the DfE</p> <p>Marie took the group through the report and changes – this poses significantly different treatment which has huge implications for schools funding in future years.</p> <p>Grant had shared at the Spring term headteacher briefings and Marie had drafted a letter to heads and governors which were shared in appendix 1. Heads voiced significant concerns around the speed and actions required to bring the high needs block into balance. The HNB working group will be taking this forward as outlined in the paper.</p>	
5	<p>Admissions Appeals – Charging of Services</p> <p>Marie took the group through the report. Although a number of options have been explored for example, funding from CSSB, the legal advice recently provided is clear that funds have been delegated and appeals should be chargeable to all schools moving forward. The direct costs only are being recovered in order to provide a level of protection to schools. This change will be notified to all schools and will apply wef September 2020.</p>	
11	<p><i>Date and Time of Next Meeting</i></p> <p>Next meeting – date set at: Monday 1st June 2020 @ 8.30am</p> <p>Re-arranged to Tuesday 2nd June @ 11am</p> <p>Next Schools Forum meeting Thursday 11th June 2020 @ 1.30pm</p>	