

Schools Forum

MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING HELD ON 10 DECEMBER 2020 VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS.

Present:

Neil Baker (Chairman), Nikki Barnett, Aileen Bates, Andy Bridewell, Rebecca Carson, Mark Cawley, John Hawkins, Cllr Ross Henning, Lisa Percy (Vice-Chair), John Proctor, Giles Pugh, John Read (substitute for Sam Churchill), Nigel Roper, Graham Shore, Trudy Srawley, Fergus Stewart, David Whewell, Catriona Williamson and Lynn Yendle (substitute for Jon Hamp)

Also Present:

Cllr Jane Davies (Portfolio Holder, Education and SEND), Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager), Lisa Fryer (Education Officer – Independent Specialist Placements), 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), Simon Thomas (FACT Programme Lead), Lucy Townsend (Director of Childrens Services)

43 Apologies and Changes of Membership

Apologies were received from the following Forum members: Sam Churchill – John Read from Lyneham Primary School attended in Sam's place, from Georgina Keily-Theobald, Mel Jacob, Denise Lloyd and Jon Hamp – Lynn Yendle attended in Jon's place.

Apologies were also received from the following Wiltshire Council Officers – Helen Jones (Director – Commissioning)

Membership changes

The Forum had been notified that Fergus Stewart would no longer be Chair of WASSH from the end of December 2020. This role will be Co-Chaired by Georgina Keily-Theobald from Downland School and Ian Tucker from St John's in Marlborough from January 2021.

The Chair thanked Fergus Stewart for his support on Schools Forum and congratulated him on completion of his term as Chair of WASSH.

44 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2020 were presented and it was

Resolved:

That the Chairman sign the minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2020.

45 **Chair's Announcements**

As the Agenda was quite lengthy the Chair reported that he would include a 5-minute comfort break in at an appropriate point during the meeting.

46 **Declaration of Interests**

There were no interests declared.

47 **Public Participation**

No statements or questions had been received in advance of the meeting and there were no members of the public present at the meeting.

48 **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 30 November 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 4 November and 4 December.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the minutes of the joint meeting of the School Funding and SEN working group held on 30 November 2020 and the Early Years Reference group meetings held on 4 November and 4 December 2020.

49 **Update on the Multi-Agency Families and Children's Transformation (FACT) Programme**

Simon Thomas (FACT Programme Lead) referred to the update on the multi-agency FACT programme that was circulated with the Agenda. Simon highlighted the following:

- The feedback from the FACT Executive Board earlier in 2020 was that the programme should be more focused with defined projects. The 28 projects were then reviewed, and now clear milestones had been set to simplify and target the work of the multi-agency FACT programme;
- There were now 7 current priority projects
 - i) Earliest Support in Communities

- ii) Young People's Service
 - iii) Transitional Safeguarding
 - iv) Integrated Working
 - v) Alternative Provision
 - vi) Early Support Assessment
 - vii) Speech, Language and Communication
- FACT would continue to monitor the following Agendas which are continuing – Troubled Families, Education RESET plan, Stronger Families, PAUSE, SEND Inclusion, Contextual Safeguarding, Dads Matter Too, Council redesign of MH/LD services, Five to Thrive/Trauma informed approaches;
 - There were also some projects currently in the scoping phase – Transport, Easy Support front doors and Multi-agency use of the Case Management System; and
 - Particularly relevant to Schools Forum was the implementation of the Early Support Assessment which was a shift to replace the CAF. The feedback from schools proposed a simplified form which was easier to complete and pull information together from a school and family perspective. Webinars were being presented to promote the programme and training materials were available on the [Safeguarding Vulnerable People Partnership website](#) There was a multi-agency group overseeing this project and feedback was sought for the interim report which would be completed by 1 February 2021.

Helean Hughes (Director – Education & Skills) gave an update on the Inclusion Project and highlighted the following:

- The aims of the project were to maximise the number of learners who are successfully included in mainstream education and to ensure there is quality, suitable alternative provision in place for learners for whom full-time mainstream education is not currently suitable;
- It was hoped that the successes would be a reduction in exclusions, improved attendance for vulnerable learners, reduced children missing from education and that alternative providers are assessed as being highly effective in terms of Health and Safety and Safeguarding; and
- Staffing capacity was being increased, including a Strategic Lead and two temporary officers being appointed for which funding had been accessed from the FACT programme for 18 months.

Simon Thomas reported that they were doing some reflection on FACT to ensure that they have the right education representatives and would be considering a way forward as to how they might usefully communicate and understand the views from the Education sector. FACT was interested to hear the views and the problems faced by those in education and were always

looking at ways to improve the ways in which they work to improve outcomes for families.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the FACT programme update.

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

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

- An overspend of £9.105 million was currently projected against the overall school's budget. The main driver of this was the ongoing pressures on the high needs block;
- There was a small underspend of £0.166 million on the early years budget. For the spring term, the Government's current guidance is that settings would only be paid for children attending settings. The local authority has a duty of sufficiency and has been working closely to support providers with grants as much as they are able to. However, private income losses could not be supported in line with the terms of the grant funding. Due to the uncertainty, no variance was being declared in year as the local authority want to support settings as much as they can. The 19-20 adjustment based on the January 2020 census data was an increase of £0.539 million. In addition, the 20-21 allocation increased by £0.943 million. This reflected a higher count of children than the previous year;
- The forecast underspend on the school's budget related largely to the school's growth fund which currently showed an underspend and would be helping to offset the overall pressure on the DSG;
- The high needs budget was under significant pressures with the major driver of the increased costs being volume. Whilst the number of EHCP's being requested had slowed slightly (possibly due to the Covid restrictions in the summer term) the forecast demand would mean that there could be 4289 pupils with an EHCP by the end of March 2021 which would of course increase the high needs spend;
- The DSG reserve brought forward of £11.35 million is increased by the positive early year's adjustments. The forecast overspend would take the reserve into a deficit position of £19.916 million. The deficit is cash flowed by the local authority and is a major financial risk for the council. By comparison at the end of the 2019/20 financial year the Council's general reserves stood at £15.456 million;

- The impact of Covid on the LA's finances is significant, and this was raised at a meeting with representatives from the DfE today. The additional Covid funding available for Councils and Schools for 2021/22 is not clear and the representative said that she would look into that for the LA; and
- From 2018/19 the majority of LA's had a deficit budget and there were updated rules governing deficits, with LA's being required to produce a 'DSG Management Plan'. This was not published with the Agenda as stated and would be shared with the Forum at the January 2021 meeting.

An Early Years representative highlighted that in paragraph 15 of the report the reserve brought forward of £11.350 million was a deficit and Marie Taylor agreed to amend that in the report.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the budget monitoring position as at 31 October 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.

51 Update on behalf of the High Needs Block Recovery Group

Helean Hughes (Director of Education and Skills) gave a verbal update on the progress of the High Needs Block Recovery Group. Helean highlighted the following:

- The High Needs Block Working Group had last met on 12 November 2020 and the minutes of that meeting had been circulated with the Agenda papers;
- As part of the high needs financial recovery plan the working group were overseeing the implementation and impact of 8 projects;
- Dyslexia Friendly Schools – The British Dyslexia Association were evaluating the scheme that had been set up and schools were carrying out an audit of their provision. This would be reviewed at the end of the school year. The virtual training and this project had not been paused during Covid. 13 primary schools and 5 secondary schools had received 48 hours of training and a parent survey had been created. Once the audits had been completed, action plans would be put in place and the schools would then work towards the quality mark;
- The Inclusion and School Effectiveness project continues to be paused;
- Work on the ELP and Resource Base project had now started, and Officers were looking at the provision across Wiltshire;

- SEND Assessment and EHCP – Officers were currently collating data to get a clear view of priorities and from January 2021 they would reconfigure panels and needs assessments. The FACT programme had provided resource for that;
- Post-16 Transition – Someone from the LA would be leading on this project and again the FACT programme had provided resource for this. This would start from January so further progress would be reported at the next meeting;
- SEND Alternative Provision – A specialist provision was being looked at. There would be a quality assurance process to hold AP providers to account, review provision and consider costs to ensure that there was effective AP with clear entry and exit criteria to get children back into mainstream sooner than previously; and
- Early years – 2nd round of HELM, 84 children were discussed, identified that we have improved as we have gone along and are now settling in with the right support at the right time.

Lisa Fryer (Education Officer – Independent Specialist Placements) provided a verbal update on the Independent Special School (ISS) deep dive that had been carried out since September. Lisa highlighted the following:

- That Lisa had moved over from being a Locality Officer as from 1 September 2020 into a 2-year secondment post looking at Independent Special School Placements as part of the high need's recovery work. Lisa was currently carrying out a deep dive of those children and young people with an EHCP who were currently in ISS's to try to understand why the LA have a high usage of ISS's and to look at ways to reduce the placements and become more creative to develop our local offer;
- From reviewing the ISS cohort, it was highlighted that the greatest number of children was those with a primary need of SEMH. Consideration would be given to look when they may be able to change placements, which may be when they move to different phases of education, to best meet their needs;
- The SEND service had renewed its operational focus on 'value for money' from all ISS/ISP settings and would go through clear procurement processes and ensure what the costs would be transparent and where , placements would be time limited that there was an appropriate exit strategy;
- They had optimised attendance at Annual Reviews as this had been easier with virtual meetings – having been trickier for ensuring attendance when held out of the county;

- Work had been undertaken to understand the potential 'Bring back' cohort and what they might need so that this could inform the local offer, commissioning of places and what could be put in place to support local schools with this;
- Placement sufficiency was a big issue and changes had been made to the Phase Transfer Specialist Panel format to prevent further escalation to ISS placements moving forward;
- Officers were working with the Virtual School around placement moves and to minimise unnecessary escalation to ISS;
- Since the start of the financial year c£300k savings had been identified, but there would continue to always be a demand for ISS placements, but these vary in costs; and
- There was a HNB ISS savings target of £0.5 million savings for 2020-21 and 2021-22 and £1 million in 2022-23. This would be hard to achieve and would need a sophisticated approach, however, the work was already seeing some benefits of understanding this cohort more deeply.

The Chair expressed how please he was that the secondment had happened, and this previously identified work was now carried out.

Cllr Laura Mayes, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills asked about parent involvement in the discussions about the placements for children and young people and highlighted the importance of involving parents in the discussion. Parents know what they want for their and they will want to fight for what is best for their children.

Lisa Fryer responded that all the work was person centred and acknowledged that it was important to engage parents earlier as there is often a lot of anxiety of what is coming next when children move through the education phases. Cllr Mayes asked what discussions were taking place with the Wiltshire Parent Carer Council around the strategy for this work. Lisa Fryer confirmed that she had not yet had a deep discussion with the WPCC but that this would be a priority as they moved forward in January.

Helean Hughes confirmed that the WPCC was not currently represented on the High Needs Working Group and would take that as an action to seek representation for the meetings.

A Forum Member questioned asked if access had been denied to the authority for some out of county based annual reviews. Lisa Fryer confirmed that previously whilst invites had been received to the meetings there had been issues with Officer attendance because of the distances involved, but now with remote working this made participation much easier.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the updates on the High Needs Block Recovery Group and the Independent Special Schools deep dive.

52 **Dedicated Schools Grant Consultations 2021-22**

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) referred to the report which sought to update on the results of the most recent Autumn consultations relating to De-delegation of funding for central services and a possible transfer of funds from Schools Block to High Needs Block. Grant highlighted the following:

- Under the 'soft formula' all funding should be fully delegated to schools, however certain central services can be 'de-delegated' for maintained schools, with approval of the maintained Schools Forum representatives;
- All maintained schools were consulted, and 36 responses were received – 33 responses from primary schools and 3 from secondary schools;
- The responses received were significantly in favour of retaining the de-delegated services in both primary and secondary schools;
- In relation to a possible transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, the Local Authority have the flexibility to move up to 0.5% and anything higher would require approval from the Secretary of State through a disapplication request. It had been agreed at the October 2020 meeting of Schools Forum that this would not be applied for as only two applications were approved for the 2020-21 year;
- The consultation was carried out via Right choice and was open to all schools. A total of 22 responses were received - 3 secondary, 1 special and 18 primary schools. 15 out of the 22 did support a transfer from Schools Block to High Needs and all 22 respondents did not want a reduction in Top-Up values;
- Only 4 out of 22 supported a 'hybrid' option of a block transfer and a reduction in Top-Up values;
- Of the 15 that supported a transfer, 53.33% (8) voted for a £1.4m 0.5% transfer;
- At the October 2020 meeting of Schools Forum it was highlighted that approximately £800k of funding could be made available (through preliminary modelling) if the Mobility factor was not introduced (£571k) and if the maximum Sparsity allowance for primary schools was not increased from £26k to £45k, this would release a further £220k of funding which could be transferred to the High Needs block.

The Diocesan representative expressed concern about not increasing the Sparsity allowance to fund the transfer to High Needs and felt that the sparsity

increase would be needed to support small schools as Wiltshire had a number of small village schools. He felt that it this would be the wrong to help with the High Needs pressures to take away the identified national support for small rural schools.

Grant Davis responded that the report was highlighting the options available to Schools Forum. The decision would need to wait until the DfE inform of the funding levels on 18 December to see if the NFF was affordable for Wiltshire. Grant did not see a reason why it would not be affordable but would need confirmation of the funding levels.

The Chair suggested that a report be prepared for the next meeting to identify which Schools in Wiltshire would be eligible for Sparsity funding and show options of how implementing Sparsity allowances or not would affect those schools to aid the decisions that would need to be taken by Schools Forum.

Grant Davis reported that the whole issue of sparsity has caused inequity of funding. Where there are two schools of a similar size and composition but geographically one school is considered sparse and the other is not, then one school will be eligible for sparsity funding and the other will not be eligible. The current funding is felt by Schools Forum members not to currently provide an equitable solution. Schools Forum supports the presumption against the closure of small and rural schools but does not feel the current DfE Sparsity funding factor provides the most appropriate solution. The DfE will be issuing some consultation on supporting small and rural schools and the Local Authority would look forward to responding to it, although it was not anticipated that this would be ready to report on by the January 2021 meeting.

It was agreed that a report would be prepared for the January 2021 meeting, to identify the numbers and locations of schools that benefit from the Sparsity allowance within Wiltshire.

Grant Davis reported that for this financial year there were 31 schools that received the Sparsity Allowance (2 secondary and 29 primary schools) with a total allocation of £0.345 million.

Resolved:

- 1. That Schools Forum note the report which details the local consultation responses in relation to the schools delegated budget for 2021-22 financial year.**
- 2. That Schools Forum agree “in principle” that the following services be de-delegated for Maintained Schools:**
 - i) FSM – primary and secondary**
 - ii) Licences – primary and secondary**
 - iii) Trade Union – primary and secondary**
 - iv) Maternity – primary and secondary**
 - v) Ethnic Minority Support – primary only**

- vi) Traveller Education – primary only
- vii) Behaviour Support – primary only

3. That Schools Forum agree to a Block transfer between Schools Block and the High Needs Block, of 0.5% (the maximum allowable without Secretary of State approval) which equates to approximately £1.4m, subject to affordability of the National Funding Formula, when school funding for 2021-22 has been confirmed.
4. That Schools Forum receive details of the number and location of the Schools in Wiltshire that would be eligible to receive the Sparsity Allowance and show the impact of not agreeing to move to the higher level of funding.

53 Allocation of Funding for Pupil Growth 2021-22

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) referred to the report which sought agreement on the methodology for allocating funding for pupil growth from the Schools Block Growth Fund in 2021-22. Grant highlighted the following:

- There was a change in the methodology for funding for Local Authorities for growth two years ago, however this had not changed the way in which growth funding was allocated locally to schools;
- Growth allocations for 2021-22 would be based on the pupil data from the October 2020 census and the October 2019 census. The DfE measure growth within Local Authorities at middle layer super output area (MSOA) 1 level and in Wiltshire there are 62 MSOA's with an average of 4 schools in each MSOA area;
- Whilst there would not be any new schools opening there had been pupil growth in Wiltshire. The allocation for 2021-22 would be announced later in December as part of the schools funding announcement;
- The Growth Fund comprises of 3 elements – New schools, basic need expansion and infant class size regulations;
- Local Authorities may set aside Schools Block funding to create a small fund to support good schools with falling rolls and this fund would represent a top slice of the Schools Block for which criteria would need to be established to support the fund, including clear trigger points for qualification;
- Schools Forum has always resisted the establishing of a Falling Rolls Fund, but were being asked to give consideration to doing so in light of previous discussions and the additional pressures being placed upon the Schools Block; and

- There had been no pressure from Schools or other groups for the establishing of a Falling Rolls Fund.

Resolved that Schools Forum:

- i) Approve the criteria for allocating Pupil Growth Fund in 2021-22.**
- ii) Note that the budget for the Growth Fund be set at its meeting in January 2021, when the full DSG has been confirmed for the 2021-22 year.**
- iii) Following discussion, it was agreed not to establish a Falling Rolls Fund.**

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

54 **Dedicated Schools Budget - Provisional Central Schools Block Update 2021-22**

Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children and Education) referred to the report which sought to update the Forum on issues relating to the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) budget for 2021-22 financial year and the decisions that would need to be made as part of the budget setting process. Marie highlighted the following:

- That the Forum were being asked to make some in principle decisions at the meeting to make the modelling and decision making for the January 2021 meeting slightly easier;
- The provisional allocation for the Central Schools Services Block was £2.449m. The DfE had been reducing payments for historic commitments and £0.367m had been allocated for this based on those commitments agreed as eligible in 2020-21 reduced by 20% of £0.092m;
- The Central Schools Services Block is the funding for the LA to carry out central functions on behalf of pupils in all schools – the central functions;
- Section A – Central copyright licences. Although notification of this amount had not yet been received the same level of inflation had been assumed so this amount could change;
- Section B - The 2.75% pay award for salary inflation had also been assumed, but following the Government Spending Review these amounts would change so at the January 2021 meeting these amounts would not be at the same level;
- Historic commitments – The same level of funding for the LAC Personal Education Plans and the Child Protection in Schools Adviser had been requested. The prudential borrowing proposed allocation had been

reduced so that would mean there would be an unallocated CSSB balance that could be available to transfer to the High Needs block;

- ESG funding was previously removed as a ringfenced grant. In Wiltshire the ESG was not directly removed from education budgets but taken as a reduction in funding for the whole council. This is because education is a priority for the Council.;
- The DfE had provided an alternative transitional grant but had not yet confirmed that the school improvement monitoring and brokering grant would continue into year 2021-22 – should this grant be removed or significantly reduced, the situation would need to be reviewed; and
- Assuming the proposed budget is accepted by Schools Forum, an amount of £0.195m unallocated CSSB is estimated to be available to transfer to fund high needs pressures.

Resolved:

1. That Schools Forum note the report and decisions in relation to the Central Schools Block budget 2021-22 and agree the following amounts in principle in advance of setting the Schools budget in January 2021

Approval required & legislative narrative	Services covered	2020-21 Budget £M	Wiltshire Budget Proposal 2021-22 £M
<p>Section A</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools forum approval is not required (although they should be consulted) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Copyright Licences for 2021-22 for Wiltshire as set by the DfE. 	£0.382m	£0.392m*
<p>Section B</p> <p>Schools forum approval is required on a line-by-line basis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • back pay for equal pay claims • remission of boarding fees at maintained schools and academies • places in independent schools for non-SEN pupils • admissions 	<p>The limitation on increases to centrally held spend has been removed from the budgets for admissions and servicing of school’s forums. It is therefore proposed to apply salary inflation to the budget for the central teams and address the safeguarding and admission pressures. This is affordable within the overall CSSB allocation.</p> <p>Services previously funded by the retained rate of the ESG**:</p>		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> servicing of school's forum contribution to responsibilities that local authorities hold for all schools contribution to responsibilities that local authorities hold for maintained schools (voted on by relevant maintained school members of the forum only) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Welfare Service 	£0.194	£0.199
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asset Management 	£0.181	£0.186
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statutory / Regulatory Duties 	£0.651	£0.669
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions 	£0.426	£0.438
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Servicing of Schools Forum 	£0.003	£0.003

Approval required & legislative narrative	Services covered	2020-21 Budget £M	Wiltshire Budget Proposal 2021-22 £M
<p>Section C</p> <p>Historic Commitments: Schools forum approval is required on a line-by-line basis. The budget cannot exceed the value agreed in the previous funding period and no new commitments can be entered into</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> capital expenditure funded from revenue – projects must have been planned and decided on prior to April 2013 so no new projects can be charged contribution to combined budgets – this is where the school's forum agreed prior to April 2013 a contribution from the school's budget to services which would otherwise be funded from other sources existing termination of employment costs (costs for specific individuals must have been approved prior to April 2013 so no new redundancy costs can be charged) 	<p>Funding for LAC Personal Education Plans - Schools Forum decision December 2007 to support PEPs for Looked After Children from 2008/09 financial year as required under "Care Matters". Allocation based on original estimate of £500 per LAC and managed by Virtual Head Teacher.</p>	0.103	0.103 <i>Meets definition And required evidence is available</i>
	<p>Child Protection in Schools Adviser - Schools Forum decision January 2006 to support staff within Children's Services to provide support and advice to schools enabling them to meet their statutory responsibilities.</p>	0.056	0.056 <i>Meets definition And required evidence is available</i>

• Prudential borrowing costs – the commitment must have been approved prior to April 2013	Prudential Borrowing Schools forum decision to support approx. £3m capital financing for 13-year period	0.300	0.208 <i>Meets definition And required evidence is available</i>
Total		0.459	0.367
Balance unallocated and available to transfer to the HNB		0.184	0.195

2. That Schools Forum note that notification of the school improvement monitoring and brokering grant has not yet been shared by the DfE. If the grant ceases or is significantly reduced, the expenditure plan will need to be reviewed, decisions made will be reconsidered at the next available Schools Forum meeting.

55 Dedicated Schools Budget - High Needs Block Update 2021-22

Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children & Education) referred to the report which sought to update Schools Forum on the issues related to the High Needs Block for 2020-21 and a pre-briefing for the decisions that will need to be made as part of the budget setting process for 2021-22 at the January meeting. Marie highlighted the following:

- The High Need block provision allocation for 2021-22 is £57.529 million which represents an increase of £5.541m (10.66%). 36% of Wiltshire's funding was based on historical funding compared to the national average of 33%. Whilst the uplift was most welcome it does not fully address the magnitude of cumulative pressures from previous financial years or fully address the anticipated pressure for the 2021-22 financial year for Wiltshire. It was hoped that the long-awaited SEN review would address and imbalance;
- The additional pressure of £10.1m to meet current spend levels continues which was not the same as high need spend as there are vacant posts in year which we would wish to recruit to;
- The total estimated cost pressure for 2020-21 was £14.063m. It was not possible to fully fund the pressures from within the high needs block and an assumption model could be that there is a transfer from the Central Block, a transfer from the Schools Block and a transfer of any excess

from the Growth Fund would still mean an estimated funding shortfall of £8.091 for the High Needs block; and

- The current forecast overspend on the School Funding reserve was £19.916m. The level of deficit had triggered the requirement to submit a DSG Management Plan to the DfE and this would be shared with the Forum in January for approval.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the pressures on the High Needs Block for 2021-22 and the potential options to reduce the shortfall against high needs budgets including agreeing a transfer from Schools Block to balance the high needs pressures and noted that this would be considered in full at the January 2021 meeting.

56 **Dedicated Schools Budget - Early Years Block Update 2021-22**

Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children and Education) referred to the report which sought to update Schools Forum on issues related to the Early Years Block for 2021-22 and the decisions that would need to be made as part of the budget setting process for the 2021-22 financial year. Marie highlighted the following:

- Details of the 2021/22 early years funding will be received later in December, together with the rest of the DSG information for 2021/22;
- The Chancellor announced in his spending review that £44m was being put into early years education to increase the hourly rate for providers and whilst this would probably not even cover the cost of living it was better to have than not to have. The modelling options would look to pass on the maximum possible increase to providers.

An Early Years representative asked whether the national funding increase of 8p for 3&4 year old funding which was not possible to fund in 20-21 plus 5p potential to change 21-22 funding could be taken onto account when modelling the 21-22 hourly rates. Marie Taylor confirmed that they would model likely childcare hours and the total allocation for 21-22 and reminded the Forum there was a minimum % to pass to providers from the funding. When the allocations are received, January's report and detailed working paper will look at modelling options within % of pass through.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the update on the Early Years Block.

57 **Covid Costs - Case Studies from Schools and Early Years Settings**

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) referred to the report which shared with Schools Forum the results of a recent survey with

schools relating to the additional Covid costs being incurred by Schools and Early Years settings. Grant highlighted the following:

- The Director for Education and Skills (Helean Hughes) has regular contact with the DfE to discuss a number of issues including Covid related costs. A key topic raised by schools and Early years settings is the continuing additional costs pressures faced since the start of the 2020-21 academic year;
- A survey was sent to schools and early years settings to give them the opportunity to demonstrate the additional costs that they are incurring which cannot be met from existing resources. The results of the survey will be used to help lobby local MP's, support the work of the f40 group and ask the DfE for additional funding to support schools through the current pandemic;
- Over 30 responses had been received and common themes related to cleaning – deep cleans, materials and the increased frequency required, staffing to cover those who were shielding, absent and isolating, PPE costs, catering costs (making arrangements to ensure bubbles can be retained), additional IT costs to enable remote working etc;
- There were also lost income sources from breakfast and after school clubs, holiday clubs, income from lettings and catering, contributions from 'Friends' of the school or PTA organisations and less children on roll due to some parents choosing to home educate;
- Some organisations had been able to mitigate some additional costs through making savings in some budget areas;
- The impacts on the schools that had responded were shown in the appendices and there were huge differentials between schools - this information would be shared with the f40 group;
- Not surprisingly the number of pupils eligible for a Free School Meal had grown significantly during the Covid period. Given the projected growth in FSM eligible pupil numbers, there was the potential that due to the lag in school funding, schools will be educating significantly greater numbers of pupils eligible for FSM, FSM6 and PPG funding than they are actually funded for. If there was recognition of this by the DfE this would alleviate a significant additional cost pressure; and
- The findings from the survey would form part of the Authority's lobbying with Members, the f40 group, MP's and other stakeholders to highlight the funding shortfall.

An Early Years representative reported that many early years settings had been unable to continue with their breakfast and/after school club provisions due to mixing of 'bubbles' and those were significant losses that were not covered by

the Government funding and a risk that the settings could not continue to remain open.

A secondary academy representative asked how any shortfall might be distributed. Grant Davis responded that funding would be based on October Census data and the Pupil Premium funding based on the January census data and from the DfE's point of view they might consider that they are short funding against the FSM but with the announcement public sector pay freezes they would recognise the school budgets have some savings and expect schools to get manage within their allocation.

The Chair agreed that the anticipated shortfall was worrying shortfall and that in the January decision matrix if there was a shortfall, it would be a cost pressure that would need consideration.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the report and support the use of the survey and Free School Meal projections in lobbying for additional funding.

58 **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 and share their recent communication with the DfE in relation to the impact of Covid upon schools. Grant highlighted the following:

- That the f40 group are continuing to campaign on behalf of its members on the continuing impact of Covid on school and education funding and a letter was sent to Tony Foot (director of the Education Funding Group, DfE) and Tom Goldman (Deputy Director, Funding Policy Unit, DfE) on 20 October 2020; and
- Subsequent to the letter being sent a meeting was held between the f40 group and Tom Goldman and they were advised that the DfE were relying on the information they could provide and asked for information around the costs that schools are facing. Wiltshire would continue to support f40 with their lobbying and it was good to note that discussions with the DfE were taking place and that we are partner to that. A copy of the notes from that meeting held on 3 November would be circulated with the minutes of this meeting (**attached as Appendix 1**).

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the content of the f40 letter in support of additional Covid related funding for Schools.

Appendix 1 to Minutes - Minutes of f40 meeting

59 Update on School Admission Appeals

Libby Johnstone (Democracy Manager) referred to the update on the introduction of charges for Admission Appeals. Libby highlighted the following:

- The Forum would recall that the DfE had updated guidance around admission appeals and that this poses a number of challenges including confirmation that funding for admissions appeals lies with schools; the subsequent introduction of charges and schools electing to accept pupils above PAN to avoid appeal costs;
- Schools Forum had previously not favoured options to increase the Central Schools Services Block or take an allocation from the budget of maintained schools to fund admission appeals as this would not affect all schools, including those that do not have appeals. The preferable option would be to introduce charges to schools that do have admission appeals;
- Schools were consulted over the summer and a survey was issued to ascertain if schools would be likely to buy into an appeals service at a similar rate; and
- Since the survey, the local authority has become aware of situations where schools would prefer to admit pupils over the Planned Admission Number (PAN) in order to avoid paying for appeals. This would lead to popular schools being over capacity whilst other local schools continued to have surplus places. It was felt that it would be useful to have feedback from Schools Forum members on this issue and for them to consider drafting a position statement to send out to schools.

Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children and Education) reported that the Authority's powers were limited in this matter, but the Admissions Team had advised that it would be useful if there was a joint statement issued. Unfortunately, there was not a statutory duty for a School to stick to their PAN and if the PAN's were simply going to be ignored by schools this would be difficult for the LA to manage the planned admission numbers. It was suggested that there should be a LA and Schools Forum expectation and hope that schools would conform to their PAN.

The Chair asked what the point of a PAN was if schools can ignore it. Helean Hughes (Director – Education & Skills) confirmed that schools do have control as an Admission Authority, but for voluntary aided schools and academies, Wiltshire was not the Admission Authority. It was suggested that Schools Forum could provide a statement to ask schools to consider and be mindful of the situation the LA is in and highlight the need for place planning and to be away of growth planning income.

After discussion it was agreed that a group be set up to discuss this further outside of this meeting. Neil Baker, Nigel Roper, Giles Pugh, David Whewell and Lisa Percy volunteered to join this group and work with Clara Davies and Libby Johnstone and an update could be provided at the January meeting.

Resolved that Schools Forum:

- 1. Note the update on the introduction of charges for School Admission Appeals and that the Local Authority is currently considering representations received following the consultation.**
- 2. Set up meeting to between those detailed above to consider and prepare a draft position statement on behalf of Schools Forum to be agreed at the January 2021 meeting and then circulated to all schools.**

60 **Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools 2021-22**

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) referred to the report which sought to update Schools Forum on the Wiltshire Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools. Grant highlighted the following:

- That the Local Authority is required to publish a scheme for financing schools and that when making any changes to a Scheme that all maintained schools are consulted before approval is sought from Schools Forum. Wiltshire's current scheme document was considerably dated, and a rewrite had been undertaken which would be subject to consultation before being brought to Schools Forum for approval.

Resolved that Schools Forum:

- 1. Note the proposed consultation which will be sent to maintained schools.**
- 2. Consider the introduction of the new Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools at a future meeting, based upon the consultation responses.**

61 **Confirmation of Dates for Future Meetings**

The Forum noted that the future meetings would be held at 1.30pm via Microsoft Teams:

21 January 2021
11 March 2021.

62 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 1.30 - 4.35 pm)

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Notes of meeting with DfE held on Tuesday, November 3, 2020

DfE:

- Tom Goldman, Deputy Director, Funding Policy Unit, Department for Education
- Kwamina Korsah, Policy Advisor, Department for Education

f40:

- Cllr James McInnes, f40 chair / Cabinet Member for Children and Schools, Devon CC
- Margaret Judd, Funding Manager, Dorset Council
- Andrew Minall, Head of Education Financial Services, Hampshire CC
- Karen Westcott, Secretary of f40

1. Introductions

TG explained that Tony Foot had now returned from sabbatical and had been appointed the Department for Education's Director of Finance. He said unfortunately TF had been unable to join the meeting that day.

2. Discussion

JMcl thanked the DfE team for the opportunity to meet to discuss the impact of Covid-19 on school and education budgets.

He said budgets were already tight for schools, and the ongoing pandemic had exacerbated the issue for many.

TG said the meetings with the f40 group were useful. He said the government remained strongly interested in additional Covid costs for schools, and the more information DfE had, the better.

He said the DfE needed evidence and examples, which could most usefully come through representative organisations, such as f40.

JMcl said schools had done a tremendous job – opening to all pupils from September and working within the new parameters of the pandemic.

He said, as he understood it, schools were able to claim back additional costs brought about by the pandemic from earlier in the summer term, but that they were so far unable to claim back any more recent expenses.

KK explained that he was managing school budgets and policy around Covid funding. He said schools would be able to take advantage of a second 'mop up' round of claiming back expenses that were still outstanding from the summer term.

3. Extra costs

JMcl said most children were back in class from September, but schools were incurring a lot of extra costs, particularly with regards supply teaching, as so many teachers were having to isolate due to Covid.

JMcl said demand had already outstripped the supply teacher budgets of many schools, and f40 believed the issue needed to be recognised and addressed.

- Subsequent to the meeting, the DfE announced additional financial support relating to staff absence costs between the beginning of November and the end of December 2020.

JMcl said many schools would also be facing additional winter bills this year. He said as Covid required schools to keep windows and doors open, to aid ventilation, many would be utilising the heating more to compensate.

MJ said there were many additional costs, such as:

- Buying extra resources – as children could no longer share due to social distancing
- Winter costs
- Additional water usage caused by extra cleaning and washing of hands

MJ said she believed a long-term view needed to be taken on the impact of Covid, as while some schools may have made savings initially – from cancelled trips, heating, closing part of their buildings – many will have incurred greater costs over the autumn term.

She said cash flow may be a problem for some schools, so ensuring a sustainable plan was in place would be vital.

AM said one size did not fit all and he understood why the Treasury would push back on some aspects of the Covid costs.

However, he said it was important to recognise that while some schools could be flexible in the way they operated their budgets and staffing levels, others had very little wriggle room. For some, Covid was having a real impact on their ability to continue.

AM said, for example, a small school with four teachers that relied on the headteacher to step in when a teacher was off ill, would struggle if any of its teachers had to isolate for two weeks. Whereas a large school with many teachers may be able to operate more smoothly when members of staff had to isolate.

AM said he believed, due to size, small schools were less able to cope with staff absences than larger schools during Covid because recent funding changes had typically directed greater gains to the bigger schools.

AM said schools were also having to buy extra resources, and were having to pay more for water, heating, and sometimes additional things, such as sewerage services.

For example, he said there were cases of schools having to empty cesspits twice as often as usual because of the extra cleaning and hand washing.

4. Special Schools

TG asked what the situation was in special schools, and said it was vital they were considered in all of the discussions.

JMcl said special schools were spending more on PPE, which should be recognised by the DfE. f40 provided information to TG and KK about how much had been spent on PPE by an academy trust during the first six months of the pandemic – more than £43,000 over five schools.

It was explained that some pupils at special schools were prone to licking and biting staff, so wearing full PPE was paramount for teachers and support staff.

5. DfE requesting more information

TG said the DfE would like more information about the additional cost of PPE for special schools, along with other additional costs for SEND schools during the pandemic.

He also said the DfE would like more information about the number of staff that were absent from schools due to Covid, and schools' ability to cope with gaps in staffing.

He agreed that one size did not fit all. He said the DfE would want to ensure that any system supported schools, whilst also allowing them to respond to their individual circumstances.

He said the more understanding the DfE had about the degree of variability between schools, the better it would be able to do that. He said they were keen to know what proportion of schools – even with the best will in the world – f40 felt could not cope with the added pressures of Covid and teacher absence.

JMcl said it appeared that secondary schools were coping better than primaries. He said when a member of a primary class contracted Covid, the whole class went off for two weeks, including the teacher and teaching assistant. In a small school, the impact was great.

KK said it appeared that economies of scale were at play – the bigger the school, the better they were able to cope.

KK said the DfE was interested to know how close schools were coming to closing and not being able to continue their activities. He said the department was trying to get the best possible sense of how widespread the problem was.

JMcl said in Devon, they had had 235 teachers isolating (at that time). He said there were a lot of very small primary schools in Devon, which were struggling with the Covid situation. However, he said they hadn't, at that point, reached a position where they had to close.

TG said he appreciated that some schools didn't have a lot of fat in the system, so were unable to deal easily with teacher absences.

He said it could be that schools in deprived areas had a greater number of Covid cases but were relatively more highly funded, so were better able to deal with teacher absences due to isolating.

Conversely, he said in less deprived areas, while the cases of Covid may be fewer, schools may be less able to deal with teacher absences when they arose, purely because they had fewer resources.

MJ said even schools with a greater number of staff may have to resort to support staff teaching children when qualified teachers went absent, so children were still losing out – even if the schools appeared to be coping better.

MJ also reminded the DfE that not all supply costs were measured against a specific supply budget. She said a headteacher or other senior leader may undertake supply, for example, but that would be at the expense of the time they had to undertake their headship/school duties.

MJ said some schools employed supply via zero-hour contracts of known staff (retired staff for example), but the costs may appear in the general staffing budget, not in the supply budget.

TG agreed and asked if f40 could help in providing more information.

6. Covid testing in schools

JMcl asked if teachers and pupils could be given higher priority when it came to Covid testing. He said entire cities were now being tested, and so questioned whether whole schools could be tested in the same way – with results returned immediately.

TG said he would pass that suggestion on. He agreed that the faster the testing, and more widespread it was, the better, although there was, of course, a much wider context in deciding how to prioritise the availability of testing.

7. Cash flow

TG asked if many schools were struggling with their cash flow. He said, as it stood, he believed there were only a few schools with serious cash flow issues and there were mechanisms in place to deal with them. He said he would be interested to know if that situation was changing.

Members of f40 agreed.

8. Loss of income

MJ said loss of income was also a big issue for many schools and Early Years providers.

MJ said she appreciated that schools could not be recompensed for everything they had lost but said f40 believed they should be compensated for part of their lost income – as was the case for local authorities.

TG asked how much of a problem loss of income was to schools.

AM said some breakfast and after-school clubs had closed, while others had started running again, but were scaled back. He said schools were often still incurring full costs from these clubs, while not receiving the same income.

He said many schools were dealing with redundancies, and their associated costs, linked to clubs and activities, such as these.

MJ said school clubs and Early Years were not being used as much as they were. She said parents were often not using them because they wanted to restrict contact and the chances of their children contracting the illness. She also said many parents were working from home, so the need for after-school clubs and nurseries had declined.

JMcl said a lot of activities, such as cubs and scouts, had not resumed since the first lockdown.

9. Balancing savings with extra costs

TG said he appreciated that schools had faced additional costs.

However, he said schools may have also made some degree of off-setting savings during the first lockdown period. TG said the DfE would welcome more information about both savings and additional costs.

MJ said the maintained schools in Dorset had been asked to provide the local authority with a predicted return on budgets for 2020/21. She said the council wanted to be able to compare year on year expenditure. However, she said that information was only just being collected now.

AM said there would be savings, whether it be from catering, school trips, or heating and water usage, though, of course, outweighed by the additional costs incurred.

JMcl said it was important to remember that most schools remained open throughout the lockdown, so while there may have been savings, schools were not closed, but were supporting vulnerable children and the children of keyworkers. They will have continued to have operating costs, he said.

TG asked if f40 could help to identify the scale of savings that may have been made by schools during the first half of 2020.

10. Additional issues

JMcl said when schools returned in September, everyone thought there would be increased instances of vulnerable children having come to harm during the first lockdown period. However, he said evidence had so far not shown this to be the case.

JMcl said the fact that children were in small bubbles, and less able to have confidential conversations with teachers, may mean that some children feel unable to voice their concerns or fears. He said issues may come to light at a later date.

JMcl asked that the DfE consider this issue in their long-term planning around Covid support.

And he also asked if a long-term plan could be adopted with regards school transport and extra funding.

TG said he understood both points and said they would be taken into consideration.

11. Elective Home Education

MJ raised the issue of Elective Home Education (EHE) and said more children were being taken out of schools due to the pandemic. She said, as a result, these children will not have been included in the October school census, and therefore not included in funding projections for next year. MJ said this posed a problem for schools if they were then brought back into the system next year, as there would be insufficient funding to cater for them.

MJ suggested the DfE use UPN / ULN data through the census to understand whether this was happening and adjust funding to individual schools accordingly.

Both AM and JMcl said they had seen a spike in the number of children being taken out of school for EHE.

TG said the department would keep a close eye on EHE to monitor the trends and would take action accordingly. He said they had also been looking at the number of children enrolled into Reception at primary schools, but Covid had not appeared to have had an impact on the numbers.

12. SEND

JMcl said he appreciated the discussion was about Covid costs for schools but felt he could not ignore the issue of SEND. He asked if the DfE was looking at SEND funding.

TG said, without doubt, SEND costs was a very significant issue in school funding. He assured f40 that the department was looking at the issue of SEND and said colleagues were working hard on progressing the SEND review.

13. In summary

The f40 group has agreed to assist in providing more information to the DfE on:

- PPE and other costs to SEND schools
- Impact of teacher absences on schools' ability to cope with Covid
- Supply teacher costs to schools
- Savings to schools

Ends