

## Wiltshire Council

### Schools Forum Finance & SEN Working Group 27<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Schools Forum  
7<sup>th</sup> October 2021

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## Update on DfE Consultations

### Purpose of report

1. To provide an update on the Department for Education (DfE) national consultations impacting on schools and local authority budgets. A number of consultations are either underway or have been completed and these include.
  - a. Business Rates
  - b. Fair School Funding for all (deadline for responses 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021)
  - c. Sparsity
  - d. SEN Review

### Background – Business Rates

2. Between March and May 2021, the DfE consulted on the centralisation of business rates for schools. On 18<sup>th</sup> August 2021 the DfE published their response and changes to the current process, and these are outlined below. A link to the DfE website can be accessed here: [Changes to the payment process of schools' business rates - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-payment-process-of-schools-business-rates)
3. Business rates are a tax charged on the occupation of non-domestic properties, including schools. The key proposal in the consultation was for the DfE to centralise the payment of business rates on behalf of all schools, both maintained and academy schools. The proposal is due to take effect from April 2022.
4. Within Wiltshire, the impact will be minimal for maintained schools, as Wiltshire is both the billing authority and funding body, therefore in essence schools don't physically receive funding for or pay for their school business rates.
5. For academy schools, this will be a welcome change as at present, academy schools must pay for their business rates before recovering the monies from the DfE.
6. The DfE will create a single reconciliation between our schools and the Council, as the billing authority. The proposals should create efficiencies for schools as well as cashflow benefits for academy schools.

## **Background – Fair School Funding for all: completing our reforms to the National Funding Formula (NFF)**

7. The deadline for responding to this consultation was prior to this meeting of schools' forum and therefore the consultation was considered at length by the School Funding and SEN Working Group at an extraordinary meeting, held on the 8<sup>th</sup> September 2021.
8. A link to DfE consultation website can be accessed here: [Fair school funding for all: completing our reforms to the National Funding Formula - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/fair-school-funding-for-all-completing-our-reforms-to-the-national-funding-formula)
9. This consultation continues the DfE journey towards a '**hard**' formula with no or little local flexibility and whilst in Wiltshire we align very closely to the NFF and there would be very little impact on budgets for the majority of schools, working group members felt they would like to retain some local flexibility. Other proposals include changes to the central schools' services block which could have an impact on the local authority's ability to fulfil its statutory responsibilities and therefore the level of support they are able to provide to schools without charge. These concerns have been fed back as part of the response.
10. A School Funding and SEN Working Group (Schools Forum) response was compiled and shared with Headteachers, Governors and School Business Managers via Right Choice, Helean's Weekly Newsletter and the respective 'Briefings'. The DfE consultation is appended to this report. The response from School Funding and SEN Working Group are appended, as are minutes of the extraordinary meeting.
11. The local authority has also submitted a response in its own right.
12. This information is provided as an update.

## **Background – Sparsity**

13. A separate paper has been prepared outlining the consultation and proposals for Sparsity, which will require discussion and consideration by Schools Forum, due to its potential impact upon the 2022-23 budgets.

## **Background – SEN Review**

14. This DfE review is still outstanding. The DfE did publish some documents on the 19th July 2021 regarding sustainable high need systems including some case studies. These will of course be considered as part of our recovery planning however the ideas and projects are aligned with our own thinking around creating specialist placement capacity, managing demand, and early intervention to prevent pressure later in the system.
15. A link to DfE website can be accessed here: [Creating sustainable high needs systems - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/creating-sustainable-high-needs-systems)
16. This information is provided as an update.

## **Proposals**

17. Schools' Forum notes the DfE consultation information around fair school funding and the SEN review.
18. Schools' Forum notes the changes and impact of the DfE changes to business rates payments following the DfE consultation.
19. Schools' Forum refers to the separate paper for the consultation on Sparsity.

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