

Schools Forum (SF)
School Funding and SEN Working Group (SFWG)
MS TEAMS MEETING
23rd September 2024
Minutes

Present: Marie Taylor (Chair), (Finance, local authority ((LA)), Grant Davis (Finance, LA), Kathryn Davis (Director, Education & Skills), Lisa Fryer (HOS, SEN & Inclusion), Liz Williams (HNB Sustainability Finance Lead), Ben Stevens (HNB Sustainability Strategic Lead), Lisa Percy (Chair of SF / Hardenhuish), John Hawkins (Teacher / Governor rep), Graham Shore (Deputy Chair SF / Holy Trinity), John Read (PHF maintained rep, Lyneham Primary)

Apologies: Georgina Keily-Theobald (Downland)

1.	<p>Welcome and Apologies</p> <p>MT welcomed the group to the virtual meeting.</p>	
2.	<p>Minutes</p> <p>There were no outstanding actions.</p>	
3.	<p>Matters Arising</p> <p>There were no matters arising.</p>	
4.	<p>SWFG Membership</p> <p>MT queried the SFWG membership following the recent changes of SF reps. MT to make enquiries when SF induction is offered to the new SF members.</p>	MT
5.	<p>Schools Funding (DSG) Budget Monitoring Report (MT)</p> <p>MT shared her report & appendices – highlights, underspends in EY due to demand and Schools block small underspend offsets the HNB pressures. HNB pressures in line with demand for services and rising demand patterns – forecast deficit reserve balance to £61.184m at the end of the financial year higher than the SV agreement forecast of £51.027m.</p> <p>Discussion around opening of Melksham House (April 24) and SAIL whose numbers are growing as leadership is strengthened.</p> <p>LP Secondary RB – current co-hort physical difficulties, epileptic profiles so appropriately placed and YP thriving at school – avoids Silverwood.</p> <p>SV payment £26m received last year and £2.2m received in June, £2.2m in September. Adherence to plan will ensure future payments are received.</p> <p><i>LP left the meeting to greet prospective parents and so the agenda was rearranged so that Schools Revenue Balances report was taken next</i></p>	
6.	<p>Schools Revenue Balances (GD)</p> <p>Primary academisations have been steady 21/22 to 23/24</p>	

	<p>Secondary - no secondary academisations but DfE funding for schools with deficit balances in 23/24 helped the overall position.</p> <p>GD working with schools in deficit using the schools budget template to formulate a recovery plan.</p> <p>JR – some schools have high balances? GD confirmed there was a scheme to remove excess balances – we removed this around 12 years ago as unfair to remove from maintained and not academy schools however some LA’s have re-introduced this.</p> <p>GD was asked to take HN to PHF & present position – also include in Governor training</p> <p>GD - high balances made school funding look falsely positive at DfE / national level therefore difficult to lobby for more funding.</p> <p>GS – budget setting principles dictate funds should be applied to operational budgets for the pupils present in the census. Academy trusts are expected to retain 5% in their reserves. Do any new HT need support with finance competency, so they are more confident to allocate funds and not hold back for emergencies?</p> <p>LW – if there are large ongoing surpluses schools need to be really clear how these are to be spent – governors and HT joint plan</p> <p>JH – SIA may be able to make recommendations</p> <p>KD helpful – Ofsted do not mention finances when they visit</p> <p>GD there is a clawback process – maybe we could issue questionnaire to schools asking them to confirm their spending plans for large balances. MT/GD to progress</p> <p>Falling birth rates are a concern for schools</p> <p>John – we need to have these difficult decisions with schools</p> <p>KD – small schools strategy has changed to school places strategy group to support where any size of school might be struggling.</p> <p>GD confirmed there were recovery plans in place for 14 maintained schools, Chilton Foliat had come out of deficit and cumulatively deficits have reduced.</p>	<p>GD</p> <p>GD/MT</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>SEND Transformation Update (LW)</p> <p>SEND & AP strategy now ratified by Cabinet</p> <p>LW took the group through the sustainability plan and SV agreement including the conditions under which the DfE will continue with funding. Conversations with advisers are positive they feel our plan has the right actions but will want to see that the council is generating plans to ensure the deficit can be brought back on track.</p> <p>£5.7m SV capital approved by the DfE for the development of a satellite for Exeter House which releases our own capital for other projects.</p> <p>Significant work taking place resources are identified and we are committed to Early Intervention workstreams. High Needs Sustainability Board on 24 September to consider proposals for the re-working of the sustainability plan.</p> <p>JH – is there a chance the DfE will stop Safety Valve payments? LW next steps, if the DfE considers that the Council cannot bring the plan back on track, would be enhanced monitoring with support and reporting – in that circumstance they pause payments and the deal must be renegotiated.</p> <p>GS are other LAs realigning? LW that information not readily available but we are engaged with other Safety Valve councils via networks run by the LGA and it is the case</p>	

	<p>that some councils are working with the DfE to renegotiate their Safety Valve agreements.</p> <p>JH – we support you good wishes for the discussion at the Board, ISS still my bete noir, are unit costs increasing? MT yes despite commissioners challenging % increases, there are genuine staff pay uplifts at all provisions.</p> <p>EHCP Top Up Review</p> <p>Still working on consultation for Schools Forum, hope to bring decision to January the position is complex and we aim to reduce re-bandings following this work.</p>	
8.	<p>Core Schools Budget Grant (GD)</p> <p>New grant announced in July 24 to offset 5.5% pay award for teachers – 7 months grant until funding baselined in 25/26. Paid in December 24 based on Oct 23 data Mainstream schools - formulaic approach, then £610 per place for special schools</p> <p>LF - primary RB impact higher as more teachers proportionally – is this covered in a workstream? LW Staffing mix will be collected. How we inflate year on year will need to be calculated with this in mind.</p>	
9.	<p>AOB</p> <p>School colleagues gave feedback that Monday mornings were not good for SFWG – MT to change the day of the week from November onwards.</p>	MT
10.	<p><i>Date and Time of next Meeting</i></p> <p>SFWG 8.30am – date to be agreed – planned as a virtual teams meeting.</p> <p>Schools Forum 1.30pm 12th December 2024 – planned as a face to face meeting.</p>	

Glossary

RB – Resource Base

SV – Safety Valve

DfE – Dept for Education

LGA – Local Government Org

ISS – Independent Special Schools

EY – Early Years

LA – Local Authority