

Schools Forum

MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING HELD ON 8 JUNE 2023 AT ONLINE MEETING - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS.

Present:

Nikki Barnett, Aileen Bates, Lyssy Bolton, Andy Bridewell, Rebecca Carson, Michele Chilcott, Stella Fowler, John Hawkins, Cllr Ross Henning, Graham Nagel-Smith, Nick Norgrove, Lisa Percy (Chair), Giles Pugh, John Read, Graham Shore (Vice-Chair), Trudy Srawley, Ros Sutton, Ian Tucker, David Whewell, and Catriona Williamson.

Also Present:

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager)
Richard Hanks (Interim Co-Director - Education & Skills)
Cate Mullen (Head of Inclusion and SEND)
Lisa Pullin (Democratic Services Officer)
Marie Taylor (Head of Finance - Children and Education)
Simon Thomas (FACT Programme Lead)

14 Apologies, Substitutions and any Changes of Membership

Apologies for absence from Members were received from:

- Angela Brennan
- Georgina Keily-Theobald
- Emma Osmund

Further apologies were noted from:

- Helean Hughes (Director – Education & Skills)
- Anthony Fennell (Head of Special School Transformation)
- Cllr Laura Mayes (Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Skills)
- Cllr Jane Davies (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, SEND, Transition and Inclusion)
- Cllr Suzanne Wickham (Portfolio Holder for SEND and Inclusion)

The Chair announced the following Membership changes; namely, that Mike Thomas and Helen Carpenter would be taking over from Jon Hamp and Ian Tucker as the WASHH Special School Academy representative and Chair of WASHH – Secondary Academy representative respectively. Furthermore, it was noted that Richard Hanks had been appointed as the Interim Co-Director for

Education & Skills and would be working alongside Helean Hughes. The Chair welcomed the new Members and thanked Jon Hamp and Ian Tucker for their contributions while a part of the Schools Forum.

15 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 January 2023 were presented for consideration.

The Chair noted that Minute Item 10a and 10b seemed to be duplicated, which the Democratic Services Officer confirmed would be rectified. After which, it was:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum approved and signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 January 2023 as a true and correct record.

16 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair noted that depending on the length of the meeting, a comfort break may be had at an appropriate time.

17 **Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

18 **Public Participation**

There were no questions or statements submitted.

19 **Updates from Working Groups**

The Chair raised the update from the last meeting of the Early Years Reference Group held on 31 March 2023, and the update from the last joint meeting of the School Funding Working Group and SEN Working Group held on 22 May 2023. There being no questions or comments on the updates, it was then:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum noted the updates from the last meetings of the Early Years Reference Group and the joint School Funding Working Group and SEN Working Group, held on 31 March 2023 and 22 May 2023 respectively.

Update on FACT (Families and Children Transformation)

An update on the FACT Programme was delivered by the FACT Programme Lead, Simon Thomas, who highlighted the following:

- The multi-agency 'Family Help' arrangements were introduced, and it was explained that the FACT partnership looked at how to respond to different pressures in the system felt pre and post COVID recovery, and to concentrate their collective energies into a combined approach focussing on the space of early intervention and prevention.
- The aim of the project and the different workstreams the partnership was engaged in were detailed; namely: family hubs, communications and branding, an online platform, workforce development, a pilot scheme in Westbury and Warminster, and outcomes and evaluation.
- It was explained that the pilot scheme was created to explore if working together in geographically defined areas in different ways could provide better and more effective early intervention and prevention.
- Additional funding had been secured to appoint Family Help and Early Help Mental Health Practitioners who would be working directly with families and providing training, support and advice to schools and other organisations. Thus, establishing strong relationships, delivering a quicker response, and easier, smoother, and more accurate operations.
- Monthly Pilot Operational Group meetings were being conducted to identify challenges, opportunities for development, and key priorities.
- The emerging priorities for the pilot scheme were then explained: early intervention activity, building parental confidence and competence, improving families' financial security, awareness of the programme, and accessibility of resources and support.
- A lot of time and effort had been invested into creating a cohesive brand following feedback that the existing system was relatively confusing, fragmented, and disjointed. Therefore, this umbrella brand would cover all services providing early intervention and prevention, communicating to families, schools, and other relevant organisations that these services were working in tandem to deliver a more collective and connected system across the County. This branding would be utilised through a new logo and straplines and would be linked closely to the development of an online platform which would be the single source of any and all relevant information.
- The workforce development aspect was briefly covered; in short, ensuring a competent and confident workforce. The practice framework to ensure this cohesion was then displayed.
- The education related outcomes and measures of success were then detailed, and it was confirmed that officers would be seeking more formal feedback from school colleagues to assess the impact of the project.
- It was confirmed that the rollout of the project and branding across the whole County was due to launch in Autumn 2023 onwards. Furthermore,

feedback from the pilots over the duration of the scheme would be shared to aid in the rollout into other areas as soon as appropriate.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that a paper on the Family Hubs Commissioning would be going to Cabinet in the near future, and an update would be brought back to the Forum after such. It was further confirmed that the Area Boards and Local Youth Networks would have input into the process and that it was officers' intention to maximise the links between the different youth groups, with a dedicated place at the table for the partnership representing these different groups. Furthermore, officers had attended Area Board meetings in Westbury and Warminster to inform Members and attendees of the pilot scheme.

The PHF – Maintained Primary Representative noted that they now had a Family Champion working within their school once a week, and that early reports were positive, and that parents were appreciative for the opportunity to drop in and get support from this dedicated officer as and when it was needed. The Chair expressed anticipation for the future when the programme was fully rolled out.

After which, it was:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum noted the FACT update.

21 **Dedicated Schools Budget - Budget Monitoring Year End Position for 2022-23**

Marie Taylor, Head of Finance – Children and Education, referred to the report which presented the budget monitoring year end position of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for the financial year 2022-23 as at 31 March 2023, and highlighted the following:

- The appendices, particularly Appendix 1, outlined in detail the variance analysis on each of the budgets.
- Table 1 in the report showed a summary per funding Block and it was noted that all Blocks had underspent bar the High Needs Block (HNB). It was explained that there was a significant underspend in the Early Years Block (EYB) due to the difference between the take-up in comparison to the census funding levels taken from the Department of Education (DfE). However, it was confirmed that the DfE undertake yearly in-year and post-year financial adjustments in the next month or so, therefore the variance would to some degree disappear after the usual post adjustment in the 2023-24 financial year.
- Table 2 in the report showed the breakdown of Early Years Learners and an overspend in the Inclusion Support Fund, however it was emphasised

that this was not necessarily a negative thing, as it was likely a reflection of the benefits of the Fund and demand across the system.

- It was confirmed that Early Years Officers had been successful in their COMF funding bid to the Director of Public Health for grants for 2022-23. Furthermore, £100k had been ear-marked for the Hardship Fund, but no requests had been received in 2022-23 despite take-up in previous years.
- The forecasted underspend in Schools Budgets was explained as being due to the School Supply Cover Fund not being used as anticipated, alongside alternative grants being used to fund some of the relevant activity in that area. Thus, helping to offset the overall pressure on the DSG.
- The High Needs Budget was projected to overspend by £13.499m, however it was stressed that when the level of funding available did not match local needs, no realistic budget could be set at an achievable level. Therefore, Members were reassured that it was not indicative of individual budget issues, but instead that the whole block was under significant pressure.
- Furthermore, throughout the pandemic, professionals could not assess children and young people in school, thus leading to an inevitable backlog in Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) assessments. Continual increases in assessment requests were noted as leading to assumptions around future plans needing to be constantly adjusted to ensure higher accuracy.
- It was explained that the major driver for the increased cost was volume, which was explained as being measured in full-time equivalent (FTE) pupils. Table 3 in the report was then referred to, where the percentage of children with an EHCP in Wiltshire had doubled to 12% since the previous financial year, which could be attributed to the impact of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns.
- It was noted that the biggest areas of overspend within the High Needs Budget were Independent Special School packages, alternative provision, costs of pupils in non-Wiltshire schools, named pupil allowances and top ups. A breakdown of the data was shown in Table 4 in the report.
- Additionally, High Needs related overspends within mainstream schools were noted as not necessarily being negative, as it meant that Wiltshire had more inclusive schools who were helping to support those High Needs Learners.
- The Central Schools Services Block was driven by careful management of the specialist education packages for children in care, and alternative grant funding had been secured to help offset the costs in that area.
- DSG Reserve was noted as being one of the biggest financial concerns for the Council. Table 5 of the report was referred to, and it was noted that the reserve had brought forward £25.973m, which was increased by the positive Early Years Block adjustment of £0.564m.

- There was an actual variance of £9.276m across the whole piece, with £34.685m being carried forward, and it was reiterated that this sat within the Council's balance sheet and was cash flowed by the Council.
- It was explained that the Transformation Board within the Council and Chaired by the Chief Executive, Terence Herbert, had earmarked an investment of £1.6m into this area over the next two financial years by deploying temporary resources to drive the transformational change required.
- The Early Years Reference Group had considered limited one-off usage of the Early Years Contingency Reserves which was proposed to be utilised through appointing 4 temporary FTE Early Years Intervention Advisers, and Inclusion Support for settings including outreach, training, and mentoring, alongside an Early Years Conference in the Autumn term. All of which aimed to assist with COVID recovery for children while also contributing to the early help and prevention plans.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum noted the budget monitoring position including the balance on the DSG reserve at the end of the financial year in conjunction with the high needs recovery plan and Delivering Better Value (DBV) update as per Agenda Item 10.

22 Dedicated Schools Budget - Budget Monitoring 2023-24

Marie Taylor, Head of Finance – Children and Education, referred to the report as part of Agenda Supplement 1, which presented the budget monitoring information against the DSG for the financial year 2023-24 including forecasts of expenditure as at 30 April 2023. The following was highlighted:

- An overspend of £12.623 was currently forecast against the overall Schools Budget, and it was noted that the main driver for the variance was the ongoing pressure on the HNB, as discussed in the previous Agenda Item.
- Table 1 of the report was then summarised.
- The Early Years Budget was then discussed, and it was noted that no variance would be forecast on the free entitlement budgets; it was too early in the financial year as the summer adjustments were yet to be released by the DfE. Additionally, the small underspends in both age funding streams as per Table 2 of the report were noted as being aligned with the slight reduction in actual variance in take up and it was anticipated that it would be removed in whole, or part, as a result of the DfE's post financial year adjustments and if the January 2023 census numbers had fallen.

- Table 3 of the report was highlighted, and Members were notified of Wiltshire's huge success with the take up of the 2-year-old Disadvantaged Grant, ranking top compared with both South West Authorities and statistical neighbours for Spring 2023. Officers were anticipating that this would be a contributing factor in children's progress and attainment in their later academic years; again, linking to early intervention and prevention.
- Members were informed that in the Central Government Spring Budget, the Chancellor had announced changes to Universal Credit childcare payments, and the expansion of childcare support for working parents to include children from 9 months old up to school age. The specifics and timings of these changes were detailed in the report.
- Furthermore, it was explained that schools and Local Authorities would be receiving £289m in funding for a 'pathfinder' to tackle the barriers to working parents of Primary School age children by increasing the supply of wraparound care and providing financial incentives for those signing up as childminders. However, it was noted that the DfE anticipated that by September 2026, most Primary Schools would have the ability to provide their own before and after school care.
- No variance forecast was included within the report for Schools Budget as again, it was too early in the financial year as the timings of any census driven payments due to schools was yet to be released.
- The High Needs Budget was again forecasting significant overspends which was noted as being largely based around the previous year's forecast, however it did not account for rebanding requests and new plans, as many were yet to be finalised through the system.
- As mentioned in the previous Agenda Item, the number of children with EHCPs in Wiltshire had risen to 12% within the previous financial year, thus informing the estimates for 2023-24 as per Table 3 of the report.
- The biggest areas of overspend within the High Needs Budget were largely the same as the previous year, however it was noted that the plans for Capital Expansion were to provide more specialist school places in order to reduce reliance on the out-of-County and independent sectors. Officers highlighted that further updates on these plans would be discussed in more detail at the next planned meeting of the Schools Forum.
- Table 4 of the report was referred to and it was noted that the breakdown of the data was largely reflective of that of 2022-23.
- The DSG Reserve and Management Plan was discussed, and it was noted that the significant demand and pressure on resources was placing considerable strain upon the Council's Risk Register. Furthermore, the updated DSG management plan workbook had been shared with Newton as part of the DBV programme, and officers had seen reports suggesting that Wiltshire were underestimating rather than overestimating future demand.

- It was anticipated that the reserve brought forward of £34.685m from 2022-23 would be increased by the negative EYB adjustment following the 2022-23 underspend. Therefore, as a result of the current forecast overspend, officers were forecasting that the reserve would fall into a deficit position of £47.308m at the end of the financial year 2023-24.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum noted the forecast budget monitoring position including the balance on the DSG reserve at the end of April 2024 alongside the update later in Agenda Item 10, on the HNB recovery plan and work with the DfE delivery partners Newton and CIPFA.

23 **Update from the High Needs Working Group and Delivering Better Value in SEND Programme**

Cate Mullen, Head of SEND and Inclusion, presented an update on behalf of the High Needs Block Working Group alongside further updates on the DBV in SEND Programme, SEND Peer Review, and SEND Ofsted/CQC reports. The following was highlighted:

DBV In SEND Programme

- The background of the programme was briefly explained, and it was noted that it was split into two different phases; Diagnostic and Implementation, which when combined would take approximately two years. Members were informed that Wiltshire Council's diagnostic phase would be starting in August 2023, and if all went to plan, officers could submit a grant application by Christmas 2023 and upon approval, would then move into the Implementation phase.
- Further details of the Diagnostic phase were then given, and it was explained that its aim was to ensure that local HNB Sustainability Plans were informed by a solid evidence base regarding the current and projected HNB expenditure and activity.
- Through this phase, officers would receive support from financial, practice, and change advisors to:
 - Identify roots causes and underlying cost drivers.
 - Create mitigating solutions and reforms.
 - Assess current capabilities.
 - Facilitate engagement of families and delivery partners.
 - Develop a quality assured HNB Sustainability Management Plan.

- The funding criteria for the implementation phase was then explained, and it was noted that the Council would need to demonstrate that they:
 - Know the priority changes needed to impact on key HNB sustainability measures.
 - Have worked collaboratively with delivery partners and parents.
 - Have co-produced an aligned mitigation plan.
 - Have identified the necessary resources needed.
 - Have a realistic activity plan to implement high impact changes.
 - Have leadership capacity and necessary governance arrangements in place to successfully take implementation plan into next phase.

- Slides taken directly from the DBV team (and included within the Agenda) were then displayed, with comments from Wiltshire Council officers in the blue boxes included for further information. These slides outlined the specific tranche and wave that the Council were a part of, a roadmap and indicative timeline of the Diagnostic Phase, and an introduction on the Case Reviews aspect.
- Case Reviews were then explained in more detail; in short, the Council would work together with schools, settings, and others to look at individual case level data for children with SEND, bringing a collective focus on the individual experiences and outcomes for these children and young people.
- An example Case Review was shown, but it was highlighted that the programme gave the ability for the Council to amend the process depending on areas of focus and what works best and most effectively for officers within Wiltshire.
- Furthermore, officers would give significant consideration as to how these reviews would work in practice, ensuring that officers were not overloaded and respecting the relevant stakeholders' availability, while maintaining the appropriate level of time and attention dedicated to each individual case.
- It was noted that the Case Reviews were scheduled to begin in the second week of September 2023, but due to the pressures across the education system during that time, officers were keen to rearrange this to the end of September 2023. However, officers would soon be meeting with DBV officers to work towards finalising the timeframes in more detail.
- It was confirmed that officers had been successful in securing Transformation Funding from the Council which had been used to appoint a range of roles such as a Sustainability Strategic Lead Officer (High Needs Block), Finance Lead Officer, Data Officer, and Mitigation Lead Officers. These additional resources could therefore allow the Council to undertake the DBV to the level of scrutiny and detail needed to be successful.

- Members were encouraged to contact Ben Stevens, the Sustainability Strategic Lead, with any further questions or if they would like to be a part of those case conversations, however it was clarified that the opportunity would be available to all schools and settings. Email: ben.stevens@wiltshire.gov.uk.

SEND Peer Review

- Members were informed that the SEND peer review would be taking place between 13-16 June 2023 and would be looking at 5 key lines of enquiry:
 - The impact of effectiveness of the local area partnership.
 - The early identification of SEND/support through a graduated approach across the local area partnership.
 - Voice and engagement of service users and families.
 - The neurodevelopmental pathway in Wiltshire – process and lived experience for CYP in Wiltshire.
 - Joint commissioning arrangements across the local area in Wiltshire.

SEND Ofsted/CQC

- Members were informed that 5 reports had been published for Hartlepool, Brighton and Hove, Cornwall, Warrington, and Nottinghamshire, with examples of each of the 3 possible outcomes seen:
 - *“Arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes”.*
 - *“Inconsistent experiences and outcomes”.*
 - *“Widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes”.*

In response to a question regarding SEND Ofsted/CQC, officers noted that they recognised that there was always scope for improvements for Wiltshire families’ SEND experiences and although officers aspired to be within the top tier, they felt they were more realistically placed within the middle outcome. However, once further inspection reports were published, officers would get a better sense of where they were likely to sit. It was also highlighted that as the framework looked at the whole of a local area, it sometimes presented a challenge to effectively demonstrate joined up and effective working across the County.

Furthermore, although it was assumed that those Local Authorities also within the DBV would have similar overspend percentages to that of Wiltshire, a correlation between overspend and performance was not as linear as often

expected. This was noted as being an historical issue within Wiltshire, as 50% of the funding formula for the HNB is based on a past number of what were called 'statements', thus not being representative of the County as a whole, in the present. Therefore, it could be said that other Local Authorities could have a more accurate funding formula, and as a result have more balanced figures.

Following which, it was:

Resolved

- 1) The Schools Forum noted the update on behalf of the High Needs Block Working Group.**
- 2) The Schools Forum noted the update on the Delivering Better Value in SEND Programme.**

24 DfE Consultation - Implementing the Direct National Funding Formula

Members took a comfort break from 14.55pm – 15.05pm.

Grant Davis, Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager, provided an update following the DfE consultation with stakeholders regarding the reforms to the National Funding Formula (NFF), which took place between June and September 2022. The following was highlighted:

- It was explained that as the Schools Forum had aligned itself with the current NFF, the impact of the new changes on Wiltshire schools were broadly minimal, and that many of these changes would take effect in the 2024-25 academic year.
- With the aim of creating greater national consistency and convergence towards the NFF, the key areas of the consultation included:
 - Flexibility to transfer funding between Blocks.
 - National approach to calculating "Notional SEN".
 - Growth and Falling Rolls funding.
 - Split Site and Exceptional Circumstances (rentals) funding.
 - Minimum Funding Guarantee and the Funding Cycle.
- The outcomes of the consultation, as detailed within the report, and their impacts on Wiltshire schools, were then further explored and briefly noted below.

High Needs

- Continued flexibility to transfer funding to High Needs Budgets through an application process to the Secretary of State. Further details on how it would work in practice were still being finalised, but upon the

announcement, the Schools Forum would be updated at the next appropriate meeting.

- A national approach to calculating schools' indicative SEND budgets would be introduced and further consultations on the design and operation of the approach would follow in due course.

Growth and Falling Rolls Funding

- It was noted that Wiltshire did not have a Falling Rolls Fund, however it had been announced that as part of the transition to a full NFF, establishing and implementing minimum criteria requirements with regard to the delivery of Growth and Falling Rolls Funding before moving to full NFF standards, could be required.
- Further consultations and information on the changes to the two funding opportunities would follow in due course, at which point officers could begin undertaking more meaningful conversations on the topic.
- The requirement for schools to be "Good" or "Outstanding" in order to be eligible to receive Falling Rolls funding would be removed.
- Funding would now be calculated on both a 'growth' and 'significant decline' in numbers basis from 2024-25.
- Growth and Falling Rolls Funding would be expanded to allow Local Authorities to fund the revenue costs associated with repurposing school buildings or school places, thus supporting Local Authorities to use surplus space to create further SEND Units or Resource Bases in mainstream schools.
- Local Authorities would have the ability to retain some local flexibility in the allocation of growth funding to schools.

Split Sites

- Split Sites Funding would be allocated on the basis of a formula factor made up of a 'basic eligibility' element and a 'distance' element. Wiltshire had 6 split site schools, all of which would continue to meet the funding criteria.
- It was being proposed that approximately 60% of the 2024-25 NFF lump sum was an appropriate amount for the split site allowance. This figure was still under review, but if confirmed, would lead to a 16% decrease in funding for these Wiltshire schools, as they were currently funded at 76% of the lump sum.
- However, those schools which would lose funding, or were no longer eligible, would see their funding protected through the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG).

Exceptional Circumstances (Rentals) Funding

- This was explained as being for schools across the County who don't have suitable accommodation for the provision of tasks such as holding whole school events or PE activities.
- At present, where these schools spend more than 1% of their budget on renting such facilities, Wiltshire provided funding to help support this cost. However, the funding threshold was proposed to raise to 2.5%, thus impacting on those 7 schools eligible for Exceptional Circumstances Funding in Wiltshire.
- Yet, it was reiterated that those schools which would lose funding, or were no longer eligible, would see their funding protected through the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG).

Minimum Funding Guarantee

- During the transition to the direct NFF, Local Authorities still had the ability to continue to use their local formula for the purposes of determining the MFG.
- A move to a simplified pupil-led funding protection under the direct NFF was being proposed, which officers welcomed, as it would simplify the calculation significantly, would improve the transparency of the funding system, and would make understanding the calculations more accessible for schools.

Funding Cycle

- As it was recognised that schools and the sector needed early information to support their budget and strategic planning, this would continue with early information regarding the design of the subsequent year's formula provided in July of each year.
- A calculator tool was also in development, thus supporting schools, academies, and Local Authorities in estimating more accurate budgets.

- The next steps and a brief breakdown of the impact of the changes in Wiltshire were then referred to, as per the report.
- The importance of the role of the Schools Forum was emphasised in spite of some of the reforms discussed.

Following which, it was:

Resolved

The Schools Forum noted the DfE's response to their consultation on reforms to the NFF.

25 **Planned Local Autumn Consultations (in Principle decisions)**

Grant Davis, Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager, presented the report and relevant appendices with regard to the Annual Schools Consultation. The following was highlighted:

- There were three areas of focus within the consultations for 2024-25: namely, De-delegation of Central Expenditure, Funding for Education Functions, and Transfer of Funding from the Schools Block to the HNB. Proposed questions for each of the three areas were in the appendices to the report.
- Background on the De-delegation of Central Expenditure was given, and it was explained that the purpose of the consultation was to get feedback from maintained schools to see whether they would prefer to continue contracting the Local Authority to provide services centrally, or whether they would prefer to have the funding delegated to them directly, and therefore independently commission these services.
- Further details as to Funding for Education Functions, or School Improvement Functions, were then given and it was explained that Local Authorities had the opportunity to fund improvement services through either de-delegation or on a traded basis, as a result of the reduction to the Local Authority Monitoring and Brokering Grant (LAMB). Therefore, the consultation aimed to determine whether maintained schools would elect to de-delegate this funding from their budgets to support the loss in the LAMB grant.
- Finally, it was reiterated that the transfer of funding between Blocks could be impacted by the DfE proposed NFF reforms as discussed in the previous Agenda Item, alongside the significant DSG deficit both existing and forecasted. Although the deficit was supported by a recovery plan, the aim of the consultation was to gain feedback from all schools with regard to their opinions surrounding such a transfer. It was stressed that the transfer would only go ahead if it was deemed affordable.
- Furthermore, a briefing note would be circulated to all schools regarding the work being undertaken as part of the DBV Programme.

Following which, it was:

Resolved

- 1) **The Schools Forum approved the consultation questions for maintained schools around delegation and de-delegation of**

budgets for central services and school improvement within the Schools' Block (Appendix 1 & 2).

2) The Schools Forum approved the consultation questions for all schools around setting the 2024-25 Schools Budget (Appendix 3).

26 **Update on the work of the F40 Group**

Grant Davis, Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager, provided a verbal update on the work of the F40 Group, in which the following was highlighted:

- The F40 was composed of 43 of the lowest funded Local Authorities in the Country and was created to seek a greater level of fairness and equal opportunities for all children, regardless of where they live, and to remove historical discrepancies locked into how schools are funded.
- Further aims were to secure the sufficiency of funding for all schools to ensure they all have the same opportunities, and that the impacts felt from challenges such as the cost-of-living crisis, COVID, budget cuts, and recruitment and retention issues would not prejudice the education of children at any school.
- Throughout 2022-23 the Group had campaigned to influence policy and decision making nationally by engaging with appropriate and relevant Members of Parliament and Central Government departments, through actions such as setting up briefings, engaging in conversations, and tabling questions.
- Particular areas of focus in their current campaigning were noted as being SEND, Early Years Learners, and Capital Funding. The latter was briefly detailed; in short, there was a national backlog for school maintenance, repairs, and improvements which was being compounded by a lack of funding. This was particularly concerning in respect of the national proposal to be carbon neutral and at net-zero by 2040, which would not be achievable within school settings unless further investments were made to support these changes.

The Chair noted that she found the updates especially useful and was glad to see the work the Group were doing to campaign on Wiltshire's behalf. Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum noted the update of the work of the F40 Group.

27 **Scheme for Financing Local Authority Maintained Schools**

Grant Davis, Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager, provided a brief verbal update on the Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools, where the following was highlighted:

- It was explained that Local Authorities were required to publish schemes for financing schools, setting out the financial relationship between them and the schools they maintain, and that this needed to be updated yearly in line with any DfE revisions.
- A minor tweak on the income from the sale of assets following the 2023 DfE updated guidance, as per the report, was highlighted.
- Furthermore, it was noted that another minor change on borrowing by schools was required following the 2022 DfE updated guidance, which would be incorporated into the 2023-24 Wiltshire scheme.
- Upon the inclusion of the above changes, Wiltshire would be completely compliant with the DfE's guidance.

Following which, it was:

Resolved

The Schools Forum noted the updates required to the Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools.

28 **Confirmation of Dates for Future Meetings**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 5 October 2023 at 1.30pm and was planned to be held online via Microsoft Teams.

Future meeting dates were confirmed as below:

5 December 2023 – 1.30pm

18 January 2024 – 1.30pm

14 March 2024 – 1.30pm

29 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 1.30 - 3.45 pm)

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

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