

Schools Forum
School Funding and SEN Working Group
MS TEAMS MEETING

27th November 2023

Minutes

Present: Marie Taylor (Chair), (Finance, local authority ((LA)), Grant Davis (Finance, LA), Cate Mullen (Head of Inclusion & SEND, LA), Lisa Percy (Chair of SF / Hardenhuish), John Hawkins (Teacher / Governor rep), Catriona Williamson (Mere) Graham Nagel-Smith (Morgan’s Vale & Woodfalls), Graham Shore (Deputy Chair SF / Holy Trinity), Helean Hughes (Director LA), Ben Stevens (HNB Recovery, LA), Liz Williams (Finance, LA)

Apologies: Simon Thomas (LA), John Read (Lyneham) Georgina Keily-Theobald (Downland) Rebecca Carson (Woodford Valley)

Andy Bridewell (Ludgershall Castle) is now represented by CW at the working group.

1.	<p>Welcome and Apologies MT welcomed the group to the virtual meeting and explained that there would be no update on budget monitoring for the December meeting due to the timing of reporting the High Needs / Safety Valve position to Cabinet.</p>	
2.	<p>Minutes There were no outstanding actions.</p>	
3.	<p>Matters Arising There were no matters arising.</p>	
4.	<p>High Needs Recovery and Safety Valve Programme Update (BS/LW) LW shared the presentation with the group, highlights. A series of co-production workshops has been valuable and added insight to the plan. The fully costed plan is still work in progress with first submission due to the DfE on 15/12/2023. A further meeting of SFWG is scheduled for Monday 4th December to share this with the group prior to Schools Forum on the December. LW to set meeting.</p> <p>Spend increasing rapidly, “latent demand” the increased capacity in special schools and resource bases in September 23 has not lessened the need for independent special school places as anticipated and more work needs to be done to understand this.</p> <p>Unmitigated forecast comprising increased complexity of need and demand (volume) is showing a £57m in year deficit by 2029/30.</p> <p>LW ran through the workstreams on the slides and handed over to BS – a number of actions are planned, linking into the workstreams including, bringing Wiltshire into line with statistical neighbours, placement sufficiency strategy (linked to deflecting ISS) a shift in post 16 away from ISP with more FE and employability support, placement inflation/ price management.</p> <p>Block Transfer – can we afford more than 0.5% - linking into first workstream of mainstream Inclusion and increasing support pre-EHCP – the SoS did not previously approve a SF recommendation of 0.7% however when any local authority is in Safety</p>	LW

	<p>Valve, any disapplication requests would be considered favourably, where Schools Forum approval has been sought, and given.</p> <p>The DfE are looking for a 5-year plan, our preference is 7+ years.</p> <p>LP asked – do we know what tribunal costs are – to share with schools? CM to confirm.</p> <p>JH reminded the group of the lack of success at tribunal often in relation to ISP which was a particular area of high cost he was interested in.</p> <p>BS responded – if we have a clear support and provision decision making processes with evidenced base, we can defend our decisions at tribunal. Important that a “no” is not a closed door for parents and there are alternatives.</p> <p>LP commented parental preference is challenging for schools and the LA, parents are more knowledgeable so working with parents is crucial.</p> <p>MT – thanks to LW and BS for the considerable amount of work going on in this area.</p>	CM
5.	<p>Teachers’ Pension Increase (GD)</p> <p>GD gave a verbal update recently shared that teachers pensions contributions for employers would be increasing by 5% from 23.68% to 28.68% wef 1st April 2024 and that the DfE would be sharing details of a pension grant to offset cost pressure in schools.</p>	
6.	<p>National Funding Formula for Schools & High Needs (GD)</p> <p>The original DfE announcement for school funding increases for the 2024-25 year was made in error and they have reissued the revised information. Total Schools Block uplift will be 1.9% nationally which equates to an uplift in core funding values of 1.4% and not the previously confirmed 2.4%. For Wiltshire this means that the Schools Block of £366m reduces to £363m – a £3m reduction. The 1.9% increase means less increase per pupil due to the increase in national pupil numbers.</p> <p>Other key points include.</p> <p>Minimum per Pupil Funding Levels (MPPFL) will be £4,610 for primary and £5,995 for secondary.</p> <p>Discretion over setting Minimum Funding Guarantee between 0% and 0.5% increase</p> <p>Budget allocations due 15th December 2023</p> <p>LW – an ‘in principle’ decision regarding Block Transfers in December would help with the Safety Valve work although it is understood that a final decision would be taken in January 2024</p>	
7.	<p>De-Delegated DSG & Block Transfer Consultations 2024/25</p> <p>25 responses – significantly in favour of electing to continue with full de-delegation for centrally provided services.</p> <p>14 responses – majority support to continue with de-delegating funding to ensure School Improvement services continue following the loss of the LAMB Grant</p> <p>16 responses – overwhelming support for a transfer of funding from Schools Block to the High Needs Block, with the majority supporting a transfer of 0.5%. A block transfer decision would be looked on favourably by the DfE as part of the Safety Valve work and would be linked to support for mainstream schools.</p> <p>LP – timing of consultation around % transfer challenging but not significantly high enough to be a concern as long as NFF is affordable, will need PHF and WASSH</p> <p>CW – finances are tight for schools and discussions will need to be handled sensitively.</p>	

	<p>LW – agreed confirmed we need to be really clear about what schools will get for the investment.</p> <p>GNS – would be useful to show per pupil deduction.</p> <p>LP – and confirm investment back into the SEN system.</p> <p>Group generally supportive as long as NFF affordable and a transfer of greater than 0.5% would be supported. A transfer of 0.55% (£2m) would equate to an additional request of £2.53 per pupil.</p>	
8.	<p>Pupil Growth 2024/25 (GD)</p> <p>GD took the group through his report. Wiltshire is fully compliant with the extra requirement to be included in the regulations for 2024-25.</p> <p>A discussion around the merits of introducing a Falling Rolls fund took place.</p> <p>LP falling rolls fund – not supportive of change – we need to focus our energies on support for the SV programme.</p> <p>GS agreed with LP not keen to deploy falling rolls.</p>	
9.	<p>Maintained Schools – Support for Deficits (GD)</p> <p>The DfE announced £40m support for schools with deficit budgets. £20m for local authorities – Wiltshire’s share is £405k. GD’s paper outlined a number of options to distribute the funding to schools.</p> <p>There was much discussion around the grant itself and the best recommendation for Schools Forum, but the group felt option 1 was the fairest, using a straight line allocation method to all 12 schools with deficits. (Wiltshire has been awarded the funding based upon the size of the cumulative deficits and therefore the current schools in deficit are the reason that the £405k of funding has been awarded)</p> <p>The group were concerned at the deficit situation and MT reassured them all schools concerned will supported by GD and his team, all with Recovery Plans. In each case there is a ‘story’ behind why the school is in deficit and all deficit schools are supported with their financial planning.</p> <p>GNS asked – does it need to be spent this year? GD confirmed it was a 23/24 grant and any unspent monies would be transferred to the DSG reserve (deficit).</p> <p>GD to amend paper to recommend option 1</p>	GD
9.	<p>AOB</p> <p>There was not any - any other business</p>	
10	<p><i>Date and Time of next Meeting</i></p> <p>The next Schools Forum meeting after our December meeting will be <u>back to Thursday 18th January 2024 @ 1.30pm</u>. This is planned as a face-to-face meeting at County Hall.</p> <p>The date of the next meeting of this group is scheduled for Monday 8th January at 8.30am. This is planned as a virtual teams meeting.</p>	