

Schools Forum
School Funding and SEN Working Group
MS TEAMS MEETING
25 September 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), Georgina Keily-Theobald (Downland) Rebecca Carson (Woodford Valley) Ben Stevens (HNB Recovery, LA), Liz Williams (Finance, LA)

Apologies: Simon Thomas (LA), John Read (Lyneham)

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.</p> <p>Introductions to the new group members Ben and Liz – who many remembered from her previous role in Wiltshire.</p>	
2.	<p>Minutes from last meeting – 22 May 2023 There were no outstanding actions.</p>	
3.	<p>Matters Arising There were no matters arising.</p>	
4.	<p>School Balances 2022/23 (GD) GD shared his report and appendices – highlights, the year-end position of balances in maintained schools was £12.2m, with £14.4m surplus and £2.2m deficit balances. GD shared appendices whereby continual surplus or deficit balances could trigger a DfE investigation – this has never taken place in Wiltshire. Schools, however, are utilising their deficits to fund increased wage bills, energy and other costs with high levels of inflation and increases than the funding increases. MT asked GD to confirm if he was working with all schools with deficits – confirmed HH noted there was a significant number of balances and welcomed headteacher views on this, LP said school leaders were conscious of non-funded pay awards and emergency site costs which needed to be allowed for, CW said schools should be using funds on pupils and not retaining such high reserves HH agreed that having a one-year settlement was not conducive to strategic planning GS shared that as an academy he was expected to retain a 5% + balance with an SRMA follow up if not achieved, that the school estate was aging and the lack of clarity around future funding unhelpful. HH was concerned that f40 lobbying around school funding would be challenged by the DfE in Wiltshire with such high balances GD confirmed the 2.5% increase for 2024/25 and that schools would be forced to rely on surplus balances where costs exceeded this - there had been no long-term settlement since the “Boris Billions” years GK-T said for special schools, funding is based on pupils and can be volatile, small teams commit to spend but can’t deliver due to capacity.</p>	
5.	<p>Schools Funding (DSG) Budget Monitoring – August Report 2023/24 (MT) MT shared her report & appendices – highlights.</p>	

	<p>This year, the drawdown from the DSG reserve has been taken at the beginning of the year rather than at the end. In this way, a more realistic budget can be set, and budget holders can be held to account. The transfer for 2022/23 is £16.648m</p> <p>The EY block adjustment has taken place. Schools block small underspend offsets the HNB pressures.</p> <p>HNB pressures are attributable to demand for services and not price increases. The forecast is significantly higher than in previous years which is largely attributable to investment in specialist places in mainstream and special with no counter reduction in ISS and requests for assessments being higher than previous years, 2022/23 total 950 with the year to date being 824.</p> <p>The overall forecast overspend is £1.971m which should be viewed in conjunction with the planned drawdown. The forecast DSG deficit reserve is £53.832m</p>	
6.	<p>Safety Valve (LW & BS)</p> <p>LW and BS took us through the slide pack provided with the agenda. The Safety Valve (SV) programme is a DfE programme for councils with very high deficits against their DSG accounts. Wiltshire was invited to join the SV programme in July and this now means that work on the Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme has ceased. Under the SV programme the council will commit to developing a plan to bring the high needs block into a position of in-year financial balance and the DfE will commit to pay off the legacy deficit (up to a maximum of 15% of DSG). There is a potential opportunity to submit a business case for capital funding if this clearly links to the recovery plan. The plan must be submitted to the DfE in January and recovery must be within 5-7 years.</p> <p>DLUC and DfE message is that the statutory override will end 2026/27 which means 2/3 local authorities will need to have sufficient reserves to fund their deficits, and many will be unable to do this.</p> <p>Approach – deficit first, outcomes second, LA leads on own solutions so key to this is partner approach – co-design is key, SF, schools, parents, carers, children – workshops to surveys.</p> <p>Ben had 3 asks of Schools Forum</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programme Board / Task & finish group membership 2. November – ½ day workshop 3. Survey <p>HH asked – how can we engage more schools?</p> <p>LP – lots of inclusive heads have other priorities, many new secondary HT in the north – suggest coffee and cake, working lunch, networking opportunity, personal invite not global email</p> <p>CM – important as lots of our data is out of step with national / local data e.g.: requests for assessment in Wiltshire are too high</p> <p>MT asked – how many LAS in SV? BS – 34 + 5 invited this year from DBV including ourselves so 39 and another 5 will be invited next year</p> <p>HH and CM left for Ofsted KIT meeting at 9.30am</p>	
7.	<p>Early Years updates (MT)</p> <p>MT took the group through her report including the new requirements on wraparound childcare for primary schools.</p> <p>The DfE surveyed schools and have published that 74% of schools offer before and after childcare. MT asked the group if any schools offered wraparound childcare from 8am til 6pm and only one school (CM) currently offered this.</p>	
8.	<p>Indicative Schools Funding 2024/25 (GD)</p> <p>GD took the group through his report. Highlights as follows.</p> <p>MSAG will be rolled into 24/25 funding and so the announced national 2.7% increase in funding is in reality a 2.4% increase in core funding factors</p>	

	<p>£440m national HNB increase – 4.3%</p> <p>DfE are tightening the National Funding Formula but Wiltshire already mirrors the NFF so no impact for Wiltshire (66% of LA's now mirror the NFF)</p> <p>Overall increases for Wiltshire</p> <p>Schools Block 3.08%</p> <p>High Needs Block B 5.29%</p> <p>Central Schools Services Block 2.07%</p> <p>Early Years Block – TBC in due course</p> <p>Schools Forum will still be making funding decisions for the 2024-25 year.</p> <p>GD ran through a couple of key areas including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Notional SEN - Split Site Funding - Growth Funding - Falling Rolls Funding <p>De-delegation consultation is open now, results to be considered in December</p> <p>The role of SF will be to make funding decisions including the potential transfer of funds between the Schools Block and the High Needs Block.</p>	
9.	<p>AOB</p> <p>MT informed the group that Helen Carpenter and Mike Thomas would be attending Schools Forum for the first time in October as WASSH and Special school reps and that she had recently run through an induction with them both.</p>	
10	<p><i>Date and Time of next Meeting</i></p> <p>The next Schools Forum meeting after our October meeting will be Tuesday 5th December 2023 @ 1.30pm. 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 27th November at 8.30am. This is planned as a virtual teams meeting.</p>	