

**Schools Forum**  
**School Funding and SEN Working Group**  
**MS TEAMS MEETING**

**17 June 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 (Finance Lead – High Needs Block Sustainability), Ben Stevens (High Needs Block Sustainability Strategic Lead), 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), and Rebecca Carson (Woodford Valley)

**Apologies:** Andy Bridewell (Ludgershall Castle), Simon Thomas (LA), Georgina Kiely-Theobald (Downland)

1.	<b>Welcome and Apologies</b>  MT welcomed the group to the virtual meeting.	
2.	<b>Minutes</b>  There were no outstanding actions.	
3.	<b>Matters Arising</b>  There were no matters arising.	
5.	<p><b>Schools Funding (DSG) Budget Monitoring Provisional Outturn (MT)</b></p> <p>MT shared her report &amp; appendices – highlights, underspends in EY post financial year adjustment and in year adjustment by the DfE both under £0.1m. Schools block small underspend offsets the HNB pressures. HNB pressures in line with demand for services and rising demand patterns – slight improvement since the previous report due to assumptions made around numbers in the final quarter of the year. First Safety Valve payment received from the DfE at £26.8m which reduces the deficit reserve balance to £28.706m at the end of the financial year.</p> <p>Provisional overspend £3.645m + previous drawdown from the reserve £16.648m – total in year pressure of £20.293m a slight improvement on both what was shared as a plan with the DfE and what was last reported to Schools Forum.</p> <p>The 2024/25 budget monitoring will be shared at the next meeting in order to align with the Cabinet reporting timetable.</p> <p><i>RC asked – if there is a change of Government, will there be cost implications for ISS schools? Confirmed no as long as VAT remained reclaimable on education services GS suggested working with ISS schools who may be struggling financially – to explore whether they have room on their school sites for some specialist provision – KD to consider with LT/ MT</i></p>	KD/MT

6. HNB Suite of Reports (LW/BS)

**a. SEND Transformation Update**

LW took us through the report – this is the Council’s largest financial risk. SV agreement DfE funding £67m (~£26.8m received to date) and the council is contributing £70.2m over the recovery period. Recruitment progressing well – first quarterly monitoring report to the DfE will be to the end of May. £6.7m due in 2024/25 from the DfE. Still waiting to hear whether the £5.7m DfE SV capital bid was successful. Some projects are rated amber – LW outlined the reasons which were around timing and recruitment.

*MT asked – how will we ensure all schools are engaged? KD responded there would be support and healthy challenge by the SEN & Inclusion advisers. Reminded schools we are open to pilots from schools and there is earmarked funding for these.*

*GS shared independent assessments often recommended an EHCP and some schools were not inclusive, often recommending other, nearby schools for children with additional needs. LP agreed this was also happening in secondary especially where CYP were more complex and parents more demanding.*

*KD responded the LA are working with health professionals but there is little we can do to influence the private health specialists. KD shared that where it was known schools were telling parents they could not meet need she was having very robust conversations with the leadership team of those schools.*

*CW said there were situations where parents were insistent an EHCP was required, were using the complaints route to get one even when professionals did not recommend a plan*

*KD responded the LA need to ensure the EH offer is really robust and covers social challenges and approaches to parenting. Three new staff in IFD to change culture in the LA so the default is to look holistically at that child’s situation and not recommend assessment in place Sept 24.*

*GS – following a period of poor attendance at school – an EHCP is not the best route of entry back in but that’s often recommended. KD responded – needs to be REP oversight and we have Melksham House and The Northwood Centre for CYP with EBSA, anxiety concerns – an EHCP adds nothing for these CYP.*

**b. Consultation on Block Transfer for 2025/26**

LW took the group through her report which outlined the proposed questions for the consultation on a block transfer from schools block to high needs block in 2025/26. The Safety Valve agreement includes an assumption of a 1% block transfer and the report proposed the information that would be required to support the consultation to enable schools to assess the benefits and impact of the transfer.

*LP asked about the process given that the Safety Valve plan already assumes a 1% transfer. LW responded that the assumption is in the plan however decisions on a block transfer have to be made on an annual basis. When Ministers consider any disapplication request they will want to understand the views of schools and what consultation took place.*

	<p><i>LP noted that the schools block does not cover the post-16 age range and that she had concerns about a transfer being required to support increasing post-16 costs in the high needs block.</i></p> <p>GD shared initial modelling of methodologies to manage any reduction in NFF formula factor values. It was agreed that the consultation should reflect the impact on AWPUs as this ensures any reduction is applied in the same way across all schools.</p> <p>It was agreed that the consultation would need to include information on the impact on schools and the additional investment that a transfer would facilitate. It was also agreed that the consultation should be discussed at WASSH and PHF during the autumn term.</p> <p>c. Growth Funding for Specialist Places – LW summarised the key issues in the report which proposes a formulaic approach towards supporting significant growth in specialist settings.</p> <p><i>LP asked how the proposed funding compared with spend in 2023/24 using a less formulaic approach. LW confirmed that this would be incorporated into the report for Schools Forum.</i></p> <p><i>LP asked whether the increase in places always necessitated additional staffing. LW responded that the proposed growth would be applied where schools are increasing their planned place numbers significantly – for example 40 or 50 places in a new school year.</i></p> <p>d. EHCP Top-Up review – initial principles. LW outlined her report which outlined the principles to be applied to a review of EHCP top-up payments. It was noted that the report would be issued as a supplementary item for Schools Forum as it needed to be shared with Cabinet before publication.</p>	
7.	<p><b>Annual Consultations – De-delegation (GD)</b></p> <p>GD presented the annual de-delegation consultation report for maintained schools. Each year, the questions to be asked of maintained schools are presented to the group to confirm their acceptance of the consultation questions.</p> <p>No amendments were proposed to the questions posed from the 2024-25 consultation.</p>	
8.	<p><b>PHF Reps / Proportions</b></p> <p>GD presented a verbal update to the group to confirm that despite the recent cohort of academy conversions, no changes would be required to the current membership proportions. The Clerk to Schools Forum will present the numbers formally at the October Schools Forum meeting.</p>	
9.	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <p>There was no AOB however following the meeting, CW updated MT that AB would no longer attend the working group but we are not losing him from Schools Forum, CW will ensure AB is updated and of course, papers will still be shared.</p>	
10	<p><b><i>Date and Time of next Meeting</i></b></p>	

	<p>SFWG 8.30 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024, Schools Forum 1.30pm 10<sup>th</sup> October 2024</p> <p>This is planned as a virtual teams meeting.</p>	
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