

Schools Forum

MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING HELD ON 9 JUNE 2022 AT ONLINE MEETING - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS.

Present:

Nikki Barnett, Aileen Bates, Lyssy Bolton, Andy Bridewell, Rebecca Carson, Michele Chilcott, Sam Churchill, Stella Fowler, John Hawkins, Georgina Keily-Theobald, Lisa Percy (Chair), Graham Pike, John Proctor, Graham Shore (Vice-Chair), Trudy Srawley, Ian Tucker, David Whewell and Catriona Williamson

Also Present:

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager), Helean Hughes (Director – Education & Skills), Cate Mullen (Head of SEND and Inclusion), Lisa Pullin (Democratic Services Officer), Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children and Education), and Cllr Suzanne Wickham (Portfolio Holder for SEND)

60 Apologies and Changes of Membership

Apologies were received from Cllr Jane Davies (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, SEND, Transition and Inclusion), Jo Grenfell (Observer – Post 16, Wiltshire College), Jon Hamp (Special School Academy representative), Cllr Ross Henning (Observer – Local Youth Network), Cllr Laura Mayes (Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Skills), Cllr Dominic Muns (Portfolio Holder for Education), Graham Nagel-Smith (Primary Academy representative), Giles Pugh (Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education representative), Nigel Roper (Maintained Secondary School representative), Ros Sutton (Primary School Governor representative) and from Lucy Townsend (Corporate Director – People/Director of Children’s Services).

Substitutions

Nikki Bennett was the substitute for Jo Grenfell.
Graham Pike was substitute for Graham Nagel-Smith.

There were no changes to the membership of Schools Forum.

61 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 January 2022 were presented.

Resolved:

That the Chair approve and sign the minutes of the meeting of Schools Forum held on 20 January 2022.

62 **Chair's Announcements**

There were no announcements.

63 **Declaration of Interests**

There were no interests declared.

64 **Public Participation**

No questions or statements were received in advance of the meeting.

65 **Updates from Working Groups**

The Forum noted the update received by way of the minutes of the meeting of the Early Years Reference Group meeting held on 31 March 2022.

There were no questions arising.

The Forum noted the update received by way of the minutes of the meeting of the School Funding and SEN working group held on 23 May 2022.

There were no questions arising.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the minutes of the Early Years Reference group meeting on 31 March 2022 and the joint meeting of the School Funding and SEN working group held on 23 May 2022.

66 **Update on the work from the F40 Group**

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) referred to the report which sought to provide Schools Forum with an update on the membership of the F40 group and their current work and highlighted the following:

- That Wiltshire were members of the F40 group as one of the 42 lowest funded local authority areas;
- The F40 group seeks fairness and equal opportunities in education for all children, regardless of where they live and to remove historical discrepancies locked into how schools are funded;
- F40 more recently had become in highlighting the underfunding of SEND funding and the way it is calculated based on historic need and raises that there is a £1billion overspend in local authorities for SEND;
- A number of senior politicians had been appointed to F40 – Sir Gary Streeter MP (Conservative), Layla Moran MP (Liberal Democrats) and

Emma Hardy MP (Labour). It is good to have political representation to bring issues to the fore;

- The recent work of the F40 group included MP briefings, meeting with the DfE in relation to the SEND review and working with the Education Policy Institute;
- Wiltshire benefits from its membership of F40 and follow their lead in the responses to national consultation; and
- When the DfE look at the per pupil funding rates on the 'league tables' Wiltshire primary schools are 109 out of 150 and secondary schools are 146 out of 150 worst funded authorities. The overall position of being 139 out of 150 of the worst funded does not sit comfortably.

Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children & Education) reported that they had received a letter from the F40 group to encourage local authorities and schools to ask their MP's to attend the MP briefings. WASSH were asked to write on behalf of Wiltshire Schools to encourage the Wiltshire MP's. Ian Tucker (Chair of WASSH) agreed to request this via WASSH.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the ongoing work of the F40 group on behalf of its members.

67 **Dedicated Schools Budget - Budget Monitoring - 2021-22**

Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children and Education) referred to the report which presented the year end budget monitoring information against the DSG for the financial year 2021-22 as at 31 March 2022 and highlighted the following:

- Despite low levels of funding and with an overspend of £7.066 million against the overall schools block, there was good recovery plan work being done and the final outturns ended up with more favourable position than previously forecast due to a slowing of EHCP plans;
- The Early Years underspend was largely due to the lower take up of the 3 and 4 year old funding - it was likely that some parents had decided not to send their children to take up their entitled place. The take up for disadvantaged 2-year-old take up was above what was planned and this was due to success with active promotion through Children's Centres staff and health visitors;
- The underspend on the Schools Budget largely relates to the schools growth fund which is helping to offset the overall pressure on the DSG;

- High needs budgets were overspent by £9.723m. The biggest areas of overspend are named pupil allowances and top ups, particularly post 16, independent special school packages, and Wiltshire pupils in non-Wiltshire provision. When the level of funding does not meet the local need the budget cannot be set at an achievable level and so the location of the overspend is not an indication of individual budget issues but that the whole block is under significant pressure;
- Whilst the numbers of EHCP's was still rising it had slowed slightly, however, this could be due to a number of factors including professionals having reduced access to and contact with pupils due to the Covid pandemic;
- The cost of Independent Special School fees had gone up by £784 per student but this would also be for the increase in teachers' pay and pension costs;
- The High Needs Working Group continue to meet regularly to discuss the recovery actions and look to investigate and address issues internally and with external partners;
- The DSG reserve brought forward of £18.717 million is adjusted by the negative early years block adjustment of £0.189 million. The overspend takes the reserve into an overall deficit position of £25.973 million which the local authority is cash flowing; and
- The DSG Management Plan is a live working document which continues to be updated. Officers from Wiltshire and two other local authorities had a meeting with the DfE in March to learn more about the DfE's Development Better Value (DVB) programme and the assistance on offer from the national recovery resources. Another meeting was planned to discuss the next steps and SEN and finance speciality and recovery plans and actions and funding attached to that transformational work and any funding for it.

A Primary School Governor representative asked about the slowing rate of EHCP and asked if that related to schools behaviour or the turnaround process and the changes affecting that? Marie Taylor responded that she felt it was slowing because there had not been eyes and ears on children (whilst there had not been during the school closures in the pandemic) and that since then they had been playing catch up and there were large numbers to keep up with back log. Transitional support payments were available to try and put funding into schools to respond to their needs. So, whilst there had been a drop in numbers off EHCP's this was due to a number of things, but mostly a catch up with the processing following a lull in the pandemic.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the year end budget monitoring position and the deficit DSG reserve balance as at 31 March 2022.

68 **Dedicated Schools Budget - Budget Statement 2022/23**

Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children and Education) referred to the report which presented the budget statement for the DSG for the financial year 2022-23 and highlighted the following:

- This report was a snapshot of the opening budget for 2022-23. The provisional allocation of the early years budget was £28.521 million and there would be adjustment by the DfE in the summer. The budgeted spend for 2 year old funding was £1.175 million with £25.254 million for 3 and 4 year olds. This budget was not increased by the supplementary grant due to the national increases to the hourly rates and other funds. The Inclusion Support Fund has been extended to 30 hours from 15 for 2022-23 as part of the preparation for schools programme within the high needs recovery plan. Any unspent COMF grant for Early Years could be rolled forward and this would be discussed with the Early Years Reference Group;
- The Schools budgets were increased and in addition schools have been allocated the schools supplementary grant to alleviate increases in energy, national insurance and other costs. Following consultation, a transfer of 0.5% was agreed from the Schools block to support the High Needs block and an amount equivalent to the 50% reduction in the school improvement brokerage and monitoring grant in January 2022 to replace the removal of this funding;
- The High Needs budget increased by £4.9 million (budget £65.105 million) but the estimates of requirement for 2022-23 exceeded this at the time of setting the budget by £11.160 million;
- The historical element of the Central Schools Services budget has been reduced by 20% in line with recent years, despite this a limited sum continues to be transferred to support the high needs block;
- The significant projected overspend for 2022-23 could create a deficit reserve of £37.133 million. The Director for Finance (Andy Brown) plans to co-ordinate a local authority response to the SEN review consultation as that DSG reserve is unsustainable for local authorities to manage; and
- It was hoped that the ongoing working of the High Needs Block Recovery Working Group would mitigate some of the projected overspend, however the impact of the majority of schemes was longer term.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the original dedicated schools budget statement and balance brought forward on the DSG reserve.

69 **Update from the High Needs Block Working Group**

Cate Mullen (Head of SEND and Inclusion) gave an update on behalf of the High Needs Block Working Group and highlighted the following:

High Needs Block Recovery Plan

- The recovery plan was in place which detailed changes and mitigations in relation to the high needs block overspend. They were working to meet children's needs within Wiltshire schools so that there could be cost savings to reduce the overspend and to provide education for children in places as close to their homes as possible;
- There was DfE oversight and support in place with this and there was the possibility of additional support and funding for local authorities with significant overspends from the DfE;
- Additional places were being created through capital funding at special schools and resource bases including the creation of new resource bases for September 2022 at Silverwood School, Exeter House and other satellite locations; and
- There was ongoing consideration of gaps in available provision and how we can support this, e.g. SEMH provision and the wide range of need that this encompasses.

Wiltshire Costed Provision Map

- This tool had been set up to enable schools to detail what they are putting in place for their children with SEND. Cheshire East had developed a provision map and Officers had worked with them to gain their approval to utilise their costed provision map. Officers had worked with SENCO's in Wiltshire in its development and the feedback received so far was that the provision map was easy to use;
- A worked example an individual provision map for an NPA was shown at the meeting.

A Primary Governor representative asked about the rates of EHCP assessments had returned to the pre Covid rates? Cate Mullen responded that the rate of requests for EHCP's was not behaving in the way it was before Covid, the rate per month had remained steady with some ups and downs. There had usually been predicable patterns before Covid but since Covid there were fairly unpredictable patterns.

SEND Review (Green Paper)

- This was a large consultation document and there would be an additional SEND Board meeting to look at the 22 consultation questions. Responses were also being collated from colleagues to gather a multi-agency response across the local area and a response would be drafted by the local authority.

The Parent Carer representative reported that the Wiltshire Parent Carer Council had some consultations coming up for any parent carers who were struggling to make sense of the green paper.

[What we do - Have your say! - Important Opportunity to Have a Say on the SEND System & Alternative Provision in England - WPC \(wiltshireparentcarercouncil.co.uk\)](http://wiltshireparentcarercouncil.co.uk)

Resolved: That Schools Forum

- 1. Note the minutes of the meeting of the High Needs Block Working Group held on 5 May 2022.**
- 2. Note the updates on behalf of the High Needs Block Working Group.**

70 DFE Consultation - 'Completing the reforms to the National Funding Formula'

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) referred to the report which sought to provide Schools Forum with an update on the DfE consultation with stakeholders regarding their reforms to the National Funding Formula which took place between July and September 2021. The DfE have published their response following the consultation and the report sets out the outcome from the response and the proposed next steps. Grant highlighted the following:

- The consultation reflected the continued DfE journey towards a 'hard' formula with not or little local flexibility. In Wiltshire, the formula had been already aligned to the NFF and so there would be no or very little impact on budgets for Wiltshire schools;
- The key outcome was that the Government would bring forward the relevant legislation to achieve this change when parliamentary time allows. It was not known when this would be, however in the second consultation (that was released on 7 June 2022), 2027-28 is mentioned which is some 5 years away;
- The second consultation refers to split sites funding, exceptional premises factors (e.g. schools that down have their own hall or playing field etc), PFI funding and a national approach to funding growth and falling rolls;

- As part of the first consultation, stakeholders were asked about their views for moving maintained schools to being funded on an academic year basis. In the findings there was no clear majority in favour of a move so this would not be prioritised as a move towards the direct NFF;
- The move to a direct NFF would mean that the role of schools forums would change but the DfE expect they would continue to play an important part in local decision making and stakeholder engagement and the DfE also plan to review how schools forums engage with high needs funding issues following the SEND review;
- Officers would look to arrange a meeting towards the end of Term 6 of the School Funding and SEN Working Groups to gather feedback to be able to prepare a response on behalf of the local authority and to also provide a suggested response for schools to be able to respond.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the DfE's response to their consultation on reforms to the NFF.

71 **Annual Schools Consultation - Delegation of Central Expenditure 2023-24, Funding for Education Functions 2023-24, Transfer of Funding from Schools Block to High Needs Block 2023-24**

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) referred to the report which sought to brief Schools Forum and agree a set of questions to be sent out to all schools in the autumn of 2022 and highlighted the following:

- Officers were getting organised early with the three areas of consultation that would be sent out to all schools in the autumn which related to de-delegation, funding for education functions and a proposed transfer of funding from the School Block to the High Needs Block;
- In relation to de-delegation, traditionally maintained schools had agreed collectively that central budgets be de-delegated and provided by the local authority;
- In relation to the funding for education functions, the DfE decided to reduce the Local Authority Monitoring and Brokering Grant (LAMB) by 50% in 2022-23 with full removal in the 2022-23 year. A local consultation exercise was undertaken in advance of the 2022-23 year to determine whether maintained schools would elect to de-delegate funding from their budgets to support the loss in the LAMB grant;
- The School Effectiveness team were working to set out proposals regarding options for the delivery of the service from 2023-24, in order to consult with maintained schools and understand the most appropriate route to fulfil their needs; and

- A transfer of funding from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block was agreed to contribute to the High Needs Block recovery plan in the 2022-23 financial year. As we move towards the 2023-24 year, Officers would consult with ALL schools which would cover a range of options ranging from transferring funds from Schools Block.

An early years representative asked that within the consultation Officers make it clear of the amounts involved with the proposals and included the total quantum.

Resolved: That Schools Forum

- 1. Decide on the consultation questions for maintained schools around delegation/de-delegation of budgets for central services within the schools' block.**
- 2. Decide on the consultation questions for all schools around setting the 2023-24 Schools budget.**

72 **Household Support Fund (HSF) - 2022-23**

Marie Taylor (Head of Finance – Children and Education) referred to the report which presented the Council's expenditure plan for the Household Support Fund grant received from the Department of Work and Pensions and highlighted the following:

- This fund was introduced in December 2021 as the 'Winter Grant' which was to support children and families during the pandemic. This then became the 'Local Grant' and has now become the Household Support Fund;
- The total Wiltshire allocation to date was £5.3 million and originally the majority of this funding had been for families with children but would now be split equally between individuals and families without children and families with children;
- The planned use of the current year's allocation of £2,728,656.41 sees 45% going to families with children, 33% allocated to pensioners and remaining funds going to other vulnerable residents by way of food banks, housing services, and Working Age Households.
- No Council admin costs had been factored into the grant as this was being absorbed but there would be payment card costs of £22,034;
- There was also a contingency fund if there was higher take up than planned, e.g. food banks; and

- There would be another allocation in Autumn 2022.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the expenditure plan for the Household Support Fund and the change of focus from a majority of funding aimed at support for families to support both families and other households equally.

73 Schools Finance Manual Update

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager) gave a verbal update on the Schools Finance manual that relates to maintained schools and highlighted the following:

- That there had been a complete update and re-write of the schools Finance Manual for maintained schools in April 2022. Academies would use their own Trust financial handbook. The manual was available on Rightchoice and there was a range of topics covered.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum note the update on the Schools Finance manual that relates to maintained schools.

74 Confirmation of Dates for Future Meetings

The Forum noted that the future meetings would be held on:

6 October 2022
8 December 2022
19 January 2023
16 March 2023.

75 Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 1.30 - 3.05 pm)

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

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