

AGENDA SUPPLEMENT (1)

Meeting: Schools Forum

Place: Council Chamber - County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, BA14 8JN

Date: Thursday 12 December 2024

Time: 1.30 pm

The Agenda for the above meeting was published on 4 December 2024. Additional documents are now available and are attached to this Agenda Supplement.

Please direct any enquiries on this Agenda to Lisa Pullin, Tel 01225 713015 or email committee@wiltshire.gov.uk of Democratic Services, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge.

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This Agenda and all the documents referred to within it are available on the Council's website at www.wiltshire.gov.uk

6 Updates from Working Groups (Pages 3 - 12)

- a) The draft minutes of the meeting of the Early Years Reference Group held on 26 November are now available and attached.
- b) Attached are revised draft minutes of the School Funding and SEN Working Group held on 28 November 2024. Please disregard the version attached in the main agenda pack.

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 10 December 2024

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Early Years Reference Group Meeting Tuesday 26 November 2024

1. Welcome and introductions

Lyssy Bolton (LB), Jane Boulton (JB), Lucy Bracher (LB) Lucy-Anne Bryant (LAB) (Chair until item 3), Emma Cooke (EC), Jackie Day (JD), Emma Egan (EE), Charlotte Forester (CF), Lisa Fryer (LF), Jenny Harvey (JH) (notes), Sarah Hawkins (SH), Julia Honeywell (JHo), Kirsty Merrifield (KM), Debbie Muir (DM), Kai Muxlow (KM), Marie Taylor (MT), Karen Venner (KV) (Chair from item 4), Kerry Yeates (KY), Hannah Yeates (HY), Emily Wood (EW), Naomi Wright (NW)

2. Apologies

None. Introductions done

3. Chair position (LAB)

This agenda was brought forward to the start of the meeting.

LAB reported that both KV and KM had volunteered to be Chair, so the roles of Chair and Vice Chair could be appointed to. KM proposed KV for the role of Chair which was seconded by JD.

LAB handed over to KV who then chaired the rest of the meeting.

ACTION: None

4. Minutes of last meeting (27 September 2024)

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

5. Matters arising

Item 4 - EC informed the group that Ben Stevens will be attending next EY manager meeting scheduled for 11.02.2025.

Item 7 - LAB reported that she will be meeting with Wiltshire College later today.

Item 9 – LAB/EC have both been incredibly busy with the recent SEND inspection so have not had an opportunity to move this forward. EC will organise a meeting before EYRG is next scheduled to meet in January 2025. KY commented that the problems are continuing and needs addressing.

ACTION: EC to organise HV meeting

6. Budget Monitoring (MT)

MT shared a Powerpoint presentation which is an extract from the report being tabled at the next Schools Forum meeting on 12.12.2024. There are significant and ongoing pressures in the high needs area. For early years there is a large underspend which follows the pattern of previous years as the funding is based on census data and the forecast on actual spend to date. The DfE prepare an in-year adjustment and post year adjustment each taking into account revised EY census data.

The quarter 2 forecast shows 3- & 4-year-old entitlement with the largest underspend. MT stated that local authorities do not know how the DfE calculate their in and post year figures so it's impossible for us to work out. Also reported is a small underspend on 2-year-olds.

The Working Parent Entitlement's for 2-year-olds and 9–23-month-olds are both new areas. The Working Parent Entitlement for 2-year-olds is currently forecast with a slight overspend and there is no accurate forecast for the 9-23 months olds to share yet.

EYPP and DAF are both showing as underspent hence why the forecast is displaying 0.00.

EY central expenditure is showing as underspent due to team vacancies.

LAB queried whether there would be an opportunity to move any potential underspend from 9–23-month-olds to Working Parent 2-year-olds to cover that slight overspend. MT confirmed the budget is given to EY to spend as we wish. The DfE will not recover funding because of an underspend; however, they will recover funding linked to activities.

ACTION: None

7. Early Years expansion (LAB)

LAB expressed thanks to everyone who had expanded their settings to date and confirmed only half the budget has been spent to date. Bradford-on-Avon is the biggest area of concern. The new setting at Limpley Stoke is due to open in the New Year 2025. Other areas of focus are Tidworth, Bulford and Devizes.

The group discussed several issues:

- challenges being faced as a setting on a military base and the way the military operates; military families unable to plan too far ahead, lack of premise space despite having quota for staff.
- difficulties faced where school a setting is based is becoming an academy. The local authority is unable to be involved during the transition phase.
- impact of budget changes on setting expansion and sustainability

JD raised the issue of increased NI costs and business rates on behalf of John Proctor, owner of South Hills nursery group. He has sent a letter to local MPs about business rates and the national Living Wage and their impact on settings. KV agreed all private providers were in the same situation and it's a real concern moving forward. LAB asked for this topic to be on the next agenda and asked for EYRG to raise the issue with individual MPs, but early years providers do need to take this on themselves. JH will send a letter to all EYRG members to sign, and KV will then organise with the sector/MPs.

MT suggested KV write a piece for EY newsletter encouraging providers to lobby their MPs including links to look at.

**ACTION: Business rates to be added as agenda item at next meeting
JH to organise a letter for EYRG signature
KV to write a lobbying article for EY Newsletter**

8. Wraparound expansion (LAB)

LAB reported this is progressing well with new expanded provision set up across the county and encouraged members to get schools in their areas to make contact. NH has a team of 3 working hard to help roll this out, who are happy to have conversations with any interested parties.

ACTION: None

9. AOB

DfE are planning to tighten up on the charging policy – there is a desire to make charges clear and specific. LA has met with DfE – Providers will be consulted on the proposed changes to the wording in the guidance (timescale for this is not known).

EC reported EY is currently not represented on the Education Safeguarding Group. EYRG members get first refusal to participate. Sarah Hawkins and Jane Boulton would both like to learn more. (Emma to share info with them).

LAB reported Children's Select approved our Early Years Strategy this morning. This is a very positive outcome; we now have got councillors backing on the importance of EY.

KM agreed to be vice-chair – draft minutes will be shared with both Karen and Kirsty to agree before final circulation, and both will have opportunities to create the agenda.

KM raised the issue of mid-term starters and their payment dates and their financial impact on settings. JH and LAB will look to see if any changes can be made to this area.

JD gave positive feedback to Spurgeons for their thorough and good communication, especially around the temporary closures of their 1:1 support offer. This is helped enormously to manage both the setting and family's expectations.

A brief discussion on recruitment activity was had. A recruitment fair is planned for May to be held in the Atrium at County Hall – everyone is invited to get involved. LAB is meeting with Wiltshire College after this meeting to discuss this. KM campaigned to the group to get providers to share their experience/passion for working in the EY sector at their local college, this input could help inspire and keep motivated those training to enter the profession. KV has links to Bath College should anyone wish to make contact. JB shared that she speaks to Year 10 students at local Secondary Schools when they are deciding working experience options. Important to also inspire students who are taking decisions on future career/training paths.

ACTION: EC to forward information on Education Safeguarding Group to SH and JB
LAB to contact KV for Bath College contact
JH/LAB to look into mid-term starters and payment dates

10. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 9th January 2025 at 2pm.

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Schools Forum (SF)
School Funding and SEN Working Group (SFWG)
MS TEAMS MEETING
28th November 2024
Minutes

Present: Marie Taylor (Chair), (Finance, local authority ((LA)), Grant Davis (Finance, LA), Liz Williams (HNB Sustainability Finance Lead), Ben Stevens (HNB Sustainability Strategic Lead), Kai Muxlow (Commissioning, LA), Lisa Percy (Chair of SF / Hardenhuish), John Hawkins (Teacher / Governor rep), Graham Shore (Deputy Chair SF / Holy Trinity), John Read (PHF maintained rep, Lyneham Primary), Nicola Whitcombe (Springfields Academy representing Special academies), Adam Smith (Chilmark, PHF representing maintained small schools)

Apologies: Georgina Keily-Theobald (Downland) Kathryn Davis (Director, Education & Skills); Lisa Fryer (HOS, SEN & Inclusion)

1.	<p>Welcome and Apologies</p> <p>MT welcomed the group to the virtual meeting.</p>	
2.	<p>Minutes</p> <p>There were no outstanding actions.</p>	
3.	<p>Matters Arising</p> <p>MT updated the group on some relevant points from a DFE regional meeting earlier this week.</p> <p>Minimal changes to the formula and approach and marginal increase for schools. The DFE received a lot of complaints from the group around the increases in funding and lateness of the guidance and allocations which was due to the general election outcome. NI grant - more details to be received in December or early in the new year similar methodology but looking at mainstream schools with resource spaces who of course have higher staff ratios which is helpful.</p> <p>Notional SEN no changes for 25/26 but in future the DFE are looking at what schools might be asked to do with this funding.</p> <p>Statutory override for local authorities with the DSG deficit no updates however the DFE are working with the MHCLG and the treasury on the future of this arrangement.</p> <p>The DFE confirmed that the safety valve mechanism was not confirmed into the future, but we know that £895 million has been ring fenced to support local authorities with high needs block deficits no detail available as yet.</p> <p>There was also discussion round section 19 medical needs peoples and recharging schools and excluded people recharging.</p> <p>A question was asked about the early years NI insurance grant and no detail was available. The DFE were publishing something “hopefully soon.”</p>	

4.	<p>Schools Funding (DSG) Budget Monitoring Report (MT)</p> <p>MT shared her report & appendices – highlights, underspends in EY due to demand and Schools block small underspend offsets the HNB pressures. HNB pressures in line with demand for services and rising demand patterns – forecast deficit reserve balance to £66.233m at the end of the financial year higher than the SV agreement forecast of £51.027m and an increase since the last report of £4.959m.</p> <p>BS was able to update that the DFE have confirmed that our voluntary revised plan can be submitted by the 11th of December - the DFE advisor has committed to feedback when we submit and wanted to confirm that this was not an enforced plan as other local authorities due as part of enhanced monitoring.</p>	
5.	<p>School block transfer (LW)</p> <p>LW presented the report which included detailed feedback from the Right Choice consultation. There was a lively discussion around some of the feedback from schools around the consultation process fed into via from WASSH colleagues and from the primary sector. LW agreed to take all feedback on board and reminded the group that clarity had been provided both in January and there had been a full report to school forum in June confirming the intention to consult on a 1% transfer.</p> <p>One of the items raised was that DFE policy had changed in relation to whether the council can still submit a request without the agreement of Schools Forum? There was a question as to whether the local authority would still choose to submit a disapplication without the support of schools. LW explained that we were still in a DfE process and the local authority could still choose to submit a disapplication but could not make a transfer unless the Secretary of State agrees and the Secretary of State will take into account schools forum views.</p> <p>JR raised concerns about the democratic process in relation to who makes the final decision. LW confirmed the LA was still in the middle of the Democratic process so is not in a position to decide what the actions will be. JR pointed out that the majority of schools have supported a transfer of up to 0.55%, in line with previous transfers, but they do not support the full 1% and asked who would make the decision. LW confirmed the process was Schools Forum then HN Sustainability Board, a recommendation would be made from the Board to Cabinet.</p> <p>LW confirmed that the DfE are expecting us to submit a request for a 1% block transfer, in line with the Safety Valve agreement, but we want to take the views of schools seriously before making a final decision on how to proceed. The responses to the consultation have been helpful; nothing surprising in there in the feedback from schools. LP said this was a historic deficit which gained momentum and appreciated it's a very difficult position. The local authority acknowledges the impact on schools and that action is needed.</p> <p>LP asked do we know when the funding allocation for 25/26 is due? LW confirmed we were expecting provisional allocations today. LW confirmed that the DfE date for submitting a disapplication request was the 18th November and therefore this had been submitted because we were advised by the DfE that we had to submit it in order to later be able to amend it following the Schools Forum discussion.</p> <p>LW agreed to group recommendations to breakdown questions 1A 1B & 1C by primary and secondary sector and also further by the size of school.</p> <p>JR raised a concern that there is not enough information of how the objectives will be achieved on the SEMH plans within the safety valve program. JR also asked where the evidence has come from within the LA that the objectives are achievable but received no answer to this. LW confirmed it's a good challenge arising from information shared at the</p>	

	<p>PHF briefing and WASSH conference. She took lots of questions and was still looking at the responses, the SEN inspection had taken time away from officers, but agreed we do need to start sharing updates of progress.</p> <p>JR said schools need more evidence of impact to make the decisions and it knocks the confidence of head teachers LW confirmed we're in the early stages of the plan, demonstrating outcomes is difficult but we will need to have some specific communications to demonstrate the impact. It's a big system and a slow change and we need to demonstrate where we are making that impact.</p> <p>LP confirmed secondary teachers were feeding back that they had not seen evidence of the benefits and would welcome this.</p> <p>BS confirmed that he felt there had been a lot of communication around elements of the plans he felt SENCOs were aware of MISAs but appreciated that head teachers may not be. LP said she didn't feel that was the case as her SENCO was not aware but some comms around the plans would be welcome. Officers took this as an action.</p> <p>AS raised that school balances schools with high balances are not helpful when we are looking at a position of such pressure and suggested school budgets should be looked at with regard to who's got huge carry forwards AS's view is that the impact of a SB transfer on smaller schools is proportionately higher.</p> <p>LW confirmed we're not able to take school balances into account as any adjustment to the block must be made on in year funding not historical reserves as per the DFE regs. Actions relating to the Schools Forum discussion in October on school balances would be taken forward separately..</p> <p>LW confirmed we should have the indicative funding by Schools Forum date and be able to do some early modelling. LP asked if we can have any information before Schools Forum LW confirmed the deadline for papers is the Tuesday so we should be able to produce papers as long as the guidance is received today. GD confirmed he would be able to run through the modelling using 2023 census data so it would be in draft and would only be in a position to confirm fully in January, but we will be able to make in principal decisions for the December meeting</p> <p>MT thanked the group for their input and asked would it be useful to show the process in a flowchart showing the various stages of consultation so that there's no further misunderstanding? Agreed to be useful.</p>	LW BS GD
6.	<p>De delegation Report (GD)</p> <p>GD shared his report which included responses from the consultation 46 primary schools and 4 secondary schools and overwhelming support to continue to de-delegate from primaries. However, GD had had discussions with the secondary rep and they had all agreed to vote to procure their own School Improvement as a collective. It was felt they could get better value as did the local authority from purchasing support from elsewhere.</p> <p>There were no comments from the group.</p> <p>GD confirmed that de-delegation can be separated between primary and secondary maintained schools.</p>	
7.	<p>Growth Fund (GD)</p> <p>GD presented his report. With a general dipping in the birth rate, we don't have any new schools generally but, sometimes we have areas of housing development and obviously the infant class size regs mean that sometimes additional funding is required from the</p>	

	<p>growth fund. In addition, sometimes there is a requirement to expand certain schools to ensure capacity is available and this needs to be supported.</p> <p>Nicola had to leave the meeting at this point.</p> <p>Confirmed Wiltshire had never set up a falling rolls fund and the group agreed that this was still the feeling from members as this would need to be top sliced from school block. Wiltshire's falling rolls funding through the DfE's calculations of our 'Growth' allocation helps to fund the SB transfer.</p> <p>JR queried the DFE thoughts around the falling rolls fund. GD confirmed that it was introduced as an option around 10 years ago. Take up nationally by LA's has been minimal, and Schools Forum have consistently agreed that establishing a Falling Rolls Fund has not been supported in Wiltshire.</p> <p>Almost all Primary schools are witnessing a drop in numbers due to the birth rate falling. Colleagues from the LA are meeting with the DFE next week to discuss the viability of some schools and it's a wider conversation where schools are in multi academy trust. One option is to take PAN's down to more appropriate levels.</p> <p>MT explained that the DFE have made it clear that schools are shrinking we are not able to convert space into resource spaces for example and then ask them for basic need funding a couple of years later GD confirmed that small schools are protected by sparsity funding now as part of the NFF which has really helped small schools</p>	
8.	<p>2025/26 Schools funding (GD)</p> <p>GD presented his report - the 2025/26 values are expected today.</p> <p>LW said rolling all those grants into the AWPU impacts the value of the 1% in monetary terms and we need to consider the cash value of that 1% and whether it needs to be 1% or the cash value based upon last years 1% cash figure.</p> <p>LP said the number of schools impacted by the MFG might be worth modelling up. GD said once the financial modelling is completed, we can consider more fully in the January meeting.</p>	GD LW
9.	<p>AOB</p> <p>GD brought back to the group a piece of work he had done on revenue balances of maintained schools with historically large balances for more than five years and shared that some have plans to use the balances.</p> <p>There was considerable discussion in the group with strong views that saving revenue for capital was not appropriate particularly whilst there were lots of schools with a disadvantaged learner gap. The group was very interested in clawbacks however we would have to do a clawback arrangement with a separate arrangement for maintained and Academy schools and this would be likely, to be inequitable - officers agreed to look at a working group to look at the schools financial data with some of the performance data and bring their conclusions back to schools forum.</p>	MT GD
10	<p><i>Date and Time of next Meeting</i></p> <p>SFWG 8.30am – 14th January 2025</p> <p>Schools Forum 1.30pm 23rd January 2025</p>	

	This is planned as a face to face meeting.	
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Glossary

RB – Resource Base

SV – Safety Valve

DfE – Dept for Education

LGA – Local Government Org

ISS – Independent Special Schools

EY – Early Years

LA – Local Authority

SoS – Secretary of State

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