

Schools Forum

MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING HELD ON 18 JANUARY 2024 AT CONFERENCE SUITE, 1ST FLOOR, COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE.

Present:

Lyssy Bolton, Andy Bridewell, Helen Carpenter, Rebecca Carson, Michele Chilcott, Stella Fowler, Jo Grenfell, John Hawkins, Cllr Ross Henning, Georgina Keily-Theobald, Graham Nagel-Smith, Nick Norgrove, Lisa Percy (Chair), Giles Pugh, John Read, Graham Shore (Vice-Chair), Trudy Srawley, Mike Thomas, Karen Venner, and Catriona Williamson

Also Present:

Adam Smith (Primary Heads Forum)

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager)

Ellen Ghey (Democratic Services Officer)

Richard Hanks (Co-Director – Education and Skills)

Lisa Pullin (Democratic Services Officer)

Ben Stevens (Sustainability Strategic Lead – High Needs Block)

Marie Taylor (Head of Finance - Children & Education)

Simon Thomas (FACT Programme Lead)

Deborah Williams (Strategic Financial Management Adviser)

Liz Williams (Finance Lead – High Needs Block Sustainability)

1 Apologies, Substitutions, and any Changes of Membership

Apologies for absence from Members were received from:

- Nikki Barnett
- Aileen Bates
- Ros Sutton
- David Whewell

Further apologies were noted from:

- Helean Hughes (Co-Director – Education and Skills), who had left Wiltshire Council
- Kathryn Davis (Interim Director – Education and Skills)
- Lisa Fryer (Head of SEND and Inclusion)
- Cate Mullen (Former Head of SEND and Inclusion), who had left Wiltshire Council
- Councillor Suzanne Wickham (Portfolio Holder for SEND and Inclusion)

2 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Part I (public) minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 December 2023 were presented for consideration.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum approved and signed the Part I (public) minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 December 2023 as a true and correct record.

3 **Chair's Announcements**

There were no Chair's announcements.

4 **Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

5 **Public Participation**

There were no questions or statements submitted.

6 **Updates from Working Groups**

The Chair raised the updates from the last joint meeting of the School Funding Working Group and SEN Working Group, and the last meeting of the Early Years Reference Group, both of which were held on 8 January 2024. There being no questions or comments on the updates, it was then:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum noted the updates from the last joint meeting of the School Funding Working Group and SEN Working Group and the last meeting of the Early Years Reference Group, both of which held on 8 January 2024.

7 **Update on FACT (Families and Children Transformation) Programme**

A verbal update on the FACT Programme was delivered by the FACT Programme Lead, Simon Thomas, who highlighted the following:

- Members were reminded that the FACT partnership looked at how to respond to different pressures in the system felt pre and post COVID

recovery, and to concentrate their collective energies into a combined approach focussing on the space of early intervention and prevention.

- The multi-agency 'Family Help' arrangements were briefly outlined in which it was explained that the approach focussed on enabling children, young people, and families to access the right help at the right time through a coordinated and robust system concentrating on identifying additional needs at the earliest point, building resilience across all residents, and providing joined-up support that prevented further escalation and late intervention services.
- The pilot scheme that had been operating in Westbury and Warminster since Spring 2023 was discussed and Members were reminded that the scheme was created to explore if working together in geographically defined areas in different ways could provide better and more effective early intervention and prevention. It was explained that additional resources had been allocated to the scheme to create further capacity to build on existing successes and to test and evaluate new methods of joint working.
- It was confirmed that additional funding had allowed officers to appoint Family Help and Early Help Mental Health Practitioners who were working directly with families and provided training, support, and advice to schools and other organisations. It was emphasised that establishing strong relationships and consistent, effective communication was critical to the success of the scheme and ultimately better supporting Wiltshire residents. These officers were based in school settings and were offering no appointment drop-in sessions and group work and were focussing on building and strengthening local communities.
- It was noted that the pilot scheme was considering more restorative approaches and analysing the general culture and behaviour of children and young people in school, not just those with challenging behaviour. The results of which would allow officers to understand what the local priorities were and how to best intervene at the earliest point.
- Further roles that had been recruited were detailed including a Pilot Locality Co-ordinator, and Family Hub Practitioners & Community Navigators, which would start in post in Spring 2024.
- Feedback had been received which noted that the existing system was relatively confusing, fragmented and disjointed. Therefore, officers had invested a lot of time and effort into creating a cohesive brand which covered all services providing early intervention and prevention, communicating to families, schools, and other relevant organisations. This had led to the development of an online platform, All Together, which was the single source for all relevant information for Wiltshire residents to peruse. It was emphasised that officers were focussing on a strong communications strategy to advertise this provision to ensure that residents were aware of how they could access the specific support they needed. The website can be found through this link: [All Together - Wiltshire Together](#)

- Members were then shown excerpts of feedback received from Wiltshire residents which had identified early success factors and areas for improvement such as upskilling front-line staff on working with families and tailoring services based on local need. Officers reassured Members that once further evaluation of all feedback had been conducted, the results would be circulated across the County.

In response to a question, it was clarified that the FACT initiative was a local scheme, therefore the Council did not receive any national funding from the Government bar the introduction of the Mental Health Champion role. However, it was explained that the program was jointly funded by Wiltshire Council, Health, and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Members queried how officers would quantify and present the results of the pilot scheme and how long the funding was guaranteed for. In response, officers explained that they were in the process of launching an outcomes framework which would be used in tandem with a variety of short-term indicators such as family and partner feedback, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) referrals, and school suspension data. In the longer term, officers would be looking at social mobility, and school attendance rates. It was confirmed that funding was secured until Spring 2025, however officers highlighted that as they were concentrating on increasing resource capacity, different investment options may have to be considered in due course.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum noted the update.

8 Dedicated Schools Budget - Budget Monitoring 2023-24

Marie Taylor, Head of Finance – Children & Education, presented the report which detailed the year end budget monitoring information against the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for the financial year 2023-24 as at 30 November 2023. The following was then highlighted:

- An overspend of £4.385m was forecast against the overall Schools budget. The main driver for this forecast variance was noted as being the ongoing pressures on the High Needs Block (HNB), however Members were reassured that the reasons for that were known and understood.
- As per Paragraph 4 it was explained that the Government acknowledged the deficits held by Local Authorities (LAs), which were estimated at £2.6bn nationally. As such, the Government introduced a three-year statutory override in 2020 which separated LAs DSG deficits from their wider financial position. However, it was confirmed that this override had been extended until 2026.

- Paragraphs 5 and 6 were then detailed before moving onto each block individually as per the order listed in the report.
- Paragraphs 7 to 9 referred to the Early Years budgets in which there was a projected underspend of £1.004m. The Early Years budgets had been decreased by £2.250m as a result of the planned transfer to the DSG reserve. However, it was emphasised that this would facilitate improved budget monitoring and should reflect the Department for Education's (DfE) post year adjustment of the variance which was due to actual children's attendance and therefore payments, being less than those calculated by the DfE using the updated census data.
- Paragraph 10 referred to the Schools Block budgets in which there was a projected underspend of £0.090m and was noted as relating to central teams and helping to offset the overall pressure on the DSG.
- Paragraphs 11 to 13 referred to the High Needs budgets in which there was a projected overspend of £5.606m. The High Needs budgets had already been increased by £18m as a result of the planned transfer to the DSG reserve in order to facilitate improved budget monitoring. It was explained that the main driver of the increased cost was volume with the number of Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) being requested continuing to increase post pandemic which had exacerbated the existing pressure on the HNB as officers worked to reduce the pandemic EHCP assessment backlog and named pupil allowances. Officers further highlighted that Agenda Item 11, Safety Valve Programme Update, would provide a more detailed update on the High Needs Sustainability Team's work with the DfE and partners to investigate and address the issues faced.
- Paragraph 14 referred to the Central School Services budgets in which there was a projected underspend of £0.151m as a result of the underspend on central services and an underspend in admissions due to appeals panel income.
- Paragraphs 15 to 18 referred to the DSG reserve and management plan which outlined a breakdown of the reserve calculations and the introduction of the Safety Valve Programme. It was noted that once all calculations had been made, the DSG reserve had a forecasted deficit position of £56.247m.

Members expressed concern as to the degree of deficit, however acknowledged all the work that officers were doing to address and mitigate this figure.

There being no other questions or comments, it was then:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum noted the forecast budget monitoring position including the balance on the DSG reserve at the end of November 2023 together with the report later in the Agenda on the High Needs Block recover plan and the Safety Valve Programme.

9 **School Budget Setting 2024-25**

Grant Davis, Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager, introduced the item which would provide details on the overall funding settlement on each of the Funding Blocks and emphasised that the decisions for each of the Funding Blocks would be made during Agenda Item 10, School Budget Decisions 2024-25, after consideration of each of the update reports.

9a School Revenue Funding 2024-25 - Funding Settlement and Budget Setting Process

Grant Davis, Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager, presented the report and updated the Schools Forum on the revenue settlement announced by the Department for Education (DfE) on 19 December 2023, and budget setting process for 2024-25. The following was then highlighted:

- Paragraphs 4 to 7 were briefly detailed in which it was confirmed that for 2024-25 the Government had pledged to boost schools funding with an increase of £1.8bn (3.1%) into the overall Schools Block with a further £440 (4.3%) pledged for the High Needs Block (HNB). In addition, the Teachers Pay Additional Grant (TPAG) would continue in the 2024-25 year, totalling a further £900m. Furthermore, there would be an additional grant to reflect the additional cost of the increase to employer contribution rates for the Teachers Pensions' Scheme from April 2024, with details of how the grant would be calculated made available in due course.
- Paragraphs 10 to 12 discussed the National Funding Formula (NFF), and it was confirmed that 2024-25 would be another 'soft' year with the Schools Forum retaining their role in determining the school funding allocation methodology. The DfE had further confirmed their intention to move to a 'hard' NFF by 2027-28, however it was reiterated that as Wiltshire's local school formula already mirrored the NFF, any tightening of the formula would have a minimal impact on Wiltshire schools.
- Paragraph 14 referred to the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) and it was reiterated that the Schools Forum had agreed to set the threshold at the maximum 0.5% to be consistent with previous years and to ensure that all schools received a minimum uplift in their per pupil funding of 0.5%.
- Officers then listed the changes to the main formula as per Paragraph 15.
- As per Paragraph 18, it was confirmed that the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) funding would continue with the rates being uplifted by 1.5% and the numbers of eligible PPG pupils taken from the October 2023 census.
- The school revenue funding settlements for each of the Funding Blocks were then detailed as per the order listed in the report.

- It was confirmed that the provisional Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation for Wiltshire Council was £493.461m, an increase of £41.165m from 2023-24, with the table in Paragraph 19 showing the breakdown of the Funding Blocks and the table in Paragraph 22 showing the year-on-year split of funding between Blocks.
- Paragraph 25 detailed pupil movements year-on-year and it was highlighted that Wiltshire was seeing a drop in the birth rate for children starting Primary School whereas Secondary Schools were seeing a surge in numbers which was indicative of the change in demographics within the County.
- Paragraphs 27 to 32 provided updates on the Central School Services Block (CCSB), HNB, and Early Years Block (EYB). Officers drew particular attention to Bullet Points 6 and 7 of Paragraph 28 and Paragraph 30 which highlighted that EYB funding had provisionally increased by over £20m which reflected the increased provision being made available within the early years sector.
- Paragraphs 33 to 34 referred to Funding Block transfers and it was reiterated that the Schools Forum had previously agreed to a transfer of up to a maximum of 0.55% from the Schools Block to the HNB if affordable. As such, due to the requirement that any transfer in excess of 0.5% would require the express approval from the Secretary of State, Members were informed that a Disapplication Request to transfer 0.55% had been submitted with a decision pending. However, officers were expecting to receive support in light of the Council's Safety Valve Programme and the backing of the Schools Forum.
- Paragraphs 35 to 40 referred to the budget setting process for 2024-25 and de-delegation, with Paragraph 36 detailing the breakdown in the calculation for the Schools Block funding available for distribution to schools. It was further confirmed that financial modelling had confirmed that the NFF was fully affordable taking into account the Block transfer of £2m and setting a Growth Fund of £734k.
- Finally, it was noted that at the December 2023 meeting of the Schools Forum, Maintained Schools voting Members agreed that the de-delegation of services would continue in 2024-25 and that Maintained Schools would de-delegate funding to support school improvement services.

In response to queries, officers reassured Members that as the Wiltshire schools funding formula mirrored the NFF, there would be no implications on Wiltshire schools when the DfE moved to a 'hard' NFF. Furthermore, there could be scenarios in the future where there could be affordability concerns, but it was emphasised that the decisions made by the Schools Forum were resilient and as there were no plans for any new school developments in the near future, it bolstered decision making and left the Council in a good financial position.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was then:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum noted the report.

**9b Dedicated Schools Budget - Schools Block Update 2024-25
(Delegated Budget)**

Grant Davis, Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager, presented the report and updated the Schools Forum on issues relating to the schools delegated budget for 2024-25 and the decisions that needed to be made as part of the budget setting process. The following was then highlighted:

- Paragraphs 2 to 4 detailed the main considerations for Members, with officers drawing particular attention to Paragraph 3 which listed the notable changes to the main funding formula for 2024-25.
- Paragraphs 5 to 9 were discussed and referred to the National Funding Formula (NFF) where officers again emphasised that based upon the School's Block allocation, the formula was fully affordable for the 2024-25 financial year, applying all the NFF factor values.
- Paragraphs 10 to 15 referred to the Growth Funding and Falling Rolls Allocations for 2024-25 and it was noted that for the first time, the Department for Education (DfE) had issued funding to Local Authorities (LAs) based on falling rolls. However, it was reiterated that at the December 2023 meeting of the Schools Forum, Members had decided to not introduce a Falling Rolls Fund for 2024-25 based on a number of factors. Furthermore, at the December 2023 meeting, Members confirmed the criteria for allocating Growth Funding.
- Paragraphs 16 to 20 were then briefly detailed referring to the historical position and affordability considerations.
- Sparsity and Split Site Funding were then briefly discussed as per Paragraphs 25 to 31 and officers noted that Members had agreed to mirror the NFF sparsity changes within the Wiltshire formula. Furthermore, it was highlighted that the DfE had determined that funding for split sites would be based upon a two-pronged criterion: Basic Eligibility and Distance Funding. Paragraph 31 detailed the implications of such on those applicable schools in Wiltshire.
- Paragraphs 32 to 35 referred to Minimum per Pupil Funding Levels (MPPFL) and it was highlighted that as the NFF was embedded, the quantum of funding awarded through the MPPFL, and the number of schools eligible to receive funding, should continue to decrease.

There being no questions or comments, it was then:

Resolved:

- 1. The Schools Forum noted the report.**

- 2. The Schools Forum confirmed its intention to apply all the funding factors at the 2024-25 National Funding Formula rates.**
- 3. The Schools Forum confirmed the setting of the Minimum Funding Guarantee at a level of 0.5%, as being fully affordable.**
- 4. The Schools Forum confirmed the transferring of 0.55% (£2.0m) of the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, as the full National Funding Formula was affordable.**
- 5. The Schools Forum agreed to the level of the Growth Fund at £0.734m.**

(The decisions numbered 2 – 5 above, were made later in the meeting under Agenda Item 10)

9c Dedicated Schools Budget - High Needs Block Update 2024-25

Liz Williams, Finance Lead – High Needs Block Sustainability, presented the report which updated the Schools Forum on issues relating to the High Needs Block (HNB) for 2024-25 and the decisions that needed to be made as part of the budget setting process. The following was then highlighted:

- It was reiterated that the budget approach for 2024-25 was approved in principle at the December 2023 meeting of the Schools Forum with the final allocations being published in the interim. It was further noted that the budget proposals reflected Year 1 of the proposed Safety Valve Programme Plan submitted by the Council in December 2023, with the final draft of the plan being submitted on 12 January 2024.
- Paragraphs 4 to 6 detailed the main considerations for Members, and it was emphasised that due to the interdependencies of decisions across all of the Funding Blocks, final decisions on the HNB would be presented alongside those that Members were required to make on all other Blocks.
- Officers drew particular attention to Paragraph 8 which explained that the increase in the deficit took into account the provisional HNB allocation announced in December 2023 and an assumption of a transfer of £2.0m from the Schools Block, which was agreed in principle by Members in the December 2023 meeting.
- It was explained that Appendix 1 provided an assessment of the pressures on the HNB for 2024-25 with the impact of those pressures giving an unmitigated in year deficit of £28.535m. Thus, posing a significant financial risk to the Council.

- The Safety Valve Programme was raised, and it was reiterated that the Plan aimed to bring the HNB spend into an in year balanced position within a 5-year period. Paragraph 11 listed a breakdown of the costs and savings arising from the planned mitigating actions as part of the Safety Valve Programme, with the proposed mitigated budget of £106.3m shown in Appendix 2.
- Finally, Paragraphs 13 to 16 detailed the Special School Minimum Funding Guarantee and the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit reserve and management plan as discussed in previous Agenda Items.

There being no questions or comments, it was then:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum noted the pressures on the High Needs Block for 2024-25 and the mitigating actions which reflected Year 1 of the Safety Valve Programme Plan.

9d Dedicated Schools Grant - Early Years Block Update 2024-25 (Indicative Allocations)

Marie Taylor, Head of Finance – Children & Education, presented the report which updated the Schools Forum on issues relating to the Early Years Block (EYB) for 2024-25 and the decisions that needed to be made as part of the budget setting process. The following was then highlighted:

- Paragraphs 3 to 9 detailed the main considerations for Members and noting that in the Spring budget of 2023, the Government had launched a largescale Childcare Expansion which included increased funding rates and extensions to the age entitlements for parents of eligible children. As such, the provisional EYB settlement for Wiltshire was £52.886m with Paragraph 5 showing a breakdown of the different funding elements.
- Officers drew Members' attention to Appendix 1 and Paragraph 7 which listed the criterion in place for setting a local formula and the main changes to the Early Years Entitlements: Local Authority Operational Guide 2024-25 which was published in November 2023; Bullet Points 1 and 2 of Paragraph 7 were specifically highlighted for Members' awareness. It was further confirmed that the criterion had been universally agreed at the Early Years Reference Group (EYRG).
- Appendix 2 detailed the Council's passporting process in which it was proposed that 100% of the 2-year-old disadvantaged funding would be passed through to providers and 95% minimum of the other funding streams.
- Paragraph 10 noted that in the 8 January 2024 meeting of the EYRG, Members had considered a number of funding options, attached as

Appendix 1a and 1b, with the consensus being to support the Council's recommendations as listed under the paragraph.

- Paragraphs 12 to 14 referred to the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) of which £0.200m had been earmarked to link to Workstream 1 of the Safety Valve Programme. It was highlighted that as part of the preventative inclusive agenda and the recovery actions for the High Need Block (HNB) budget, an additional sum of £0.180m had been ringfenced from the HNB to support children with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) in the early years sector. Demand on this fund had been reflected in the budget estimate.
- Paragraphs 15 to 22 detailed the Disability Access Fund and Early Years Pupil Premium proposals which were fully passported to providers as per the DfE guidance. Furthermore, unspent funds would be returned.

There being no questions or comments, it was then:

Resolved:

1. The Schools Forum noted the update on the Early Years Block and agreed to the Local Authority preferred proposal.

Local Authority Preferred Proposal:

a. To set the following basic hour provider rates for entitled children:

| | | |
|-------------|--|--------------|
| i) | Under 2-year-olds | £9.63 |
| ii) | 2-year-olds | £7.17 |
| iii) | Disadvantaged 2-year-olds | £7.48 |
| iv) | 3 and 4-year-olds (universal and working parents) | £5.21 |

b. That the Central Early Years' Team budget be set at £0.859m.

c. That the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund be set at £1.142m.

d. Increase deprivation and rurality to reflect current spending levels at £250,000.

2. The Schools Forum agreed up to £900 per child for 2024-25 from the Disability Access Fund with the Local Authority to passport the funding.
3. The Schools Forum agreed to the uplift in funding for Pupil Premium to be set at £0.68 per hour with the Local Authority to passport the funding.

4. **The Schools Forum agreed to maintain at least 95% of funding to be passed through to providers.**
5. **The Schools Forum noted that all other funding factors remain at current 2023-24 levels, or funded levels.**

(The decisions numbered 1 – 5 above, were made later in the meeting under Agenda Item 10)

9e Dedicated Schools Budget - Central School Services Block Update 2024-25

Marie Taylor, Head of Finance – Children & Education, presented the report which updated the Schools Forum on issues relating to the Central School Services Block (CSSB) for 2024-25 and the decisions that needed to be made as part of the budget setting process. The following was then highlighted:

- It was noted that Members approved the proposed budget in principle at the December 2023 meeting of the Schools Forum, with officers informing Members that the only change since that time was that the actual charge for copyright licences had still not yet been received from the Department for Education (DfE) as negotiations with the Copyright Licencing Agency were ongoing. It was clarified that a best estimate had been used and any amendment would change the contribution to the High Needs Block.
- As per Paragraph 3 it was confirmed that the Council had received a CSSB allocation of £2.643m which was calculated using the NFF for the CSSB. Funding for agreed historic commitments for 2024-25 was then added to the amount of funding generated by the formula to give the overall total CSSB.
- Officers then briefly explained the function of the CSSB, and the decisions needed to be made as per Paragraphs 5 to 14, with particular attention paid to Appendix 2 which outlined the proposed budget for each of the services covered.
- It was noted that assuming the proposed budget was accepted, an amount of £0.025m unallocated CSSB was estimated to be transferred to fund high needs pressures, with officers referring to the table under Paragraph 14.

There being no questions or comments, it was then:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum noted the changes in the table under Paragraph 14 of the report, Page 72 of the Agenda Pack, and considered the required

decisions below to the Central Schools Services Block budget for 2024-25 as itemised in Appendix 2 and below:

- i. **Section A: Central Copyright Licences – Consult Only (*the Department for Education have confirmed that they are still negotiating rates with the Copyright Licencing Agency*).**
- ii. **Section B: Central Functions – Approve on a Line-by-Line Basis**
- iii. **Section C: Historic Commitments – Approve on a Line-by-Line Basis**
- iv. **Including the transfer of surplus Central Schools Services Block grant to support the High Needs Block.**

(The decisions numbered i – iv above, were made later in the meeting under Agenda Item 10)

10 **School Budget Decisions 2024-25**

The Chair led Members through the decisions to made, and it was then:

Resolved:

Overall Budget

1. **The Schools Forum agreed to set the overall Schools Budget above the level of the Dedicated Schools Grant Settlement. Namely, £521.635m, including the additional drawdown from the Dedicated Schools Grant reserve to support the High Needs Block budget.**

Central Schools Services Block

2. **The Schools Forum noted the Local Authority Decision to set the budget at £0.511m for Central Copyright Licences for 2024-25 (Section A)**
3. **The Schools Forum agreed the expenditure for the Central Schools Services as follows (Section B):**

| | | |
|-------------|---|----------------|
| i) | Education Welfare Service | £0.241m |
| ii) | Asset Management | £0.225m |
| iii) | Statutory/Regulatory Duties | £0.810m |
| iv) | Admissions | £0.502m |
| v) | Servicing of Schools Forum | £0.003m |
| vi) | Centrally Retained Teachers Additional Pension Costs | £0.138m |

4. The Schools Forum agreed the central spend on Historic Commitments as follows (Section C):

| | | |
|------|--|---------|
| i) | Funding for LAC Personal Education Plans | £0.103m |
| ii) | Child Protection in Schools Adviser | £0.056m |
| iii) | Prudential Borrowing | £0.029m |

5. The Schools Forum noted that these allocations allowed a transfer of £0.025m to support the High Needs Block.

Schools Block – Delegated Budget

6. The Schools Forum agreed to apply all the funding factors at the 2024-25 rates.
7. The Schools Forum agreed to set the Minimum Funding Guarantee at a level of 0.5%, as being fully affordable.
8. The Schools Forum agreed the level of Growth Fund at £0.734m.
9. The Schools Forum confirmed transferring 0.55% (£2.0m) of the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, as the full National Funding Formula was affordable. *This transfer exceeds the 0.5% threshold for Schools Forum approval, therefore the Department for Education require confirmation that Schools Forum Members have voted on this proposal. As such, please find a record of the voting below:*

| Member Name: | For | Against | Abstain |
|-------------------------|-----|---------|---------|
| Lyssy Bolton | √ | | |
| Andy Bridewell | √ | | |
| Rebecca Carson | √ | | |
| Helen Carpenter | √ | | |
| Michele Chilcott | √ | | |
| Stella Fowler | √ | | |
| John Hawkins | √ | | |
| Georgina Keily-Theobald | √ | | |
| Graham Nagel-Smith | √ | | |
| Nick Norgrove | √ | | |
| Lisa Percy | √ | | |
| Giles Pugh | √ | | |
| John Read | √ | | |
| Graham Shore | √ | | |
| Mike Thomas | √ | | |
| Karen Venner | √ | | |
| Catriona Williamson | √ | | |

10. The Schools Forum noted that the previously agreed budgets for de-delegation of Central Services were set as follows:

| | | |
|------|---|----------------|
| i) | Access Budget Software | £58,255 |
| ii) | FSM Eligibility | £30,218 |
| iii) | Trade Union | £31,577 |
| | <i>Total Budget: Academies and Maintained</i> | <i>£90,000</i> |
| iv) | EMAS & Travellers | £589,911 |
| v) | Behaviour Support | £694,579 |
| vi) | Maternity Supply | £606,825 |
| vii) | School Improvement (LAMB) | £459,000 |

High Needs Block

11. The Schools Forum noted the pressures on the High Needs Block for 2024-25 and the mitigating actions which reflect Year 1 of the Safety Valve Programme Plan.

12. The Schools Forum agreed to set the Special School Minimum Funding Guarantee uplift at 0.5% for 2024-25, in line with Mainstream Schools.

13. The Schools Forum agreed to set the 2024-25 Top Up rates for Special Schools, Resource Bases, ELP's (Enhanced Learning Provision in Secondary Schools), and NPA's (Named Pupil Allowances in Mainstream Schools), to increase by 4%, in line with inflationary pressures in schools.

Early Years Block

14. The Schools Forum agreed to set the following basic hour provider rates for entitled children:

| | | |
|------|---|-------|
| i) | Under 2-year-olds | £9.63 |
| ii) | 2-year-olds | £7.17 |
| iii) | Disadvantaged 2-year-olds | £7.48 |
| iv) | 3 and 4-year-olds (universal and working parents) | £5.21 |

15. The Schools Forum agreed up to £900 per child for 2024-25 from the Disability Access Fund, with the Local Authority to passport the funding.

- 16. The Schools Forum agreed to the uplift in funding for Pupil Premium to be set at £0.68 per hour, with the Local Authority to passport the funding.**
- 17. The Schools Forum agreed to maintaining at least 95% of funding to be passed through to providers.**
- 18. The Schools Forum agreed that the Central Early Years Teams budgets be set at £0.859m.**
- 19. The Schools Forum agreed that the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund budget be set at £1.142m from the Early Years Block.**
- 20. The Schools Forum noted the deprivation and rurality increase to reflect current spending levels at £250,000.**
- 21. The Schools Forum noted that all of other funding factors remain at current 2023-24 levels or funded levels.**

11 Safety Valve Programme Update

Liz Williams, Finance Lead – High Needs Block Sustainability, presented the report which updated the Schools Forum on the draft Safety Valve Plan and highlighted the changes that were made in response to Department for Education (DfE) feedback in advance of the 12 January 2024 submission to the Secretary of State for approval, and to form the basis of a Safety Valve Deal for Wiltshire. The following was then highlighted:

- The main considerations for Members were detailed as per Paragraphs 8 to 18, with particular attention drawn to Paragraphs 9 and 11 which noted the updates to the unmitigated pupil number forecast to include the children and young people currently awaiting assessment, and the milestones that had been added to the plan to provide further assurance that it was deliverable.
- As discussed in earlier Agenda Items, it was confirmed that a Disapplication Request had been submitted to the Secretary of State for a block transfer above 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block.
- It was further confirmed that a capital request to support the plan was also submitted on 5 January 2024 which was intended for the expansion of Special Schools places in the South of the County to directly contribute towards the delivery of Workstream 2.

- Officers noted that it was expected that approval would be given for the plan in its final form following positive feedback from DfE advisers. Therefore, if approved, officers were anticipating that the Government would send a Safety Valve Deal for review and signature before April 2024.
- The financial implications and risks that may arise if the proposed decisions were taken or not taken were listed as per Paragraphs 19 to 28. The significant financial risk and pressure that the forecast High Needs Block (HNB) deficit presented to the Council was again stressed and Members were reassured that given the ambitious nature of the plan, the Programme Team had commenced the first stages for the delivery of the plan immediately to ensure that key conversations were already happening before April 2024.
- Finally, officers confirmed that further updates would come to future Schools Forum meetings as officers developed implementation plans. Therefore, Members should consider it as a standing item on the Schools Forum agenda for the foreseeable future.

In response to Member questions, officers confirmed that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was ringfenced at present but highlighted that this could change pending the approval of the Safety Valve Agreement, as Council contributions may be required. It was also emphasised that there was a HNB deficit across the Country which was estimated to be in the region of £3.6bn by March 2025. As such, there were many other Local Authorities experiencing high or increasing deficits and who were therefore implementing Safety Valve or Delivering Better Value Programmes to address and mitigate these issues. Accordingly, Wiltshire was not considered an outlier.

Members noted that they were pleased to see that the feedback received from the DfE for the draft submission of the plan was minor and constructive which they felt was a reflection of the dedication and commitment of Ms Williams and the other officers associated with the project; all were commended for their hard work.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum noted:

- a. The updates to the Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan and the SEND Sustainability Plan.**
- b. The submission of those documents to the Department for Education on 12 January 2024.**
- c. The continued progress to reduce and remove the financial risk that the deficit in the High Needs Block represented.**

12 **Confirmation of Dates for Future Meetings**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 14 March 2024 at 1.30pm and was planned to be held remotely via Microsoft Teams.

Future meeting dates were confirmed as below:

27 June 2024 – 1.30pm
10 October 2024 – 1.30pm
12 December 2024 – 1.30pm
23 January 2025 – 1.30pm
13 March 2025 – 1.30pm

13 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

14 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

The Schools Forum considered the recommendation to exclude the public. Following which, it was:

Resolved:

To agree that in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the public from the meeting for the business specified in Item Number 15 because it is likely that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act and the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

15 **Schools Forum Minutes**

The Part II (private) minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 December 2023 were presented for consideration.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum approved and signed the Part II (private) minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 December 2023 as a true and correct record.

(Duration of meeting: 1.30 - 4.05 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Ellen Ghey of Democratic Services,
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