

School Funding Working Group Meeting

26 May 2016, 3:30pm

Cotswold Space – County Hall

MINUTES

Present: Liz Williams, Grant Davis, Susan Tanner, Martin Watson, Phil Cook, Neil Baker, Catriona Williamson

1	Minutes from previous meeting The minutes from the previous meeting had already been considered by Schools Forum	
2	Copyright Licences There was an action from the previous Schools Forum meeting to confirm what schools should be purchasing in relation to copyright licences and what is covered by the DfE. EW circulated the guidance that is sent out to all schools (including academies) each year detailing what is covered under the central DfE licence. <i>Action – Guidance to be circulated to Schools Forum members</i>	EW
3	Outturn 2015-16 EW circulated a summary of the provisional outturn position for the schools budget for the financial year 2015-16. The outturn was an overspend of £0.899m, an improvement of £0.794m on the previous forecast. EW reported that the main changes were an additional allocation of DSG to reflect the Early Years census of January 2015 and the impact of academy conversions on the amount initially budgeted for rates in individual schools. The overspend against High Needs budgets was as previously reported. It was discussed that both the Schools Block and Early Years Block had underspent and therefore contributed to offsetting the overspend within the High Needs Block. This meant that the impact on the DSG reserve was not as significant as initially projected and it was anticipated that the closing balance on the reserve would be £0.591m.	
4	Update on High Needs Budgets EW and ST gave an update on the current position in relation to management of High Needs Budgets. It was reported that the new banding system had been implemented and the revised top up values applied. This had generated a lot of calls from schools and some requests for rebanding of pupils on to higher bands. The following issues for the continued management of the high needs budgets were discussed:	

	<p>1. <i>Recoupment of unfilled places</i> It was confirmed that following the review of places carried out for the 16-17 academic year there should be fewer unfilled places across schools. It was agreed that where places remained unfilled, the current system of recoupment (through the top up mechanism) would continue to be applied in the 2016-17 academic year.</p> <p>2. <i>Banding Moderation Process</i> ST reported that it was necessary to implement a consistent system for considering rebanding requests and for ensuring moderation of banding decisions. ST proposed that the weekly SEN Panel be used to consider rebanding requests. This would enable requests to be considered promptly and ensure a consistent process. Some concerns were expressed that the panel was an officer led process and that school involvement was needed in rebanding discussions. It was agreed that a proposal would be taken to PHF and WASSH to seek school involvement in the SEN Panels to enable cases to be considered regularly. <i>Action ST and Judith Westcott to develop proposal</i></p> <p>3. <i>Exceptional Numbers of Statements Formula</i> Expenditure against the exceptional numbers of statements had been discussed at the previous meeting. EW confirmed that the purpose of the formula was to recognise that for schools with higher numbers of pupils with additional needs the mainstream formula could not always reflect the additional costs incurred. Currently the factor is set to trigger additional funding for schools where the overall number of pupils with statements/EHCPs is greater than 3.5% of the number on roll. As the numbers of pupils with statements/EHCPs has increased over the last 2 years, so the expenditure under this formula has also increased and this has created another pressure on the high needs block. EW suggested that possible options could be to consider whether the 3.5% level was still appropriate, whether the total paid out under the factor should be capped or whether there were other ways to reflect additional costs in schools. NB proposed that rather than the overall numbers of pupils with statements/EHCPs the formula should also look at how pupils are distributed across different year groups as this may have more impact on a school's ability to manage and support the needs of children. <i>Action it was agreed the GD would review the available data and consider whether a formula could reflect numbers of pupils with statements/EHCPs in different year groups</i></p>	<p>ST/Judith Westcott</p> <p>GD</p>
5	<p>Procurement of Licences for Schools Management Information System</p> <p>GD circulated a confidential report detailing the current options in relation to the purchase of licences for the School Management Information System for maintained schools. It was noted that this budget is currently de-delegated and held centrally on behalf of maintained schools</p>	

	<p>Having considered the options within the report it was agreed that the recommendation of the Schools Funding Working Group is that the budget for SIMS Licences should be delegated to maintained schools from April 2017.</p>	
6	<p>De-delegation of central budgets</p> <p>A further discussion took place on the impact of the Department for Education (DfE) proposals for a National Funding Formula on those services that are currently de-delegated on behalf of maintained schools in Wiltshire. The initial DfE proposals require 100% delegation of schools block budgets by April 2019. The second stage of the consultation on the national funding formula has yet to be published by DfE.</p> <p>It was agreed that in this context the annual consultation with schools on the de-delegation of individual budgets would not be the most appropriate approach and that there needed to be an overall plan to support the delegation of these budgets within the required timescale. It was therefore agreed to recommend that Schools Forum agree not to carry out the annual consultation on de-delegation in September and that Schools Funding Working Group should work with officers to develop an overall plan for delegation over the next two years.</p> <p><i>Action – EW to summarise the budgets currently de-delegated, potential issues in relation to delegation and the interdependencies with other projects within Children’s Services as a whole. This would be considered at the next meeting of Schools Funding Working Group.</i></p>	EW
7	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>It was agreed that the next meeting will be held on Tuesday 5th July 2016 at 8:30am.</p> <p>The meeting will consider options for delegation of schools block budgets and any updated proposals from DfE on a national funding formula.</p>	