

Councillors Briefing Note No. 274

Service: Children's Services

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Date Prepared: 05 January 2015

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Wiltshire Council joins f40 – fair funding campaign

Wiltshire has joined the f40 group of education authorities. f40 represents the education authorities in England which receive the lowest cash allocations from government for primary and secondary pupils.

The decision has been made by the Schools Forum, which comprises representatives of schools in Wiltshire (maintained schools, academies and special schools) for the purpose of determining allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant. The Forum has an independent chairman. Wiltshire Council representatives attend meetings of the forum as observers and contributors, but without voting rights.

f40 is campaigning to change the way the government allocates funding to local authorities and schools. It wants to see a system which recognises the special needs of all LAs whether they are in urban, rural or inner London locations. Fundamentally their aim is to encourage government to change the system to allow the lowest funded councils to catch up.

The government has recognised that a new, fairer and more transparent school funding system is needed. In 2015-16, an additional allocation of £390million was shared between many of those authorities identified as being among the poorest funded. Of this amount, around £210million was allocated to f40 member authorities. Wiltshire received £5.7million.

The f40 Group welcomed the extra funding but it expressed concern that the methodology for allocating the extra cash was flawed, in particular because it is solely based on the Schools Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant. This resulted in allocations to some authorities that were already comparatively well-funded while some very low funded authorities received little or no increase.

The £5.7 million made only a marginal improvement to Wiltshire's position. Prior to receiving the 'fairer funding' monies, Wiltshire was ranked the 6th lowest funded authority in the country (out of 151). Following the receipt of the additional funding, Wiltshire is now ranked the 7th lowest funded authority in the country.

By virtue of membership, Wiltshire is now entitled to have a representative on f40's Executive Committee. The representative has yet to be determined.

The f40 group operate a Finance Managers Research Team made up of experts from member authorities which works closely with the DfE to develop models towards a new funding formula.