

Schools Forum

MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING HELD ON 27 JUNE 2024 AT ONLINE MEETING - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS.

Present:

Nikki Barnett, Aileen Bates, Lyssy Bolton, Andy Bridewell, Helen Carpenter, Rebecca Carson, Michele Chilcott, Stella Fowler, John Hawkins, Georgina Keily-Theobald, Graham Nagel-Smith, Nick Norgrove, Lisa Percy (Chair), John Read, Graham Shore (Vice-Chair), Trudy Srawley, Karen Venner, Nicola Whitcombe, David Whewell, and Catriona Williamson.

Also Present:

Tony Hayzen (Observer), Julia Honeywell (Observer), Cllr Nabil Najjar, Ed Powe (Observer), and Cllr Suzanne Wickham

Grant Davis (Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager), Kathryn Davis (Director - Education and Skills), Lisa Fryer (Head of SEND and Inclusion), Ellen Ghey (Democratic Services Officer), Kai Muxlow (Interim Head of Families and Children Commissioning), Lisa Pullin (Democratic Services Officer), Ben Stevens (Sustainability Strategic Lead – High Needs Block), Marie Taylor (Head of Finance - Children & Education) and Liz Williams (Finance Lead – High Needs Block Sustainability)

16 Apologies, Substitutions and any Changes of Membership

Apologies for absence from Members were received from:

- Cllr Ross Henning
- Giles Pugh

Further apologies were noted from:

- Amanda Butler (Head of School Effectiveness)
- Cllr Jane Davies (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, SEND, Transition, and Inclusion)
- Adam Smith (Primary Heads Forum)

The Chair announced the following Membership changes:

- Nicola Whitcombe was welcomed to the Schools Forum as the Headteacher of Springfield Academy as Special School Academy representative, taking over from Mike Thomas.
- Andy Bridewell, Catriona Williamson, Michele Chilcott, Rebecca Carson, and Graham Nagel-Smith were thanked for their hard work and commitment during their time as a part of the Schools Forum.

It was further noted that Toni Hayzen (Pembroke Park Primary School), Ed Powe (Staverton Primary School), and Julia Honeywell (Director of Children's Service – YMCA) were all in attendance as observers.

17 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 January 2024 were presented for consideration.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum approved and signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 January 2024 as a true and correct record.

18 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair made no announcements.

19 **Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

20 **Public Participation**

There were no questions or statements submitted in advance of the meeting.

21 **Updates from Working Groups**

The Chair raised the updates from the last meetings of the Early Years Reference Group held on 22 March and 7 June 2024, and the previous joint meeting of the School Funding Working Group and SEN Working Group held on 17 June 2024.

There being no questions or comments on the updates, it was then:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum noted the updates from the last meetings of the Early Years Reference Group held on 22 March and 7 June 2024, and the previous joint meeting of the School Funding Working Group and SEN Working Group held on 17 June 2024.

22 **Dedicated Schools Budget - Budget Monitoring 2023-24**

Marie Taylor, Head of Finance – Children & Education, introduced the report which presented the budget monitoring information against the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for the financial year 2023-24 as at 31 March 2024. The following was then highlighted:

- All the figures presented in the report were provisional, with the report due to be submitted to the July 2024 meeting of Cabinet for approval.
- The figures as noted in Paragraphs 4 to 7 of the report were detailed alongside Appendices 1 to 3.
- The budgets for the Early Years, Schools, High Needs, and Central School Services Blocks respectively were then detailed as per the relevant sections of the report.
- Finally, officers highlighted Paragraphs 21 to 22 of the report which detailed the deficit position and the first payment from the Department for Education (DfE) in relation to the Council's Safety Valve Agreement.

There being no questions or comments, it was then:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum note the provisional outturn budget monitoring position including the balance on the DSG reserve at the end of March 2024, together with the reports later in the Agenda on the SEND Transformation Programme.

23 **SEND Transformation Update**

Liz Williams, Finance Lead – High Needs Block Sustainability, presented the report which updated Members on the SEND Transformation Programme. The following was then highlighted:

- The different facets of the Programme were noted as per Paragraph 3 of the report, with officers emphasising that the report focussed on the High Needs Sustainability Plan and Safety Valve Agreement.
- It was noted that since the last meeting of the Schools Forum, the Safety Valve Agreement had been signed and the Programme Team had begun to implement the different workstreams with Appendix 1 detailing the summary table from the Council's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan which supported the Safety Valve Plan.
- The onset of the delivery of the plan, including recruitment to the Programme Team, was detailed as per Paragraph 15 of the report.
- The two programme areas that were RAG rated Amber were highlighted, with officers explaining the reasons behind the rating as per Paragraph 20 of the report.
- Finally, officers highlighted the table under Paragraph 24 of the report which informed Members of the different changes that schools would start

to see as a result of the Programme, in domains such as finances, policy and governance, and training and professional development.

The Chair thanked officers for the presentation and commended the amount of hard work being undertaken between meetings.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum note the update on the High Needs Sustainability Plan and the proposed changes to be implemented for the new school year.

24 **Annual Schools Consultation - Transfer of funding from Schools Block to High Needs Block 2025-26**

Liz Williams, Finance Lead – High Needs Block Sustainability, presented the report which briefed Members on the consultation questions, and supporting information, to be sent out to all schools in the autumn of 2024 on the principles and value of any block transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in the 2025-26 financial year. The following was then highlighted:

- The background to the report as per Paragraphs 2 to 3 were detailed, and Members were reminded that in previous years, the Schools Forum had applied a principle to any block transfer decisions that the value of the transfer should not impact on the agreed National Funding Formula (NFF) values for schools. With the High Needs Sustainability Plan including an assumption that a transfer of 1% would be made from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block for the next 4 financial years starting from 2025-26, it was recognised that it must be the subject of an annual consultation with schools and the Schools Forum, and an annual disapplication request to the Secretary of State.
- It was noted that a transfer of 1% would impact on NFF levels allocated to schools, therefore the consultation for 2025-26 would need to model the potential impacts.
- Paragraph 10 of the report was highlighted, with officers seeking the views of Members in respect of the proposed consultation questions for schools as per Appendix 1.

In response to Member questions, officers clarified that adjustments could be applied in a number of ways, but after discussions with the Schools Funding Working Group, it was agreed that the most appropriate way would be to apply the reduction to pupil values. However, further information was needed before realistic estimates and the impacts on schools could be assessed.

Furthermore, it was explained that if there was no support for the transfer after the consultation, the financial impact would be the difference between 0.5% and 1% which would equate to approximately £1.6 to £1.8m. Although this was

acknowledged as a relatively small amount in the context of the whole High Needs Block, it was emphasised that as much investment as possible was needed in order to deliver the Safety Valve Plan as written, and Members were reassured that the Plan included a core workstream focussing on support for Mainstream Schools. It was further noted that a 1% transfer was consistent with other Local Authorities who were also involved in the Safety Valve Programme.

Members emphasised the importance of ensuring a sustainable system for SEND in terms of resource bases and alternative provisions and suggested that officers submitted a case study to a future meeting with the impacts on schools in other Local Authorities who made a 1% transfer to the High Needs Block from the Schools Block. It was further noted that if the transfer wasn't agreed it could jeopardise the release of funding from the Department for Education (DfE), therefore it was important that a satisfactory resolution was found.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum confirmed the consultation questions and supporting information for all schools around a block transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in the 2025-26 financial year.

25 **Allocation of Funding Growth in Specialist Places**

Liz Williams, Finance Lead – High Needs Block Sustainability, presented the report which sought agreement on the methodology for allocating funding for the growth in places in Wiltshire specialist provision from the High Needs Block. The following was then highlighted:

- The background to the report as per Paragraphs 2 to 4 of the report was noted and it was highlighted that the principles of any growth funding mechanism should be that funding is proportionate, predictable, and applied on a formulaic basis in line with agreed criteria.
- Paragraph 8 of the report detailed the 3 proposed criteria for funding pupil growth for the expansion and development of new special school places, with the table under Paragraph 10 displaying the significant growth within Special Schools in Wiltshire.

Members emphasised the importance of forward planning on the expansion of planned places rather than actual place in order to understand future and long term benefits over short term diseconomies of scale and to ensure viability as pupils moved into resource base settings. Members commended officers on the approach set out in the report and thanked officers for their hard work.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Schools Forum:

- 1. Approved the principle that advanced funding should be allocated to support expansion of specialist places.**
- 2. Approved the criteria for allocating growth funding for the planned increase in special school places.**
- 3. Agreed the principle of applying a similar approach for the development of new resource base places and agreed that proposed criteria should be drawn up.**

26 **Review of EHCP Top-Up Funding - Key Principles**

Liz Williams, Finance Lead – High Needs Block Sustainability, presented the report which outlined the principles to be applied to the review of top-up funding that schools receive for pupils with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and sought the views of Members on those principles. The following was then highlighted:

- Paragraphs 4 and 5 of the report explained Wiltshire's banded funding system for top-up funding. It was recognised that this was a significant issue to consider in terms of predictability, transparency, and stability of funding and to ensure that there was system that enabled schools to meet need sustainably.
- The key principles were detailed in Paragraph 9 of the report and officers noted other stakeholders such as parents, carers, and schools would be consulted before finalising the approach.
- Paragraph 10 of the report detailed the next steps and suggested timeline in order to deliver a review of top-up funding in line with the principles in Paragraph 9. Officers acknowledged that although it was an ambitious plan, it was important to undertake.

Officers explained that previous discussions on national bandings were ongoing, with the Department for Education (DfE) expected to make progress by the end of 2025. However, officers noted that they felt a quicker timescale was needed to ensure that plans could be delivered as a priority. Furthermore, it was expected that there would be a transitional implemented for national banding as all Local Authorities had their own funding banding systems at present, therefore officers wanted to be ahead of the curve.

In response to queries, officers explained that Early Years settings had been excluded from top-up rates as most were funded from the Early Years Inclusion Support Fund, not the High Needs Block. However, Members were reassured that there was a workstream focussing on Early Years, but it would run alongside this review rather than being incorporated within it. Despite this, the importance of Early Years settings was acknowledged and officers assured

Members that they were looking to undertake a review focussed on Early Years and to invest additional support at a future point.

Members noted that it would be helpful to have a strategic look at the overall income and expenditure for SEND provision on a child-by-child basis rather than overall provision but acknowledged that it would be a labour-intensive task. Furthermore, Members noted that creating networks and building an outreach model between Early Years specialists and professionals was vital in supporting Early Years settings and could allow for early interventions and therefore, a potential reduction in future EHCPs.

Members emphasised the importance of the review of top-up and growth funding for Special Schools as it enabled a higher level of security for finances and allowed staff to work on meeting needs rather than managing budgets, and thanked officers for their work.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

That Schools Forum confirm their agreement with the key principles, with a further paper to be brought to the October 2024 Schools Forum meeting detailing proposals for consultation.

27 **Annual Schools Consultation**

Grant Davis, Schools Strategic Financial Support Manager, presented the report which sought to agree a set of questions to be sent out to all schools in the Autumn of 2024. The following was then highlighted:

- De-delegation of Central Expenditure was explained as per Paragraphs 3 to 4 of the report before detailing the budgets/services being consulted on as per Paragraph 5 of the report.
- The different scenarios that could flow from the proposals to delegate the budgets were then outlined for Members as per Paragraphs 6 to 8 of the report, with the proposed consultation questions listed in Appendix 1.
- The removal of the Local Authority Monitoring and Brokering Grant (LAMB) was then reiterated for Members as per the details in Paragraphs 11 to 12 of the report.

The Chair encouraged Members to liaise with colleagues to complete and return the consultation in order to make better informed decisions on behalf of the schools in the County.

Officers confirmed that the responses from the consultation would be separated between Primary and Secondary Schools responses for easier comparisons and data retrieval.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

That Schools Forum decide on the consultation questions for Maintained Schools around delegation/de-delegation of budgets for Central Services and School Improvement within the Schools' Block.

28 **Early Years and Wraparound Childcare Update**

Kai Muxlow, Interim Head of Families and Children Commissioning, presented the report which briefed Members on the new legislation around Early Years and wraparound childcare. The following was then highlighted:

- The background to the Early Years entitlement expansion was explained as per Paragraphs 3 to 4 of the report before officers detailed more Wiltshire specific figures as per Paragraphs 5 to 8.
- It was highlighted that there continued to be a national issue with regard to recruitment and retention within the profession, therefore there was a focus on further recruitment campaigns, including the “Do Something Big” campaign by the Department for Education (DfE).
- The Central Government’s ambition in respect of wraparound childcare was detailed as per Paragraphs 11 and 14 of the report alongside the DfE allocated capital funding and programme funding figures stated in Paragraphs 17 to 21 of the report.
- It was highlighted that all provision should be running and sustainable by September 2026, and that there should robust governance through a Governing Board that should consist of wraparound care providers, delivery partners, key stakeholders, and representation from schools both running and not running on site provision to offer a varied and diverse perspective. Furthermore, the Board would hold officers to account, decide on the allocation of funding, monitor and review the implementation of the delivery plan, and would meet 6 times a year over the 2 years of the programme funding.

Members discussed the report’s proposal and considered different methods, before settling on approaching the Primary Heads Forum to secure a representative from the schools to the governing board. Officers welcomed representatives from Secondary Schools to join the Governing Board if they wanted to participate and highlighted that the Members would be updated at future meetings.

Resolved:

That Schools Forum recommend that a representative for Wiltshire schools should be secured through the Primary Heads Forum.

29 **Confirmation of Dates for Future Meetings**

The date of the next meeting of the Schools Forum was confirmed as Thursday 17 October 2024 at 1.30pm and was planned to be held remotely via Microsoft Teams.

Future meeting dates were confirmed as below:

12 December 2024 – 1.30pm

23 January 2025 – 1.30pm

13 March 2025 – 1.30pm.

30 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 1.30 - 3.05 pm)

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