

Schools Block Transfer 2025/26 – Consultation Outcome Report

Purpose of the Report

1. To update Schools Forum on the outcomes of the consultation on the proposal to transfer 1% from the schools block to high needs block in 2025/26.

Background

2. Local authorities can transfer up to and including 0.5% of their schools block funding into another block, with the approval of their Schools Forum. Where a local authority wishes to transfer more than 0.5% of their schools block funding into another block, and/or where agreement has not been reached with Schools Forum, the local authority must seek the agreement of the Secretary of State.
3. In Wiltshire, Schools Forum has recognised the pressures against the high needs block and a transfer of funding from the schools block has historically been agreed, following consultation with schools, each year, where this has been affordable within the 'cash envelope' for school funding and the NFF has been applied. In 2024/25 a transfer of £2m, or 0.55%, from the schools block to the high needs block was agreed by Schools Forum and confirmed by the Secretary of State. This was in line with the proposals in the council's High Needs Sustainability Plan.
4. The Safety Valve agreement that the council has in place with the DfE includes an assumption of a transfer of 1% of schools block into high needs block each year from 2025/26 to 2028/29. For this reason, the council has consulted with schools on a proposal for a 1% transfer from schools block into high needs block in the 2025/26 financial year. The consultation opened on 17 October 2024 and closed on 21 November 2024.

Consultation Outcomes

5. A detailed report on the outcomes of the consultation is attached to this report.
6. 61 responses were received, one of those responses was from a special school and this has not been included in the analysis as special schools are not funded from the schools block.
7. The majority of respondents were in support of a transfer of funding from schools block to high needs block. 66.7% of respondents supported the proposal for a transfer of funds from schools block to high needs block.
8. Of those respondents who supported a transfer of funding, the majority were not in support of the proposal to transfer 1% of schools block. 60.0% of respondents who supported a transfer of funding did not support a transfer of 1%. Comments

provided by those respondents indicated majority support for a transfer of 0.5% or a value that would not impact on NFF formula rates.

9. Responses have also been analysed by phase and by size of school following discussion at the Schools Funding and SEN Working Group. This analysis is also included in the consultation outcome report.
10. The majority of respondents took time to provide additional comments to support their responses. These were shared in detail with the Schools Funding and SEN Working Group and are summarised in the attached consultation outcome report. There were a significant number of comments, including from those that would not experience a reduction in funding.
11. The majority of comments from respondents who voted No to a transfer of funding referred to the financial impact on their schools. Comments also noted existing cost pressures and wider concerns relating to the SEND system.
12. There were a number of comments relating to the format and distribution method for the consultation. These are noted and will inform any future consultations.

Considerations for Schools Forum

13. Schools Forum is asked to consider the outcome of the consultation and whether a transfer of 1% from schools block to high needs block is supported. In considering this it would be important to take the following into account:
 - a. The schools block report considered earlier on this agenda confirms a minimum uplift of 0.5% in per pupil funding within the NFF in 2025/26.
 - b. Consultation responses from schools indicate support for a block transfer.
 - c. Those who have responded to the consultation, and indicated support for a block transfer, do not support a transfer of 1%.
 - d. The cash value built into the original safety valve plan is £3.754m, this is estimated to be 0.96% of schools block based on the provisional allocation for 2025/26. This will be updated in January following the final funding settlement.
 - e. In 2024/25 Schools Forum agreed a transfer of £2.0m, or 0.55%, as the maximum affordable value without impacting on NFF rates. A similar proposal could be considered, and agreed in principle, however the maximum affordable level will not be confirmed until January Schools Forum meeting.

Proposal

14. Schools Forum is asked to consider the proposed level of transfer from schools block to the high needs block in 2025/26. A number of options could be considered, including (but not exclusively):
 - a. No transfer
 - b. A transfer of 0.5%
 - c. A transfer of the maximum value affordable without impacting NFF values
 - d. A transfer of less than 1% that has a lower impact on NFF values
 - e. A transfer of 1%
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