

Schools Forum (SF)
School Funding and SEN Working Group (SFWG)
MS TEAMS MEETING
14 January 2025
Minutes

Present: Marie Taylor (Chair), (Finance, local authority ((LA)), Grant Davis (Finance, LA), Liz Williams (HNB Sustainability Finance Lead); Ben Stevens (HNB Sustainability Strategic Lead) Kai Muxlow (Commissioning, LA) Lisa Percy (Chair of SF / Hardenhuish), John Hawkins (Teacher / Governor rep), Graham Shore (Deputy Chair SF / Holy Trinity), John Read (PHF maintained rep, Lyneham Primary), Adam Smith (Chilmark, PHF representing maintained small schools.) Kathryn Davis (Director, Education & Skills); Lisa Fryer (HOS, SEN & Inclusion)

Apologies: Georgina Keily-Theobald (Downland) Nicola Whitcombe (Springfields Academy representing Special academies)

1.	<p>Welcome and Apologies</p> <p>MT welcomed the group to the virtual meeting.</p>	
2.	<p>Minutes</p> <p>There were no outstanding actions.</p>	
3.	<p>Matters Arising</p> <p>None.</p>	
4.	<p>DSG funding settlement 2025/26 – (GD)</p> <p>Some 24-25 grants, namely the</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers Pay Additional Grant (TPAG) - Teachers Pension Employers Contribution Grant (TPECG) and the - Core Schools Budget Grant (CSBG) <p>have been rolled into the base funding and the annualised CSBG figure used for all mainstream schools.</p> <p>For special schools, TPAG/TPECG/CSBC have been rolled up into one grant for 25-26 and not baselined. Special Schools will receive a new CSBG in the 25-26 year.</p> <p>There are minimum increases into core school funding for 2526 and local authorities made representations to the DFE in a recent webinar. It is possible that there will be a funding review in the spring and we can hope for additional support at that time. No uplifted allocations for pupil premium grant for 25-26 have been announced but we're optimistic for uplift.</p> <p>The allocation of £551 million for 25-26 includes a net reduction in mainstream pupils of 421.</p> <p>The CSSB is the usual formula of £42.90 per pupil plus historic spend which reduces year on year by 20%.</p> <p>High needs block for 25-26; there's a percentage protection on all factors to have increased by 7%.</p>	

	<p>Within the Schools Block was setting the growth fund at £0.5 million and the NFF is fully affordable with a block transfer of 0.236% equating to £0.914m - why have we not got as much funding available as previous years? We believe it's a tightening within the formula we have reduced growth fund due to the dropping pupils numbers.</p> <p>For de-delegation, there is no change from the 2024-25 year apart from secondary schools are opting out of the delegation for the School Effectiveness Service (former LAMB Grant) as there are only four maintained secondaries remaining.</p> <p>LP thanks to Liz and Grant for all the work around the percentage transfer in light of the disappointing settlement. Some points of clarity on the figures in the report - GD to update. A query was raised around submitting the APT (budget information to the DfE) to the DfE prior to Schools Forum. GD confirmed there are inevitable queries from the DfE and once ironed out, they need to resubmit the APT. Should there be a change following cabinet for council then an adjustment can be resubmitted. GD - it's good to have an ongoing dialogue with the DfE.</p> <p>LP pointed out we really need to have a think about our future years and plan with this tightening of the funding and affordability of NFF and block transfers.</p> <p>KD we have been very clear in the cabinet paper about our recommendation but it is a political decision and will depend on cabinet MT ask the group if they felt that lobbying was appropriate.</p> <p>LP confirmed the f40 are lobbying but apparently not anticipating this making a difference.</p>	
5.	<p>Schools block report (GD)</p> <p>GD took the group through the report and assumptions with an affordable NFF, £0.5m Growth Fund and the transfer to high needs block of £0.914m. JR - why are pupil numbers falling when there is continued house building in Wiltshire - is there an appetite in the council to rationalise or close small schools? GD confirmed we haven't seen the impact of an increased birth rate that we anticipated post-Covid, and it could be that houses are not occupied by families. The low birth rate impact is seen across the whole country and many schools are closing, particularly in London boroughs.</p> <p>JR expressed concerns around addressing this.</p> <p>KD replied to JR that this question had been asked previously at Schools Forum and it is a priority to look after vulnerable schools. There are significant surplus pupil places and we have changed the focus group from 'small schools' to 'surplus places'. The conversation has been opened up with the DfE to include academies, diocese, MATs (CEOs) and head teachers. We can share the data that Clara Davies has produced with the regions group from the DfE who are keen to be involved. We need a round-table solution and it may feel slow but we are making progress and hope that later in the spring the group will meet. The local community can feel strongly around any school changes and it's sensitive politically locally and nationally we recognise that schools seem to be hearts of local communities. GD confirmed the last school that closed in Wiltshire was Shalbourne Primary that have had five pupils.</p> <p>GD – we can reuse and re-purpose empty school buildings for specialist provision or AP Lisa Fryer said it depends on location but if you do know of empty premises do let us know as we may not be aware.</p> <p>AS - Somerset are encouraging governing bodies of small schools to not always replace a head where numbers are falling - MT replied those conversations around federations and amalgamations were part of the small schools group and will definitely be part of the</p>	

	vulnerable schools round table group and I will pass this on to Kathryn Davies, who has had to leave the meeting early.	MT
6.	<p>High needs block report (LW) LW presented the proposed budget in line with the safety valve resubmitted plan. We are over budget by 35 million which is based on demand modelling and types of provision children and young people will be overlaid with targeted actions and impact from early support reductions include early support and that growth impact on the HCP's and step down from ISS attempting mid phase as well as at times of mid phase transfer and includes new places for specialist and the impact of this .</p> <p>Band values are still being worked up based on the consultation outcome and the proposal is still to take these to Cabinet in February.</p> <p>The affordable level of transfer from the schools block is £0.914m which is a shortfall compared to the figure shared with the DFE previously and currently this shortfall of £0.816m has been added to the budget as a “savings to find” target.</p> <p>JR - is there anything new in the savings to find line - LW more of the same, most authorities are doing the same things that we are. LF added there are high cost AP packages and we know that young people should not have AP as a destination. They should either return to mainstream or maybe better in specialist provision. The Northwood Centre should add opportunities.</p> <p>Special school MFG is set at 0% for 25/26. Inflation of 2.2% has been added on top ups so the current band values will be uplifted from April but this will need remodelling when we do the new top up rates.</p> <p>JR asked about when the overrides ends. LW confirmed there has been no announcement yet but this is a significant risk as the override is currently expected to end at the end of the 25/26 financial year. We are not sure how the safety valve agreement would impact on that as the council has an agreement in place to balance the high needs block over a number of years.</p> <p>NN - where do we stand compared to other local authorities? LW we are in a difficult place with our DSG deficit which is why we're in the safety valve programme but overall Wiltshire finances are in a better position than many local authorities.</p>	
7.	<p>CSSB (MT) MT presented the report on the CSSB – the 2425 increase in copyright licenses and 2425 and 2526 teachers pay grants have been added into the baseline and for the first time in a few years we have not been able to afford the transfer to high needs block due to the 20% historic reduction. SF members must vote on each line of the on going and historic commitments within this block.</p>	
8.	<p>EY (MT) MT presented her report the early years block has increased significantly due to the four year impact of the nine months to 2 years Grant and the two years universal Grant is still early days for these with regards to take up however the budget was reasonably straightforward to allocate this year and the Early Years reference group preference was to model a reduction in the baby room rates as they felt these were too high and we were therefore able to prioritise funding into three and four-year-old rate which is the largest area of expenditure. The LA decides the rates for the EY block following consultation with EYRG and SF.</p>	

9.	<p>AOB A request was made to share papers with the group earlier – MT apologised and said they really would try to get them quicker in future.</p>	All
10	<p><i>Date and Time of next Meeting</i></p> <p>SFWG 8.30am – 4 March 2025</p> <p>Schools Forum 1.30pm 13 March 2025</p> <p>This is planned as a teams meeting.</p>	

Glossary

RB – Resource Base

SV – Safety Valve

DfE – Dept for Education

LGA – Local Government Org

ISS – Independent Special Schools

EY – Early Years

LA – Local Authority

SoS – Secretary of State