

**Schools Forum**

Date: 14 September 2023

Time: 8:30 a.m.

Venue: Via MS Teams

Paper

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Public

**MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 14 SEPTEMBER 2023 – HELD VIA MS TEAMS****Present****School forum members**

Bill Dowell (Chair)  
John Hitchens (Vice-Chair)  
Reuben Thorley – Secondary headteacher  
Andrew Smith – Independent Post 16  
Mark Rogers – Primary headteacher  
Sandra Holloway – Primary governor  
Marilyn Hunt – Primary headteacher  
Carla Whelan – Executive headteacher  
James Staniforth – Post 16  
Shelley Hurdley – Early Years

**Members**

Kirstie Hurst-Knight

**Officers**

David Shaw  
Jo Jones  
Neville Ward  
Stephen Waters  
Helen Owen

**Observers**

Roger Evans  
John Boken

**1. Apologies**

Apologies had been received from James Pearson, Stephen Matthews, Mark Cooper and Sian Lines.

Reuben Thorley advised he would need to leave the meeting at 8.45 am.

**ACTION**

## 2. Election of Chair

Bill Dowell was re-elected unanimously as Chair.

John Hitchens was elected unanimously as Vice Chair.

The vice chair spoke on behalf of the chair and himself of the privilege in having the confidence of forum and to have been re-elected.

David Shaw raised the issue of vacancies on the Schools Forum, with the following vacancies at the moment:

- Primary Governor vacancy
- Special School vacancy
- 7 academy vacancies
- 2 non-school representation vacancies

David Shaw stated that letters will be sent to schools and Governors to encourage their attendance and membership and that the issue will be raised as an agenda item at the CEOs meeting at the beginning of October. He asked for ideas, or suggestions of colleagues that would like to join to be given to himself or Jo Jones.

Jo Jones is working through a review and check of the constitution and membership and making sure that terms of reference are in order. Where terms of office are expiring seek assurance that members intend to carry on or will be making alternative arrangements

John Hitchens suggested that people may not see the relevance of the Schools Forum and that the letter sent to schools should include a description of what the forum does and the importance of people attending meetings and putting forward views on quite significant financial issues.

David Shaw agreed with this point and stated that The Department for Education and the Education Skills Funding Agency have both updated the information around expectations for forums and that this can be shared as a pre-saved version and that whilst there will be some parts of the current role that will change there is a fundamental expectation that there are no changes

**School  
Forum  
Members**

**JJ**



ahead in early years funding and high needs block funding so there is a key role for schools forum to be playing in that space.

The Chair Joined the meeting.

### 3. **Minutes and Matters Arising (not covered by agenda)**

The Minutes were accepted as a true record.

### 4. **Dedicated School Grant Monitoring 2023-24 (Stephen Waters)**

Stephen Waters presented his report which was for information only.

- The 2023-24 forecast outturn position for the DSG is a £0.376m in year-deficit.
- This deficit needs to be added to the revised £2.181m DSG surplus carried forward from 2022-23 resulting in a cumulative DSG surplus of £1.806m to be carried forward into 2024-25.
- Early Year DSG adjustment and the 2022-23 surplus carried forward allocated for schools growth fund mean that the surplus from the DSG outturn report 2022-23 has been revised from £2.695m to £2.181m.

#### **Early Years Block**

- Shropshire's provisional Early Years Block DSG allocation for 2023-24 is £17.868m and increase of £0.729m compared to the final allocation for 2022-23
- There are no variances to budget forecast at this stage in the year relating to the large budgets for universal free entitlement for 3–4-year-olds or 2 year old entitlement - there will be a more detailed forecast after the autumn term payments have been made which will be brought back to Schools Forum in November.

#### **High needs block**

- The centrally controlled High Needs Block for 2023-24 is £28.897m. This budget excludes the place funding element of the High Needs Block totalling £9.537m and the additional high needs funding allocation is £1.644m. The total High Needs Block DSG allocation (before deductions) is £40.078m



- In 2023-24, with no 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block, the 2023-24 total High Needs Budget is £3.385m higher than the 2022-23 budget of £36.693m which did include a £0.949m transfer from the Schools Block.
- The forecast outturn position for the High Needs Block is an in-year deficit of £0.370m

### **High Needs Block Variances**

- Top up funding for mainstream schools budget increased to £5.323m in anticipation of a higher level of growth than has been experienced, as evidence by a small underspend of £0.098m
- An underspend in the Top-up funding for special schools budget is due to Keystones not yet being at full capacity and so is more of a timing issue. There has been a 25% increase in the number of special school places made available across the state funded special schools in Shropshire.
- There is a forecast increase in expenditure of £0.187m for Post 16 FE college placements. Giving an underspend of £0.310m. The % increase in EHC plans is approximately 10% year on year. There is a higher proportion of post 16 pupils attending Independent Special Schools or independent alternative providers.
- There is an increase of 29% relative to last year's outturn figure, resulting in an overspend of £1.141m. This is higher growth than anticipated. There is an overspend relating to the Independent Special Schools budget. The Council has experienced a sharp increase in demand for Independent Special School placements. The value of, and number of contributions to complex, joint funded placements with social care and the Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has increased reflecting an increase in complexity. There has been more frequent use of independent alternative providers, particularly in relation to post 16.
- A small budget pressure has been reported against SEN support services in relation to an increase in demand for those services.

### **Overall Position and Forward Planning**

- The council's DSG financial position is relatively healthy in forecasting a cumulative surplus of £1.806m as at the end of the 2023-24 financial year.



- A forecasted in-year deficit against the High Needs Block DSH despite a £3.385m increase in total High Needs Budget reflects that expenditure continues to increase sharply year on year.
- The High Needs Block DSG 3-year forecasting exercise undertaken earlier in the year demonstrates that future expenditure growth is likely to outstrip future growth in High Needs Block DSG allocations, specifically from 2024-25 and beyond.
- While the position looks healthy now, this level of carry forward may well be required to support future years spending as the increase in the High Needs Block DSG funding nationally diminishes.
- There have been a number of significant changes which will affect forecasted numbers and expenditure going forward.
- Officers will develop an updated High Needs Block DSG 3 year forecast in January 2024 to reflect these changes and update the forecast expenditure accordingly. Crucially, by January the 2024-25 provisional High Needs Block DSG allocation will be published to enable more accurate forecasting around income assumptions.

Mark Rogers commented on reports of the large number of children coming out of Early Years and into school who are being suspended and observed that this didn't seem to be reflected in the figures that had been presented, that the 10% increase in uplift post 16 is also in need further down. He suggested that the process of identification of children who need help and getting them where they need to be in terms of special schools or providing specialist help is way too slow.

David Shaw clarified that whilst it isn't necessarily in the narrative, it is observable within the figures.

Marilyn Hunt spoke of the increasing number of parents going to appeal and requesting places in the independent sector and the impact this was having on costs.

Mark Rogers observed that the rebalance described is how it is feeling on the ground. He also agreed that, in relation to the year 6 going into secondary they should have an EHCP done earlier but there are problems at preschool level where nursery schools are expecting parents to make the application or waiting for the school to do it, and this is especially problematic when a child needs to go to a special school and must be transferred.



Neville Ward commented that while early years provision for high needs children is better than it ever has been previously there are still providers who are not as confident as they need to be. Neville is working with Steve Laycock in the education Psychology team on a piece of work to look at respond and provide extra help and support to providers that need it. Neville added that numbers of children presenting at settings seem to be plateauing now and that there may be some decrease in the number of children coming through the system, the issue now is children with a slightly higher level of need are being impacted by the number of children with a significantly higher level of need already within a setting.

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Carla Whelan suggested looking at a project to support developing the professional capacity within settings, with speech and language being a key part.

Neville referred to the investment that has been made in rolling out the early talk boost and the talk boost program.

David Shaw added that we are now part of the West Midlands Change Programme and we are in conversation with NHS England at the moment for Shropshire to be included in a pilot around Early Language development. We are also exploring wider advisory support services that are available and any adaptations that can be made.

Shelley Hurdley pointed out that there are some very proactive nurseries in getting EHCPs in and that she is still seeing an increase in the number of children who are needing them.

Neville said that this may be because of parents knowing which settings are more understanding of their child's needs but the numbers over the county are decreasing.

John Boken suggested a survey of nurseries and reception to find any issues with getting EHCPs done and placement problems to enable a more informed discussion.

Mark Rogers suggested early years SENCOs who move around settings may provide a more even effect across settings.

David Shaw commented that we already have a large amount of data that is reported regularly to the SEND partnership board, and we will come back the updated three-year forecast in January, he reiterated the need for consistency across settings with work being done nationally on universal Standards and within Shropshire through the Shropshire Ordinarily Available Provision (SOAP) framework and said he would be providing an update with regards to the National Change Program which launches next Tuesday.

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## 5. Updated Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2023-24 (Jo Jones)

Jo Jones presented her report which was for information only and included a summary of the provisional 2023-24 DSG and the latest updated 2023-24 DSG announced in July 2023.

- Schools block has been adjusted to reflect conversion of Primary School in April 2023
- Early Years Block has decreased by £412k due to the updated January 2023 census figures, this is provisional at this stage and will change once the January 2024 figures have been received.
- High Needs Block has seen adjustments relating to a reduction to the import/export adjustment by £195k, Additional funding for Special Free Schools of £615k and an increase in deductions for place funding in SEND hubs within mainstream schools.
- The Mainstream Schools Additional Grant (MSAG) 2023-24 of £6.77m sits outside the DSG.
- High Needs Additional Grant 23-24 of £1.644m is within the DSG under the High Needs Block
- In July 2023 the Teachers' pay additional grant was announced for 2023-24 to support schools with the September 2023 teachers' pay award.
  - The allocation for Shropshire mainstream schools is £2,030,297. This will be paid to the LA for maintained schools in October and directly to academies in November.
  - The allocation for Shropshire special schools is £193,180, this will be paid to the LA for passing onto schools within the guidelines provided.

### Permanent Exclusion Funding

- In line with the schools operational guidance, redetermination of school budget shares to enable the reallocation of funding for permanently excluded pupils will take place for both maintained schools and academies.
- The following maximum pupil level rates, for pupils without an EHCP, will apply for the academic year commencing 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023.





- There is now a breakdown of all pupil led factors to encourage and support the increased focus on early intervention and prevention promoted nationally, through the SEND and AP improvement plan, and locally, through the Shropshire Plan, exploration into different cost recovery models used by other Local Authorities for permanently excluded pupils will commence in the Autumn term 2023.
- Following this activity, and engagement with the sector, further recommendations will be provided to Schools Forum later in the year.

## 6. **School Revenue Funding Update 2024-25 (Jo Jones)**

Jo Jones provided an update on the School Revenue Funding 2024/25

- In July 2023, the education & skills Funding Agency (ESFA) published schools revenue funding guidance for 2024-25 for Local authorities and schools forums.
- For 2024-25 in Shropshire the primary unit of funding (PUF) is £5,273 (increase of £313) per pupil and secondary unit of funding (SUF) is £6,375 (increase of £404) per pupil. These will be used to calculate the schools block allocation for 2024-25 using the October 2023 census.
- In 2024-25 the following changes will be implemented.
  - LA's must use the new national formulaic approach to split sites – for Shropshire, more funding will have to be allocated under this approach than in previous years with the local formula.
  - LA's must follow the new local formula requirements for growth funding, whereby additional classes (driven by basic need) must be funded by at least the minimum funding level set out in the funding calculation.
  - LA's will be funded for falling rolls as well as growth.
- This will be a big change to Shropshire as previous years we have used the growth fund to cover other costs, including the transfer of 0.5% to High Needs Block and funding schools in line with the NFF.





- With these changes we may not be able to fund schools in line with the NFF for 2024-25 and some aspects may require adjustment.
- The following key elements of the schools NFF have been confirmed by the Government in 2024-25
  - The 2023-24 mainstream schools additional grant (MSAG) has been rolled into the NFF by adding the relevant amounts into the baselines and increasing the factor values for 2024-25 by the amounts apportioned in 2023-24.
  - The NFF values have increased for the following factors (on top of increase for MSAG) by 2.4% for basic entitlement, low prior attainment, FSM6, IDACI, EAL, mobility, sparsity and lump sum. FSM has increased by 1.6% and minimum per pupil levels have increased by 2.4%
- The minimum per pupil funding levels will be set at £4,655 for primary schools and £6,050, for secondary schools. This represents the rolling in of the MSAG and at least a further 2.4% increase per pupil.
- Local authorities will be able to set the minimum funding guarantee (MFG) also known as the funding floor, between 0.0% and 0.5%.
- Local authorities will continue to be able to transfer up to 0.5% of their schools block to other blocks of the DSG, with schools forum approval. A disapplication will be required for transfers above 0.5%, or any amount without schools forum approval.
- In 2023-24 funding was not transferred due to existing DSG High Needs Block surplus being carried forward and there was no funding remaining in the Schools Block Growth Fund, where previous transfers had been funded from.
- Updated guidance regarding the notional SEN budget for mainstream schools has been published to help LA's review their calculations and help schools understand what the notional SEN budget is for.

### **High Needs Funding Arrangements 2024-25**

The latest guidance confirms the following aspects of the High Needs national funding formula for 2024-25:



- The national increase in high needs funding from 2023-24, will be £440 million, or 4.3%.
- The funding floor will be set at 3% (compared to 5% in 2023-24)- this ensures that all local authorities' allocations per head of population will increase by a minimum percentage compared to the baseline.
- The gains cap will be set at 5% (compared to 7% in 2023-24) – the limit on gains per head of the population compared to the baseline, which means that local authorities can see an increase of up to 5% before their gains are capped.
- The MFG for maintained special schools and special academies to be operated by local authorities for 2024 to 2025 must be at least 0% and the local authority should consider setting the minimum increase within a range of 0% to 0.5%. This is for top-up payments. This is the equivalent to the MFG for mainstream schools.

#### **Central School Services Funding Arrangements 2024-25**

- The NFF for the central school services block (CSSB) of the DSG provides funding for local authorities to carry out central functions on behalf of compulsory school age pupils in maintained schools and academies.
- Funding for ongoing responsibilities in 2024-25: local authorities will continue to be protected so that the maximum per-pupil year-on-year reduction in funding for ongoing responsibilities is of 2.5%, while the year-on-year gains cap will be set at the highest affordable rate of 5.51%
- Funding for historic commitments continues to be reduced in 2024-25 by 20% from local authorities' 2023-24 allocations. As in 2023-24, historic commitments funding will be protected from dropping below the total value of the ongoing prudential borrowing or termination of employment costs, based on evidence received by the department. This protection will be applied in the DSG and so will not be shown in the NFF allocations.

The chair asked when schools will be likely to get any detail of adjustments that will be required in order to fund schools in line with the NFF.

Jo Jones stated that there will be more idea of the figures by the December meeting and that figures from last year's census will be used to model what the costs may be.



The chair inquired whether the date of the November meeting would be acceptable considering when information will be available.

Jo Jones replied that there should be a good idea of the figures by then.

Marilyn Hunt asked whether the national formula needs to be used and whether there were implications should that not be used in 2024/25

Jo Jones replied that a local formula is still being used but that it is being tightened every year in order to eventually comply with the NFF. In previous years the NFF has been followed but with the new changes there is now uncertainty about how this will work.

David Shaw added that following advice from the ESFA, funding may look different this year and they wanted to flag this to colleagues, but that figures will be as close to the NFF as possible.

Mark Rogers enquired about where the pressure is coming from in terms of schools making claims and what is driving the growth.

Jo Jones replied that a lot of Growth funding was going to year 6 to year 7 transition, and from The Bowbrook School. The growth funding has decreased but there has also been a bigger need for it. Jo added that there will be new rules in 2024/25 that we are not yet aware of but that it is assumed that growth funding will only be able to be used for growth.

Mark Rogers questioned how the funding regarding excluded children will work.

David Shaw replied that it is based entirely on the individual characteristics of the excluded child, this will be pro rata and not dependent on the size of the school, in line with the ESFA guidance.

## **7. Early Years and Childcare Funding Update (Neville Ward)**

Neville Ward provided an update to the Early Years and Childcare paper presented in June,

An adjustment to that paper is that this is now a consultative paper and does not need a vote by the forum.

- We have confirmation of the increases in EY funding wef 1/9/23.
- Funding for the 3- and 4-year-old entitlement- an increase of 33p per hour per child from £4.87 to £5.20 phpc.



- Funding for the 2-year-old entitlement – an increase of £1.56 phpc from £5.63 to £7.19 phpc
- We intend to pass on the increased funding to providers through the following method:
  - An increase in the funding rate for the 3- and 4-year-old entitlement of 31phpc from £4.44phpc to £4.75phpc
  - An increase in the funding rate for the 2-year-old entitlement of £1.51phpc from £5.29 to £6.90 phpc.

School Forum noted that the funding has been passported to providers as required by central government.

The Chair asked Shelly Hurdley for her thoughts on the update. Shelly Hurdley expressed her concern that there is already a lack of capacity and asked where extra placements will be coming from once the additional funding comes in.

Neville agreed that there will be increased pressure and demand and said that providers are being spoken to about providing extra places, but there is no extra funding to provide these places. Neville added that there is further impact from the difficulties providers are having in recruiting and retaining staff and that it would help if the right amount of money was available to be able to pay people the appropriate salary for their knowledge, expertise and responsibilities but that is not forthcoming.

Shelly Hurdley echoed Neville's thoughts on the difficulties in recruitment and thanked him for raising the issue.

## 8. Communications

- The chair confirmed that lobbying continues regarding issues in early years and special needs and stated that the membership of f40 is serving us well, praising the terrific job they are doing year on year.
- The chair reiterated the need to fill the forum vacancies.

## Future Meeting Dates:

9.



Thursday 26 October 2023  
Thursday 30 November 2023  
Thursday 11 January 2024 (Provisional)  
Thursday 14 March 2024  
Thursday 13 June 2024

The meeting closed at 9:50 am.

