

SCHOOLS FORUM

TUESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2020

Maintained School Members:

Rhian Cockwell,	Primary Headteacher
Kate Higham,	Special Headteacher
Lindsey Hull,	Pupil Referral Unit
Alison Lowe,	Primary Headteacher
Ray Williams,	Primary Governor

Academy Members

Bob Buckley,	Mainstream Academy
Gary Evans,	Mainstream Academy
Fiona Godfrey,	Mainstream Academy
Bob Linnegar,	Mainstream Academy
Karen Pyman,	Mainstream Academy
Jackie Smith,	Special Academy
Clive Zimmerman,	Mainstream Academy

Non-School Representatives

Andrew Henstridge,	Clifton Diocese
Margaret Clark,	Diocese of Bristol
Jo Morris Golds,	Early Years

Officers:

Annette Perrington	Director: Inclusion and Achievement
Gareth Cheal,	Interim SEND Lead, Education
Dawn Sexstone,	Head of Finance, Children Services
Danielle Maundrell,	Strategic Commissioner, Early Years and Childcare
Phil Wirth,	Principal Solicitor (Litigation)

Apologies for absence were received from, Peter Smith (Trade Unions), Sherryl Bareham and James Povoas (Mainstream Academy) and Nick Capstick (Special Academy).

7. Declaration of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations of interest were made.

8. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7th July 2020 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

9. Public Question Time

No questions were received for this meeting.

10.

DSG Retained Budget Monitoring

The Forum considered a report by the Head of Finance, Children Services, on the latest projected 2020-21 Dedicated Schools Grant ("DSG") retained budget position. She referred to the requirement by the Local Authority to report on the DSG budget position to the Schools Forum and advised that the report provided data on the projected year end position against the 2020-21 retained budgets based upon available information at the end of August 2020. She explained that the projected out-turn position is forecast to be £1.980m above the overall budget and that the main variances are related to increasing demand for High Needs support. Members heard that the forecast based on known demand and agreed placements as at the end of August is £1.980m and that following the projected forecast and the 2019/20 brought forward deficit of £1.679m, the total DSG balance will be a deficit of £3.659m.

Resolved: The Schools Forum notes:

- (a) That the latest projection on the 2020-21 retained budget is expected to be £1.980m above budget.
- (b) That following the projected out-turn position and brought forward deficit from 2019/20, the DSG balance will be a deficit to be mitigated of £3.659m.

11.

Monitoring of School Balances

The Forum considered a report submitted by the Head of Finance, Children Services, setting out the level of school balances, particularly regarding the planned use of 2020/21 surplus balances during 2021/22 and the use of 2022/23 surplus balances in 2022/23. She referred to:

- The summary of balances, which strongly indicated that overall balances are expected to continue to significantly reduce over the next three years from the value carried forward into 2020/21.
- The analysis of the schools' planned use of the 2019/20 surplus balances during 2020/21.
- The actual revenue balances brought forward from 2019/20 and the indicative revenue balances for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23.
- The work to be undertaken by the department to support the number of schools predicting a deficit balance in any of the financial years.
- The right of the Local Authority (LA) to use the claw back mechanism and when this may be implemented.

Resolved: The Schools Forum notes:

- (a) The schools' surplus balances brought forward at 1st April 2020 and the schools' committed use of these balances in 2020/21 and 2021/22.
- (b) The analysis of schools' planned use of surplus balances brought forward in 2020/21.
- (c) The indicative future balances to be held by schools at 31st March 2021, 31st March 2022 and 31st March 2023, taken from the three-year budget plans submitted by schools in June 2020.
- (d) The number of schools forecasting low balances on 31st March 2020, 31st March 2021 and 31st March 2022.
- (e) The school balances claw back mechanism remains in place and the circumstances that need to apply for it to be implemented by the Local Authority.

12. Schools Forum Membership and Update

The Interim SEND Lead updated the Forum on Membership matters. He advised that a review had been undertaken of the current membership in light of the evolving balance of schools in Swindon. He drew attention to point 3.3 of the report highlighting that membership had been agreed in 2019 on the pupil percentage difference between maintained and academy schools. He requested that a task group be set up to review current Forum membership with the aim of having representation from the Schools, High Needs and Early Years blocks as this would allow future work of the group to be strengthened.

Resolved: (1) The Schools Forum agrees to establish a task group to undertake a review of the membership of the Forum.

(2) That the Interim SEND Lead be requested to update the Forum on the recommendations of the task group at the Schools Forum meeting on 5th January 2021.

13. Early Years Budget Update

The Forum considered a report submitted by Strategic Commissioner Early Years and Childcare, setting out the budget position of the early years Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and provided an update on the rates to be paid to providers for 2, 3 and 4 year old funding during 20/21 financial year. She drew attention to the issues faced by early years providers due to Covid-19, the agreement that one hundred percent of 2 year old funding and ninety five percent of 3 and 4 year old funding was to be passed onto providers

Resolved: (1) That School Forum notes the early years budget funding position for Autumn 2020.

(2) That an update on the review of inclusion funding being undertaken by the Inclusion Officer be submitted at the School Forum meeting on 5th January 2021.

14. Schools Block Update

The Head of Finance, Children Services, submitted a report for members to update and discuss (a) the 2020/21 Local agreed formula values compared to the National Funding Formula (NFF) values; (b) the planned changes to the National Funding Formula for financial year 2021/22; and (c) the timeframes for the 2021/22 Budget Consultation. She reminded members of the decision taken at the Schools Forum meeting in December 2019 where they supported Option 1 when setting the local Mainstream Funding Formula and updated them on the changes to the National Funding formula for 2021/22. She concluded by advising that a consultation event for stakeholders would need to be set up before the end of November 2020 to discuss the setting of the 2021/22 individual school budgets (ISB). Members will be able to discuss the LA option either to use the National Funding Formula ('NFF') allocations or to agree a local formula with Schools Forum to enable the LA to deal with local issues including Pupil Growth.

Resolved: (1) That School Forum notes:

(a) The comparison data between the NFF and the Local agreed formula values for 2020/21.

(b) The changes that have been made to the 2021/22 National Funding Formula.

(2) That School Forum agrees:

(a) To undertake a 2021/22 Funding formula consultation by the end of November 2020.

(b) To set up an extraordinary Schools Forum meeting in December 2020 to review the formula and principles that will be applied to the funding allocated to Swindon for 2021/22.

(c) To assist the Finance Manager, Children Services, in his collection of indicative autumn census data to be undertaken in October 2020.

15. 2020-21 DSG High Needs Budget Update

The Interim SEND Lead gave a presentation (attached) updating members on the current and projected position for the Swindon Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs block and on progress made with the reforms following the July 2020 meeting. He explained that the report supports the SEND and Inclusion Strategy, the Written Statement of Action and that the proposals contained links to the 3-year action plan agreed by the Strategic SEND Board. Members noted the partnership approach between parents and carers, leaders in education across all settings in Swindon, political leaders, officers and members of Schools Forum, which has been recognised as essential to address the need to achieve a balanced High Needs budget position by 2023. He drew the following key issues to members' attention:

- The SEND and inclusion strategy and principles that will help set the activities and decisions for the future of the High Needs Block.
- Resource Allocation Tool and banding descriptors testing and how this will (a) provide more clarity about how children are funded based on their individual needs, (b) make clearer how funding is allocated and (c) removes the complicated supplementary allocations.
- How the High Needs funding without EHC plans would be transferred to support inclusion.
- How the transfer of Early Years funding will create pressure on the high needs block and how this will be addressed as part of the wider budget deficit recovery plan work.
- The pressure on the 2020/21 DSG High Needs Budget.

Following his presentation, the Interim SEND Lead, Education together with the Chair responded to members' comments and questions in respect of the following matters:

- When and where the therapeutic and advisory services were agreed and how was the benefit to the children accessing these services being measured.
- The impact on education support services due to capacity and funding constraints.
- How funding to 'Teams around the School' would be allocated to schools via a different route and would be allocated according to the child's needs.
- The centralisation of paediatric services being delivered by professionals.
- The cost of Advisory Teachers, the benefits of employing them and how their performance would be measured.
- The adoption of a different delivery mechanism for allocating high needs funding to support early intervention.
- The DSG High Needs budget forecast a deficit of 1,691m for 2020/21.

Resolved: (1) That Schools Forum notes:

(a) The progress of testing the High Needs Banding tool.

(b) The agreement to transfer of funding from early years budgets to high needs budget to support the use of Early Years Inclusion budget for its intended purpose.

(c) Further to (b) above, acknowledges pressures to be picked up as a part of the wider budget deficit recovery plan work.

(c) The DSG HN budget forecast and pressures for 2020/21

(2) That School Forum supports the recommendation to cease high needs funding for children under statutory needs assessment (£0.454m) and redirect the allocation to the “Team around the School” to support the delivery of new working practices

(3) That School Forum members volunteer to support a series of “task and finish” groups to be established and undertaken in October, which will clarify detailed spending across the DSG.

16.

2020-21 Covid 19 Finance Update

The Head of Finance, Children Services, submitted a report regarding the current financial position of the Local Authority due to the impact of Covid-19. She confirmed that this was an extract from the Budget Management 2020/21 report that went to Cabinet on the 9th September 2020. She drew attention to the year-end projection, based on the position at the end of June, reflecting pressures of £18.7m on the General Fund. This has been offset by the receipt of a Covid-19 grant, resulting in a total general fund variance of £5.686m.

Resolved: That Schools Forum notes the pressure on the Local Authority General Fund budget is a pressure of £5.686m due to the impact of Covid-19