

Minutes

Name of meeting	SCHOOLS' FORUM
Date and time	Thursday, 17 November 2023
Venue	Webinar – Virtual Meeting
Present	Beverley Gilbert – Brading CE Primary (Chair) Andrew Montrose – Christ the King College Vicky Reader – Oakfield CE Primary Steve Fairclough – Brighstone CE Primary Simon Richards – Haylands Primary Steff Gleeson – St Georges School Jayne Hill – Niton Pre-School & Brighstone Pre-School
Officers	Natalie Smith – Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion Irina Rowan - Senior Finance Business Partner Ashley Jefferies – Head of Access and Resources Information Transport & Admissions Caroline Marlborough – Principal Consultant – Childrens Services Transformation Practice Heather Morris – SEN Specialist Service Manager Cllr Jonathan Bacon – Lead Cllr for Children’s Services and Education Diane Hiscock – Clerk
Apologies	Rachel Richards – Cowes Enterprise College (Academy) Mandy Airey – Northwood Primary Academy Carl Wake – St Helens Primary School Sue Bowen – CE Diocese Mike Hayward – IW Education Federation Debra Evans – Senior Accountant

1. 2024/25 SCHOOL FUNDING [Paper E](#)

It was agreed to take Papers E and F at the beginning of the meeting to ensure a quorum for decisions required in these papers.

1.1 This paper provides an update on elements of school funding for 2023/25, including Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG), De-delegated services, Central Services and proposal for transfer of funding to the High Needs Block.

1.2 NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA

2024/25 will be the 7th year of the National Funding Formula (NFF) and no change to the basic structure is expected, other than for the Growth Fund, as shown in para 5 of [Paper E](#) . As noted in previous meetings, the additional grant for mainstream schools will be rolled into the NFF for 2024/25.

- 1.3 NFF values have increased by approximately 1.5% overall and will be slightly higher for deprivation factors – Free School Meals (FSM), FSM Ever6; also for primary schools - English as an Additional Language (EAL) and mobility.
- 1.4 The 2024/25 NFF includes factors for funding split-site schools and new requirements for growth funding and falling rolls. LAs can set the MFG between 0 – 0.5%. A transfer of up to 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block can be made with approval from Schools Forum
- 1.5 DIRECT NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA
DfE continues to move to a Direct NFF whereby funding will be allocated directly to schools. LAs are required to move closer to the NFF and IW already mirrors the formula along with 106 other LAs. This includes new requirements for split sites, growth funding and falling rolls.
- 1.6 For growth funding, additional classes driven by basic need, must be funded by at least minimum level set by DfE. Falling rolls funding can only be provided for schools where 2022 school capacity data shows that additional places will be required within 3-5 years. There is no longer a requirement in relation to this funding for schools to be judged Good or Outstanding.
- 1.7 INDICATIVE DSG ALLOCATIONS
Indicative DSG allocations were sent to LAs in July 2023 but, subsequently amended, following a DfE error, in October 2023. The final allocations will be subject to the outcome of the October 2023 Census – indicative figures are shown in the table at para 12.
- 1.8 LOCAL FUNDING PROPOSALS
Continuing to mirror NFF provides ongoing stability for schools, in preparation for implementation of the Direct Funding Formula. A breakdown of indicative values is shown at Appendix A. Most factors are expected to increase by around 1.5% with slightly higher increases in deprivation factors. Numbers on roll and pupil characteristics will impact individual school allocations.
- 1.8 MINIMUM FUNDING GUARANTEE (MFG)
It is proposed to set the MFG at 0.5% for 2024/25, as for previous years. No schools were eligible in 2023/24. It is proposed that any residual DSG be set aside for any requirement on MFG, through changes in pupil characteristics, for 2024/25. This approach has been supported through consultation with schools.
- 1.9 GROWTH FUNDING
The final allocation of growth funding will be confirmed following the outcome of the October 2023 Census. A potential estimation of £254,000 was identified, using September 2023 data.
- 1.10 In 2023/24 a Growth Fund was unaffordable and set at only £326. Forward modelling has identified an expected need for growth funding in secondary schools for 2024/25. Para 32 outlines the requirement for LAs to fund additional classes or the cost of a teaching assistant where a school is eligible.
- 1.11 It is proposed to set a Growth Fund to meet anticipated requirement of £250,000 in the secondary sector.
- 1.12 FALLING ROLLS
A decrease in pupil numbers is expected to result in an allocation for Falling Rolls for the first time in 2024/25. This is estimated at £142,000. LAs can only provide this funding to school where the 2022 School Capacity Survey shows that school

places will be required within the next 3–5 years. This is not expected to be the case and the proposal is not to allocate a Falling Rolls Fund but, to use the funding towards meeting the requirements of NFF in relation to changes in pupil characteristics.

1.13 RECONCILIATION OF INDICATIVE SCHOOLS BLOCK

As a result, the total estimated Schools Block allocation would be £90,184,000 as shown in the table in para 38.

1.14 DE-DELEGATED SERVICES

Maintained schools can continue to de-delegate funding for specific services and academies can choose to buy in them.

1.15 Licences and Subscriptions cover access to Budgeting Software and Fischer Family Trust (FFT) primary data tool. Charged as a lump sum, inflationary rise of 4% expected for 2024/25.

1.16 Trade Union Facilities Time – for release of TU Representatives to support school staff. Charged on a per pupil basis – inflationary increase of 4% from £4.14 to £4.31 per pupil.

1.17 FSM eligibility checking – charged at cost to LA for this service. It is expected that the LA will absorb inflationary increase so that the cost to schools is unchanged for 2024/25.

1.18 Final costs for all de-delegated services will be confirmed following the October Census and final December DSG allocation.

1.19 EDUCATION FUNCTIONS FOR MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

Currently charged at £72 per pupil. Mostly covers costs of premature retirement and redundancy. For 2024/25 a £2 increase to cover teachers' pension administration is proposed along with an inflationary increase of £3 (£5 overall increase) to £77 per pupil.

1.20 CENTRAL SCHOOL SERVICES BLOCK

This allocation is for the statutory duties carried out on behalf of schools and is anticipated to be around £617,000 for 2024/25 (an increase of £19,000). Elements of the funding and the expected increases are outlined in the table at para 52.

1.21 The reduction in pupil numbers is expected to impact this funding block, so LA Statutory Functions will be used as a balancing item to mitigate a reduction in funding.

1.22 Historically, the DSG includes a recharge of £670,000 each year, towards cost to the LA for SEN Transport. This contribution has remained static whilst spending has increased significantly year on year.

1.23 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK

An indicative allocation of £22,329,000 was released in October 2023 – an increase of £1,195,000. This will be subject to the October 2023 Census outcome and a final updated import/export adjustment in July 2024.

1.24 Operational guidance continues to allow LAs to transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block with Schools Forum approval (any proposal for a higher transfer would require DfE to approve). A 0.5% transfer estimated at £450,000 is proposed for 2024/25 in order to support projects to meet commitments of the Safety Valve agreement with DfE.

1.25 In the recent consultation with schools 83% agreed with this proposal.

1.26 BALANCING OF THE FORMULA – CAPPING AND SCALING

For 24/25 the budget needs to be balanced, which may not be possible unless CAPPING and SCALING is put into place. The LA currently are unable to provide figures for schools to show what this will look like.

- 1.27 Indicative modelling suggests a reduction for all school budgets could be from 1.5% to 1% but, the final cap will be determined following the outcome of the October 2023 Census and the final DSG allocation.

1.28 LOCAL FUNDING FORMULA CONSULTATION

Information has been fed into HT and School Business Manager (SBM) Forums. A consultation with schools on school funding proposals was held from 2 October to 10 November 2023. 29 of 45 mainstream schools responded - the results are noted in paras 70–72 and outlined in Appendix C.

- 1.29 The majority of respondents were in favour of all proposals and of continuing with de-delegated services.

- 1.30 Approximately 1/3 of respondents commented on insufficient funding for schools. Concerns were raised about the impact of these proposals on school budgets and budget pressures if the Growth Fund does not meet demand in secondary schools.

- 1.31 Feedback will be provided for Headteachers and SBMs.

1.32 AUTUMN STATEMENT

Government plans to make a national financial Autumn Statement 22 November 2023. Any information in relation to DSG will be fed back through Headteacher Forums and Schools Forum meetings.

1.33 NEXT STEPS

Schools Forum members will be updated at the meeting on 18 January 2024, following receipt of final DSG allocations in December 2023 and political ratification. Individual budget allocations will be sent to schools by the end of February 2024.

- 1.34 Separate sub-committee will be set up through the schools forum to look at the strategic development of the schools budget to further prepare schools for changes moving forward.

1.34 QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

It was confirmed that Chillerton & Rookley School will not feature in budget allocations to schools but, funding will follow individual pupils.

[Further information on the elements of De-delegated and Statutory Services was requested.](#)

Action – To be included in the next meeting

[Is the 0.5% transfer to High Needs affordable?](#)

This forms part of the Safety Valve Agreement and is supported by schools. The cost of provision for SEN pupils must be met, even where there is over-capacity.

All schools are impacted by the funding structures. LA Officers continue to lobby government for sufficient funding to meet the needs of schools, whilst they are closely held to account for high needs spending.

[School budgets are affected by decreasing pupil numbers and high needs issues. The need to transfer funding along with capping and scaling of budget increases is of great concern to all. It is important to get the plan right for the longer term.](#)

Do we have any idea about what may be included in the Autumn Statement.

Officers will watch closely and feedback necessary information.

If agreed, growth funding will link into the school places plan, which has to be accurate in relation to pupil numbers.

It is estimated that 3 additional classes will be needed and have to be funded (i.e. 90 x Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU)).

RESOLVED

1. That the proposal to determine the 2024/25 Isle of Wight School funding formula using the national funding formula values listed in Appendix A be supported.
2. That school and academy members of Forum agree the minimum funding guarantee (MFG) to be set at the highest level of protection (+0.5% in 2024/25) – [6 for 0 against](#)
3. That school and academy members of Forum agree the principle of ringfencing the DSG growth allocation to set the local Growth fund for financial year 2024/25 (currently estimated at £254,000) – [6 for 0 against](#)
4. That school and academy members of Forum agree the principle of not operating Falling rolls fund in 2024-25 financial year and use the allocation (currently estimated at £142,000) to manage the risk of pupil characteristics changes whilst meeting the NFF – [6 for 0 against](#)
5. That member representatives of primary and secondary maintained schools, voting separately, agree to continue to de-delegate funding for licenses, trade union facilities time and free school meals checking - [Prim 3 for](#) [Sec 2 for](#)
6. That maintained school representatives agree a contribution from maintained schools of £77 per pupil, to meet the cost of statutory services provided by the council for maintained schools – [5 for 0 against](#)

Action – Further information on services to be included at the next meeting – 18 January 2024.

7. That Schools Forum approves the proposed central school services block budgets and historic commitments for 2024/25 detailed in paragraph 53 (items b-g) – [5 for 0 against](#)

Action – Further information on services to be included at the next meeting – 18 January 2024.

8. That Schools Forum agrees high needs transfer of 0.5% of the schools block for the 2024/25 financial year – [3 for 1 against](#)
9. That school and academy members of Forum endorse the principle of using capping and scaling to balance the formula - [Unanimous](#)

2. SCHOOL FUNDING POLICY PACK [Paper E](#)

As the paper had been circulated prior to the meeting, members were asked if they had any questions in relation to the updated policy pack.

2.1 QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

It was confirmed that the Growth Fund is for eligible schools who have agreed additional classes to meet basic need. There is no enhancement to basic per pupil funding.

[How many schools are eligible for additional discretionary SEN funding?](#)

Action – Further information to be included in the next meeting – 18 January 2024.

It was felt that some headteachers did not feel well enough informed to answer some of the consultation questions. Further information/explanations would be appreciated, to enhance understanding.

It is disappointing that only 29 schools responded to the consultation.

Only a small group of Headteachers were involved in the Safety Valve discussions and felt they were not involved enough to make informed decisions.

It was confirmed that the High Needs Deficit sits against the LA as part of the overall DSG. DfE required the Safety Valve Agreement to be put in place and holds the LA to account. This led to the transformation of SEND services.

It was reiterated that schools share concerns around the impact of funding decisions but, the LA must balance the budget and seek endorsement from schools.

Action – Further information on Capping and Scaling to be included in the next meeting – 18 January 2024.

Action – Agreed to set up a sub-group for further discussion on Safety Valve (see item 1.34)

RESOLVED

1. That representatives approve the criteria for growth and falling rolls for 2024/25 detailed in Appendix A - [6 for 0 against](#)
2. That the minor housekeeping updates to the policy pack in Appendix A which will apply from 1 April 2024 be noted.
3. That the removal of Split Sites policy from the policy pack in Appendix A which will apply from 1 April 2024 be noted.

3. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

All were welcomed to the meeting and Steff Gleeson was welcomed as new Special School Representative.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations for this meeting.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions received

5. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

BG had agreed to continue as Chair for the forthcoming year and SR agreed to stand as Vice-Chair with a view to succeeding BG as Chair next year.

Action – BG duly elected as Chair and SR duly elected as Vice-Chair

6. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Terms of Reference were amended to include that the Maintained Special School Representative is elected by the Headteachers of those schools.

7. MEMBERSHIP

The membership list had been updated and will be posted on the SF website after this meeting.

Action – Number of maintained school members of the SF will be checked to match ratio against pupil numbers in each sector for the next meeting.

8. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on [13 July 2023](#) be confirmed.

9. MATTERS ARISING

Safety Valve Report included at Item 11

10. 2023/24 BUDGET MONITORING [Paper D](#)

This papers shows the overall budget position at 31 October 2023. A breakdown of the £2,287,000 deficit in the table at para 1 shows that the highest pressure is in the High Needs block. With the brought forward deficit of £4,000,007 from 2022/23 a cumulative deficit of £6,294,000 is predicted. This is 5.5% of the overall DSG.

10.1 EARLY YEARS BLOCK

Although there is no current pressure, Early Years (EY) Funding is impacted by activity reported in the January 2023 and January 2024 Censuses. The January Census was validated in July 2023 and showed a reduction in take up of funded places by 5.7% for 2 year olds and 3.7% for 3-4 year olds. This resulted in a reduction of £260,000 funding. It is expected that numbers will continue to decrease for the January 2024 Census.

10.2 The Early Years Supplementary Grant was introduced from September 2023 for the remainder of the financial year, to enable an increase to rates payable to EY providers – shown in the table at para 4. From April 2024, this will be rolled into the Early Years Block in the DSG.

10.3 SCHOOLS BLOCK

No variances are reported in relation to school budget shares. A minimal Growth Fund of £326 was set and a small underspend of £4,000 was due to academies subscribing to access FFT.

10.4 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK

An estimated overspend of £2,312,000 is predicted for 2023/24 (10.4%). Additional funding of £1,812,000 was received through the Safety Valve Agreement and a further £1,520,000 is anticipated. However, the High Needs Block is still the main pressure on the DSG. The IOW is in the top 3 LAs with high numbers of EHCPs. 6% of children have an EHCP (increased from 5.6%).

10.5 A budget gap of £569,000 was identified when the 2023/24 budget was set. Further pressures include –

- £200,000 overspend in top-up funding for mainstream EHCPs, due to an increase in more complex needs.
- £280,000 overspend in discretionary top-up funding, to support children in schools, colleges, academies and the Pupil Referral Unit, who may otherwise be in independent placements.
- £289,000 overspend on direct payments and educational packages, supporting 50 children Educated Other Than At School (EOTAS).
- £597,000 overspend on Independent Non-Maintained Special School (INMSS) places. An increase from 81 to 87 places.
- £416,000 overspend on early implementation of the new Primary Behaviour Service – partially offset by a saving of £226,000 where primary pupils have moved from the PRU.

- £117,000 overspend due to increased primary places at Medina House and more complex needs.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Is the plan to balance the High Needs Budget through the Safety Valve Programme on track?

This is covered in [Paper G](#)

Off-Island placements put considerable pressure on the DSG and in turn, on school budgets. It was noted that the IW contributed funding towards working with Hampshire colleagues to reduce off-Island placements.

This is included in the Safety Valve Programme. Not all placements are for SEN, some are for social needs.

10.6 CENTRAL SCHOOL SERVICES BLOCK

This area has a predicted underspend of £21,000 due to a reduction in non-SEN independent placements. Small numbers cause high fluctuation in the budget.

10.7 OTHER GRANTS

These are passported directly to schools.

10.8 The Maintained School Additional Grant will be rolled into the DSG from 2024/25. The Teachers' Pay Additional Grant will be rolled into the DSG from 2025/26.

RESOLVED

1. That the 2023/24 budget forecast position be noted.

11. SAFETY VALVE AND DSG MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE [Paper G](#)

11.1 FINANCIAL UPDATE

Although work is progressing well a gap in the High Needs Block is still forecast for the financial year, as reported in Paper E. Work streams take time to become fully embedded and further initiatives are being progressed to develop the outreach service and manage parent expectations, particularly where children are EOTAS.

11.2 It was agreed that the system for INMSS placements needs to be more cost effective.

11.3 TRANSFORMING SEND IOW

The 3 main priorities are to

- provide the right support at the right time for children – early identification of needs,
- improve outcomes for children with EHCPs and control costs,
- improve LA performance against statutory responsibilities, quality of EHCPs and annual reviews.

11.4 The IMPOWER SEND Tool (VSEND) which has been rolled out to mainstream schools, will be used to support improved outcomes and inclusion. It is part of the wider support system, including the new SEN Toolkit and Helpline.

11.5 Concern was raised at the Headteacher Forum that IW schools were not fully involved in development of the programme. There is some apprehension around standardisation of EHCPs. It was requested that more information be shared with schools.

- 11.6 It was confirmed that the EHCP document is to be standardised. Threshold and support information will remain as in the current SEND Code of Practice.
- 11.7 The focus is on building capacity in schools, to train and upskill staff to support SEN children, to monitor expectations and reduce the need for statutory assessments. Some schools are more inclusive and others may need assistance.
- 11.8 A short consultation was held from April to September, to provide a snapshot and inform discussion on dissemination of best practice to enable schools to effectively meet the needs of children.
- 11.9 It was noted that tribunals regarding assessment and EHCPs are time-consuming and difficult for schools.
- 11.10 The Outreach Primary Behaviour Service (PBS) was launched in September 2023 to support SEN and inclusion services. Hampshire CC have run a PBS for some time.
- 11.11 It was confirmed that Inreach support is targeted, focused support for a limited time and would not affect capacity of the Outreach PBS.
- 11.12 Discretionary Funding is where schools may apply for additional payments to further support EHCP requirements. This budget area has a forecast overspend. Further analysis is needed to ensure a robust process for payment of discretionary top-up funding.
- 11.13 Work is ongoing to develop internships and an employability hub to support young people into adulthood.
- 11.14 A sufficiency strategy for school places is being developed. Barriers are EOTAS, high levels of discretionary payments and tribunals. Any delay to the proposed Special Free School will impact on work toward the Safety Valve commitments but, work is ongoing to achieve more on-island and cost-effective placements.
- 11.15 It was noted that many LAs are in a similar position. Good practice is evident across the IW, which should be drawn together to form a single strategic document.
- 11.16 A review of Special School Funding has been undertaken and will be communicated to schools asap.
- 11.17 A TSEND Conference will be held on 24 November 2023, to outline the SEND strategy, showcase training to support children and young people and further progress work with schools.
- 11.18 A review of the EHCP assessment process is due to be completed by the end of December. The next step is to clear a backlog of annual reviews. It is hoped to have a full staff complement from January 2024 to achieve the planned progress.
- 11.19 It was agreed that a huge amount of work is underway and suggest a working group be set up to support oversight of the financial position and the Safety Valve programme.

Action – BG and HM to discuss (SR and VR volunteered to be involved)- as part of strategic development of the schools budget to further prepare schools for changes moving forward

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – All meetings will be virtual through Teams.

Thursday, 18 January 2024, 12.30pm note change of time

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

All at 8.30am

Thursday 21 March 2024

11 July 2024

14 November 2024

16 January 2025

20 March 2025