

Minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Thursday 17 October 2024 at 15:00

Present: P Hussey (Chair)

J Fellowes, N Fowler, J Hoarty, K Hughes, R Martin, B Skillings, K Warren (Vice Chair) and J Yeo

Apologies: P Herbert, H Middleton, R Tite and T Wilson

Officers: V Courtis (EHC Service Leader), M Denny (Assistant Director - Education, Learning and Inclusion), Enser (Virtual School Headteacher), S Hattle (Senior Finance Manager), N Hutchin (Assistant Director - Finance), McDougall (Education Finance Manager), S Sims (Head of Access to Education, Employment, and Training), Talbot (Principal Officer for Education Outcomes), M Hibbert (Schools Funding Accountant) and G Vincent (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer)

SF15 Apologies for Absences

Apologies were received from Rob Tite, Paul Herbert, Helen Middleton and Tony Wilson.

SF16 Disclosures of Interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

SF17 Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2024 were agreed as an accurate record. There were no matters arising.

SF18 Forecast Outturn 2024-25

A number of updates were provided, these are detailed below:

- The latest DSG funding allocations and in-year adjustments were noted.
- The early years block was reduced by £1.2 million, now totalling £34.9 million.
- The projected in-year deficit was £419,000, reducing the overall carry forward to just over £6 million.
- Variances included a £1.2 million overspend on the early years block and a £600,000 underspend on the high needs block.

- Adjustments were made based on the January 2024 Census data, affecting the early years allocation.
- The high needs block showed volatility with pressures such as a £1.2 million overspend on special school top-up funding and a £232,000 overspend on mainstream top-up funding.

Actions:

1. The Forum noted the latest DSG funding allocations for 2024/25 and the latest forecast outturn position.

SF19 Budget Setting 2025-26 and Government Updates

The Report was presented by the Education Finance Manager, Michelle Hibbert, the key points are set out below :

- Updates on the national funding formula and DSG were provided.
- The draft budget consultation for 2025-26 was approved.
- Key elements included no substantial changes to the national funding formula for 2025/26 and the rolling of certain grants into the formula were highlighted. Local authorities would continue to be funded at an average rate for primary and secondary education.
- The draft consultation included options to manage funding pressures, such as clawback, capping gains, reducing the age-weighted pupil unit, or adjusting minimum per pupil levels. A number of other updates were provided, with full detail included in the report.

A member inquired whether the Teachers Pay Award would be supported by government funding in future years, and was told by officers that the funding would be included in the formula for future years.

Actions:

1. The Forum noted the latest updates on the national funding formula (NFF) and the DSG.
2. The schools forum agreed the draft 2025/26 budget consultation on funding the schools block shortfall due to pressures relating to growth.

SF20 2025-26 Growth Fund

Michelle Hibbert, Schools funding Accountant introduced the report, advising that approval was sought for pupil number adjustments and updates to the growth criteria, with the current situation set out by the officer with further detail in the report.

The possibility of receiving falling rolls funding for the first time in 2025-26 was discussed, with officers advising that if funding was received a criteria would need to be set.

The Forum were advised that it was unlikely any school in Milton Keynes would meet the mandatory requirements and it was unlikely the funding would be used.

Members were told that the mandatory criteria for falling rolls funding were set by government, which included a mandatory condition that places would be required in the subsequent three to five years.

It was stated by officers that the value of the falling rolls fund would be equal to the amount received from the local authority.

A number of options for managing growth funding pressures were discussed, including potential changes to the growth criteria for new schools.

A member queried what happens when falling rolls funding was unspent, and if it could be clawed back, officers advised that there was no mention of claw back, and officers also advised there was potential to use the funding for other areas.

The Forum discussed the Falling Rolls Fund, and it was agreed to operate a Falling Rolls Fund. That funding received by the Local Authority would be paid out in full and Funding would be distributed using the total number of reduced places for schools with pupil numbers that have reduced by 10% or more between the October 2023 and October 2024 census counts, less the first 5 places in line with growth funding.

Actions:

1. The Schools Forum approved the pupil number adjustments required to support growing schools for 2025/26.
2. The Schools Forum approved the 2025/26 growth fund criteria, subject to updates for the minimum primary growth factor and the lump sum payment for new schools which would be updated after the budget announcement on 30 October 2024.
3. The Schools Forum noted the draft growth forecast for 2025/26.
4. The Schools Forum noted that further changes may be necessary to the growth fund criteria for new schemes, this would be investigated further through the Quadrant meetings.
5. The schools forum agreed to operate a falling rolls fund for 2025/26 and agreed the following criteria:
 - That funding received by the Local Authority would be paid out in full.
 - Funding would be distributed using the total number of reduced places for schools with pupil numbers that have reduced by 10% or more between the October 2023 and October 2024 census counts, less the first 5 places in line with growth funding.

SF21 2025-26 De-delegated Services

The item was introduced by officers with a report, a number of areas for de-delegation were identified by officers, with the key points for each set out below:

Facilities Time

- The funding request for facilities time remained the same as the previous year.

Schools Insurance

- Insurance services for maintained primary schools were discussed.
- The per pupil amount for 2025-26 was expected to be lower than the RPA (Risk Protection Arrangement) rate but these had not been finalised.
- That it would be communicated with schools forum representatives if the rate was higher than the RPA rate, and would be voted on again at a future meeting of the Forum.

Schools Improvement

- That the Proposal was for DE delegation from maintained primary and secondary school budget shares.
- The monitoring and brokerage grant that used to cover this had now been removed, and de-delegation was the new model to support maintained schools.
- That the traded model was not working, due to low take-up of services.
- That the decision would be conducted virtually by November 8 regarding de-delegation.
- That there were 50 maintained schools (excluding those with Academy orders or converting to academies by the start of the new financial year) and that there were 14,161 pupils in these schools.
- The per pupil rate was set at £19.70, totaling £278,971.70 (rounded up to £279,000 for clarity).
- This represents 0.3% of the maintained schools' budget share.
- For the High Need Block, there were five local authority maintained special school and a similar per pupil rate applied to the number of pupils in these schools, totalling £22,500.

The following points were raised in the discussion:

- A number of events and methods were proposed to encourage engagement with the proposals.
- A member voiced their support of the proposal, and requested clarification on the services provided by this service, officers advised that the following services would be available:
 - Comprehensive evaluation of overall effectiveness,
 - Full comprehensive safeguarding audit annually
 - Regular face-to-face meetings for maintained school leaders and chairs of governing boards,
 - Support and guidance around Ofsted inspections,
 - Access to an improvement partner for telephone advice and guidance,

- Support during critical incidents.
- It was suggested by a member that HR Support or advice could also be included. Officers advised that they would take this away.
- A member inquired what the impact of fewer maintained schools would be on the per-pupil funding level. Officers responded stating that the required funding would reduce with the number of maintained schools.
- Officers advised that feedback on the proposal could be emailed to Alison Talbot and Marie Denny.
- Officers clarified that the de-delegation request would be reviewed annually and this this would not impact MNS.
- A member questioned the £0.009m increase from previous proposals and was advised that this was due to increased staffing costs and pay inflation.
- A further query was received, with a member asking whether non-maintained schools bought into the scheme and was told some did.

Actions:

1. The Forum approved de-delegation of £0.025m funding for the facilities Time for support staff and £0.013m for the Facilities Time for teachers.
2. The Forum approved the de-delegation of funding for the Insurance Services contingent on the final rate being lower than the RPA rate.
3. The Forum approved the deduction of £0.023m from the high needs block for School Improvement.
4. The Forum noted that representatives would consult with their sectors and vote remotely by November 8 regarding de-delegation from maintained primary and secondary school budget shares.

SF22 Early Years Reference Group

An Update was provided by Simon Sims, Chair of the Early Years Reference Group. The Forum were advised that the following matters had been discussed:

- The Discussion focused on the Disability Access Fund (DAF).
- That the Group had decided to distribute any leftover DAF as a lump sum to eligible settings at the end of the year.
- That there were challenges in identifying eligible children due to lack of information from the Department for Work and Pensions.

SF23 High Needs Reference Group

An Update was provided by Victoria Courtis, Chair of the High Needs Reference Group. The Forum were advised that the following matters had been discussed:

- Updates included the high needs block overview, key performance indicators, and recommissioning of speech and language therapy and occupational therapy services were provided.

- Schools and settings were encouraged to complete a survey on these services.
- the pressures on the high needs block and the need for new specialist units were dicussed
- That the Group approved the terms of reference for the next 12 months.

SF24 Forward Planning

·16 January 2025

Forecast Outturn 2024/25

Budget Setting 2025/26

Government Updates

THE MEETING WAS CLOSED AT 16:10