

**SCHOOLS FORUM
11 JANUARY 2024
4.30 - 5.41 PM**



Present:

Stuart Matthews, Academy School Representative (Chair)
Elizabeth Savage, Academy School Representative (Vice-Chair)
Sue Butler, Early Years PVI Provider
Caroline Johnson, Primary School Representative
Juanita Dunlop, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Trudi Sammons, Primary School Representative (Headteacher)
Keith Grainger, Secondary School Representative (Headteacher)
Grant Strudley, Academy School Representative
Gareth Croxon, Academy School Representative (Headteacher)
Katie Moore, Academy School Representative
Paul Tatum, Trades Union Representative

Apologies for absence were received from:

Stuart Bevan, Academy Representative (Headteacher)
Councillor Roy Bailey, Executive Member for Children, Young People & Learning

21. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

Members were notified that a vacancy on the forum had emerged for an Academy School Representative following Stuart Bevan offering his resignation.

22. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

23. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the forum held on 13 December 2023 be approved as a correct record.

Arising from the minutes the following points were noted:

- Paul Clark had circulated comments on the feedback received in relation to the Safety Valve programme to headteachers.
- Grainne Siggins would send out a letter to political leaders once the concerns on school funding had been relayed by headteachers.

Grainne Siggins provided an update on the Safety Valve programme which had been the topic of the previous Schools Forum. The initial Safety Valve proposal was submitted on the 15 December 2023, following approval from the Forum on 13

December 2023. Discussions had continued with the Department for Education (DfE) over the Christmas period. Following approval at a full council meeting on 10 January, the final Safety Valve application was to be submitted on 12 January. The results of this application were not expected to be received until March, however in the meantime the local authority would begin work on the implementation plan.

24. **2024-25 Proposals for the Early Years Budget**

The Forum considered a report which sought agreement on early years budget for the 2024-25 academic year.

Funding allocated through the early years block of the DSG was estimated to be significantly higher than in recent years owing to the expansion of the entitlements from April 2024, this would expand the level of care the local authority was obligated to provide for children which would now start at aged 9 months through to 4 years.

The current early years funding formula would remain for 2024-2025 as the release of confirmed information from the DfE did not allow sufficient time for a proper consultation, however it was expected in the subsequent year there would be a consultation with providers to ensure it remained fit for purpose.

It had been agreed with the Early Years Forum that a single base rate would be in place for all 2-year-olds however some of the disadvantaged 2-year old cohort would attract the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP), which would add £2 on top of the base rate.

Both EYPP and Disability access fund (DAF) are being expanded across all age groups for eligible children.

A consultation with childminders would commence in the spring term to seek views on whether they should receive their funding on a monthly basis, rather than termly. This may better fit their business model.

Following the Forum's questions and comments the following points were raised;

- There were some concerns about whether there was an adequate number of nursery places, however early data from the DfE indicated that there would be sufficient places.
- Funding had been secured for a sufficiency manager to monitor whether there would be sufficient nursery places.
- There were some concerns about how attendance would effect funding, due to funding being paid out pro-rata when a child does not attend nursery for all 5 days off the week.

RESOLVED that considering the council's proposals for allocating funds to schools to contribute to the cost of the September 2023 Teachers' Pay Award
1. to **AGREE** A fixed lump sum payment of £1,489.12 to each eligible provider for the period September 2023 to 31 March 2024 (point 5.1).

2. to **AGREE** A fixed lump sum payment of £3,500 to each eligible provider for the 2024-25 financial year (points 5.3 to 5.5).

RESOLVED That Schools Forum considers the early years budget proposal from the council and **AGREES**:

3. That for the 2024-25 financial year the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning sets:

- i. The early years dedicated schools grant (DSG) income budget at £15.149m (Table 2)
- ii. The funding rates in the early years funding formula are as set out in Tables 3, 4 and 5
- iii. The proposed budgets as set out in Annex 2

4. That Schools Forum **NOTES** the Council's plan to consult with childminders on the introduction of monthly payments from April 2024, as set out in points 5.32 to 5.34.

25. **2024-25 Proposals for the Schools Block and Central Schools Services Block Budgets**

The Forum considered the final proposals from the Council for the 2024-25 Schools Block (SB) and Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) elements of the Schools Budget. There was also a further update on the Safety Valve.

Paul Clark informed the Forum that these were the final budget proposals and build on previous reports and agreed decisions.

There were no new budget issues to consider, with decisions now being sought on the annual autumn term financial consultation with schools on a small number of matters where the majority view of school responses was being recommended. The one exception to this would be in relation to the minimum funding guarantee which was initially proposed to increase 2023-24 funding rates by at least 0.5%, however, detailed calculations with current data suggested this was not affordable, and therefore the recommendation is for no reduction in per pupil funding.

Previously identified budget proposals had also been recalculated in light of the results from the confirmed October 2023 school census. The most significant change relates to the updated Additional Educational Needs data, which presented a new unfunded pressure of £0.301m. However, other changes in income and budget proposals mean that only £0.067m of this pressure is proposed to remain unfunded.

In real terms, before the Block Transfer / top slice, the budget would mean around a 1.8% increase in funding per pupil for schools. There is an average 1.4% increase after the Block Transfer / top slice.

The Forum was also notified that whilst they had agreed a block transfer at the previous meeting, it was still subject to approval from the Secretary of State for Education as the block transfer was above 0.5%. It was expected the Secretary of State would make a decision by March. This meant that all budgets sent out would be provisional, on the basis that the Secretary of State agreed to the block transfer.

Following the Forum's questions and comments the following points were raised:

- The Forum noted it's concern at the 1.7% increase in funding per pupil for schools, as members felt it would not cover rise in costs due to inflation and would therefore have a detrimental effect on schools and pupils. The Forum was further concerned on the effect of pay awards.

- It was confirmed the proposed budget would ensure that all regulations around minimum per pupil funding would be met.

Adding to comments on the Safety Valve mentioned during minutes and matters arising, Paul Clark informed the Forum that the Council had approved the funding to commence the preparation for the SMEH school. There was also additional funding for the secondary SRP developments, pending confirmation from the DfE that they would provide additional resources towards this provision.

RESOLVED to AGREE that after taking account of the school responses to the October 2023 financial consultation and overall affordability:

1. Item for Maintained Primary School members only
 - i. de-delegation of budgets continues for the services requested by the council.

Item for Maintained Secondary School members only

 - ii. de-delegation of budgets continues for the services requested by the council.

Item for all Maintained School members only (includes Special and PRU)

 - iii. a £20 per pupil contribution continues to be made by maintained schools towards the cost of delivering 'general' education related statutory and regulatory duties.

Items for all Forum members

 - iv. all schools receive at least the same amount of per pupil funding as received in 2023-24 financial year, with the £0.039m cost to be met from reduced funding increases for those schools receiving the largest uplifts in per pupil funding.
 - v. That the notional SEN budget quantum be determined through the actual number of pupils on SEN support or in receipt of an EHCP, with individual school Notional SEN Funding amounts calculated from the key proxy SEN funding factors in the NFF plus an element of core per pupil funding amounts.
2. to **AGREE** that the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning is requested to approve:
 1. the initial changes to budgets as set out in Table 2, in particular:
 - a. that the Schools Block DSG be set at £96.308m (columns A and B of line 4)
 - b. that the Central School Services Block DSG be set at £0.848m (column C of line 4)
 - c. that factor values in the BF Funding Formula are set at the same values as included by the DfE in the Dedicated Schools Grant, subject to:
 - i. applying the 0.5% deduction for the transfer to the HNB
 - ii. applying reduced funding rates to the AEN factors to the level required to absorb the £0.067m unfunded pressure.
 - d. the changes to all other budgets that amount to £4.353m (column D of line 17)
3. to **AGREE** that in the event of the Secretary of State for Education not agreeing the 0.35% Schools Block transfer that is above the limit permitted locally, that the £0.341m be placed in the LA managed Growth Fund for later consideration.
4. to **AGREE** that the Executive Director: Resources be authorised to submit DfE pro forma templates for the 2024-25 BF Schools Budget in accordance with the decisions taken at this meeting.

5. to **AGREE** as decision maker:
 - i. that the arrangements in place for the administration of central government grants are appropriate.
 - ii. the budgets for the LA managed Growth Fund are as set out in Annex 2
 - iii. the budgets for LA managed Central School Services Block services are as set out in Annex 3.
6. to **NOTE** the current position on the Council's Safety Valve proposal.

26. **2024-25 Proposals for the Local Authority Budget**

Paul Clark presented the Forum with a summary of the Council's draft budget proposals for 2024/25 with a key focus on the people directorate. As an interested party, the Forum was being asked to comment.

The budget proposals included a summary of commitments from previous years, an update on government grants that are expected to be received and a range of economies and budget pressures that have been put forward for consideration.

If the proposals are agreed there would a £6.3 funding gap before increases in council tax. The Forum was informed this could be filled either by use of reserves, cuts to spending or increases in council tax.

The Forum considered the Executive's proposals relating to the schools' element of the People's Directorate. The Forum recognised the financial difficulties facing Councils and expressed concern that as the centres of their communities, in supporting the most vulnerable families, further pressures will fall on schools to increase support. This will need to be managed within an average increase in per pupil funding of 1.4% which is likely to be significantly below the level of cost pressures in 2024/25, with the council's proposals assuming a 3.5% increase for pay wards.

RESOLVED That the Schools Forum had commented, as captured in the minutes, on the 2024/25 budget proposals of the Executive for the People Directorate in respect of:

- i. The revenue budget (Annexes A to C),
- ii. The capital programme (Annexe D).

27. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The next meeting would take place on Thursday 7 March 2024.

CHAIRMAN