



SCHOOLS FORUM

13 DECEMBER 2023

SUPPLEMENTARY PAPERS

TO: ALL MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

The following papers have been added to the agenda for the above meeting.

These were not available for publication with the rest of the agenda.

Kevin Gibbs
Executive Director: Delivery

	Page No
4. SAFETY VALVE UPDATE	3 - 10
To update the Schools Forum on the initial Safety Valve proposal to be submitted by Bracknell Forest Council to the Department for Education by 15 December 2023 and to report responses from schools to a consultation on the council's proposal to secure a transfer of the equivalent of 1% of the schools block funding into the High Needs Block, while capping the impact on any individual school budget to a maximum of 0.5%.	

This page is intentionally left blank

TO: Schools Forum
DATE: 13 December 2023

Annex C - Outcomes from the November/December 2023 consultation with schools on responding to the increased cost of supporting children and young people with high needs.

1. By the 8 December response deadline, 22 replies had been received from 23 out of 39 schools (59% response rate). A reply was received from 18 primary schools (60%), 4 secondary schools (66%) and Kennel Lane Special School. This represents a good response rate, which gives confidence that decisions on these matters can be taken with the knowledge of the majority view of schools. A further response was submitted after the consultation deadline, which was also in support of the proposals.
2. The questions are set out below and responses summarised.
3. **Question: Do you agree that the increased cost of supporting pupils with high needs should be supported by a block transfer into the High Needs Block, equivalent to 1% of Schools Block funding, which caps the impact on an individual school's budgets to no more than 0.5%?**

Responses from 21 schools supported this proposal (91%). 2 schools disagreed.

4. **Question: If you have answered 'No' above, what other measures to you propose to ensure that spend on the High Needs Block is brought in line with budget?**

Two schools answered 'No' and their responses to this question were:

St Margaret Clitherow

- Reducing costs further centrally
- Stop all the wasting of money caused by delays in working with the schools and working in a timely manner
- Working with schools to avoid the need to avoid the need to mediation and tribunals, as engagement at early stages would enable this to be prevented and significant costs saved
- Finding further ways to stop sending Bracknell Forest children to costly and unnecessary out of borough provision
- Ensure children's needs are met at school level so that the unnecessary cost outlined above is not needed, thereby saving money in the long run. This could be achieved by the LA fulfilling its statutory requirements in terms of delivering funds to schools at the appropriate time.

Wooden Hill

- None

5. **A number of schools made comments to the consultation and these are set out below.**

School comments arising from the November/December 2023 financial consultation

School	Y/N?	Comment
Binfield (10)	Y	It is a 'yes' with huge reluctance. The issues with SEND have been continuously highlighted to BFBC over the last 12 years or so by Headteachers. Lack of action by BFBC has resulted in the crisis now and schools are not in a position to take any more cuts to budgets. Schools are receiving and dealing increasingly complex needs, and this is a time when more support is needed at school level, not less. BFBC should look at mitigating the loss to schools by all available means, including utilising reserves as well as pushing forwards with getting the right resources available in the borough to support our neediest children.
4 Birch Hill (26)	Y	<p>We are realistic and understand that we have some difficult choices to be made - and we realise, if we do not make the cuts, the SoS/DfE may well impose them. However, has a full and independent analysis of these cuts been completed? What will the impact be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • further reduction in already limited services for the most vulnerable children and families - including PPG children • Will the current proposed plan be enough – or will further cuts be needed in Year 2,3 • How will Services are already in recruitment crisis in; EP, OT, SALT, and School Support Staff (TAs) be supported? • Will the proposed SEND Banding Tool result in less 'element 3' funding to schools to provide full adult support • Education Standards, especially for the most vulnerable will be negatively impacted
Bonitas Trust (13) (Ranelagh and Jennett's Park)	Y	We are requesting that for all students who the LA are considering or proposing to be educated at a provision outside of the LA, their details are circulated to all schools in the LA (both secondary and primary) with a detailed overview of their needs and the actual and/or proposed funding that is attached to pay for their provision. Schools will then be able to provide a detailed offer as to whether they can meet the student's needs.

College Town (18)	Y	No comment.
Cranbourne (28)	Y	As a school we have worked extremely hard to minimise our own deficit and it's a shame that we are now expected to find another approx. £5,000 particularly as we have only had a Reception intake of 19 pupils instead of 30. This will further impact next year's budget.
Crown Wood (5)	Y	<p>It is clear that the Safety Valve Programme, while better than the alternative of taking no action, is clearly a 'sticking plaster' which won't solve the systemic problems – and lack of funding - in the national approach to identifying and supporting children and young people with SEND.</p> <p>Despite the proposed financial transfers and cutting of services, the report states the LA is still likely to be faced with a debt of £40m (40% of the LA's budget). The date of 2029-30 is mentioned in the consultation report as the 'realistic' end point of the programme. 7 Years! Children starting in Reception in September will be in Secondary School before the programme ends (if it ever does!). My concern then is that this is going to be the first year of the annual clawing back of money from school budgets and the prelude to even deeper cuts to SEND and other local services. In this context, the phrase, "withdrawn as soon as possible" doesn't feel to be any time soon.</p> <p>I cannot disagree with the LA's desire for, "early intervention and demand management – focusing on ensuring children and young people's needs are identified early and they are supported to remain in mainstream education where appropriate." However, without adequate funding and specialist professionals / services, this is not achievable. The effect of the Safety Valve Programme in the short and medium term (if not longer) is to reduce schools' capacity to support children with complex needs, store up problems for the future and to ask teachers and support staff, already on their knees, to do it alone. We don't have enough EPs, SaLTs, Occupational therapists now! I have real concerns about the effect – both on staff and pupil wellbeing and on standards - of asking schools to do more with less year on year.</p> <p>We are between a rock and a hard place and I see no alternative than to support the proposal. I am, however, in equal measure angry and frustrated on behalf of the children, parents and staff in my school community at the situation we are in.</p>

9

Crowthorne (11)	Y	<p>As a school we have appreciated the meetings that have taken place to give us a voice around this issue, and to keep us informed of updates. As Head, I am aware of the time and effort that has gone into making these happen and it has been appreciated.</p> <p>Heads indicated early in this process that they would "reluctantly agree" to the 0.5%, however it should be time limited.</p> <p>As a small school, we will feel the impact of the 0.5% top slice more than a 2FE or larger school. I know this has been raised within meetings but wanted to note it here too. We receive less PP funding than larger schools and despite being full, we have in the past had to make difficult decisions (including redundancies and re-structuring) to ensure we can balance our budget.</p> <p>As I raised at a recent meeting, Heads would be interested to know how much Health will be contributing, and whether they will be asked for more. Is it the figure give on Page 3, point 20 of the consultation document? (£100.000)?</p> <p>As a maintained school, we value the services provided by the LA and hope that these will be protected as far as possible, so that the day to day impact on children and staff is minimal.</p>
Edgbarrow (7)	Y	This is a reluctant 'yes' as we can see no reasonable alternative. In the event that the budget performs better than forecast, this should be the first element that is unwound and returned to schools.
Garth Hill (23)	Y	We agree to this reluctantly and recognise this is the best of a bad choice of options under consideration before this proposal was presented for consultation with schools. We are gravely worried about the impact on schools, services and young people in Bracknell Forest. Our sincere hope is that the plans overall will help to improve provision in the long term, but it is an acutely challenging position for us all to be in and we expect it to remain so for some significant time.
Holly Spring (9)	Y	Headteacher: I assume all other options have been explored.
Kennel Lane (15)	Y	No comments.
Meadow Vale (14)	Y	No comments.

Sandhurst (19)	Y	No comments.
Sandy Lane (12)	Y	<p>It is clear that the Safety Valve Programme, while better than the alternative of taking no action, is clearly a 'sticking plaster' which won't solve the systemic problems – and lack of funding - in the national approach to identifying and supporting children and young people with SEND.</p> <p>Despite the proposed financial transfers and cutting of services, the report states the LA is still likely to be faced with a debt of £40m (40% of the LA's overall budget!).</p> <p>The date of 2029-30 is mentioned in the consultation report as the 'realistic' end point of the programme. 7 Years - Children starting in Reception in September will be in Secondary School before the programme ends - assuming it does. Our concern is that this is going to be the first year of the annual clawing back of money from school budgets and the prelude to even deeper cuts to SEND and other local services. In this context, the phrase, "withdrawn as soon as possible" doesn't feel to be any time soon.</p> <p>The 0.5% 'top slice' isn't perhaps massive in cash terms in Year 1 - but cumulatively over 7 years, it will have a real impact on school budgets - and that is assuming it stops after 7 years which is in no way guaranteed.</p> <p>Cannot disagree with the LA's desire for, "early intervention and demand management – focusing on ensuring children and young people's needs are identified early and they are supported to remain in mainstream education where appropriate." However, without adequate funding and specialist professionals / services, this is not achievable. The effect of the Safety Valve Programme in the short and medium term (if not longer) is to reduce schools' capacity to support children with complex needs, store up problems for the future and to ask teachers and support staff, already on their knees, to do it alone. We don't have enough EPs, SaLTs, Occupational therapists now. I have real concerns about the effect – both on staff and pupil wellbeing and on standards - of asking schools to do more with less year on year.</p> <p>The question arises as to whether the LA are being coy in sharing their desire to make it harder for an EHCP to be awarded? It seems as if the new graduated approach is effectively to delay, delay, delay (by requiring schools to jump through hoops and provide more evidence) and the introduction of the new 'banding tool' which I fear will depress top up funding into BF schools. Aside from the increasing top slice, this is a real concern and will inevitably lead to more children with complex needs in our schools, but less funding and support to manage those needs.</p>

St Joseph's (6)	Y	As Bracknell schools are contributing to this school, please can systems be put in place to ensure that the places go (where possible) to children from Bracknell schools. The actions schools need to take to ensure this happens should be an agenda item on HT Briefings and SENCO forums – at least once a year. With the business of a school year, these important actions can be overlooked and need at least annual review.
St Margaret Clitherow (29)	N	<p>This has been a very rushed and frantic consultation process, where lots of pressure is being placed on schools at a very busy time of year.</p> <p>We would need to consult with the Directors of our MAT to see what their view is on this is and to sanction an ongoing significant commitment such as this. We have had no time to do this.</p> <p>The stress that the SEN and failings of SEN are currently placing on our school is phenomenal and the responses we receive as a school are very poor and do not meet the statutory duties of a Local Authority.</p> <p>We have been trying to resolve these issues for 18 months and we are treated rudely, not engaged with replies are not answered.</p> <p>It is very hard to see that the offered 0.5% of our budget is going to be the solution to all of these failings, since we have seen no improvements in the past 2 years since the OFSTED grading was Inadequate and significant funds were given to the LA to help support them after this judgement, which again has made no impact on delivering better support and value to school and the SEN children we support on a daily basis.</p> <p>We are not prepared to support this when the failings of SEN to pay out on our current EHCP has forced the school to currently be reporting a deficit on our budget circa around £70K still owed to the school.</p>
St Michael's CE (27)	Y	No comments.
St Michael's Easthampstead (17)	Y	<p>This cannot be a permanent increase, it should be limited to at the very most 5 years. The council will know by then if the plan is working.</p> <p>My only other comment would be that as a school in deficit I would hope that the LA would not seek to cut any further from my staff support given that I am now going to have provide more SEN support with less from the borough.</p>
The Pines (20)	Y	No comments.

Uplands (22)	Y	It is felt by governors, headteacher and SBM that schools have no choice but to accept the proposal. We have deep concerns about the overall impact on children across the borough of the cost cutting required to meet the requirements of the D of E Safety Value but wish to support BFC.
Warfield (24)	Y	Whilst we recognise the need for the measures under proposal, the governing board are concerned about the impact on children inevitable cuts in services will have. We need to be confident that the core duties are completed in a timely manner and to a consistently high standard. This is the very least we should be able to expect, and it still has yet to be achieved particularly with regards to SEND services.
Wooden Hill (25)	N	Can only answer no as being asked for a financial contribution without clear understanding of what the service offer will look like post process. As our contribution would then impact on how we are able to commission alternatives we may require as a result. There is also a real concern that the 0.5% will develop into more when/if other savings are not realised.

