

# Minutes of Schools Forum

**Monday 15 January 2024 at 2.30pm  
in Annexe 2 - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:**

**Maintained Primary**

S Baker, A Gilbert and W Lawrence.

**Maintained Secondary**

C Handy-Rivett.

**Maintained Special Schools**

O Flowers.

**Pupil Referral Unit**

K Hazelwood

**Governors**

E Benbow and D Steen.

**Academy Primaries**

L Bray, J Farmer and R Reed.

**Academy Secondaries**

M Arnull, G Faux, K Featherstone, and J Topham.

**Special Academy**

N Toplass (Chair).

**Early Years Partnership**

C Spooner.

**16-19 Provider**

C Hadley.



**Officers:** Julie Andrews (Assistant Director - Education Services); Abi Asimolowo (Head of Financial Business Partnering-People); Elaine Taylor (Finance Business Partner) and; Connor Robinson (Democratic Services Officer).

1/24 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from J Barry (Vice-Chair), L Mason and A Connop (Substitute)

2/24 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

3/24 **Minutes**

Forum members raised the previous request relating to information on the Special School Additional Grant and Teachers Pay Additional Grant. Forum members were advised that the direction of travel was similar to previous years and that the decisions around Special School Additional Grant and Teachers Pay Additional Grant were made outside of Forum.

In response to questions relating to Union Facilities time Forum was presented with the weighting breakdown for unions to claim.

The current facilities time formula was based on Sandwell Trade Union membership on schools buying into the local authority.

<b>Sandwell Trade Union membership on schools buying into LA Facility Time</b>	<b>Allocation from duties in days</b>
0 - 50	0.5
51 - 100	1
101 - 300	2
301 - 500	3



501 - 800	4
801 - 1500	5
1501 - 2500	6
2501 and above	7

The distribution of funding for Facilities time was noted as:

ASCL	0.5 day per week
ATL	1 day per week
GMB	5 days per week
NAHT	1 day per week
NASUWT	4 days per week
NEU	6.5 days per week
UNISON	5 days per week
UNITE	0.5 day per week

The balance of the facilities time pot was not available and would be communicated to Forum members at a later date.

Further to Minute No. 58/23 it was reported that the school in question had received the additional funds which would make a positive impact this financial year. It was anticipated that a sustainable plan would be established to ensure the school avoided the position of having to repletely catch up on its finances.

Members noted that a High Needs Block monitoring report was not on the agenda. Forum was advised that the staff member responsible for the report had returned to the Council and reports would be provided to subsequent meetings.

Forum members raised the continued increase in those pupils with SEND and the financial impact that was incurring across schools. Members advised that it was necessary for the continued monitoring of the High Needs Block to ensure its sustainability.

Additional concerns were raised about the accuracy of the previous minutes from meetings held on 6 November and 11 December 2023. Forum agreed to defer the minutes of both meetings to ensure they accurately represented the discussions at those meeting.



**Resolved** that the minutes of the meetings held on 6 November and 11 December 2023 be deferred to the next meeting.

4/24

## **Dedicated Schools Grant Allocations and Draft Budgets 2024/25**

Schools Forum considered the Dedicated Schools Grant Allocations and Draft Budgets 2024/25.

Forum considered the report that informed members of the draft funding allocations for the DSG and the draft school budget information for 2024/25 in accordance with recommendations and decisions voted at the last schools forum meeting (Minute No. 56/23 - 11 December 2023). Forum was advised that the budget information may change, subject to approval from the Department of Education (DfE) and/or decisions that would be taken at Cabinet on 7 February and subsequently Council 20 February 2024.

Forum members were asked to note that the final funding model which would be submitted to the DfE to meet the final deadline date of 22 January 2024 and whereby the authority should receive confirmation of the budgets shortly thereafter. The deadline for disseminating 2024/25 funding to Schools was 28 February 2024.

The information within the report was to allow school governing bodies and academy boards to start their financial planning for 2024/25 and to make appropriate structural and educational adjustments to meet the needs of young people within the constraints of their resource allocations.

The DfE announced the DSG allocations by block for 2024/25 on 19 December 2023:



<b>DSG Block</b>	<b>Allocation prior to Adjustments</b>	<b>Adjustments</b>	<b>Allocation after adjustments</b>
	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>
Schools Block	349.852	(3.276)	346.576
Central School Services	2.381	0	2.381
High Needs	75.436	(4.490)	70.946
Early Years	38.535	0	38.535
<b>Total</b>	<b>466.204</b>	<b>(7.766)</b>	<b>458.438</b>

Forum noted that the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant (MSAG) was included in the National Funding Formula (NFF) for 2024/25. Therefore, this would not be paid as a separate grant to mainstream schools in 2024/25.

The increase in the Early Years Grant was due to the expansion of the Early Years Offer to include 15 hours funding for the working parents of 2 year olds from April 2024 and for children from 9 months old from September 2024. This offer would be further expanded to 30 hours funding for all children of working parents from September 2025. A consultation would take place on how this expansion would work later in the year.

A comparison of the funding and the pupils from 2022/23 to 2024/25 was detailed as:



<b>DSG Block (After Adjustments)</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>
Schools Block allocation	£305.502m	£323.182m	£346.576m
Pupil Numbers	56,025	56,462	57,014
Central Schools Services Block	£2.249m	£2.306m	2.381m
High Needs Block allocation	£58.137m	£67.737	£70.946m
Pupil Numbers in special school	832	884	967
Early Years Block allocation	£23.387m	£25.823m	£38.535m
3 & 4 Year old Universal PTE	5,524	5,517	TBC
3 & 4 Year old – Additional 15 Hours PTE	1,592	1,667	TBC
2 Year old PTE	1,168	1,331	TBC
Early Years Pupil Premium (This funding is included within the “Early Years Allocation above”)	£0.308m	£0.339m	TBC

The 2024/25 Early Years Block allocations were indicative, and based on Schools, Early Years and Alternative Provision censuses data from January 2023. The final allocations for each of the funding streams would be based on five-twelfths of the January 2024 census numbers plus seven-twelfths of the January 2025 census numbers.

The High Needs Block allocations were provisional figures and would be updated in the new financial year. The import/export adjustment would be updated in the summer term 2024 to reflect the latest data from the January 2024 schools census and the RO6 of the 2023 to 2024 Individual Learner Record (ILR). The DfE would make further adjustments in April 2024 to the place funding deductions for the academic year 2024 to 2025 to reflect the outcome of the 2024 to 2025 place change notifications process and to reflect further academy conversions.



The Schools Block funding that had been distributed through the main funding formula was £343,810,026. This had been calculated as follows:

<b>Description</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>
	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>
Schools Block DSG	325.898	349.852
Less NNDR	(2.716)	(3.276)
Less Pupil Number Growth Contingency	(1.664)	(1.600)
Less Falling Rolls Fund Contingency	0	(0.654)
Less Transfer from Schools Block to Central Schools Services Block	(0.455)	(0.512)
<b>Schools Block DSG Available to Distribute</b>	<b>321.063</b>	<b>343.810</b>

The school funding model had to be submitted to meet the DfE deadline of 22 January 2024 for review and final confirmation of the budgets.

Two secondary schools qualified for the recently established falling roll fund. Therefore, an amount of £654,000 had been top-sliced from the school's block.

The rates for the local authority formula to be applied to school's budgets for 2024/25:



<b>NFF Factor</b>	<b>2023/24 £</b>	<b>2024/25 £</b>
Primary basic entitlement	3,661.82	3,803.04
KS3 basic entitlement	5,184.44	5,381.50
KS4 basic entitlement	5,274.34	5,557.05
Primary FSM	216.20	252.84
Secondary FSM	216.20	252.84
Primary FSM6	319.49	473.77
Secondary FSM6	587.35	802.69
Primary IDACI F	32.11	57.02
Primary IDACI E	106.43	128.94
Primary IDACI D	498.71	497.84
Primary IDACI C	562.12	558.91
Primary IDACI B	611.03	605.93
Primary IDACI A	661.32	672.19
Secondary IDACI F	47.16	81.12
Secondary IDACI E	377.71	389.66
Secondary IDACI D	693.19	695.87
Secondary IDACI C	789.22	788.30
Secondary IDACI B	869.84	865.86
Secondary IDACI A	939.44	953.50
Primary EAL3	579.34	589.41
Secondary EAL3	924.84	1009.66
Primary LPA	1,240.97	1247.37
Secondary LPA	1,810.11	1829.10
Primary mobility	112.88	211.59
Secondary mobility	163.55	303.9
Primary lump sum	135,044.95	140,740.46
Secondary lump sum	135,044.95	140,740.46





A number of variations were noted across the rates by Forum.

The movement to the NFF had necessitated that only the NFF split site factor could be used in the APT. Sandwell's local split site factor was significantly higher than the NFF factor. This had resulted in significant reduction in the funding for one school in the formula for 2024/25.

An Infant and Junior school were proposing to merge into a primary school from 1 January 2024. The nature of the merger was that the Infant school would close, and the Junior school's status would change to a full primary school. The formula had been prepared based on the primary school starting on 1 January 2024. Should that not be the case, there would need to be a re-run of the formula which would have an impact on the affordability and other factors in the formula.

The DfE allowed overall gains for individual schools to be capped as well as scaled back to ensure that local formulae were affordable. This methodology was new to Sandwell in 2023/24 as the Council move closer to the NFF. It was found that the Councils local formula had a small shortfall of £0.5m in 2024/25 and so 2.9% capping and 58.58% scaling had been applied.

The higher the level of capping, the more the number of schools that would gain but the more severe the level of scaling to ensure the Schools Block was affordable.

Forum was reminded that local authorities can cap any gains schools receive through the 2024 to 2025 local formula and this would be applied on the same basis to all schools. The DfE applied caps and scales to academy budgets on the same basis as for maintained schools.

Capping and scaling factors were not applied to schools that had opened in the last 7 years and had not reached their full number of year groups. This definition of new and growing schools did not include existing schools that are extending to include a new phase and have empty year groups in the new phase.



Following questions and comments from Forum members, the following was highlighted:-

- the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant was now included within the NFF and was not a separate grant;
- within the DSG the High Needs Block was noted as £70.946m for 2024/25;
- no school had previously qualified for access to Falling Roll Fund, this had now increased to two schools and the amount had been agreed in principal;
- the DfE had mandated that split sites move to the NFF;
- it was noted that the NFF would include 2.9% capping and 58.58% scaling, any school falling below the cap would not be affected;
- there were questions relating to the capping and scaling having a more positive effect for primary schools, however officers stated that the effect would be more random;
- the move to the NFF was likely to favour secondary schools;
- any update to the capping and scaling would be shared at the next meeting.

**Resolved** that Schools Forum note the Dedicated Schools Grant Allocations and Draft Budgets 2024/25 and are content for the data to be submitted to the DfE.

5/24

## Schools Closedown Timetable 2023/24

Forum considered the Schools Closedown Timetable 2023/24. The Government had a deadline for local authorities to publish their audited accounts in July 2024. It was, therefore critical for all stakeholders to work together towards this deadline.

The critical deadlines were noted as 1pm on:

- 9 February 2024 - Leasing returns
- 15 March 2024 – Interim Capital Return
- 3 April 2024 – Copy of Bank Statement
- 17 April 2024 – Year End Excel Closedown Template

In order to comply with external audit and achieve the closedown deadlines set by the authority, the Children's Finance Team would



need to have the Excel Closedown Templates as and when they are completed. This would allow sufficient time for returns to be checked, queries resolved and information to be uploaded and reconciled to the Authority's General Ledger.

A detailed position of Schools' financial outturn would be available at the July 2024 meeting.

Following questions and comments from Forum members, the following was highlighted:-

- if schools were able to stagger their submissions it would not create a backlog for finance staff who are unable to process every school on the same day;
- early publication of the closedown timetable should give schools without internet banking time to resolve this so that 31 March bank statements could be accessed and forwarded in a timely manner.

**Resolved** that a revised closedown timetable 2023/24 be distributed to schools by the end of January 2024.

## 6/24 **Future Meeting Dates**

The Forum noted the future meeting dates:-

- 18 March 2024
- 1 July 2024

## 7/24 **AOB**

Funding for safeguarding for schools to be sourced from the DSG was raised. Forum was advised that the funding of the safeguarding arrangements was statutory, and the current funding model had run its course, funds were now required to be directed towards the arrangements. All safeguarding partners were required to fund the arrangements and it was hoped that a proportion of the DSG would be available to fund the local authorities contribution.



It was proposed that the Forum reinstate the SEND Working Group, following review and streamlining of the workstreams, the Council was of the opinion that it would be more appropriate for the SEND Working Group to pick up this piece of work as an already established group.

**Resolved** that:-

- (1) A report detailing the safeguarding arrangements and the exploration of a DSG contribution b presented to the 18 March meeting.
- (2) The SEND Working Group be established to review SEND banding and top-ups and the financial implications. The Working Group would include O Flowers (Chair), J Barry, M Arnull, C Hadley, C Handy-Rivett, K Hazlewood, W Lawrence and N Toplass)

Meeting ended at 3.49pm

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