

Schools Forum

Minutes and Actions

15.1.26

Apologies

Steve Margettes

Dan Hamer

Sally Banfield

• **Introductions & Membership**

- New members introduced, including Nik Salter as Early Years Rep.
- Sarah Tomkinson and Stuart Biddles announced their resignations as Chair and Vice Chair.
- Alex Newton agreed to act as interim Chair, with Steve Margettes as interim Vice Chair.
- Ongoing issues with forum membership and representation; Alex to review and contact potential members.
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• **Potential hourly rates for Early Years 26/27**

- Proposed rates: 3 & 4 year olds up by 6.61%, 2 year olds by 4.91%, under twos by 5.08%. Average increase is 4.59%. Half of the DfE adjustment is retained as contingency, the rest distributed to providers.
- Retained element for central services set at 2.6% (below the 3% maximum).
- Forum agreed to share these rates with providers.
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• **Comparison between 25/26 & 26/27 DSG**

- High Needs Block for 26/27 is cash flat due to DfE suspending the allocation formula pending SEND reforms.
- 25/26 saw growth in High Needs Block, but still overspent.
- In-year grants now included in DSG unit values.
- NFF rates up 1.97%, but not fully affordable; will be scaled back by ~0.38%.
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• **National Funding Formula - unit values 26/27**

- NFF unit values increased by 1.97% for mainstream schools.
- Actual allocations will be scaled back by about 0.38% due to affordability constraints.
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• **% increase in funding for Special Schools 26/27**

- Special schools' funding increase matches mainstream (1.97%), applied to total funding (not just top-up rates), subject to affordability.
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- **Centrally retained functions for 26/27**
 - Planned pupil growth (mainly for St. Michael's), school admissions, servicing of forum, and early years retained element agreed as presented.
 - Planned pupil growth funding is required by DfE, even with falling rolls.
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- **De-delegation decisions for 26/27**
 - Maintained schools agreed to de-delegate free school meals eligibility, EAL/travellers for primary; insurance not de-delegated for secondary.
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- **Verbal update regarding having to amend the NFF values by less than 0.5%**
 - School allocations for 26/27 cannot be funded at full NFF rates; values will be reduced by less than 0.5% (about 0.38%) to make allocations affordable within the Schools Block.
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- **Standing Items & Future Planning**
 - Ongoing concern about potential future transfer from schools block to high needs block ("Virement"); agreed to keep as a standing agenda item and monitor other LAs' actions.
 - Hannah Baker to bring a future paper on Element 3 funding and SEND reforms once the white paper is published.
 - Request for an update on pupil place planning and sustainability, especially regarding St. Michael's and falling rolls.

Actions

- **Membership & Governance**
 - Alex Newton to review forum membership, contact potential new members, and clarify representation.
 - Sarah Tomkinson to share the current membership/terms of reference document with Alex.
 - Louise Willmott to add governance support and membership review to the next agenda.
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- **Early Years & Finance**
 - Emma Kerridge to clarify and communicate the transition plan for the 12/13/14 week funding model.

- Rob Parr to provide alternative scenarios for retained funding and more detail on central staffing roles in future papers.
- Rob Parr to circulate the early years staffing breakdown to all forum members.
- Sarah Tomkinson to escalate the issue of early years access to the high needs block.
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- **High Needs & SEND**
 - Hannah Baker to provide tribunal and mediation data related to high needs block funding at a future meeting.
 - Hannah Baker to bring a paper on Element 3 funding and SEND reforms after the white paper is published.
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- **Centrally Retained Functions**
 - Rob Parr to bring DfE guidance on planned pupil growth, admissions, and forum servicing to the next meeting.
 - Hannah Baker/Claire Talbot to provide an update on pupil place planning and sustainability.
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- **Standing Items**
 - Louise Willmott to keep the schools block to high needs block transfer (“Virement”) as a standing agenda item.
 - Rob Parr to bring a paper on which LAs have made block transfers and to what levels.

Decisions

Planned Pupil Growth / Falling Rolls **Y**

Schools Admissions Services **Y**

Servicing the Schools Forum **Y**

Retained element of Early Years (2.75 retained in 25/26, proposed 2.60% in 26/27) **Y**

Funding moved from Schools Block to High Needs Block **N**

- **Chair/Vice Chair:** Alex Newton appointed interim Chair; Steve Margetts interim Vice Chair.
- **Early Years Rates:** Proposed hourly rates and methodology for 26/27 agreed for sharing with providers.

- **Centrally Retained Functions:** Agreed to planned pupil growth, admissions, forum servicing, and early years retained elements as presented.
- **Delegation for Maintained Schools:** Agreed to de-delegate free school meals eligibility, EAL/travellers for primary; insurance not de-delegated for secondary.
- **Standing Item:** Agreed to keep schools block to high needs block transfer as a standing agenda item and to monitor other LAs' actions.
- **Element 3 Funding:** Agreed to await SEND white paper before reviewing Element 3 funding.