

Schools' Funding Forum (SFF) 2nd February 2024

9.00am – 11.00am Virtual on Microsoft Teams

Item No	Item	Action owner
1	<p><b>Welcome and Introductions</b> The Chair welcomed new members to the group.</p>	
2	<p><b>Minutes and matters arising from meeting on 18th January</b> Due to short time elapsed between meetings, the actions were discussed but will be picked up in the next meeting.</p>	
3	<p><b>Results of consultation on Early Years Extension to Free Entitlement</b> Sally Cutting (Finance Recovery Consultant) talked through the paper and accompanying slides. A question was asked about whether the timing of this decision was usual. Karen Stone explained that the Government does not normally announce the rates until just before Christmas, which we then have to internally assess and analyse, before undergoing to appropriate decision-making process, which may include the requirement for a consultation. The consultation has hopefully given providers a sense of the scale of the rates ahead of formal announcement. This is an exceptional year with the scale of change in Early Years. A question was also raised in relation to how Early Years providers claim their funding and how often they are paid. This is covered within the paper. Karen Stone acknowledged the current processes had evolved over time and the council is proposing to take the opportunity, with the significant expansion of the early years offer, to review this process. The Forum supported the approach of focusing the immediate changes to the payment schedules of childminders only rather than imposing changes to larger providers to avoid any cash flow issue. The Forum agreed the recommendation in relation to central services.</p>	
4	<p><b>Services to Schools</b> Karen Stone (Finance Business Partner) talked through the paper. The Forum commented that they appreciated the additional information that was provided in the latest consultation. Recommendation 4.1 – Forum agreed this recommendation. Recommendation 4.2 – 5 agreed, 0 disagreed the recommendation. Recommendation 4.3 – 5 agreed, 0 disagreed the recommendation. All recommendations agreed.</p>	
5	<p><b>Notional SEN</b> Karen Stone (Finance Business Partner) talked through the paper. The Forum noted they are mindful of the impact of the notional SEN top up on schools. The Local Authority does not know at the start of any year what the SEN figure for the year will be as it is impacted on by the number of claims submitted and when the top up is triggered for each individual school. Karen demonstrated that for 373 schools there would be no change in their notional SEN top up.</p>	

	<p>In order to maintain the same size pot the threshold would need to be increased from 40% to 45% and the Forum were asked for their views. It is likely this is the last year this will be done in this way due to the localities model from 2025/26 onwards.</p> <p>The Forum approved the changes to the Notional SEN Budget calculation and the proposals detailed in the paper.</p> <p><i>Subsequent to the Schools Funding Forum and to respond to concerns raised during the Forum, in relation to the impact of both the changes to the calculation of the SEN Notional Budget and increasing the threshold to access the SEN Notional Budget on our smallest schools, a further variation was made to the final calculation whereby the threshold was maintained at 40% for our smallest schools, 45% for medium schools and 50% for our larger schools. This further evened out the impact across schools but still maintaining an average 45% threshold.</i></p>	
6	<p><b>Gifts and Hospitality</b></p> <p>Jody Catterall-James (Schools, High Needs and Early Years Manager) talked through the paper and explained that changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools require a consultation with schools prior to approval by the Funding Forum. Comments were requested on the attached paper and draft policy.</p>	
7	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth request for the Isle of Sheppey schools – Karen explained that this was still being worked through and would be brought back to a later meeting.</li> <li>• There will be a consultation with all schools on procurement thresholds, following discussion at meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> January.</li> <li>• DFFG meeting to be arranged to discuss BCM before the end of March 2024 – volunteers requested.</li> </ul>	