

TITLE Requested Transfer of 0.5% DSG Schools Block to the High Needs Block 2024/25

FOR CONSIDERATION BY Schools Forum on 6 November 2023

WARD None Specific;

LEAD OFFICER Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

This report forms part of regular reporting to Schools Forum, informing areas of statutory decision making and improving visibility and consultation on wider Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) financial matters.

RECOMMENDATION

Schools Forum is asked for the following:

1. To note the outcome of the stage 3 schools' survey gathering views on the recommendation to support the request of the 0.5% transfer of DSG Schools Block budget to the High Needs Block in 2024/25.
2. To reach a decision as to whether to support the recommended transfer.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The report presents the outcome of the schools' consultation regarding the request of the 0.5% transfer of DSG Schools Block budget to the High Needs Block in 2024/25.

This work builds on an earlier stage 1 consultation in June / July entitled 'Right Spaces, Right Places' that gathered Wokingham school views of the strategic priorities regarding Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and proposed spending on SEND provision and support.

This was followed by a stage 2 consultation gathering views on the recommendation to support the request of the 1% transfer, which ran between 18/09/23 and 2/10/23 and showed a clear majority of 68% of schools were against the transfer, (although a majority of secondary schools were in favour).

The outcome of stages 1&2 were detailed in the report to Schools Forum on the 11th October 2023.

At the October meeting Forum members recognised the importance of the vote and requested the following changes:

- That the total requested transfer be reduced to 0.5% of DSG Schools Block.
- That the model for allocating this funding be adjusted to reduce the impact on primary schools and to shift more of the financial impact onto secondary schools.
- That the new model should be presented to all schools again and their views surveyed (recognising that the timescales for this were very tight)
- Forum agreed to hold an Extraordinary meeting on the 6th November to hear the results as to how schools voted regarding the new model and to reach a final decision as to whether to support or reject the requested transfer.

The new model was developed and approved by Friday 13th October and was emailed round to schools with a survey on Monday 16th October.

Schools have been offered an opportunity to meet the Council officers to explain and answer any questions that they may have. Over 20 schools took up the offer mostly during the last week of term for Headteachers and School Business Managers to meet the officers. Lead Member Cllr Prue Bray attended a number of these meetings and information was also presented to the Governor's Forum on Wednesday 18th October.

At the time of writing this report the voting remains open BUT it can be reported that there is now a clear majority (over 90%) in favour of the 0.5% transfer; a detailed breakdown will be provided at the Forum meeting on 6/11/23 but the majority is sufficiently large enough that it will stand regardless of how any remaining votes are cast.

6th November 2023

01. Purpose of the Report

To present the case for the transfer of 0.5% of budget from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in 2024/25 and to present schools' views of this proposal based on a recent survey.

02. Recommendation

Schools Forum is asked for the following:

1. To note the outcome of the stage 3 schools' survey gathering views on the recommendation to support the request of the 0.5% transfer of DSG Schools Block budget to the High Needs Block in 2024/25.
2. To reach a decision as to whether to support the recommended transfer.

03. Background

This report should be read in conjunction with the last report to Schools Forum regarding the proposed transfer from DSG Schools Block to High Needs Block presented on the 11th October 2023.

At the October meeting Forum members recognised the importance of the vote and requested the following changes:

- That the total requested transfer be reduced to 0.5% of DSG Schools Block for 2024/25; circa £740k.
- That the model for allocating this funding be adjusted to reduce the impact on primary schools and to shift more of the financial onto secondary schools.
- That the new model should be presented to all schools again and their views surveyed (recognising that the timescales for this were very tight).
- Forum agreed to hold an Extraordinary meeting on the 6th November to hear the results as to how schools voted regarding the new model and to reach a final decision as to whether to support or reject the requested transfer.

04. Report

04.i New Funding Model

Following Schools Forum the new model was developed and approved by Friday 13th October.

The updated proposal would see a reduced transfer of a total of circa £740k schools block (0.5% of the total) for 2024/25 and was modelled to reduce the primary phase contribution slightly. Taking this transfer into account every school in Wokingham will receive an increased budget allocation next year totalling 5% across the system – although this ranges between 3.1% up to 6.9% depending on a number of factors.

There are constraints limiting how much flexibility the LA has in determining how this contribution is apportioned between schools; some schools are protected from contributing anything due to minimum funding guarantees. Of those that would contribute the level would depend on a number of factors but the overview looks like this:

Total number of schools	66	
Number of schools gaining	0	0%
Number of schools not contributing (due to protections in place from minimum funding guarantees)	24	36.4%
Number of schools contributing less than 0.5%	32	48.5%
Number of schools contributing more than 0.5%	9	13.6%
Contribution range for primary schools:	Between 0% and 0.28%	
Contribution range for secondary schools:	Between 0.7% and 1.1%	

04.ii Engagement and Dialogue

Schools received individual emails showing the % impact of the new model on Monday 16th October with an attached survey and were asked to respond to Ming Zhang (Assistant Director Education and SEND) as soon as possible; replies were requested by the end of term (Friday 20th October) but the survey remains open until Friday 27th October for late replies.

Meetings were also offered to primary schools at short notice and officers met with over 20 schools mostly during the last week of term to explain the new model and take any queries from Headteachers and School Business Managers. Lead Member Cllr Prue Bray attended a number of these meetings.

Information was also presented to the Governor's Forum on Wednesday 18th October.

04.iii Outcome of Survey and Feedback

At the time of publishing this report the voting remains open BUT it can be reported that there is now a clear majority (over 90%) in favour of the 0.5% transfer; **a detailed breakdown will be provided at the Forum meeting on 6/11/23** but the majority is sufficiently large enough that it will stand regardless of how any remaining votes are cast.

The reasons given for the change of voting are summarised as follows:

- Most schools said they understood the reasons for the request and support the activity that is underway but that the previous request was unaffordable in the current financial climate.
- The significant reduction in the request from primary schools made this easier to accept.
- Some schools indicated that they wanted to see significant improvement in the coming year and that their vote of support next year was very much dependent on this progress being visible by the end of the year.

05. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Given the fact that there is a majority of support from the majority of schools for the proposed improvement measures Schools Forum are asked to approve the 0.5% transfer of Schools Block to High Needs Block for 2024/25 as a commitment to the joint working required to reach a balanced High Needs Block budget by 2029.

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