

**Bury Schools Forum
Monday 14 January 2025
Microsoft Teams**

Attendance

Early Years

None in Attendance

Maintained Primary

Richard Ainsworth,
Simon Waddington,

Governor (Plus Governors Forum) (S)
Headteacher – Hollins Grundy Primary

Maintained Secondary

None in Attendance

Maintained Special

Joanne Hurst

Millwood Primary

Academy Primary

Martin Van Hecke

The Sycamore CE Trust – St Thomas's C E Primary

Academy Secondary

None in Attendance

Special

None in Attendance

Pupil Referral Unit

None in Attendance

Non-Schools Sector

Helena Thom

NEU

16 – 19 Education Representative

None in attendance

Children's Services Department

Stephen Holden

Director of Education and Skills

Elissa Reeve

Senior Finance Analyst – Safety Valve

Rachel Stirk

Head of Service (Education Operations)

Alison Vidler

Senior Schools Finance Officer (Schools & Systems Finance)

Wendy Young

Head of Service Special Education Needs (SEND) & Inclusion

Observer(s)

Katy Ashworth

School Business Manager (Millwood)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Rachel O'Neil

Headteacher – Hoyle Nursery

Carinna Vitti

Principal – Holy Cross College

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

It was agreed:

That subject to the correction, on page 3, of Ashworth to Ainsworth in relation to Richard Ainsworth, the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meeting.

3 MATTERS ARISING

Richard Ainsworth referred to Minute 6, PRU Revised Funding Arrangements and the vote for consideration that had been made by the Forum but then not carried forward by the Local Authority. Richard asked where the funding would come from.

Stephen Holden explained that although the Forum had not agreed, the guidance for Schools' forum states that on the matter of PRU funding, the forum: "Gives a view and informs the governing bodies of all consultations" and does not 'decide'. The local authority had made the decision to take into consideration the view of the Forum but had to also consider and keep in line with the other GM authorities.

Alison Vidler explained that the funding would come from the High Needs Block.

4 SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES FUNDING 2025-26

Alison Vidler presented the Schools & Academies Funding update 2025-2026.

1. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2025-26

Following the publication of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations on 18 December 2024, which takes into account the fully validated October 2024 pupil census, the 2025-26 DSG for Bury was summarised in the table set out in the report.

It was explained that the 2024-25 baseline shown includes the Core Schools Budget Grant, Teachers Pension Grant and Teachers Pay Grant in the Schools Block and the Early Years Budget Grant in the Early Years Block. This is for the purpose of demonstrating the actual variance as these have been incorporated into the 2025-26 DSG.

2. Schools Block

The application of the NFF unit values, agreed at Schools Forum in December 2024, results in the allocations shown in Table 2 in the report. The amount of funding distributed to schools, including the centralised Rates payments, equates to almost 100% of the Schools Block Funding. The effect of pupil number variances between the October funding census collections for 2023 and 2024 needs to be noted in respect to the impact on the figures included in the table.

Primary schools have seen an overall net reduction of 226 pupils.
Secondary schools have seen an overall net increase of 7 pupils.

It was stated that for both sectors there will be individual schools with reductions, and others with gains to pupil numbers. They will all need to financially plan for pupil number changes, in order to sustain their balanced budget positions.

£184,170 transfer to the High Needs Block is 0.11% of the total Schools Block. This is within the permitted 0.5% which was approved at the December 2024 meeting.

3. Central Schools Services Block

It was explained that Schools' Forum is required to approve the allocation of budgets included under the CSSB, which was created several years ago in place of the former Education Services Grant (ESG) retained functions funding for Local Authorities. The former ESG funding was added to the DSG in April 2018 in order to help sustain the services that it is intended to support.

The overall amount of grant in the 2025-26 CSSB has increased by 3.2%.

The following should be noted:

The centralised National Copyright Licences cost increases are not yet known but they have increased by more than the standard funding increase in recent years. Therefore, provision is made for this in the figures below;

there is a reduced requirement for the former Teachers' Pay and Pension Grant funding for teachers employed in central services due to restructures in CYP;

the other services funded via the CSSB have been increased in line with the overall funding increase. This leaves an unallocated balance of £128,400.

Decision:

Bury's Schools' Forum recommend the allocation of CSSB budgets as outlined to the applicable services for 2025-26 and to transfer the remaining balance of £128,400 to the High Needs Block in support of High Needs cost pressures and the DSG Management Plan.

4. High Needs Block

It was explained that high needs funding is provided to local authorities through the high needs block of the DSG, enabling them to meet their statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014.

The overall amount of grant in the 2024-25 High Needs Block has increased by 6.6%. The final allocations include adjustments for:

- October 2024 Special Schools census data;
- the new Brookhaven School (academy) – this will be adjusted by the DfE, as the new school funding was only applicable to 2024-25;

Further changes to the High Needs Block funding are made in-year where there are changes, particularly in relation to import/export adjustments.

5. Early Years Block

It was reported that the Early Years Block would be adjusted in-year 2025 -2026 in respect of to fluctuations in Early Years Participation. The final funding allocation is based on two sets of data:-

January 2024 accounts for April 2025 to August 2025 (5/12ths)

January 2026 accounts for September 2025 to March 2026 (7/12ths)

Therefore, the funding received from the DfE is based on take up of places as at the two census dates. The Authority funds Early Years providers on actual take up of places, as notified by providers through the Early Years Portal which means that there is inevitably a variance in the funding allocated and the actual costs each year. The free childcare offer has been extended so that eligible working parents in England will be able to access 30 hours of free childcare per week for 38 weeks per year from the term after their child turns 9 months to when they start school. There has also been an above inflation increase to the Pupil Premium funding rate in the Early Years Block. This has risen from £0.68 per hour to £1.00 per hour. The initial indicative funding for 2025-26 is therefore significantly higher than in 2024- 25.

A table setting out the figures and variation was included in the report.

Included with the papers was the Early Years Funding Consultation paper.

For 2025-26 Local authorities are required to pass-through at least 96% of funding for each of the following funding entitlement streams individually:

- 3 & 4YO entitlements (no change)
- Under 2s
- 2YO disadvantaged offer
- 2YO working parents

This pass-through requirement ensures that most of the government funding reaches providers so that they can deliver the government's free entitlements. Bury has historically passported more than the minimum requirement for 2, 3 and 4 year-olds.

It should be noted that the DfE has increased the minimum pass-through requirement from 95% to 96% for 2025-26, and it is likely to be further increased in future years following the increase in Early Years funding.

The percentage retained by Local Authorities is used to contribute to Early Years SEN inclusion costs, central support services covering advisory support, sufficiency requirements, free entitlement eligibility checking, and management and administration of the complex Early Years Single Funding Formula determinations, allocations, systems, and statutory reporting requirements.

A table showing the proposed Central Early Years budget was included in the report.

Decision:

Bury's Schools' Forum approve the allocation of the Early Years Block as set out in the report.

5 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK PROPOSED BUDGET 2025 - 2026

The Schools' Forum received a report informing them of the proposed HNB budget for the financial year 2025 – 2026.

The report set out the High Needs Block Allocation as:

High Needs Block Allocation	£m
Basic Calculation	46.067
Special Schools	3.591
Pupils Net Export	-0.294

Hospital Education	0.618
Teachers Pay & Pensions	0.125
TOTAL	50.107

The proposed summary of budgeted spend and income as follows: -

Summary of Bury HNB Budget 25-26	£m	App	%age
Expenditure			
Special Schools & PRU	20.928	1	38
Resourced Provision	2.856	2	5
EHCP Funding	29.618	3	53
Inclusion and Home Tuition	1.026	4	2
SEN Support Services	1.123	4	2
Total Expenditure	55.551		100
Income			
HNB Allocation	-50.107		
Health Funding	-1.600		
Schools Block Transfer	-0.200		
Bury Council Contribution	-2.000		
FE Direct Funding Adjustment	1.272		
PSV Income	-0.702		
Total Income	-53.337		
In Year Deficit	2.214		
Deficit B/f (Appx)	20.319		
Budgeted Deficit C/f	22.533		

This shows a budgeted deficit of £2.214m which is far from ideal. At the time of writing this report the Schools Block can only afford to transfer £0.2m against a target of £0.7m.

Set out in the report was information relating to:

Unit Values
 Special Schools
 Resourced Provision
 EHCP's Budgets
 SEN Inclusion and SEN Support Services
 Management Plan

Those present were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and the following points were raised:

- Richard Ainsworth referred to the 22.5m deficit as set out in the report and asked whether this would affect the PSV and what the impact would look like.

It was explained that this would affect the PSV and that ways to make further savings would be considered. Discussions were taking place. The submission had been submitted to the DFE and every stream leader has been asked to review their parts of the plan to consider alternative options and how to speed up reaching goals and targets.

Simon Waddington asked whether local authorities shared best practices with each other in similar situations in relation to the plan?

It was reported that this did happen.

It was agreed:

That the contents of the report be noted

Note: The meeting started at 4pm and ended at 4.50pm