

Appendix A - Consultation Summary 2020/21

1. Question 1

1. Do you agree that, subject to final affordability, West Berkshire should mirror the DfE's 2020/21 NFF and that this formula should be used to calculate funding allocations? If not, please let us know with your reasons why.

16 responses, 15 agree, 1 disagree, comments below:

- 1.1 I agree with this. Although my school does not come out as favourably as others, this seems to be the fairest way to work and is likely to mirror funding moving forward as well, so will not have any future surprises.
- 1.2 Yes, we agree West Berkshire should mirror the DfE's 2020/21 NFF.
- 1.3 Yes we agree – there is no effect on schools and meets the needs of mobile children
- 1.4 We absolutely agree that subject to affordability pre any block transfers West Berkshire should mirror the DfE's NFF. This is the most sensible and logical path given the DfE's commitment to a hard NFF.
- 1.5 Our school is in an area with a relatively high IDACO score, correlating with higher numbers of GRT pupils, who tend to require higher levels of support in early years with regard to behaviour and literacy. This is inadequately represented by WBC's SFF deprivation factor.

2. Question 2

2. Do you agree that West Berkshire should introduce the mobility factor in the local formula in order to mirror the NFF? If not, please let us know with your reasons why.

16 responses, 16 agree, comments below:

- 2.1 I agree that West Berkshire should introduce the mobility factor. Again, although as a school we would not be positively impacted by this, it seems a fair way of moving forward.
- 2.2 Yes, we agree that the mobility factor should be introduced.
- 2.3 We agree to this technical change which introduces a mobility factor driven by census data to mirror the NFF.
- 2.4 The rural nature of WB means that many pupils live more than 2 miles from the nearest school. Many pupils in our school catchment travel out of the LA area to their nearest school, while some pupils travel from out of LA area to our

school. This conforms to proposal 1 that SFF should mirror NFF, which includes mobility factor from 2020/21.

3. Question 3

3. Do you agree that any shortfall in funding is addressed by using Option 3, using a combination of reduced AWPU values and applying a cap on gains? If not, please let us know with your reasons why.

16 responses, 13 agree, 3 disagree, comments below:

- 3.1 I agree that this is the fairest way of splitting any shortfall in funding and am happy to move forward in this way.
- 3.2 Yes, we agree that any shortfall in should be addressed by using option 3.
- 3.3 Yes, although applying a cap on gains means our school loses funding which is disappointing as we have invested so much in marketing to increase pupil numbers only to have funding removed because of the cap.
- 3.4 No we do not agree – because some schools cannot afford a reduction in AWPU.
- 3.5 Thank you for sending out the consultation documentation, which looks comprehensive and easy to follow. I would like to express my support for Heads' Funding Forum colleagues' view that Option 3 is the more equitable approach and agree with all the proposals as detailed in the document. I am sure that this has been a challenging piece of work and would like to thank you and your team's efforts in presenting indicative figures in a timely and positive manner.
- 3.6 No, we believe that Option 1 should be chosen. In 2019/20 West Berkshire's locally determined NFF proposed limiting the gains cap to 2% when the DfE's 2019/20 NFF had proposed a gains cap of 6.09% (a further 3% gain on top of the 3% in 2018/19 which West Berkshire did mirror and implement). The reality for West Berkshire Schools in 2019-20 was that after all the updates and corrections to the modelling the gains cap was limited to 0.22% and not the 2% initially proposed, due to affordability. For too long now West Berkshire schools that have previously been underfunded against the NFF, have been held back from the path of receiving the full gains a DfE NFF would give, due to affordability. The fair and equitable basis for any adjustment for affordability given the steps taken in setting the 2019-20 formula is Option 1.
- 3.7 Agree, if this is the most equitable, but moving away from the NFF AWPU rates seems to be a step in the wrong direction.
- 3.8 There will be no NFF gains cap, so that all schools attract their full allocations under the formula. This contradicts proposal 1 that SFF should mirror NFF. Our school is currently undersubscribed therefore a gains cap will punish efforts to grow NOR.
- 3.9 Yes for the good of schools overall, however any reduction would be detrimental to us.

4. Question 4

4. If you have any comments/suggestions on the additional funds proposal or the criteria set to access the other additional funds please provide details.

4 responses, 4 agree, comments below:

- 4.1 I agree that we should have the current additional funds. I do not agree with the suggestion that was made in schools forum regarding schools with a high proportion of SEN support children, as I believe that this gives a perverse incentive to increase numbers in this area and it is not as robustly checked/decided as EHCP Plans.
- 4.2 We are in favour of options 3 and 4.
- 4.3 Comment: re: (f) (2) our school reduced the number of classes at the start of 2019/20 due to falling rolls. In 2018/19 WBC Schools Forum agreed to cease the Falling Rolls Fund as only one school qualified for payment in the past four years. NOR fell largely due to reduced district-wide fertility, but this was compounded at our School due to diseconomies of scale.
- 4.4 Re: (f) (3) our school faces a deficit budget due to reduced NOR over this period and should be eligible for a Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund. This fund held £181k in reserve at the end of 2019/20.

5. Question 5

5. If you do not agree with any of the proposed services being de-delegated, please let us know with your reasons why.

8 responses, 7 agree, comments below:

- 5.1 I agree with all of the services that are suggested for de-delegation.
- 5.2 We are happy with the services being de-delegated.
- 5.3 We agree with the majority of the proposed services being de-delegated, but would question how/why the amount for schools in difficulty needs to be topped up to £250k if it has not been required this year. Is this based on prior knowledge or a huge increase in schools in difficulty?
- 5.4 We do not agree with the de-delegation relating to Primary Schools in Financial Difficulty. There is no such financial 'safety net' for Secondary Schools and the existence of the Primary fund does not encourage sound financial decision making. (comment made by a Secondary School).
- 5.5 De-delegating the Schools in Financial Difficulty Fund would require this fund to be maintained to previously agreed minimum £250k.

6. Question 6

6. Which of the following options would you support regarding a transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block for 2020/21? a)
0% b) 0.125% c) 0.25% d) 0.5%

16 responses, a) 7, b) 0, c) 4, d) 3 plus 2 responders supporting a transfer but not saying which percentage.

Overall against a transfer 7, supporting a transfer 9. Comments below:

- 6.1 I am happy to support transfer of funds from the schools block to the high needs block, if there is a specific aim for the money to be used to 'invest to save'. My concern with the 0.5% transfer is that the use of the money has not been fully thought through. I think that if 0.5% were to be transferred, rather than it being used to top up vulnerable child funding, it would be more useful to increase the amounts spent on ASD/Therapeutic thinking resource across the authority, as this would be likely to reduce the number of permanent exclusions and thus ease the pressure on the high needs budget. However, it could also, perversely, increase the number of EHCPs, as it provides additional reports that could be used for evidence for EHCPs, so this would need to be thought through very carefully.
- 6.2 We would support 0.5% being transferred from the schools block to the High Needs Block for 2020/21.
- 6.3 0%. We believe that the shortfall is due to a lack of central government funding whereby funding levels do not match pupil need. Attempting to paper over such issues by moving cash, which would largely only come from medium sized schools, is short sighted. It is also the case that this would in no way remove the deficit in this budget and would also likely have numerous other opportunities costs for all pupils. Urgent government action is needed to fully fund SEND education. Only by refusing to 'rob peter to pay paul' will we move closer to the necessary awareness of the urgency of the situation.
- 6.4 We agree that the LAL centre should be fully funded however feel that the use of funds for the other services would be better given directly to schools to be used as required rather than having to go through lengthy application processes to access funds or services.
- 6.5 0%. My choice is based on the fact that SEN should be funded appropriately by the DfE. By taking funding direct from school budgets then I feel it is just hiding the problem and putting an even greater burden on schools.
- 6.6 0% because the government needs to realise that they must invest – we can't keep bailing it out.
- 6.7 High Needs provision and sustainability has been an on-going concern for many years. Any top slice in the face of the additional high needs funding announcement and the prospect of a £3mn deficit on the High Needs Block at the end of 2020-21 is of concern, both from the perspective of financial discipline and strategic development of efficient, effective and affordable provision.

Whilst West Berkshire is a small authority and it will be providing the DfE with a deficit recovery plan in 2020, there is no escaping from the fact that the deficit forecast at the end of 2020-21 at £3.1m will be 15% of High Needs Block Funding which has increased by some £1.6mn and that despite this increase the in-year deficit for 2020-21 is £1.1m.

The DfE are clear that all LAs are expected to keep their local offer of special provision under review and to plan ahead strategically to ensure good quality provision can be developed and sustained in line with available resources.

The DfE in The Schools Operational Guide 2020-21 states that any proposal to transfer should be presented along with a range of evidence and gives expectations on what that evidence should include. In terms of evidence:

There is no detail provided of previous movements between the blocks and why those transfers together with the increased high needs funding for 2020-21 are not adequate.

There is no breakdown of the changes in demand for special provision over the last three years which we would have liked to see split between 3-11, 11-16 and 16-19 and 19-25, as well as by provision type. There is a reference to an increase in EHCPs of 33% but this is from 2014 to date and so includes the period of SEN 19-25 and Raising Participation Age changes too.

There is no strategic financial plan setting out how the LA intends to bring High Needs expenditure to levels that can be sustained within anticipated future High Needs funding levels.

We are not clear that an increase of £350k to the vulnerable child grant, the significant majority of £520k top slice, is or has been shown to be the best way to spend that sum on securing good quality special provision.

We are cautious and reluctant to allow the High Needs Block any further discretion on spending funded by schools through a transfer from the Schools Block. This position has been taken because of the above and has been further compounded by the fact that back in 2017-18 schools were told that the PRU Strategic Review's purpose would be to secure savings in the High Needs Block deliverable from 2018-19.

3. Introduction/Background

3.1 One of the purposes of the PRU Strategic Review was to secure savings in the High Needs Block. By reducing the number of places from 84 to 66, there are savings simply from a reduced number of places needing to be funded. Place funding alone has reduced the budget requirement by £180,000.

The following table from the High Needs 2020-21 budget shows that the savings have not been secured and that the PRU Strategic Review has resulted in some unintended and very expensive consequences.

Against 2018-19 budget spend PRU top ups to the end of 2020-21 will create over £2m pressure on the High Needs Block.

The High Needs Block deficit of £521k from 2018/19 (which back in October 2017 was predicted to be a surplus of £131k) is predicted to grow to £2.050m 2019/20 and then to £3.159m at end 2020/21.

There is no accompanying analysis of PRU places and demand both historic trend forecast and no detail of any options or outcomes or review of the PRU

Strategic Review that was implemented to address, limit and reverse the unintended consequences. The gulf between the planned for savings and actual costs appears to be widening and unchecked.

3. PUPIL REFERRAL UNITS (PRU) – STATUTORY

3.1 Table 3 shows the budgets for PRU top ups.

TABLE 3 PRU Budgets	2018/19 Budget		2019/20 Budget			2020/21	Difference 19/20 budget & 20/21 prediction
	Budget £	Outturn £	Budget £	Forecast £ (Month 7)	Over/ (under) £	Estimate £	
PRU Top Up Funding (90625)	542,950	800,225	757,700	847,980	90,280	818,400	+60,700
PRU EHCP SEMH Placements (90628)	0	223,699	331,400	502,760	171,360	578,230	+246,830
Non WBC PRU Top Up Funding (90626)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	542,950	1,023,924	1,089,100	1,350,740	261,640	1,396,630	+307,530

- 6.8 0.25%, but any transfer of funding needs to be linked to better information on how schools can access vcg funding, as well as access to asd advisory services and access to the proposed new specialist TAs. 0.5% of dsq is too large a deduction when there is no guarantee that it won't just get eaten up by the already increasing HN overspend. £259k seems a reasonable compromise. We would also like to have seen more funding going into increasing HN top-up rates which have not kept pace with staff cost increases for several years now. Was this option considered at all?
- 6.9 We are generally not supportive of any transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block as it would result in a reduction in per-pupil funding. However, our school was one of the schools who couldn't access vulnerable children's funding during the current year because it had run out - there was no other source of external funding available for the additional emergency support a child required. We would therefore support option (c) a 0.25% transfer