

- AGENDA



SCHOOLS FORUM

Date: Thursday 05th December 2024
Time: 4.30pm
Place: Microsoft Teams

Distribution

Members of the Committee

Pippa Osborne (Chair)	Dave Baker (Vice Chair)
Julia Anwar	Ross Newman
Dave Farr	Diane Owen
Tania Craig	Will Roberts
Nicky Edwards	Fr. Malcolm Strange
Paul Evry	Andy Watson
Dave Farr	Susie Weaver
Kim Garland	Bernice Webber
Clare Haughton	David Williams
Florence Hiatt	Sue Wright
Aaron Jefferies	
David Jenkins	
Nicola Jones	
Jonathan Keohane	
Ruth Laing	
Louise Leader	

Appropriate Officers attending:

Mustafa Salih
Hilary Smith
Caroline Warren

Councillors attending:

Ian Boulton

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AGENDA

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS
2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Pippa Osborne)
3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Pippa Osborne)
4. ANY OTHER ITEMS THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT (Pippa Osborne)
5. MINUTES FROM 14th NOVEMBER 2024 MEETING (Pippa Osborne)
6. UPDATE ON SCHOOLS BUDGETS 2024-2025 (Deb Luter)
7. PHASED IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW BANDING AND TOP UP ARRANGEMENT FOR MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS (Caroline Warren)
8. TRADE UNION FACILITIES POOLED BUDGET REPORT (Mustafa Salih)
9. SCHOOLS BUDGET 2025-2026 INCLUDING OPTIONS FOR A BLOCK TRANSFER (Mustafa Salih)
10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

**South Gloucestershire Schools Forum
Minutes of Meeting held on
Thursday 14th November 2024
Microsoft Teams**

PRESENT:**Forum Members:**

Pippa Osborne (Chair)	Headteacher Christ Church Junior School
Julia Anwar	Head of Business Operations, Olympus Academy Trust
Tania Craig	Executive Head Teacher, New Horizons Learning Centre
Nicky Edwards	Early Years representative
Paul Evry	Chief Finance Officer, Mosaic Partnership
Dave Farr	Finance Manager, Leaf Trust
Kim Garland	Headteacher, Brimsham Green Secondary School
Flo Hiatt	Head of Additional Learning Support, SGSC
Aaron Jefferies	Primary Governor, Coniston Primary School
David Jenkins	Governor, Crossways Schools
Nicola Jones	Representative Special Academies
Jonathan Keohane	Headteacher Callicroft Primary School/Olympus School
Louise Leader	Headteacher, Pathways Learning Centre
Ross Newman	CEO of the Leaf Trust representing Academies
Diane Owen	Chair to Academy Council at King's Oak Academy
Lisa Parker	Primary Headteacher, Park and Parkwall Primary Federation
Will Roberts	Chief Executive, CSET
Fr. Malcolm Strange	Bristol Diocese
Susie Weaver	Executive Director, Cabot Learning Federation
Sue Wright	Finance Director CSET

Executive Councillors:

Ian Boulton, Cabinet Member - Schools, Skills, Employment and Business

Officers:

Mustafa Salih, Service Director Resources and Business
Hilary Smith, Service Director, Education, Learning and Skills
Deb Luter, Senior Accountant - People (Children)
Michelle Palmer, Accountant – People (Children)

Others: Tamsin Moreton, Director of Finance & Operations, Enable Trust
Elly Owen, District and Branch Secretary – South Gloucestershire NEU

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Attendees were welcomed by the Chair.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Chris Sivers, Dave Baker, Andy Watson, Bernice Webber, David Williams

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – None

2. ANY OTHER ITEMS THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT

- Schools in Financial Difficulty – Schools have not yet had to submit their schools budgets as the planning meetings are still happening due to the recent grant and pay rise negotiations being worked through and this item will be moved to the December meeting.
- In-person meeting and action regarding the name of Schools Forum will be discussed in AOB.

3. MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING – 26 September 2024

MS –We have decided to move any of the papers that relate to setting next year’s school funding levels to the December meeting because they are all linked together as its part of the background to all the other papers setting next year’s budget.

Apologies the LGA report and presentation was not circulated; however these will be circulated shortly together with the School Funding Settlement 2025 presented at today’s meeting.

Update on the Trade Union rep to the forum. This is still work in progress as struggling to find out the right route to contact all the trade unions and when we have the contact details we will write to all individual trade unions to ask them to liaise together to give us a name to put forward and hopefully have a formal rep.

EO - Happy to provide a list of Trade Unions. I would like to be the union rep for today as no effort was made to get a rep.

PO - Apologies this has not happened but any reps need to be agreed by the body they are representing and while you can stay listed on today’s minutes as a visitor you are very welcome to contribute but you will not be able to vote today.

EO - That was the failure of the Council officers and not the Trade Union team and we would have agreed a rep.

Remainder of the Minutes recorded as a true record.

4. High Needs working Group Update (Susie Weaver/Hilary Smith)

SW - At the last HNWG meeting we covered a new set of key items on special place planning, ASD and SEMH. Update from LA officers on various themes which will be reported to the HNWG at the next meeting on the 20th November and take the action for cluster funding as some of this work is really significant and sustained and committed through the Schools Forum decision making. We recognise that some of the updated strands are reliant upon some of that funding. We have an ongoing item within the agenda which is all about clear communication of strands and governance

with David and Hilary making sure there is really good communication and make sure our governance teams are in the loop and were pleased with some of specific pieces of work through Mastodon C and need to make sure it is sustainable.

HS – Mastodon C work. It is useful to know how we are taking some of that forward as we need to prioritise the areas around ASD and SEMH. We have delivered an expansion at Pegasus and we have been talking about the expansion of New Horizons for SEMH but hasn't progressed as there are a couple of options to fast track. We have identified a strategy that will be developed which was referenced at the last Schools Forum meeting as part of our commitment of our special school planned places this year and tomorrow we will be advising where we want to go with this part of the strategy and to invite schools who wish to expand SEMH provision.

We are still having high levels with SEMH which is significantly higher than the national average. We do need to focus on expenditure in alternative provision but we haven't focussed moving forward with a new model in relation to medical needs where we are looking to reduce the places with Pathways Learning Centre and going ahead in the 2024/25 academic year. We need to reduce that capacity and manage that demand if we can.

We are intending to undertake a trial within the LA around medical needs with greater involvement of our health colleagues in terms of early assessment and to deliver that model in the new year and using existing staff and resources.

KG - Is there a sense that schools will respond positively to requests to expand SEMH provision?

TC - How will you assess the expressions of interest i.e. experience of dealing with SEMH and successful outcomes

HS – We are going ahead with a request to schools to come forward who would be interested but we still need to think how are we going to do this because we want to do it strategically and include it in the discussions with headteachers. We need to decide where the demands are and where they should be located and be an element of capacity and to take account of capital request requirement.

PO – While we are a Schools Forum the purpose and constituency is around the finances of schools and the four different blocks of funding, and we are all keeping that at the centre of it and headteachers are looking at a system with tremendous pressures and issues and that all of us are committed to make a difference to the children and the staff behind some of us for many years.

LL - This isn't the forum to go into the PLC issues. There is still a lot to be discussed and that will still be a focus on the HNWG in terms of finance. It is essential that SF members consider the importance of the impact of potential reduction in long term sustainability as a whole and recognising what is fair and reasonable in our support over a number of years. For example, HNWG on behalf of Schools Forum to explore a

joint impact assessment where we might reduce in one area and exploring alternative to support another system – collaboration and joined upness and pulling those elements and working as one.

SW – The next HNWG meeting will go into more detail of the terms of reference and best value for money to meeting the children’s needs and also note the expressions of interest for schools.

5. Dedicated Schools Grant 2024/25 Quarter 1 (Mustafa Salih)

This is the Q1 position for the schools budget in all the areas of schools expenditure. It is an early position in terms of the outturn for the end of the year. Highlighting ongoing overspend of £10.7m is significant and we are amongst the largest overspends in this area. As part of our Safety Valve work, we have reported to the DfE our reprofiled plan to get back to balance.

Q2 – Projections are going to get more accurate and hopefully start to show a more positive picture.

6. Schools Budgets 2024-2025 (Mustafa Salih)

Mustafa produced a presentation on School Funding Settlement 2025-26 which will be forwarded to SF members after the meeting.

Schools in Financial Difficulty

When we met with the Safety Valve colleagues they suggested that we should look to seek approval from Schools Forum for a bigger block transfer. We had asked the DfE for additional capital funding but there will be no new capital funding as the new Government is working through a new process to review all SEND arrangements. On the Safety Valve, the DfE will get back to us on our profile plan.

7. Any Other Business

PO – Feedback on exploring the name of the Schools Forum to include Early Years. Started to look at our neighbouring authorities and during a wider search the only was Nottingham. I am recommending that we maintain South Gloucestershire’s title as Schools Forum.

I propose a standing item on the agenda either once or bi-annually for Early Years issues to give credence to that sector.

NE – Appreciation from the Early Years reps for your feedback.

Action: Pippa to contact Nicky outside this meeting and this item to be put on the Forward Plan.

7. Schools Forum Forward Plan 2024/2025

Dec 2024	05 th	Microsoft Teams	
		Special Place Planning	Hilary Smith
		Update on Schools in Financial Difficulty as part of the Deb Luter role in supporting those schools and schools budget options to block transfer	Mustafa Salih
		School Budgets 2025-26 Including Options for a Block Transfer	Mustafa Salih
		Trade Union Facilities pooled Budget Report and TU rep	Mustafa Salih
		Rescheduled in-person meeting in January 2025 and based at Winterbourne Academy	Pippa Osborne

Jan 2025	16 th	In-person meeting at Winterbourne Academy	
		Early Years Funding 2024-2025	Jo Briscoombe
		Proposed Financial Amendments: Breach Funding	Caroline Warren
		Growth Funding Policy update	Caroline Warren
		Falling Rolls Policy 2024 – 2025 (report)	Caroline Warren
		Special Schools Funding Arrangements	Mustafa Salih
		Q2 Financial Monitoring report 2024 – 2025	Mustafa Salih
		School Budget Announcement	Mustafa Salih

March 2025	13 th	Microsoft Teams	
		F40 update	Mustafa Salih
		Q3 DSG Report 2024-2025	Mustafa Salih
		Safety Valve update	Mustafa Salih
		EHC Breakdown	Hilary Smith
		HNWG	Hilary Smith
		Place Pressures	Hilary Smith

May 2025	08 th	Provisional Forum Date – depending on need for any decision reports	
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		Academisation update	Michelle Trigg
		Safety Valve update	Mustafa Salih
		HNWG update	Susie Weaver
		Mainstream Place Numbers	Hilary Smith
July 2025	03 rd	Microsoft Teams	
		Membership of the Forum	Michelle Trigg
		Schools in Financial Difficulty Update (Report) (Maintained Schools & Academies update)	Mustafa Salih
		Funding Update (including School's supplementary grant)	Mustafa Salih
		Outturn Report 2024-2025 verbal update (outturn report)	Mustafa Salih
		Financial Regulations for Schools	Justine Poulton
		Scheme for Financing Schools – DfE Directed Changes	Caroline Warren
		HNWG update	Susie Weaver

Sept 2025	25 th	Microsoft Teams	
		Schools Forum Membership update	Michelle Trigg
		Outturn 2024-2025 Report	Caroline Warren
		Proposed Financial Arrangements – Falling Rolls Funding (Low Pupil Number Contingencies)	Caroline Warren
		Financial Regulations for Schools	Justine Poulton
		Place Planning	Hilary Smith
		Safety Valve update	Mustafa Salih
		Special Schools Funding update	Mustafa Salih
Year 3 of New Banding and Top-Up Arrangements Review and Update	Mustafa Salih		

Nov 2025	06 th	Proposed in person meeting – venue to be confirmed.	
		Current Position on school places across schools system in South Gloucestershire Update	Hilary Smith
		High Needs Working Group Update	Hilary Smith?

		School Budgets 2025-2026 (verbal update)	Mustafa Salih
		Schools in Financial Difficulty Update	Deb Lutter
		Q1 Financial Performance Report 2023-2024	Caroline Warren

Dec 2025	04 th	Microsoft Teams	
		Schools Budget Announcement	Mustafa Salih
		Implementation of new banding and top up arrangement for special schools and alternative provision	Mustafa Salih
		Proposed Financial Amendments: Breach Funding	Caroline Warren

South Gloucestershire Council

SCHOOLS FORUM – For Information

05th December 2024

Update on Schools' Budgets 2024-25

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of the report is to report on Schools' financial position and compare to previous years. It also highlights the pressures schools are facing and the support the Council has in place for supporting schools with financial challenges.

2. Background

- 2.1 Local authorities have overall responsibility for financial probity in schools that they maintain.
- 2.2 Schools have had to depend on their carry forward balances to balance budgets and the number now unable to do so is increasing year on year. The number of schools with an in-year deficit is also increasing.
- 2.3 Schools Strategic Finance Group (SSFG) continues to review and identify schools with financial challenges.

3. Budget 2024-25 and comparisons

- 3.1 For comparable purposes, figures in these reports relate solely to the current number of maintained schools within SG.
- 3.2 Budget submission deadline was 31st May 2024 and out of the 58 schools, 54 submitted on time with the remaining 4 giving reasons for the delay. All were submitted in the correct format with the correct narrative of who had approved and when included.
- 3.3 The below tables show the number of schools reporting a cumulative deficit or anticipated cumulative deficit with the majority struggling to adhere to the Financial Regulations by producing a recovery plan. This is largely due to falling pupil numbers without the ability to reduce class sizes, increasing SEN, insufficient grant values and inflation on expenditure increasing at a greater rate than income.
- 3.4 For the second year running, schools are reporting specific issues with recruitment (and therefore having to rely on expensive agencies), rising resources costs and increased repairs required due to the age of buildings.

3.5 The cessation of Integra (specifically cleaning, catering and HR services) has placed additional challenges on schools with many now having to increase expenditure in these areas. Schools have also communicated that it has increased workload for School Business Managers which in turn has increased hours required and therefore increased costs.

4 School Finances for 2024-25

4.1 The following table shows the number of schools with deficit budgets in 2022-23 and 2023-24 and the number of schools that had forecast deficits for 2024-25 both when originally setting their budgets and as at now. This does show a potential for the number of deficit budgets schools to increase from 11 to 24(25).

Table 1 – Schools reporting cumulative deficits and balances

Out of a total of 58 schools	22-23 outturn	23-24 outturn	24-25 Original Forecast budget	24-25 Forecast Budget @ revised visit (Nov 2024)	25-26 (as at 24-25 revised visit)	25-26 (as at 24-25 revised visit)
Number of schools and percentage	8 (13.5%)	11 (18.6%)	24 (40.7%)	25 (43%)	36 (62%)	39 (67%)
Cumulative deficit balances	£551,636	£1,244,304	£2,607,144	£2,838,065	£5,463,923	£8,146,560
Total school balances (surplus / deficit)	£6,303,409	£4,963,278	£1,741,646	£1,275,624	£2,506,618	£5,882,862

4.2 Importantly and for understandable reasons forecasts often tend to overstate adverse risks and understate favourable uncertainties and this pattern can be seen in the following table, which shows the number of forecast deficits often reduces by the time actual outturns are known (a reduction from 18 schools forecasting deficits to 11 actually having deficits in 2023-24).

4.3 If that pattern was to be repeated in 2024-25 the current 25 forecast deficits could end up being closer to 15, which is also shown below. Although still an increase in schools with deficit budgets a movement of 11 to 15 (rather than 25) presents a more manageable number of schools to support.

Table 2 – change in number of schools reporting cumulative deficit from revised to outturn

Out of a total of 58 schools	22-23	23-24	24-25 potential based on previous years
Number of schools reporting cumulative deficits as at revised	11	18	25
Number of schools reporting deficit outturn	8	11	15

4.4 Table 3 shows a similar positive movement in overall balances between forecasts and actuals.

Table 3 – change in balances from revised to outturn

	22-23	23-24
Revised budget balances	£3,844,419	£4,137,923
Outturn balances	£6,329,188	£4,936,264

5. Grants

5.1 Mainstream schools receive the majority of their funding based on NOR from October census data. They also receive a number of Grants, some of which can only be estimated at budget setting.

5.2 Several of these grants are primarily based on the NOR and national averages. For some schools under subscribed (and in some cases those that are full too that tend to be smaller) this is contributing to financial pressures. There are many cases where the grant given is not enough to cover the actual cost it relates to. This has been the case for all recent grants to cover Teachers pay award and therefore is an additional cost to schools year after year.

5.3 The Core Schools Budget Grant for 2024-25 was announced after budgets were submitted and therefore was not included in original Budget submissions. It has been added in during Revised Budget visits by Schools Finance and whilst the expectation would be that this would have improved forecast outturns the tables above do not indicate that.

5.4 The table below details the grants paid to schools in 24-25 and the total value of the grants.

Table 4 – Main Grants 2024-25

Grant	Funding based on	Total Value of Grant
Pupil Premium Grant (PPG)	Number of eligible pupils in October census data	£7,727,275
PE / Sports Grant	Pupil numbers (yrs 1 to 6) in January census data	£1,059,538

Universal Infant Free School Meals	An average of meals taken by Reception, Year 1 & 2 pupils (excluding those who are eligible for FSM6 as part of PPG) in October and January census data	£3,826,895
National Tutoring Programme (NTP) Ended Aug 24	Number of eligible pupils and hours of tuition, DfE funded 50% (for final AY) of a maximum of 15hrs per pupil and a maximum of £18 per hour	£158,775
Recovery Premium Ended Aug 24	Set rate (different for Key Stage and type of setting) per eligible pupil (FSM6, LAC, PLAC)	£388,988
Teachers Pay Additional Grant (TPAG)	A lump sum, plus a basic per pupil rate (differs between Key Stages), plus a per pupil rate for eligible pupils (FSM6)	£3,813,612
Teachers Pension Employers Contribution Grant (TPECG)	A lump sum, plus a basic per pupil rate (differs between Key Stages), plus a per pupil rate for eligible pupils (FSM6)	£4,699,420
Core Schools Budget Grant (CSBG) To cover overall costs but specifically the teachers and support staff pay awards for 2024	A lump sum, plus a basic per pupil rate (differs between Key Stages), plus a per pupil rate for eligible pupils (FSM6)	£4,279,679

6 Support from the Council

- 6.1 For schools' core funding, the LA can only passport on what is calculated through the NFF, but the Falling Rolls policy and Growth policy are there to provide additional funding (subject to meeting criteria) to support specific cases. Over recent years officers through the SSFG have adapted these criteria to ensure more schools can access this funding. While it isn't a complete solution to many of the pressures schools face, it does provide additional short term financial support.
- 6.2 In addition, training is available to Senior school leaders and Governors on a range of financial management matters to better equip them in financial monitoring, budget setting, benchmarking and forward planning. The Schools Finance Team also offer a tiered subscription service plus ad-hoc and bespoke services such as payroll reconciliation and budget monitoring.
- 6.3 The Council also invested in a new Senior Accountant post that focuses on the Council's work supporting schools with financial challenges. This has led to more time being allocated to reviewing schools' budgets, coordinating meetings between schools, the Strategic Lead for Statutory Education (Admission numbers) and the

Strategic Lead for School Improvement, to discuss potential areas for savings and assisting with recovery plans. The Council is also making regular use of the DfE funded School Resource Management Advisor (SRMA) programme with 1 currently in progress and 2 due to begin shortly and be completed by January 25. Finally a new tracker has been formulated for reviewing schools in financial difficulty identifying financial improvement plans and reporting to the Schools Strategic Finance Group.

Author: Deb Luter – Senior Accountant for Department for People

South Gloucestershire Council

REPORT TO: Schools Forum for Consultation

DATE: 5th December 2024

REPORT TITLE: Banding and Top-Up Funding Arrangements for Pupils with Education and Healthcare Plans (EHCPs) – Year 3

All Wards

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Forum on the move to the third year of the SEND Top-Up and Banding Arrangements. In February 2022 the Council through Cabinet and Full Council approved the implementation of new banding and Top-Up Funding arrangements with specific transitional protection to apply over academic years 2022/23 to 2024/25.

Recommendations

The Council will be moving to the planned third year of phased transitional protection for EHCP Top-Up rates and this paper updates the Forum on the assurance process undertaken to support that move and seeks views from the Forum on that move.

Policy

2. The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations set out requirements local authorities have to follow in establishing funding arrangements for schools. These regulations are supplemented by the DfE's High Needs Operational Guide 2024/25 that provides specific guidance regarding the funding arrangements for supporting pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
3. The source of funding to support schools and SEND pupils is a ring-fenced grant received by local authorities known as the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Local Authorities must distribute an element of the Schools Budget to their maintained schools using a formula which accords with the regulations made by the Secretary of State for Education and enables the calculation of a budget share for each maintained school. The financial controls within which delegation works are set out in the Council's Scheme for the Financing of Schools.
4. The DSG is allocated to local authorities in 4 blocks as follows:
 - Schools Block: relates mainly to funding for mainstream school budget shares
 - High Needs Block: relates to funding to support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND),

- Early Years Block: relates to funding for supporting nursery education providers and other general early years education responsibilities,
- Central Services Block: relates to funding to support LA statutory responsibilities relating to schools.

5. Requirements relating to each of the blocks and the DSG in totality are covered in the regulations previously mentioned.

Background

6. South Gloucestershire Council carried out a review of how Top-Up Funding (TuF) and banding is undertaken and found that the previous system was very complex, decisions were not always consistent and proportionate to the assessed needs of the children and young people. This often led to confusion for parents, schools and officers and a lack of transparency.
7. In January 2021, a working group, led and facilitated by 2 independent SEN consultants, was commissioned to carry out this review.
8. The Review highlighted the previous complex and confusing arrangements including a plethora of funding allocation methodologies.
9. The previous approaches also created a lopsided system within South Gloucestershire. The review found that South Gloucestershire, was characterised with more children being identified as requiring an EHCP than other comparable LAs. The funding allocated as TuF was (and still is), on average, much higher than in most other local authorities across the country. This factor can clearly be seen in the following charts:

Chart 1: Top Up Funding for Mainstream Schools (DfE 2020/21 Data)

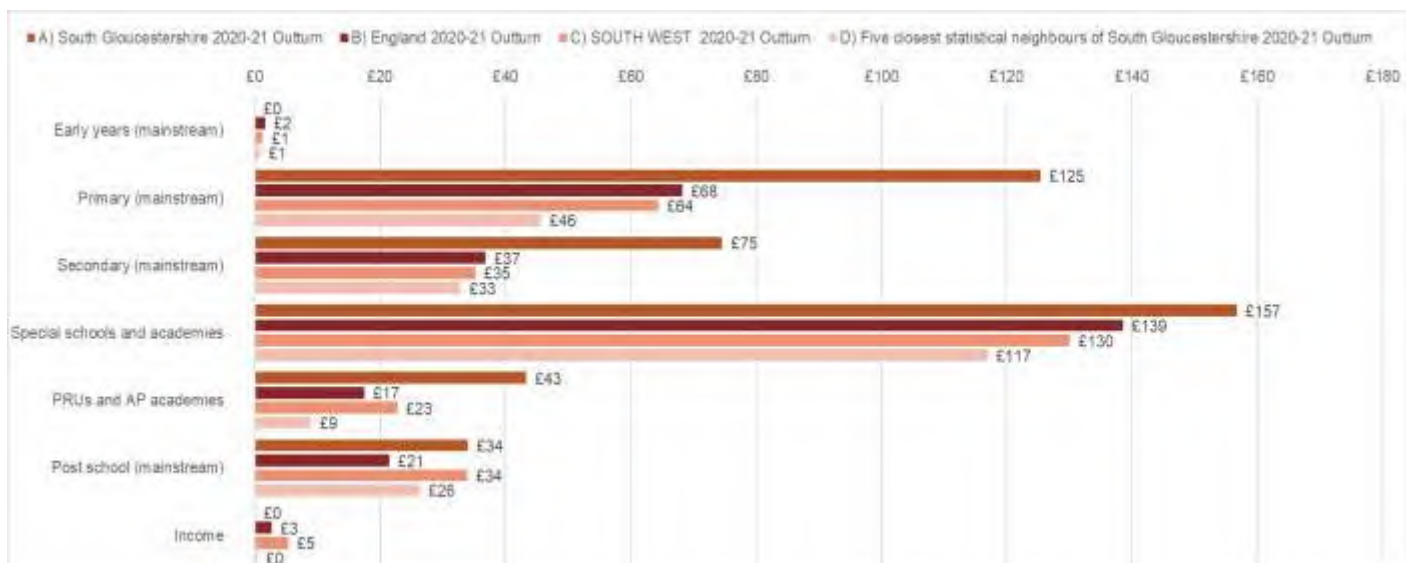


Chart 2: Top up Funding for Mainstream Schools (DfE 2021/22 Data)

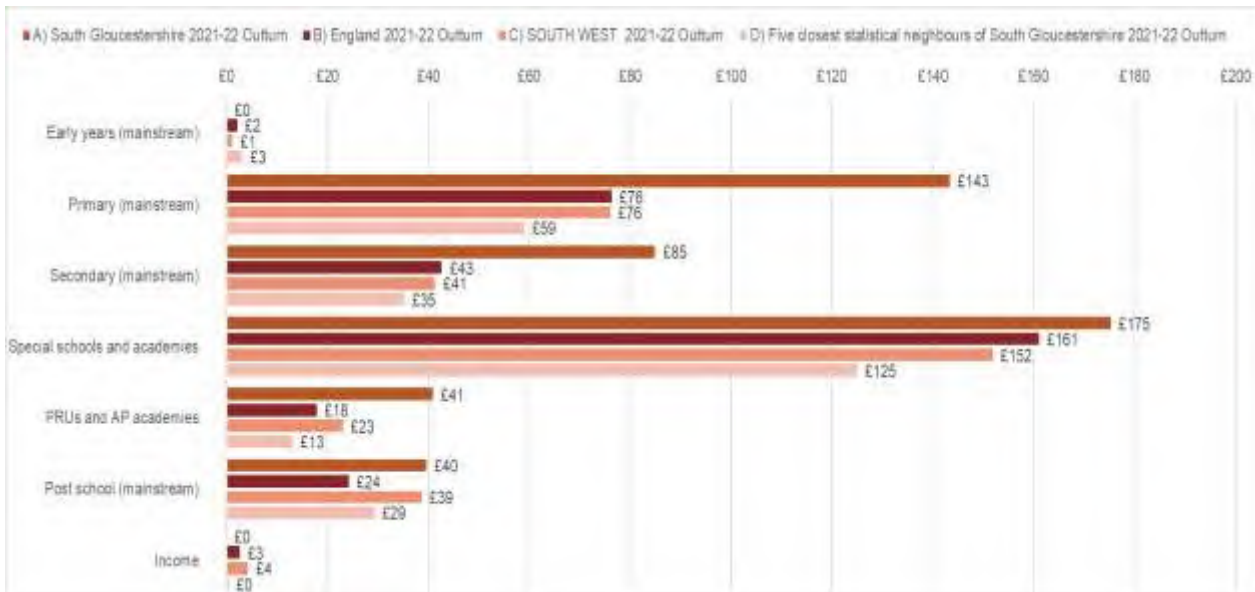
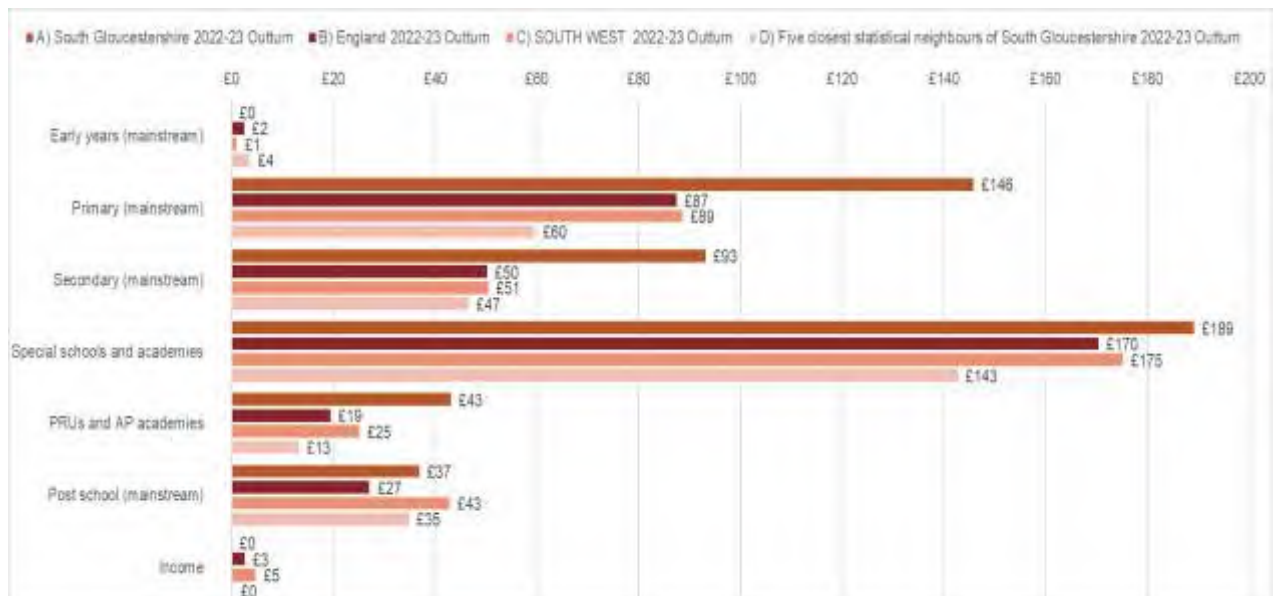


Chart 3: Top up Funding for Mainstream Schools (DfE 2022/23 Data)



Safety Valve Agreement

10. The gap between the funding we receive and our expenditure is significant and continues to rise with increased demand and costs. The council has a Safety Valve agreement with the Department for Education (DfE) which targets moving to an in-year balanced budget on the DSG and repayment of the cumulative deficit. The council holds a cumulative brought forward deficit balance on its Dedicated Schools Grant of £27,460k, which had

been budgeted to increase during 2024/25 by £7,708k based on the updated December 2023 Safety Valve submission.

11. As part of our original and revised safety valve agreement, developing a new funding mechanism and getting the Local Authority spend to be more in line with other Local Authorities both nationally and locally forms part of our agreement. Under the agreement the expectation is that as long as we maintain progress towards the agreed targets the Council will receive £25m to help reduce the historic cumulative deficit.
12. The important consideration is that without the DfE's injection of £25m the Council and schools would have needed to save that amount themselves requiring a much greater and longer impact on schools. It is therefore critically important that progress is maintained to ensure the DfE pays the Council the full £25m.

New Banding and TuF System

13. Following the review, a new banding and top-up system was introduced from September 2022 and included significant transitional protection.
14. Previous data reported to Schools Forum showed that reductions in South Gloucestershire top-up levels needed to reach the England averages would need to be: Primary - 40%, Secondary - 43%, Special - 20%, PRUs - 54%. Independent/Private - 21%
15. However, to ensure we took manageable steps to a balanced budget position the aim was and remains to move **towards** the England Averages for the proportion of pupils supported with EHCPS and top up levels rather than **to** them.
16. Top up level changes approved were as follows:
 - Prim/Sec: 25% reduction rather than 40%/43%
 - Spec: 14% reduction rather than 20%
 - PRU: 17% reduction rather than 54%
 - Ind/Priv: 10% reduction rather than 21%

17. Taking manageable steps is an important factor in the changes introduced and this was to be achieved by applying transitional protection. The target to achieve in top-up reductions was chosen to be a much lower target than the data would suggest (25% rather than 40%/43% for primary/secondary) and it was to be done in a phased way over 3 years e.g. for prim and secondary:

2022/23 - 7%
2023/24 – 10%
2024/25 – 8%

18. Year 1 of transitional protection was implemented from September 2022 and following a Case Study review with findings reported to Schools Forum, year 2 transitional protection was implemented on 1st October 2023.

19. It is now time to introduce year 3 reduced transitional protection, but before doing so officers, carried out due diligence and conducted a major piece of work to assess the ability of schools to meet the identified needs within EHCPs as protection reduces.

Process and Improvement

20. A sample of EHCPs were reviewed in detail to assess whether the next phase of TuF rates with reduced protection that would apply from 1st January 2025 would deliver sufficient funding to allow the pupils needs as set out in Section F of the EHCP to be fully met.

21. 39 EHCPs from a representative sample of schools and bandings were reviewed in this way. The review team included Schools Representatives, Educational Psychologists, EHCP Team representatives and finance representatives. This work took place over several months and each EHCP was reviewed at a very detailed level.

22. The Local Authority would like to say 'thank you' to Lou Coles, Trust SEND Lead, Cabot Learning Federation and Clare Halsey, Assistant Director SEND and Disadvantaged Learners, CSET Education Team for dedicating their time and being part of the Case Study review meetings.

23. Including school representatives was welcomed by the review team as it highlighted a key area of improvement during the review process. The group felt that clarity within Section F is needed; in some cases, support that should form part of the core education offer were included, whereas these should not be funded via Top up funding. It was felt that it was confusing for parents, schools and the local authority officers in determining the true cost of supporting Section F of an EHCP.

24. Local Authority Officers have been looking into how the section F of an EHCP can be improved to incorporate the full support required but clearly identify which elements are supported by the educational offer and which elements form part of the additional support required. This work is currently on hold due to a national review of EHCPs currently being undertaken which may result in a standardise template for all Local Authorities to use for EHCPs.

Results of Review

25. For full transparency, of the 39 EHCPs reviewed 3 were removed from the final summary, as a result of the section F within the current EHCPs being updated for Specialist provision and confirmation from the EHCP Team that these pupils were transferring to a Special School in September 2024. They were therefore not representative of pupils placed in mainstream settings.

26. Across the 12 schools and the 36 EHCPs there was a complex picture that emerged. In overall terms, on average the TuF rates were greater than the assessed costs of supporting the pupils. This supports moving to the new TuF rates with lower protection.

27. Where the EHCPs were older and based on the previous Ready Reckoner model, then on average, the TuF rates fell short of covering the costs. The reason for this is that the

older EHCPs offer less flexibility to schools on how support for those pupils is delivered. The positive news is that these Ready Reckoner based EHCPs are reducing and are expected to be phased out over the next year or so.

28. As a contrast it was found that for the majority of the remaining 13 EHCPs assessed via the new banding system, the TuF rate allocated was higher than the assessed costs of Section F within the EHCP.

29. As shown in the table 1 below, the 23 cases previously on the old Ready Reckoner system resulted in an average deficit of £2,967 pa compared to the 13 cases on the new Banding (TuF) system giving an average surplus of £3,248 pa. This was after the costings considered an estimated pay award and other inflationary costs and a £6k contribution from the schools to each EHCP.

Table 1 – Summary of Case Study

<u>Summary of Average RR vs Banding</u>	
Average deficit for 23 cases currently on protection (old RR)	£2,967
Average surplus for 13 cases currently on Banding with no protection	-£3,248
Average net surplus based on cases review	-£281

Overall the number of pupils on Banding is increasing compared to those in receipt of RR Protection

30. Whilst there continues to be a cost differential between the EHCPs previously on the old Ready Reckoner model and the EHCPs on the new Banding (TuF) system it should be noted that the number of plans in receipt of payment protection is reducing. The change in numbers will be due to a natural reduction in transition protection require, school leavers, changes in funding via annual reviews and requests for the Banding allocated to be reviewed. In addition, the number of new EHCPs awarded is increasing. Table 2 below provides Schools Forum with data on the number of EHCPs on the banding system and of those EHCPs, the number in receipt of payment protection.

Table 2 – Number of EHCPs with Payment Protection

<u>Number of EHCPs on Banding with Payment Protection</u>				
Number of EHCPs	Ready Reckoner			
Sep-22	861			
Number of EHCPs	Band	Payment Protection	Percentage of Plans in receipt of Payment Protection	Percentage reduction in Payment Protection per year
Mar-23	888	565	63.63%	
Mar-24	1,107	454	41.01%	19.65%
Nov-24	1,156	261	22.58%	42.51%*

* Based on year 3 level of payment protection

31. As in the previous year findings the sampling did show that in 2025/26 academic year, once all the protection has ceased, the overall position could switch to being a net shortfall. It would therefore be a difficult case to make to move to that position in 2025/26 (academic year) unless the sampling evidence changes due to, for example the further phasing out of the historic EHCPs. At that point the latest DfE benchmarking data will also need to be assessed to see if South Gloucestershire's outlier position had changed.
32. Importantly, a critical part of the new banding arrangements is that schools can seek, through the annual review process, to have the banding level of an individual EHCP to be looked at and reviewed. That is and will continue to be available for any school where the TuF funding can demonstrably be shown to be insufficient to meet the needs identified in the EHCP. With that important protection in place and given that for the sampled EHCPs, the results showed a net surplus position together with the number in receipt of protection reducing, this does give assurance that year 3 of the new TuF rates with reduced protection can be introduced.
33. When the new banding and top-Up rates were introduced, the Council agreed to undertake this annual review before the next phase of reduced protection occurred. The protection is due to finish on 31st August 2025 and this exercise will be repeated next year and the results reported to the Forum before protection is fully removed.
34. The conclusion of the sampling exercise does give confidence that the next phase of reduced transitional protection is reasonable for schools to manage and given the continued picture of South Gloucestershire TuF rates still being significantly higher than all comparators it is right to move to the next phase of reduced Transitional Protection.
35. Original plans were to move to the new reduced protection rates in September 2024, however as this case study review took longer than anticipated schools have continued to be funded at the previous rates and this will continue up to the end of December 2024, with the change now taking place from 1 January 2025.

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South Gloucestershire Council

SCHOOLS FORUM

05th December 2024

TRADE UNION FACILITIES POOLED BUDGET REPORT

To Follow

South Gloucestershire Council

SCHOOLS FORUM

05th December 2024

SCHOOLS BUDGET 2025-2026 INCLUDING OPTIONS FOR A BLOCK TRANSFER

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