

Matters Arising – Various

The following short updates are presented in order to keep Forum members informed of important matters that are not picked up within other reports.

Chancellor's Autumn Statement

- The Autumn Statement that was presented to Parliament on 22 November did not announce any new additional revenue Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding. On this basis, we do not expect additional sums to be included within the 2024/25 DSG Schools Block and High Needs Block settlements, when these are confirmed later in December.

Early Years Teacher Pay Grant

- On 16 November, the DfE announced details of an additional one-off Teacher Pay Grant allocation for early years (3&4-year-old entitlement delivery), following the September 2023 teachers' pay award. Bradford has been allocated £243,503 for the period September 2023 to March 2024.
- We intend to allocate this Grant to all 3&4-year-old entitlement providers as a one-off lump sum, based on actual recorded delivery across the autumn and spring terms. This will be a pro-rata calculation. A small value of this Grant is additionally allocated to Maintained Nursery Schools (MNS), which we will allocate to MNS based on January 2024 Census numbers alongside the equivalent element of the Early Years Supplementary Grant. All allocations will be paid in March 2024 (at the point spring term delivery is confirmed).

Support Staff / Officers' Pay Award April 2023

- The National Employers announced their pay offer for support staff / officers (the NJC pay scales award) for April 2023 back in February. The Employers' offer is similar to the final pay award that was agreed for April 2022: £1,925 on all scale points (up to scale point 43 of the NJC scale), with a 3.88% uplift on all points above the NJC scale (point 43). This equates to a range of uplifts, between 9.42% at the bottom of the scale up to 3.88% at the top of (and above) the scale.
- This NJC award was agreed on 1 November.

Employer's Contribution to Teacher Pensions Review April 2024

- The indication is that the employer's contribution to teacher pensions will increase at April 2024 from 23.6% to 28.6%.
- The indication is that this increase will be financial supported (probably via a Teacher Pensions Grant, as was the case at the last review at September 2019). The Autumn Statement did confirm that the Treasury will provide additional funding to support this.

DfE Wraparound Childcare Programme - Update

- The DfE published at the end of October guidance for local authorities on the development of the national wraparound childcare programme. The Government's aim is for all parents of primary school children who need it to be able to access childcare in their local area from 8am to 6pm. Parents should expect to see an expansion in the availability of wraparound care from September 2024, with every parent who needs it able to access term-time wrap-around childcare by September 2026. Parents will still be expected to pay to access this provision (the DfE's programme aims to increase the availability of childcare, rather than subsidise the cost of it).

- This programme (and the additional funding allocated by DfE to support it) will be delivered through local authorities. Local authorities are expected to work with primary schools and PVI early years providers, including childminders, to introduce or expand wraparound childcare provision in their area, to “test flexible ways of providing childcare and to gather evidence of what works”.

Additional Schools in Financial Difficulty Monies – Maintained Schools

- Alongside the publication in July of the teacher pay award for September 2023, the DfE announced that there would be a national £40m ‘schools in exceptional financial difficulty’ fund to support schools and academies that face exceptional budget pressures in meeting the cost of the award. The DfE announced mid-October the details of how the £40m is allocated. £20m has been allocated to the ESFA to support academies via the existing exceptional financial circumstances requests route. £20m has been allocated to local authorities directly for support for maintained schools.
- Regarding the £20m allocated to local authorities for maintained schools, this has been allocated across only 35 authorities on a pro-rata basis where the DfE has calculated that the value of the deficits that are held by their maintained schools is greater than 1% of funding. Because the DfE has used prior year outturn data (we believe 2022/23 data) and because we had a maintained secondary school that held a deficit of a significant value in our 2022/23 outturn, before the conversion of this school to academy status, Bradford has been allocated £0.934m from the £20m.
- The DfE has given local authorities a good deal of flexibility in how this funding is used, but its purpose is to support maintained schools in deficit. This does not simply have to support the consequences of the September 2023 teachers’ pay award. Authorities are permitted to take account of the wider financial positions of schools and other factors that may cause budget pressure. Authorities are required to be ‘transparent’ in how their monies are used. The DfE cites reporting to the Schools Forum as part of this transparency.
- This £0.934m will be classed as DSG income. We have clarified with the ESFA directly that we are permitted to carry over any unspent funds into 2024/25 in order to continue to support maintained schools in financial difficulty next year. Where we have unspent funds, it is likely that these will be added to the balance of de-delegated funds within the Schools Block and carried forward as a ring-fenced sum into 2024/25.
- The Authority is currently considering how a proportion of this funding can be allocated to support maintained schools in deficit in 2023/24, with the intention that some of this funding is allocated before March 2024 to reduce or eliminate the values of these deficits, where it is appropriate to do so, but that a good proportion will be carried forward to be used in 2024/25. Members will identify and understand that there are pros and cons related to the allocation of such additional funding to a small number of maintained schools and that the Authority will wish to tread carefully.
- The Authority expects to report to the Schools Forum at the March 2024 meeting on the allocation of funding during 2023/24.