

WIRRAL COUNCIL

SCHOOLS FORUM – 16th January 2024

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

NOTIONAL SEN BUDGET 2024-25

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides Schools Forum with an update on the latest Department for Education (DfE) guidance on the operation of the notional SEN budget within local school funding formulae, and seeks views of Schools Forum on the local authority's approach for calculating the Notional SEN Budget.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The requirement to identify a Notional SEN budget for maintained schools and academies is set out in regulation 11(3) of the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2023. Additional guidance is published in July 23 by the DfE in 'The Notional SEN Budget for Mainstream Schools: Operational Guide 2024 to 2025'.
- 2.2 The notional SEN budget is not a budget that is separate from a school's overall budget. It is an identified amount within a maintained school's delegated budget share or an academy's general annual grant (GAG). It is intended as a guide for a school's spending decisions and is neither a target nor a constraint on a school's duty to use its 'best endeavours' to secure special provision for its pupils with SEN.
- 2.3 It is important to note that the notional SEN budget is not intended to provide the high needs cost threshold set by the regulations (currently £6,000 per pupil per annum) for every pupil with SEN, as most such pupils' support will cost less than that. Nor is the notional SEN budget intended to provide a specific amount per pupil for those with lower additional support costs, although the local authority may make reasonable assumptions about what those costs might be for the purpose of ensuring that their schools' notional SEN budget calculation is realistic.

3.0 WIRRAL NOTIONAL SEN BUDGET AND 2024-25 REQUIREMENT

- 3.1 The Wirral notional SEN budget for 2023-24 is calculated as 100% of the funding received for low prior attainment factor. The total notional SEN budget contained within the funding formula in 2023-24 is £16.29m and it is equivalent to 6.5% of the total School Budget and notional SEN funding per eligible pupil is calculated as £1,059.66.
- 3.2 Based on the DfE document "Schools block funding formulae 2023 to 24", 75% of local authorities are allocating between 5% to 15% of schools block funding as notional SEN. The overall percentage of formula allocation which is designated as the notional SEN budget across all local authorities is 11.5%.

3.4 There is currently no national approach to the calculation of schools' notional budget for pupils with SEN through the National funding formula (NFF). The operational guide states that DfE would expect the notional SEN budget to include:

- a small part of the basic entitlement funding (national average weighting 3.19%)
- a larger part of deprivation funding, reflecting the higher prevalence of lower-level SEN amongst disadvantaged children. (national average weighting: Free School Meals 31.15% and IDACI 35.77%)
- the majority, or whole, of the low prior attainment factor funding as this is the best proxy for pupils with low cost, high incidence SEN. (national average weighting 84.76%)

3.5 For 2024-25 the DfE requires notional SEN funding, not attributable to pupils with an EHCP, must exceed £1,500 per other SEN pupil. LAs should aim for a figure of between £3,000 - £3,500 per other SEN pupil. Currently the calculated per pupil figure using the October 23 census data is £1,294 and it does not meet the requirement.

4.0 PROPOSED APPROACH FOR 2024-25 AND FUTURE YEARS

4.1 As there is a significant gap between the figure calculated by the Wirral approach and the DfE recommendation, it is recommended to have a consultation with schools to decide which funding formula factors should be used and their proportions.

4.2 It is proposed that the notional SEN budget for 2024-25 is set just above the minimum requirement of the DfE (£1,500) by allocating 1% of the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) to clear the requirement. Schools then will be canvassed in the new financial year on a revised approach to set the budget at the DfE recommended level.

4.3 The notional SEN funding for each school would be higher than in previous years, meaning that a greater proportion of the School Budget Share or GAG is deemed to relate to the cost of support for SEN pupils. The School Budget Share or GAG itself is not impacted.

4.4 The position will be annually to take account of any pupil characteristic changes and any national approach from the DfE to the calculation and management of the Notional SEN budget.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That the Forum notes the report.

7.2 Schools Forum's views are sought on the proposal of calculation methodology for the notional SEN budget for 2024-25 and the consultation for the future years.

Simone White
Director of Children, Families and Education