

15<sup>th</sup> October 2024**Appendix A**

**Subject:** School Forum Response to top slice 0.5% (collated) - (16 people)  
**From:** M Towers

It has taken some time to get and collate the responses.

**\*\*Forum members – FYI\*\* Where there has been similar content, I have summarised the best I can.**

As of now, we have received a total of 16 responses to the consultation, including input from 2 primary heads, 2 primary governors, 3 secondary heads, 1 secondary governor, 1 early year's representative, 1 diocese representative, and 6 other representatives. The feedback presents a range of concerns and perspectives that will need to be carefully considered as part of this process. The responses currently show 1 in favour, 11 opposed, and 4 undecideds.

**This would demonstrate a majority as opposed.**

The concerns raised include the Local Authority's effectiveness in managing SEND provision, the financial impact on schools, and the fairness of the proposed funding deduction. Many respondents highlighted issues such as delays in EHCP processing, inadequate SEND budgets, and the potential disproportionate effects on schools with higher SEND needs. There is also a call for more details and transparency regarding how the funds would be managed and utilized to ensure they benefit the schools equitably.

Overall, the feedback suggests a need for a more comprehensive approach to address systemic issues in SEND provision, with a focus on ensuring that any changes support schools and their most vulnerable students effectively.

The consultation responses can be summarized as follows:

**1. Concerns Over Local Authority (LA) Effectiveness and SEND Provision:**

- There is a general lack of confidence in the Local Authority's SEND initiatives, with respondents questioning the evidence for any positive impact. Delays and inefficiencies in EHCP processing, coupled with inconsistent decision-making, have created significant challenges for schools.
- The existing SEND budgets are already inadequate, and schools are struggling to manage the increasing number of students with complex needs. Many fear that reducing funding would further compromise their ability to meet these needs.

**2. Financial Impact on Schools:**

- Schools are concerned that the proposed 0.5% block funding deduction will disproportionately affect those with higher levels of SEND needs and low Free School Meal (FSM) percentages, which are often small, rural schools.
- Respondents argue that taking more money from schools, which are already under financial strain, would exacerbate the problem. They suggest that the LA's proposal does not account for the financial reality facing most schools.

### **3. Fairness and Equity Issues:**

- There is a perceived disparity in the proposal's financial impact across schools, with some facing significantly larger deductions than others. Schools serving vulnerable populations or with higher SEND needs feel particularly disadvantaged.
- Some responses suggest that schools with lower attainment outcomes and higher FSM levels would be unfairly burdened, while others would be minimally affected.

### **4. Inadequate Detail and Lack of Confidence in LA's Plan:**

- Several responses indicate that the proposal lacks sufficient detail on how funds would be used to benefit schools. There is also scepticism regarding the LA's capacity to manage additional funds effectively, given past issues with SEND administration.
- The absence of a clear business case, accountability measures, and impact assessments raises doubts about whether the initiative would bring any real improvements.

### **5. Alternative Approaches and Need for Further Information:**

- Some respondents suggest that focusing on inclusion in mainstream schools and addressing systemic issues would have a better long-term impact.
- While there is recognition that SEND requires more resources, many stakeholders need more convincing evidence and details before supporting the proposed changes.

### **6. General Scepticism and Calls for Broader Reform:**

- Many believe that the proposal merely shifts the problem rather than addressing the root causes of inadequate SEND funding. There is a call for broader reforms to the current SEND funding system.
- Respondents emphasize that schools should have more autonomy in deciding how to allocate funds to support their pupils effectively.

Overall, the responses highlight deep concerns about the proposal's financial implications, equity, and the LA's ability to deliver improvements in SEND provision.

On the survey, in response to the question, “Do you have any other feedback on either the school block transfer or our forum in general that you would like me to work on/improve?”, the feedback highlighted several key areas for consideration:

#### **1. Timing and Distribution of Paperwork:**

- Multiple respondents indicated dissatisfaction with receiving meeting documents on the morning of the meeting, as this does not provide sufficient time to review and engage meaningfully.
- It was strongly suggested that paperwork, especially for substantial items like the block transfer proposal, should be distributed at least a week in advance.

#### **2. Meeting Format and Accessibility:**

- While remote meetings were considered convenient, there was a preference for in-person meetings, at times, as they were seen as more productive potentially.
- Suggestions included making the chair's and vice chair's contact details available to facilitate discussions before meetings.

#### **3. Attendance and Engagement:**

- Concerns were raised about member attendance, suggesting a policy on how many times a member can miss or send apologies before further action is warranted, given the forum's limited annual meetings.
- Positive feedback was also given for the increased clarity and focus of recent meetings, with appreciation expressed for the chair's leadership.

#### **4. Impact of Funding Decisions:**

- There were concerns about how funding changes might affect the most vulnerable groups, questioning whether targeting schools could contravene the Equality Act.
- Calls were made for a plan based on impact and evidence before committing to decisions involving funding reductions.

#### **5. School Forum's Effectiveness:**

- Some respondents felt the forum was functioning as a “tick-box exercise,” with little effect on decision-making by the Local Authority (LA).
- The need for a space that allows more robust discussions was emphasized, as some felt feedback was met with defensive responses from the LA.

#### **6. Recommendations for Future Actions:**

- The possibility of seeking independent advice, especially from other local authorities experienced with similar challenges, was suggested.

#### **7. General Appreciation:**

- Despite concerns, there was acknowledgment of the chair's efforts in enhancing meeting quality and focus.

The feedback indicates areas for potential improvement while also recognising progress in specific aspects of forum operations and leadership.