

Hindhayes School



Full Governors Meeting Thursday 13th March 2025 starting at 5.30pm – Chestnut Classroom

Minutes

Present: Louise Melia (Chair), Kate Nester (Headteacher), Lucy Shakesby, Helen Clark, Neil Howiantz (Vice-Chair), Linda Monaghan, Ken Southern, Ben Amos (virtual).

In attendance: Mike Sales (Business Manager), Jenny Warrington (Clerk to Governors)

Apologies received and accepted: Sue Court, Michelle Heap.

No apologies received: Martin Lukins

The meeting started at 5:32pm.

47/2425 – Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

48/2425 Opportunity to declare Pecuniary Interests

None declared

49/2425 Headteacher update report (including attendance)

The Headteacher gave a verbal report and circulated contextual information about admissions and attendance.

- Pupil numbers have gone up to 165
- There was concern that a Year 2 leaver may start a cycle of leavers but so far that hasn't happened
- There's been a new starter from Zimbabwe, there are now four families from Africa attending the school. The new child has settled well.
- There have been two new children in Year 1 as well.

Ben Amos joined the meeting virtually.

- Where there is persistent absence (under 90%) a process is followed, with letters sent home first. The school tackles lateness and recognises the impact this has on progress in phonics (Soundwrite). Phonics may be moved to a later time in the day, perhaps to 9:30am instead of 9am which was discussed with Jeremy Handscomb.

A governor asked how many children were affected by lateness? And whether there was a particular trend in lateness on a particular day for example?

The school tracks a number of children regarding their attendance and lateness. There is no a particular trend in absence.

- The school has completed a local authority attendance self-assessment audit which traffic lights particular aspects of attendance management on a website dashboard. There were some ambers which were explained e.g there is no PFSA currently, there is a lack of staff in the office.

A governor asked does the school chase absence in the mornings?

Yes we should be chasing, it would be flagged to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and managed actively.

- The school has chosen not to have a late book for several considered reasons.
- A governor noted that 97% on the self-assessment dashboard was still amber.

A governor asked what time constitutes lateness?

After 9:10am a child would receive a L for late or U for unauthorised absence. The school tried to find a way through to support families. It's better to come to school at some point than not at all.

- The school regularly reviews, every two weeks, children's absence data and who is at risk of absence. It's talked about every day and at staff meetings. If there's any worry, it's talked about.
- The Vice Chair noted that his action from the last meeting was to contact county about how absence fines were managed and he had a quick response. The response detailed the need for a robust approach with penalty or request for

school support, and the approach was supported by a suite of Local Authority template letters so the process is depersonalised from the school.

- The Head noted one of the other aspects of the self-assessment dealing with action plans for persistent absence, which amounts to 5 children in school and recommended a risk assessment for those children. There is no time in school for completing these risk assessments for every child, particularly when absence can be due to part-time attendance arrangements, illness and medical appointments. Plans are implemented where necessary and it comes back to the relational policy.
- Another aspect of the self-assessment is about accountability for the process of managing attendance – there is a regular and approved system. The school has no capacity physically or monetarily to increase monitoring of the system.

A governor asked whether rewards were used for good attendance?

In the past the school used medals but came away from this system. Children can't help being ill or needing to go to medical appointments. As infants, children are reliant on their parents to get them to school.

A governor asked why the vulnerable children number was to be confirmed.

The Headteacher needed to discuss this number with the Deputy Head.

50/2425 -Safeguarding

The Headteacher shared a record of behaviour incidents being logged each week this academic year to date.

A governor noted that it was good that the numbers of unkind words and swearing had been reduced from 6 incidents in the Autumn Term to 3 (unkind words) and 1 (swearing) in Spring Term 3.

51/2425 Finance Report by Business Manager

The Business Manager had written and circulated a 9 page document regarding the school's finances and led a discussion about the Month 9 Report (April to December), looking forward 2025-2026 and feedback from the LA budget deficit meeting.

- Current deficit was £93,000 – this is an improved figure from £121,000 (down £27,000) which is the result of staffing changes, new apprentices, and a focus on keeping on track. Hard work from the staff team has enabled this reduction in the deficit but it is still a big figure to deal with.
- The document (appendix of these minutes with also questions and answers from a governor) was shared with staff with a view to continuing being transparent about the financial situation.
- Redundancy is a reality of the current situation. It isn't just Hindhayes that is dealing with a deficit. There is acknowledgement that the funding model particularly, for infant schools with the pressures of 1:1 support and medical needs, requiring urgent review and this has contributed deficit position as additional staffing has been needed, without being offset with the correct level of funding needed.
- Local authority funding just isn't enough to balance the budget and there is pressure to do that whilst acknowledging the school are doing all they can to achieve this.
- Infant Schools need extra funding for 1:1 staffing and medical needs support. A recent Infant Headteacher Meeting confirmed all settings are encountering the same issues.
- Staff at Hindhayes are fulfilling multiple roles. Ofsted said 'too many hats'.
- Hindhayes has been consistent in its message that it has 6 classes and should be funded for the costs of a teacher and TA in each class as a minimum. Consumables and staffing costs are increasing and income has been falling in real terms.
- The funding model is broken. Money which was protected for rainy days and for 1 to 1 support is being used.

Looking forward to 2025-2026

- Next year from (April 2025 to March 2026) means that the 24/25 deficit is added and therefore the overall projected deficit could be £180,000 deficit. This situation isn't just Hindhayes many other schools are in a similar position. However, Infant schools have been hit first with the reduction of pupil numbers over the past few years but will also be the first to see signs of growth.
- There is an in-year deficit of £75,000. There were 163 children at the funding point (that is 17 less than the maximum capacity and at £5,000 per child that is £85,000 less income than needed, so we can see the impact of the funding shortfall).
- Hindhayes still needs to fund the '1:1' support needs without additional income which we know has contributed to the deficit.

- In October 2021, 2022 and 2023 there were 60 children starting. 51 children are leaving at the end of Year 2 this year. Year 1 is increasing in number. - This can be removed.

A governor asked whether the budget had been compared with other infants schools?

Yes, it would not be possible without drilling down into their budgets as they are not like for like as traditional benchmarking is becoming less straightforward as acknowledged by colleagues in SFAT.

A governor asked about the 22 second choices? And whether capacity can increase beyond 60?

The second choices are unlikely to be allocated as they are often out of the catchment area.

The school cannot exceed 60. Only the Local Authority can allocate places above 60 where it deems necessary. There is a small pot of funding if the number exceeds 60.

Hindhayes celebrated the refurbishment and it made a difference to parental choice. Hindhayes was the second choice for 22 families.

Hindhayes is the only school in the area who can take extra children as there is a spare classroom but that would result in mixed aged classes.

There are signs of recovery. There will be 60 children in September. Parental choice appreciating the grounds and classroom refurbishment.

- Curriculum is 1% of the budget
- Premises is 7% of the budget
- Staffing is 72% of the budget (staffing used to be 75%-80% of the budget)

A governor asked whether the budget had been compared with other infants schools?

No, it would not be possible without drilling down into their budgets as they are not like for like.

A Governor asked about the core offer.

The core offer will likely be reduced. The Head has multiple roles and this is not reflected in the teacher ratio. It's a good indicator but only an indicator.

A governor asked whether 60 intake was assumed?

Yes, there is benchmarking against other schools.

- There is a growing budgetary problem, the funding model doesn't work for Hindhayes or infant schools generally. Where there are falling pupil numbers, with additional needs, and high energy costs there is little capacity to have impactful changes.
- The governors discussed the Core Offer of the Local Authority and what services were offered in this package. There has been difficulty getting technical support, for example when ICT support was needed when moving from SIMS to Bromcom there were legal reasons given for not providing support. You can't pick and choose the support from the Core Offer and the Office Team pick up most of what was previously undertaken by Somerset Council.

A governor asked whether academisation offered more support when the county was offering less?

Somerset finances are certainly under pressure. It is likely in the future, possibly the next 10-20 years, academies will provide more than local authorities.

Local Authority Budget Deficit meeting

The Local Authority Budget Deficit meeting went smoothly, when the local authority realised Hindhayes wasn't spending more money than necessary. In most schools the local authority can find £40,000 from the budget but when they couldn't find any savings, it was confirmation of the hard work on the budget already.

A governor asked whether 0.6 teacher less was a solution?

No, the SRMA Report and Deficit Working group report looked at ratio not need. Staffing is at its minimum to safely open. The school has already lost a learning mentor and PFSA. There is no recovery plan and the local authority couldn't find £40,000 in savings. The Headteacher has no time to be strategic, or to monitor attendance. . There wasn't much challenge in the local authority meeting as they couldn't see a strategy for savings and what was being done tangibly to make any savings. The Chair commented that what had been produced and presented was well prepared for and received in the meeting.

From the Business Manager's perspective, the financial year finishes positively, from the experience with the local authority and the building project, which was Local authority and donations funded, and saved on costs, which was overall good value for money. Also, the in-house photos were well received. The school will look to have three photo shoots a year, at Christmas, for Sports day and one other. The probation service is also providing free labour at weekends and this is going well. 4-5 people equals 20 hours a week of labour, the school needs to make use of this opportunity. A governor remarked that the grounds looked super and that decorating or clearing gutters may also be next on the list for the right group.

The context for Somerset Council currently is that council tax is increasing by 7% which is more than other councils are allowed to increase by and it may not avoid financial implications. The local authority meeting said that 80% of schools were in an in-year deficit. The situation is not just Hindhayes but most schools.

The Local Authority looked hard for savings but they identified none. The redundancy notice is necessary.

A governor asked what did the local authority say about the special educational needs costs?

The Headteacher took them through the details of the Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) needs and showed that the funding model doesn't work for this. The Head had a spreadsheet before the meeting with the EHCP targets and what was needed giving the local authority a good understanding of who is in school and what was needed. It was a very detailed report.

There was real acknowledgement that there was a great SEND need and no solutions.

Action – Chair will write to Local Authority for an update after meeting to identify current points for discussion or action.

The governors said they are concerned for the welfare of staff and don't want to add more pressure on. They are here to listen and understand and support with the situation as it continues.

52/2425 MAT Update and Vote on whether to continue looking at MAT options at the current time

Following on the extra meeting with the local authority to discuss multi-academy options, the governors discussed whether to carry on exploring options or to halt discussing the issue at the current time. The governors were pleased that so many could attend the extra meeting with the local authority and all governors received the notes from the meeting. The governors noted that fewer schools are looking to become an academy currently. With 80% of secondary schools already academies it's more likely that secondary schools would convert. At the moment, only 40% of primary schools are academies.

The governors noted that the landscape in terms of academisation is changing and therefore they may come back to the issue at any point in the future. The governors are always look for what is strategically best for the school and its families.

Vote: The governors voted to leave discussing the idea of academisation for the current time. They decided to leave it until they want to discuss it again.

53/2425 Report from Jeremy Handscomb - Curriculum development work in phonics and recording in the wider curriculum

The governors remarked that the report was great and it was noted that Jeremy Handscomb would be back next week.

A governor asked whether the school would change the time phonics was taught?

The school said it may begin each morning with a softer story time, moving quality phonics to later in the morning once the children had settled.

A governor asked about the update training.

The online update training followed the 2017 face to face training and highlighted a change towards reading in text, with books out on tables. This meshed well with what Jeremy Handscomb had recommended, with a focus on segmenting and blending and practice of that through fluency of reading, and at an early age balance writing expectations.

It was recognised that the online training was likely to be less effective than face to face training for those younger staff members who weren't at Hindhayes in 2017. Unfortunately, the school did not have the £1200 to have a face-to-face trainer this year.

A governor asked about the meaning of shared articulation?

This meant a common terminology of language. For children to be articulating their understanding of the language terminology.

A governor asked about class structure and how much do Teaching Assistants teach the Soundwrite programme?

There are five Teaching Assistants teaching a group of children their phonics. Who leads each group depends on experience. Currently everyone taking a group has had the 2017 face to face training. Children's progress is monitored and groups can be changed as necessary to maximise learning.

A follow-on question asked whether all Teaching Assistants could achieve more?

Teaching assistants take years to gain enough experience to be confident and skilled in teaching groups. Younger staff members are supported to develop as much as possible, but it takes time.

The school has worked hard to ensure that group leaders for phonics have received the best training.

The Vice Chair would like a governor walk around on Soundwrite and would report this back to the governors.

Action: Deputy Head will present an update on Soundwrite to governors for the June meeting, if enough changes have been implemented.

54/2425 Complaint report to governors

The Chair fed back to governors about a complaint received at the beginning of January about the special education support their child was receiving. The complaint has been resolved and other agencies were involved.

A governor asked what support was in place for the child.

Team around the child continues.

55/2425 Policies to be agreed

The vice chair made a comment that all the policies were evidence of the values and underpinning ethos of the school.

Questions about policies before they were approved:

Pay policy - This is the model version from the local authority, the school doesn't have performance related pay, the school uses the somerset pay spine.

Early Career Teachers – there are at least three routes of support packages for early career teachers, when taking on a new teacher, the route can be chosen.

The following policies were submitted and were approved by governors:

- Pay policy
- Early Career Teachers
- Uniforms
- Supporting Children with Medical Conditions
- PHSER + C (Personal, Social and Health Education Policy Including Relationship Education and Citizenship)

Governors approved all policies except the Exclusions policy which would come back to governors with revisions for the May meeting.

Action – Headteacher to lead a presentation on school values at the May meeting

56/2425 Minutes of the last Meeting (16 January 2025) to be approved

The minutes of the 16th January meeting were approved by governors without amendment.

57/2425 Action points from previous meeting

The behaviour principles were in progress and website check had been done.

58/2425 Any other Urgent Business

Notes from clerks briefing were circulated before the meeting.

A governor queried whether the sports premium information was on website.

The Head said yes, the information was on the website and the Sports Premium was on the larger self-evaluation (SEF) document. The Chair asked for it to be a standing item at the last meeting of the year.

Action: Sports premium to be an annual agenda item for last meeting of the year.

59/2425 Governor School Visits and Training

Helen Clark walked the site with Mike Sales on Wednesday 5th March

Ken Southern had met with Mike Sales on dates which the login system should have recorded.

Louise Melia had met with the Head teacher on Tuesday 4th March (and weekly otherwise)

60/2425 Preferred Meeting Day/Time for 2025-2026

Governors discussed a change to the meeting day and decided Wednesday meetings in future. Next meeting would be changed to Wednesday 7th May.

61/2425 Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 7th May, 5:30pm in Chestnut Classroom.

The chair of Governors thanked everyone for attending.

The meeting ended at 7:22pm.



Signed by Chair of Governors

Date: 07.05.2025

Action Points

Agenda item	Action by	Agreed Action	Update for next meeting
23/2425	MS	The Business Manager will look at the checklist for what must be published online and the pay policy would come to the next meeting.	In progress
25/2425	MH & LM	Write page of behaviour principles	In progress
30/2425	LM	Circulate potential dates for the Governors Strategy Day	tbc
34/2425	KN/LS	School to let Governors know when next performance assemblies are	
36/2425	NH	Contact LA to find out which schools are producing faster progress	Done
40/2425	LM	To contact Jane Weatherall to discuss options re joining a MAT	Done
43/2425	NH	Vice chair to write to attendance officer about council implementing their own fining policy.	Done
43/2425	KN	Head to number pages of school development plan	
51/2425	LM	Chair will write to Local Authority for an update after the budget meeting to identify current points for discussion or action.	
53/2425	LS	Soundwrite presentation for June Meeting	
55/2425	LS	Exclusion policy updated for May meeting	
55/2425	KN	Presentation on school values for May meeting	
58/2425	JW	Clerk to add Sports Premium report and discussion to last meeting of year annually	

Appendix 1: Governor and staff – Financial position update 09/03/25

This update will cover the following:

- Month 9 Report (24/25 Financial Year based on actuals April to Dec' 24)
- Budget Plan (2025/26 Financial Year – Projections for 12 months)
- LA School Budget Support Meeting

Month 9 Report:

Since the last Finance update was circulated on 14/11/24, we have completed the Month 9 Report (April to December '24 actuals spend + 3 months remaining estimated costs). The further we get into the financial year the more accurate the projections become.

The headline figure from the Month 9 Report is that Hindhayes is projecting to be £93,303 in overall deficit – However, please note that this is an improved position from the Month 7 Report where the projection was reporting a £120,737 deficit. Therefore, although still a deficit the position improved by £27,434.

The improvement in the financial position still remains bleak but must be given context. As I will also cover the Budget Plan in this summary, I do not think it's helpful to go into greater depth for this current year report but will highlight some of the reasons below.

- Staffing – This is the school's greatest cost but also its greatest asset. Where there have been staff movements, we have looked at each post and tried to protect classroom-based resources. We have invested into Apprentice Teaching Assistants to work alongside our experienced and knowledgeable staff. Key posts have not been reappointed to and work redistributed where possible. Staff are undertaking multiple roles and the whole team could not be working any harder. They are a credit to themselves and Hindhayes and we must ensure they continue to know this doesn't go unnoticed and appreciate their commitment. We must continue to challenge the funding received from the Local Authority. Although it is known, particularly for Infant schools, that there is an additional pressure of 1:1 support being largely responsible for the deficit, we should continue to press the LA for more funding.
- Challenging all spend – The school review all of its spend and benchmark against other schools. We have worked hard to ensure quotes for any work are best value not just in terms of the cost. It has been acknowledged that Hindhayes is a beautiful school but is an older building with larger grounds and trees. There is no additional funding to reflect this and we receive the same budget despite the inevitable costs incurred. We have received good support from the Local Authority to match fund the building project (Summer 2024) and hope that the more efficient side of the building will reduce heating costs as well as be a better working and learning environment for children and staff (resulting in higher attendance and less sickness).

- Falling pupil numbers – Last year our pupil numbers for the October Census were 163 but had to open 6 classes which has capacity for 180 children. Once again, we have the costs for running 6 classes and income for only 90% (163/180). There is however improvement forecast for the September '25 intake where we will welcome 60 children (2 full reception classes).
- Additional income – The team work incredibly hard on activities during the year to generate funds. The recent Christmas Fayre, the inhouse taking of photos and events have been really positive for our income projections.

Budget Plan 2025/26 financial year:

The Budget Plan is another detailed, line by line report which looks at the spend for Hindhayes. We work with colleagues in SFAT (Schools Finance and Accounting Team), to produce a joint report. This report covers the period April '25 – March '26 as well as the next 2 financial years. Schools which are projecting a deficit position have much greater scrutiny on their figures, which we welcome to ensure nothing has been missed.

The projected deficit at the end of 2025-26 financial shows a worst-case scenario of £180,463. However, please note £105,663 of this is deficit from previous years and the in-year deficit (budget less expenditure) is £74,800. When taking into account the additional 1:1 need from the children we support with medical and support needs the in-year deficit can be explained.

It is also worth considering that as the number of children grow income will increase and the in-year deficit reduces. The table below highlights these costs and assumptions:

	2024/25 Estimated Outturn	2025/26 Proposed Budget	2026/27 Proposed Budget	2027/28 Proposed Budget
Funding	£1,026,230	£1,063,496	£1,079,890	£1,098,975
Expenditure Plan	£1,084,645	£1,138,296	£1,132,911	£1,137,678
In Year Balance	-£58,415	-£74,800	-£53,020	-£38,703
Balance from previous year includes only BO2 balances	-£34,889	-£105,663	-£180,463	-£233,483
Revised Deficit	-£93,304	-£180,463	-£233,483	-£272,186

The Hindhayes budget allocation is calculated on pupil numbers and you will see these have steadily been reducing since 2018 when the school were 9 classes (as identified in the Somerset Council Population Forecast):

Year	Pupil Numbers	Class Numbers	Actual Number of Classes
Actual October 2021	200	7	7
Actual October 2022	178	6	7
Actual October 2023	153	6	6

However, numbers are starting to increase and as mentioned earlier in this report 60 'first choice' children want to start in September (with a further 22 'second choice').

PUPIL NUMBERS

The funding allocation for 2025/26 is based on the number of pupils on roll as at October 2024.

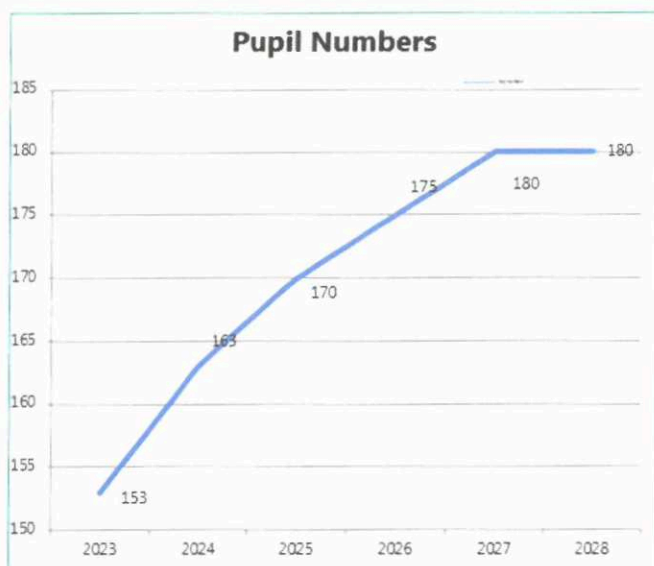
Year	Pupil Numbers	Class numbers (based on 30 pupils per class)	Actual number of classes
Actual October 2023	153	6	6
Actual October 2024	163	6	6
Estimated October 2025	170	6	6
Estimated October 2026	175	6	6
Estimated October 2027	180	6	6
Estimated October 2028	180	6	6

Hindhayes appear to be bucking the trend when we look at the Population Forecast (see attached Report). The recent Open Days were really successful and our first opportunity to celebrate the Good/Outstanding OFSTED Report as well as show off our newly refurbished Year 1 & 2 classrooms and corridor. Feedback was really positive from these sessions which we hope translated into families choosing Hindhayes for the high-quality teaching and learning they could see in the classrooms when being shown around, but also environment as well as our WRAP offer and quality food provision.

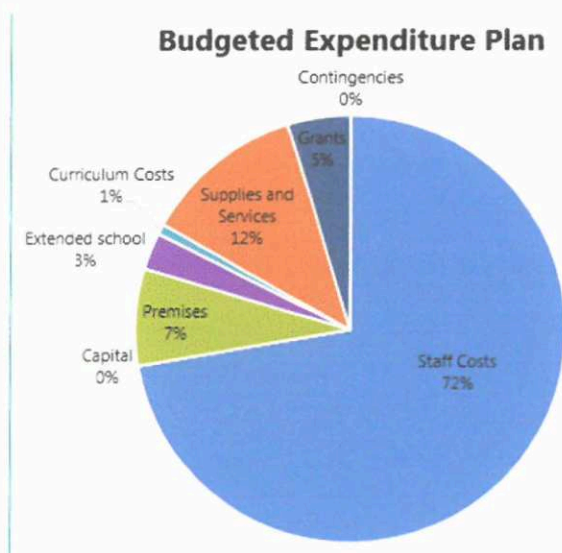


Somerset School
Population Forecast

These green shoots of recovery need to be carefully balanced with the overall financial position but are encouraging. Our funding is retrospective so the funding for 2025/26 is 163 children, then 2026/27 based on 170 children. Therefore, tackling the deficit is a long-term project.



As a school we can benchmark ourselves against other schools and we know from this that staffing on average usually accounts for 75 – 80%. As you can see Hindhayes figure is 72% when looking at the Budget Plan. Grants are also used to supplement staffing (Pupil and Sports Premium) of up to 5%. This highlights that the school are not overstaffed – See pie chart below:



Other areas to highlight are that only 1% of expenditure is spent on the curriculum and 7% on 'Premises', despite Hindhayes being an older building with large grounds. Also, there is 0% for contingency, i.e. because we are in deficit that there are no spare funds for unforeseen costs (such as heating failures, trees requiring maintenance etc.).

Pressures remain the additional 1:1 support staff needed for children who join in reception or Years 1 and 2 with additional learning and or medical support needs. The Local Authority have highlighted that this is a growing problem for Infant Schools especially and that the current funding model makes no allowance for the additional resources we need. The following are areas which have been acknowledged as areas which need addressing:

- Falling pupil numbers across Somerset (with Infant Schools impacted first)
- More children joining school with additional needs requiring 1:1 staffing
- An inadequate funding model which the LA agree needs revising – This includes a lack of adequate funding for schools with older, inefficient buildings as well larger grounds for example.
- Energy costs have stabilised but still high
- Core Offer (Buy back from LA) figures for 24/25 is still a significant cost
- Wage inflation including National Insurance changes from April '25

Just on the funding model, we know that funding is received per child and even with 163 children there is a shortfall of 17 for 6 classes (assuming 30 in each class). 17 Children at approx. £5k per child would equate to additional funding of £85,000. Our in-year deficit is £74,800 so we can see the shortfall in places has a massive impact on the financial position.

We also know that Hindhayes volunteered to have an independent financial review (report attached) in June '23. Once again, no specific areas were highlighted that hadn't already been considered or being worked towards.



SRMA LA
Deployment - Somei

Since the visit/report, several other schools have reported that they too have had SRMA's and these have highlighted very similar suggestions to the Hindhayes recommendations. *Some of these settings had to reverse cuts because they had a detrimental impact on the day to day running of the setting.* As an SLT we feel that we have put in place as many of the recommendations as possible and operate on a minimum staffing level.

For the 2025-26 Budget Plan we have made a number of staffing changes from September '25 to help reduce costs further. Some of these are through natural turnover of staff however Governors have also invoked the redundancy procedure and agreed to reduce by 0.6fte teaching days and 3 hours grounds maintenance. As an SLT we are really sadden to have to do this (see further comment later in this report). The areas to look make savings have been exhausted.

Examples include advertising vacant Teaching Assistant positions and recruiting Apprentice TA's. We have been encouraged by our recent appointments; however, this

brings its own challenges of cover for college days as well as losing experienced staff. There is also the impact it has on existing staff due to the pay scale being limited and feeling their long serve or experience isn't recognised. We absolutely value all our staff and a wider issue for many schools regarding the pay for these professional roles needs to be had.

We also know that the Local Authority Core Offer is expensive for schools for services which are bought in such as Payroll, Legal Services, tree surveys etc.

100 Year Building project – This delivered on time and on budget. Recognition needs to be given the NC Tucker who were a fantastic team to work with and went above and beyond. Also, the fundraising amounts donated and the LA for jointly funding the project and working with the school to enable us to project manage this. The overall costs were £270k and by the school project managing this itself has saved 15% in Property Services fees equating to a minimum of £40.5k. Without the school project managing this the build would have had to have been compromised by this amount (i.e. no toilets for the classrooms or similar) or found this additional money which would have been unlikely from further fundraising or support by the LA.

Other examples where we have tried to be creative and offer 'added value' are the school photos. Staff pulled together and took photos which generated £2,000 without incurring any tangible costs. Over the year and 2 sessions like this I think we could cautiously project £4,500. 2nd Hand professional equipment has been purchased so that we can make this an ongoing income generator for the school.

We are also working with the Probation Service and have set up a 'weekend support team' who offer free person power with grounds maintenance and we are already seeing the benefits of this resource.

We are also going to be able to generate an additional £4k from the Pathfinder Project where we support other schools. Kate is also DSL, SENCO and covers as many classroom staff absences for training and/or sickness. I think this demonstrates as a school; we are looking to be creative wherever possible.

As we know Somerset Council, like many councils across the country, are struggling financially. This continues to be well documented but further information can be sought here:


[Government announces Exceptional Financial Support for Somerset Council](#)

There is a £66m shortfall in the 2025/26 financial year. Significant cuts have been made to services and the Council narrowly avoided implementing a section 114, which is affectively where administrators will come in to make all decisions on any spend. Although school budgets currently remain unaffected by the budget savings, the services which schools access have and are being affected.

To highlight this message further the weekly message from Amelia Walker (Service Director Education) sent the following message (006/03/25):

A message from Amelia Walker - Service Director Education 06/03/25

 Thursday, 06/03/2025 | Somerset Council

 Share

In case you missed it, there was news coverage this week of the Department for Education's intention to publish a White Paper proposing legislative changes to the SEND system. This was rumoured behind the scenes earlier this year but has now been confirmed. This will unquestionably be controversial, and disability lobby groups have already made clear they will fight any attempt to 'water down' rights for parents of children with SEND. However, it has been made clear to the government by parliament that there must be rapid action to address the poor outcomes for children, schools, families, and local authorities. The latest estimate is that 53% of all local authorities are on track to trigger a Section 114 'bankruptcy' notice in March 2026 unless the issue with escalating High Needs deficits is firmly addressed.

Also in the finance space, Somerset Council's budget meeting took place yesterday. The Council has been granted exceptional financial support by central government, enabling a higher rate of council tax increase (7.49%) and the ability to meet the Council's revenue needs by selling assets, known as a capitalisation directive. Even though Somerset will have a higher than average council tax increase in the coming year, low increases in the past mean that average council tax levels will remain relatively low in the county. The main reasons for the pressures on the budget are due to the longstanding lack of national reform in adult and children's social care.

One of the ways that the council has succeeded in setting a budget has been the very difficult restructuring process that is only now coming to a conclusion. I would like to thank everyone in the school system who has been patient and understanding over the past four months, recognising the impact that this has had on our teams. Since the start of this half term, we have been making appointments to many roles, and this continues. The full structure and all contacts will be made available after Easter. We will endeavour to share the new management structure before the end of term.

A couple of things to draw your attention to in the bulletin: firstly, packages are live for 25/26 on the SSE website. Please do make your purchases of support.

Secondly, some new information has been added to the [Attendance Site](#). There has been a huge amount of investment in updating our approach locally to attendance. Please do familiarise yourself with these resources. Attendance support from our Education Engagement team members is being merged with the Family Intervention Service to provide a joined-up approach to prevention, as was shared at the Headteacher Briefing recently.

Schools which had a projected deficit, which include Hindhayes (*between 75 – 80% are projecting an in-year deficit*), have been asked to provide a Recovery Plan. See next section – School Budget Support Meeting:

In Summary:

At Hindhayes we have tried to work within the budget allocation but this is very challenging and isn't possible this year, especially as the previous year's deficit is added into our figures. We have looked at every area of spend within the school again and a number of valued colleagues left us/are due to leave. Kate works as SENCO and DSL as well as Headteacher and we try to be creative in all areas of work.

I have worked for Somerset Council since 1994 and seen several periods which include recruitment freezes but this feels a particularly bad time for local government funding however with the change of Government and recent positive OFSTED judgement the school are well placed to continue to increase pupil numbers.

As we know the recent OFSTED inspection rated Hindhayes as good in 4 areas and outstanding in personal development. Kate and the Team have delivered to the extent that OFSTED rate the school as highly as they do, *despite* the financial challenges. For me this goes to demonstrate what a well led and dedicated team we have. We request support from the community, seek the best deals, support numerous fundraising and bring in items from home for school to save money.

In summary the following are what I consider the key points to remember (these %'s may have increased):

- Approx. 80% of Somerset schools have an in-year deficit
- Approx. 33% of Somerset Schools have an overall deficit (meaning they have no c/f from previous years to offset their overspend)
- Infant Schools are affected by the reduction in pupil numbers first, then all through primary, then secondary.
- No other `financially viable business would be able to open with less income than expenditure.
- We know that our school (like many others) are seeing an increase in children with 1:1 support, including medical and SEN need meaning that we have additional staff to support these needs.
- In the last SRMA (independent financial audit) the recommendations were to reduce TA's, as well as deliver Forest School more cheaply. We also lost 2 days PFSA support. These `additional' but essential posts have been reviewed.
- As much is picked up by staff such as ICT & property, caretaking tasks as well as generating additional income through grants and fundraising, taking photos, building project management for example.

Despite the bleak financial position, I have every confidence that if we work as we have done this past year and in previous years, that we can reduce the deficit down further. An example of this is last financial year where we pulled our projected financial position back by £27k.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss this report with you.

School Budget Support Meeting

On Tuesday 6th February a meeting was held with the following staff:

Kate Nester – Headteacher

Louise Melia – Chair of Governors

Kate Edwards – Education Relationship Manager
Heather Good – Strategic Manager – Head of Education Leadership
Margaret Dalziel – Finance Manager (Deficit Working Group)
Mike Sales – Business Manager

This was a difficult and challenging, no stone unturned meeting with the following agenda items:

1. Overview
2. Current financial position (Month 9 Report)
3. Draft Budget Plan 2025/26
4. SMRA Report June 2023 – Recommendations and actions
5. SEND costs
6. School data – Pupil numbers/staff structure/Pupil & Staff ratio/Class structure
7. External contracts
8. Questions
9. Actions/plans

As you'll see from the agenda, every area was covered and although professional, challenging conversations were had, there was recognition that Hindhayes had worked incredibly hard to work within the budget. It was acknowledged that this wasn't possible with the level of 1:1 need identified which had contributed significantly to the deficit.

I also put my post forward for consideration for redundancy to be replaced by a LA Bursar package, for the good of the school. The costs for this support plus additional tasks such as compliance, H&S, Payroll etc. and day to day administration wouldn't generate savings and lose flexibility. However, I wanted to ensure all posts had been included as part of cost savings/redundancy.

Feedback was also that these meetings tended to generate some savings (average £40k) but none were identified because we had worked to the SMRA recommendations as well as benchmarking and therefore there were no areas that hadn't been considered.

At the start of the meeting a Recovery Plan was expected and it concluded that one couldn't be constructed as this time as there was nothing further the LA could identify to make further saving within the Hindhayes budget.

Mike Sales
09/03/25

Appendix 2: Finance Update March 2025 Governor questions and answers

- Which posts have not been filled as they became vacant and how has the work been distributed? This has been over a period of time, not just this current financial year.
- Could we have a breakdown of which roles are held by which staff? Yes, of course – I have a spreadsheet which has this information on. This would probably be something I could show you in school when convenient, rather than simply send you the document.
- How are staff deployed day to day? All staff will have their designated classes and children who they usually support. Where there is sickness of staff or children then staff can be deployed to support where needed.
- How does the school pressure the LA? We have been consistent in our communication with finance and school support and improvement staff from the LA. We have maintained the issues of children starting in school where we quickly identify 1:1 in terms of medical or SEN need for example. In all budget discussions I reiterate that the funding model doesn't take account of schools where pupil numbers have reduced, or where deficits are not as a result of poor management. We know that many schools are in a similar position.
- Is there any recognisable data yet re. the hope that the more efficient side of the building will reduce heating costs as well as resulting in higher attendance and less sickness? It's early days in terms of the heating costs but we are seeing less staff and children absent. More analysis would be needed and when time permits we can compare the 3 classes where the refurbishments have taken place comparing September to February comparing this year vs. last.
- How many children are leaving from Y2 in July '25? 53 leaving and gaining 60 in Sept – Therefore a net increase of 7 children.
- What income is generated by fundraising activities? Photos appear to show £2K (less cost of equipment) Projections for 25/26 for photos could be £5k and Fayres a similar amount at £5.7k.
- From Ms Walker's memo of last week might we be looking at lower 1:1 provision from LA? I think with the reduction in the number of Somerset Council staff with the reorganisation there is bound to be a drop in response time and/or experience. I have already seen a reduction in the support for the transfer to our new finance system Bromcom, for example.
- Is the Pupil Number chart assuming 60 per yr intake into the future? We're estimating NoR 1701 in 25. 175 – 26. 180 '27 onwards.
- Looking at the benchmark pie chart if we are spending less on staffing than other comparable schools then they are more likely to have much larger deficits - is this true? It's difficult to comment on other schools but I think benchmarking will become increasingly difficult as traditional school structures will change significantly.

Example office team doing multiple roles that office staff in other schools may not do.

- An inadequate funding model which the LA agree needs revising. Is there any suggestion that they will do anything about this in the foreseeable future? Ms. Walker's memo would suggest not. I agree – I think there's acknowledgement that when the funding model works against the school, i.e. less children = less funding but where, like Hindhayes you have the same costs and there's already a deficit it becomes a perfect storm of decreasing income and then increased costs.
- Wage inflation including National Insurance changes from April '25 – I assume that this is included in the Budget plan? Yes, the Pay Awards and NI changes have been factored into the report.
- Governors have also invoked the redundancy procedure and agreed to reduce by 0.6fte teaching days and 3 hours grounds maintenance. I agree with invoking the redundancy procedure, there is clearly little option, however, when did Governors agree to this officially? This was discussed at the meeting on 25th February (MAT/Finance Mtg update).
- What is the alternative to Core Offer? Could we get services cheaper without asking more of existing staff? I think this wouldn't generate enough savings and a lot of the systems such as Payroll, HR etc wouldn't be practical to use another provider. If we were a bigger school there would be benefits. However Scott and I have taken on more property and ICT related tasks to reduce the amount of the costs incurred previously.
- Excellent work on the building programme. It would be interesting to see the breakdown of costs involved – including office time spent on project management. Yes, no problem – Again, this might be one I can do in school easier with you.
- It would be good to hear about the Community Payback support team. No problem – Again a face to face discussion might be useful. Effectively this free labour which is overseen by a Manager from the Probation Service weekly. I collate the tasks and allocate (as and when they have the right people to do these tasks). In 3 weeks they have done some great work.
- What is the Pathfinder Project? Kate will be able to give greater detail but effectively this is where other schools will approach Hindhayes for support and guidance with best practice and advice and we are paid a grant of £5k for that support.
- What classroom cover has Kate provided in the academic year so far? Lots – I can run through the school calendar with you to highlight those dates.
- How can we promote our school to increase pupil numbers? However, are we not only 10 pupils from maximum? In which case is there any point pushing for more than the extra 10? We need to push and to grow so although we are 6 classes now if we continue to be the choice of choice and the PAN is increased and in the schools

financial and long term interests to do so then we should keep pushing. Again, more an area for Kate's expertise to discuss further.

- Thanks for the summary of the key points. Are there any % comparisons to Infant Schools? Yes, but as mentioned even our LA colleagues said benchmarking is becoming less helpful. However I do have some of the work I have done previously and very happy to share that with you. Again, suggest we do that in school though.
- You mention that no other financially viable business would be able to open with less income than expenditure. What significance does this have in considering future planning? I was referring to the funding model. Basically the LA have a limited budget but the expectation is to run and open Hindhayes and other schools with less funding than required and then challenged when the position is a deficit. It's a broken model in my opinion when pupil numbers have been declining.
- Hindhayes ethos or policy (I'm not sure which) has been not to refuse any child. Does this have to change/be modified considering the lack of resources available to accommodate these children? Does the impact on the learning of other children in the class have to be considered? I'll leave this for you to discuss with Kate.
- Is there a simple information sheet which clarifies and explains how the reduction of TA staffing, delivering Forest School more cheaply and the loss of PFSA role have been managed? There isn't a separate document to the budget plan.
- In the last financial year the projected financial position was pulled back by £27k. How was this saving made? Yes, again this is something that I can illustrate by showing you the projections at the start of the year and how we finished the year. Examples will include employing TA Apprentices opposed to non-TA apprentices. Contracts being reviewed and all spend challenged, do we actually need this, if we do can we source freely/cheaply. Additional income generation, photos/Pathfinder project etc.
- School Budget Support meeting - Are there any minutes to this meeting? It wasn't a minuted meeting. The notes I made were the only record of the conversation.