

**Attainment Scotland Fund
Evaluation: Process Evaluation
- Scottish Attainment
Challenge Local Authority
Leads Survey - Full Findings
and Supplementary
Documents, 2022/23**



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation: Process Evaluation - Scottish Attainment
Challenge Local Authority Leads Survey - Full Findings and Supplementary
Documents, 2022/23

Contents

Contents	2
Introduction	4
Methodology/data sources	5
Chapter 1: Governance and support	6
What worked well and what could be improved in the national and local governance and support with implementation of the refreshed Attainment Scotland Fund?	6
Designated Attainment Advisors	6
Wider Education Scotland.....	8
Regional Improvement Collaboratives	8
Scottish Government.....	9
Chapter 2: Funding	12
What funding was allocated through the Scottish Attainment Challenge Refreshed Attainment Scotland Fund to schools and local authorities, to what extent was it used within funds requirements and/or supplemented with other funding sources? What were stakeholders' views on the implementation of the new funding structure introduced with the Scottish Attainment Challenge refresh?	12
Attainment Scotland Funding as an additional resource	12
To what extent core or other funding was utilised to support the Scottish Attainment Challenge Mission	13
Chapter 3: Implementation	15
How did local authorities implement the Strategic Equity Fund alongside Pupil Equity Fund and Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund?	15
Implementation of Strategic Equity Funding	15
Planning for strategic use of ASF (SEF, PEF and CECYP)	17
How local authorities developed Stretch Aims 2022/23	19
Stakeholder engagement in developing stretch aims	20
Planning and implementing the use of ASF: what worked well in local authorities in 2022/23 and what could be improved	21
Chapter 4: Approaches	24
How do the approaches for equity support pupils (and parents/carers) from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds?	24
Pupil Equity Fund (PEF)	26
Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund (CECYP)	31
Chapter 5: Monitoring and Evaluation	34

How are schools and local authorities monitoring, refining and evaluating their approaches to address the poverty-related attainment gap?	34
Annex A: Scottish Attainment Challenge Logic Model	36
Annex B: Process Evaluation - Evaluation Questions and Sub-evaluation Questions.....	37
1. Governance What worked well and what could be improved in the national and local governance and support with implementation of the refreshed SAC?	37
2. Funding What funding was allocated through the SAC Refresh ASF to schools and LA's, to what extent was it used within funds requirements and/or supplemented with other funding sources? What were stakeholders views on the implementation of the new funding structure introduced with the SAC refresh?.....	37
3. Implementation How did local authorities implement the Strategic Equity Fund alongside PEF and CECYP?	37
4. Approaches How do the approaches for equity support pupils (and parents) from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds?.....	37
5. Monitoring and evaluation How are schools and local authorities monitoring, refining and evaluating their approaches to address the poverty-related attainment gap?.....	38
Annex C - SAC Leads Survey Questionnaire	39

Introduction

The Scottish Attainment Challenge refresh, launched in March 2022, included a new Mission:

'To use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap to deliver on the Scottish Government's vision of equity and excellence in education'.

A [revised Attainment Scotland Fund evaluation strategy](#), published alongside the Scottish Attainment Challenge refresh, seeks to ensure that the evaluation continues to assess progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap within the context of the new Scottish Attainment Challenge Mission and to offer insights into the operation of the refreshed programme.

Specifically, the evaluation aims to provide learning about the overall implementation of the refreshed Attainment Scotland Fund and the extent to which progress has been made towards meeting intended outcomes articulated in the Scottish Attainment Challenge Logic Model in support of the Scottish Attainment Challenge Mission.

As detailed in the Evaluation Strategy, Evaluation Objective 4 focuses on the process of implementation of the Attainment Scotland Fund:

'To provide learning on what worked well and what could be improved in the process of implementing the ASF overall, as well as a specific focus at the funding stream level in terms of the Strategic Equity Fund, Pupil Equity Fund and Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund'.

The detailed [analytical plan for Year 1 \(2022/23\) of the Attainment Scotland Fund](#) set out the evaluation priorities for the 2022/23 school year. This included a process study in the first year of implementation of the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge. The emphasis on process in Year 1 of the new Evaluation Strategy reflects the importance of gathering early insights into the operation of the refreshed programme.

This interim process evaluation report is the first output on the process theme and reports on data gathered in the first year of the evaluation. This data supports an understanding at national, regional and local level and across stakeholders of the processes and early implementation of the refreshed Attainment Scotland Fund in relation to Objective 4.

Future reporting on the implementation of the Scottish Attainment Challenge Refresh will be undertaken following further exploration at local level and wider stakeholders in Years 2 and 3 of the evaluation.

Methodology/data sources

This Report contains analysis of the responses to a survey of local authority Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) leads.¹ The Survey of Local Authority Scottish Attainment Challenge Leads was issued on 11 May and closed on 12 June 2023 and received 19 responses from across the 32 local authorities, which constitutes a 59% response rate. Survey methodology was utilised because it is a key investigation tool which can collect nuanced feedback and opinions, reported anonymously which when analysed results in key insights and learning for the ASF process evaluation strand.

Responses included seven responses from previous Challenge Authorities, five responses from local authorities previously in receipt of Schools Programme funding and seven local authorities previously in receipt of PEF only. One respondent indicated their role was Head of Service, for sixteen their Scottish Attainment Challenge lead role was undertaken as part of a wider role, and for two their Scottish Attainment Challenge lead role was undertaken as their sole remit.

The survey was administered from an online survey platform by invitation. It was promoted in advance with local authorities through communication to Directors of Education, and a range of actions were undertaken to maximise the response rate during the survey period. This included reminder emails with the survey link and an extension of the closing date from 7 to 12 June.

In previous years of the ASF evaluation, local authority views were sought via the Local Authority Survey which was circulated to Directors of Education. This survey achieved between 15 (46%) and 28 (87%) responses from across the 32 local authorities. Attainment Scotland Fund Local Authority survey data gathered during 2015 to 2021 was not published as standalone reports, but rather contributed to the annual ASF evaluation reports which brought together data from a range of sources.

Responses to the survey are presented in the following chapters on findings. This includes both responses to the closed questions included in the survey, and presents an analysis of the open text responses.² The analysis was undertaken using Excel, and utilised the funding stream previously received by the local authority as a key categorisation, namely former Challenge Authority local authorities, former local authorities in receipt of Schools Programme funding, and local authorities formerly in receipt of PEF-only.

¹ Local authority Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) Leads are local government officers in a lead role supporting strategic planning for the Challenge.

² Closed questions can be answered with scaled response, or response options such as yes or no, whereas open questions allow the respondent to provide information on what they think and feel about a subject.

Chapter 1: Governance and support

What worked well and what could be improved in the national and local governance and support with implementation of the refreshed Attainment Scotland Fund?

The Local Authority Survey included a series of open text questions inviting responses on aspects of the governance and support provided through the refreshed Attainment Scotland Fund.

Designated Attainment Advisors

Scottish Attainment Challenge Local Authority Leads who responded to the survey reported very positive experiences of working with Attainment Advisors³. This was the case across all local authority groupings (i.e. previous Challenge Authority local authorities, previous Schools Programme local authorities and previous PEF-only local authorities). Attainment Advisors were variously described as working 'very closely' with the local authority, as 'invaluable' and as providing 'excellent support'. One former PEF-only local authority respondent stated that the 'evidence (is) clear in terms of added value within the role'.

Several key aspects of the role emerged:

- The AA role as link/conduit point/single point of contact was seen as highly important. Acting as a conduit to good practice in other local authorities was highlighted as an important aspect of the role;
- Some respondents specified particular aspects of the role i.e. LA level support and input, and support to individual establishments, as well as the two elements within the Attainment Advisor role of providing both a support and challenge function: '*Crucial to provide the support and challenge required around the delivery of the SAC programme.*' (Previous Challenge Authority LA respondent);
- Universal and targeted support offered by AAs was also highlighted by one previous PEF-only local authority respondent.

Several respondents specifically described how integrated their AA was within the wider central team, as exemplified by the quote below from a respondent in a local authority previously in receipt of Schools Programme funding:

'Our AA is extremely supportive, approachable and has integrated well into our wider central team. (They have) built up excellent relationships with central team staff and a number of Head Teachers. (They have) worked with targeted schools in terms of ensuring that their PEF plans are robust and clear measures are identified from the outset.'

³ Each local authority has an assigned Attainment Advisor for the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Attainment Advisors are employed through Attainment Scotland Funding by Education Scotland. They provide a support and challenge function to their assigned local authority.

The role of Attainment Advisors in the development of stretch aims at the local authority was also positively highlighted. For example, one previous Challenge Authority respondent noted that their AA had been: *'...supportive in their role particularly with the work with Head Teachers to develop stretch aims as an iterative and collaborative process'*.

Important aspects of consistency of support and awareness of the local authority context/circumstances were highlighted. For example, one rural authority (a previous PEF-only local authority) flagged the importance of the designated AA understanding the *'unique context as a smaller rural local authority with discrete opportunities and challenges'*. Another respondent from a previous PEF-only local authority summarised their view of their designated AA support as follows:

'Excellent support. It has been so good to have a period of consistent and dedicated support from our AA. (AA) provides a strong combination of support and challenge and has been an important bridge and conduit between the LA and Ed Scot/Scot Gov'.

Variability of experience was a factor noted in a number of responses. One previous Challenge Authority local authority respondent noted that individual Attainment Advisors had brought different skills and knowledge of the local authority context. Another respondent (previously Schools Programme local authority) pointed to the highly beneficial nature of support currently received from their AA, but noted that this has not always been the case with (over time) varying degree of engagement from different assigned AAs.

In terms of areas for improvement, there were fewer comments and several indicated that this was not applicable i.e. they did not see any aspects which could be improved.

Mirroring factors outlined above in terms of the value placed on consistency and skills and experience matching local needs, a small number of respondents highlighted aspects which could be improved, such as the need for improved consistency of personnel or for improvements in AA skills and experiences matching local needs such as awareness of local contexts.

One local authority respondent (a previous PEF-only local authority) suggested improvements related to planning and reporting in terms of an advance annual plan being provided by the AA, as well as suggesting a move to bi-annual rather than tri-annual reporting:

'A plan from the Attainment Advisor would be helpful in terms of the actions to be achieved throughout the year. For many local authorities, SAC funding is reducing and activity has been merged with their core business and so there is duplication of reporting. A move to bi-annual instead of tri-annual would be proportionate'.

A small number of respondents (from local authority previously in receipt of Schools Programme and previous PEF-only local authority) pointed to a wish for more time designated for their assigned AA to work within the local authority. One described this as *'more designated time for local authority work'*. Another pointed to a desire to have more time from AA facilitated *'on the ground'* in the area, although recognised this was difficult in practice not least due to the rural nature of the local authority.

One respondent sought a broad improvement from their AA, as described below:

'(D)epth of strategic engagement, greater support and challenge, bringing more of the national best practice and guidance to the local table.'

One respondent (a previous PEF-only local authority respondent) pointed to their own lack of time to engage given their wide ranging remit as a constraint, rather than a need for improvement from the AA perspective.

Wider Education Scotland

Perspectives of wider Education Scotland (ES) support were also broadly positive across respondents. Networking meetings, drop-in sessions, access to national guidance and best practice were all highlighted in responses, including the benefit of the refreshed Equity Toolkit and resources on the National Improvement Hub. Attainment Advisors were viewed as a conduit to wider Education Scotland support, although there was one instance where it was perceived that the designated Attainment Advisor could provide an improved conduit role.

In terms of Senior Regional Advisors (SRAs), several positive comments were highlighted in responses, with descriptions of SRAs as *'extremely supportive'*; *'support via the SAC team has been really good'*, and quarterly meetings with SRAs seen as helpful.

Several responses highlighted inconsistency/variability of support from the Education Scotland regional team, alongside some suggestions for improvement. This included the potential for Education Scotland to play an enhanced role supporting understanding of cross-connections with relevant policy (such as Whole Families Wellbeing Fund); the provision of a tool to support the calculation of stretch aims; improved accessibility of website resources; further good practice sharing; and a clear understanding of wider Education Scotland roles/remits/responsibilities and how this can support systems improvement.

Regional Improvement Collaboratives

Views on the governance/support role provided by Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) were mostly positive across all local authority groupings although there were some more mixed views provided by a small number of respondents. There were specific examples provided by former Challenge Authority local authority respondents of working with early years Excellence and Equity

Leads, and a SAC regional network focused on collaborative working. Several mentioned their active engagement in their RIC, or close working relationships between the RIC and local authority heads of service.

Previous Schools Programme local authority respondents highlighted the role of RICs in sharing good practice, local knowledge and peer support. One described such work with their RIC in terms of there being *'many opportunities for collaboration and looking outward/sharing practice'*. A small number of former Schools Programme local authority respondents made specific reference to work within their RIC related to attendance, and one noted broader partnerships related to data and to Additional Support Needs (ASN):

'A number of helpful partnerships have been initiated or further developed this session. This has included partnering with RIC colleagues to focus on attendance, in addition to the valuable support of the RIC Data Coach. Links with RIC ASN colleagues have also been developed with support from our AA'.

However, the potential for duplication of activities was also flagged. One previous Challenge Authority local authority respondent noted the need to ensure that all RIC activities are *'adding value'* to and not duplicating the work of local authorities and others. There was also a degree of variability of experience evident within responses. For example, there was recognition given by some respondents of their local authority needing to engage more fully with the RIC. One respondent noted their hope that new personnel within the RIC would lead to further engagements regarding collaboration. There was also some closer alignment suggested, such as between the RIC plan and SAC:

'Scope for better co-ordination of work across the RIC partners and closer articulation with the RIC plan and SAC'.

Suggestions were also made for closer alignment between practitioners and RIC:

'We need to continue to ensure that practitioners feel connected to the work of the RIC'.

'More joint practice work – coaching in context across the RIC'.

Scottish Government

Perspectives from respondents across local authority groupings in terms of governance and support from Scottish Government, including provision of the framework and guidance, were also broadly positive. Responses variously highlighted the use of guidance and frameworks, support related to stretch aims, Scottish Attainment Challenge events and support from Scottish Government colleagues. Frameworks and guidance were viewed as *'valuable and informative'*, *'very useful and on the whole accessible'* and as *'very useful reference points'*. The effectiveness of the frameworks supporting strategic development at local authority

level was raised by one former Challenge Authority local authority respondent: *'Effective in enabling strategy development within the frameworks set out through for example the logic models'*.

Support from Scottish Government colleagues was also valued, with one respondent specifically highlighting direct support from Scottish Government officials via the ADES PIN Network as *'hugely valuable'*. Another pointed to *'constructive dialogue around the refreshed framework, particularly around stretch aims'*.

However, less positive aspects were also raised. For example, the process of setting stretch aims was viewed as *'frustrating'* by one former Schools Programme local authority respondent. The timing of updated guidance was also highlighted by respondents across local authority groupings, with some noting that delays to the issuing of crucial guidance such as for PEF had negative implications for the planning and support available for schools. For example, one respondent from a local authority previously in receipt of Schools Programme funding noted:

'Updates to recent national operational guidance came after meetings where these could have been shared and discussed, giving time for implementation of changes'.

Events arranged by Scottish Government were well received overall, although there was some differing opinion related to the format of events in terms of whether face-to-face were preferable to online or hybrid. Again, responses suggest information is sought to be shared in a more timely fashion with more notice for planned events. One former Challenge Authority respondent flagged that they would find it beneficial to have further collaborative events on refreshed Strategic Equity Fund guidance and the Scottish Attainment Challenge Mission in the coming academic session.

Some specific improvements were also suggested. For example, several respondents pointed to pressures due to changing guidance, too many and potentially conflicting demands in the system, as illustrated by the following response by a former PEF-only local authority respondent:

'Further consideration to discrete pressures/issues in a smaller, rural local authority context which is outwith officer control. Navigating the policy landscape with changing guidance and implementation pressures at time based on timescales/launch'.

One respondent provided their perception around stretch aims versus local authority targets, and the need for greater clarity and alignment of measures:

'Greater clarity over measures and alignment with Insight etc which I know is coming but also cognisance of local authority role and demands. For example SAC stretch aim v authority targets. Can't have different targets to work towards and if stretch aims are overly aspirational this means they are

likely to distinct from more realistic authority targets. Too many demands in the system'.

Chapter 2: Funding

What funding was allocated through the Scottish Attainment Challenge Refreshed Attainment Scotland Fund to schools and local authorities, to what extent was it used within funds requirements and/or supplemented with other funding sources? What were stakeholders' views on the implementation of the new funding structure introduced with the Scottish Attainment Challenge refresh?

A number of questions included in the SAC Leads Survey provide evidence in support of the Evaluation Question above on funding. This included both closed response question and open text responses.

Attainment Scotland Funding as an additional resource

A closed response question included in the survey invited respondents to indicate the extent to which they viewed ASF as being used as an additional resource. The majority (fifteen) indicated that they viewed ASF as additional resource 'to a great extent' and four 'to some extent'. One respondent did not respond.

Comments provide further understanding of the views of local authorities with regard to perceptions of ASF additionality. There was a strong statement of Strategic Equity Funding additionality in most former Challenge Authority responses, with a focus on additional staff and targeting of resources on pupils impacted by poverty. For example, one former Challenge Authority described:

'ASF is designed primarily to mitigate against the inequities caused by poverty across our LA communities. The requirement to focus on the areas in most need must be maintained as our primary goal. SEF is not used to support core budgets'.

Another former Challenge Authority respondent focused their response on additionality related to each of the funding streams, stating: *'SEF (previously 'SAC') and CECYPF funds are used to provide additional supports to those children and young people disproportionately impacted by disadvantage. PEF is 'additional' – but a focus for us is to ensure that PEF is used to improve outcomes.'* The appropriate targeting of additional resources was also a feature in responses, for example:

'We continue to fund additional staffing to all primary schools to support the development of teaching and learning and to provide targeted interventions for those children for whom poverty is a barrier to their learning'.

There was a more qualified response from one former Challenge Authority respondent. Their view was that whilst some funding was used to provide additional support in schools *'(T)here is (a) move to ensure that the plan becomes embedded in core business. However, it would not be realistic to accept that funding has not and does provide additional services'.*

Former Schools Programme local authorities who viewed ASF as additional ‘to a great extent’ highlighted the opportunity for creative approaches (*‘...it is about additionality. Striving for creative and innovative approaches to close the gap and mitigate impact of poverty’*) and broadening of the targeting linked to need (*‘...has enabled us to target a greater number of schools where need is greatest’*). One viewed SEF to have replaced some Schools Programme funding, but noted that PEF was all additional, stating that in their view *‘All PEF funding has provided additional services/staff to that already in place. SEF in Year 1 replaced an element of Schools Programme funding, which supported provision of additional services and staff.’*

Those respondents in former Schools Programme local authorities who viewed ASF as additional ‘to some extent’ highlighted the opportunity through SEF to extend central team support further to schools, as well as additionality in terms of roles funded with staff in place due to funding, such as family link workers.

All former PEF-only local authorities viewed ASF as additional ‘to a great extent’. Comments provide further explanation for this rating, for example:

‘We have operated the principle throughout that the use of PEF/SEF must be on the basis of additionality to the core provision. This has focused on providing additional staff, programmes, activities or interventions that wouldn’t otherwise have happened.’

Responses highlighted new posts created as a result of introduction of SEF. For example, in one local authority, a new Quality Improvement Officer post, six new Principal Teachers of Equity, and four new Family Support Worker posts, were highlighted, all of which were additional. Another former PEF-only local authority noted that there was additional staffing of Principal Teacher Transitions in one locality, and in another locality the introduction of an Equity Team comprising three part-time teachers, a family inclusion support worker and an equity data administrator would *‘drive forward equity agenda’*. Newly created services were also highlighted, as well as services developed with a more robust focus on children impacted by poverty, as a result of SEF.

To what extent core or other funding was utilised to support the Scottish Attainment Challenge Mission

A closed response question included in the survey invited respondents to indicate the extent to which their local authority had utilised core or other funding towards the Scottish Attainment Challenge Mission. The great majority of respondents indicated the use of core or other funding towards the Scottish Attainment Challenge Mission. For ten respondents this was to a great extent, for seven to some extent, whereas for two this was viewed as to a limited extent.

Comments indicated a range of ways in which local authorities utilised core funding, or more broadly detailed the local authority’s focus on the Scottish Attainment

Challenge Mission. Several respondents focused on the wider mission/goal/aim of the local authority rather than just the funding. Others highlighted the use of approaches such as nurture which had been adopted across the local authority.

The central importance of the SAC Mission for local authority priorities was also a core feature in several former Challenge Authority local authority responses, as illustrated by the following response extracts from three local authority respondents:

'All of our work is about improving outcomes for all children and young people, and narrowing opportunity, attainment and achievement gaps'.

'Within our local authority we see the mission as an all-encompassing approach to supporting the needs of children, families and staff using all available resources to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap'.

'The SAC mission is a council wide priority and the service plays a vital part in realising this mission therefore a range of funding is used to deliver on closing the poverty related attainment gap'.

Similarly, several former Schools Programme local authorities highlighted the importance of the Scottish Attainment Challenge in terms of local authority priorities. For example, one respondent described that *'commitment to social justice is at core of our best value approach to get the universal offer right for our children. SAC is about the additionality to accelerate progress in closing the gap and mitigate impact of poverty'.*

Core funding was also used to complement or supplement ASF, such as extending the reach of initiatives or staffing in line with the strategic approach. One respondent, for example, described their local authority approach to the use of core funding to supplement ASF as follows:

'We have supported our SEF budget further to ensure increased reach and opportunity of strategic work'.

One former PEF-only local authority supplemented the total PEF allocation for schools across the local authority to ensure sustainability and extension of the reach of its key local authority-wide PEF programme.

Several former Challenge Authority local authority respondents also highlighted the use of funding from other sources to support Scottish Attainment Challenge interventions as part of their transition from Challenge Authority funding to Strategic Equity Funding. For example:

'CECYP (funding) is used to a limited extent to support SAC interventions as we move from a Challenge authority towards SEF. We aim to move further with this as we approach further SEF reduction'.

Chapter 3: Implementation

How did local authorities implement the Strategic Equity Fund alongside Pupil Equity Fund and Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund?

The revised Evaluation Strategy included a new Evaluation Question related to implementation, as indicated above. A number of questions, both closed response and open text, were included in the SAC Leads Survey in order to provide insights into the experience of local authorities in implementation of the different strands of the Attainment Scotland Fund in the first year of its operation under the revised Scottish Attainment Challenge Mission. In particular, these questions have sought to provide an understanding of the differential experience of local authorities based on their former status with regard to receipt of Challenge Authority, Schools Programme, and Pupil Equity Funding.

Implementation of Strategic Equity Funding

The refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge introduced Strategic Equity Funding (SEF), a new strategic element of Attainment Scotland Funding provided to each of the thirty-two local authorities in Scotland⁴. Local authority respondents were invited to indicate which aspects of implementation of the Strategic Equity Funding were working well, and which could be improved, based on their experiences of implementing the Strategic Equity Fund during its first year of operation.

In terms of perceptions of what was working well in the implementation of SEF, responses varied to some extent by local authority groupings based on previous funding.

Respondents from former Challenge Authority local authorities were broadly positive about the strategic approach enabled through SEF. One commented, for example, on the *'reasonably consistent'* level of funding which the local authority continued to allocate to *'well established programmes and initiatives'*.

Former Challenge Authority local authority respondents highlighted the potential for improved longer-term planning through the introduction of the SAC Logic Model linking the national to the local authority level, budgets linked to academic sessions, improved modelling and planning, linked to sustainability, as well as a reduction of bureaucracy (e.g. in financial reporting).

This is highlighted in the comments below:

⁴ Prior to the Scottish Attainment Challenge refresh in March 2022, Attainment Scotland Funding was distributed via Challenge Authority funding to nine local authorities, Schools Programme funding to 74 schools across twelve local authorities, and via Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) distributed directly to schools. Strategic Equity Funding (SEF) replaced Challenge Authority funding and Schools Programme funding for the 2022/23 session, providing funding to each of the thirty-two local authorities. See [Pupil attainment: closing the gap - Schools - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/pupilsattainment/closing-the-gap-schools) for further information.

'The use of the logic models from national to local levels supported the implementation mode at local authority level'.

'The ability to plan long term using the Logic Model has allowed for a more strategic approach. This tied to the ability to budget across an academic session ensure better workforce planning linked to key interventions and improved decision-making'.

Those responding from local authorities previously in receipt of Schools Programme funding were also broadly positive about the strategic approach enabled through SEF. A range of positive aspects were highlighted in responses, including:

- Perception of more equitable distribution of funding and the involvement of all local authorities;
- Opportunity to respond to local need (eg *'greater flexibility to meet local demand'*);
- Four year timescale - viewed by one respondent as helpful given this supports a *'strategic vision and action plan'*;
- Improved opportunities to support children and young people most in need; and,
- Enhanced reach and increased opportunities (eg Continuing Learning and Professional Development for staff).

Very positive views were expressed by most respondents of previous PEF-only local authority respondents in terms of the funding model for SEF including all local authorities, and the associated recognition of the impact of poverty across local authorities. As one respondent noted:

'The recognition that poverty exists in all areas of Scotland was very much welcomed, along with additional resource being provided to the 32 LAs'.

The strategic nature of SEF across local authorities was also welcomed by former PEF-only local authority respondents. This was described by one respondent as providing *'increased flexibility for LAs to determine funding more strategically from the centre, especially to support schools where PEF was limited or funds required supplement'.*

The stretch aims and guidance and frameworks were also broadly welcomed by former PEF-only local authority respondents, alongside the four-year ring-fenced funding viewed as supportive, for example in terms of longer-term staffing commitments.

Two further specific positives were highlighted by previous PEF-only local authorities as a result of introduction of SEF. One respondent highlighted the development of specific projects to allow discrete issues to be addressed at locality

level. Another pointed to the creation of a 'whole family wellbeing service' focused on attendance, with family worker support provided beyond the school gate.

In terms of any areas for improvement in implementation of SEF, several did not identify any suggestions for improvement. For example, one respondent from a local authority formerly in receipt of Schools Programme funding commented '*we feel that the new funding structure is working well*'. A number of aspects for improvement were suggested and included the timing of guidance (such as PEF) issued too late, and the suggested need for further flexibility to support in-year decision-making.

The negative financial impact of the introduction of SEF on former Challenge Authorities was highlighted by several respondents of former Challenge Authorities, describing for example the negative impact on what could be taken forward within the local authority due to reduced funding under SEF, and perceptions of the increasing effect over time due to the tapering of funding. Another former Challenge Authority respondent perceived that a reduction in funding for some local authorities and an increase for others would mean that '*authorities will be at very different phases in relation to their SAC planning and priorities*'.

Also highlighted were suggestions regarding the alignment of financial and academic years, and the temporary nature of funding (and impact on staffing contracts).

There were several suggestions made regarding potential improvements to the stretch aims process. For example, two respondents from former Schools Programme local authorities suggested more guidance on stretch aims would be welcomed, and one pointed to a need for improved clarity.

Several comments were also made related to funding and reporting. Whilst funding was welcomed, one previous PEF-only local authority suggested reporting could be further streamlined through existing reporting mechanisms such as NIF. Another suggested the need for an extended funding window: '*funding window kept open to September for final pay run of the school session*'. Finally, one respondent pointed to the incremental nature of funding, stating that the '*incremental nature of funding means most funding in final year and at odds with sustainable impact*'.

Planning for strategic use of ASF (SEF, PEF and CECYP)

Respondents indicated a range of local authority structures and governance arrangements in place to support ASF funding streams, with new and existing posts, and new and existing structures for SEF, PEF and CECYP. Table 1 below provides detail on responses for each funding stream by the nineteen local authority respondents. In relation to SEF, there were 13 existing posts plus 14 new posts, and eight existing structures plus six new structures (such as governance boards). In relation to PEF, there were 12 existing posts plus 12 new posts, ten existing structures plus four new structures. For CECYP, there were ten existing posts, 15 new posts, seven existing structures and five new structures.

Table 1 Local authority structures/governance in place to support ASF funding streams

SEF	
Existing posts	13
New posts	14
Existing structures (eg governance board)	8
New structures	6
Other	1

PEF	
Existing posts	12
New posts	12
Existing structures (eg governance board)	10
New structures	4
Other	1

Other: some schools have used PEF for new posts (previously PEF-only LA)

CECYP	
Existing posts	10
New posts	15
Existing structures (eg governance board)	7
New structures	5

Local authority respondents were asked how they had planned for the strategic use of ASF funding (SEF, PEF and CECYP) in their local authority setting. A key theme in former Challenge Authority local authority responses was continuity of the existing direction (eg *'six years into the SAC journey'*) with governance arrangements and central teams already in place (eg *'strong governance processes in place'*). Respondents also flagged how their local authority had planned in terms

of the role of governance processes, boards, SAC project leads, and the range of steps undertaken to inform their strategic direction such as evaluation, contextualised analysis involving key partners, identification of priority areas and linkages with other priority areas across a local authority.

Previous Schools Programme local authority respondents also highlighted continuation from Schools Programme as a factor in planning for SEF, as well as increased use of data and increased consultation with a range of stakeholders. The establishment of planning groups to support the new policy at local authority level were also highlighted.

Former PEF-only local authority respondents described a range of aspects to support planning for the strategic use of ASF. Several described the use of collaborative approaches in place in their local authority. Specific collaborative approaches such as Participatory Budgeting were mentioned, as were collaborative approaches to needs analysis, and engagement by senior officers and headteachers e.g. to develop local authority SAC plans. One respondent had utilised a previously established collaborative mechanism for PEF allocation to support strategic planning for SEF and CECYP. Other aspects noted in former PEF-only local authority responses included:

- The appointment of key posts to support collaborative working, such as the creation of an Engagement Officer post to support collaborative working across the three funding streams; and,
- The development of tracking and monitoring processes both at local authority and school level.

How local authorities developed Stretch Aims 2022/23

The Scottish Attainment Challenge [Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress](#) introduced a requirement for local authorities to set ambitious, achievable stretch aims for progress in overall attainment and towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap in the 2022/23 academic year. Stretch aims are to be embedded in local authority education service improvement plans.

The two aspects highlighted across responses in terms of how local authorities had developed their stretch aims in 2022/23 were the role of data and the role of stakeholders. Most respondents highlighted both aspects, whilst a few focused on either data or stakeholders.

- Data included historical data, current trend data, data at local authority and at school level, comparator data (national comparator and benchmarking with comparator local authorities). Some challenges in the use of data were flagged by respondents. The importance of starting with data at the school level in order to be informed by those '*closest to the school level*' was highlighted by one respondent (former PEF-only local authority).

- Stakeholders – the range of stakeholders involved highlighted included Attainment Advisors (viewed by several respondents as providing a key role), SAC Leads, wider SAC central teams, and data analysts. Consultation with headteachers/school leaders was also recognised as key.

The importance of both ‘bottom up’ and ‘top down’ aspects of Stretch Aims development was apparent in responses. For example, the role of local authority senior leaders ensuring the development of stretch aims focused on improving learner outcomes, combined with the role of schools focused on setting attainment targets reflecting the central stretch aims.

The importance of utilising data and stakeholder consultation in tandem was also referenced. For example one former PEF-only local authority respondent described *‘working with schools and data sets there was collaborative and robust processes to the setting of our stretch aims’*.

Stakeholder engagement in developing stretch aims

A closed question on stakeholder engagement in developing stretch aims was included in the survey. In terms of stakeholder contribution to the development of stretch aims in local authorities, respondents indicated central local authority staff, headteachers, and Education Scotland were involved to a greater extent than stakeholders including pupils, parents and carers, third sector organisations/partners, families and communities, RICs or elected members.

A number of key themes emerged from comments related to stakeholder engagement in the development of stretch aims and these were broadly shared by local authority respondents regardless of former ASF funding. Factors identified as impacting on stakeholder engagement in developing stretch aims included:

- Tight timescales for the development of Stretch Aims were viewed as having limited consultation with a wider range of stakeholders. This was particularly viewed to have limited consultation with parents, pupils and families/communities (e.g.: *‘With the timescales available we were unable to consult as much as we would have wished to with parents, pupils and families/communities’*). Two respondents, both from former PEF-only local authorities, noted that elected members were only involved at a later point in the process, being invited to comment and approve stretch aims.
- Challenges associated with the new approach were also raised, such as the availability of relevant data (e.g. one former Challenge Authority local authority respondent perceived that baseline data was *‘largely irrelevant’* as a result of COVID-19), or around meaningful stakeholder engagement.

Several commented on a local authority intention to broaden engagement with stakeholders in future years. As one respondent noted: *‘(It) was challenging to meaningfully involve all stakeholders as this was a new approach. We will refine*

our approaches to involving stakeholders now that we have been through (the) first year of stretch aims’.

Planning and implementing the use of ASF: what worked well in local authorities in 2022/23 and what could be improved

SAC Leads were invited to provide their feedback on what had worked well in local authorities in planning and implementing the use of ASF in 2022/23, and what could be improved. There were a number of key themes in responses including:

- continuity and change;
- collaboration; and,
- use of data.

In terms of continuity and change, responses regarding what worked well focused both on descriptions of building on what was in place previously, existing plans and partnerships (e.g. *‘(we) will work tirelessly to ensure the funding remain highly impactful’*) as well as focusing on refreshed approaches and the benefits of this (e.g. *‘refreshed approaches that align priorities to maximise impact’*). Continuity was particularly key within former Challenge Authority local authority responses but was also a theme within some previous Schools Programme local authority responses, where aspects such as building on PEF and CECYP planning and implementation approaches (e.g. *‘well developed and embedded’*), and the opportunity through SEF to increase the scale, speed and depth of approaches (e.g. *‘(increase) pace of roll out and reach across the local authority’*) were all highlighted.

One former Schools Programme local authority provided a description of a particular approach to continuity in terms of support to schools in the local authority who had previously received Schools Programme funding:

‘...continuation of funding to (...) schools previously in receipt of SP through use of SEF. This has been used to provide additional staffing capacity to continue to increase pace of progress on closing PRAG’.

Strong collaboration and partnership working was a further theme in responses across local authority groupings. For example, *‘cross-service engagement and buy in’* as a result of ASF funding was viewed as supporting the wider council-wide mission by one former Challenge Authority local authority respondent. One respondent highlighted the engagement of all stakeholders, from learners through to elected members.

The effective use of and interrogation of data and the role of data in improving decision-making and ensuring targeting of resources to greatest need was a further theme in responses.

'The effective use of data has ensured that the use of the ASF has become more targeted. Through interrogation and analysis of the data improved decision-making has ensured that resources are deployed to where the greatest need is'.

'Focused sessions with AA and data officer to using data to inform the equity gap and then supporting with planning. Building on range of interventions for equity and (Cost of the School Day)'.

A number of other themes were noted in responses from former PEF-only local authority respondents in terms of what was working well in planning and implementing the use of ASF in their local authority, including:

- Additionality provided through the funding highlighted by one respondent;
- The setting of aspirational or ambitious targets was highlighted by a few respondents, one describing this as *'working towards [aspirational targets] in order to close identified attainment gaps'* and for another that targets had been *'ambitious to reflect (the) framework for recovery guidance'*;
- Developing a culture and climate for change.

Several respondents pointed to the combination of factors which worked well, as illustrated by the following quotes:

'Analysis of attainment data – national and virtual comparator and attainment over time. Consultation with school senior leaders'.

'Consultation with schools and then benchmarking and analysis of data to determine baselines and stretch aims'.

In terms of areas for improvement, there were several aspects highlighted by local authority survey respondents. The need for wider stakeholder engagement was a theme across respondents, but was raised specifically by a number of prior PEF-only local authority respondents. Engagement with RICs and other local authorities were noted as areas which could be improved by several former Challenge Authority local authority respondents, as was the need for improved engagement with children and young people in planning processes.

Time factors were also highlighted by several respondents. For example, one respondent noted the limited time to plan and another stated that further advance notification to plan and develop stretch aims would be appreciated in future years. The constricted timescales combined with other demands and pressures present within the education system were viewed as factors limiting time available for stakeholder engagement by one respondent.

The need for continual improvement was a theme across a number of aspects, including evolving processes for SEF noted by one former Schools Programme local authority respondent. Several referenced steps taken by their local authority

for improvement. For example, one former PEF-only local authority respondent noted they had *'revised [their] PEF plan after consultation over the session and created a PEF/data workbook that captures stretch aims for equity and excellence'*. Further improvements in terms of measurement of impact were also highlighted by several respondents, both in terms of improving tracking of interventions for impact overall as highlighted by a former Challenge Authority local authority respondent, and specifically improving measurement of PEF impact at the school level as highlighted by a former Schools Programme local authority respondent.

Addressing challenges related to staffing and to underspend were also highlighted, for example focusing on recruitment to posts in a more timely manner, and addressing the impact of staffing on underspend as well as ensuring greater clarity related to underspend.

Planning for sustainability as funding reduces was highlighted by a few respondents, such as one former Schools Programme local authority respondent who pointed to addressing reductions in allocations to previous Schools Programme schools which had led to the need to *'consider how best to grow our SEF resources'*.

Chapter 4: Approaches

How do the approaches for equity support pupils (and parents/carers) from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds?

The evaluation has a specific focus on the approaches developed and utilised by local authorities to closing the poverty-related attainment gap, as indicated by the inclusion of the evaluation question above, supported by a number of sub-evaluation questions (see Annex B).

Local authority respondents were invited to respond to several related questions on the theme of the approaches utilised in their local authority in 2022/23, in the context of the introduction of the revised Scottish Attainment Challenge and Strategic Equity Funding alongside Pupil Equity Funding and Care Experienced Children and Young People Funding.

Firstly, the survey invited responses regarding the extent of change in approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap within individual local authorities in 2022/23, through a closed question as well as open text responses to provide further explanation.

All nineteen respondents indicated that there had been a change in their local authority approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap in 2022/23, with four indicating the approach had changed 'to a great extent' and the remaining fifteen indicating that the approach had changed 'to some extent'. There were differences in terms of responses to this closed question depending on former receipt of ASF (Challenge Authority, Schools Programme, PEF-only) which are described in the section below.

Amongst former Challenge Authority local authority respondents, only one of the seven respondents indicated there had been a great extent of change in their approach. For the remaining former Challenge Authority local authority respondents who indicated the approach had changed to some extent, a number of themes were apparent in their responses, including:

- An emphasis on continuing with workstreams despite reduced funding to the local authority under SEF as opposed to through Challenge Authority funding;
- Impact of cost-of-living crisis on families; and,
- Ongoing impact of COVID-19, such as impact on attendance.

Whilst one former Challenge Authority local authority respondent highlighted the opportunity provided through SEF for longer term planning, another focused strongly on the challenges of funding reduction, noting significant challenges and redeployment of staff which would be particularly apparent in 2023/24 rather than 2022/23 as a result of utilisation of PEF to maintain additionality across most schools during the current year. The ongoing challenges of COVID-19 and cost-of-living were also highlighted in the context of funding reduction:

'The understanding of the impact of COVID and the devastating cost of living crisis have contributed to the poverty related attainment gap and as such we are working further within our communities with interventions designed specifically to support families to reengage with establishments and themselves'.

For those respondents from local authorities previously in receipt of Schools Programme funding, there was a considerable change in approach for those schools previously in receipt of Schools Programme funding highlighted, as result of the withdrawal of this funding at the school level and the introduction of SEF at the local authority level. Respondents from local authorities previously in receipt of Schools Programme funding also referenced the local authority level funding as enabling a strategic approach and support across authority, a more focused approach and a mechanism to ensure effective targeting, as illustrated in the following responses:

'SEF has enabled us to introduce authority level support for literacy, numeracy and HWB, this has allowed for a more focused approach to ensure the right children/young people and schools are targeted'.

'As a Schools Programme we had very limited LA funding so now have a complete strategy to support SEF'.

Respondents from local authorities formerly in receipt of Schools Programme funding highlighted the adoption of a range of approaches. Several had opted to continue to provide funding through other ASF (SEF or PEF) to schools previously in receipt of Schools Programme funding, at least for the 2022/23 year. One described that this was the case for 2022/23 but that from 2023/24 onwards a place-based approach would be introduced through SEF. As with former Challenge Authority local authorities, increased levels of need post COVID and as a result of the cost of living crisis were highlighted by former Schools Programme local authority respondents.

Collaboration was also a theme, both across services (such as with Community Learning and Development and anti-poverty teams), and SEF driving forward a specific collaborative focus (such as cost of living, attendance), as illustrated by the following quote:

'Collaborative projects had been driven specific areas forward eg attendance, interrupted learners. This has been due to SEF'.

School attendance was specifically raised as an area of focus for SEF funding due to attendance patterns post COVID by several respondents.

Of those former PEF-only local authority respondents, only one indicated a great extent of change of approach, with the remaining six indicating that there had been change in their approach to some extent. SEF was viewed as providing a central resource in addition to PEF at school level, and enabling the development of

strategies. There were descriptions of forward planning with a broadening range of interventions, utilisation of resources such as Education Scotland's Equity Toolkit, and the National Improvement Hub, and the development of oversight bodies for SEF. One former PEF-only local authority highlighted a '*sharpened focus on SAC agenda*'.

Approaches introduced as a result of SEF were viewed by several former PEF-only local authorities as complementing/supplementing what was being done through PEF through the allocation of funding to the central local authority to support work. For example, one described that '*with the introduction of SEF, a small amount of additional money is available to supplement existing PEF funded teams and interventions*'). Another former PEF-only local authority respondent described that its approach continued with SEF supplementing some of the work which was being developed by schools. As with former Challenge Authorities and former Schools Programme authority respondents, the introduction of SEF alongside the ongoing context of cost of living and ongoing COVID impact was a key feature influencing approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap raised by former PEF-only respondents, as illustrated by the quote below:

'The cost of living crisis has made our schools look differently at use of PEF and required family supports now required, with change of focus as we look to next year's planning. Covid-19 continues to have an impact, particularly in relation to developmental gaps, social and emotions, mental health and wellbeing and behaviours expressed by a number of children and young people. Schools continue to look to work with children and families in order to support identified needs. Where there has been some flexibility in use of PEF during the pandemic years and difficulty for a number of schools in recruiting staff to key roles, schools are now planning for the future using a range of wider interventions supported by equity toolkit/NIF and wider good practice examples'.

Pupil Equity Fund (PEF)

The SAC Leads Local Authority Survey included a range of questions designed to elicit respondents' views relating to Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). This included a number of open text responses and one closed response.

Firstly, respondents were invited to provide their perspective of how their local authority supports schools to effectively and fully invest PEF. Across local authority responses, there was evidence of established and routine support as well as specific/bespoke support provided by local authorities to schools. Respondents described embedded processes, further developments and increased intensity of support, such as through newly created processes and newly appointed posts such as new Education Officer or Quality Improvement Officers.

The proportionality of support emerged as a factor in a few responses, and was related to the size or scale of both the local authority and the size of the central local authority team supporting SAC. Several respondents described specific posts

for PEF support such as a designated PEF officer, whereas for others this was part of a postholder's role. Table 2 below lists aspects of support mentioned by local authority respondents. All respondents mentioned more than one aspect to the support provided.

Table 2: Local authority support to schools to effectively and fully invest PEF

Local authority level PEF guidance developed for schools Regular meetings/liaison with schools and headteachers with a range of central officer staff such as dedicated PEF officers, SAC leads, equity and excellence leads, education officers and QIOs PEF clinics and one-to-one drop ins Targeted meetings and support visits with headteachers Quality assurance processes AA support and challenge including one-to-one support – and role of AAs in tandem with SAC Lead SAC/PEF frameworks in place eg new PEF planning tools Support from dedicated PEF officers Sharing PEF guidance with senior leaders CLPL with headteachers Sessions for new headteachers Financial monitoring (eg monitoring monthly spending forecasts) HR, financial and CLPL support Governance/oversight boards and bodies for scrutiny of plans and outcomes (eg ASF Governance Boards) Tri-annual reporting – opportunity for dialogue with AAs

Local authority respondents were invited to indicate their view of what support to schools in planning for and use of PEF was working well, and what could be improved. Mirroring the list outlined in Table 2 above, what works well was viewed as support provided to schools in a number of ways, including through structures and processes, new tools, through standardised reporting linked to school improvement planning and through relevant post-holders, to support linkage between central level and schools and encourage collaboration with relevant local authority services such as providing links to finance and HR support.

Templates and monitoring tools including new tools were frequently highlighted. Four former Challenge Authority local authority respondents highlighted different templates/monitoring tools including:

- PEF school improvement plan template;
- MS Form for school level record of spend;
- Tool to support collaborative planning between central team and headteachers;
- Tool to support tri-annual tracking in partnership with School Business Officers.

The role of new tools in supporting improved analysis was referenced, as illustrated by the following quote:

'(The) new PEF planning tool has allowed better analysis and linking PEF spend to interventions. In turn this has allowed greater analysis at central level plus identification of support required'.

Governance structures such as PEF oversight boards were also noted as working well by several respondents. One respondent, for example, stated that *'The PEF governance board has been recently re-established to ensure that the new guidance is implemented effectively. This previously worked well as it included a range of colleagues from procurement, HR, finance and education'*.

Networks to support collaboration were a further element of support viewed across respondents as working well, and included examples such as equity networks, PEF networks, and headteacher conferences. One respondent pointed to a peer support and challenge model, whilst another highlighted a collaborative approach to pool PEF resources across the local authority.

A balance between school autonomy and local authority support and challenge, and of both standardised/routine and bespoke support was also a theme raised. This was described as follows by one respondent of a local authority formerly in receipt of Schools Programme funding:

'Autonomy for schools but within a framework ... central team act as critical friends in supporting the formulation of plans'.

In terms of respondents' views of where local authority support to schools in planning for and use of PEF could be improved, responses differed across local authorities largely depending on previous ASF funding received.

Several former Challenge Authority local authority respondents highlighted actions which had been put in place for 2023/24 or which were forthcoming. For example, one former Challenge Authority local authority respondent noted actions developed for 2023/24 including a spending template, alongside an impact review put in place by the relevant oversight/scrutiny body, with a school review system now in place to include significant element of PEF scrutiny. Another former Challenge Authority local authority respondent pointed to a process of ongoing financial review which was being explored to ensure less slippage of PEF. Other improvements described by former Challenge Authority local authorities included an improved finance system, as well as a number of continual improvements such as sharing practice between schools, tracking of PEF impact and undertaking contingency planning.

Several local authority respondents formerly in receipt of Schools Programme funding did not identify any areas for improvement, whilst the remainder raised a number of areas for improvement including around increased focus on learner voice, and the further development of school staff capacity related to use of data and reduction of underspend.

Ongoing needs or improvements in progress were highlighted by former PEF-only local authority respondents. This included improved planning and reporting, a call for more timely introduction of PEF guidance from Scottish Government in order to enable local authority support to schools, further improvements in the use of data, support with financial planning, sharing of good practice and continued developments in terms of new tools for monitoring and evaluation. The quotes below provide an illustration of such aspects:

'Better and more strategic/systemic use of data to track key measures'.

'Planned data analysis sessions to strengthen measurement of PEF interventions using qualitative and quantitative means'.

'Mid-year reflections and analysis built into new PEF workbook and new evaluation format introduced. Greater sharing of good work across school settings and directorate'.

Local authority respondents expressed a range of views related to how schools in their local authority had invested PEF in 2022/23. Although this varied to some extent across local authority groupings, views were overall broadly positive. Factors highlighted included the robust use of data and evidence to support decision-making on spend (e.g. *'a robust contextual analysis, resulting in appropriate targeted interventions to address gaps and barriers'*), the importance of effective targeting and the investment of PEF based on local needs. However, there was also a recognition where this could be improved and/or where there was a clearer focus developing. Some respondents were positive about opportunities through the stretch aims approach for increased evidence of impact to emerge.

Several respondents, from local authorities formerly in receipt of Challenge Authority or Schools Programme funding, expressed the viewpoint that there continued to be variability amongst schools suggesting that whilst most schools were viewed as investing effectively, some were in need of additional support and others will need more focused support. There was also a recognition by several local authority respondents of the need for wider consultation with learners and parents, as well as a continued need for support and advice around tracking impact of interventions. For example, one former PEF-only local authority respondent noted:

'Our schools know the pupils requiring support very well, and the areas that need improvement. They have invested money to target this improvement. They continue to need support and advice around tracking impact of interventions'.

A number of areas of challenge were also identified by individual respondents, including the extent to which PEF was targeted at children and young people impacted by poverty versus universal approaches, schools experiencing recruitment challenges for some posts, making PEF spend more difficult, and the need for more sharing of impactful interventions.

The majority of local authority respondents were of the view that there is sufficient support for local authorities and schools to effectively and fully invest their PEF, whilst several did not think there was sufficient support or were unsure. Comments provided offer further explanation in support of respondent views.

For those who responded 'yes' they perceived there was sufficient support for local authorities and schools, several former Challenge Authority local authority respondents as well as several former PEF-only local authorities provided further comment, alongside one respondent from a local authority formerly in receipt of Schools Programme funding. Aspects highlighted included the importance of addressing PEF spend decisions at the local level, overcoming barriers such as procurement and provider access, use of updated PEF guidelines, the importance of established structures and systems and the importance of SAC networking events.

One specific recommendation for support came from a respondent of a local authority formerly in receipt of Schools Programme funding, recommending the need for further relevant examples particularly regarding PEF in rural settings. A further specific recommendation was the need to keep PEF spend '*high on the agenda through accountability and reporting linking to senior officers*', given the multiple demands on schools.

The smaller group of respondents who were unsure about whether there was sufficient support or did not perceive there to be sufficient support also provided a number of specific individual points of feedback. One respondent from a former Schools Programme local authority, suggested that the provision of standardised tools for local authorities would be welcome rather than being required to develop these at local authority level. The delay in the refreshed PEF guidance and perceptions of the negative impact of this was noted by one respondent from a former Challenge Authority local authority, stating: '*If changes are required to the PEF approach, authorities and schools need time and resource in order to deliver on these changes.*' Finally, one former PEF-only local authority respondent highlighted their perspective of a need for increased accountability for PEF '*in line with SEF principles*'.

Reporting arrangements for schools to report on their PEF plans were broadly viewed as sufficient. Standards and Quality (S&Q) reporting was largely viewed as an established and appropriate route and one which minimises bureaucracy:

'Reporting as part of the Standards & Quality report minimises bureaucracy and ensures that schools see the relevance of PEF.'

Responses also pointed to recognising the importance of utilising existing planning and reporting cycles in school – School Improvement Plans (SIP) and Standards and Quality (S&Q) reporting – whilst several former PEF-only local authority respondents pointed to improvements to SIP and S&Q reporting and formats noted for current session. In addition, one respondent viewed Standards and Quality

reporting as linking core local authority and additional funding, and ensuring that schools see relevance of PEF:

'The use of the Standards and Quality reports ensures that there is a link between the core offer from the authority and the additional funding that supports tackling the poverty related attainment gap'.

The role of Education Managers and Officers was also suggested by one respondent as important, enabling *'professional dialogue'* with headteachers to assist in reporting.

Several respondents had created bespoke PEF reporting mechanisms within their local authority. One former PEF-only local authority respondent noted this as part of improved Standards and Quality reporting as follows: *'Tightened (reporting) up this session as was too ad hoc. Now part of SQ report and next session built into new PEF workbook'.*

Attainment Advisor reporting via Tri-annual Reporting was seen as positive by several, although one respondent suggested a greater focus in Tri-annual Reports on PEF could be helpful.

Whilst there were predominantly positive views expressed regarding reporting, it was acknowledged by one respondent that reporting is potentially challenging for schools in receipt of smaller amounts of PEF.

Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund (CECYP)

The SAC Leads Local Authority Survey included a set of three questions designed to elicit respondents' views relating to Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund (CECYP)⁵. These related to the extent to which the CECYP Fund was viewed to have supported strategic decision-making to improve attainment or outcomes for care experienced children and young people within the respondent local authority, and what was perceived as working well/could be improved in working collaboratively across services including social work to plan and implement the CECYP.

All those who responded were of the view that the CECYP Fund had supported strategic decision-making to improve attainment or outcomes for care experienced children and young people within the respondent local authority⁶, with an equal proportion of respondents viewing this as 'to a great extent' and 'to some extent'.

⁵ Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund provides funding to local authorities to enable them to target initiatives, activities, and resources that will improve the educational outcomes of this group of disadvantaged young people - See [Pupil attainment: closing the gap - Schools - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot) for further information.

⁶ All apart from one who did not respond to this question. There were therefore 18 responses to this question rather than 19.

Perceptions of what was working well in working collaboratively across services including social work to plan and implement the CECYP were broadly shared across respondents. Collaboration, joint planning, and partnerships were highlighted in all responses. Dedicated postholders such as Virtual Headteacher/Virtual School was highlighted in particular as a way which is supporting joint working and supporting capacity building.

‘(Virtual Headteacher) has established positive relationships across directorates working together for CECYP’.

‘... closer alignment of services to improve outcomes for CECYP. It has also supported staff capacity building across establishments’.

Several other points were raised, including a recognition of the shared responsibility between heads of social work and education for CECYP as key, as well as the importance of alignment of CECYP with related strategic priorities relating to care experienced children and young people such as The Promise. A few respondents (both former Challenge Authority local authority and former Schools Programme local authority) perceived that the Virtual Headteacher approach was an important mechanism in terms of linkages to other strategic priorities such as The Promise.

Table 3 below provides examples of collaborative working in relation to CECYP gathered from responses⁷.

Table 3 – Examples of collaborative working in relation to CECYP

- (1) Service collaboration: Services working closely together though a project board which works to ensure all leavers have access to a positive destination.
- (2) Governance and scrutiny arrangements: Multi-agency governance board established to plan and implement CECYP Fund. This was viewed as a strength due to *‘a range of partners com(ing) together to review data and ensure the approaches are directed to the right area’.*
- (3) Creation of new posts: Establishment of new Quality Improvement Officer Care Experience post. This was viewed as helping to *‘ensure (the) strategic action plan engages relevant partners and is driven by (a) shared commitment to The Promise’.*

A number of separate issues were raised across local authority respondent groupings in terms of aspects which could be improved in working collaboratively across services including social work to plan and implement the CECYP. Points raised by respondents of former Challenge Authority local authorities included a suggestion of the need for a review of the CECYP work plan in relation to SEF and the wider local authority services to ensure no duplication; the need for a further focus on Continuing Professional Development to ensure training for all stakeholders in available supports for care experienced children and young people

⁷ All examples are from former Challenge Authority local authority responses.

and their families; and further focus on the evaluation of approaches and evidencing of impact related to the CECYP Fund in closing the poverty-related attainment gap for care experienced children and young people.

Respondents from former Schools Programme local authorities raised a separate set of points in terms of areas for improvement, highlighting funding consistency, collective responsibility, ensuring effective collaboration between Virtual Headteachers and wider aspects of service provision such as Corporate Parenting and improving staff capacity across all related services to ensure consistent support.

The need for ongoing improvement in collaboration across services relating to care experienced children and young people was also raised by several former PEF-only local authority respondents, one of whom suggested the need for increased involvement of the third sector in planning. Several former PEF-only local authority respondents also noted that the forthcoming appointment of Virtual Headteacher posts in their local authority were anticipated to bring further improvements (e.g. to *'support and bridge our services'*, and to *'provide sharper focus and time'*).

Chapter 5: Monitoring and Evaluation

How are schools and local authorities monitoring, refining and evaluating their approaches to address the poverty-related attainment gap?

The refreshed ASF evaluation strategy seeks to provide insight into monitoring and evaluation in relation to the ASF, with the inclusion of the above evaluation question. As a result, two questions were included in the SAC Leads survey to explore this aspect of local authority perspectives on ASF.

The first question sought respondents' views of how local authorities monitor and evaluate approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Descriptions of approaches were provided across local authority respondent groupings. This included:

- Effective scrutiny through established forums/scrutiny structures. Examples included a monthly SEF Board; Children and Young People Impact Forum. Regular reporting to elected members was also recognised as important.
- A range of approaches to the use of data and evidence, including the use of data on tracking interventions. For example, one respondent highlighted the existence of a local authority data team which provides monitoring and evaluation support both to the central local authority team and to individual schools. Another respondent highlighted the existence of a central team quality improvement officer post with core responsibility for monitoring and evaluation. Also highlighted by one respondent was a specific data-driven self-evaluation approach.
- Linking data and evidence and tracking with effective scrutiny. A key role was noted by one respondent for SAC Leads in terms of collaboration, use of tracking data and effective scrutiny.

Most former Challenge Authority local authority respondents highlighted that there was more than one aspect to their local authority approach, such as data and evidence plus scrutiny/oversight. There was more limited evidence of scrutiny structures highlighted by respondents of local authorities in receipt of former Schools Programme funding and by respondents of former PEF-only local authorities than by former Challenge Authority local authority respondents.

The second monitoring and evaluation-related question sought to provide insights into how local authorities support schools to monitor and evaluate their approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap. A range of approaches to support schools to monitor and evaluate approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap were described by local authority respondents, including generic approaches such as school improvement support and challenge visits, data support and data discussions, professional dialogue between SAC Lead, AA and headteachers, feedback provided on school level plans and reports, and CLPL to support tracking and reporting on impact.

A number of specific approaches were also described by several respondents, including former Challenge Authority local authority respondents and respondents from authorities previously in receipt of Schools Programme funding. This included the provision of specific tools to support schools, such as bespoke local authority dashboards and monitoring/tracking toolkits. One former PEF-only local authority respondent highlighted a local authority level toolkit. Several other elements of support were also highlighted by individual respondents, including:

- Support from specific postholders (eg QIEO);
- One-to-one bespoke support on planning and reporting on impact;
- School review system;
- School quartile approach, involving focused discussions with school leaders on SIMD1 cohorts; and,
- Coaching in context.

The survey did not seek to gather respondent views on the relative effectiveness of different monitoring and evaluation approaches, but rather to develop understanding of the types of monitoring and evaluation approaches and activities which are being undertaken at local authority level both in monitoring and evaluating approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap and in supporting schools to undertake such activity. Further exploration of monitoring and evaluation approaches and processes, and stakeholder perceptions of their relative effectiveness at local authority and school level, are suggested as an important next step.

Annex A: Scottish Attainment Challenge Logic Model

The Scottish Attainment Challenge Logic Model illustrates, at a high level, the activities that will lead to the short, medium and long term outcomes designed to achieve the Scottish Attainment Challenge mission ‘to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap’.

The Scottish Attainment Challenge Logic Model can be accessed at:

[tackling-poverty-related-attainment-gap-theory-change-scottish-attainment-challenge-logic-model.pdf \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultations-petitions/uploads/tackling-poverty-related-attainment-gap-theory-change-scottish-attainment-challenge-logic-model.pdf)

Annex B: Process Evaluation - Evaluation Questions and Sub-evaluation Questions

1. Governance

What worked well and what could be improved in the national and local governance and support with implementation of the refreshed SAC?

- What worked well and what could be improved in the national organisation, governance and support of the ASF?
- What worked well and what could be improved in the regional (SRA areas) governance and support of the ASF?
- What worked well and what could be improved at a local authority level?
- What worked well and what could be improved in the governance and support across SEF, PEF and CECYP?

2. Funding

What funding was allocated through the SAC Refresh ASF to schools and LA's, to what extent was it used within funds requirements and/or supplemented with other funding sources? What were stakeholders views on the implementation of the new funding structure introduced with the SAC refresh?

- How much funding did local authorities and schools receive through ASF funding streams (SEF, PEF and CECYP)?
- How did local authorities and schools utilise resources from ASF funding streams towards equitable outcomes of raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap?
- What worked well, and what could be improved on, in the implementation of the new funding structure introduced with the SAC refresh? (eg multi-year funding)
- To what extent was the funding viewed as an additional resource?
- How did local authorities utilise core/other funding to support the SAC mission?

3. Implementation

How did local authorities implement the Strategic Equity Fund alongside PEF and CECYP?

- How did local authorities develop Stretch Aims and identify local targets?
- How/to what extent did schools and other stakeholders contribute to the development of Stretch Aims and identification of local targets?
- How did local authorities include plans within Stretch Aims (more accurate to consider as SEF?) on how all ASF funding streams are to be used strategically?

4. Approaches

How do the approaches for equity support pupils (and parents) from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds?

- How did LAs and schools develop their approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap?
- How was the focus of approaches determined? To what extent were selected approaches targeted versus universal? If interventions were not targeted at pupils (and

families) from the most deprived backgrounds, why was this?

- To what extent did the focus change as a result of changing circumstances (impact of COVID-19 and recovery; cost of living crisis)?
- How and to what extent did local context shape approaches?
- To what extent was there a continuation or adaptation of existing approaches?

5. Monitoring and evaluation

How are schools and local authorities monitoring, refining and evaluating their approaches to address the poverty-related attainment gap?

- How did LAs and schools monitor and evaluate their approaches?
- How did LAs and schools use monitoring and evaluation evidence to refine their approaches?

Annex C - SAC Leads Survey Questionnaire

The text below forms the process⁸ questions included in the Scottish Attainment Challenge Local Authority Leads Survey 2022/23.

All questions with an asterisk (*) were required to be answered.

1) Your role within the Scottish Attainment Challenge

* Please select the option which best describes your role in relation to the Scottish Attainment Challenge

(Scottish Attainment Challenge lead role as sole remit/Scottish Attainment Challenge lead role as part of wider remit/Other)

Your local authority

2) * Which ONE of the following describes the Attainment Scotland Funding received by your local authority PRIOR to the Scottish Attainment Challenge refresh?

(Challenge Authority and Pupil Equity Funding/Schools Programme and Pupil Equity Funding/Pupil Equity Funding only)

Governance and Support

We would like to ask about your experiences of governance and support in relation to aspects of the Attainment Scotland Fund. This includes specific roles, bodies and wider resources including guidance provision.

Please use the boxes below to provide your written response.

3) What aspects work well in relation to your local authority engagement with the following:

Designated Attainment Advisor

Wider Education Scotland support (including National Improvement Hub, Equity Toolkit)

Regional Improvement Collaborative

Scottish Government (including Scottish Attainment Challenge Framework and policy guidance)

4) What aspects could be improved in relation to your local authority engagement with:

Designated Attainment Advisor

Wider Education Scotland support (including National Improvement Hub, Equity Toolkit)

Regional Improvement Collaborative

Scottish Government (including Scottish Attainment Challenge Framework and policy guidance)

⁸ A series of questions related to the thematic strand of the evaluation were included in the survey. These are not included as these are reported on separately.

Funding and resources

5) What worked well in relation to implementation of the Strategic Equity Fund, the new funding structure introduced with the Scottish Attainment Challenge refresh in 2022/23?

6) What could be improved in relation to implementation of the Strategic Equity Fund, the new funding structure introduced with the Scottish Attainment Challenge refresh in 2022/23?

Routing to Questions 7, 8 or 9 dependent on response to Question 2

Challenge Authority and Pupil Equity Funding: 7) What was the impact (if any) in your local authority following the change from Challenge Authority to Strategic Equity Funding?

Schools Programme and Pupil Equity Funding: 8) What was the impact (if any) in your local authority following the change from Schools Programme to Strategic Equity Funding?

Pupil Equity Funding only: 9) What was the impact (if any) in your local authority of the introduction of Strategic Equity Funding?

10) * To what extent is Attainment Scotland Funding used as an additional resource (ie to provide additional services/staff to that already in place) in your local authority?

(To a great extent/to some extent/to a limited extent/not at all)

11) Please comment

12) * To what extent does your local authority utilise core and/or other funding to support the Scottish Attainment Challenge Mission?

(To a great extent/to some extent/to a limited extent/not at all)

13) Please comment

Implementation of Attainment Scotland Fund

We are interested in collating information on local authority structures and posts created to implement and deliver ASF-supported plans in 2022/23.

14) Which of the following local authority structures and posts are in place to support implementation of the ASF funding streams? (Please tick all that apply)

For each funding stream (SEF/PEF/CECYP)

Existing posts/newly created posts/existing structures (eg governance board)/newly created structures (eg governance board)/other (please describe)

15) How has your local authority planned for the strategic use of Attainment Scotland Funding (SEF, PEF and CECYP)?

16) Please briefly describe how your local authority developed stretch aims for 2022/23?

17) To what extent did the following stakeholders contribute to the development of stretch aims in your local authority?

(To a great extent/to some extent/to a limited extent/not at all)

Headteachers

Classroom teachers and other practitioners

Pupils

Parents/carers

Third sector organisations/partners

Families and communities

Regional Improvement Collaborative

Education Scotland

Central local authority officers

Elected members

18) Please comment

19) What has worked well in planning and implementing the use of Attainment Scotland Funding in your local authority in 2022/23?

20) What could be improved in planning and implementing the use of Attainment Scotland Funding in your local authority in 2022/23?

Approaches to Closing the Poverty-related Attainment Gap

21) * To what extent has the approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap changed in your local authority in 2022/23?

(To a great extent/to some extent/to a limited extent/not at all)

22) Please explain (with reference to the introduction of SEF, and wider context eg COVID-19; cost of living).

Pupil Equity Fund (PEF)

23) Please briefly describe how your local authority supports schools (including special schools) to effectively and fully invest Pupil Equity Funding?

24) What works well in how your local authority supports all schools with planning for and use of Pupil Equity Fund?

25) What could be improved in how your local authority supports all schools with planning for and use of Pupil Equity Fund?

26) What are your views on how schools, including special schools, have invested their PEF during 2022/23?

27) Do you think there is sufficient support for local authorities and schools to invest PEF effectively and fully?

(Yes/No/Unsure)

28) Please comment

29) What are your views of the arrangements in place for schools, including special schools, to report on their PEF plans?

Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) Fund

30) To what extent has CECYP Fund supported strategic decision-making to improve attainment or outcomes for care experienced children and young people in your local authority?

(To a great extent/to some extent/to a limited extent/not at all)

31) What has worked well in working collaboratively across services including social work to plan and implement the CECYP?

32) What could be improved in working collaboratively across services including social work to plan and implement the CECYP?

Monitoring and Evaluation

33) Please describe briefly how your local authority monitors and evaluates approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap?

34) How does your local authority support schools to monitor and evaluate their approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap?