

**Minutes of the Schools Forum – 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

**Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams and YouTube**

**Status: Agreed**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Establishment</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Gill Eatough (GE) <b>Chair</b>	Learning Community Trust	Academies (Special)
Laura Arscott (LA)	Telford College	16 – 19 Providers
Christobel Cousins (CC)	Lilleshall Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Newport Cluster
Yvonne Crilly (YC)	Woodlands Primary School	Maintained Primaries – South Cluster
Heather Davies (HD)	The Bridge Special School	Maintained Special Schools
Mark Davis (MD)	St Peter’s Bratton Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Wellington Cluster
Darren Lennon (DL)	Linden Centre PRU	Maintained PRUs
Simon Wellman (SW)	Director Education & Skills	Representative of the Executive Director of Children’s services
Natalie Bevan (NB)	Service Delivery Manager SEND	Representative of the Executive Director of Children’s services
Tim Davis (TD)	T&W Group Accountant	Representative of the Director of Finance
Andy Wood (AW)	T&W Senior Accountant - Schools	Representative of the Director of Finance

**1. Apologies - AW.**

1.1 Apologies were received from:

Shirley Reynolds – Cabinet Member Education & Skills.  
Rachel Cook – Newdale Primary School.  
Sarah Roberts – High Ercall Primary School.  
Penny Hustwick – ABC Day Nurseries.  
Claire Whiting – Redhill Academy

1.2 GE welcomed YC to the Forum representing the South Cluster.

**2. Minutes of the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021 meeting and matters arising - GE**

2.1 The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting. The minutes can be found at the link:

[January 2021 approved minutes.](#)

2.2 TD advised that whilst the budget paper presented at the January 2021 stated that the government policy was that there would be no pay rise for public sector employees NJC staff have now been offered a pay rise of 1.5%. TD pointed out that this is due to local authority pay policies being outside of the remit of central government.

### **3. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) outturn 2020/21 - TD.**

3.1 TD talked the Forum through the main points of the paper which can be found at the link below:

[DSG Outturn 2020-2021 paper.](#)

3.2 TD spoke on the work done in the high needs area by SW & NB which is now reflected in the surplus balances reported for FY2020-21. The importance of the LA and settings working collegiately was emphasised, as such a collective approach helps significantly to manage high needs budget constraints.

3.3 Concerning the increase in balances held within maintained schools GE commented that most of the balances were held within the primary sector as only two maintained secondary schools remain.

3.4 CC commented that Lilleshall's, and probably many other schools, balances increased in part due to late receipt of Covid grants which have been carried forward for spending this year.

3.5 MD stated that St Peter's, Bratton clamped down on all unnecessary expenditure due to the reduction in wraparound clubs income.

3.6 Concerning the increase in the DSG balances, NB emphasised that there are still significant pressures around SEND provision.

3.7 TD touched upon the ongoing and long awaited DfE review of the high needs system and funding which would have an impact on future high needs planning. SW advised that the review was due to be published in June 2021.

### **4. High Needs Update - TD.**

4.1 The Forum was presented with a paper on this agenda item. The paper can be found at the following link:

[T&W 2021/22 High Needs Budget paper.](#)

4.2 TD stated that the figures showing the increase in funding received for high needs did not fully reflect the net resources available, because the increase in funding for FY2020-2021 of £3m was partly offset by a cessation of the top-slice (around £0.6m) from the schools block and in 2021/22 around £0.5M of the increase replaces teachers pay grants.

- 4.3 TD restated that until the outcomes of the DfE HN review are known that we need to be cautious with our funding decisions. However to ensure inflationary pressures are recognised, the top-up banding rates for special school budgets in FY2021-22 have been increased by 2% and £660 also added for each pupil to reflect schools loss of separate teachers pay grants.
- 4.4 TD highlighted the LA proposals for spending within the HN area as follows:
- Three additional HN units to open. Units at Wrockwardine Wood Infants and John Randal Primary along with a unit at one of our secondary settings.
  - Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) and Alternative Provision review. One aspect of this is intended to be additional support for the transition between school phases to reduce the need for moves into Special Schools.
  - Devolving funding to clusters/MATs for managing need locally.
- 4.5 GE asked if pupils needing support will be identified. SW confirmed that they would and that clusters and MATs would be instrumental in this. The LA is looking for schools to communicate to the LA what they need.
- 4.6 GE stated that the Learning Community Trust (LCT) has been working with Telford College on the transition to 6<sup>th</sup> Form provision and it seems to be having positive results.
- 4.7 CC confirmed the need for transition planning as generally within the first term around 10% of Lilleshall pupils were having problems coping in the secondary sector.
- 4.8 DL agreed that there are a lot of pupils struggling with transition with some being referred to the PRU.
- 4.9 GE stated that we need to work quickly to help the current year six to transition in September.
- 4.10 TD advised that the previous SEN contingency fund, now known as Fair Share, has now been expanded to include an additional element which is on a bidding basis. The LA is keen for schools to bid for funding so that genuinely inclusive schools do not feel financially penalised.
- 4.11 TD advised that the local authority intends to move to a new banding system which will encompass all types of settings with one banding scale for all. This will be a challenge and may take some time but the LA will consult with schools.
- 4.12 SW added that the LA really wants to get more funding into those mainstream schools that are inclusive. No pupil will lose out on current funding as a result of the change. Funding will be based upon the need of the pupil.
- 4.13 GE stated that this should improve transparency which will be welcome.

4.14 SW stated that the reduction in the out of county placements has freed up funds to enable us to make the changes required.

## **5. Early Years Update - TD.**

5.1 The Forum was presented with a paper on this agenda item. The paper can be found at the following link:

[Early Years' Update paper](#)

5.2 During the January 2021 meeting there were questions raised around the centrally held Early Years' (EY) funding to support the EY team. A number of meetings were held between the members concerned and the EY team to resolve the questions and concerns raised. Arising from this, a description of functions, services provided and financing of the EY team was published on the Education Bulletin. This is also included as an appendix to the EY paper. All settings should now be aware of the services available as standard and on a buy back basis.

5.3 Due to a change in the methodology used to fund the LA for the EY block the LA was able to distribute an additional £161K to settings. The LA recognises the EY sector is facing considerable funding pressures due to the modest increases to the EY funding block compared to national minimum wage increases, etc, so thought it only fair to distribute the unexpected additional funds.

5.4 SW advised that an EY steering group has been set up to work across all settings.

## **6. AOB - GE.**

6.1 GE raised the question of how future meetings should be held, face to face or via Microsoft Teams. GE suggested that the first meeting of the new academic year should be face to face and then move to Teams.

6.2 MD suggested that there may be lot of face to face meetings in schools in the new academic year and from a time pressure point it might be better to have a Teams meeting in September and face to face in November.

6.3 TD stated that historically the November meetings tend to be longer and required votes to be made regarding centrally retained funding.

6.4 It was therefore agreed that the September meeting would be Virtual and the November meeting Face to Face.

6.5 There being no further business the meeting closed at 10:20.

## **7. Next Meetings**

The dates of the forthcoming meetings for the academic year 2021/2022, are as follows:

- Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2021 at 9:30 am
- Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021 at 9:30 am
- Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022 at 9.30 am
- Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2022 at 9.30 am
- Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022 at 9.30 am

[Planned Forum Meetings](#)