

Minutes of the Schools Forum – 19th May 2022

Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams and YouTube

Status: Accepted

Name	Establishment	Representing
Gill Eatough (GE) Chair	Learning Community Trust	Academies (Special)
Michael Scott (MS)	Newport Girls High School	Academies
Christabel Cousins (CC)	Lilleshall Primary School	Maintained Primaries - Newport Cluster
Rachel Cook (RC)	Newdale Primary School	Maintained Primaries - Central Cluster
Abi Martin (AM)	Southall Special School	Maintained Special Schools
Simon Wellman (SW)	Director Education & Skills	Representative of the Executive Director of Children's services
Tim Davis (TD)	Group Accountant	Representative of the Director of Finance
Andy Wood (AW)	Senior Accountant - Schools	Representative of the Director of Finance

1. Apologies - AW.

1.1 Apologies were received from:

Robert Fox – Donnington Wood Junior School.
Claire Whiting – Redhill Academy.
Penny Hustwick – ABC Day Nurseries.
Sarah Roberts – High Ercall Primary School.
Heather Davies – The Bridge Special School.
Darren Lennon – Linden Centre PRU.
Yvonne Crilly – Woodside Primary School.

2. Minutes of the 13th & 19th January 2022 meeting and matters arising - GE

- 2.1 The minutes of the 13th & 19th January 2022 were accepted as a true and accurate record.
- 2.2 There were no matters arising that would not be covered in the current meeting agenda.

[13th January 2022 approved minutes.](#)

[19th January 2022 accepted minutes.](#)

3. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Outturn for the Financial Year 2021-22 - TD.

3.1 TD provided a paper for the Forum which can be found at the follow link:

[DSG Outturn for FY2021-2022.](#)

3.2 The paper presented the outturn for the Local Authority (LA) DSG position and that of LA maintained schools.

3.3 Generally speaking the schools block, early years and central services blocks outturn at or close to budget. The DSG balance is therefore mainly impacted by the high needs (HN) block.

3.4 In FY 2021-22 there was an in-year overspend of £244K, reducing balances from the £576k brought forward to £333k at year end. Taking into account the additional funding received in FY2021-22 this shows the pressures on HN.

3.5 The ESFA has already warned that increases in future years would be limited to much lower levels than in recent years.

3.6 Overall the LA is doing well compared to many other LAs. The Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has reported that across all LAs the total DSG deficits totalled in the region of £1bn.

3.7 TD advised that LA maintained schools revenue balances have reached around £12.3m which is a 75% rise over the last two years.

3.8 MS asked about the treatment of balances within LA maintained school, in the context that academies are asked to justify balances held. TD responded that there is a balance control mechanism in place, in accordance with the scheme for financing schools, which stipulates the percentage of balances held. The LA would be challenging schools above the relevant thresholds in the summer and retains the ability to clawback balances.

3.9 RC stated that balances in some schools were higher due to being unable to recruit staff as competition from the private sector is increasing.

4. Schools Growth Fund 2023-2024 onwards - TD.

4.1 TD presented the paper which can be found at the link below:

[Schools Growth Fund](#)

4.2 TD outlined the current use of the growth funding received within the schools block and stated that this would continue along similar principles for those schools that agreed to increase their pupil admission number (PAN) or to have a temporary increase in intake above PAN.

- 4.3 The growth fund is being reintroduced for new schools, to fund start up costs and any diseconomies of scale, as required by the DSG Operational Guidance, which states the type of expenditure that should be covered.
- 4.4 The Forum is asked to agree to establish a growth fund on this basis, with the amounts required being confirmed at a meeting in the autumn term.
- 4.5 MS asked that we ensure that there is no double funding provided to new schools. TD confirmed that we would monitor this, but the Operational Guidance states that start up and diseconomies funding would not be provided by the ESFA, so this should not happen.
- 4.6 The Forum were asked if they approved the establishment of a Growth Fund for 2023-24 based on the above criteria, with the amounts allocated to be confirmed in the autumn and **all were in favour, including CW who voted via email.**

5. Exceptional Circumstances Allocations 2023 – 2024 - TD.

- 5.1 The Forum was presented with a paper which can be found at the link:
[Exceptional Circumstances 2022/23](#)
- 5.2 TD described how the funding is calculated that comes into the LA in the Schools Block and explained that the exceptional circumstances allocations to the LA does not affect the schools budgets as it is allocated in addition to the formulaic allocations to local authorities.
- 5.3 A discussion took place on how schools benefit from the use of the Joint Use funding.
- 5.4 Members were asked for their approval of exceptional items for FY2023-2024 and **all were in favour including CW who voted via email.**

6. High Needs Update - TD.

- 6.1 The Forum was presented with a paper which can be found at the link:
[High Needs Update](#)
- 6.2 TD highlighted that income had gone up substantially in recent years, but so had expenditure
- 6.3 Post 16 and independent placements are amongst the most significant areas of pressure. SW commented that we are working on extending the local options for post 16 provision to minimise out of area placements, which can be extremely expensive and take the young person out of their home area. We have done well to control the costs of independent placements but it remains a financial concern.
- 6.4 With regard to paragraph 3.2 of the paper AM wished to clarify that Southall is managing the unit at Langley (as the paper could be interpreted as implying that it is managed by Haughton).

- 6.5 SW stated that collaborative work has enabled the LA to use the HN funding effectively and invest in early intervention. SW also stated that the move to a unified banding system would not result in any child's funding reducing. There will be more funding for Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and therefore more funding flowing to mainstream settings.
- 6.6 GE stated that some schools continued to have a disproportionate number of children and young people with EHCPs. For example, within HLC secondary there are 55 EHCPs and only 25 of these are for pupils in the school's catchment area.
- 6.7 RC stated that there are major recruitment difficulties, in terms of recruiting the right calibre of staff to work with EHCP pupils. There is increased competition from other employers, who in some cases have significantly increased their rates of pay.
- 6.8 CC commented that COVID has led to some people re-evaluating their lives and whether they want to continue to work as before.
- 6.9 RC stated that Stacy Picken and her team had set up workshops to encourage people to consider working in education, which was very welcome. RC also stated that Newdale had reggraded many of their support staff and hope that this will aid retention.
- 6.10 GE said that some people perceive schools as still being centres for COVID outbreaks, which does not help recruitment.
- 6.11 AM stated that Southall is experiencing significant numbers of tribunals with parents wanting their children to move to Southall, with resulting pressure on availability of places.

7. School Improvement Update - TD.

- 7.1 The Forum was presented with a paper which can be found at the link:
[School Improvement Paper](#)
- 7.2 The School Improvement consultation is ongoing with schools being asked to have their say.
- 7.3 Schools have been asked to join a working party to reveiw the processes.
- 7.4 RC asked if the response to the consultation had been good. SW said that only a minority of schools had responded and we will again ask for volunteers to join the working party via the Schools Bulletin.
- 7.5 SW stated that he was very disappointed that the DfE has stated there is a timescale of 2030 for all schools to be in, or in the process of joining, an academy trust, but have withdrawn funding for statutory duties from now.

8. AOB - GE.

- 8.1 AW asked members to consider volunteering to be Chairperson for the next academic year. Members also need to confirm with their cluster/establishments that they are representing that they will continue to represent them next year.
- 8.2 MS asked which academies the academy representatives represent, is it by area? TD stated that mainstream academies represent academies in general according to DfE Forum guidance – there is no distinction between primary or secondary sectors for example.
- 8.3 There being no further business the meeting closed at 11:00.

9. Next Meetings

The dates of the forthcoming meetings for the academic year 2022/2023, are as follows:

- Thursday 29th September 2022, at 9.30 am
- Thursday 17th November 2022 at 9.30 am
- Thursday 19th January 2023 at 9.30 am
- Thursday 9th March 2023 at 9.30 am
- Thursday 18th May 2023 at 9.30 am

[Planned Forum Meetings](#)