

Minutes of the Schools Forum – 20th May 2016

Walker Room, Meeting Point House, Telford Town Centre

Status: Agreed

In attendance:

Name	Establishment	Representing
Sue Blackburn (SB) – Chairperson	Coalbrookdale & Ironbridge Primary	Maintained primary – South Cluster
Malcolm Boulter (MB)	HLC Primary	Maintained Primary – Governors
Sue Cusack (SC)	Church Aston Infants	Maintained Primary – Newport Cluster
Heather Davies (HD)	The Bridge Special	Maintained Special Schools
Chay Davis (CD)	Ercall Wood Secondary	Maintained Secondary Schools
Ros Garner (RG)	Newport Girls’ High	Academies
Mark Gibbons (MG)	Windmill Primary	Maintained Primary - Central Cluster
Jessi Gupta (JG)	Captain Webb Primary	Maintained Primary Schools
Penny Hustwick (PH)	ABC Day Nurseries	PVI & Childminders
Claire Lamb (CL)	Redhill Primary	Maintained Primary – North Cluster
Helen Osterfield (HO)	Tibberton Primary	Maintained Primary - Small Schools
Paul Roberts (PR)	HLC Secondary	Maintained Secondary Schools
Jim Collins (JC))	Assistant Director, Education & Corporate Parenting.	LA Observer
Tim Davis (TD)	Finance Team Leader	LA Observer
Andy Wood (AW)	Schools Funding /Senior Accountant	LA Observer

1. Apologies – TD.

1.1 Apologies were received from the following:

Becca Butler – Dothill Primary
Christobel Cousins – Lilleshall Primary
Louise Lowings – Madeley Nursery
Paul Watling - Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families
Tracey Smart – Finance Manager

2. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising – SB.

2.1 The group reviewed the minutes from the meeting that took place on 18th March 2016 and accepted them as an accurate record.

2.2 There were no matters arising.

2.3 The minutes can be found at the following link:

http://www.telford.gov.uk/downloads/file/4134/march_2016_-_minutes

Pupil Growth Contingency Fund – TD.

- 2.4 The Forum were reminded of the discussions held at previous meeting and of the working methodology shown on the worksheet. The workings for potential allocations, and the applications, can be found at the following links:

[http://www.telford.gov.uk/downloads/file/4183/may_2016 - workings for growth fund - financial year 2016-17](http://www.telford.gov.uk/downloads/file/4183/may_2016_-_workings_for_growth_fund_-_financial_year_2016-17)

[http://www.telford.gov.uk/downloads/file/4184/may_2016 - growth fund applications - financial year 2016-17](http://www.telford.gov.uk/downloads/file/4184/may_2016_-_growth_fund_applications_-_financial_year_2016-17)

- 2.5 The amount that the Forum had approved to be top sliced from the DSG schools block was £100,000. The Forum were reminded that the DfE's consultation on future school funding had suggested that the growth fund for the following two years will be limited to the 2016/17 amount. Thus, if the fund overspends in 2016/17, this could potentially reduce the funds available for 2017/18 to below £100,000, as the overspend would have to be met from a 2017/18 fund of no more than this sum (or be covered by the LA from general fund – which is not possible for the LA in its current financial circumstances).
- 2.6 CL commented that she was taken aback when she saw the level of balances held in schools. In this context schools could hardly complain to the LA about (for example) services offered to schools no longer being subsidised as a result of LA cutbacks. CL asked if the balances quoted included the single status balances held. TD – No this represents an additional £3M+.
- 2.7 PR stated that the balances did not reflect the deficit budgets that some schools were having to set for FY1617.
- 2.8 MB stated that in his opinion the paper presented was flawed as it did not differentiate between planned growth, at the LA's request, and unplanned growth. TD referred the Forum to the previous minutes where this had been discussed.
- 2.9 CL stated that she thought that this fund was for schools that had to employ another teacher as a result in the growth in pupil numbers.
- 2.10 PR stated that having criteria as described by CL would make the decisions on allocations more straight forward.
- 2.11 TD questioned whether this would always be fair for secondary schools as an increase in numbers may not necessitate an increase in classes, but could mean that additional staff would be required across different subject areas.
- 2.12 CL stated that she thought that the funding should be used to employ additional staffing for the additional pupils.
- 2.13 CD stated that additional funding should be to allow schools to meet the current requirements not to grow capacity.

- 2.14 TD pointed out that the move away from a strictly formulaic approach did make each decision more difficult.
- 2.15 CL thought it was difficult to decide which schools should be entitled to funding, in terms of whether the monetary level of balances held, or the percentage of the school's budget represented by these balances, was more significant. In some cases the percentage is high but the monetary level of balances held is very small in comparison to other schools.
- 2.16 MG asked whether a member of the Forum from a school that has made an application should be able to vote on that allocation? Other members commented that the nature of the Forum was that members had to make decisions / express views on financial matters that would have a direct financial impact on their school.
- 2.17 CD stated that his choice would have been to keep the allocation criteria purely to numbers; i.e. without the opportunity to supplement the numbers with reasons to support a potential allocation.
- 2.18 MB felt that head teachers should have had the opportunity to support their case in person which would have given them the same chance as members of the Forum.
- 2.19 JC stated that the Forum had decided to judge each application for funding on a case by case basis. The LAs preference would have been to continue to use a purely formulaic approach.
- 2.20 CL stated that the original idea was to approve allocations with knowledge of the overall context of the school. Funds could therefore be targeted to where most required.
- 2.21 PR stated that the allocations should be on a criteria basis rather than on a case by case basis, which would be a move back towards a formulaic approach.
- 2.22 TD stated that if the additional criteria was that the school would need to employ an additional teacher, then this would be judging internal management decisions. For example he was aware of a school that had recently decided to employ sufficient teachers to enable single age classes throughout the school, despite currently being well below capacity (albeit with expectations of rapid growth). This had required the school to reduce all other costs to a minimum.
- 2.23 MG stated that we are looking for fairness and efficiency. Should we approve all applications that meet the formulaic criteria and then look at the amounts paid to each?
- 2.24 CD stated that allocations to all schools would require each allocation to be scaled back, leading to a lower amount of funding per pupil, which would be unfair to settings with a genuine need for additional funds
- 2.25 TD pointed out that if we wanted to take a step back to a more formulaic approach we could remove all those applications that have balances above the relevant BCM %.

- 2.26 MB asked if it was fair to penalise those schools that have strong financial management and have managed to build up balances.
- 2.27 JC stated that he understands why governors and head teachers do plan their finances but the original principle was that the growth fund would be used to support those schools that had significant growth in pupil numbers and did not have sufficient reserves to meet the pupil's educational needs.
- 2.28 CL proposed that we should approve those applications from schools that had balances below the relevant BCM % and have stated that the funding would be used to employ additional staff to support that growth and then look at the remaining applications individually. The Forum voted on this proposal: For: Nine; Against: Two; one abstention.
- 2.29 Allocations approved according to the above criteria were for Ercall Wood Secondary, Meadows Primary and St Peter's and St Paul's Primary. The total allocation at this point was £56K at the scaled down level.
- 2.30 The Forum then looked at the remainder of the applications and identified that there may be a case for making an allocation to Captain Webb Primary, St Mary's Primary and HLC Primary phase, as each of these schools had an increase in pupil numbers exceeding 30 (i.e. the equivalent of more than one class).
- 2.31 As these three settings all had balances that exceeded the funding required to employ an additional teacher the proposal was made to not allocate any growth funds in 2016/17. For: Six; Against: Three; Abstentions: Three.
- 2.32 MG stated that HLC primary should be considered as exceptional case due to the agreed increase in the school's Pupil Admission Number (PAN).
- 2.33 CL pointed out again that this is intended to be an emergency fund for schools that needed additional funding specifically to fund teaching for that growth. However it was agreed that the group did need to look specifically at how, and where, funding for planned growth should be met.
- 2.34 CL proposed that as we now agreed that only the three schools from the first wave of approvals would receive funding and that their allocations should be scaled back up to use the full £100,000.
- 2.35 TD suggested that we could scale back up to £80,000 and hold the remaining £20,000 to have a look at HLC Primary and any other cases that may arise in the Autumn.
- 2.36 A vote then took place on CL's proposal. For: Eight; Against: Zero; Abstentions: Four.
- 2.37 CL asked for an agenda item for the Autumn term to be a discussion on the funding of planned growth.

2.38 JC thanked everyone for their participation in the discussion.

3. High Needs Sub-group update – TD.

3.1 TD reported that the group had met to discuss the current situation. Planning ahead was currently difficult, due to the uncertainties around funding arising from the DfE's proposed changes to High Needs funding (phase 1 consultation has been published but no further details as yet).

3.2 MG stated that he felt that the personnel involved should be reassessed as the aims of the group seem to have changed since the group was initially established.

3.3 JC proposed that the group should remain as it stands for now until we know the outcome of the DfE's consultation. This was agreed.

4. Union Facility Time – TD.

4.1 TD stated that the unions had formulated a contribution scheme for schools to buy in to union facility time support. TD stated that although the arrangements are directly between individual schools and the unions, the LA has agreed to collect funds from schools on behalf of the unions.

4.2 Currently schools across all phases have agreed to contribute around £20K. Most of this is from the secondary phase, as only a minority of primary schools have so far decided to opt in.

5. Any Other Business - SB

5.1 JG stated that Single Status at T&W has been going on for far too long. Other LAs have resolved this years ago. As noted earlier, schools have been holding back significant sums of money for many years now. JC agreed to ask Jonathan Eatough, Assistant Director, Governance, Procurement and Commissioning, the LA's lead on Single Status, to attend the next Forum to provide an update.

5.2 TD informed the group that all but one school had submitted their 2015/16 Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) on time.

5.3 TD also informed the group that the DSG carry forward for FY1516 was around £350K.

5.4 TD stated that two more primary schools had recently converted to academies – Grange Park Primary joined the Community Academies Trust (CAT) from 1 April 2016 and Dawley Primary joined Wulfrun Academies Trust, part of the Church of England Central Education trust (CECET).

5.5 The next meeting of the Forum, in the Walker Room, Meeting Point House will be Friday 23rd September 2016, 9.30 am

5.6 Details of all planned meetings can be found at the following link:
http://www.telford.gov.uk/downloads/file/507/forum_meetings