

Minutes of the Schools Forum – 16th November 2023

Via Microsoft Teams and You Tube.

Status: Draft

Name	Establishment	Representing
Claire Whiting (CW) Chair	Redhill Primary Academy	Academies
Christobel Cousins (CC)	Lilleshall Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Newport Cluster
Sarah Roberts (SR)	High Ercall Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Wellington Cluster
Michael Scott (MS)	Newport Girls' High School	Academies
Darren Lennon (DL)	Linden Centre PRU	Maintained PRUs
Penny Hustwick (PH)	ABC Day Nurseries	PVI Settings
Sarah Farrelly (SF)	The Bridge Special School	Maintained Special Schools
Simon Wellman (SW)	Director of Education & Skills	Representative of the Director of Children's Services
Tracey Smart (TS)	Finance Manager	Representative of the Director of Finance
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.

Joe Edgar – Haberdashers Abraham Darby.

Rachel Cook – Newdale Primary School.

2. Minutes of the 28th September 2023 meeting and matters arising - CW.

2.1 The minutes of the 28th September 2023 were accepted as a true and accurate record. With an amendment to the spelling at paragraph 4.10. A copy of the minutes can be found here:

[Minutes of 28th September 2023.](#)

- 2.2 CW asked, regarding paragraph 4.9, if we had the updated rates for early years funding for FY2024/2024 yet. TD confirmed that it would probably be the second half of December before they were published.
- 2.3 CW also asked, regarding paragraph 4.13, about the sufficiency data for EY. SW responded that this was still being worked on.
- 2.4 CW asked, in relation to paragraph 5.4, how many schools were contributing to union facility time. TD responded that mainly previous year's contributors had taken up the option to contribute; concentrated in secondary phase schools and MATs.
- 2.5 CW asked, on behalf of RC on paragraph 6.2, if there was any response on the concerns raised. SW stated that HR had responded to schools concerns.

3. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Update for Financial Year 2024-2025 - TD

- 3.1 The Forum were provided with a paper which can be found here:

[Dedicated Schools Grant \(DSG\) Paper for the Financial Year 2024-2025.](#)

- 3.2 The DfE/ESFA have restated the amount of Schools Block allocations for FY2024/2025 due to incorrectly estimating the number of pupils to be funded from their fixed quantum of funding. The result being that the "*overall cost of the Core Schools Budget...would be 0.62% greater than allocated*". The impact to T&W on a like for like pupil basis is a loss of funding of £1.469m.
- 3.3 According to the DfE the revised overall increase in funding per pupils is 1.9% nationally; 2.12% for Telford and Wrekin. However, as can be seen in the restated table some of the drivers are reducing by over 1% and this may be due to changes in demographics, such as higher ratios of deprived pupils.
- 3.4 Over the last few years, due to higher inflation, there have been additional grants made to education, after the main settlement has been announced. However this may or may not be the case this year, which makes budgeting in the short and long term problematic. The government's autumn statement next week may provide more clarity.

4. Funding Statutory Services for Schools - 2024/25 Central Schools Services Block and De-delegation - TD.

- 4.1 Papers were provided to support this agenda item and these can be found at the links:

[Funding Statutory Services for Schools - 2024/25 Central Schools Services Block and De-delegation – Word document.](#)

[Funding Statutory Services for Schools - 2024/25 Central Schools Services Block and De-delegation – Excel document.](#)

- 4.2 CW advised that this agenda item has come forward annually for the last seven years or so and over the years has been discussed in detail; so proceeded on the basis that the overall proposal was familiar to the Forum and asked members for any specific questions. Forum were reminded that there are two votes; the first for all mainstream schools, including academies, and the second just for maintained schools.
- 4.3 Regarding the first vote, TD pointed out that the funding requested is from the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) and is allocated specifically for funding these statutory services. Despite this, the DfE requires an annual Forum vote approving the use of this money for statutory services.
- 4.4 SW advised that T&W (like many other local authorities) has very significant budget pressures and has recently invited expressions of interest from all staff for voluntary redundancy. There will therefore potentially be changes/reduction in staff and to the services offered.
- 4.5 CW asked if the costs of the services would change. TD stated that statutory services would stay reasonably static dependent on the amounts received within the CSSB. The amounts requested for de-delegation could have to change as the number of maintained pupils reduce with conversions to academy status. By not increasing the de-delegation rates per pupil, the local authority has absorbed the significant inflationary pressures over the last few years.
- 4.6 CW asked, on behalf of RC, whether the funding in CSSB cover the admission appeals process, as she was not happy with the service. Also safeguarding are increasing the costs of their courses. SW reminded the group that the funding requested here was to cover the statutory elements of services and that any additional services provided were therefore voluntary courses provided to schools at their request. SW stated he would provide a breakdown of the statutory services element provided by safeguarding.
- 4.7 CW moved the meeting onto voting.
- 4.8 The first vote for £966K was passed with all in favour.
- 4.9 The second vote for approximately £389K was passed with all in favour.

5. Joint Use Funding 2024/25 - TD.

- 5.1 The Forum were presented with a paper for this agenda item which can be found at the link:

[Joint Use Funding 2024-2025](#)

- 5.2 TD explained that since the move to the four block DSG system, a decade ago, the LA has substantial exceptional funding to support joint use leisure facilities. A significant portion of this supports swimming provision for schools. The DfE is now looking to streamline their funding system, as part of the transition to a national funding formula at school level and as

a result have examined exceptional factor funding items. In particular they have decided that swimming facilities are not exceptional items.

- 5.3 The issue first became apparent late last year when the exceptional items needed to be resubmitted to the ESFA. Due to the lateness of the notification regarding possible removal of funding, the ESFA agreed to continue with the funding for 2023/2024 and work with the LA to resolve the issue for the following year. Nothing was heard from the ESFA until T&W contacted them in July. Discussions have taken place which resulted in the ESFA requiring the LA to make a disapplication request for 2024/25.
- 5.4 SW advised that this funding (at least for swimming, the position on non swimming joint use is less clear) would at best be phased out or at worst cut entirely for FY2024/2025. This loss of income would mean that schools would have to pay for swimming at LA leisure facilities. Modelling of potential costs/charges of swimming, suggests that the potential income that the LA would receive from schools would not cover the amount of funding lost.
- 5.5 MS stated that T&W have been fortunate in not having to charge schools for swimming as this is not the case in other local authorities.
- 5.6 CC stated that schools may be forced into only taking those pupils that really need to have swimming lessons to meet the curriculum requirements. CC also stated that PE grant could be used to fund staffing for swimming lessons.
- 5.7 SW advised that the issue will be raised with Primary Headteachers Forum next week and with Secondary Heads following that.
- 5.8 AW asked the Forum if they were happy for the LA to continue to pursue the disapplication of the regulations in pursuit of the exceptional funding. All were in favour of requesting the funding.

6. De-delegation for Statutory School Quality Assurance Services - TD.

- 6.1 The Forum were presented with a paper to support this agenda item which can be found at the link:

[De-delegation for Statutory School Quality Assurance Services](#)

- 6.2 CW stated that the proposal was very similar to that from last year so it may not be necessary to discuss in depth.
- 6.3 RF had emailed questions to CW and asked if the staffing structure was in place and is the service making progress. SW confirmed that this is the case, and that positive feedback had been received from schools. SW reminded the group that this is a statutory service. RF had also asked for clarity of the impact of the service, SW confirmed 88% of schools in Telford are graded good or above by Ofsted.

6.4 MS asked what are green, light touch schools, doing to support other schools? The response was that working within clusters and through the teaching school, was the approach within T&W to spread good practice

6.5 CW moved to a vote and all were in favour of de-delegation.

7. De-delegation for Free School Meal Eligibility Checks - TD.

7.1 The Forum were presented with a paper to support this agenda item which can be found at the link:

[De-delegation for Free School Meal Eligibility Checks](#)

7.2 CW stated that this was again the same decision as in previous years.

7.3 As there are no Secondary School representatives attending they will be approached individually to request them to de-delegate.

7.4 All primary representatives voted in favour of the proposal.

8. Proposal to transfer Schools Block funding to High Needs in 2024/25 - TD.

8.1 The Forum were presented with a paper to support this agenda item which can be found at the link:

[Proposal to transfer Schools Block funding to High Needs in 2024/25](#)

8.2 TD reminded the Forum that the back in the financial years 2017/18 & 2018/19 the Forum approved a transfer of 0.5%, which then equated to around £0.6m. This assisted the LA to recover from a deficit position. The balances of DSG can be seen at paragraph 3.3 of the paper.

8.3 Members are reminded that this proposal would apply equally to academies as it would to LA maintained schools and all Forum members would therefore have a vote when a decision is required.

8.4 TD stated that the projected deficit for FY2023/2024 is likely to be well over £1m, even after utilising the balance brought forwards of £247K.

8.5 The initial allocations for high needs for FY2024/2025 are only increasing by around 5%, as compared to increases in recent years of around 10% per annum. Such an increase would only be enough to cover the expected spend for the current year. Given inflationary and demand pressures it is very unlikely that expenditure will be able to be kept at current levels.

8.6 Should the LA end the year with a deficit balance on DSG it is likely that the LA will be invited to enter into the DfE's 'Delivering Better Value in SEND' programme. This will result

in close scrutiny of our spend with a risk that 'discretionary' initiatives so support inclusion in mainstream schools are curtailed.

- 8.7 SW is proposing to consult with schools to transfer 0.5% of the schools block over to the high needs block which would raise approximately £0.8m. Estimates of the impact on schools can be seen at paragraph 4.1 of the paper presented. SW stated that we would accept the outcome of the Forum vote following the consultation, i.e. we would not seek to approach the DfE to overturn a 'no' vote if that was the outcome.
- 8.8 CW stated that the best route for the consultation would be via the Primary Heads Forum and secondary equivalent and then maybe clusters if required.
- 8.9 SW reiterated that he didn't want to cancel all the good provision that had been put in place over the last few years and that he hoped there was a local consensus around this.
- 8.10 CC stated that provision for SEND support is much better now.
- 8.11 SR stated that schools are having to apply for more and more EHCPs as pupils have more complicated needs.
- 8.12 CC thought that many schools will support the proposal.
- 8.13 CW stated that schools will rightly have strong views, differing depending upon the type of school.

9. AOB - CW.

- 9.1 SW pointed out that this will be TD's final meeting in his current role and thanked him for his contribution. CW agreed and added her thanks.
- 9.2 CW stated that there was a clash between the Forum and PHF for the March 2024 meeting. It was agreed to move the March 2024 forum to 14th March at 11.00.
- 9.3 AW confirmed post-meeting that the January 2024 meeting would again be an in-person meeting at Meeting Point House.

10. Next Meetings

The dates of the forthcoming meetings for the academic year 2023/24, are as follows:

- Thursday 18th January 2024
- Thursday 14th March 2024
- Thursday 16th May 2024

[Planned Forum Meetings](#)