

**Minutes of the Schools Forum – 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023**

**Via Microsoft Teams and You Tube.**

**Status: Approved**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Establishment</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Claire Whiting (CW) <b>Chair</b>	Redhill Primary Academy	Academies
Christobel Cousins (CC)	Lilleshall Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Newport Cluster
Rebecca Nash (RN)	St Lawrence Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Wellington Cluster
Heather Davies (HD)	The Bridge Special School	Maintained Special Schools
Ollie Pointon (OP)	Newport Girls' High School	Academies
Natalie Bevan (NB)	SDM SEND & Personalisation	Representative of the 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:

Simon Wellman - Director of Education & Skills.

Darren Lennon – Linden PRU.

Sarah Roberts – High Ercall Primary School.

Rachel Cooke – Newdale Primary School.

Michael Scott – Newport Girls' High School.

Penny Hustwick – ABC Day Nurseries.

**2. Minutes of the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2023 meeting and matters arising - CW**

2.1 The minutes of the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2023 were accepted as a true and accurate record. A copy of the minutes can be found here:

[Minutes of 9<sup>th</sup> March 2023.](#)

2.2 Minute 3.7 TD advised that an email vote resulted in additional votes in favour of the Early Years proposals, none were received against the proposal, and so the motion was passed.

2.3 Agenda item 4 from the previous meeting will be revisited at this meeting under agenda item 4.

2.4 There were no further matters arising from the previous meeting.

### **3. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Outturn 2022-2023 - TD**

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

[Dedicated Schools Grant \(DSG\) Outturn 2022-2023.](#)

3.2 TD summarised the paper, highlighting that despite an additional £3m in funding compared to the previous year, the DSG balance reduced slightly, from £333,000 to £247,000. This demonstrated that all the additional funding received was absorbed in year, along with an element of the brought forwards balance. There are, due to inflationary pressure, and ongoing pressures in the demand for High Needs provision, still considerable pressure on the High Needs Budget.

3.3 TD advised the Forum that T&W were in a good financial position compared to most local authorities, due to collegiate working with settings, whilst two thirds of local authorities have accumulated deficits in DSG totalling (we understand) at least £1bn. The DfE have directed that for the moment (not permanently) these deficits are ring fenced within LA accounts so that the financial stability of a number of councils remains intact.

3.4 TD advised that maintained school balances had remained steady in the year compared to the large increases in the COVID years. CW stated that it was not helpful that schools have large balances when schools in general were asking for additional funding for the sector. TD responded by stating that the LA intends to use the balance control mechanism (BCM) for maintained schools over the summer to ensure that schools over the thresholds identified in the Scheme for Financing Schools (5% of the annual budget for secondary schools, 8% for other schools) have plans to use their accumulated balances.

3.5 HD stated that the majority of special schools finished the year with in-year deficits with reduced balances carried forwards and are looking at larger deficits in the FY2023-2024.

### **4. Update on High Needs Budget for FY2023-24 – TD/NB.**

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

[Update on the HN budget for FY2023-2024.](#)

4.2 TD advised that despite the ESFA statement that increases to the HN block would be in the region of 5% for 2023/24 we have received an increase of around 10%. However, with inflationary cost increases, we still face substantial budgetary pressures.

4.3 NB spoke of increasing the number of specialist hubs in response to the demand for places; plans are being worked on for additional hubs from September although nothing is finalised yet.

- 4.4 CW asked about early years provision at The Bridge. TD responded that there is considerable pressure on space for statutory school age children at the Bridge, with an area of the building that had been borrowed from HLC now returned to them and alternative provision at Wrockwardine Wood Infants site being used.
- 4.5 HD advised that there is considerable pressure at reception with high numbers of requests for places at the Bridge.
- 4.6 CW asked if the new hubs would create spare capacity or would they be used for known pupils. NB responded that the new hubs would be used for known pupils but pointed out that there will be additional demands from pupils moving into the area and pupils with needs as yet unknown.
- 4.7 CW stated that some pupils were being held back in nurseries, as it was felt that they would not cope with the school environment.
- 4.8 TD explained the reasoning behind and the workings of the Fairshare and Inclusive Schools Forum.
- 4.9 NB updated the Forum on the local unified banding system. It will be held back at present due to the ESFA looking at a national banding system.
- 4.10 HD advised the Forum that there are funds within the teaching school that are available to invested in upskilling staff, but will need to canvas schools for the best use of the funds.
- 4.11 CW asked what progress had been made in exclusions as a result of the funding given to the secondary sector to reduce the number of exclusions and if the funding will continue. NB stated that although this is Andy Cooke's area she knew that it had made a positive impact on the number of exclusion and in particular with regard to those schools that had higher rates of exclusions.

## **5. Proposed increase to Apprentices' pay - TD.**

- 5.1 TD advised the Forum the the local authority was increasing apprentices hourly rate of pay from £4.81 to £ £6.83 for FY2023-2024 which is above the national rate of £5.28. Additionally in FY2024-2025, the hourly rate will increase to £9.84, which will bring them almost to the national minimum wage.
- 5.2 This will have an impact on T&W maintained schools only, there are currently 25 apprentices that this will effect.

## **6. AOB - CW.**

- 6.1 AW advised that meeting dates for the next two AY were available for members to enter into their diaries.

- 6.2 AW also advised that the Scheme for Financing Schools had been updated; although this was only with minor change for bringing the document up to date with academy conversions etc. The document will be on the T&W website prior to being enacted on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023.
- 6.3 TD advised that there had been an announcement on early years funding whereby the ESFA had recognised that EY funding was not sufficient. There will therefore be an increase in two-year-old funding rates of around 25% and three and four year old funding of 4%. Whilst this is very positive news, no further details since the announcement has been forthcoming.
- 6.4 AW stated that the Fairshare Part A allocations for the summer term have been calculated and would be on the website shortly.
- 6.5 There being no further business the meeting closed at 10.15

## **7. Next Meetings**

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

- Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023
- Thursday 16th November 2023
- Thursday 18th January 2024
- Thursday 21st March 2024
- Thursday 16th May 2024

[Planned Forum Meetings](#)