

Minutes of the Schools Forum – 28th September 2023

Via Microsoft Teams and You Tube.

Status: Draft

Name	Establishment	Representing
Claire Whiting (CW) Chair	Redhill Primary Academy	Academies
Rachel Cook (RC)	Newdale Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Central Cluster
Christobel Cousins (CC)	Lilleshall Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Newport Cluster
Sarah Roberts (SR)	High Ercall Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Wellington Cluster
Robert Fox (RF)	Donnington Wood Junior School	Maintained Primaries – North Cluster
Heather Davies (HD)	The Bridge Special School	Maintained Special Schools
Darren Lennon (DL)	Linden Centre PRU	Maintained PRUs
Joe Edgar (JE)	Abraham Derby Academy	Academies
Michael Scott (MS)	Newport Girls' High School	Academies
Simon Wellman (SW)	Director of Education & Skills	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:

Paul Roberts – Learning Community Trust.

Angus Neal – Holy Trinity Academy.

Penny Hustwick – ABC Day Nurseries.

2. Membership of the Schools Forum/ appointment of Chairperson - CW.

2.1 The members were asked for volunteers for the role of Chairperson for the current academic year. There was common agreement that CW had done an excellent job of chairing over the past year and in the absence of any other volunteers. CW kindly agreed to continue in post for the next academic year.

3. Minutes of the 18th May 2023 meeting and matters arising - CW

3.1 The minutes of the 18th May 2023 were accepted as a true and accurate record. A copy of the minutes can be found here:

[Minutes of 18th May 2023.](#)

3.2 SW advised that the title for him within apologies was incorrect and needed amending. AW amended.

3.3 There was nothing else arising from the May 2023 minutes.

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

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

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

4.2 TD summarised the paper as follows.

Schools Block.

4.3 The Schools Block has increased by around 2.5% per pupil compared to last year, (taking account of the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant), which would imply that the Government is anticipating inflation / pay awards to reduce significantly in 2024/25, as otherwise schools are being expected to absorb a real terms reduction in funding. Over the last couple of years, there have been additional grants, announced subsequent to the main DSG announcement. We could speculate that this might again occur in FY2024/2025 if inflation and pay awards are substantially higher than the DSG increase.

4.4 TD/AW are currently modelling the formula to mirror as closely as possible the national funding formula as in previous years.

High Needs Block.

4.5 Telford & Wrekin's (T&W) High Needs block income will increase by 4.3% compared to 2023/24, based on the published draft allocations. This matches the overall average increase for LAs. In cash terms this is an increase of £1.5m for T&W, which is substantially less than the increases of £3m or more per annum allocated over the last few years.

4.6 Similar to the schools block, last year T&W's initial increase of £1.8m was then supplemented as part of a national increase following the government's Autumn budget statement. It remains to be seen whether any further increase is announced, but as things stand the financial risk around high needs for 2024/25 is very significant.

Early Years Block.

- 4.7 Funding has increased in-year in 2023/24 as a result of additional funding announced in March 2023. In particular there was a substantial increase in funding for two year olds.
- 4.8 In 2024/24 publicly funded provision will increase significantly, with 15 hours funded provision being offered for all two years olds of working parents from April 2024. Provision will then be further extended from September 2024, with 15 hours being offered for children who are 9 months old (again for working parents only).
- 4.9 The Government has announced 2024/25 hourly rates for two year olds and the nine months elements but has yet to confirm the hourly rates for three and four year olds.
- 4.10 RC asked if we have capacity within T&W for the expansion of the offer. SW advised that the early years team have a capacity map which shows where the anticipated pressures will be. SW also advised that we are currently awaiting information from DfE/ESFA on what, if any, additional funding will be available to increase capacity.
- 4.11 CW wondered if private settings would want to provide the additional free entitlement as it might cause financial pressures if they receive less than they are already charging.
- 4.12 HD wondered whether SEND implications had been fully considered when the government decided to expand the offer.
- 4.13 SW offered to provide sufficiency projections for the next meeting if it was felt beneficial. CW confirmed that this would be useful.
- 4.14 RC stated that marketing is needed to attract support staff into schools and PVI's, as competition from the private sector is fierce. There was general agreement that recruitment and retention of support staff continued to be very difficult.

Central Schools Services Block (CSSB).

- 4.15 TD advised that the final allocation of this block was likely to be similar in cash terms to previous years, despite general inflationary pressures and in particular the cost of centrally purchased licenses (i.e. purchased by central government) which are funded from this block increasing by approximately 18% over the last couple of years.

Conclusion.

- 4.16 Despite the Government's requirement for schools to set budgets over three or more years, planning ahead is very difficult in an environment of relatively high inflation and resulting in-year funding announcements.

5. Unions letter request for de-delegation – TD.

5.1 The Forum were provided with a letter from teaching unions which can be found here:

[Paper from Teaching Unions to the Directors of Education.](#)

5.2 TD reminded the Forum that a similar letter has been received in previous years, asking Schools Forums to approve de-delegation to support union facility time. T&W last de-delegated funding for this purpose in 2015-2016.

5.3 TD pointed out that due to de-delegation only being applicable to maintained schools, and the increased number of academies, de-delegation would create a two-tier system whereby individual maintained schools would not have a choice to buy-in, whereas academy trusts would have such a choice.

5.4 In the absence of de-delegation, T&W has a system of voluntary contributions from schools for union facility time. The letter from local union representatives requesting contributions for 2024/2025 has recently been received by the local authority and will be distributed shortly.

6. AOB - CW.

6.1 RC raised her concern over the proposal for Occupational Health to be separated from the HR service and run by a private practice. Especially concerning was the issue of assessments being outsourced for “Fitness to teach” requirements. Rebecca Hulsmeier (RH) has been invited to the Central Cluster to discuss. CW asked if it would be better to invite RH to the Primary Heads Forum to brief a wider group of schools.

6.2 SW stated he had noted the concerns raised and would take them back to RH to make her aware.

6.3 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 16th November 2023
- Thursday 18th January 2024
- Thursday 21st March 2024
- Thursday 16th May 2024

[Planned Forum Meetings](#)