

Minutes of the Schools Forum – 6th June 2024

Microsoft Teams Meeting.

Status: Draft

Name	Establishment	Representing
Claire Whiting (CW) Chair	Redhill Primary Academy	Academies
Angus Neal (AN)	Holy Trinity Academy	The Maintained Secondary School
Sarah Roberts (SR)	High Ercall Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Wellington Cluster
Rachel Cook (RC)	Newdale Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Central Cluster
Robert Fox (RF)	Donnington Wood Junior School	Maintained Primaries – North Cluster
Adam Wheeler (AWe)	Coalbrookdale & Ironbridge Primary School	Maintained Primaries – South Cluster
Nicola Davis (ND)	The Bridge Special School	Maintained Special Schools
Emily Tracey (ET)	The Bridge Special School	Maintained Special Schools
Darren Lennon (DL)	Linden Centre PRU	Maintained PRUs
Joe Edgar (JE)	Haberdashers' Abraham Darby Academy	Academies
Sophie Webster (SW)	Newport Girls' High School	Academies
Penny Hustwick (PH)	ABC Day Nurseries	PVI Settings
Simon Wellman (SW)	Director of Education & Skills	Representative of the Director of Children's Services
Tim Davis (TD)	Finance Manager	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:

Christobel Cousins – Lilleshall Primary School.

2. Minutes of the 18th January 2024 & 2nd February meetings and matters arising - CW.

2.1 The minutes of the 18th January 2024 & 2nd February were accepted as a true and accurate record. Copies of the minutes can be found here:

[Minutes of 18th January 2024.](#)

[Minutes of 2nd February 2024.](#)

- 2.2 CW referred to minute 4.4 from the January meeting and asked if a plan/ working group had been set up to determine the way forwards regarding swimming. TD stated that the LA was still seeking clarification from the DfE/ESFA regarding non swimming joint use funding but it had been confirmed that funding for swimming would cease from 1 April 2025. SW stated that we do now need a working group for swimming as asked for volunteers. RF & SR offered to be part of this.

3. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Outturn 2023-2024 - TD

- 3.1 The Forum were provided with a paper which can be found here:
[DSG Outturn FY 2023-2024](#)
- 3.2 As the accounts for FY2023-2024 are now complete the local authority is in a position to brief the Forum on the final outturn position of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Historically, and this year is no different, the balance on DSG is driven mainly by the high needs position.
- 3.3 The year started with a surplus balance brought forward of around £247k. The closing position outturned at a deficit of £1.823m thus an in-year overspend of £2.07m. The increase in funding allocated to high needs in the year was £3.422 and the total increase in spending therefore was £5.492m.
- 3.4 For 2024/25, the high needs allocation from Telford & Wrekin is £36.639m, an increase of £1.668m compared to 2023/24, i.e. a much smaller increase than seen in recent years. Although the Forum agreed to transfer 0.5% of the Schools Block to high needs, amounting to £820K, even including this, the increase in funding is less than previous years.
- 3.5 Given that 2023/24 expenditure was already £2m more than the available resources, the total funding for 2024/24 is unlikely to be sufficient to cover inflationary pressures (e.g. from pay awards) even before any impact from demand pressures. Such pressures include the full year impact of 2023/24 increases that occurred part way through the financial year, e.g. new independent placements from September 2023 and new EHCPs during the year. There is little indication that the demographic, social and legislative pressures driving high needs expenditure are easing.
- 3.6 RC asked if there are many EHCP applications in the pipeline and if there was a surge recently. SW said he would ask the question of the SEND team but knew that there had been an increase in applications of 70% in requests, with a particularly sharp increase in the secondary phase. This increase could be related to the continuing impact of COVID lockdowns.
- 3.7 CW stated that maybe we needed to look at the costs in ISF. SW agreed to bring a paper to the next meeting to clarify EHCP and ISF trends.

- 3.8 In the context described above, there is thus a significant risk that the existing deficit significantly increases in 2024/25. To address this risk, a high needs cost improvement plan is being developed.
- 3.9 As noted at previous Forum meetings, the context to this situation is the national high needs deficit, at over £1bn at the end of March 2023.
- 3.10 With regard to school balances, TD advised that maintained schools' balances have started to decline after the increase during the COVID years. Revenue balances decreased by £1.3m and Capital balances decreased by £450k. Mainstream maintained schools have set budgets which plan to use a further £2.6m in financial year 2024-2025 (although historically schools have underspent against budgets, on average).
- 3.11 This is an indication, amongst other things, of the inflationary pressures faced by schools, particularly from support staff pay increases, for which (unlike teachers pay and pension increases), no specific additional funding has been provided.
- 3.12 The figures above mask considerable variances in individual schools – a number of schools with stable or falling pupil numbers are finding it financially very difficult whereas others still have significant balances with which to absorb cost pressures, at least in the short to medium term.

4. Scheme for Financing Schools AY2024-2025 - CW.

- 4.1 Papers presented to support this agenda item can be found at the links below.

[Update to the scheme for financing schools.](#)

[Annex to Update to Scheme for Financing.](#)

- 4.2 TD advised the Forum that we are required to inform the Schools Forum of any changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools ("The Scheme"). As the changes in the scheme were directed revisions from the ESFA there is no need for the changes to be approved by Forum.
- 4.3 From 1 April 2024, International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) 16 took effect. It removes the distinction between operating and finance leases for accounting purposes. For maintained schools this had the effect of classifying all leases as a form of borrowing – and any borrowing by maintained schools requires Secretary of State approval.
- 4.4 In certain areas (for example photocopiers) leasing is common in schools. Therefore, in order to avoid each lease having to be individually approved, the secretary of state has provided blanket consent to the most common leasing activities. These are described in the DfE's "IFRS16 Maintained Schools Finance Lease Class Consent 2024" included as an appendix to this paper.

5. AOB - CW.

- 5.1 AW advised the members that as this is the last meeting of this academic year they should confer with the settings that they represent to confirm that they will/will not be representing them in the next academic year. It was also advised that the meeting dates for the following academic year would be circulated to identify conflicts and to place in diaries.

6. Next Meetings

The dates of the forthcoming meetings for the academic year 2024/25, are as follows:

- Thursday 26th September 2024
- Thursday 14th November 2024
- Thursday 16th January 2025
- Thursday 20th March 2025
- Thursday 15th May 2025

[Planned Forum Meetings](#)