

Minutes of the Schools Forum – 12th December 2024

Microsoft Teams Meeting.

Status: **Draft**

Name	Establishment	Representing
Claire Whiting (CW) Chair	Redhill Primary Academy	Academies
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
Christobel Cousins (CC)	Lilleshall Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Newport Cluster
Darren Lennon (DL)	Linden Centre PRU	Maintained PRUs
Joe Edgar (JE)**	Haberdashers' Abraham Darby Academy	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

* Attended until 10.00.

** Attended from 10.00.

1. Apologies - AW.

1.1 Apologies were received from:

Paul Roberts – Academy PRU.

Joe Edgar – Abraham Darby Academy – not able to attend until 10.00.

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

2.1 CW was nominated by RC and seconded by RF as chairperson. CW kindly agreed to continue as chairperson for another year.

3. Minutes of the 6th June 2024 meeting and matters arising - CW.

3.1 The minutes of the 6th June 2024 were accepted as a true and accurate record. Copies of the minutes can be found here:

[Minutes of 6th June 2024.](#)

3.2 Items 3.6 & 3.7 regarding SEND will be addressed at the January 2025 meeting.

4. School Funding 2025/26 - TD

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

[School Funding for the Financial Year 2025-2026](#)

4.2 TD talked through the paper.

4.3 The Schools Block of the dedicated schools grant (DSG) has increased considerably but this is mainly due to the amalgamation of the Teachers' Pay Grant, the Teachers' Pension Grant and the Core Schools Budget Grant. Once these grants are added to the prior year allocations by driver, so that we are comparing like with like, the comparison shows less than a one percentage point increase, considerably lower than current inflation and significantly less than recent pay awards.

4.4 RC stated that with this level of increase in income schools will be focussed on the cost of outgoings. TD stated that schools, and LAs, were being seriously squeezed.

4.5 The Schools Block funding formulae will be submitted to Cabinet for approval in January 2025 with the proposal that we continue to mirror the DfE funding formulae as far as is possible.

4.6 The draft allocation of High Needs (HN) Block DSG for T&W shows a £2.9m increase to around £39.5m. This represents an increase of 8%, which is greater than the increase in 2024/25 but significantly less than the preceding years, which were between 10 and 12%.

4.7 The DSG deficit brought forward to 2024/25 was £1.8m and it is projected to deteriorate by approximately £4m in-year, to leave a deficit of around £6m by the end of FY2024/25. So an increase of £2.9m is unlikely to be sufficient to stop a further deterioration in the HN position in FY2025/26.

4.8 The Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) is very slightly higher than 2024/25, but this increase is likely to be consumed by the increase in centrally purchased licences. We may see an increase to the draft allocation when October 2024 census numbers are applied to the funding allocation formula, but this will be modest.

4.9 The Early Years (EY) block information is released separately from the other blocks, and this was the case when we received the first indications of the 2025/26 funding on Tuesday this week. The EY block has increased considerably to around £30m but this is mainly due to the expansion of the various offers - the increases in per child funding for T&W range between 2.9% and 4.4%.

4.10 PH stated that the EY sector will struggle with the increase in the minimum wage and the increase in employers ERNIC contributions. TD agreed that ERNIC will be a significant problem for schools and local authorities as it will push up not just directly employed staffing costs, but supplier costs as well.

5. Arrangements for funding statutory services provided by the Local Authority - TD.

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

[Funding for statutory services FY2025-26](#)

[Central Schools Services Block Statutory Services 2025/26.](#)

5.2 TD summarised the paper explaining the historic position and how we got to where we are now.

5.3 RC stated that she was concerned with the number of schools that are converting to academy status which will presumably increase the costs to those schools that remain. TD stated that is true for the 2025/26 de-delegated funding request but once the amount was agreed it would not change for the current year and we will look at this again next year.

5.4 RC stated that schools needed to be able to see what the top slices are to be able to compare to the amounts quoted by MATs when they are looking to recruit schools to join them and to see that they are not being disadvantaged by staying with the LA. AW had sent RC some figures in response to a request earlier in the week and TD pointed out that the de-delegations requested represented less than 1% of maintained school budgets.

5.5 RC also queried the Safeguarding Training Costs given that schools are also being charged for attending safeguarding training.

5.6 CW stated that when these charges first came to the Forum the lines on the request were looked at in detail so newer members may not remember that process. Charges are to cover the statutory elements of the service but it would be useful to examine this in more details before the 2026/27 request for such funding. SW agreed to provide details to a 2025 Forum meeting (March, May or September/October) so that members were fully informed before the meeting at which a vote is taken.

5.7 CW stated that schools need to know what they are paying for and that they are not paying twice for the same service. CW asked if a reduction in numbers means less work or is there a requirement regardless? TD stated that the reality is somewhere in between – there is an impact on the volume of work as the number of maintained schools shrinks, but it does not diminish in direct proportion to the number of schools.

5.8 CW asked to move to voting on the two proposals.

5.9 The first vote for all members was approve the proposal to use the balance of the CSSB, after centrally purchased licences, roughly £966K to support the proposed services. All voted in favour of the proposal.

5.10 The second vote was for LA maintained schools' members was to de-delegate £30.99 per pupils for the statutory services. All voted in favour of the proposal.

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

6.1 The Forum was provided with a paper which can be found here:

[Statutory School Quality Assurance FY2025/26.](#)

6.2 TD summarised the paper which explained the background to the request to de-delegate funding for the statutory service, explaining that the LA is also partially bearing the cost of this service to the tune of £45k, plus inflation on costs since the original agreement several years ago.

6.3 RC stated, as per the previous agenda item, we need to do a deep dive to explain the costs of the service to ensure that it is fair and value for money.

6.4 CC agreed that with the trend for schools to convert, costs need to be justified.

6.5 SW agreed to bring further details of the service back to a later meeting. SW did state however that any spare capacity generated by schools converting was being reinvested into the quality assessment service. It is also difficult to provide a quality service if we are not able to offer an hours/pay package to attract and retain appropriate staff.

6.6 RC stated that she had met on Teams with TD/AW to discuss the papers for this meeting, as she would otherwise not have felt confident in voting without a full understanding of the basis of the proposals.

6.7 SW stated that we need forward plans with these votes so that all members feel confident with what they are agreeing to. However the changing governmental landscape and the impact on availability of information can be problematic.

6.8 CW moved the group to a vote, which was for LA maintained schools only, to de-delegate £11.24 per pupil for Schools Quality Assurance. RC & CC voted in favour, and it was agreed that AW would email RF, AN & SR for their vote as there are only a small number of members that are eligible to vote.

(Subsequent to the meeting, SR & AN responded in favour, and RF abstained, so the motion was therefore passed)

7. De-delegation for Free School Meal eligibility checks - TD.

7.1 The group were presented with a paper which can be found at the link:

[De-delegation for Free School Meal eligibility for FY2025/26.](#)

7.2 The paper detailed the historic position and the proposal to de-delegate £9.00 per FSME pupil to support the FSM assessment process within the LA.

- 7.3 RC asked if the costs to academies was at the same level as that of maintained schools. AW confirmed that the service invoices academies that buy into the service at the same rate. RC opined that the charge to academies should be higher.
- 7.4 CW moved the group to a vote which again was just for LA maintained schools. RC & CC voted in favour, and it was agreed that AW would email RF & SR for their vote as only a small number of members that are eligible to vote.
(Subsequent to the meeting, both SR & RF responded stating that they were in favour, so the motion was therefore passed for Primary Schools)
- 7.5 AW stated that he would also email AN as he is the only member of a secondary school, and this vote is sector specific. (Subsequent to the meeting AN voted in favour of the proposal so the motion is therefore passed for the Secondary School)

8. Joint Use Funding 2025/26- TD.

- 8.1 This agenda item was a verbal update, so no paper was presented.
- 8.2 DfE are attempting to “tidy up” the national funding formula and are looking to eliminate exceptional items where possible. They have already stated that they will not fund swimming which accounted for around 50% of the £600k+ of exceptional item funding we received. The funding for this however is still included in the initial allocations received for 2025/26. We are awaiting clarification on the remaining funding from the DfE.
- 8.3 CC fed back from the swimming steering group, stating that it is difficult to set guidance for a minimum requirement, as schools have very different circumstances / arrangements.

9. AOB - CW.

Membership of the Forum.

- 9.1 CW voiced her concern at the number of members that did not regularly attend meetings. AW advised that there are a number of vacant positions. PH asked if she could represent both school governors in addition to her current PVI representative role. SW/TD stated that they would look into this.
- 9.2 The meeting closed at 10.35.

10. Next Meetings

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

[Planned Forum Meetings](#)

- Thursday 16th January 2025
- Thursday 20th March 2025
- Thursday 15th May 2025