

## MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 23 JANUARY 2025 – HELD VIA MS TEAMS

NOTES WERE PRODUCED USING AI VIA COPILOT AS AGREED BY FORUM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MEETING

<b>1</b>	<b>Apologies</b>	
	Apologies had been received from Mark Davis, Sian Lines, Sarah Godden	
<b>2</b>	<b>Minutes and Matters Arising</b>	
	The minutes were accepted as a true record	
<b>3</b>	<b>Financial Position Update</b>	<b>DS</b>
	<p>David provided an update on the latest financial position for the Council, highlighting a significant reduction in cost spending power for Shropshire, which is between 24 and 28 million compared to previous rules. He mentioned ongoing work on the medium-term financial strategy and the challenges faced by the Council due to the funding reduction.</p> <p><b>Financial Settlement:</b> David explained that the draft settlement shared before Christmas indicated a significant reduction in cost spending power for Shropshire, between 24 and 28 million, compared to previous rules. This reduction poses additional pressure and necessitates further savings for the next year.</p> <p><b>Consultation and Strategy:</b> David mentioned that there is a live consultation on the medium-term financial strategy, with ongoing work to address the challenges. The Council has responded to the initial settlement and is expecting further updates in February.</p> <p><b>Impact on Shropshire:</b> David highlighted that Shropshire's funding increase is only 3.1%, one of the lowest figures among authorities, which presents a significant challenge. The Council is working through the implications and will share updates with the cabinet by February 12th.</p> <p><b>Deprivation and Costs:</b> David noted that the financial settlement does not adequately recognize the higher unit costs and deprivation levels in Shropshire, impacting areas such as family hubs, early years funding, and road maintenance. The Council maintains over 3000 miles of roads, significantly more than metropolitan areas, adding to the financial strain.</p>	

	<p><b>Future Actions:</b> David stated that the Council has shared the practical challenges with central government during the consultation period and is awaiting further information on the final financial strategy and settlement. Links to relevant papers and consultations were provided in the chat for colleagues to review.</p>	
4	<p><b>School Funding Arrangements 2025-26</b></p> <p>Sam updated the forum on the school funding arrangements, noting a 6.4% increase in allocation. She mentioned that the schools' National Funding Formula (NFF) is affordable and that the forum is asked to agree on the recommendation to transfer any remaining balance to the high needs block after fully funding individual schools.</p> <p><b>Funding Increase:</b> Sam reported a 6.4% increase in school funding allocation, amounting to £13,013,500. This increase is due to changes in the number of pupils on roll (NOR) and updates to the schools' National Funding Formula (NFF).</p> <p><b>NFF Affordability:</b> Sam confirmed that the NFF is affordable and that schools can be funded in line with the NFF. She provided details on primary and secondary unit funding based on the October school census numbers on roll.</p> <p><b>Block Transfers:</b> Sam discussed the transfer between blocks in previous years and noted that it was not possible in 2023-24 and 2024-25 due to affordability. This year, a possible transfer of up to 0.5% would be possible to the high needs block after fully funding individual schools in line with the NFF.</p> <p><b>Forum Agreement:</b> The forum was asked to agree on the recommendation to transfer any remaining balance up to 0.5% of the schools block into the high needs block after fully funding individual schools. The recommendation was approved by a show of hands.</p>	SB
5	<p><b>Top Up Funding Increase</b></p> <p>Lisa announced an immediate increase in the cost of provision map from £12 to £16 per hour, acknowledging that it is still not enough and that a broader review of funding and banding levels will be conducted.</p> <p><b>Immediate Increase:</b> Lisa announced an immediate increase in the cost of provision map from £12 to £16 per hour, recognizing that the previous rate was outdated and unrealistic.</p>	LT



	<p><b>Further Review:</b> Lisa acknowledged that the new rate of £16 per hour is still insufficient and that a broader review of funding and banding levels will be conducted. This review will involve working with schools and settings to ensure appropriate support.</p> <p><b>Banding Adjustments:</b> Lisa mentioned that individual discussions will take place with schools to adjust bandings and ensure funding levels are appropriate. The goal is to have new bandings and funding levels in place by the start of the next academic year.</p>	
6	<p><b>Early Years Funding</b></p> <p>Andy presented the early years funding update, highlighting an increase in the budget to £42,158,731 due to the new entitlement for children from nine months to 30 hours of free entitlement. He also mentioned the proposal to employ SEND advisory teachers for early years to support settings and improve early intervention.</p> <p><b>Budget Increase:</b> Andy reported an increase in the early years budget to £42,158,731, up from £29,196,000, due to the new entitlement for children from nine months to 30 hours of free entitlement starting in September.</p> <p><b>SEND Advisory Teachers:</b> Andy proposed employing SEND advisory teachers for early years to support settings and improve early intervention. These teachers will provide outreach support to different settings, aiming to keep more young people in mainstream primaries and secondaries.</p> <p><b>Funding Allocation:</b> Andy explained that the early years block covers provision of early years SEND, a disability and disadvantage fund, a sustainability fund, and centrally retained costs. The centrally retained costs are below the 3% guideline, ensuring maximum funds go to providers.</p> <p><b>Rate Increases:</b> Andy announced rate increases for early years funding: £5.42 per hour for three and four-year-olds, £7.15 per hour for two-year-olds, and £9.25 per hour for nine-month-olds. These increases aim to support settings and improve outcomes for children and families.</p> <p><b>Forum Approval:</b> The forum was asked to approve the 2025-26 funding rates as outlined. The rates were approved by a show of hands.</p>	AN
7	<b>GSP and Top Up Funding Changes</b>	LT/JR



	<p>John and Lisa discussed changes to the Graduated Support Pathway (GSP) and top-up funding, including the introduction of panels to review requests, the removal of the 1-2 and 3-term options, and the increase in the cost of provision map to £16 per hour. They emphasized the need for a broader review of funding and banding levels to ensure appropriate support for schools and settings.</p> <p><b>GSP Changes:</b> John outlined changes to the Graduated Support Pathway (GSP), including the introduction of panels chaired by education quality advisors to review requests. The panels will include representatives from the school community and will meet monthly.</p> <p><b>Funding Duration:</b> John announced that GSP funding will be awarded for 12 months as standard, removing the 1-2 and 3-term options. This change aims to provide more consistent support for children and schools.</p> <p><b>Alternative Provision:</b> John explained that GSP funding will not cover the costs of registered alternative provision (AP) such as TMBSS, as these are already subsidized. However, primary schools can use GSP funding for short-term AP (up to six weeks) under certain conditions.</p> <p><b>AP Development Fund:</b> John introduced a new primary AP Development Fund, allowing schools to bid for resources to address shared needs. This fund aims to provide additional support for groups of children with specific needs, such as secondary transition.</p> <p><b>Implementation Timeline:</b> John stated that pilot panels will be launched in February, with a full rollout planned for April. The process will be reviewed in March, and the goal is to deliver resources to schools within two weeks of the panel meeting.</p>	
8	<p><b>Communication</b></p> <p>WD will be preparing and sending a detailed joint letter with the leader of the Council to MPs regarding the ongoing funding of Shropshire schools and early years</p>	
8	<p><b>Follow Up Tasks</b></p> <p>Links to financial papers and consultation added to chat for colleagues</p> <p>Provide link to overall DSG values and amounts from last few years to help understand the consolidation of grants</p>	<p>DS</p> <p>DS</p>



	Letter to be written to Government, highlighting challenges faced by Shropshire schools due to the funding settlement	DS
	Share the changes to GSP and Top Up funding with the broader school community through HT briefings	JR
	Initiate review of the bandings for all schools and hubs including individual discussions and working groups	LT
8	<b>Future Meeting Dates</b>  Thursday 20 March 2025 Thursday 19 June 2025 Thursday 11 September 2025 (tbc) Thursday 13 November 2025 (tbc)	

