**Schools Forum Meeting – Attended by Sarah Shirras – Head of St Williams Primary School on 22nd November 2019**

At our Schools’ Forum meeting on 22nd November, we took the decision to transfer 0.5% from the schools budgets to the high needs block. This was a very difficult decision for us to make, going against the majority of school leaders who responded to the Consultation and adding to the significant financial pressure schools find themselves under. The Consultation responses from schools and academies supported no transfer of money from schools’ budgets to the Higher Needs Block by a significant majority. Comments made in response to the Consultation reflected the significant financial pressures facing many schools as well as the, at present, limitations in the systems for funding to support SEND children in mainstream settings. Despite the additional funding coming in to schools for the next financial year, our first-hand experience and that of our school leader colleagues is that we face significant ongoing financial pressures.

Given this context, our decision to support the 0.5% transfer was made to ensure the plan for financial recovery stays on track and to ensure the success of the SEND transformation programme. This programme is the means by which we will improve the support for our most vulnerable children through extending specialist provision, insuring provision is there for the right children and for supporting mainstream schools to meet ever more complex needs in their settings. The pressures of these needs not being met is felt by school leaders and individual teachers; it has a direct impact on teacher well-being and the retention of experienced staff as well as on the recruitment of new teachers.

A key issue for school leaders is that, whilst fully supporting the SEND transformation agenda, the changes this will bring are not here now but continuing financial pressures are. We have worked in times of uncertainty for a long while but the level of uncertainty, politically and financially, is greater than ever.

As Chair of Schools’ Forum, I was proud and impressed by the collective level of understanding of these issues and our desire to see the ‘bigger picture’ – the long term commitment to improving the system for SEND children which will improve the system for all children. This was a very difficult decision for us to make as we also are acutely aware of the impact funding pressures is having on headteachers, CEOs and Governors.