**Report to Schools’ Forum 2 February 2021**

**From Amanda Whitehead – Assistant Director, Education**

# Item 9: Closure Process 2020/21

**This report was originally presented to Forum on 5 February 2020. All changes to the report have been highlighted in yellow and shown in bold font for ease of reference.**

**1. Introduction**

* 1. This report provides an update on the statutory deadline for local authorities’ statutory accounts in 2020/21 with particular reference to the date Easter falls in 2021.
  2. Good Friday falls on 2 April 2021 and Easter Monday on 5 April 2021.

**2. Deadline For 2020/21 Closure of Accounts**

2.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 came into force on 1st April 2015. The regulations require local authorities in England and Wales to produce their statutory accounts by 31st July each year.

2.2 The regulations reduced the timescales to produce the statutory accounts by one month, with the accounts now having to be prepared by 31st May 2021. The external auditors then have a further two months to audit the accounts.

**3. What this means?**

3.1 The local authority has a statutory duty to ensure maintained school accounts are incorporated into its accounts. To provide sufficient time to carry out this work, the school accounts will need to be closed during the first week of April.

3.2 **During the period from 1st April until a school’s preliminary visit is complete, please do not process invoices or raise orders.**

3.3 **Clearly, the position relating to lockdown and COVID-19 restrictions is uncertain. The local authority continues to support schools in reducing face to face interaction and to ensure all staff remain safe.**

3.4 **For the 2019/20 closure of accounts, preliminary close visits were adapted to operate remotely. It is likely that a similar approach will be taken for 2020/21 preliminary visits, unless there is significant change in government restrictions and the local authority approach to keeping staff safe.**

3.5 To ensure the statutory deadlines are adhered to we will need to make the necessary arrangements to ensure systems are made available for local authority finance staff to complete the preliminary close visit. **In practical terms, a member of school staff will need to complete a number of activities on school systems, guided by local authority finance staff over the phone. This approach was taken for 2019/20 accounts and worked very successfully, hugely assisted by support from school staff.**

3.6 The **remote** visits will take place between Tuesday 6 April 2021 and Friday 9 April 2021. The **remote** visit will be booked in advance to minimise any disruption, the visit typically takes one hour to complete. To avoid any delay, school staff are advised to ensure their bank reconciliation; suspense items and purchase card transactions are cleared in advance of the visit.

3.7 **Leading up to the year-end, further instructions and details will be shared with all school administrators.**

**4. Recommendations**

4.1 Schools’ Forum is asked to:

a) note the contents of this report;

b) ensure that the head teachers (maintained schools only) they represent are aware that adequate staff cover is required in each school (or via a remote connection to school systems) to support the closure of accounts over Easter 2021.