



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM (WSF)

Wednesday 22 June 2023
Remote Meeting Held Via MS Teams

The meeting started at 2.30 PM

IN ATTENDANCE:

a. WSF Members

Malcolm Richards (Chair) [MR]	- Governor, Bromsgrove
Bryn Thomas (Vice Chair) [BT]	- HT Wolverley CE Secondary School
Marie Pearse [MP]	- HT Evesham Nursery School
Phil Hanson [PH]	- Headteacher Pershore High School
John Bateman [JB]	- Governor, Aspire Alternative Provision (AP)
Nathan Jones [NJ]	- HT Meadow Green
Ed Francis [EF]	- HT Fort Royal Primary School
Chris King [CK]	- CEO Severn Academies Education Trust
Jo Kelleher [JK]	- Governor, Bredon Hill Academy
Lizzie Dixon [LD]	- HT Franche Primary School
Tim Reid [TR]	- Church of England Board of Education
Adrian Ward [AW]	- CEO/Exec Head of Bordesley MAT

b. Local Authority (LA)

Councillor Tracey Onslow [TO]	- Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills, Worcestershire County Council
Phil Rook [PR]	- Chief Financial Officer - Worcestershire County Council
Sarah Wilkins [SW]	- Director of Education and Early Help Worcestershire Children First
Caroline Brand [CB]	- Schools Finance Manager – Worcestershire Children First
Mel Barnet [MB]	- Director of All Age Disability Services – Worcestershire Children First
Rob Phillips [RP]	- Finance Business Partner - Schools - Worcestershire Children First
Ruth Bessant [RB]	- Finance Business Partner - Schools - Worcestershire Children First

1. Apologies

Paul Essenhigh [PE] (Also resigned due to retirement)	- Executive HT Catshill Middle, Catshill First and Nursery Schools
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Annette Summers [AS]	- Nursery Owner
Lorraine Petersen [LP]	- Governor, Bromsgrove
Emma Prichard [EP]	- Principal Black Pear Trust
Vivek Shah [VS]	- Nursery Owner
Jeff Robinson [JR]	- Governor, Malvern Hills

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

3. DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTERESTS WITH ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

Bryn Thomas for agenda item 13 – as a school with a deficit budget
 Jay Heart for agenda item 13 – as a school with a deficit budget

4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING (19 January 2023)

Minutes agreed.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

None raised.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a. Maintained Schools Conference (CB).

CB gave a verbal update on the upcoming Maintained Schools Business Management Conference which is taking place on Tuesday 27 June 2023. There will be speakers from both Zurich Municipal and the DfE regarding their Risk Protection Arrangement Insurance (RPA). Schools will need to select a provider for their school's insurance cover by 30 September 2023.

b. WCC Cabinet Report – Provisional Financial Results 2022/23 (PR)

PR gave an update stating that the local authority ended the year with a £7.3m deficit due to a few factors including the impact of inflation and increased demand, this is going to be funded by using reserves this year.

The local authority published its financial accounts, on the 31 May 2023. A copy is available on the council's website for scrutiny.

7. Maintained School Balances (CB/PR)

CB presented the report and gave a summary of maintained school revenue balances for the financial year 2022/23. These have reduced by a further £1.1m from £5.5m to £4.4m.

The number of schools ending the year with a deficit balance increased from 28 to 30. The total of the deficits for the year is £10.8m.

The number of maintained schools setting budgets for 2023/2024 is 112 of which 28 have set a deficit budget. 25 schools, ending 2022-2023 with a deficit balance, have set a deficit budget for 2023-2024.

The total value of deficit budgets is £11.6 m against the value of surplus budgets of £8.7m. This indicates that schools' balances will be in deficit totalling £2.9m at the end of this financial year.

CB asked that the following points be noted:

The Local Government Pension Fund (LGPS) is fully funded for at least the next 3 years, 2023-2024 to 2025-2026, therefore there is no pensions back funding charge for schools to pay. This is an annual saving of £2.9m based on last year's charge.

The Mainstream Schools Additional Grant. This one year only grant totalling £4.3m is in addition to the Schools Block funding allocation, becoming part of Schools Block funding in 2024/25.

SW gave an update on the part that the School Resource Management Adviser (SRMA) has given to schools. This resource is helping schools. It is the expectation of the DfE and local authority for maintained schools with a deficit or financial difficulty will be offered this resource.

MR asked if we investigate surplus balances. CB reminded WSF that the LA has provision in its Scheme for Financing Schools to challenge excess surplus balances held by schools over the permitted level for their sector. However, in view of the current financial pressures on schools, permission is requested annually to be light touch,

Agreement was given to review excess surplus balances as part of this financial year's budget monitoring programme.

CB also confirmed that the LA will be requesting a three-year budget forecast from schools within this financial year.

8. Year End position for the DSG (PR/RP)

PR gave an update on the DSG year-end position. The High Needs Block has increased by £9.3m to £20.3m. This was due to further increases in demand and inflation. The cumulative deficit will need to be funded by the LA from 2026/27.

EF confirmed that the F40 was meeting with MPs to raise the issue of High needs Funding and will feedback to WSF at the meeting in September.

MP also said that maintained nurseries are also raising the issue of Early Years Funding with MPs and the government.

9. DfE Delivering Better Value in SEND (PR/MB)

Oli Clipsham from Newton Europe gave an update on the background and purpose of the Delivering Better Value programme. Newton Europe is supporting with the diagnostics stage of the programme, looking at all options and possibilities for change.

They are also aggregating the information they have received from the 55 local authorities involved in the programme and will report back their findings to the DfE. Giving them information on the position and barriers that local authorities are facing with delivering better value in SEND.

PR/MB discussed the context and overall picture of High-Level Needs funding if we did nothing. The trajectory of forecast spend would mean we would have a deficit of circa, £180m by 2027/28 if this is not mitigated. The plan has been produced with partners across the sector.

This is not going to flatten out the cost but there are opportunities for reducing cost and making sure that the outcomes for the young people in Worcestershire.

MB confirmed we have been asked to pilot the SEND and AP change programme which we have agreed.

PR confirmed that the cost of Newton Europe is being funded by the local authority and we are a participant in the process which is also being funded by the DfE.

10. New Secondary School, funding agreement, (Decision) (SW)

This is to agree the minimum funding pupil for the school opening which is anticipated for the academic year 2026/27 for Year 7 only. They will receive funding for the year 7 as being full going forward, with year 8 being funded on actual number on roll thereafter.

This was agreed by WSF.

BT raised concerns about how the curriculum and the staffing of the new school would be funded. SW to discuss this with Oasis Academy Trust and ask for clarity on how they will meet education needs and bring back to a future WSF.

11. New ASD School (Verbal update) (MB/SW)

MB/SW gave update on the new ASD school in Malvern. To date 9 Academy Trusts (AT) have attended information events. It is anticipated that the successful provider/AT will be announced in January 2024.

12. HLN Supplementary Funding (Decision) (RP)

RP explained the proposal and WSF agreed to this funding to be allocated to special school and APs.

13. Scheme for Financing Schools – Agreement to reduce interest on Deficit Schools and Procurement (RP)

RP explained the changes to WSF, change 1 brings us in line with regulation after Brexit and the other is changing the interest on schools with a deficit by removing the additional 1%. The local authority already put this in place for the end of financial year 2022/23 with us bring this to the WSF to match.

This was agreed.

14. Growth Funding Criteria (RP/PR)

The Chair asked this to be brought to the WSF for reference. It was requested that this goes out to all schools via SW newsletter to schools.

Should this document also include Resource units, but unfortunately this is school block rather than HLN block funding.

15. SEND Accelerated Progress Plan (SW/MB/BT)

MB confirmed that SW/MB/BT have been to scrutiny panel and thanks to all that attended.

DfE have recognised the positive culture change within schools and additional staffing in SEND and health to support. The lack of provision for SEND pupils and this is being worked on by the schools, local authority, and health.

BT emphasised the changes in the culture of mainstream schools to SEND pupils and working together for the pupils.

16. Disapplication for 'Exceptional Premises' (Decision) (RP)

RP explained that this was brought last year, and we need to ask for this agreement again this year. We still have 4 schools that need this additional support.

This was agreed by the WSF.

17. Split site funding and criteria for financial year 2024/25 (RP)

RP explained that one school would gain this funding next financial year and one school would lose this funding. RP confirmed that these schools will be updated on this.

18. Funding Consultation 2024/25 (Decision) (RP)

RP explained that last year we asked WSF for agreement if they want the local authority to go out and consult on the funding for school or not. If agreed, we would keep funding on the same principals as previous years.

This was agreed by the WSF to remain with current principals.

Meeting ended.

The meeting closed at 3.55 PM.

Date of next meeting

The date of the next WSF meeting: - Thursday 21 September 2023 at 2.30 PM
(Remote Meeting - MS Teams)