



# worcestershire county council

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

Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021  
Remote Meeting Held Via MS Teams

The meeting started at 10am

### IN ATTENDANCE:

#### WSF Members

Malcolm Richards (Chair)	-	Governor, Bromsgrove
Bryn Thomas (Vice Chair)	-	HT Wolverley CE Secondary School
Marie Pearce	-	HT Evesham Nursery School
Paul Essenhigh	-	Executive HT Catshill Middle, Catshill First and Nursery Schools
Lizzie Dixon	-	HT Franche Primary School
Ed Francis	-	HT Fort Royal Primary School
Tim Reid	-	Church of England Board of Education
Tom Jenkins	-	PVI Sector
Jeff Robinson	-	Governor, Malvern Hills
Phil Hanson	-	HT Pershore High School
Chris King	-	CEO Severn Academies Educational Trust
Lorraine Peterson	-	Governor, Bromsgrove
Adrian Ward	-	HT Trinity High School

#### Local Authority (LA)

Phil Rook	-	Director of Resources Worcestershire Children First
Chris Bird	-	Senior Finance Business Partner Worcestershire Children First
Caroline Brand	-	Schools Finance Manager Worcestershire Children First
Rob Phillips	-	Schools Finance Team Worcestershire Children First
Richard Taylor	-	Assistant Director for HR OD & Engagement Worcestershire County Council
Mark Price	-	Regional Contract Director Liberata
Ian Fitzgerald	-	HR & Payroll Service Delivery Director Liberata
Gabrielle Stacey	-	Assistant Director SEND and Vulnerable Learners

## **1. APOLOGIES**

Sarah Wilkins	-	Director of Education and Early Help Worcestershire Children First
Councillor Marcus Hart	-	Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education
Emma Pritchard	-	Principal The Black Pear Trust
John Bateman	-	Governor, Aspire Alternative Provision (AP) Free School
Greg McClarey	-	Archdiocese of Birmingham
Edward Senior	-	16-19 Providers
Nathan Jones	-	HT Meadow Green Primary School
David McIntosh	-	Governor, Wyre Forest
John Bateman	-	Governor, Aspire Alternative Provision (AP) Free School

## **2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None.

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

Chris Bird declared an interest as a foundation trustee of the Our Lady of the Magnificat MAT.

## **4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING (23<sup>rd</sup> September 2021)**

Tim Reid highlighted a spelling mistake in his surname and apologies were to be added for the meeting from Lorraine Peterson.

Following these minor amendments, the minutes were agreed.

## **5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

None as all picked up within the agenda.

## **6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

## **7. SCHOOL PAYROLL ISSUES IN SEPTEMBER - LIBERATA**

7.1 Phil introduced that given the significant issues for schools resulting in no payment of some staff that Richard Taylor Assistant Director for HR OD & Engagement, Mark Price, Regional Contract Director Liberata and Ian Fitzgerald, HR & Payroll Service Delivery Director were in attendance to highlight what had gone wrong and how this would be addressed so this situation did not occur again.

7.2 Richard Taylor highlighted that from September 2021 the HR service has transferred back to the County Council and his team are there to support schools with a wide range of HR and OD matters. The contract for payroll was through the County Council and this was provided by Liberata. Richard also mentioned September Payroll issue had been raised at the Section 8 meeting with the trade unions.

7.3 Mark Price spoke to the forum and sincerely apologised for the problems caused to individuals, schools and academy trusts in September and stated that the service provided was not good enough and they were taking steps to ensure this does not happen again.

7.4 Ian Fitzgerald ran through a detailed presentation which highlighted statistics and volumes for September and how additional resources as well as transforming how the services were delivered to ensure service and process improvements would be made. One area Ian highlighted was the Helpdesk and communications with customers and how this needed to be improved as it was and unacceptable level of service.

The WSF members asked various questions around how the September volume was not anticipated, ensuring timely and effective communication to schools and how schools and individuals would receive refunds for any bank charges / costs incurred. Following a discussion it was agreed that Ian would liaise with schools impacted as there was a list of staff and establishments where staff had received emergency payments. The Forum thanked Mark and Ian for their attendance.

## **8. SCHOOL FUNDING 2022-23 LOCAL ISSUES**

### **8.1 Recommended Policy**

(a) Phil advised the WSF recommended policy for 2022-23 had been communicated to schools following the WSF meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2021 and that no contra indications had been received.

(b) The WSF noted the position.

### **8.2 WSF Required Decisions**

(a) The WSF were requested to consider their required decisions for 2022-23. These would then form part of the WCC Cabinet report to inform the decisions required by the Cabinet.

(b) The WSF were reminded that, decisions on the potential to transfer schools block funding, delegation and de-delegation matters and centrally retained items are for designated members of the WSF, whereas the final decision on the LSFF was for the WCC Cabinet. The WSF were requested to consider and either endorse, approve or otherwise the recommended actions.

(c) Phil advised that the voting arrangements were as follows: -

Schools Members and PVI Members only – LSFF for endorsement or not.

- Maintained Mainstream School Members only – approval or not for the delegation and de-delegation for central services for their phase only.

- All WSF Members – approval or not for schools’ block transfer and centrally retained services for all schools.

(d) LSFF for 2022-23

- Although not a WSF decision, the WSF were requested to consider endorsement of the proposal.
- On a show of hands, the WSF RESOLVED TO ENDORSE (For 11 votes; Against 0 votes; Abstentions 0 votes) the LSFF in 2022-23 to continue as far is affordable and practicable to be based using the DfE Year 4 NFF parameters using the DfE required data sets and formula factors as in the NFF, with the estimated factors to be detailed in the WCC Cabinet report.

(e) Potential to Transfer 0.5% of the Schools Block DSG in 2022-23 to the High Needs Block

- The WSF considered its statutory responsibility in making a decision on the transfer of Schools Block Funding. In line with the Schools Forum (England) Regulations 2012, the WSF considered the issue.
- On a show of hands, the **WSF RESOLVED NOT TO APPROVE** (For 0 votes; Against 12 votes; Abstentions 0 votes) the transfer in 2022-23 of 0.5% of the Schools Block funding to support High Needs budget pressures.

(f) Delegation and De-delegation of Centrally Retained DSG Services for Maintained Mainstream Schools

- The WSF considered its statutory responsibilities in making decisions on the delegation or de-delegation of services currently centrally retained in the DSG. In line with the Schools Forum (England) Regulations 2012, the WSF maintained school members by phase considered these areas.
- On a show of hands, the **WSF MAINTAINED SCHOOL MEMBERS BY PHASE UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO APPROVE** (Primary: For 3 votes; Against 0 votes; Abstentions 0 votes; and Secondary: For 2 votes; Against 0 votes; Abstentions 0 votes): -
  - The continued initial delegation and transfer of the following centrally retained services for 2022-22 as in 2021-22 as follows: -

<b>FORMULA FACTOR</b>	<b>SERVICE</b>
Basic Per Pupil	School Specific Contingencies (not early years) Support for Schools in Financial Difficulties 14-16 Practical Learning Options Schools Insurance Staff Costs Supply Cover Licences and Subscriptions
Deprivation	FSM Eligibility
EAL	Support for Minority Ethnic Pupils
Low-Cost High Incidence SEN Prior Attainment	Support for Underachieving Groups Behaviour Support Services

- The delegation or de-delegation of these areas by reducing the formula amounts for maintained mainstream schools as follows in **Table 1**: -

**Table 1: Delegation/De-Delegation Decisions for Maintained Mainstream Schools Only**

<b>Phase/Service [Formula Factor for De-delegation indicated]</b>	<b>Primary Delegation</b>	<b>Primary De-delegation</b>	<b>Secondary Delegation</b>	<b>Secondary De-delegation</b>
School Specific Contingency (SSC) <b>[Per Pupil (AWPU)]</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes
Support for Schools in Financial Difficulty <b>[Per Pupil (AWPU)]</b>	Yes	No	Yes	No
Behaviour Support Services <b>[Low Prior Attainment]</b>	N/A	N/A	Yes	No
14-16 Practical Learning Options <b>[Per Pupil (AWPU)]</b>	N/A	N/A	Yes	No
Support for Minority Ethnic Pupils/ Underachieving Groups – English as an Additional Language <b>[EAL 3 Years]</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes
Traveller Children <b>[Low Prior Attainment]</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes
Free School Meal (FSM) Eligibility <b>[FSM Annual]</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes
Schools Insurance <b>[Per Pupil (AWPU)]</b>	Yes	No	Yes	No
Staff Costs/Duties Supply Cover –				
Civic	No	Yes	No	Yes
Trade Union	No	Yes	No	Yes
HR Related	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>[Per Pupil (AWPU)]</b>				
Additional School Improvement Services	No	No	No	No
Former General Duties Previously Funded by the Former Education Services Grant (ESG)	N/A	No	N/A	No

**(g) Centrally Retained DSG Services**

- The WSF also considered its statutory responsibilities in making decisions on other centrally retained DSG services. In line with the Schools Forum (England) Regulations 2012, the WSF considered these areas.

- On a show of hands, the **WSF MEMBERS UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO APPROVE** (For 11 votes; Against 0 votes; Abstention 0 votes) the continued central retention in 2022-23 of the centrally retained services as detailed, limited to the 2017-18 budget level or as prescribed by the DfE (indicative budgets are shown either limited to previous year levels or **estimated** funding subject to final clarification and change) for: -
  - Copyright Licensing Agency (CLA) and Music Publishers Association (MPA) licenses (subject to DfE prescription) – £0.41m **estimated**.
  - Contributions to Combined Services – the Early Intervention Family Support (EIFS) service budget – £0.77m **actual** (reflecting the 2021-22 amount will be reduced by a further 20% because of the DfE change to the Central Services Schools Block DSG).
  - Co-ordinated admissions scheme – £0.60m **estimated**.
  - Servicing of the Schools Forum – £0.06m **estimated**.
  - Services previously funded by the retained rate of the ESG – £1.26m **estimated**.

(h) The WSF considered the need to exercise its responsibilities to inform the County Council Cabinet of the issues discussed and decisions for the 2021-22 LSFF and its decisions on transfer from the Schools Block, delegation/de-delegation for maintained mainstream schools and other centrally retained services for all schools. Phil advised the WSF he would feedback to Cabinet accordingly on the above issues.

#### **RESOLVED –**

**The WSF unanimously agreed that all these above decisions be communicated to the Worcestershire County Council Cabinet as required.**

#### **9. DfE CONSULTATION ON REFORMING ON LOCAL AUTHORITY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FUNCTIONS ARE FUNDED**

9.1 Phil advised on the recent consultation on views to remove the School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant ('the Grant'), which is currently allocated to local authorities to support school improvement activities. Subject to the outcome of this consultation, the proposal is that the Grant would therefore be ended with effect from the start of FY 2023-24, phased so that it would be reduced to 50% of the current amount on a per school basis in FY 2022-23 to give councils and maintained schools time to adjust to these new arrangements. For Worcestershire the Grant is £413k per annum and this does not support the core school improvement team within WCF.

9.2 The WSF had a detailed discussion on the grant and the disappointment of this proposal, Tim Reid stated that this provided a valuable support to a number of schools and he would be responding to this consultation separately and will also forward his response to Phil. The chair also stated that WAG would also be making a submission.

9.3 Phil will also liaise with Nicky Jones to produce a response on behalf of the County Council. A number of Headteachers agreed that they would respond with their phases as the removal of the grant could impact on school improvement and effectiveness.

#### **10. HIGH NEEDS UPDATE**

10.1 Phil introduced the item and Chris ran through the update in terms of the financial information and detailed areas of spend in the high needs budget and detailed the reasons

behind the challenges faced in the service. Chris also highlighted the average unit costs and numbers of children supported. Chris also mentioned that the unit cost will change due to the updating of special schools data. Phil also reminded the forum of the national context predicting a deficit of £1.3bn by the end of 2022-23 for member LAs and given the change to the accounting treatment is only for a 2-year period this represents a significant financial 'cliff edge' when the deficit reverts back to local authorities which was a significant risk to the County Council.

10.2 Gabrielle ran through in detail the approach to management of the High Needs deficit within the SEND service and updated the forum on the aspects of the plan the developments in place.

10.3 The WSF asked questions and commented as follows: -

- Concerns raised by the Vice Chair at the last meeting had been addressed and he welcomed the detailed report.
- Members did acknowledge that this was a difficult area to 'turn the tanker' around but wanted to be kept apprised of the progress given the size of the deficit.
- Members also had concerns that this level of transformation needed capital investment and we collectively needed to continue to highlight and lobby all we can to highlight this significant issue.
- Member asked how this would be funded, Phil responded that any capital funding would have to compete against other council pressures and priorities and that Simon Geraghty and Marcus Hart are meeting with Robin Walker MP very soon and will be highlighting the need for Capital Funding and the pressure on the High Needs Budget.
- Ed raised that he was meeting with Robin Walker on Friday and will also be raising the issue of Worcestershire low funding and access to capital.

10.4 In closing the item, the Vice Chair thanked the LA and the WSF for considering the matter and the transparency in the report, debate and decision making.

## **11. F40 GROUP UPDATE – MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 20<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2021**

11.1 Noted.

**The meeting closed at 11.55am**

The date of the next WSF meeting is: -

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022 at 2pm Via Remote Meeting MS Teams