



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

Thursday 27th September 2007
Woodland Room, Countryside Centre, County Hall Campus

The meeting started at 2.00 pm

IN ATTENDANCE:

WSF Members:

Peter Garner	-	Walkwood Middle School
June Longmuir	-	Governor, Bromsgrove
Bernard Roberts	-	Prince Henry's High School
Richard Aust	-	Chadsgrove Special School
David Hargreaves	-	Governor, Redditch
Prue Winton	-	Governor, Tenbury
Sean Devlin	-	Archdiocese of Birmingham
Terry Holland	-	Blackminster Middle School
Naomi Christelow	-	Evesham Nursery School
Julie Farr	-	Church of England Board of Education
Frank Howard	-	Governor, Bromsgrove
Steve Baker	-	Union Representative
David McIntosh	-	Governor, Wyre Forest
Maureen Hudson	-	Governor, Redditch

WSF Observer Member:

Dave Waldron	-	LSC
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Local Authority (LA) Officers:

Colin Weeden	-	Children's Services
Andy McHale	-	Children's Services
Trish Mallinson	-	Children's Services

Worcestershire County Council (WCC) Member:

Liz Eyre	-	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
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1. CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

1.1 Election of Chair

(a) Andy took the Chair and advised that the term of office for the current Chair Peter Garner had expired on 31st August 2007. Nominations were invited for Chair.

(b) Terry Holland proposed Peter Garner, which was seconded by Frank Howard. No other nominations were received.

RESOLVED – That Peter Garner be elected as Chair of the WSF for the 2-year period ending 31st August 2009 in line with his current term of office.

Peter Garner took the Chair for the rest of the meeting.

1.2 Election of Vice Chair

(a) The term of office for the current Vice Chair had expired on 31st August 2007. Nominations were invited for Vice Chair.

(b) David Hargreaves proposed Frank Howard, which was seconded by Prue Winton. No other nominations were received.

RESOLVED – That Frank Howard be elected as Vice Chair of the WSF until 30th November 2008 the end date for his current term of office.

1.3 Membership List September 2007

(a) The WSF noted the resignations received from Richard Beckett, Flora Wright and Paul Crosher. Andy confirmed that relevant letters had been sent accordingly.

(b) The Chair welcomed new Forum members Maureen Hudson, David McIntosh and Steve Baker to the meeting. Andy confirmed induction packs of information had been sent.

(c) Andy advised on the proposed changes to the Schools Forum regulations recently circulated. The key changes were: -

- Schools Forums with non-school members have to widen their membership to include representatives of the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) early years sector and the 14-19 Partnership.
- The limit on non-school members has been increased from up to 1/5th to up to 1/3rd of members.
- The scope of the school membership has been widened to permit membership for 'senior members of school staff' responsible for financial issues.
- Schools Forums need to have formal arrangement for substitutes.

(d) The implications for the current WSF membership of 20 (16 school and 4 non-school) were further advised as follows: -

- The need to create 2 new non-school categories. This would mean a WSF membership of 22, which provides for school members of 16 (73%) and non-school of 6 (27%). This satisfies the non-school membership limit and the required 2:1 majority for school members.
- The WSF had already considered the option for a wider scope for school membership and agreed for this to stay as Headteachers and Governors.
- The WSF already have informal arrangements for substitutes, which now need to be formalised. It was noted these nominations had to be in the same category for each individual member.
- The Early Years and Childcare Partnership no longer exists so a change in this category is required.

RESOLVED –

To increase the current WSF membership by 2 in the non-schools category to include representation from the PVI early years sector and the 14-19 Partnership as required resulting in a total new membership of 22 (16 school and 6 non-school).

To change the existing category for Early Years and Childcare Partnership to Childcare Act Implementation Group and to seek a nomination for WSF membership.

The Clerk to make the necessary changes to the WSF constitution for all these issues as required.

ACTION – All WSF members to advise the Clerk on the name of their nominated substitute.

2. APOLOGIES

Sarah Beadsworth	-	Governor, Wyre Forest
Cherrill Illingworth	-	Oakhill First School
David Braham	-	Bengeworth First School
Malcolm Richards	-	Governor, Bromsgrove
Liz Quinn	-	Stourport High School
Lesley Towey	-	Early Years and Childcare Partnership

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING (5th July 2007)

Agreed.

4. MATTERS ARISING

4.1 Data on Statements

The information provided was noted and Colin confirmed that further information was to be shared at relevant Headteacher meetings.

4.2 s106 Issues

(a) The information provided was noted and some members felt it was a useful paper. The first set of tables showed resources received but not yet allocated and the second set of tables resources received and allocated but not yet spent.

(b) Some Forum members raised issues on the need for transparency in the use of these resources and that VA schools were not able to access funding. Colin advised that these agreements are required to be developed in partnership with the District Councils and this has impacted on previous practice. Similarly the previous agreements were built into narrow pyramids of schools and as such did not include RC schools. This is not the case now.

(c) Colin further advised that any application has to demonstrate that the additional housing puts pressure on school places, so there will not be any resource in areas of surplus places.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

5.1 Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR)

Trish advised of the need to change relevant financial reporting structures e.g. school tabulations, SAP, etc into the national CFR format. The Forum noted and agreed this position.

5.2 WSF Web Site

Andy advised of some development work for a WSF web site to support the e-communication of WSF business. A proposed structure was tabled. It was agreed to proceed for publication on this basis as part of the WCC web site.

6. SCHOOL FUNDING MATTERS

6.1 The Management of Surplus Balances

(a) Andy introduced the report, which summarised the current position on those schools being challenged on the level of surplus balances in 2005/06 and 2006/07. The Forum was advised the scheme would be fully operational from 2008/09. It was noted the level of carry forward in some schools is high making the case for additional funding difficult. However, poor funding levels require schools to accrue balances for capital works.

(b) Trish confirmed that the interest is paid to and charged to schools on surplus and deficits balances. This is based on the average money market variable rate. The overall net level of £14m is invested as part of the County Council balances but it is not possible to see how this compares to the net interest paid to schools.

(c) The paper also confirmed further details on the DCSF requirement for a 5% levy on all surplus balances to be re-distributed to all schools on a basis to be agreed. This has to operate in addition to the existing Fair Funding scheme provisions for the management of surplus balances. It was agreed to convene a WSF working group to consider the issues including re-distribution.

RESOLVED – That a working group of Forum members and officers comprising Sean Devlin, Julie Farr, Richard Aust, Naomi Christelow, June Longmuir, David Hargreaves, Andy McHale and Trish Mallinson be formed to consider the issues and report back at a future meeting.

6.2 Schools in Deficit

(a) Andy introduced the report, which detailed the current position on schools in deficit and the support arrangements in place. The Forum were very supportive of the work but were concerned on the frequency of officer meetings. Colin confirmed this happens regularly as well as consideration by the Children's Services Leadership Team. There was also a need to consider key triggers such as a HT retirement.

(b) It was felt there needed to be discussion between Headteachers and Education Improvement Advisers (EIA's). It was confirmed that the impact of the FMSiS was key here together with the ability to issue a notice of concern. Although the setting of deficit budgets is not permitted in practice there is the allowance of a 'licensed deficit' over a

maximum of 3 years. There was concern on the new schools in the deficit list and some longstanding deficits.

(c) The Forum supported the proposal in section 4.2 of the report for a working group to produce a SDP costing model as an example of good practice but not as a prescribed template for the SDP itself.

RESOLVED – That a working group of Forum members/nominees and officers comprising Bernard Roberts, Peter Garner (nominee), Frank Howard (nominee), Sue Howell and EIA colleagues be formed to consider the issues and report back at a future meeting.

6.3 Proposed Scheme to Support Schools in Financial Difficulty

(a) The Chair reported on the meeting of the Forum sub group, who had considered the consultation responses and incorporated the changes into a further draft. These were agreed but it was noted there needed to be a final amendment to section B12 in the revised scheme.

(b) The Forum commented on the excellent document and thanked the working group for its work. It was felt is was robust enough to deal with the very small number of likely applications and that it would not be possible for schools to engineer financial support. It was noted that its introduction from 2008/09 was dependent upon DSG availability.

RESOLVED – The WSF unanimously agreed to introduce the amended scheme as presented to be called the ‘Schools Deficit Recovery Scheme’ from 2008/09 subject to DSG headroom availability and the Clerk to communicate this to all schools.

7. SOCIAL DEPRIVATION UPDATE

7.1 Andy introduced the report and advised the Forum of the completion of the return during the summer. The Forum commented that the lack of a robust national definition and criteria for this issue makes comparison difficult. This was evidenced by the significant variations in the LA benchmarking returns.

7.2 The Forum endorsed the commentary made with the return and particularly the concern that the DCSF were concentrating on such a small part of the DSG and the basis of their assumptions from the previous SFSS model was flawed. The role of the WCC external Children’s Services adviser was noted.

8. NATIONAL REVIEW OF THE DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG)

8.1 Andy advised that the DCSF had now published the terms of reference for the review of the DSG for the third multi budget period commencing April 2011. LA’s were invited to comment on these.

8.2 The draft response, making the relevant points, was noted and was agreed to be sent to the DCSF by the due date of 2nd November.

RESOLVED – The response to the consultation attached to the report be sent to the DCSF by 2nd November 2007.

9. SCHOOL FUNDING ISSUES 2006/07

9.1 Varying of Non-AWPU Data Sets

(a) Colin advised that was a critical area for the next multi budget period and reiterated the practice in the current 2-year budget period. The Forum commented on the dilemma between predictability, stability and data accuracy.

(b) The issues arising as a consequence of having to confirm the resource units prior to the start of the multi budget period was stressed and could impact more in the next period due to a lower DSG settlement. The Forum felt it was not appropriate to indicate a preferred option but wait to see the results of the consultation with schools.

9.2 Early Years

Andy advised of all the areas for development during the next multi budget period. The Forum supported the need to set up an Early Years Provider Reference Group, as a sub group of the WSF, to lead on the issues and report back.

RESOLVED – That the WSF agree to the set up of an Early Years Provider Reference Group to consider the issues and that WSF members Cherrill Illingworth, Naomi Christelow, Prue Winton and the PVI Member be nominated to sit on the group along with other representatives of the LA and PVI sector.

9.3 Explanatory Note for LA's

Andy advised of the recently published guidance note on the changes for 2008-11. The guidance did not readily provide any further significant detail. Colin alerted the Forum to the issues in the document relating to efficiency assumptions and the potential impact on the MFG and DSG.

9.4 Draft Consultation Paper 2008-11

(a) The Forum noted the draft paper and that it had to cover all potential national and local issues relating to the next multi year budget period 2008-11. Forum members were requested to make any final comments to Andy by 3rd October 2007. The document would be circulated before half term with a return date of 26th November 2007.

(b) Andy advised that the final version would include some further details for issues on SEN and EAL.

ACTION – WSF members to make any final comments to Andy by 3rd October 2007.

9.5 14-19 Reforms

(a) The issues were noted together with the need for partnership working. There was a concern that information relating to diplomas had not progressed at the required pace.

(b) On VIP, there were further issues relating to the uncertainty of the funding, which would impact on staffing, curriculum planning and timetabling. It was felt that further representation should be made from the WSF.

RESOLVED – A letter to be sent to the DCSF raising concerns on the VIP issues from the WSF.

10. SECTION 52 BUDGET BENCHMARKING 2007/08

10.1 The detailed benchmarking statistics were noted and it was confirmed the high comparative level of devolving resources in WCC was partly due to the delegation of SEN services.

The meeting finished at 4.00pm

**Date of next meeting: Thursday 6th December 2007
2.00pm Woodlands Room Countryside Centre
County Hall Campus**