



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

Wednesday 23 November 2023
Remote Meeting Held Via MS Teams

The meeting started at 2.30 PM.

IN ATTENDANCE:

a. WSF Members

Bryn Thomas (Vice Chair) [BT]	- HT Wolverley CE Secondary School
Marie Pearce [MP]	- HT Evesham Nursery School
Jo Kelleher [JK]	- Governor, Bredon Hill Academy
Annette Summers [AS]	- Nursery Owner
Lorraine Petersen [LP]	- Governor, Bromsgrove
Vivek Shah [VS]	- Nursery Owner
Ed Francis [EF]	- HT Fort Royal Primary School
Jay Hart [JH]	- HT Kingfisher School
Nathan Jones (NT)	- HT Meadow Green Primary School
Phil Hanson (PH)	- HT of Pershore High School

b. Local Authority (LA)

Councillor Tracey Onslow [TO]	- Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills, Worcestershire County Council
Sarah Wilkins [SW]	- Director of Education, Early Years, Inclusion and Pupil Place Planning Worcestershire Children First
Chris Bird [CBI]	- Acting Director of Resources Worcestershire Children First
Rob Phillips [RP]	- Finance Business Partner - Schools - Worcestershire Children First
Ruth Bessant [RB]	- Finance Business Partner - Schools - Worcestershire Children First

BT thanked member for attending the rescheduled meeting, originally planned for 9 November, in which we would have not meet quorum if it had proceeded.

1. Apologies

Malcolm Richards (Chair) [MR]	- Governor, Bromsgrove
Mel Barnet [MB]	- Director of All Age Disability Services – Worcestershire Children First
Caroline Brand [CBr]	- Schools Finance Manager – Worcestershire Children First
Tim Reid	- Church of England Board of Education

Jeff Robinson (Previous Governor, Malvern Hills) has resigned as he has stood down as a governor. WSF would like to pass their thanks for the dedicated support for the many years of service that Jeff has contributed to schools, Worcestershire Association of Governors, and WSF.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

CBi as a Volunteer Foundation Director of Our Lady of Magnificat Multi-Academy Trust and a family member who runs a nursery provision.

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

None

4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING (21 September 2023)

Minutes agreed.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

a. Agenda Item 8 - WSF membership vacancies

RP confirmed that there are two potential new members. This is being followed up by the Chair. One is from Worcestershire Association of Secondary Headteacher (WASH), and the other new member proposed is a headteacher of an Alternative Provision (AP)

SW to discuss latest position with RP so that we can fill vacancies in membership and feed back to WSF at the next meeting.

b. Agenda Item 10 c – Unity guaranteed funding 2024/25

RP confirmed that this is still being worked on and relates to the 3.4% based on the previous year's funding.

6. Indicative Dedicated School Grant (DSG) rates for 2024/25

RP updated WSF on the latest position of the indicative DSG. There has been a further update since the meeting in September, due to the Department for Education (DfE) error in calculations using incorrect pupil information. The quantum of funding is the same as previously notified by government, but the rates were inflated due to the error.

7. School Block Changes

RP updated WSF that due to agenda item 6 this only affected the school block funding which is where the error was and supplied the latest information relating to the potential funding rates.

BT said his understanding, from information being published, is that this worked out to about £20,000 for an average primary school and £50,000 for a Secondary school.

RP confirmed that, even though the individual factors have changed, the funding floor has remained the same.

8. Early Years Consultation - Worcestershire

RP confirmed that Worcestershire Children First (WCF) officers had met with members of WSF before the consultation went out. He would like to pass his thanks to them all for their time, support, and suggestions.

The consultation is live at present and closes at 5 PM on 14 December.

9. WSF Required Decisions

BT confirmed that this item was resolved on the 9 November via email, as we were unable to meet due to quorum. RP confirmed that we had sufficient agreement from member that all have been agreed. Allowing the local authority to continue with the de-delegation of services, and central block.

10. WSF Constitution (Verbal)

This item was agreed to be deferred until the next meeting when the Chair will be present to lead on this.

11. Financial Support for Local Authorities Support Schools in Financial Difficulty 2023 to 2024

BT started this item by giving some context around the fact the Government had put aside £40 million to support schools in financial difficulty. The Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has retained £20 million to support academies and £20 million has been allocated to Local Authorities (LA) Worcestershire was the third highest with £1.56 million. The allocation is based on the value of deficits as a proportion of maintained schools' income above 1%.

RP advised that several schools have already requested a portion of this funding also It was agreed that the LA should not start allocating any of the funds until a fair and transparent policy for allocating the funds is agreed.

RP also confirmed that WCC would only be able allocated funding to maintained schools in all sectors, mainstream, special, PRUs, nursery school. Academies would need to contact the ESFA, but we value the thought of all members.

CBi confirmed the discussion is not a proposal on how the LA would use the funds, as there is published criteria, this is an opportunity to discuss initial thoughts. The LA are looking for WSF to make suggestion on what should be included. The conditions are quite loose, but it advises that schools in financial difficulty does not necessarily mean schools who are currently in a deficit.

JH asked if there was sufficient funding to clear the historic deficits in schools?
BT confirmed that this was not the case.

WSF discussed if this should be on an application basis, or a formula driven allocation due to schools that may not be showing a deficit but could be schools in financial difficulty but still a surplus by making cuts that this money may be able to support.

SW confirmed that the money should not be used to pay off deficits due to the teacher pay award.

MP asked if this could be used to support schools that may be about to receive large bills after the recent condition surveys that are being carried out, or involved in local projects, or sustainability projects?

PH asked if it needed to be formula driven with multiple factors and weighted towards small schools, where larger schools can benefit from economies of scale?

SW expressed that it may need to be part of a recovery plan for the school and linked to a School Resource Management Advise (SRMA) review, BT agreed that this should be part of any agreement with the school before they received any of the funding.

JH expressed that deficits may also be because of risk assessments for Health and Safety (H&S) or safeguarding issues. This also needed to be considered.

BT confirmed that any school at present that maybe requesting any funding from this allocation, should be informed that the council is consulting with WSF on this and that until the policy for allocating funding had been formulated, that no allocation would be made.

RP confirmed that there would be further feedback to WSF.

12. Wraparound Provision Schools

SW gave an update on the position and confirmed that the LA was receiving revenue funding (Delivery Support Funding) and waiting for an announcement on the capital funding. The capital funding earmarked by Government is a £100m and will be shared amongst all LAs. WSF was informed that this project is being led by Nicky Burford, and that we will be bringing regular updates on this and changes to EY to WSF for the next few years, as these projects roll out.

The guidance states that any pupil should be able to attend a wraparound provision locally to their school from 8AM until 6PM. It should be self-funding via parental charges, and not fall on the school or council to fund. SW asked that RP also attached the handbook that has been published to members of WSF. This document is for the LA but will support understanding of members.

The LA has been allocated about £2.7m for this project, over the next three years. This funding cannot be used for capital projects; however, it can be used to assist with the setting up of this provision. It also cannot be used to fund future provisions. SW emphasised that this is not an easy task to build this capacity.

The LA, at present, is working on an assessment of need and capacity, as a result, they will be asking schools and other providers in the sector for information going forward and would like to thank all in advance for their support in supplying this information.

NJ raised concerns around the local geographical area of Worcestershire, and the moving of children from one school to another, if the school does not have this provision. So, would the council be looking at using some of the capital

funding for school transport. Maybe this could also be used to provide a bit of joined up thinking around transporting of pupils.

EF raised the concern of cost to parents covering this for pupils within special schools, and that this could lead to it becoming unviable for special schools to run the provision and parents believing they have a right to this provision. Especially if you have a child needing either one to one, or two to one support. This also raises where special schools are taking from a wider area which could be counted as local.

NJ also raised the problems with having to increase the hours of staff and if this could be done or staff be found who would want these additional hours. RP reiterated that this does not all need to be supplied by schools and that this could be school's working with a private childcare provider.

LP raised that this could have major impact for special schools as they have pupils with very specific needs that need to be met, which again needs specifically trained staff, which is at a cost, and is there the possibility of schools falling into legal action against the school or the LA around the Equality Act.

SW thanked member for the comments and feedback.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a. Cost of School Transport

NJ raised the cost of Home to School Transport is becoming a major issue on the school's finances.

TO explained that a review is ongoing, which sits under highways and will feedback to WSF once completed.

Meeting ended.

The meeting closed at 3.29 PM.

Date of next meeting

The date of the next WSF meeting: - Thursday 11 January 2024 at 2.30 PM
(Remote Meeting - MS Teams)