



Minutes of the Meeting of the Worcestershire Schools Forum (WSF)

**Thursday 11 January 2024
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
Phil Hanson (PH)	- HT of Pershore High School
Jo Kelleher [JK]	- Governor, Bredon Hill Academy
David Butler	- Principle Tudor Grange (Worcester)
Marie Pearse [MP]	- HT Evesham Nursery School
Annette Summers [AS]	- Nursery Owner
Vivek Shah [VS]	- Nursery Owner
Elizabeth Dixon	- Franche Primary School

b. Local Authority (LA)

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

Councillor Tracey Onslow [TO]	- Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills, Worcestershire County Council
Jay Hart [JH]	- HT Kingfisher School
Mel Barnet [MB]	- Director of All Age Disability Services – Worcestershire Children First
Caroline Brand [CBr]	- Schools Finance Manager – Worcestershire Children First

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

As all maintained schools could apply for item 10 it was felt that it did not need to be listed. With Academy Schools being able to apply to the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

4. Minutes of the Last Meeting (23 November 2023)

Minutes agreed.

5. Matters Arising From The Minutes

6. Any Other Business

a. Worcester Children First – contract with Worcestershire County Council

To be covered by CBI under item 7b Cabinet Decisions.

7. Cabinet Decisions

a. 14 December 2024 – Fair Funding for Schools 2024/25 National and Local Funding Arrangement for Schools

CBI updated WSF that the Council had approved the funding formula as discussed previously with WSF.

b. 11 January 2024 – Budget and Council Tax 2024/25

CBI confirmed that budget position for all councils at present are hard and with Worcestershire and a high number of other councils are having pressures in Home to School Transport, Social Care and Adult Social Care. To meet the pressures the Council are going to need to implement a number of savings as per the paper attached the agenda.

These pressures do not include the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) as they are off balance sheet at present. This is planned to change when the Statutory override ceases in 2026.

The other document discussed at the Cabinet Meeting on 10 January is the WCF Contract which expires at midnight on the 30 September 2024. The contract was for five years. The council is minded not to continue the contract when it comes to a natural end. This was agreed by Cabinet, but still to go to full cabinet. This would led to staff and services returning to WCC.

SW confirmed that work will begin, and it will not affect the working of WSF, but will not affect this forum going forward.

BT requested that the working between the schools and WCF is continued when back in WCC. SW reassured WSF that it will be the same staff moving back so we would not be expecting any changes in working methods.

8. School Block Allocation 2024/25

RP reported that we were unfortunately WCC were unable to match the National Funding Formula in its entirety this year, we have taken approximately £140 thousand from the Growth Fund and reduced some of the factors by a pound or

two and minimum funding guarantee, to reduce us from the original circa £500 thousand shortfall. One of the factors for the funding short fall is a drop in the primary cohort of pupils.

RP also confirmed that we have disagreed with the ESFA on one of the schools who they felt should receive split-site and exceptional premises. As the ESFA are going to fund Split-Site we have withdrawn the exceptional premises factor for this school. As we believe you should only receive one or the other funding streams not both.

MR raised concerns on the dropping number of Primary pupil and asked if this was being fed back to the sector, RP confirmed that the Provision Planning Team were discussing with individual schools.

SW also confirmed that with primary schools, her team are work closely with cluster rather than the full primary partnership.

BT Thanked RP for his work on the return and keeping the level as high as possible, especially with other local authorities having a larger variance than Worcestershire and still trying to meet the gap.

9. Provisional Schools Funding Settlement

RP gave a briefing on the DSG settlement for Worcestershire. This is showing a very large increase in Early Years. This is due to the changes in the funding of Early Years children due the changes being implemented this financial year. 2-Year-old from working families from April 2024 and for children who have turned 9 months before the funding period for September 2024. This will also change as the year progresses and actual numbers are known as the funding is based on the Department for Education (DfE) estimate of uptake.

Members are also reminded that the school block has increased but they are reminded that the Mainstream Supplementary Additional Grant has been for 2023/24 has been amalgamated into this area in 2024/25.

10. Financial Support for Local Authorities Support Schools in Financial Difficulty

RP updated the forum on the criteria and that all maintained school can apply for this funding. The deadline for applications is the 1 March 2024. This will then allow for the process to be completed within the financial year.

The funding is revenue funding rather than capital so should be used for revenue projects.

A discussion around this item took place, and SW asked for feedback with the forms and application.

BT fed back that he thought that the process and forms looked easy and helpful and that we may have some clarity on the definition on Capital.

PH Commented that the SRMA is a great process and that they can seem sometimes brutal for an outsider of the school looking in but well worth the process and implementing the recommendations.

11. Outcome of Early Years Consultation

RP updated WSF the consultation papers, and that there was overall support for all the recommendations put forward to the sector. With the hope that this will also help the sector to be able to set budgets without having to wait for the LA to confirm hourly rates, due to understanding the criteria and split of the funding rate received.

The hourly funding rate is approved by the member with responsibility for this area, but any comments would be incorporated in any recommendation presented. No feedback from the WSF was given.

RP asked that the schools forum acknowledge the support that Nicky Buford put into this consultation, which without her support, RP would not have been able to meet the timeline and deadline of this consultation.

12. Specialist Equipment

SW updated WSF on the papers within the agenda paper and asked for feedback on the proposals. Schools have asked for an updated policy, the current policy is legal, but does need updating for organisation etc.

We have no outstanding request for supporting within special schools as the SEND team have come to agreement with schools.

The policy will be updated and brought back to WSF for reference. The process will also look for an alternative for purchase and storage of this equipment going forward, as this is normally done by the school currently.

This policy may potentially have an impact on the High-Level Needs Block for the additional cost of equipment but will also have saving where items can be used by other pupils in other schools.

BT noted that it was strange that the NHS make the decision on the equipment needed, but they don't pay for it. He also supports the sharing of equipment and the purchasing of any equipment being centralised.

13. WSF Constitution

It was agreed we need to look at the vacancies within WSF and needing to make sure that we match membership with the requirement of any constitution to empower WSF.

14. WSF Membership Vacancies

We have had some rolling vacancies, with these being within the governors within schools more than any other.

SW to contact the primary school partnership to find additional primary school governors and other groups concerning secondary and middle deemed secondary schools.

15. Cost of School Transport

This is being looked at with member of council and officers. The local authority has certain statutory requirements for home to school transport. The cost of this being approximately 50% each for maintain stream and special provision. With the amount per pupil being a lot higher for pupil attending specialist provision.

The council is looking at ways to reduce the burden and meet the needs of the young people. The funding for this section comes from the main council budget and is not funded from any DSG. This is to make sure we meet our duties and best value for the taxpayers.

The home to school transport for reference is no longer within Children Service but sits in Economy and Infrastructure area with other transport costs to support the resource to monitor and consider options.

BT raised that school are happy to work with the council to look at solutions to this area. This was echoed by SW to raise this with the Home to School Transport Team.

Meeting ended.

The meeting closed at 3.29 PM.

Date of next meeting

The date of the next WSF meeting: - Thursday 16 May 2024 at 2.30 PM
(Remote Meeting - /MS Teams)