

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

Wednesday 11 December 2024
Remote Meeting Held Via MS Teams

The meeting started at 2.30 PM.

In Attendance:

a. WSF Members

Edward Francis (Vice Chair) [EF]	-	Headteacher Fort Royal Special School
Elizabeth Dixon	-	Headteacher Franche Primary
Malcolm Richards (Chair) [MR]	-	Governor, Bromsgrove
Marie Pearse [MP]	-	Headteacher Evesham Nursery School
Phil Hanson [PH]	-	Headteacher Pershore High School
Vivek Shah [VS]	-	Nursery Owner

b. Local Authority (LA)

Daniela Carson	-	Assistant Director for All Age Disability (0 – 25) – Worcestershire County Council
Nicky Burford	-	Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency and Improvement Lead – Worcestershire County Council
Phil Rook	-	Chief Financial Officer, Worcestershire County Council
Rob Phillips [RP]	-	Finance Business Partner - Schools - Worcestershire County Council
Sarah Wilkins [SW]	-	Assistant Director Education, Early Years, Inclusion and Pupil Place Planning

1. Apologies

Annette Summers [AS]	-	Nursery Owner
Chris King (CK)	-	SEAT
Councillor David Chambers (DC)	-	Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education, Worcestershire County Council
David Butler [DB]	-	Principle Tudor Grange (Worcester)
Holly Hancock [HH]	-	Senior Finance Business Partner, Worcestershire County Council
Jo Kelleher [JK] (Resigned)	-	Governor, Bredon Hill Academy
Ruth Bessant	-	Finance Business Partner - Schools - Worcestershire County Council

Steph Simcox

- Deputy Chief Financial Officer,
Worcestershire County Council

2. Declaration of Interests

None

3. Declaration of Potential Conflict of Interests with Items on the Agenda

None

4. Minutes of the Last Meeting (12 September 2024)

Minutes agreed.

5. Matters Arising from The Minutes

None

6. Indicative Designated Schools Grant (DSG) Rates for 2025/26

RP presented the papers to WSF. It was also noted that the new updated block includes all the previous grants so the increases are welcome but that this will not relieve the pressure that schools have.

The estimated allocation are an increase but the caveat need to be included that this is mainstreaming of the other grants and that this funding includes all the additional money announced by Government.

a. Central Block

RP presented the papers and discussed with WSF that this item should be noted for agenda item 6ai.

EF asked what the reduction of 20% annually to the Family Support Works meant, SW and PR explained that this is a reduction in the funding that the local authority took from the DSG previously, but that the Council had been picking up the additional burden which does mean a further pressure on the Council.

b. School Block

RP presented the papers and talked through the information. It was also confirmed that the Council needed to make sure that they were within 2.5% of the National Funding Formula (NFF), and did not change with any other decision made to either transfer from the school block or not.

Again, it was reiterated that these figures included all the grants that the school had previously received. It was noted that we are expecting a future grant from the government to support schools with the additional cost of the National Insurance changes, but no information on the funding mechanism is not know at present on this.

The forum has agreed that a letter from the Chair should go out to all parties lobbying for additional support for this area. RP to draft a letter for MR to discuss at the next meeting with member to seek feedback before sending.

i. De-delegation for Mainstream schools and Central Block

The forum member from the maintained sector vote unanimously to continue with the de-delegation of the services below.

- Schools Specific Contingency
- Support for Minority Ethnic Pupils/Underachieving Groups
- Free School Meal (FSM) Eligibility Checking
- Trade Union Staff Cost and Duties.

It was agreed that the Council would confirm in a letter to schools that the de-delegation have been agreed by WSF and is not a Council decision.

WSF members also agreed unanimously to continue with the current position for the central block and listed expenditures.

ii. Transfer from School Block

RP presented the papers to WSF. PR explained that this would not clear the deficit and at present this amount would be about the equivalent of servicing this deficit.

It was confirmed that we were not able to confirm that any changes to the funding rates could be guaranteed due to this transfer.

DC said a review of the current banding model was going to take place especially the higher levels were between E3 and E4 is over a £10,000 gap but this will not start until after February half-term.

WSF raised that they would like the Council to consider this amount should be used to support the increase the funding rates, especially as this is also causing hardship for schools. It was agreed that Worcestershire have never taken this step before, and this is showing that the major concerns that WSF concern around this issue.

WSF member unanimously agreed to transfer 0.5% of the school block to the high needs block in financial year 2025/26.

7. Wraparound and Early Years Expansion Programme

NB gave a short presentation to WSF on the current position of this programme, the EY funding rates announced on the 10 December and the latest information know on the “Breakfast Club” programme.

NB confirmed that the information concerning funding was regularly sent to all schools and provider through both the “EY Bulletin” and “Education Bulletin” and emails to all schools and providers.

Concerns were raised with the funding for this programme, especially around how this could be made sustainable with the new programme, of free “Breakfast Clubs”, where this has been part of the wraparound offer.

Sustainability going forward for provision is being raised as a concern in the sector with all the changes and the potential of not being able to charge anything additional on top-of the funding received from the Council.

The recruitment of staff for these programmes and especially with the increase of inclusion within maintained schools for pupils with complex needs as that how they can also make this cost effective for the school and the parents.

EF confirmed that when his special school ran a wraparound provision for pupil, which charged as much as they felt they could and used other funding streams it was still costing their school approximately £10,000 a term to run.

It was also felt that Local Member of Parliament should be invited to attend WSF so that members can discuss this with them.

8. Financial Position report to Cabinet

PR gave WSF an update on the current financial position of the Council still with approximate £12.5 million, with the three big overspending are being, Adult Social, Children Social Care placement and Home to Schools Transport. The Government have set the maximum increase to council tax of 4.99% for 2025/26.

PR confirmed that at present the statutory override is in place and that with the announcement to be made concerning funding will also clarify this.

9. DSG HLN Management Plan

PR and RP gave WSF an update of the work being carried out to create a robust plan. The council confirmed that this will not lead to reducing the deficit as this is too large a historical deficit and will only at best slow down further increases. The need was felt by WSF that the high-level needs needed to be funded to match the requirement in this area.

WSF requested that this be part of the letter to be produced as part of agenda item 7. This is to include the requirement to continue the statutory override and that sufficient funding to meet the requirements of the legislation is required.

This is going to be added as a regular item for WSF to discuss.

10. Delivering Better Value in SEND

Provision and Planning is taking place to make sure we have the correct mixture of provision/places to reduce the number of pupils needing to go to out of county provision.

We have opened new provision between Heart of Worcester College and National Staff in September, to allow pupils to attend a local provision, which would have previously attended an out of county independent provision.

Additional efforts are being made on the progress and processes before a young person would go to out of county provision to make sure that it is the correct provision for the pupil or if it would be better to keep them in the local community.

11. DfE SEND AP and Improvement Plan Change Programme Partnership

DC confirmed that phase 1 was completed. Phase 2 is focusing on AP outreach work, which has started. This will support the young person to be in the correct provision that they need rather than being forced on the pupil due to exclusion.

WSF welcomed the work that is taking place on this.

12. Scheme for Financing Schools

The paper was presented for WSF to agree on changing the time-period of average weighted interest used after being raised that schools would like this figure at the same time as budget setting.

WSF agreed this unanimously and welcomed this to support schools.

13. Service Level Agreement

The papers were presented and that this is so the forum of the services available to the schools and what they can expect from the teams selling their services.

The council will be continuing to bring these to WSF for reference so that the forum is aware of services to support schools.

14. Any other business

a. Vice Chair WSF

This item was taken out of sequence so that a New Vice Chair could be agreed. It was agreed by WSF that Edward Francis would become the Vice Chair with the previous person leaving the position and their school.

Meeting ended.

The meeting closed at 16.20 PM.

Date of next meeting

The date of the next WSF meeting: - Wednesday 16 January 2025 at 3.00 PM
(Remote Meeting - MS Teams)