



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

Wednesday 15 January 2025
Remote Meeting Held Via MS Teams

The meeting started at 3.00 PM.

In Attendance:

a. WSF Members

Edward Francis (Vice Chair) [EF]	- Headteacher Fort Royal Special School
Malcolm Richards (Chair) [MR]	- Governor, Bromsgrove
Phil Hanson [PH]	- Headteacher Pershore High School
Vivek Shah [VS]	- Nursery Owner
Annette Summers [AS]	- Nursery Owner
David Butler [DB]	- Principle Tudor Grange (Worcester)
Tim Reid	- Executive Diocesan Director of Education for the The Diocese of Hereford and Diocese of Worcester
Elizabeth Dixon	- Headteacher Franche Primary

b. Local Authority (LA)

Phil Rook	- Chief Financial Officer, Worcestershire County Council
Sarah Wilkins [SW]	- Assistant Director Education, Early Years, Inclusion and Pupil Place Planning
Holly Hancock [HH]	- Senior Finance Business Partner, Worcestershire County Council
Rob Phillips [RP]	- Finance Business Partner - Schools - Worcestershire County Council

1. Apologies

Councillor David Chambers (DC)	- Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education, Worcestershire County Council
Steph Simcox [SS]	- Deputy Chief Financial Officer, Worcestershire County Council
Marie Pearse [MP]	- Headteacher Evesham Nursery School
Daniela Carson [DCa]	- Assistant Director for All Age Disability (0 – 25) – Worcestershire County Council
Nicky Burford [NB]	- Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency and Improvement Lead – 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 (11 December 2024)

Minutes agreed.

5. Matters Arising from The Minutes

None

6. Cabinet Decision

RP presented the agenda paper to WSF. That the funding formula would be going to the Cabinet meeting on 16 January, later than normal due to not having any actual funding rates and information until later in the funding cycle due to the General Election.

This also confirms the previous decision in December confirming the 0.5% of school block to the high needs block, with us trying to keep to the NFF as much as possible, the only change will be the next item on amounts.

PR gave an update on the public account body report, and work done by the F40 is showing that the funding system for SEND is still not viable at present. The Government have committed to change but this and other reports are clear it needs to be done quickly. Some of the things already started including DBV and Change Programme which WCC are already involved in.

Councils are still waiting for confirmation on the statutory override, if this is going to continue after March 2026 or will end.

7. Schools Block Allocation 2025/26

RP presented 3 options for the forum to decide which is their preferred option as the funding received for the School Block is insufficient to fund the National Funding Formula in its completeness. The total spend to meet the NFF would be £454,507,380, this is £3,530,319 more than the school block allocations.

The transfer of £2,283,957 is part of this but £1,246,362 would still have needed to be recouped even if this had not been agreed.

Option 1 is to reduce the AWPU by £48 for each type, setting the Minimum Funding Guarantee to the minimum (-0.5%), a capping of 0.13% on a 50% Scaling, and reducing the pupil growth by 12.29%

Option 2 is to reduce the AWPU by £73 for each type, setting the Minimum Funding Guarantee to the minimum (-0.5%), and no capping or Scaling, and reducing the pupil growth by 2.08%

Option 3 is to reduce the AWPU by £45 for each type, setting the Minimum Funding Guarantee to the minimum (-0.5%), a capping of 0.55% on a 100% Scaling, and reducing the pupil growth by 12.32%

It was confirmed that schools would still receive the funding floor where necessary.

WSF agreed unanimously for option 3 to be taken forward.

8. Provisional Schools Funding Settlement

RP presented the report showing fewer pupils in primary school and increase in in secondary, which is due to the previous high numbers working through the system.

The DSG has increased by about 7% but a large amount of this was previous grant so the actual increase is only about 2%.

The central block has increased this is due to the prior year grants for teaching staff and the increase in Copyright Licences has been partly funded. Historic commitments have decreased by 20% again this year.

High needs block has increased by about 2.28% increase, with special schools receiving the same grant as last year for teacher pay, for example.

The question was asked about where in the falling rolls in schools, SW explained some area are going down with other increasing and suggested that member maybe interested in the education sufficient reports going to February cabinet.

9. Free School Meals Auto-Enrolment

SW presented the briefing paper, around this item. It was felt to be a good idea but understood that it maybe hard at present with the council and district councils but wanted the thoughts of WSF

It was agreed that it would be good for the council to push this within the briefing to local MPs. It would be better for it to be automatically rather than an opt in and be an opt out.

10. Early Years – Funding Rates

RP presented the briefing paper to WSF. He confirmed that these rates were produced based on the agreement ratified by WSF last year. It was confirmed that this was the full early years, sector.

The National Insurance Contributions was a concern of WSF with this increase and also the increase in National Minimum Wage that these rate increases did not go far enough. SW to add this to the local MPs briefing.

11. Any other business

a. SRMA Mentoring Program

RP confirmed that as part of WCC work with the Department for Education Schools Resource Management Advisors, they are now opening up that school staff can receive mentoring, for no cost. It was confirmed that all Worcestershire schools would be informed of this, through SW weekly bulletin.

b. Time and dates of future meetings

The local authority officers are asking if it would be possible to move from a Thursday due to other meetings.

MR suggested that we remain as is for the present time.

ED if consideration of the time could be taken around the school day.

c. Local authority Government Reorganisation and Financial Position

The budget is going forward to the council at present, with high pressures within adult services, children's social care and home-to-school transport, the local authority is struggling to set a balanced budget. With also the increase in cost for NIC and National Minimum Wage will influence the local authority, due to the supplier passing this cost on without additional grant to cover this. The funding remains are around the same but the demand for these services is increasing.

For example, when the local authority received a new social care grant of about £1.7 million but we overspent by £10 million on children's. We have had other grants cut, and we did not get any of the new grant which replaced these.

PR has had to apply for Exceptional Financial Support to buy the council time, which is not something taken lightly. With we believe, around, another 17 other local authorities doing the same.

PR then covered the Local Authority Government Reorganisation through devolution in its white papers; they are looking at all councils being a unitary by either 1 April 2027 or April 2028. Worcestershire have responded by the deadline of the 10 January to not hold elections in May 2025.

The overall decision for councils will be made by the government not the local authority on the way forward with councils needing to put forward their suggested option.

It was agreed to keep this on the agenda for WSF on progress and the way forward.

d. Breakfast Club

SW confirmed that Worcestershire had 10 Schools that had been accepted onto the pilot for this. With the LA feeding back to WSF at the next meeting on the pilots and how it is working. We are also mindful of how this will affect school and other sectors involved in wraparound provision.

Meeting ended.

The meeting closed at 16.04 PM.

Date of next meeting

TBC due to agenda item 11 b.

DRAFT