



worcestershire county council

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

Thursday 8th July 2021
Remote Meeting Held Via MS Teams

The meeting started at 2.05 pm

IN ATTENDANCE:

WSF Members

Malcolm Richards (Chair)	-	Governor, Bromsgrove
Bryn Thomas (Vice Chair)	-	HT Wolverley CE Secondary School (Until 2.40pm re-joined 3.10pm)
Marie Pearse	-	HT Evesham Nursery School
Paul Essenhigh	-	Executive HT Catshill Middle, Catshill First and Nursery Schools
Nathan Jones	-	HT Meadow Green Primary School
Emma Pritchard	-	Principal Black Pear Trust (Until 3pm)
Lizzie Dixon	-	HT Franche Primary School
Adrian Ward	-	HT Trinity High School
Ed Francis	-	HT Fort Royal Primary School
Jay Hart	-	HT Kingfisher School
Ian Enwright	-	Executive HT Riversides and Newbridge Schools (Substitute Member)
David McIntosh	-	Governor, Wyre Forest
Lorraine Petersen	-	Governor, Bromsgrove
Stephen Baker	-	Union Representative
Greg McClarey	-	Archdiocese of Birmingham
Catriona Savage	-	PVI Sector (Until 3pm)
Tom Jenkins	-	PVI Sector

Local Authority (LA)

Phil Rook	-	Director of Resources Worcestershire Children First
Sarah Wilkins	-	Director of Education and Early Help Worcestershire Children First
Andy McHale	-	Senior Finance Business Partner Worcestershire Children First
Caroline Brand	-	Schools Finance Manager Worcestershire County Council
Rob Phillips	-	Accountancy Officer School Funding Worcestershire County Council

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| Gabrielle Stacey | - | Assistant Director SEND and Vulnerable Learners
Worcestershire Children First
(Until 3pm) |
| Richard Taylor | - | Assistant Director Human Resources, Organisational Development and Engagement
Worcestershire County Council
(Until 2.20pm) |
| Sharon Booth | - | Head of Human Resources Operations
Worcestershire County Council
(Until 2.20pm) |

1. INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

1.1 Introductions

(a) Due to temporary technical difficulties the Vice Chair took the Chair at the start of the meeting.

(b) The Vice Chair introduced new WSF members Ed Francis HT Fort Royal Primary School (Special School Maintained Category), Jay Hart HT Kingfisher School (Special School Academy Category) and substitute member Ian Enwright Executive HT Riversides and Newbridge Schools (Special School Academy Category) to their first WSF meetings.

(c) The Vice Chair introduced Richard Taylor and Sharon Booth to the WSF for agenda item 5.

1.2 Apologies

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| Jeff Robinson | - | Governor, Malvern Hills |
| Chris King | - | CEO Severn Academies Educational Trust |
| John Bateman | - | Governor, Aspire Alternative Provision (AP)
Free School |
| Tim Reid | - | Church of England Board of Education |
| Edward Senior | - | 16-19 Providers |
| Councillor Marcus Hart | - | Cabinet Member with Responsibility for
Education
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 (20th May 2021)

Agreed.

5. MATTERS ARISING

5.1 The Chair joined the meeting at 2.10pm.

5.2 Liberata Transfer

(a) Phil Rook and Richard Taylor briefed the WSF on the latest position on the transfer of services from Liberata back to WCC and WCF. Services for accounts payable and receivable transferred to WCC on 1st June 2021. The HR function will transfer from 1st September 2021 into WCC and the Schools Finance support function will transfer from 1st September 2021 into WCF. Consultation is currently underway on these transfers.

(b) Richard confirmed a letter would shortly be sent to schools confirming the changes with a focus on receiving the same service with current teams at no additional cost. There was the intention to discuss further with the WSF on the breadth of service and proposed improvements.

(c) The WSF noted the changes and commented they were pleased that the services were coming back in-house, with the hope more schools would buy back.

Richard Taylor and Sharon Booth left the meeting at 2.20pm

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 A member of the WSF requested clarity on the implications of the additional bank holiday in June 2022. Sarah confirmed a recommendation for a regional approach was being considered by the Director of Children's Services and schools would be notified shortly.

7. SCHOOL FORUM REGULATORY MATTERS

7.1 Change to the Schools Forum (England) Regulations 2012

Andy confirmed of a change to the above regulations making permanent provisions to enable Schools Forums to be held remotely.

7.2 Governance Benchmarking Report

Andy introduced the report which benchmarked WCC Schools Forum arrangements with 9 other county councils. The Chair commented that the WSF arrangements compared very favourably in the analysis and the WSF noted the issues.

8. HIGH NEEDS ISSUES

8.1 The Chair requested the WSF consider this item next.

8.2 County Council Network (CCN) and Society of County Treasurer's (SCT) Reports

(a) Phil introduced the item and requested the WSF to treat the reports as confidential and not for general circulation. The analysis is predicting a deficit of £1.3bn by the end of 2022/23 for member LAs and given the change to the accounting treatment is only for a 2-year period this represents a significant financial 'cliff edge' when the deficit reverts back to local authorities.

(b) Phil advised the deficit in WCC is predicted to rise to £14m and the additional HN DSG allocated is not keeping pace with current and future demands.

8.3 LA and SEND Data Update

(a) Gabrielle introduced the report and advised this had formed a presentation to the Head of Special Schools Association (HSSA) in the previous week. The WSF noted the issues detailed in the presentation. Gabrielle confirmed significant work was currently taking place looking at the banding system and the potential need for change e.g. more bands, exceptional costs, etc.

(b) Concerns had been raised by HSSA on the levels of top up funding not being increased and there needs to be consideration of a base level for special school pupils as well as the need for a comprehensive capital plan to develop capacity in the sector.

(c) Gabrielle advised on the challenge at the previous WSF on the EHCP projections and reported updated figures had been provided. These showed an increase in the number of assessments and that WCC is currently above the national average.

(d) The WSF commented as follows: -

- There is the need to look at the cost of a base place in special schools as the minimum level of funding needed to cover costs – HSSA feel place funding and an E3 top up is required as a minimum for all pupils in the sector.
- There needs to be consideration of the contribution by health in supporting the cost of HN places.
- Will the banding review apply to mainstream as well as special schools?
- Schools appreciate the current work on this but there are specific issues for the special school sector e.g. top up rates have not increased since 2014 and staff inflation for non-teaching staff is a significant cost burden.
- There are surpluses in special schools, but these are a consequence of significant increasing rolls in the sector.
- There is an impact on mainstream schools too and this should not be perceived as a sector vs. sector issue.
- The late admissions arrangements often mean mainstream schools receive late paperwork and not enough top up funding to cover staffing requirements.
- The role of the WSF is to receive reports and scrutinise the HN Management Plan actions, such as the significant numbers and associated costs of independent sector placements.

(d) The LA responded as follows: -

- There is a need to understand the unit costs of special schools and co-produce on the banding work. The outcomes of this will come back for discussion with the WSF and will require Cabinet consideration.
- Any proposals for change will increase the HN funding pressures and require consideration of the financial implications as the HN deficit needs to be repaid.
- The County Council is lobbying hard through SCT, CCN and F40 for additional funding.
- The LA is following up the health service contributions through a joint committee with the CCG.
- The HN Management Plan will continue to be discussed at the WSF and monitoring of the HN budget will be part of that agenda.

9. MAINTAINED SCHOOL BALANCES 2020-21

9.1 Andy introduced the report which detailed the revenue balances position for **maintained schools only** as at 31st March 2021.

9.2 The key headlines are: -

- Balances have increased by £2.7m from £1.3m from the previous year to £3.9m.
- The number of schools in deficit has reduced from 39 to 32 but the value of the deficits had increased from £9.2m to £10.2m, in the primary and secondary sectors.
- The LA is supporting 26 schools that have set deficit budgets in 2021-22.
- The light touch challenge to those schools with excess surplus balances would continue.

9.3 The WSF commented as follows: -

- Concerns for those schools with significant deficits and how does the LA challenge and support such schools.
- The impact of Covid has affected school finances e.g. loss of self-generated and early years income, additional cleaning, additional equipment, staff cover, increased requirements for pupil support, etc.
- Some schools' balances are held on behalf of other schools e.g. teaching schools.
- Providers in the maintained nursery schools' sector have not been able to claim for the additional costs incurred due to Covid.
- There is a useful report by Parent kind on income generation and other issues that can be shared with the WSF.
- There will be a level of increased costs yet to be incurred around safeguarding, mental health, etc.

9.4 Sarah confirmed as detailed in the report, the LA works very closely with schools in financial difficulty and is in regular contact and briefings including WCCs Chief Financial Officer.

10. DSG OVERTURN 2020-21

10.1 Andy introduced the report which confirmed the DSG Reserve position as at 31st March 2021.

10.2 With the funding of the HN overspend and other DSG adjustments the DSG reserve was now **£6.5m in deficit**. The analysis also showed the HN trend with a HN overspend of £25m between 2017-18 and 2020-21. The WSF noted this and that the DSG deficit will require funding for pupil growth and early years not spent in 2020-21 to be allocated to those areas in 2021-22.

10.3 The WSF noted the allocations made to schools accessing in-year funding through the Pupil Growth Fund for basic need in **Appendix B**.

RESOLVED –

The WSF: -

- **Noted the details of the DSG Centrally Retained Services in Appendix A.**
- **Noted the DSG C/Fwd position for 2020-21 as at 31st March 2021 and allocations made for the Pupil Growth Fund in Appendix B.**

10.4 In response to a query from a member of the WSF Andy agreed to follow up some admissions issues with the service.

11. F40 GROUP UPDATES

11.1 DfE Meeting 11th June 2021

The WSF noted the minutes.

11.2 Executive Committee Meeting 14th June 2021

(a) The WSF noted the minutes.

(b) Andy advised that Ed Francis was now a member of the executive committee, which was very useful in supporting WCCs fairer funding campaign for all schools. Andy further advised the LA would continue to support the F40 technical officer's group

12. WSF MEETING SCHEDULE ACADEMIC YEAR 2021/22

12.1 The WSF noted the proposed schedule and potential agenda items. At the moment the meetings would continue to be held remotely.

12.2 Under the proposed work programme on national decisions for 2022-23, Andy advised no policy direction had been confirmed by the DfE. It is likely the local schools funding formula position in WCC continuing to use the NFF would need to be considered early in the Autumn Term 2021.

13. WSF RETIREMENTS

13.1 The Chair advised that Stephen Baker Union representative was retiring at the end of the academic year and so was stepping down from the WSF. On behalf of the WSF, the Chair thanked Stephen for all his hard work and support over the years. On behalf of the LA, Andy advised Stephen had completed 14 years' service on the WSF and thanked him for all his hard work and support. Stephen responded accordingly and stated his gratitude for the advice he had been given by the LA in his role as ATL lead on finance.

13.2 The Chair further advised that Andy McHale financial adviser and clerk to the WSF was retiring in early September 2021, so this would be his last WSF meeting. On behalf of the WSF the Chair thanked Andy for all his hard work, dedication, and support to the WSF and the campaign for fairer funding. Andy responded accordingly and thanked the WSF members, WCC officers and members both present and past for all their help and support over the last 17 years servicing the WSF. He wished the group all the best for the future and to continue the fight for fairer funding for all Worcestershire schools.

The meeting closed at 3.50pm

The date of the next WSF meeting: - Thursday 23rd September 2021 at 2pm
via MS Teams