

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

Thursday 23rd May 2019
Kidderminster Room, County Hall, Worcester

The meeting started at 2.00 pm

IN ATTENDANCE:

WSF Members

Malcolm Richards (Chair)	-	Governor, Bromsgrove
Paul Essenhigh	-	Executive HT Catshill Middle, Catshill First and Nursery Schools
Nathan Jones	-	HT Meadow Green Primary
Vivienne Cranton	-	HT Hollymount Primary School
Adrian Ward	-	HT Trinity High School
David McIntosh	-	Governor, Wyre Forest
Stephen Baker	-	Union Representative
Tricia Wellings	-	PVI Sector

Local Authority (LA)

Nick Wilson	-	Interim Assistant Director Education and Skills Children, Families and Communities
Andy McHale	-	Service Manager Funding and Policy Children, Families and Communities
Caroline Brand	-	Finance Manager Children, Families and Communities
Penny Richardson (from 2.30pm)	-	Interim Group Manager SEND Children, Families and Communities
Councillor Marcus Hart	-	Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills

1. APOLOGIES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

1.1 Apologies

Marie Pearse	-	HT Evesham Nursery School (Absent)
Bryn Thomas	-	HT Wolverley CE Secondary School
Chris King	-	CEO Severn Academies Educational Trust
Tim Reid	-	Church of England Board of Education
Deb Rattley	-	HT Chadsgrove Special School
Lorraine Petersen	-	Governor, Bromsgrove
Greg McClarey	-	Archdiocese of Birmingham
Jeff Robinson	-	Governor, Malvern Hills
John Bateman	-	Governor, Aspire Alternative Provision (AP) Free School
Edward Senior	-	16-19 Providers

1.2 Announcements

(a) Andy advised the WSF that Sue Alexander had retired from WCC leaving the County Council at the end of April 2019 and paid tribute to her significant contributions to WSF and school funding matters. The Chair concurred and on behalf of the WSF thanked Sue for all her hard work.

(b) The PVI representative advised that Denise Phelps was no longer a PVI provider so had stepped down from the WSF. The sector would arrange for another representative.

(c) The Chair thanked Adrian Ward for chairing the last WSF meeting in January 2019 in his absence.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

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

None.

4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING (16th January 2019)

Agreed.

5. MATTERS ARISING

None.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

7. TEACHER APPRENTICESHIPS

7.1 Andy advised colleagues from the University of Worcester were unable to attend so the item would be re-scheduled for the new academic year.

7.2 Members of the WSF requested information on the workings, the process for accessing, particularly for schools in financial difficulty, and the amount in the Apprenticeship Levy fund.

RESOLVED –

The Clerk to arrange a report for a future WSF meeting.

8. CABINET DECISIONS 31st JANUARY 2019 FOR 2019-20 BUDGET (PARAGRAPH 10)

8.1 Andy advised that the Cabinet paper included the DfE notified DSG position for 2019-20 and items discussed at the WSF meeting on 16th January 2019.

8.2 The WSF noted the issues.

9. OUTCOMES OF THE DfE CONSULTATION FOR REPORTING DEFICITS OF THE DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG)

9.1 Andy advised that the DfE had now published its policy on this and LAs with a DSG deficit of 1% or more of its gross total DSG would be required to submit a recovery template by the end of June 2019.

9.2 Andy further advised the DfE definition of 'deficit' relates to the cumulative DSG position as at 31st March in the County Council's accounts.

9.3 In response to questions from the WSF, Andy confirmed the final accounts process is still subject to external audit scrutiny and has yet to be fully completed. However, current indications show by drawing down all the current DSG Reserve and other DSG adjustments to support the current high needs overspend the deficit on the DSG Reserve as at 31st March 2019 will be within the 1% tolerance.

9.4 The WSF noted this and on this basis, there will be no need for a formal submission to the DfE this year. However, with the current HN position and its significant structural deficit an internal recovery plan will still be required and potentially a formal submission at the end of June 2020.

9.5 The WSF queried the use of all the DSG reserves given some were earmarked for other DSG pressures. Andy confirmed the actual final position on the DSG will be brought to the WSF to its meeting on 4th July 2019 as usual and that many LAs were in this position because of HN budget pressures.

10. HIGH NEEDS UPDATE

10.1 DfE Call for Evidence on the Provision for SEND and Alternative Provision: How the Financial Arrangements Work

(a) Andy introduced the report which detailed a DfE consultation to conclude on 31st July 2019. It had already been discussed in the HN Task and Finish Group.

(b) The WSF noted the issues and that the consultation did not make any specific mention of early years settings.

(c) In terms of a response given the structure of the consultation survey it could be difficult to make a WSF response so all interested parties were encouraged to respond. The WSF requested the LA look at the questionnaire and advise further at the next meeting regarding submission.

10.2 Task and Finish Group Meetings

(a) The WSF noted the issues from the Task and Finish Group meetings.

(b) Penny advised there had been good debate and challenge at the meetings and the high needs recovery plan will be extremely challenging and requires a redesign of the current system, a refocus on areas of cost escalation e.g. top up funding, post 16, post 19 and out county and looking at the continuum of provision. Several other meetings with headteachers and SENCOs had also taken place.

(c) Nick thanked the Task and Finish Group for its work so far and commented despite the use of DSG reserves a significant structural HN deficit of between £8m to £10m remains. This requires both a local recovery plan but also Government investment and will take a significant amount of time to recover the position.

(d) Councillor Hart commented this is a major issue nationally requiring relevant national consideration. The Leader of the Council had met with and briefed the Worcestershire MPs and there was a huge amount of correspondence from parents. A member of the WSF confirmed a meeting was programmed with their local MP the Home Secretary for early July 2019.

(e) Members of the WSF commented as follows: -

- There is a potential double squeeze on mainstream schools with their significant cost pressures and HN costs.
- Support looking at out county costs particularly as other LAs are using WCC provision.
- However, recognise WCC places pupils in other LAs including a significant number of pupils supported by the virtual school.

(f) Andy advised of the timescales with a further task and finish group programmed for 18th June 2019 to consider a draft recovery plan using the DfE template and other reports and then reporting to the next WSF on 4th July 2019.

RESOLVED –

Following consideration by the Task and Finish Group, that a draft recovery plan be considered by the WSF at its next meeting on 4th July 2019.

11. SCHOOL BUDGET ISSUES 2019-20

11.1 Letter to Schools

(a) Caroline advised on the key issues contained in the letter. This confirmed the local formula on the year 2 NFF parameters including increases to the per pupil floor and ceiling together with the increases in the DfE Minimum Funding Levels (MFLs) including middle schools. The WSF noted these.

(b) Caroline further advised on the separate grant notifications for teachers pay and pension grant recently confirmed by the DfE.

(c) Members of the WSF raised issues on the budget setting process and that Collaborative Planning (CP) was a useful tool with several schools providing peer support. However, there were still issues on staff training in some schools and on e5 for schools in federations, but CP seemed fine for such schools. Caroline advised that schools are paying for a service on this, so they need to continue to use the helpline.

11.2 Final Authority Proforma Tool (APT)

(a) Andy introduced the report which detailed the final January 2019 position on the APT for 2019-20 together with a comparison to 2018-19.

(b) Andy confirmed following the support of the WSF, the submission of the APT for 2019-20 was made to the ESFA using the Year 2 NFF parameters and funding any shortfall from the Schools Block DSG overall, which now includes the national formula allocation for the Pupil Growth Fund. This approach has been approved by the ESFA with the 2019-20 shortfall of £0.461m being funded from the Schools Block DSG overall.

(c) The WSF noted the year on year changes in the data sets and NFF parameters. In particular, the need for a further £1.6m to support the MFLs and the increased requirement of £3.3m for the changes to the per pupil floor and ceiling.

(d) In response to questions from the WSF Andy confirmed the sparsity factor parameters were from the NFF and no transfer or top slice had been made from the Schools Block to support other DSG cost pressures.

12. REQUIRED CHANGES TO THE SCHEME FOR FINANCING MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

12.1 Andy advised that the DfE had published some changes to their statutory guidance governing the above scheme. The changes were detailed in the report and needed to be incorporated into the existing scheme.

12.2 Caroline advised on the changes made by the DfE to the Schools Financial Value Standard for 2019-20 with a more detailed declaration for the submission and it still including a requirement for 3-year budget planning.

RESOLVED –

On a show of hands, the Maintained Schools WSF members (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstentions) approved the required changes to the Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools and for its publication on the WSF web site.

13. F40 GROUP ISSUES

13.1 The WSF noted the campaign sheet, the updated NFF proposals and the notes of the DfE meeting on 9th April 2019.

13.2 The WSF also noted the retirement of the Chair and Secretary of the F40 Group and commended the roles they had played. The WSF were supportive of a renewed impetus in the new F40 executive group arrangements.

14. ACADEMIES UPDATE

14.1 The WSF noted the current academies position as at 1st May 2019.

14.2 The WSF discussed the current local and national position on academisation and the ability of schools to federate. Nick commented that there is pressure from the RSC for stand-alone academies to become part of MATs.

The meeting closed at 3.30pm

The date of the next WSF meeting is: -

Thursday 4th July 2019 at 2pm
Kidderminster Room
County Hall
Worcester

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