



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

Wednesday 21 September 2023
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
Marie Pearse [MP]	- HT Evesham Nursery School
Jo Kelleher [JK]	- Governor, Bredon Hill Academy
Annette Summers [AS]	- Nursery Owner
Lorraine Petersen [LP]	- Governor, Bromsgrove
Vivek Shah [VS]	- Nursery Owner
Jay Hart [JH]	- HT Kingfisher

b. Local Authority (LA)

Sarah Wilkins [SW]	- Director of Education and Early Help Worcestershire Children First
Mel Barnet [MB]	- Director of All Age Disability Services – Worcestershire Children First
Chris Bird [CBi]	- Acting Director of Resources Worcestershire Children First
Caroline Brand [CBr]	- Schools Finance Manager – Worcestershire Children First
Rob Phillips [RP]	- Finance Business Partner - Schools - Worcestershire Children First
Ruth Bessant [RB]	- Finance Business Partner - Schools - Worcestershire Children First

1. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Malcolm Richards – Nominated by BT and vote unanimous.

Bryn Thomas – nominated by JH and unanimous.

2. Welcome

CBi – welcome as new Acting Director of Resources Worcestershire Children First.

3. Apologies

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| Ed Francis [EF] | - HT Fort Royal Primary School |
| Councillor Tracey Onslow [TO] | - Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills, Worcestershire County Council |

4. 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.

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

LP for Agenda Item 14 as Chadsgrove is properly one of the largest users of this item and whatever the outcome will have an impact on this school.

6. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING (22 June 2023)

Minutes agreed.

7. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

None raised.

8. WSF Attendance Academic Year 2022 to 2023

The attendance for academic year and the constitution of the school forum.

We have several vacancies and want to maintain the group and recruit members to keep a balanced group. SW to write to the headteacher phase groups to ask for member to the WSF.

Governor vacancies, it is agreed that Worcester Children First (WCF) will email out to as many governors to seek membership applications to WSF. MR also suggested that it may also be appropriate to amend the constitution of WSF and its membership and who can elect members going forward.

RP to seek legal confirmation of changes to the constitution and find out the process. This is to be brought back to the pre-meeting.

9. Cabinet Report Financial Verbal update

CBi gave an update on the financial position of the county council, with pressures of £30 million underlying this year. We have one off funding to bring this figure down to £18 million.

This is mostly down to three areas, Children Social Care, Adult Social Care, and Home to School Transport, which are demand led services.

The £30 million does not include the DSG overspend, which is forecast to increase by a further £8 million this year.

BT asked, how close the county council is to a Section 114 notice, CBi confirmed that this is not presently on the table, and we are probably in the middle of the pack.

10. School and LA Funding overview

a) Indicative DSG rates for 2024/25

RP went through the report submitted to WSF, and that we will not know the exact figure until December.

LP asked if the £10,000 per place will be the same? RP confirmed that this will be the same for next year.

JH asked should we have a lobby group to increase the £10,000? BT confirmed that this would be go against government plans as looking at the option of transferring more children from special schools into mainstream SW also confirmed that the WCF will continue to look at this going forward and will continue to lobby and make this point were appropriate.

b) School Block

RP presented the paper. No questions

c) HLN Block

i. Funding PRUs/AP 2024/25

RP presented the paper. No questions

SW asked what Unity will receive, but this will need to be calculated as they have only just opened in September 2023.

d) Early Year Block

i. Early Years Supplementary Grant

RP presented the paper.

VS confirmed that this is a hard year and emphasised the need to increase the salaries of staff to retain and to recruit new staff

SW confirmed that this is challenging for both the sector and the council.

RP confirmed that we are having EY briefings next week.

LP suggested, due to the increase of funded age ranges, that this could also lead to an increase in the number of children with SEN . RP confirmed the Department for Education had also confirmed that you can use EY block funding to cover the additional cost of inclusion, but this is being considered very carefully as we know that the sector also needs the funding to be able to supply the places.

AS agreed with VS, staff retention is a major issue and they have never had such a large waiting list before. There is concerns on the impact of this on sufficiency. SW confirmed that the Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure sufficiency, and we are continuing to assess this. We are planning more detailed work to support the sector.

MP confirmed that the majority of EY funding is taken up with staffing and that is before other costs increasing.

JH agreed with MP but suggested that there does not seem to be any recognition in the funding for the additional works needed.

ii. Early Years Changes and timetable

RP presented the paper. No questions

SW confirmed that £12 million to help implement this process. RP confirmed this is how much Worcestershire will receive and then how this is spent.

iii. Early Years Consultation – Government

RP presented the paper. No questions

No questions.

iv. Early Years Consultation – Worcestershire

RP presented the paper and asked if the following members would consider joining, VS, AS, MP, LD, and NJ. RP to invite them to a meeting to discuss the consultation before sending to the sector.

11. Delivering Better Value in SEND & DSG Management Plan – Update

MB presented the paper and discussed the latest position. She confirmed that we still have not received confirmation yet of a successful bid, and that the DfE have asked for additional information on what else we are going to be able to do to reduce the deficit.

MR asked if there are any constraints on the grant? MB confirmed it is not able to be used on capital projects or reducing the DSG deficit, and it needs to be used for the implementation of new processes or projects.

12. DfE SEND AP and improvement plan change programme partnership

MB presented the paper and confirmed that the DfE have budgeted £70 million for this change programme. We are in one of the nine regional groups.

LP asked if any changes in legislation was discussed. MB and BT thought that this was definitely a consideration that was being looked into as part of this project. They also confirmed that it would support future legislation would also raise the profile of NHS England in the support of individual of all ages.

MB & BT both felt it is not about more money but about using the money that you have more efficiently to meet the needs of the individuals of all ages.

BT agreed with MB that each area has a 'Local Area Inclusion Plan'. The challenge will be getting the communication right and getting them, all involved.

SW confirmed that the communication would go through the school phase leads so that they can share this with the individual schools and other mechanisms for the early years sector.

13. Scheme for Financing Schools

RP presented the paper with changes going forward to the Scheme for Financing Schools.

No comment read and then voted that this was approved.

14. Equipment Policy

MB raised this agenda item with WSF. She confirmed they are looking at a policy document going forward. Due to the complexity of need where most requests have been around £4k to £5k each. With some of these items only being for short term use before the pupil outgrows them or needs something else.

LP raised that her belief is that a lot of the need for the equipment is due to health issues rather than educational need, as a result there should be more of a split between health and education, with a lot of specific equipment being needed which cannot be used by other pupils afterwards.

MP recommended the use of a central store for all equipment.

BT commented, when visiting a special school recently, was that a pupil's equipment was needed so that they could attend school rather than needed to educate the pupil.

MB stated we need to have a policy for the use and funding of equipment, so we have a way forward for all stake holders.

SW confirmed that there is three parts of this, linked to the pupil's care plan and purchase, second the storage, and third the administration, health and safety, and repair of the equipment.

Agreed this is a complex area that needed to be considered which would also impact the HNB.

15. Teacher Pay Additional Grant

RP present the paper for reference to the school.

No comments

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

Meeting ended.

The meeting closed at 4.15 PM.

Date of next meeting

The date of the next WSF meeting: - Thursday 9 November 2023 at 2.30 PM
(Remote Meeting - MS Teams)