

**MINUTES of the meeting of Herefordshire Schools Forum held at Hereford Education and Conference Centre, Blackfriars Street, Hereford on Wednesday, 7th June, 2006 at 1.30 p.m.**

<b>Present:</b>	<b>Julie Powell (Chairman)</b>
<b>Church Members</b>	<b>Rev. I. Terry</b>
<b>Parent Governor Members</b>	<b>Mrs C. Woolley</b>
<b>Teacher Representatives</b>	<b>C. Lewandowski</b>
<b>Primary School Representatives</b>	<b>Mrs. C. Potts and Mrs. T. Kneale</b>
<b>PRU School Representatives</b>	<b>(none)</b>
<b>Secondary School Representatives</b>	<b>J. Docherty, A. Marson and D. Williams</b>
<b>Special School Representatives</b>	<b>Mrs. S. Bailey</b>

**In attendance:** Councillor B.F. Ashton, R. Hatherill (Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership) and Councilor D.W. Rule MBE (Cabinet Member – Children and Young People)

**1. APPOINTMENT OF CHARIMAN**

Mrs. J.S. Powell was nominated and seconded for the Chair.

**RESOLVED: That Mrs J.S. Powell be appointed as Chairman of Herefordshire Schools Forum for the ensuing year.**

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from T. Edwards, Ms. C. Garlick, Ms. D. Strutt and P. Cosgrove.

**3. NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

There were no named substitutes.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**5. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 9th February 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

## **6. SOCIAL DEPREIVATION FUNDING IN SCHOOLS**

The Forum considered the potential impact of changes in social deprivation funding for Herefordshire schools in accordance with the timescale set by the DfES and HM Treasury review.

The Manager of LMS and Planning informed the Forum that the proposals outlined in the report highlighted a potentially significant change in the way deprivation funding was awarded. Full details of the proposals from the DfES and HM Treasury were included at Appendix 1 to the report. The Local Authority had been asked by the DfES to submit a statement outlining its current local policy and practice. A copy of the statement was included at Appendix 2 to the report.

It was explained that as part of the 2006/07 schools budget £310,000 had been allocated on factors relating to the level of deprivation. Under the current proposals from the DfES and HM Treasury this allocation would need to rise to £5.4m. In order to meet this expectation funding would need to be reduced by approximately £200 per pupil from each schools budget and then reallocated to schools in greatest need. It was felt that this would not be achievable by 2008 without causing staff redundancies.

In the course of discussing the proposal the following concerns were noted:

- That rural deprivation should be considered as a factor of social deprivation.
- There was often a link between socially deprived pupils and special educational needs which this funding may help to address.
- It was felt that free school meals was not a good indicator of social deprivation.
- Concern was expressed about the effect the proposals may have on budgets for small schools.

The Forum agreed with the proposal that a working group be established to consider the proposal in more detail. It was expected that the working group would advise the Forum of its findings at a future meeting.

It was suggested that Mrs. Kneale (Primary School) and Mr. C. Barker (Secondary School) be appointed to the working group with the remaining members being appointed at the next meeting of Primary School Headteachers and Herefordshire Association of Secondary Heads.

The Manager of LMS and Planning informed the Forum that financial assistance for cover staff would be provided to those who sat on the working group.

The Forum requested that their concerns be made known to the Regional Minder at the Government Office for the West Midlands and asked for him to be invited to the next meeting of the Forum.

**RESOLVED:**

**THAT (a) a working party be established to consider and report back on the implications of the proposals on social deprivation funding;**

**(b) Mrs. T. Kneale and C. Barker be appointed to the working party and**

the remaining members be appointed at the next meetings of Primary Headteachers and Herefordshire Association of Secondary Heads.;

and;

(c) the Chair of the Forum write to Regional Minder from the Government Office of the West Midlands outlining the Forums concerns and inviting the Regional Minder to the next meeting of the Forum.

## 7. ICT SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS

The Forum received an update on ICT support in schools following the Forums decision to withhold £333,000 earmarked for the Broadband network.

The Head of Commissioning and Improvement (Schools and Services) explained to the Forum that a number of meeting dates had been set to address the finer details of the ICT support to schools. He explained that the cost of the current years Service Level Agreement had risen to meet the true costs of the service provided.

A number of issues were currently ongoing including: discussions on the broadband network; benchmarking with other similar services; and meetings to solve the remote access problems.

A Member of the Forum expressed a view that the principal issues of concern to schools were related to connectivity and remote access and these issues needed to be resolved and co-ordinated by the Local Authority, otherwise some schools would obtain their own individual supplier who could meet their individual needs.

The Head of Commissioning and Improvement (Schools and Services) responded by advising against schools securing individual ICT contracts. He added that it was anticipated that a way forward would be established by the end of June 2006.

The Forum believed that the best course of action was to wait for the results of the forthcoming meetings before authorising the release of the withheld money. Rather than invoke its emergency procedure the Forum resolved to hold an additional meeting to consider the issue of ICT support to schools before the end of term.

**RESOLVED: THAT a special meeting of Herefordshire Schools Forum be held before the end of term to further discuss the issue of ICT support in schools.**

## 8. REVIEW OF HEREFORDSHIRE MUSIC SERVICE

The Forum considered the funding and financial underpinning of Herefordshire Music Service.

The Manager of LMS and Planning informed the Forum that concerns were being expressed at the rate of increased charges for music tuition and instrument hire. Charges were necessary to make up the short fall between the Government grant and the real cost of providing the service. There were fears that the increased cost would prevent children from low-income families learning a musical instrument. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that the Local Authority would no longer be able to reinvest service underspends in instrument stock as it had done previously.

The Finance Officer explained that it was possible for low-income families to apply

for a bursary to help fund music tuition and instrument hire. There was currently a budget of £5,000 for music bursaries which was currently under utilised.

The Forum felt schools should be encouraged to subsidise music lessons themselves as already occurred in a number of County Schools. They also felt that group lessons should be encouraged to help share costs and that the under utilised bursary scheme should be more widely marketed. If the increased marketing of the bursary scheme did not result in an increased take up of the scheme then the thresholds on which awards were made should be reviewed.

**RESOLVED:**

**THAT: (a) funding for the Music Service continue as at present by increasing the hourly teaching rate and hire charge for musical instruments on an annual basis in line with increases in costs;**

**(b) schools be encouraged to subsidise music tuition and instrument hire;**

**(c) the music tuition and instrument hire be more widely marketed;**

**and;**

**(d) should the wider marketing of the music tuition and instrument hire bursary not result in an increased uptake then the thresholds for awards be reviewed.**

**9. SCHOOLS BUDGET 2006/2007**

The Forum was informed of the Section 52 Education Budget Statement for 2006/07.

The Manager of LMS and Planning informed the Forum that the dedicated schools grant (DSG) set by the DfES had been provisionally set at £78,679,000. This sum had been calculated on pupil numbers collected in January 2006. However, the estimated number of pupils was 104 higher than the number which actually started school in September 2006. Therefore, the actual DSG received from DfES for 2006/07 was £342,022 lower than anticipated. This shortfall would be carried forward and taken out of the 2007/08 DSG unless it was offset by an underspend in 2006/07.

The Forum was also informed that the 9.1% increase in the central expenditure budget approved at an earlier meeting of the Forum had now been reduced to just a 6.5% increase. The final increase in the Individual School Budget was 9.5%.

A copy of the finalised Section 52 budget statement, schools budget summary and central expenditure limit were attached as appendices.

The Forum expressed concern that the budget awarded from the DfES was less than it had estimated and wished to express this concern to the DfES and Local Government Association.

**RESOLVED:**

**THAT: (a) the shortfall in Dedicated Schools Grant received from the DfES be noted;**

**(b) the 9.5% increase in Individual Schools Budget and Central expenditure increase of 6.5% be noted;**

**and;**

**(c) a letter be sent by the Chairman to the DfES and Local Government Association expressing concern about the shortfall in Dedicated Schools Grant.**

**10. SCHOOL BALANCES MARCH 2006**

The Forum received a report on school balances at the end of the financial year 2005/06.

The Manager of LMS and Planning informed the Forum that overall school balances had fallen by 3.5% in revenue terms and 28.2% in capital terms in 2005/06 when compared to 2004/05 figures. However, secondary school revenue balances, special school capital balances and all school sectors balances in relation the extended schools initiative had risen. It was explained to the Forum that this had occurred due to the allocation of specific grant funding which would soon be spent.

A breakdown of each individual school's budget and balances was available on the Council's Website.

**RESOLVED: THAT the overall reduction in school balances be noted.**

The meeting ended at 3.20 p.m.

**CHAIRMAN**