HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of Herefordshire Schools Forum held at Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford HR1 1SH on Tuesday 12 March 2013 at 9.30 am

Present: **Mrs D Strutt (Chairman)**
Mr NPJ Griffiths (Vice Chairman)

Mrs S Bailey, Mr P Barns, Mrs L Brazewell, Mr P Burbidge, Mrs J Cecil, Mr JA Chapman, Mr K Crawford, Mr J Docherty, Mr T E Edwards, Mr R Leece, Mr C Lewandowski, Mrs R Lloyd, Mr S Matthews, Mrs J Rees, Mr S Robertson, Mrs K. Rooke, Mr A Shaw, Mrs L Townsend, Mr S Woodrow and Mr K Wright

In attendance: **Councillor GJ Powell (Cabinet Member – Education and Infrastructure)**

Officers: **Mr C Baird, Assistant Director People's Services Commissioning, Mr M Green, Senior Finance Manager, Mr L Knight, Head of Provider Services (Additional Needs) and Mr T Brown – Governance Services.**

110. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mrs A Jackson and Mr I Peake.

111. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

None.

112. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mrs S Bailey and Mrs K Rooke declared interests in relation to Agenda item 5; Report of the Budget Working Group as a member of staff and a Governor respectively at Brookfield Special School.

113. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

114. REPORT OF THE BUDGET WORKING GROUP

(Mrs S Bailey and Mrs K Rooke declared interests and did not vote.)

The Forum considered the report of the Budget Working Group (BWG) on the following matters: options for Special School top up funding values 2013/14; Pupil Referral Unit Top-Up Funding values and extra delegation to High Schools; SEN Protection Scheme – annual (fixed) or termly (variable) calculation; and high needs top-ups for academies.

A supplementary report had been circulated in advance of the meeting setting out proposals for top-up charging for primary intervention places, in accordance with the BWG's request that this aspect be reviewed.

The Chairman of the BWG introduced the report noting that because of the complexity of the funding of the High Needs Block and uncertainty as to the Department for Education's guidance on post-16 place funding the BWG would be regularly reviewing expenditure on this

area. The Senior Finance Manager then presented the report explaining each of the proposals.

RESOLVED: That: the Cabinet Member (Education and Infrastructure) be recommended that:

(a) Special School top up values for 2013/14 should be allocated on the basis of individual top-ups determined on a school by school basis as follows;

Blackmarston	**Standard**	**£8,725**	**Enhanced**	**£15,660**
Barrs Court	**Standard**	**£6,000**	**Enhanced**	**£12,935**
Brookfield	**Standard**	**£7,265**	**Enhanced**	**£14,200**
Westfield (Primary)	**Standard**	**£11,850**	**Enhanced**	**£18,785**
Westfield (Secondary)	**Standard**	**£9,125**	**Enhanced**	**£16,060**

(b) in relation to Pupil Referral Unit top up funding values:

i. the adoption of the Herefordshire model (Model 2) for PRU top-up charges is approved whereby the full top-up value is split into two parts of £4,325 so that schools and the local authority contribute equally;

ii. the full top-up value for 16 long stay PRU pupils is retained so that high schools only meet the 1st year cost;

iii. Fees for permanent places (whether through exclusion or otherwise) are fixed at £4,325 irrespective of date of PRU transfer;

iv. Intervention charges are pro-rata of £4,325 on a daily basis;

v. The Managed Moves Panel is required to fund PRU top ups for placements on the same basis as schools;

vi. Top-up values for primary short stay PRU intervention places should be set at £5.50 per day for 2013/14;

vii. A budget of £5,632 is retained in the High Needs block (to be deducted from the "PRU buffer funding") to fund the top-ups for primary intervention places at Brookfield school in 2013/14;

viii. And a shadow charging process is implemented for 2013/14 charging the high needs block rather than schools directly for this initial year;

ix. The arrangements for commissioning short stay places for primary and potentially secondary schools be reviewed for 2014/15.

x a buffer of £129,750 (equivalent to 15 top-ups of £4,325) is retained in the high needs block to cover the identified risks for 2013/14 initially (inclusive of a sum of £5,632 to fund the top ups for primary intervention places at Brookfield school in 2013/14) – to be reviewed for 2014/15;

xi £198,950 is allocated to high schools from the High Needs Block via a formula based on 1/3 pupil numbers, 1/3 Low Prior Attainment and 1/3 Ever-6 Free school Meals; and

xiii a briefing note on the agreed top up funding arrangements be circulated to all schools;

(c) the SEN protection scheme should be recalculated termly on a pro-rata basis to reflect the changes in high needs pupils throughout the year; and

(d) in relation to high needs top ups for academies, Option 1 be supported: delegate 5/12th of the newly delegated SEN funding to academies to achieve consistent funding for all schools and pay the new Band 3 (£1,350) and Band 4 (£5,500) top-ups to all schools.

115. DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION REVIEW OF 2013-14 SCHOOL FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Forum considered a response to the Department for Education (DfE) Review of 2013-14 School Funding Arrangements.

A draft response was circulated at the meeting for consideration. The Senior Finance Manager (SFM) gave a presentation. A copy of these papers has been placed on the Minute Book with the agenda papers. Schools had been invited to submit comments for the Forum's consideration. The presentation summarised the few comments received from schools and put forward for consideration some principles that might underpin school funding in the County. The SFM commented that the current values in the funding formula adopted by the Authority placed it in the mainstream.

Officers considered that the fact that the DfE had included questions about sparsity in the consultation paper suggested some recognition at least of the significance of this issue for a number of authorities. As the second sparsest County it was an opportunity for the County to highlight the importance to Herefordshire schools and the complexity of funding generally of small rural schools.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- The consultation document asked whether the distance travelled to school could be used as a sparsity factor, with consideration also being given to whether actual travel distance, rather than distance as the crow flies, could be used. The draft response suggested a maximum travel time of 45 minutes from home to school for a primary school pupil should be used to identify if a school was "a necessary school". A Member suggested that this was too long a travel time for young pupils some of whom would have extremely long days at school as a consequence. The Assistant Director clarified that this was a local standard that had developed over time. On balance the Forum did not think it necessary to amend the draft response on this point.

- In relation to the single lump sum currently paid to all schools the SFM commented that the DfE needed to decide whether the lump sum was provided to cover school

fixed costs or was a subsidy method for small schools. The draft response expanded on this point.

An observation was made that if the lump sum and the protection it offered small schools by meeting fixed costs were to be removed and the funding was allocated solely on the basis of school numbers this would both lead to the closure of unviable schools and prevent unviable schools being established.

- The consultation also invited comment on whether there should be separate lump sums for primary and secondary schools. The draft response set out a proposal for what the lump sum would need to be to cover fixed costs at a Primary School and fixed costs at a Secondary School.

  A concern was expressed that the sum suggested for Primary Schools would not cover the fixed costs of larger primary schools. It was questioned whether the funding received as a result of the additional pupils at such schools would offset a reduction in the lump sum. It was confirmed that some authorities did allocate "stepped" lump sums.

  It was noted that there would be scope for detailed discussion of the implications once the DfE's proposals were announced following the consultation exercise.

- The concept of "necessary small schools" referred to in the consultation document was discussed. The Authority's view was that strategically there were pairs of schools where if one were to close the other would then automatically become necessary. The Assistant Director commented that changing school provision and the size of provision was a very difficult issue to resolve, but did need to be addressed within the new legislative framework, including the developments regarding free schools.

  It was suggested that the focus should be on the needs of pupils and this meant that some small schools were necessary to serve the needs of some families whose economic circumstances meant they could not, for example, transport pupils considerable distances by car.

  That the fact that the County was a rural County needed to be reflected in the nature of school provision to preserve that status.

- It was unrealistic to expect any additional funding from the DfE and Schools had to face the fact that an independent observer would demand an explanation of the number of surplus places in the current system.

- Consideration should be given to inviting a representative of the Department for Education to the County to discuss the funding issues facing schools in the County because of the sparsity factor.

- The DfE had a choice between applying a hard centrally set funding formula or a looser formula where a percentage of funding was available to be allocated locally to reflect local circumstance.

- It was suggested that it would be useful to know how many pupils attended school in their catchment area.

The Forum considered the draft response to each question in turn. There was a consensus that the response could be approved in principle and that a draft response amended to reflect discussion at the meeting should be circulated for comment before being finalised and submitted.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the draft response be approved in principle, subject to the amendments accepted at the meeting; and

(b) a revised draft response be circulated to Members inviting them to confirm that the response reflected the discussion at the meeting or submit comments and the response then be finalised by officers after consultation with the Chairman.

116. WORK PROGRAMME

The Forum noted the work programme.

117. MEETING DATES

Noted.

The meeting ended at 11.00 am **CHAIRMAN**