

**MINUTES of the meeting of Herefordshire Schools Forum held at  
The Council Chamber - The Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square,  
Hereford, HR1 2HX on Friday 10 March 2017 at 9.30 am**

**Present:** Mrs J Rees (Chairman)

Mrs S Bailey, Mr P Barns, Mr P Burbidge, Mrs J Cohn, Mr A Davies,  
Mr P Deneen, Mr T E Edwards, Ms A Jackson, Mr T Knapp, Mr C Lewandowski,  
Mr M Lewis, Mrs S Lines, Mrs R Lloyd, Mrs K Weston and Mr P Whitcombe

**Officers:** Chris Baird, Malcolm Green and Les Knight

**262. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Wendy Bradbeer, Sara Catlow-Hawkins, John Docherty, Martin Farmer, Jonathan Godfrey, Nigel Griffiths and Lynn Johnson.

**263. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)**

None

**264. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

**265. MINUTES**

**Resolved:**

**that the minutes of the meeting of 13 January 2017 be approved and signed by the chairman as an accurate record.**

**266. REPORT OF THE BUDGET WORKING GROUP**

The chairman of the budget working group was unable to attend the meeting and had submitted written comments. In his note he thanked the schools finance manager and the clerk to the meeting for facilitating the working party and thanked the members of the budget working group for their hard work in the previous two meetings, which had been very detailed and focused. He also thanked the head teachers of the special schools for sharing their information with the group.

The schools finance manager briefed the meeting on the activities of the budget working group as set out in the report. The following key points were highlighted.

Special School Funding

An independent report had been commissioned from Mr Mark Whitby of Acuity Education to determine if the funding received by Herefordshire special schools was fair

compared to statistical neighbours and if the expenditure on staffing was reasonable compared to other special schools.

The final version of the report had been received and was unchanged from the draft which had been circulated with the agenda papers. The special school heads had accepted the report as accurate and helpful.

The schools finance manager highlighted the benchmarking tables on pages 25 to 27 of the agenda pack to be particularly helpful in setting the situation in each school in context. Benchmarking for Brookfield had been difficult due to lack of comparator data.

The conclusion of the report was that Barrs Court, Blackmarston and Brookfield received reasonable levels of income but that Westfield had a low level of income per pupil compared to statistical comparators. It was intended that the low funding allocated to Westfield be investigated further.

Mrs Bailey thanked the budget working group for allowing the special school representatives to attend the meetings. She commented that the original data used in the report had been captured prior to a restructure at Blackmarston and that updated data had been submitted. She also noted that statistical comparators were not always the same category of school. The special school representatives had been pleased to meet with Mr Whitby and supported his judgements that the level of funding to the special schools was reasonable.

**It was resolved that:**

**the conclusions of the independent review of special schools funding as set out by Mr Whitby in his report be endorsed and in particular that the low funding allocated to Westfield school be investigated further.**

#### National School Funding Formula

The schools finance manager briefed the meeting on the proposed joint local authority and schools forum response to the DfE stage 2 consultation. The response was due by 22 March 2017.

Letters had been sent to the county's two MPs highlighting the council's concerns over the proposed national formula and other schools funding issues. The letters were identical except for the example schools used, which were selected from the relevant constituency. The local authority would continue to lobby for support from the county MPs. Individual schools were encouraged to make their own representations.

The schools finance manager confirmed that the local authority response would be shared with all schools and he encouraged schools to respond individually to the consultation, highlighting their own circumstances.

In running through the draft response the following points were made:

- stakeholders of small schools may not agree that a teaching head is a luxury, the decision to recruit a teaching head should be based on local data and circumstances, different models of leadership should be reflected in the response
- schools should make their own responses to the consultation and personalise the response to their own situation
- the F40 group had constructed a detailed model to show that a lower rate of funding for additional needs factors was appropriate, most schools serving deprived communities in Herefordshire lose money despite higher funding for additional needs

- the lump sums used historically in different authorities were very different, moving to a single national figure would inevitably be difficult given the different starting positions
- there was a lack of evidence in the DfE paper as to how the lump sum figure had been arrived at
- it was suggested that the lump sum should cover a schools fixed costs and that the lump sum should be stepped to take account of different sizes of school, however this was not universally supported
- larger schools may struggle to sustain support to smaller schools through federations or MATs if their funding drops
- sparsity factor needed to be considered alongside the lump sum
- that Herefordshire had been proactive historically in making savings, retaining high levels of delegation to schools and maintaining budget discipline by ring-fencing the three funding blocks
- the area cost adjustment threw up significant inequalities between similar schools in different local authorities, while there were some acknowledged differences in costs between areas the adjustments proposed were not felt to be fair and reasonable
- the wording of the response would be updated in light of comments received during the meeting

Chris Lewandowski gave details of the impact of the area cost adjustment on two example Herefordshire schools if they were moved to other local authority areas. The full detail of this would be circulated with the minutes of the meeting.

**Resolved that:**

**subject to comments made by forum members, the draft response to the DfE consultation on the national school funding formula be approved for submission to the DfE by the 22 March closing date.**

Response to high needs funding consultation

The schools finance manager gave a verbal update on the proposed response to the high needs consultation. He noted that little work had been done on this so far as the F40 group had been focussed on the mainstream funding consultation.

Herefordshire would gain by about 3% under the proposed formula. The background to the formula was very technical and included a 50% historic spend factor and elements for population, income deprivation, free school meals, disability living allowance and children in bad health.

It was proposed that the schools finance manager, together with the head of additional needs and the assistant director commissioning and education finalise a response for submission. The Herefordshire response would be based on the F40 group response, a draft of which had just been received.

**Resolved:**

**that the response to the high needs formula consultation be based on the f40 draft and finalised by officers prior to submission to the DfE.**

ESG transitional funding allocation

The schools finance manager reminded forum members that at the meeting in January 2017 the issue of how to allocate the £372k of ESG transitional funding had been discussed. It had been agreed to allocate £210k to an exceptional redundancy reserve

and to allocate £50k for school improvement work for the period April 2017 to August 2017. This left £112k to be allocated.

It had been suggested that this funding could be used to fund the apprenticeship levy for those schools required to pay in in 2017/18. The council had felt that other options should be considered which might deliver better value and longer term impact.

The schools finance manager outlined a package of measures proposed to be funded from this one off grant:

- £20k for HR / payroll IT system improvements, the SLA for 2018/19 would be frozen due to the efficiencies delivered giving an ongoing saving to schools
- £20k for improvements to the IT system for processing of SEN payments, again SLA costs would be frozen or reduced for 2018/19
- £55k to bring forward the planned savings from the Kielder Centre a year early, allowing this funding to be released in the high needs block
- £17k to fund a review of tariffs in Westfield school resulting from the independent review of special school funding.

The final package of allocations relating to the ESG transitional grant funding would require approval by the cabinet member for young people and children's wellbeing.

**Resolved that:**

**The proposals for the allocation of the ESG transitional funding of £372k be recommended to the Cabinet Member for Young People and Children's Wellbeing as follows:**

- a) **Exceptional redundancy reserve, £210k**
- b) **School Improvement for the period April 2017 to August 2017, £50k**
- c) **HR / payroll improvements, £20k**
- d) **Improvements to SEN payments computer system, £20k**
- e) **Bring forward savings from Kielder Centre from 2018/19 to boost high needs block funding in 2017/18, £55k**
- f) **Cost of undertaking the tariff review costs – up to £17k**

High Needs Budget 2017/18

The schools finance manager referred the members of the forum to the detailed budget set out on pages 59 to 60 of the agenda pack. Changes from 2016/17 were generally related to cost pressures and tidying up.

The budget working group had considered whether high needs tariffs paid to early years children should continue to be paid from the high needs block or from the early years block. DfE guidance allowed either approach. Moving these costs to the early years block would have released a further £130k to increase high need tariffs. There had been extensive discussion on the issue but the budget working group considered that the principle of maintaining the ring-fence around each funding block was important. The recommendation of the group was therefore that the high needs block continue to fund early years high needs tariffs.

A further proposal had been considered by the budget working group to fund an outreach service using special school staff to support mainstream schools. The group acknowledged that there was insufficient funding to deliver everything and decided not to recommend any funding for outreach in the 2017/18 budget. This item could be reconsidered for the 2018/19 budget.

The remaining funds in the high needs block were recommended to be used to uplift the tariffs.

**Resolved that:**

**the Cabinet Member for Young People and Children's Wellbeing be asked to approve the following :**

- a) the integrity of the three funding blocks remains a key principle and the early years block should not take on additional high needs costs currently funded from the high needs block;**
- b) the remaining £243k of high needs funding be allocated as follows:**
  - i. £50k be reserved to meet the cost of any tariff amendments arising from the review at Westfield and the other special schools; and**
  - ii. £193k be allocated to increase the tariffs (rounded) as follows:**
    - Tariff A: £1,360 (+£50)**
    - Tariff B: £3,340 (+£90)**
    - Tariff C: £5,700 (+£200)**
    - Tariff D: £9,170 (+£540)**
    - Tariff E: £12,950 (+£550)**
    - Tariff F: £17,260 (+£470)**

The chairman thanked the budget working group for their hard work in considering these issues and considered that the outcome was a fair reflection of all parties interests.

#### **Summary of recommendations agreed**

**It was resolved that:**

- a) the conclusions of the independent review of special school funding as set out by Mr Whitby in his report be endorsed and in particular that the low funding allocated to Westfield school be investigated further;**
- b) subject to comments made by forum members, the draft response to the DfE consultation on the national school funding formula be approved for submission to the DfE by the 22 March closing date; and**
- c) the response to the high needs formula consultation be based on the f40 draft and finalised by officers prior to submission to the DfE.**
- d) The proposals for the allocation of the ESG transitional funding of £372k be recommended to the Cabinet Member for Young People and Children's Wellbeing as follows:**
  - a) Exceptional redundancy reserve, £210k**
  - b) School Improvement for the period April 2017 to August 2017, £50k**
  - c) HR / payroll improvements, £20k**
  - d) Improvements to SEN payments computer system, £20k**
  - e) Bring forward savings from Kielder Centre from 2018/19 to boost high needs block funding in 2017/18, £55k**
  - f) Cost of undertaking the tariff review costs – up to £17k**
- e) The budget working group recommends to the schools forum that the Cabinet Member for Young People and Children's Wellbeing be asked to approve the following :**
  - a) the integrity of the three funding blocks remains a key principle and the early years block should not take on additional high needs costs currently funded from the high needs block;**
  - b) the remaining £243k of high needs funding be allocated as follows:**

- i. **£50k be reserved to meet the cost of any tariff amendments arising from the review at Westfield and the other special schools; and**
- ii. **£193k be allocated to increase the tariffs (rounded) as follows:**
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## **267. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

The head of additional needs introduced the report. He reminded the members of the forum that the high needs task and finish group was one of four established some time previously. Its purpose was to look at pressures and possible solutions relating to provision for pupils with high needs. A paper had been circulated at the January 2017 schools forum for reading and feedback. The paper before the forum at this meeting was broadly the same but reworked to make it easier to follow.

It was noted that no specific funding was allocated to this task, with resources needing to be found from savings elsewhere or by making a specific business case to the forum. However most of the actions identified by the task and finish group require time and thought only.

The head of additional needs highlighted the growth in special school places in Herefordshire of 38% over 5 years, compared to 12-15% growth nationally. This rate of growth could not continue. The task and finish group was split into smaller working groups to consider 5 key areas:

- a) the number of special school places needed
- b) the provision in mainstream schools
- c) improving the offer for young people with SEND post 16
- d) preventing the need for high cost residential placements, particularly for ASD/LD and challenging behaviour
- e) improving early years provision to prevent later underachievement and cost

The head of additional needs thanked his co-chair, Sara Catlow-Hawkins, and those who had participated in the task and finish group.

The proposals from each of the 5 key areas were then considered in turn. The following key points and comments were made:

### Section A – the number of special school places needed

- a figure of a maximum of 1.2% of the predicted overall 2-19 school population for 2021 was proposed to determine the number of special school places required, this reflected the national average and was close to the existing number of places
- this would allow growth room to 2021
- it was difficult to predict what demands would emerge, for example improvements in medical technology had led to better survival rates for premature babies and this was now reflected in the number of two and three year olds requiring support
- advances in medicine only accounted for a proportion of growth, considered to be around 5% nationally
- mainstream provision needed to be considered alongside special schools and ensure that pupils were in the right setting for their needs and that mainstream was meeting need appropriately

- there was engagement with the child and adolescent mental health service but some input was later than officers would like, work was taking place across the board on mental health strategies to provide earlier intervention as well as the CAMHS Tier 3 service.

### Section B - the provision in mainstream schools

- there had not been a recent focus on an inclusive ethos in schools and it was proposed that a restatement of this approach should take place
- the SENCO network had been reinvigorated and was more active in sharing good practice
- the Herefordshire local offer pages were in need of updating, this information was a statutory requirement to inform families, young people and professionals, it was proposed to allocate 6 weeks of officer time to prepare new materials and update the website
- a member of the forum commented that the financial challenges faced by mainstream schools made it more difficult to be inclusive
- it was noted that the fair access panel was struggling to place some children when they moved around the county
- special schools had provided support to mainstream schools in the past and were willing to continue to do so, failure in mainstream could impact on a pupil's confidence which then manifested in poor behaviour
- a document setting out the minimum offer expected from all mainstream schools would be published and used to challenge those schools not meeting the standard
- a minimum commitment of experience in SEN would be sought from teacher training institutions.

The head of additional needs stated that the annual review system did not work particularly well as a vehicle for active monitoring of pupil progress. It was not realistic with current funding constraints to expect all reviews to be attended by an SEN Officer. Ways needed to be found to get the best out of what was available.

The provision of outreach services was discussed. The head of additional needs commented that it was difficult to place children in absolutely the right setting for their needs every time because their needs change or emerge. Some pupils were placed in special schools who, with hindsight, might not have needed to be placed there. Conversely some pupils in mainstream school might have been better placed in a special school. The question was posed how to draw on the expertise in both special schools and mainstream schools to provide support to one another and to ensure that pupils were placed in the most appropriate setting.

There were different models of outreach that could be used. The success of the intervention model used by Brookfield School was being assessed. It was noted that about half of children over the past 3 years who attended the intervention class did not revert into the 'behaviour system'.

The squeeze on funding meant that the special schools could no longer provide outreach support for free as they used to. Special schools reported that when charges were introduced the demand for the service significantly reduced, yet the need remained. There would be a cost implication for any outreach support and this would need to be funded. It was suggested that around £50k would provide the equivalent of one teacher for a year to be released for outreach support. It was noted that support and training needed to be available to all teaching staff, not just to NQTs or trainee teachers, and that it was beneficial if training was based around the need of individual pupils actually on roll rather than training being one-off events on a theoretical basis.

### Section C – improving the offer for young people with SEND post 16

- it was noted that a lot of progress had been made in preparing students for work, schools were being proactive and some internships had commenced. Good use would be made of the one off grant which was being co-ordinated through Barrs Court and which would support the co-ordination of internships. There was concern about what would happen to this role when the funding ran out.
- it was noted that young people with SEND also needed supported housing, close to suitable employment to boost their independence, the local authority was working on an accommodation strategy to deliver sufficient stock of appropriate housing
- the importance of co-ordination between education and adult social care to support those with severe and complex learning difficulties was highlighted, work would commence shortly to identify gaps in provision particularly for those with more moderate learning difficulties
- the post 16 NEET project supported by schools forum for 2016/17 had been successfully implemented, there was a desire to see this work continue but other funding would need to be secured in the order of £30k per annum. The head of additional needs highlighted that the only other funding currently available required claims for individual students and considerable bureaucracy.

### Section D - preventing the need for high cost residential placements, particularly for ASD/LD and challenging behaviour

- It was noted that schools forum approved funding in 2016/17 for a project to explore ways in which children with a high risk of needing out-of-county residential provision could have their needs met locally. The project had identified some suitable pupils and work was underway. One successful case was identified at Westfield School that had resulted in cost savings. Progress of the full project would be reported later in 2017/18.
- The importance of identifying at an early age those children likely to end up in high cost places was noted, as was the need to provide a whole package of support, not just the education component, to the child and their family.

### Section E – improving early years provision to prevent later underachievement (and cost)

- the cross over with work undertaken by the early years task and finish group was noted
- the increase in diagnoses of autism in children in the county was noted, the comment was made that earlier diagnosis requires earlier support and that children often presented with a combination of issues in need of unpicking
- the good partnership between agencies was recognised in the recent inspection of children's services, however it was noted that there was always room for improvement
- the value of SALT advice clinics was noted, funding needed to be identified to expand capacity on an ongoing basis. The early years forum representatives indicated this was to be funded for the next 3 years via the 2-year old underspend.
- it was reported that speech and language issues were an increasing issue but that communication within the authority with specialist provision and early years provision was excellent. Good communication made sure that settings had the information and support needed to deliver the best outcomes for the child.

It was noted that the planned review of the SEN matrix had not progressed due to lack of capacity. The importance of this piece of work was acknowledged.



**Resolved that:**

- a) the schools forum's views on the individual proposals outlined in Table A of the report be noted;**
- b) the head of additional needs, in consultation with the high needs task and finish group, provide an update on progress to the schools forum in October 2017; and**
- c) the head of additional needs present a detailed business case for any additional funding sought, to be consulted on during the autumn term 2017 for implementation in the 2018/19 budget.**

**268. WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES FOR 2017/18**

The chairman briefed members of the forum on the forthcoming dates of meeting for 2017/18 and the intended work programme for the June 2017 meeting.

The chairman reported that the work of the outcomes task and finish group and the capital task and finish group had been overtaken by other developments, namely the planned changes to the school funding formula and the Herefordshire schools capital investment strategy. Consequently the chairman proposed that these groups were not expected to report further to the forum and should be removed from the work programme.

**Resolved that:**

- a) the dates for meetings of the schools forum during the 2017/18 municipal year be agreed; and**
- b) the work programme for the schools forum for 2017/18 be agreed, subject to the comments made in relation to the outcomes and capital task and finish groups**

The meeting ended at 11.32 am

**CHAIRMAN**

