

Minutes of the meeting of Herefordshire Schools Forum held on a virtual meeting platform on Friday 20 October 2023 at 9.30 am

Present:	Ms A Banner (LA maintained secondary schools) (Chairperson)
	Mr P Jennings (Academies) (Vice-chairperson)
	Ms B Blower PRU - Management Committee
	Ms C Bryan Academies
	Mr A Davies Academies (primary)
	Mr P Deneen Trade Unions
	Ms N Emmett Academies
	Mr R Foster Academies (primary)
	Ms N Gilbert LA Special Schools
	Mrs G Griffin Primary Governors
	Mrs S Jenkins Local Authority Maintained Primary School
	Mr P Jennings Academies
	Mr S Kendrick Local Authority Maintained Primary School (with Nursery)
	Mr C Lewandowski Trade Unions
	Mrs R Lloyd Early Years

In attendance:

Officers: **Service Director, Education, Skills and Learning and Strategic Finance Manager**

83. ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON

Alison Banner was proposed and unanimously supported by members of the forum.

Resolved: that Alison Banner be elected chairperson of the Forum for the ensuing year.

84. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRPERSON

Paul Jennings was proposed and unanimously supported by members of the forum.

Resolved: that Paul Jennings be elected vice-chairperson of the Forum for the ensuing year.

85. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were noted from the following forum members: Andy Gosling, Ed Gwillim, Sian Lines and Sheila Taylor.

86. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

The following substitutes were noted:

Andrew Teale for Sian Lines

87. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declaration of interests.

88. MINUTES

Resolved: the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2023 be approved as a correct record.

89. LOCAL AND NATIONAL SCHOOLS FUNDING UPDATE (Pages 5 - 12)

The Strategic Finance Manager explained since preparing the draft consultation paper the DfE had admitted to a national budget error in the planning of school budgets. The DfE have under-counted pupils nationally which without budget reductions would overspend by £370m. The DfE are seeking to recover costs by reducing the per pupil amounts, and hence the amounts passed through to schools.

The following points were highlighted:

- For Herefordshire the DfE had reduced the national funding formula values with a compensating reduction in dedicated schools grant (DSG) of £40 per primary pupil and £61 per secondary pupil.
- Resulting in an approximate reduction of £1m in the LA's DSG and a compensating reduction in funding passed through to schools.
- Fully funding NFF gives surplus of £230k and by capping the gains of schools provides a further £420k, to fund £650k to the SEN Protection scheme.
- The impact of the error could lead to unplanned remodeling of schools' funding formula, later than planned schools forums for sign off, delays in submitting disapplication requests and challenges in submitting Authority Proforma Tool (APTs) on time but there would be no changes to timescales.
- It was agreed at the BWG an assessment on the impact the SEN protection scheme makes to schools would be commissioned in order to support budget decisions in January 2024.
- It was highlighted the forecast spend on the SEN protection scheme for 2023/24 was £775k-£800k whilst the funding available from the schools block is £616k.
- The Council's preferred option for 2024/25 is for Schools Forum in January 2024 to agree the full transfer of 0.5% to high needs and for Schools Forum in March 2024 to agree contribution from high needs budget of at least £100k which would require the SEN protection scheme cap to be set at approximately 185 x NOR depending on the actual contribution agreed from the high needs budget.
- The SEN has been hugely supported by schools in previous years, it has been a fundamental part of the budget planning for the last six years although it is now proving increasingly expensive each year due to the annual growth in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

For 2023/ 24 The LA have 7 high schools and 42 primary schools receiving funding:

- max primary is £64,300 for 20.8 pupils (6%)
- max high is £74,000 for 27.7 pupils (5.3%)
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Without the scheme the financial impact on the most inclusive schools will be significant.

In light of the errors made by the DfE the SFM provided the forum with two options moving forward.

A: To re-write the schools consultation paper with all the revised data, budgets and costs with a real possibility of introducing further errors and delays; or

B: To provide a covering document explaining that the DfE had reduced the DSG income and the NFF values by £0.6m.

Individual school allocations at the new lower level would accompany the consultation and schools could ask for an amended allocation with revised NOR.

In any case all allocations may change when the final DSG is received in December.

The SFM explained that option B was his preference and this was supported by the group.

The chair of the BWG expressed his thanks to the SFM for his hard work and time he had put in to evaluating what the DfE errors meant for Herefordshire. The BWG has always been in support of the SEN protection scheme and the hopes that this could continue was highlighted.

Following a question from a forum member, the SFM explained with any reductions in school budgets means reductions in staff. It was highlighted that 90% of schools funding is spent on staff, so at some point in the future, depending on the extent of school balances, there will likely be staffing reductions in schools as a consequence of the DfE's budget error.

Forum members expressed their frustrations with the DfE and highlighted the impact of these changes are likely to be significant in the education of young people and particularly the most vulnerable across the authority as well as the impact it would have on staff and morale. It was requested and unanimously agreed by the forum that a letter be written to the DfE, and copied to local MP's, expressing the forums dissatisfaction and asking that the DfE adhere to what they had previously published. An invitation would also be sent to MP's inviting them to the next schools forum meeting in January.

Resolved that:

- a) **The initial budget proposals for 2023/24 for schools and high needs, as outlined in the draft consultation paper, be approved for consultation with schools during the autumn term 2023 and;**
- b) **a covering document explaining that the DfE had reduced the DSG income and the NFF values by £1m be included.**

Action: a letter to be sent to MP's with regards to the dissatisfaction with the DfE budget errors and the impact it will have on schools and to invite them to attend the Schools Forum meeting in January.

90. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

The work programme and dates of future meetings were noted. No additional items were proposed for the work programme.

In response to a question raised surrounding the potential rise on VAT to independent schools the SFM suggested that he would expect the DFE to fully fund the cost incurred in the transfer of pupils from independent schools to state schools.

It was noted that consideration for any proposed changes to funding for early year's settings and the longer term impacts should be kept in mind for the future with regards to sufficiency and supporting schools.

91. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Friday 19 January 2024, 9:30am

The meeting ended at 10.16 am

Chairperson