

MINUTES of the meeting of Herefordshire Schools Forum held at Hereford Education and Conference Centre, Blackfriars Street, Hereford on Thursday, 9th February, 2006 at 1.30 p.m.

Present:	Julie Powell (Chairman)
Church Members	Rev. I. Terry
Parent Governor Members	Mrs. C. Woolley
Teacher Representatives	C. Lewendowski
Primary School Representatives	Mrs. C. Garlick, Ms. T. Kneale, R. Thomas and G. Williams
PRU School Representaive	(none)
Secondary School Representatives	J. Docherty, A. Marson, D. Nicholas, Ms. D. Strutt and D. Williams
Special School Representative	Mrs. S. Bailey
Observers	Ms. R. Hatherill (Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership)

In attendance: Councillors B.F. Ashton and D.W. Rule (Cabinet Member – Children and Young People)

36. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from T. Edwards, Mrs. A. Mundy and Ms. J. Waring.

37. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

G. Williams substituted for Mrs. A. Mundy and D. Nicholas substituted for Ms. J. Waring.

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

39. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 9th December 2005 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

40. LATE ITEMS/ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Committee noted that it was permitted within its Constitution to take Late Items/Any Other Business immediately after the minutes of the last meeting had been approved.

A Member of the Forum inquired about dividend payments from West Mercia Supplies to Herefordshire Schools which in so far as they understood had not been paid to date.

The Manager of LMS and Planning informed the Forum that he would raise the issue with the Director of Resources and report back to a future meeting.

41. SCHOOLS BUDGET 2006/07**Item 5A – Review of Budget Presentation**

The Forum reviewed and noted the presentation made by the Manager of LMS and Planning during the Schools Budget Consultation in January 2006.

A copy of the presentation slides had been sent to Members of the Forum separately.

Item 5B – LMS Consultation 2006/07

The Forum considered the outcome of the consultation exercise and amended the budget proposals in line with responses and determined the pattern of budget consultation for 2007/08.

The Manager of LMS and Planning informed the Forum that since the publication of the agenda papers further responses to the consultation paper had been received. An additional appendix including details of the additional consultation responses was circulated at the meeting.

The Forum went through the consultation paper question by question and, with the exception of question 1 which was deferred to be considered under item 5D, resolved each issue in favour of the majority of responses.

RESOLVED:**That:**

- (a) the threshold for primary small school protection should be fixed at 200 and the savings distributed at a fixed rate of £10,973 per school;**
- (b) the threshold for secondary small school protection should be fixed at 655 pupils and the savings distributed on a fixed rate of £5,900 per school;**
- (c) savings made from the reallocation of the key stage 1 class size grant be reallocated to all primary schools based on a flat rate of £3,300 per school and £6 per pupil;**
- (d) an appropriate level of support from Herefordshire Learning Support Service(HLSS) be offered to schools on a needs basis obtainable in a simplistic and timely manner in order to support the delivery in English**

as an additional language to foreign pupils;

- (e) a sum of £30,000 be put aside and used to provide an initial £500 grant to schools to help meet the costs of a foreign pupil in their first term in school;
 - (f) funding for Special Educational Needs Bands be increased in line with inflation;
 - (g) a 'September pupils' factor be introduced in the special schools formula from April 2006 to ensure that funding is provided for all new pupils at the start of the academic year;
 - (h) an 'eligible teacher' factor be introduced into the teachers pay and threshold payment formula from April 2006 to ensure that funding is provided to schools to meet their teacher performance and threshold costs;
 - (i) the Newly Qualified Teacher Grant not be reinstated;
 - (j) Excessive school balances should be clawed-back with effect from financial year 2006/07 and the first claw-back being applied to the balances as at 31st March 2007;
 - (k) Subject to the approval of the DfES the proposed new paragraph relating to the claw-back of excessive school balances, as contained within LMS Consultation paper contained in the agenda papers, be included within the LMS Scheme from April 2006;
- and;
- (l) subject to DfES approval the proposed revised paragraph relating to extended schools activities, as contained within the LMS Consultation paper contained in the agenda papers, be included within the LMS scheme from April 2006.

Item 5C – Extended Services – Budget Consultation

The Forum considered the outcome of the consultation exercise with schools regarding extended services and to determine the use of £150,000 provisionally allocated for extended services.

An updated summary of the consultation responses was circulated at the meeting.

The Head of School Effectiveness informed the Forum that all schools would be required to make a full extended services offer by 2011.

In all there were fourteen partnership areas in the County who would be allocated £25,000 each as the current proposal stood. The Head of School Effectiveness stated that he would prefer partnership areas to join together and combine their financial allocations in order to deliver services.

He explained that the consultation had revealed that 77% of respondents were in favour of the funding being delegated to each partnership area with services being delivered in consultation with an Early Years Development Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) development worker.

The Director of Children's Services informed the Forum that the potential link between Children's Centres and the extended services scheme had not come through in the consultation responses. However, she stated that it was important not to miss this opportunity to use Children's Centres to deliver extended services.

In response to a question the Head of School Effectiveness informed the Forum that the onus was on the Council to ensure that schools and their partners were delivering the extended services for which money had been provided. The Council would provide help and support to ensure that the money was spent on extended school development.

A Member of the Forum agreed that the money should be distributed between the partnerships, with the local authority retaining the power to call in the funding, who could decide the local priorities and then commission local schools to deliver the identified priorities.

Money for special schools was to be provided to the 15th sleeping partnership and allocated to special schools within the County. The Special Schools Representative stated that the best way to meet the needs of the families whose children attended special schools would be to provide additional provision within school holiday periods.

The Forum was informed that funding for extended services was expected to continue beyond the current two year time period which notice had already been received.

The Manager of LMS and Planning confirmed that funding provided through the Excellence Cluster was separate to the extended services budget and that "double funding" would need to be considered.

The Early Years and Childcare Manager informed the Forum that the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership would work with the local partnerships to ensure that the services being delivered met the needs of the local community.

The Head of School Effectiveness informed the Forum that the detail of the project was still to be worked out and suggested that a small group be established to discuss in detail how the project would be delivered. After discussion it was agreed that the Manager of LMS and Planning, the Early Years and Childcare Manager, the Extended Schools Officer and a nominee from each partnership area would form the group to discuss the delivery of extended services within the County.

RESOLVED: That in principle, the funding be delegated to each partnership, and the views expressed by Herefordshire Schools Forum and those in the consultation process be taken into account when determining the precise method of delegation for extended services budgets.

Item 5D – Budget Proposals 2006/07

The Forum considered the budget proposals for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2006/07. Full details of the budget proposals were included in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Manager of LMS and Planning summarised the proposals which had been approved at the last meeting of the Forum as detailed in the report. However, with regard to the increase in Central Expenditure he informed the Forum that the agreed percentage increase of 8.1% needed to rise to 9.1%. This was because it was now

necessary to fund the English as an Additional Language scheme centrally which had increased the rise up by 1%. Schools had endorsed this central provision as part of the LMS consultation.

Additional issues which had arose since the last meeting included the delegation to high schools of £130,000 in the DSG of money intended for Practical Learning Options to fund the introduction of advance diplomas and vocational courses for 14-16 year olds. The Forum was informed that this approach had been agreed by Herefordshire Association of Secondary Heads (HASH) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

With regard to Standards Fund for Schools ICT it was clarified that grant 31a had been changed so that the DfES contribution was included as capital in schools' devolved formula capital and the Council's share was now included in the general school development grant. The Forum was informed that any school funded through a PFI agreement would not be in receipt of grant 31a.

Grant 31b had been reduced from £1m in 2005/06 to £833,000 in 2006/07. The Manager of LMS and Planning reported that £500,000 was required to pay for the ongoing costs of the broadband network and that it was proposed that the remaining £333,000 could be delegated to schools.

Members of the Forum voiced concerns about the quality of the schools broadband network. It was considered that the system was inadequate and it was believed that the problems were stemming from the provider rather than the local network.

The Head of School Effectiveness informed the Forum that he was aware that there was a problem with remote access for pupils due to the Council's approach to network security.

A Member of the Forum stated that work commissioned with the Council's ICT Directorate had not been completed
The Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) stated that he had a meeting scheduled with the Head of ICT next week and that he would raise the issues which the Forum was reporting.

The Forum discussed the possibility of using the Grant 31b money to seek an alternative broadband provider.

The Head of School Effectiveness stated that a considerable amount of money had been invested into broadband networks for schools and that if schools decided to leave the system there would be complications in relation to ownership. He added that the Council's ICT Directorate should provide schools with the service that they had paid for.

The Forum discussed the prospect of using the remaining £333,000 to fund improvements in the broadband network to solve the problems currently being experienced. However, it was felt that if the additional money was simply given to the Council's ICT Directorate then the Forum feared that the required improvements in service would not materialise. Therefore the Forum felt that it would be better if the remaining £333,000 be retained by the Forum pending discussions with the Head of Information, Technology and Customer Services on what could be done to resolve the reported problems with the broadband network. Pending the outcome of discussions with the Head of Information, Technology and Customer Services, the Forum would then resolve how the remaining portion of Grant 31b should be spent.

The Manager of LMS and Planning informed the Forum that greater powers for

Schools Forum's had come into force on 30th December 2005. The Forum was now able to agree proposals for exceptions to the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) which had previously been the responsibility of the Secretary of State. Therefore the Forum was asked to approve that Trinity Primary School be treated as an exception to the MFG. This change had been previously agreed by the Secretary of State and was necessary due to the phased closure of its special unit, as the MFG unfairly extrapolates the high unit cost of the special unit to all pupils at the school providing an unfair budget windfall that can only be met by reducing the budgets of all schools. The school had been consulted on the proposed change and as in previous years had raised no objections.

The Manager of LMS and Planning reported to the Forum that following on from a deferred decision from their October meeting that no changes, other than the statutory increase to 38 weeks provision for private and independent nursery schools, were proposed for the arrangements of the education of children with special needs, at pupil referral units, for children educated outside of school or for early years education.

RESOLVED:

That: (a) the 9.1% increase in central expenditure be approved;

(b) the exception to the Minimum Funding Guarantee for Trinity Primary School be approved;

(c) that no changes in the arrangements for the education of pupils with special needs, the pupil referral units, education of children otherwise than at school and the arrangements for early years education be noted;

and;

(d) that £333,000 from Standards Fund Grant 31b be retained by the Forum pending discussions with the Head of Information, Technology and Customer Service and that the £500,000 for the ongoing running costs of the network be delegated to schools through a Service Level Agreement.

42. REVIEW OF CHARGES

The Forum considered the charges to be made to students in the 2006/07 academic year for transport, music tuition and swimming lessons.

The Manager of LMS and Planning reported to the Forum that the Council provided free transport to those children who met the necessary criteria. In addition to this the transport is also provided at a cost to pupils using vacant seats, post-16 students and from September 2006 pupils who have a denominational place at a school more than either 2 miles for primary school pupils or 3 miles for secondary school pupils from their home. He informed the Forum that inflation in the transport industry had been at approximately 5% for the last 12 months therefore it was proposed that vacant seats and denominational transport cost rise from £100 to £105 and that the cost of post-16 transport rise from £85 to £89. The cost of seats for families in receipt of free school meals was not proposed to rise and would therefore remain at

£35.

The Manager of LMS and Planning informed the Forum that it was proposed to increase the charges levied for music tuition and instrument hire. It was proposed that the hourly rate for music tuition would rise from £24 to £25 per hour and that instrument hire per term would rise from £32 to £34 for wind and brass instruments and from £20 to £21 per term for string instruments.

The Forum noted that the previous increase in the cost of music tuition in February 2005 had not seen a decline in the number of pupils learning a musical instrument as had been feared at the time.

The Manager of LMS and Planning informed the Forum that from April 2006 it was proposed that HALO manage St. Martins Pool, Hereford on behalf of the Council. In negotiations with HALO it has been suggested that a common charging policy should apply for all school use at HALO pools across the County. Herefordshire Schools also use HALO managed pools in Ledbury, Hereford, Leominster and Ross On Wye. Therefore with regard to St. Martins Pool it is anticipated that charges will rise from £32 per half hour session to £65 per one hour session.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the increases in home to school transport be approved;

(b) the increases in the cost of music tuition and instrument hire be approved;

and;

(c) the increase in the hire and instructor charges for swimming lessons be approved.

43. EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

The Forum considered approving a three-year contract with 'Worklife Support' for an employee assistance programme for teachers, support staff and centrally employed Children's Services staff.

The Workforce Remodelling Advisor informed the Forum that the employee assistance programme offered by 'Workforce Support' was a comprehensive programme of support covering a wide range of work related and personal issues, including, dealing with stress, relationships, financial counselling, legal advice and other similar issues. Support is accessible via a telephone service operated by trained specialists with an educational background. She added that 'Worklife Support' would not provide face-to-face counselling as this was already provided through the Council's own service.

A revised quote was circulated at the meeting.

The Forum was informed that the matter had been raised at a meeting of primary headteachers and at HASH. HASH had agreed that 'Worklife Support' was a worthwhile scheme which would be available to support employees at times of need.

The Manager of LMS and Planning reported that the majority of the funding for the scheme would be met centrally through the Standards Grant with the remaining amount made up for by schools, which in the context of school budgets did not require a large contribution from each school.

The Workforce Remodelling Advisor informed the Forum that quotes had not been sought from any other providers due to the charitable nature of the supplier.

The Forum discussed agreeing the 'Worklife Support' scheme in principal but leaving individual schools the final decision on whether or not they would sign up for the scheme as the money would be coming from the budgets of individual schools. However, after considering the low number of responses with regard to the LMS Consultation the Forum agreed to approve the scheme for all schools on the proviso that a letter be sent to all schools giving them the opportunity to opt out of the scheme if they wished to do so.

RESOLVED: That a three year contract with Worklife Support for an Employee Assistance Programme be approved subject to all schools being given the opportunity to opt out of the scheme.

The meeting ended at 3.24 p.m.

CHAIRMAN