

MINUTES of the meeting of Herefordshire Schools Forum held at Hereford Education and Conference Centre, Blackfriars Street, Hereford on Thursday, 9th June, 2005 at 1.30 p.m.

Present:	Mrs. Julia Powell (Chairman)
Church Members	(none)
Parent Governor Members	(none)
Teacher Representatives	C. Lewandowski
Headteacher Representatives	Mrs. P. Jewkes, A Marson (Secondary Headteachers) and R. Thomas

In attendance: Councillors J.D. Pritchard

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor D. W. Rule M.B.E, Mr. R. Aird, Mr. I. Foster and Rev. I. Terry.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

Mr. T. Bailey substituted for Rev. I. Terry.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES

It was noted that Mrs M. Haywood not Mrs C. Potts had resigned from the Forum.

RESOLVED: THAT the minutes, as amended, for the meeting held on 9th February 2005 and continued on 7th March 2005, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. MATTERS ARISING

In relation to minute number 7, the Manager of LMS and Planning reported that it had been difficult to establish the Working Party to consider the issue of reduction in small school protection however proposals would be brought to the Forum in October 2005.

In relation to minute item 11, the Forum was informed that Herefordshire Jarvis Services had put in notice to withdraw from its contract to supply school meals to the majority of schools in Herefordshire. The Manager of LMS and Planning informed the Forum that the LEA was currently working with other contractors in order to

provide meals to schools from September although this was proving difficult and he anticipated that there could be some schools in September unable to provide hot meals.

6. LATE ITEM / ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no late items.

7. REVIEW OF HEREFORDSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM - MEMBERSHIP AND CONSTITUTION

The Forum reviewed its constitution. The following were the principle points raised in the ensuing discussion:

- It was proposed that the membership of the Forum be increased to 20 members within the statutory proportions for each representative group.
- It was suggested that due to the proposed increase in the Forums membership that a school member be amended to read 'Headteachers or their representatives'.
- It was proposed that the election of a Chairman for the Forum should take place at the first meeting after Annual Council to bring the Forum into line with other Council bodies.
- Forum members requested that the vacancy concerning school governor representation on the Forum be addressed by the time of the next meeting.
- The Forum discussed raising the quorum of the meeting, handing the Chairman a casting vote and requesting that the agenda for meetings be sent out seven school days in advance of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

THAT (a) subject to the approval of the LEA and Cabinet Member (Children's Services) the membership of Herefordshire Schools Forum be increased to twenty members;

(b) subject to the approval of the LEA and Cabinet Member (Children's Services) the Constitution of Herefordshire Schools Forum be amended to read 'Headteacher or their representative' in the section on Schools Membership;

and

(c) subject to the approval of the LEA and Cabinet Member (Children's Services) the Constitution of Herefordshire Schools Forum be amended so that the Chairman is elected at the Forums first meeting after Annual Council.

8. CONSULTATION ON NEW SCHOOL FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

Forum members were informed of the Council's submission in response to the DfES consultation paper on new school funding arrangements.

A copy of the submission provided by Herefordshire Council to the DfES was attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

The Manager of LMS and Planning highlighted to the forum that the most difficult aspect was the proposal from the DfES to base school budgets on forecasted pupil numbers which could lead to schools refunding excess budgets based on overestimated pupil numbers at the year end and in the worst case scenario – after the money had been spent.

RESOLVED: THAT the report be noted.

9. THE EFFECTIVE PROVISION OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION PROJECT

The Forum was informed on the conclusions of the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project.

The General Inspector for the Foundation Stage explained the findings of the EPPE Project and its implications for Herefordshire. A summary of which was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The key findings of the EPPE project highlighted by the General Inspector were:

- Pre-school attendance improved all children's cognitive and social development above the levels of children with no or limited pre-school experience.
- An early start to pre-school between two and three years old was linked with better intellectual attainment and better peer relationships that continued into primary school.
- Pre-school attendance can be effective in reducing the need for special educational needs teaching for vulnerable children.
- A high quality pre-school can reduce anti-social/worried behaviour in children.
- The early cognitive boost provided by a pre-school education provides children with an advantage over non pre-school children in Key Stage 1 attainment.

The implications for Herefordshire which the General Inspector highlighted to the Forum were:

- That the importance of Area SENCOs should be recognised and that Herefordshire should increase the number of its pre-school Area SENCOs from 3 to 5.
- That work was needed to ensure that all private and voluntary pre-school centres in Herefordshire worked to the same curriculum.
- That all pre-schools should be encouraged to conduct self-assessments.
- It should be encouraged that at all the County's Children Centres there should be an appointment of a full time qualified teacher.

Members of the Forum expressed the desire to see the best possible pre-school provision provided in Herefordshire and pointed out the importance of the relationship between pre-school and school.

Members of the Forum also recognised the importance of the work carried out by Area SENCOs and commented that the early intervention mechanisms they provided proved cost effective in the long term.

RESOLVED: THAT the report be noted.

10. CHILDREN'S SERVICES FINANCIAL PLANNING

(a) SECTION 52 BUDGET

The Forum reviewed the 2005/06 Section 52 budget for schools.

A full break down of the Section 52 budget for 2005/06 was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Manager of LMS and Planning highlighted the following key issues from the Section 52 budget:

- The Individual Schools Budget had increased by 7.5% for 2005/06.
- The standards fund delegated to schools had increased by 51%.
- A banding budget of £520,000 had been established.
- The budget for fees for pupils at independent schools had increased to £1.3m. However, early indications were that this element of the budget could overspend.
- £65,000 had been set aside for the repair and maintenance of school kitchens.
- The Strategic Management budget had been reduced by 28%.
- The transportation budget had remained static, successfully absorbing the cost of inflation and additional school days.
- The grant received from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) had increased by 19%.

RESOLVED: THAT the report be noted.

(b) MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Forum reviewed the 2005/06 budget process and considered the priorities for the 2006/07 schools budget.

The Manager of LMS and Planning highlighted the identified pressures on the schools budget for 2006/07 to the Forum. Pressures included:

- Implementation of Workforce Reform.
- Costs of Job Evaluation process.
- Revenue costs of PFI scheme.
- Falling rolls.
- Out of County special schools.
- SEN spending.
- Information Communication Technology in schools.
- Expansion of nursery education provision.
- Increased fuel costs for school transport.
- Gershon efficiency targets.
- Cost pressures arising from the creation of the new Children's Services Directorate.

The Manager of LMS and Planning also highlighted the eight targets that are used to identify capital priorities in schools and a list of 93 capital schemes that had taken place since the creation of Herefordshire Council in 1998 which included the PFI project to replace Whitecross High School, which was set to be the first newly built secondary school in Herefordshire since 1962.

It was noted that the reason many science laboratories had been refurbished was

due to a specific Government initiative.

RESOLVED: THAT the Medium Term Financial Plan and likely cost pressures for the 2006/07 schools budget be noted.

(c) GREATER DELEGATION TO SCHOOLS

The Manager of LMS and Planning invited the views of the Forum on the level of delegation between the LEA and schools.

No views were expressed by any Forum Members.

11. MANAGING SCHOOL BALANCES

The Forum reviewed the Audit Commission data on school balances and in light of the high balances for schools in Herefordshire at March 2005 considered the options available as part of the introduction of three-year budgets for schools.

The Manager of LMS and Planning reported that Herefordshire's schools held revenue balances of approximately 11.8% (£7.2m). This figure is much higher than the national average and needed to be addressed. He informed the Forum that the balances were mostly held in primary schools and that unlike most authorities in the Country, Herefordshire had only one schools with a budget deficit.

He believed that the large balances had built up over time after schools had received payments mid-year which had not been used. Therefore the 2005/06 financial year school budgets had been fully delegated at the start of the year and schools needed to understand that additional funds will no longer be received mid-year. He thought that greater delegation at the start of the year should go some way towards avoiding the build up of large unplanned balances.

Additionally, from April 2006 three year budgeting for schools is set to be introduced nationally. These new funding arrangements also provide the LEA with the power to clawback any excessive revenue balances. It was intended that any money recovered from schools would be reinvested within the overall schools budget on capital improvements in schools.

The Manager of LMS and Planning advised the Forum that he would be whether any money would actually be returned to the LEA under the new funding arrangements. He thought that it would be more likely that schools would simply invest in items such as ICT or transfer revenue funding to capital, which was not covered by the balance clawback proposals.

Forum Members agreed that the issue of excessive revenue balances needed to be addressed. It was believed that as so much money was held across Herefordshire schools it gave out the wrong message to Government and the public that schools were over funded when, in fact, in the context of Herefordshire having many small primary schools the excessive balances held by schools was a consequence of many small schools being financially prudent.

The Forum requested that a list be circulated to all members with the details of balances for all schools in Herefordshire. The Manager of LMS and Planning stated that this was public information and will be available on the Herefordshire schools

website under Section 52 for interested parties to access in the Autumn term.

RESOLVED:

THAT (a) the LMS consultation with schools for 2006/07 budget includes the changes to the scheme for financing schools as set out in Appendix 2 to the report be approved;

and

(b) a letter be sent to all headteachers before the end of term advising them the LEA is minded to implement a scheme for the recovery of excessively large balances from April 2007.

12. GERSHON EFFICIENCIES IN SCHOOLS

The Forum was informed about the efficiency savings that the DfES is intending for schools to deliver as part of the wider implementation of the national Gershon efficiency savings.

The Manager of LMS and Planning reported that the DfES was expected to make £4.3bn in annual efficiency savings by 2007/08. Full details regarding the ways in which the DfES sought to make the necessary efficiency savings were outlined in the report included in the agenda.

In terms of schools contributing towards these savings the Head of Policy and Resources indicated that efficiency savings were not necessarily recorded monetarily.

RESOLVED: THAT the list of expected efficiency saving initiatives from the DfES be noted.

13. NEWSLETTER - CHANGE FOR CHILDREN IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Head of Policy and Resources informed the Forum that the newsletter had been attached to the agenda as an information item regarding the imminent Joint Area Review (JAR) of Children's Services in Herefordshire and the linked Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of the whole of Herefordshire Council.

He reported that a meeting with all Headteachers had been set up where they would be informed of the implications of the JAR and CPA. The Forum was told that the inspection style was still to be clarified but it was anticipated that children would be required to fill in questionnaires as part of the assessments.

RESOLVED: THAT the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 3.50 p.m.

CHAIRMAN