

MINUTES of the meeting of Herefordshire Schools Forum held at Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford HR1 1SH on Friday 23 September 2011 at 9.30 am

Present: Ms T Kneale (Chairman)
Mr NPJ Griffiths (Vice Chairman)

Mrs K. Rooke, Mr JA Chapman, Mr S Woodrow, Mr P Box, Mr TE Edwards,
Mrs S Bailey, Mr J Docherty, Ms A Pritchard, Mr A Shaw, Mrs A Jackson,
Mrs R Lloyd, Mr P Barns and Dr M Goodman and Mr J Sheppard.

In attendance: Councillor PD Price – Cabinet Member Corporate Services and Education

22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mrs J Baker, Mrs Catlow-Hawkins, Mrs J Cecil, Mr J Godfrey, Mr S Matthews, Mrs J Powell and Mr S Pugh.

23. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were none.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mrs S Woodrow declared a personal interest in agenda item 6: Proposals for a Financial Difficulty Reserve as the proposal potentially affected a school of which she was an employee.

Mr P Box declared a personal interest in agenda item 8: Dedicated Schools Grant 2012/13 – Budget Consultation as the proposal relating to Advanced Skills Teachers potentially affected a school of which he was an employee.

25. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were none.

26. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

27. PROPOSALS FOR A FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY RESERVE

(Mrs S Woodrow declared a personal interest.)

The Forum was invited to consider the provision of a financial difficulty reserve for schools.

The Chairman proposed that this item be referred to the Budget Working Group for comment prior to the Forum considering the matter.

RESOLVED: That the report be referred to the Budget Working Party for comment and the matter reported back to the Forum in December for consideration.

28. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT

The Forum was informed of the final Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2011/12, and invited to consider an outstanding issue regarding mainstreamed grants in the 2011/12 schools budget, and the outturn for 2010/11 including proposals for the use of the underspend.

The Chairman proposed that recommendation c, the use of the 2010/11 underspend should be referred to the Budget Working Group for comment prior to the Forum considering the matter. This was accepted

The Schools Finance Manager presented the report.

He reported that the Headteacher of John Masefield High School had withdrawn a request to the Forum to consider amendments to the mainstreamed grants in 2011/12.

He noted that the new section 251 benchmarking information for 2011/12 had been produced by the Department for Education showing expenditure per pupil for all retained services. This showed that expenditure per pupil in Herefordshire is generally amongst the lowest nationally with the exception of funding for special educational needs support services. It was agreed that a briefing note would be circulated to all schools.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- It was requested that a briefing note be circulated to schools on any special grant funding available to schools.
- It was proposed that the Headteacher of John Masefield High School should be formally thanked for withdrawing the request that the Forum consider amendments to the mainstreamed grants.
- The Surestart grant was underspent. A concern was expressed that funding for some projects had been withdrawn even though grant funding was apparently available. The Head of Improvement said he thought it unlikely that had been the case but undertook to seek clarification.

RESOLVED:

- (a) the final DSG settlement and the average decreases in per pupil funding in schools for 2011/12 be noted;**
- (b) the Section 251 Budget Statement be noted;**
- (c) the use of the 2010/11 DSG underspend of £421k be referred to the Budget Working Group for comment and the matter reported back to the Forum in December for consideration;**
- (d) it be noted that no further action was required in respect the allocation of mainstreamed grants in 2011/12 and John Masefield High School be**

thanked for withdrawing its request; and

- (e) a briefing note be circulated on new Department for Education benchmarking analysis and any special grant funding available to schools.**

29. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT 2012/13 - BUDGET CONSULTATION

(Mr P Box declared a personal interest)

The Forum considered a budget consultation paper explaining the budget options for the 2012/13 Dedicated Schools Grant and designed to seek the views of schools prior to developing initial budget proposals for the Forum's consideration in December 2011.

The Schools Finance Manager presented the report. He highlighted that the budget proposals provided for an overall cost increase of £900k in 2012/13. It was proposed that this be funded by a package of reductions, similar to those for 2011/12, but largely through reductions in social deprivation funding which would be offset by increases in the pupil premium for 2012/13. He commented on the timetable for the production of the budget including the proposal that if the grant settlement were significantly different from what was expected the Budget Working Group be authorised to commission a further consultation exercise.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- It was important that all schools responded to the consultation and members of the Forum were encouraged to advise colleagues accordingly.
- The Budget Working Group had sought to put forward proposals that were fair to all schools.
- Some concerns were expressed about the proposal that there should be no change to excellence cluster funding in the current year; the proposals for the delegated funding of band 3 and band 4 special educational needs funding; and the proposal relating to funding of Advanced Skills Teachers. It was agreed that the consultation document afforded schools the opportunity to raise these concerns and the Forum would consider responses to the consultation exercise as a whole.
- The Schools Finance Manager circulated a paper which benchmarked funding allocated to Private and Voluntary and Independent (PVI) settings compared with Gloucestershire and Worcestershire. The benchmarking indicated that funding in Herefordshire was now on a par with that in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. Further information was being sought from Shropshire to finalise the comparison. He reported that it was proposed there should be no budget reduction to PVI nursery funding, to amend the consultation document accordingly, and to report back to the Forum on Early Years Funding. A concern was expressed that different settings calculated their costs in different ways and it was requested that the possibility of an independent cost analysis of settings should be explored.
- That whilst principally a cost saving exercise it was essential that all budget increases were robustly challenged by the Schools Forum in accordance with principle set out in section 2.3 of the consultation document. It was requested that if any unexpected budget pressures emerged these were brought to the attention of Members of the Forum at the earliest opportunity.

RESOLVED:

- That (a) it be agreed that no budget reduction in PVI nursery funding should be required in 2012/13, that the consultation paper should be amended accordingly and a report on PVI nursery funding should be made to the Forum in January 2012; with the possibility of an independent cost analysis of settings being explored;
- (b) the consultation paper as amended be approved for distribution to schools and PVI nurseries; and
- (c) the budget process and timeline as set out in the consultation paper be approved, i.e.
- i briefings for all schools, governors and PVIs in October – dates to be confirmed;
 - ii individual response form to be returned by 11th November
 - iii Budget Working Group to meet on 25th November prior to Schools Forum to consider responses and prepare initial budget proposals
 - iv Schools Forum to consider the response to the consultation;
 - v Budget Working Group to meet on 14th December to consider whether any changes are required to the budget strategy following the DfE announcement of the school budget settlement in early/mid December and to determine whether a further short consultation with schools and PVIs is necessary; and
 - vi Schools Forum to consider the final budget proposals on 24th February 2012 and recommend final budget proposals to the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Education.

30. SCHOOL FUNDING REFORM

The Forum was informed of the consultation on the national school funding reform and invited to comment on the proposed consultation response prior to submission.

The Schools Finance Manager presented the report. The proposed response to the consultation document was appended.

It was proposed that the responses to questions 34 and 39 should be strengthened.

RESOLVED: That the draft response to the consultation paper be approved for submission to the Department for Education, noting the additional comment that would be added in the responses to questions 34 and 39 in the consultation document.

31. DRAFT GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE HEREFORDSHIRE LEARNING COMMUNITY

The Cabinet Member – Corporate Services and Education, introduced the report emphasising the current plans to encourage businesses to establish themselves in the County and the importance of equipping children with the skills to take advantage of the opportunities that would be created, allowing them to remain in the County if they wished. The guiding principles set out in the report were intended to support that aim.

The Assistant Director - Peoples Services Commissioning commented on the changing educational landscape and the opportunities and challenges this presented. He emphasised the importance of all those involved in the learning community working together as their respective roles continued to change.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- The Forum broadly welcomed the guiding principles and noted the proposals to discuss them with the Schools Strategic Planning Group, Headteacher forums and the Herefordshire Association of Governors before reporting them to Cabinet in the Spring for formal adoption.
- It was requested that the term “applied learning” should be used in documentation in preference to the word “vocational”.
- It was noted that, as reported at paragraph 21 of the report, as part of the development of the guiding principles the local authority would set out what it means to be a local authority school, as opposed to an academy or free school, so that schools and the learning community were clear about the differences.
- That whilst it was not feasible to establish a University within the County as an institution in its own right there were a number of ways in which higher learning opportunities in the County could be developed.
- The Assistant Director drew attention to the role the local authority was obliged to play in addressing long term issues of surplus places and falling rolls and how this would be exercised where the principles of Herefordshire’s learning community were not going to be achieved.

RESOLVED: That the draft guiding principles for the Herefordshire Learning Community be welcomed as a basis for further discussion and development and Members of the Forum encouraged to take the draft guiding principles forward for discussion in their own settings, as well as within their peer groups, providing feedback to the Council.

32. WORK PROGRAMME

The Forum considered its work programme.

It was agreed that the work programme would be updated to include the following:

- Proposals for a Financial Difficulty Reserve
- Use of the 2010/11 Dedicated Schools Grant Underspend
- PVI Nursery Funding

33. LATE ITEMS/ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were none.

34. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Forum noted that the next meeting was scheduled to be held at 9.30 am on Thursday 8 December.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am

CHAIRMAN