

**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 13 March 2020 at 9.30 am**

**Present:** Mrs K Weston (Local Authority Maintained Primary School)  
(Vice-chairperson in the chair)

Ms C Bryan	Academies
Mr P Burbidge	Archdiocese of Cardiff
Mr A Davies	Academies
Mr S Fisher	Academies
Mr C Lewandowski	Trade Unions
Mr P Deneen	Trade Unions

**In attendance:** Councillors Carole Gandy and Diana Toynbee

**Officers:** Strategic Finance Manager and Head of Additional Needs, Childrens Wellbeing

**55. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from the following forum members: Julie Cohn, Nicki Gilbert, Ed Gwillim, Joe Hedges, Martin Henton, Sue Jenkins, Paul Jennings, Steve Kendrick, Tracey Kneale, Sian Lines, Rose Lloyd and Rachel Rice.

Apologies were also received from the director of children and families and the assistant director education development and skills.

*Noting that a quorum of members were not present the clerk advised that under the constitution of Herefordshire Schools Forum the meeting could still proceed but could not take decisions. The members present could respond to the local authority consultation and give their views on it. The local authority could then take account of these views but was not legally obliged to do so.*

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

No named substitutes were present.

**57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**58. MINUTES**

The members present confirmed that there were no matters arising or points of accuracy relating to the minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2020. As a quorum of members were not present the minutes will be carried forward to the next meeting for formal approval.

## 59. HIGH NEEDS BUDGET 2020/21

The schools finance manager introduced the report and reviewed the slides that had been presented to the budget working group. The proposed high needs budget was set out line by line in both the presentation and the recommendations in the cover report.

Key points highlighted included:

- An increase of 13.1% in the high needs grant which resulted in a most welcome increase of £2.2m for 2020/21;
- A forecast overspend of £1.2m on the high needs budget for 2019/20, predominantly driven by overspends in funding for complex needs cases and out of county places;
- The overspend would reduce available dedicated schools grant balances to £0.5m;
- The proposed budget was largely as set out in the autumn budget consultation and was balanced to the funding available, changes from 2019/20 included the extension of the SEN protection scheme to secondary schools and the phased introduction of medical points in tariffs;
- Given the overspend in 2019/20 and continued pressures the schools finance manager could not be confident that there was sufficient reserve to avoid slipping into a deficit within the next two years;
- The government had recently changed the rules on deficit recovery so that the council could only contribute with the permission of the Secretary of State, if in deficit the local authority and schools forum would need to come up with a recovery plan;
- The government review of special educational needs had been expected to report at Christmas but had been delayed, publication was now expected at Easter 2020.

The chair shared a written comment from Nicki Gilbert who was unable to attend the meeting. In her comment she noted that the place funding for special schools of £10k had not increased since its introduction. She welcomed the proposed increase in tariffs but stated that this was a sticking plaster. Finally she recognised that nothing more could be done locally and that changes at a national level were needed to increase funding to special schools.

The head of additional needs confirmed that the £10k per place rate was set nationally and not something that could be changed locally. However the tariffs were being increased and would take account of not being able to increase the £10k.

In response to a query the schools finance manager explained that a number of other councils were in fairly serious difficulties with high needs deficits in some cases over £20m. Herefordshire had so far avoided this by taking action to balance the budgets such as revising how the PRU operated, adding additional special school places and changing SEN tariffs. There was little more that could be done whilst continuing to meet the council's statutory obligations. With the changes in regulations to prevent councils from contributing to recovery of overspends it was unclear how councils with significant deficits would ever be able to recover those funds. The budget working group had noted that it would be ironic if the government did not push for the recovery of deficits given the efforts Herefordshire had made to manage its budgets.

Members noted the views of the budget working group and expressed support for the proposed budget. It was recognised that further conversations about the longer term would be required when more detail was available.

The head of additional needs reflected that the needs in the population of children was broadly the same as before the date of the SEN reforms. It was acknowledged that children surviving complex conditions for longer and some evidence of increases in

particular needs (SEMH and ASD) resulted in some population-based increase in demand. However it was difficult to explain the growth in demand purely as being the result of the needs of the population. It was not clear exactly what was driving the additional demand for specialist places within the education system, although there were various theories being put forward.

The chair expressed thanks to the schools finance manager and the head of additional needs for their advice and guidance.

**As the meeting was inquorate the forum could not make a formal decision but those members present expressed their support for the recommendations as set out in the report and asked that these be put to the cabinet member for children and families for approval.**

The meeting ended at 9.52 am

**Chairperson**