

Minutes of the meeting of Herefordshire schools forum held at online meeting on Friday 15 July 2022 at 9.30 am

Present: Mrs K Weston (Local Authority Maintained Primary School) (Chairperson)

Mr D Bennett	Academies
Ms C Bryan	Academies
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
Ms T Kneale	Local Authority Maintained Primary School
Mr C Lewandowski	Trade Unions
Mrs R Lloyd	Early Years

In attendance: Mr P Grant, DfE

Officers: Strategic Finance Manager, Head of Additional Needs, Childrens Wellbeing and Service Director - Education, Skills and Learning

46. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following members of the forum: Alison Banner, Alex Davies, Andy Gosling, Ed Gwillm, Tim Knapp and Steve Kendrick.

Apologies were also noted from the cabinet member, children and families.

47. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

There were no named substitutes.

48. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

49. MINUTES

Resolved: It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2022 be approved as an accurate record.

50. UPDATE ON NATIONAL SCHOOLS FUNDING ISSUES

The Strategic Finance Manager (SFM) gave a presentation on national funding issues and proposals for the direct national funding formula.

Forum members discussed the proposals and put questions to the SFM, Service Director, Education Skills and Learning and the Head of Additional Needs (HAN). It was noted that:

- The local authority would continue to have a role, particularly in relation to local authority maintained schools, but it was too early to judge the impact of the shift to a direct funding formula on services provided and therefore on service level agreements;
- Rising energy costs for schools were a concern and the SFM would liaise with the f40 group to see if the results of the recent survey by the DfE could be obtained and shared; (**Action: MG**)
- The local authority would continue to monitor school budgets for local authority maintained schools and give early warning of the need to revise spending but this would be more difficult with schools using the DfE calculator tool rather than having the Herefordshire Council 5 year budget planner;
- The stated intention from the DfE was for all schools to become academies by 2030;
- Forum members valued and appreciated the work of the SFM and others in keeping budgets under control and stretching scarce resources as far as possible, it was important that the DfE took account of the rurality of Herefordshire in its approach to school funding and that the national system was fair and equitable;
- Clear and early information on teachers and support staff pay was needed, in the past announcements had been too late to allow schools to plan properly.

The service director updated the forum on plans for a local authority brokered Multi Academy Trust (MAT). This was at a very early stage but the expression of interest submitted to the DfE had been positively received. Further discussions would take place in the autumn.

The service director notified the forum that the DfE had launched a proposal for a new free special school and that the local authority had expressed an interest. A second opportunity, for a free alternative provision school, was expected to launch in the autumn and the local authority was likely to express an interest for this too. It was stressed that no commitments had been entered into at this point and that full consultation would take place. The timescales for a response to the initial launch had been tight and it was felt that the local authority should keep the option open to make a bid for a new free school.

Forum members understood the need for additional special school places and recognised the opportunity this presented. Any bid would need to demonstrate the types of need that the county currently struggled to meet and consider the best location for provision. However it was noted that this would not help to address the condition of existing special schools or alleviate funding pressures and that the SEND review proposals did not include any comment on uprating the £10,000 per place funding for special schools, which had not been increased since 2014.

The forum was also advised that:

- The DfE was looking to improve attendance as figures had yet to return to pre-covid levels, Herefordshire did not currently have any attendance officers to support schools but funding had been secured to recruit to two or possibly three posts in the 22/23 academic year;
- The school improvement grant to the local authority was ceasing but Herefordshire had plans in place to continue to provide school improvement support;
- The f40 group had held a briefing for MPs in Westminster to promote the need for fair funding for all schools and the MP for North Herefordshire had attended, another session would be arranged for later this year or early next year.

Forum members noted the updates provided and thanked officers for their input. Further detailed information on proposals for the 23/24 budget would be presented in the autumn term.

51. REPORT ON ACTIVITY OF THE BUDGET WORKING GROUP

The SFM gave an update on the work of the Budget Working Group. The meeting on 17 June had considered the outline proposal for a deficit management plan as the dedicated schools grant was now in a small deficit.

The main cause of the overspend in 2021/22 financial year related to cost pressures in the high needs block, particularly in regard to out of county placements. The HAN commented that the cost of out of county placements now formed in excess of 10% of the total high needs budget. Work was underway to increase provision to alleviate some of these pressures but delivery would take time.

The chair of the working group noted the huge efforts made to prevent overspends in the DSG and that Herefordshire was one of the last local authorities to reach this point. The group would continue to work hard with officers to address the overspend and manage the deficit.

The forum noted that further work would take place and be reported on in the autumn term.

52. ANNUAL REVIEW OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP

Forum members received the outcome of the annual review of membership. It was noted that:

- the forum was required to review membership on a regular basis to ensure that representation by schools members broadly reflects the proportion of pupils in academies and local authority maintained schools;
- analysis of the 2022 January School Census showed no significant change in proportionality and as a result no changes were proposed to the allocation of seats on the forum or the working group; and
- any further academy conversions would be monitored and if they impacted on the proportionality this would be brought back to the forum.

It was resolved that:

the outcome of the annual review of proportionality be noted and no changes made to allocations of seats on Herefordshire Schools Forum or the Budget Working Group.

53. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of meetings for the 2022/23 academic year were noted as:

7 October 2022 – this was a week earlier than the originally proposed date

13 January 2023

17 March 2023

14 July 2023

The draft work programme was noted as containing the standard regular items.

The meeting ended at 11.00 am

Chairperson