

Minutes of the meeting of Herefordshire Schools Forum held at virtual meeting platform on Friday 14 July 2023 at 9.30 am

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

Mr D Brearey	LA Maintained Primary School
Mr A Davies	Academies (primary)
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
Mr E Gwillim	16-19 Providers
Mr P Jennings	Academies
Mr C Lewandowski	Trade Unions
Mrs R Lloyd	Early Years

In attendance:

Officers: Strategic Finance Manager, Head of Learning and Achievement and Head of Additional Needs

75. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received from members of the forum.

76. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

No named substitutes.

77. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

78. MINUTES

The Strategic Finance Manager (SFM) gave an update on the communication with MPs.

F40 Invited Herefordshire MPs to a briefing in Westminster on 11 July. Currently no feedback had been received on this briefing. **Update: The secretary of the f40 group has informed the SFM this meeting has been postponed and will now be taking place on Tuesday, 12 September 2023. A reminder will be sent to MPs ahead of the briefing.**

It was arranged for the Chief Executive of Herefordshire Council to discuss education concerns with the permanent secretary of the DFE at the recent Local Government Association (LGA) Conference.

The SFM also attended an F40 finance group where the F40's ask on additional SEND revenue funding and capital funding for additional places was finalised prior to sending to the DfE for consideration in HM Treasury's October expenditure statement.

It was resolved that: The minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2023 be approved as a correct record.

79. UPDATE ON SCHOOLS FUNDING ISSUES

The SFM provided an update on the response published from the DfE on the consultation for the national funding formula 2024/25. 105 local authorities now mirror the national funding formula with Herefordshire being one of those authorities.

It was reported that there are relatively few changes that will impact Herefordshire schools for the 2024-25 financial year. The exceptional circumstances funding element used to fund the renting of Eastnor Primary School will continue for another year and changes to split site payments will not apply to Herefordshire as the factor is not used.

DfE intends to take the opportunity to simplify the arrangements particularly for PFI and Building Schools for the Future but has not yet started any consultation.

The growth fund will continue but we will be required to use the DfE National Funding Formula criteria in allocating to schools. It is thought this would not make any material difference to us.

The funding for 2024/25 has not yet been announced.

There have been significant changes to the early years funding and the rates in September will be increasing from April.

- Three and four year old rates up 6.77%
- Two-year-old funding rates will be going up by 27.7%

The percentage increases seem high but are still less than expected compared with the average funding increase.

The government have announced the teachers' pay settlement at 6.5%. It is thought that this will be funded by half new money and half of it will be from existing school budgets.

Action: A budget consultation paper will be prepared and will be brought back to Schools Forum in October.

80. REPORT ON ACTIVITY OF THE BUDGET WORKING GROUP

The Chair invited the SFM to update the forum on the activity of the Budget Working Group (BWG).

It was highlighted the minutes from the BWG meeting held on 16 June were circulated to all members.

Items of significant interest raised were:

- The outturn for 2022/23 was £733,000 overspend which increases the high needs deficit to just over £1 million. It was noted the overspend was less than the previous year.
- Autism resource bases will be coming on stream in September, the local authority is grateful to all the schools who have stepped up to take on these bases.

- A way forward was agreed to support training for the counselling service offered by Orelton Primary School so that it will become self-supporting in the future.
- Changes to the high needs matrix were discussed so that it better reflects the needs of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and associated challenging disorders.

The chair of the working group thanked members of the group for their contributions and also the SFM for his support and advice. He noted the challenge of keeping children at the heart of what we do while also keeping the budget under control. The chair of the forum echoed these comments and thanked the chair of the working group for their work.

A query was raised in regard to the autism bases. There was concern that parents had yet to receive details on what the settings will look like and what they will provide. In particular one parent had queried what would happen after key stage 1. Concerns were also flagged about autistic pupils in inappropriate settings and the difficulties this created for both the pupils in terms of accessing education and for staff in schools not able to meet the child's needs.

The Head of Additional Needs explained that a lot of work had taken place in a short time to set up the new bases and that legal processes needed to be completed before information could be widely shared. She acknowledged that this had meant communications had not gone out in the way the local authority would have liked. No formal decisions had been taken on an expansion into key stage 2 but the schools concerned were interested to explore this.

The local authority continues to work on sufficiency plans given the increasing numbers of pupils with SEND. This mirrors the national picture. The new autism units will ease the pressure but will not solve the problem. A clearer provision map would be helpful and is something the local authority will work on. Work has taken place in the background to set up framework agreements to support future development. The Head of Additional Needs noted that Herefordshire was a very inclusive area and praised schools for their willingness to support pupils in mainstream schools.

With regard to the high needs matrix changes, it was highlighted that not all special school heads had been consulted and that there were some concerns about the impact of the changes. It was clarified that discussions had taken place with the schools most likely to be affected and agreed it would be helpful to review the expectations of consultation for significant changes to funding mechanisms at the next Budget Working Group.

81. ANNUAL REVIEW OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP

The clerk to the Schools Forum presented the report.

A review of the membership for the Schools Forum had been undertaken, using the 2023 January School Census results, which showed no significant shift in the distribution of pupils between academies and local authority maintained schools. Therefore no changes to the allocation of seats were recommended for either the Forum or the Budget Working Group.

It was noted that further academy conversions would impact on the representation of seats and therefore this would be monitored and brought back to the Forum next year.

A query was made around the representation for Special Schools. It was confirmed that these were treated differently and that the review only took in to account mainstream schools.

Resolved: That, as a result of the Annual Review of the Schools Forum Membership, no changes were identified and the Membership would remain the same.

82. DATES OF MEETINGS AND WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2023/24

The proposed meeting dates for the forum for 2023/24 were noted. No objections were raised.

- Friday 20 October 2023, 9:30am
- Friday 19 January 2024, 9:30am
- Friday 15 March 2024. 9:30am
- Friday 12 July 2024, 9:30am

The Chairperson thanked all those in attendance. Special thanks were given to; David Bennett who was stepping down from the Forum as he is leaving his post and thanked him for his contributions on both the forum and the working group; Paul Jennings on his continued work on the Budget Working Group and SFM for keeping the forum very well informed.

The Chairperson noted it was the Clerk, Sarah Buffrey's last meeting and shared her personal thanks for all her support, hard work, knowledge and efficiency she has brought to the forum and wished her all the best in her future work. Members of the forum endorsed the chair's comments.

The meeting ended at 10:50.

Chairperson