

Minutes of the meeting of Herefordshire Schools Forum held at virtual meeting platform on Friday 12 April 2024 at 9.30 am

Present:	Ms A Banner (LA maintained secondary schools) (Chairperson) Mr P Jennings (Academies) (Vice-chairperson)
Ms B Blower	PRU - Management Committee
Mr P Deneen	Trade Unions
Ms N Emmett	Academies
Mr R Foster	Local Authority Maintained Primary School
Ms N Gilbert	LA Special Schools
Mrs G Griffin	Primary Governors
Mr E Gwillim	16-19 Providers
Mr P Jennings	Academies
Mr S Kendrick	Local Authority Maintained Primary School (with Nursery)
Mr C Lewandowski	Trade Unions
Ms S Lines	Diocese of Hereford
Ms H Manns	Early Years providers

In attendance:

Officers: Service Director, Education, Skills and Learning, Strategic Finance Manager, Head of Strategic Finance, Virtual headteacher and Admissions and 14 to 19 curriculum manager

98. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from, Dan Brearey, Alex Davies, Andy Gosling, Rose Lloyd, Sheila Taylor, Tim Knapp and Rosalind Pither - Head of Additional Needs.

99. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

There were no substitutes.

100. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declaration of interests.

101. MINUTES

The Strategic Finance Manager (SFM) reported that one Local Authority School had resolved its budget pressures through one voluntary redundancy and another was looking to start support staff redundancies.

The Cabinet Member, Children and Young People confirmed a letter had been written and would be sent to the Secretary of State by the end of the day.

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2024 be approved as a correct record.

102. HIGH NEEDS BUDGET 2024/25

The Strategic Finance Manager (SFM) introduced the report, the following principal points were noted;

- The high needs budget for 2024/25 had been based on the existing budget plus forecast overspends and increasing cost pressures.
- Concern was expressed that the overspend was now greater than the forecast that was prepared two years ago and is still growing.
- The budget working group had accepted the overspend position of a £6.5m funding as a result of cost pressures in excess of the additional grant of £1m provided by the DfE at their meeting on 11 March.
- The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit if the statutory override is not renewed after March 2026 will become the responsibility of the council, a major concern amongst local authorities nationally.
- An overspend of £3.7m was forecast for 2023-24 due to the use of out of county schools and increased special and mainstream school top ups. Since the report was published this had risen to £4.9m due to the following additional costs;
 - complex needs of £0.3m in the year end settlement,
 - £0.4m payment of old recruitment bills and some loss of income from 21/22 and 22/23,
 - £0.2m on an unexpected creditor on post 16 college top-ups.
- The DSG grant for 2024/25 in terms of the schools block early years and central services block were agreed by the forum on 19 January 2024.
- The SFM confirmed there had been an 18% rise in Education Health Care Plans in 2023/34 compared to 2022/23 which was a similar increase compared to other Local Authorities.
- Funding had been provided for new resource bases in schools from September 2024. It was not clear to what extent the new provision would be operational. It was likely additional independent out of county special school places would be necessary.
- The budget would be reviewed again in September when the operation of the new provision is more certain.

In response to member's questions it was noted:

1. The Head of Strategic Finance (HSF) confirmed the statutory override was in place until the end of March 2026. The council had not received any further information as to what might happen or whether that override would be extended. The High Needs deficit will have an impact on the council's overall financial position once the override periods ends and this risk was being managed as part of the council's medium term financial strategy. The forum would be kept informed of any new developments.
2. Concern was raised with the level of increase in SEN students in secondary schools.
3. The Service Director, Education, Skills and Learning (SDESL) explained that the local authority is working at pace to provide more specialist provision through the resource-based model. The number of children requiring specialist's provision in the county is significantly increasing, particularly notable in early years but there is an increase across all age ranges. Discussions are continuing with property colleagues to see how the expansion of provision can continue. Failed bids for free special schools are being reconsidered.

The Chair of the Budget Working Group (BWG) highlighted the groups support for maintaining the SEN protection scheme at the same level as in 2023-24 and that the

proportion of the overspend was relatively small verses the impact that it makes to children and young people across the authority.

Recognition of the council's continual support of Children and Young People and what is offered particularly in regards to autism development was highlighted. The consensus of the forum was that they agreed with the BWG that the proposed budget be recommended and that they supported maintaining the SEN protection scheme at the same level as in 2023-24.

Resolved

That the Forum:

- a) noted the High Needs forecast outturn position for 2023/24;**
- b) noted the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation for 2024/25 for the Schools, High Needs and Early Years blocks;**
- c) considered the recommendations of the Budget Working Group (BWG) held on 11 March 2024; and**
- d) recommends a High Needs Budget of £29.7 million for 2024/25 for approval by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People as set out in Appendix 1, noting the funding gap in 2024/25 of £4.9 million.**

The meeting ended at 10.00 am

Chairperson