

Minutes of the meeting of Herefordshire schools forum held at online meeting on Friday 19 March 2021 at 9.30 am

Present: Mrs J Cohn (Academy Special School Representative) (Chairperson)
Mrs K Weston (Local Authority Maintained Primary School) (Vice-chairperson)

Mr D Bennett	Academies
Ms C Bryan	Academies
Mr P Burbidge	Archdiocese of Cardiff
Mr A Davies	Academies
Mr P Deneen	Trade Unions
Ms N Emmett	Academies
Ms N Gilbert	LA Special Schools
Mrs G Griffin	Secondary Governors
Mr J Hedges	Primary Governors
Mr P Jennings	Academies
Ms T Kneale	Local Authority Maintained Primary School
Mr C Lewandowski	Trade Unions
Sian Lines	Diocese of Hereford
Mrs R Lloyd	Early Years
Mr N Moon	Local Authority Maintained Primary Schools

In attendance: Councillors Carole Gandy, Felicity Norman and Diana Toynbee

Officers: Strategic Finance Manager, Head of Additional Needs, Childrens Wellbeing and Assistant Director Education Development and Skills

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following forum members: Ed Gwillim, Martin Henton, Sue Jenkins, Tim Knapp.

19. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

There were no named substitutes.

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

21. MINUTES

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2021 be approved as a correct record.

22. HIGH NEEDS BUDGET 2021/22

The strategic finance manager summarised the proposals that had been included in the consultation with schools and the final proposals as set out in the report.

The head of additional needs explained that the projections for Beacon College were for more than 40 places to be filled when it opened and so the money allocated to underwrite the first 20 places was not expected to be needed and would provide some contingency in the budget overall.

Forum members discussed the proposals for the pupil referral unit. The head of additional needs explained that in order to ensure the required outcomes for pupils they needed to spend more time on site and less in off-site provision. The number of places at the PRU would shrink to 50 to reflect the available accommodation. The service was now focussed on the council's statutory responsibility for permanently excluded pupils, with schools purchasing additional services. However the pandemic had interrupted the launch of the revised service and action was required on staffing levels to address the projected resulting overspend.

Concerns were expressed by one forum member that the outcome for children should remain the focus and it was suggested that a review take place to report back to Schools Forum into how many children were denied a place at the PRU because it was full and how many because the costs of a place were too high. It was also queried what arrangements were in place for those who lived further away from Hereford where the PRU was based.

In response forum members heard that:

- the changes proposed were intended to protect the PRU and that the staffing restructure would address curriculum needs as well as the projected overspend;
- pupils received transport to the provision so that those further away from Hereford could access the service;
- calculations showed that 50 places was the likely requirement for permanent exclusions at any one time but this would be kept under review;
- schools remained responsible for outcomes of pupils they elected to place with the service;
- it was recognised that the pandemic had challenged the new model before it had time to get off the ground but officers believed it would work in the longer term;
- there was a large cohort in year 11 at the PRU at the current time and numbers would be much reduced in September, making this a good time to enact changes;
- the remit of the schools forum was primarily schools finance so some of the concerns raised would be outside the scope of the forum but further discussions would take place and anything relevant brought back to the forum at a later date.

The strategic finance manager also update the members of the forum on a range of consultations currently being undertaken by the Department for Education. Forum members noted that:

- the proposed changes to the sparsity factor were welcomed as beneficial to schools in Herefordshire;
- the consultation on the high needs block seemed premature in light of the SEND review, the outcome of which was expected shortly;
- the simplification of the payment of business rates for schools would reduce workload locally;
- Herefordshire would join other f40 group members to make a collective response as this had more weight.

The strategic finance manager shared the results of a survey of local authorities carried out by the f40 group on the position with the high needs deficits. Forum members noted that Herefordshire was one of only a few authorities who still had a surplus in their dedicated schools grant and that some councils had very substantial deficits. A recent article had focussed on the £1m overspend reported by Herefordshire for 2019/20 but

had not reflected the overall position. The county also compared favourably against its statistical neighbours. Forum members thanked officers for their work in keeping the budget under control.

The head of additional needs concluded with an update on work to implement the revised high needs matrix. Following a lack of responses to the consultation on the revised matrix specific efforts had been made to engage with parent carer voice and school SENCOs. The few responses received were generally positive. Although some concerns had been expressed it was felt that these could be addressed through communications and training. There had been extensive discussions with stakeholders as part of the process and it was hoped that the lack of response reflected general satisfaction with the new matrix.

It was resolved that:

- 1. That a balanced high needs budget for 2021/22 be recommended to the Cabinet Member for approval as set out in the report;**
- 2. the school financial contribution to the SEN threshold costs within the SEN protection scheme be limited to £150 x the number on roll as at the October 2020 census for the financial year 2021/22;**
- 3. The implementation timetable for the new high needs matrix be approved as set out in the report;**
- 4. The new tariff values be applied to post-16 contracts for the new academic year with effect from 1st August 2021;**
- 5. The new tariff values be approved as set out in the table in the report;**
- 6. As presented to the Budget Working Group on 5 March, the funding originally identified to provide for the Minimum Funding Guarantee for special schools (£100k) and to smooth the introduction of the new tariff funding proposals (£52k) is better allocated as follows:**
 - a. To avoid the minimum funding guarantee for special schools by adding 3% on the tariffs D-F as set out in recommendation 5 at a cost of £80k;**
 - b. That additional funding of £11k be allocated for PRU top-ups to ensure that the PRU is fully funded for top-up D2;**
 - c. That an additional £108 is added to tariff C4 and tariff D1;**
 - d. That the remaining £50k of funding be added to the out county special school.**

23. UPDATE ON SOLID ROOTS PROGRAMME

The strategic finance manager introduced the item by explaining that the funding for the solid roots programme was derived from surplus funds from the 2 year old NEF. The funds had been allocated on a three part programme focussed on early years in relation to:

- Early speech and language difficulties;
- Maths, literacy, learning and development; and
- Parenting, attachment and infant mental health.

At the end of the project there was likely to be a small surplus and it was recommended that discussions take place with the budget working group on how best to utilise the remaining funds.

The public health specialist explained the background to the projects and summarised the benefits to date. Forum members noted that the projects had been designed to leave a legacy for example by training local trainers who could then continue to roll out schemes once the original project had come to an end. Other training schemes which had been successfully developed and launched would be maintained through existing services going forward.

Forum members heard that the pandemic had impacted the roll out of some of the programme, while other elements had adapted using online platforms to roll out training packages. Part of the programme had been extended by 6 months at no additional cost so that the full delivery could be achieved. The assessment of the impact of the programme would be more difficult as some national data reporting had been put on hold. However there had been a good response from all the settings, groups and agencies involved and officers would be able to provide some evaluation towards the end of 2021 when all the contracts had come to an end. A further report would be brought to the forum at that point.

It was resolved that:

- a) Schools forum have reviewed the progress on delivery of projects under the Solid Roots Programme; and**
- b) The Budget Working Group be asked to consider proposals for allocation of any surplus funding that may be available at the end of the current contracts and make appropriate recommendations.**

24. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The clerk updated forum members on changes to national regulations that allowed for future meetings of the forum to be held wholly or partly remotely. This made permanent the temporary arrangements that had been put in place at the start of the pandemic. The operational and good practice guidance published by the department for education would shortly be updated and the new arrangements would need to be incorporated into the constitution of the forum in due course.

Forum members welcomed this development and commented on the amount of travel time saved by holding remote meetings and the improved attendance.

It was agreed that the next meeting on 9 July would be held via remote means and arrangements for subsequent meetings confirmed at that point.

The meeting ended at 11.00 am

Chairperson