



Minutes of the Meeting of the Worcestershire Schools Forum (WSF)

**Wednesday 9 October 2025
Remote Meeting Held Via MS Teams**

The meeting started at 3.00 PM.

In Attendance:

a. WSF Members

Malcolm Richards (Chair) [MR]	- Governor, Bromsgrove
Edward Francis (Vice Chair) [EF]	- Headteacher Fort Royal Special School
Dave Hadley-Pryce	- Headteacher The Bewdley School
Annette Summers [AS]	- Nursery Owner
Tim Reid [TR]	- Executive Diocesan Director of Education for the The Diocese of Hereford and Diocese of Worcester
Elizabeth Dixon [ED]	- Headteacher Franche Primary
Marie Pearse [MP]	- Headteacher Evesham Nursery School
Andrea Hale [AH]	- Headteacher Aston Fields Middle School
Nathan Jones [NJ]	- Headteacher Meadow Green

b. Local Authority (LA)

Sarah Wilkins [SW]	- Assistant Director Education, Early Years, Inclusion and Pupil Place Planning
Holly Hancock [HH]	- Senior Finance Business Partner, Worcestershire County Council
Rob Phillips [RP]	- Finance Business Partner - Schools - Worcestershire County Council
Nicky Burford [NB]	- Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency and Improvement Lead – Worcestershire County Council
Matthew Stiles [MS]	- Virtual Headteacher and & Education Engagement Lead

1. Apologies

Phil Rook [PR]	- Chief Financial Officer, Worcestershire County Council
Steph Simcox [SS]	- Deputy Chief Financial Officer, Worcestershire County Council

Daniela Carson [DCa]	- Assistant Director for All Age Disability (0 – 25) – Worcestershire County Council
Jay Hart [JH]	- Headteacher Kingfisher School
Ruth Bessant [RB]	- Finance Business Partner - Schools - Worcestershire County Council

2. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Chair – Malcolm Richard was Proposed by EF and Seconded by ED with no other nominees Malcolm accepted the position of Chair.

Vice Chair – Edward Francis was Proposed by MR and Seconded by ED with no other nominees Malcolm accepted the position of Chair.

3. New members to the Forum

MR introduced the new member of the WSF:

- Dave Hadley-Pryce – Bewdley High School
- Andrea Hale – Aston Fields Middle School

4. Declaration of Interests

None raised.

5. Declaration of Potential Conflict of Interests with Items on the Agenda

None raised.

6. Minutes of the Last Meeting (15 January 2025)

Minutes agreed for accuracy.

7. Matters Arising from The Minutes

Free Schools Meals (FSM) auto-enrolment item 9 previous meeting – Some local authorities have been able to implement this; at present this is not possible within Worcestershire due to being a two-tier authority. The Department for Education (DfE) are implementing a point of access system for them to do this themselves and secondly. SW is working on this and could be a possible after the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). SW was asked to contact our MPs within Worcestershire by letter requesting their support to implement this change.

Agenda 11d Breakfast clubs, NB updated WSF on the latest position to WSF, that Breakfast Club early adopters are finding it challenging to manage with a mixed picture on how this is working for schools, with some finding it is increasing use of paid wraparound and other finding that the half-hour is sufficient. They are all saying the funding is very tight. It is agreed that this is not working for pupils that have more complex needs and is not cost-effective. This is an area that is being raised with the DfE.

8. Cabinet

- a. Financial position reported to Cabinet

SW gave a verbal update on the financial position of the council, in the absence of PR who was unable to attend. The latest budget monitoring is for Period 3 (June) 2025/26 and indicates a breakeven position after use of £11.3m of reserves (£3.7m less than the budgeted £15m due to corporate underspends) and a further £33.6m of Exceptional Financial Support.

The Exceptional Financial Support process exists to support those councils facing unmanageable financial pressures to enable the council to set a balanced budget. This is not extra money, it is permission to borrow for revenue purposes which has to be paid back.

Services are overspending by £10.7m offset by savings on corporate items including a reduction in borrowing and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) and a reduction in expected utilisation of the corporate contingency.

The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget forecasts an overspend of £86.2 million against a total budget allocation of £291.8 million which is largely contained within the High Needs block of the DSG.

The number of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) rose by 4% during Quarter 1 to a total of 7,597. At this time last year, the number was 6,315 which is an annual increase of 20%.

The accumulated deficit position for the DSG reserves at 1 April 2025 was a deficit balance of £98.2m, built up from previous years' overspends. Considering the current forecast for 2025/26, the deficit balance is expected to increase to £184.4m at year-end

Whilst the High Needs deficit has a statutory override until March 2028, there is a need to recognise that if the override is removed without additional government funding there will be a significant financial pressure for the County Council. This remains a significant risk as at the end of March 2027 the forecast for this totals c£302.1m. The Council is also incurring borrowing costs relating to funding the regular expenditure on High Needs placements and support which has a direct impact on the revenue account.

SW explained the current position of the council's DSG overspend and the outcome of the external audit and what this means to the council.

It was agreed that a sub-group including members of the forum to be included to allow a clearer understanding of the DSG deficit and allow them to promote and develop system leadership in control plans for spend. It was agreed that this group would have a period of meeting until after the next Statutory Override finishes.

b. Education Sufficiency Annual Update February 2025

SW discussed the annual report that is published for reference for WSF information and reference of the forum. New version of this will be published in Spring 2026. The process for calculating these assumptions has been audited and validated by the DfE.

c. Review of Education Obligations (S106) Policy February 2025

SW gave a brief update on the updated policy that has come into effect.

SW confirmed that where large projects are taking place, the council looks at the infrastructure needs for Highway and schools where necessary and then follow the normal process.

The new housing targets that are being set are a risk for the local authority in some areas terms of meeting education infrastructure needs between now and 2040.

d. Worcester City Secondary School Update July 2025

SW confirmed the latest position and that an updated version of this will be released shortly, with shortfall in places currently being considered in the Malvern area.

e. WCC Cabinet Forward Plan

Nothing at present for Schools Forum.

9. Foxlydiate First and Nursery School DfE Key Decision New Schools & Academy Conversions and Sponsorships

The slides are in the agenda pack provided, the local authority has been working to have a model for new schools going forward up to 2040, so we don't need to recreate this each time. The only new school at present is Foxlydiate. This is a two-form entry, with the scope to be a three-form entry to meet future housing needs.

The Enterprise Academy, which is a new SEND schools in Malvern. 120 place provision that can be expanded, if necessary, which is planned to open in 2027.

SW confirmed that at a future meeting she will cover the rebuilding schools programme funded by the DfE in Worcestershire.

10. Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs Deficit Management Plan

SW presented this to WSF. This a current word version of the councils working plan, as we feel this is easier for presentation than the DfE spreadsheet version.

HH confirmed the DfE are clear on what they want from the plan which is more about mitigation of increasing the deficit and what is causing these issues. We know at present that we are receiving about half of the amount needed to supply the current services.

We are working with colleagues from NHS commissioners. ICB to examine joint commissioning share. An issue exists of some EHCP costs for health provision being met via High Needs funds.

It was also reiterated that this is the area the sub-group would be working on with council officers.

11. Early Years – Funding Rates

a. Wraparound and Early Years Expansion Programme

The 30 hours roll-out has now been completed from the 1 September 2025. We know that our 2-year-old take up appeared low last year and this was where parent that were eligible for both working and Families in Receipt of Additional Support (FRAS) had only applied under the working families' criteria. We are now able to make sure that where this is the case, it is recorded under the correct area, FRAS, then working families and has meant so far this term we are back to pre-rollout levels.

The new EY Capital phase two has started, which still has limited funds so will not allow for new building works. With submission needing the agreement of the local authority. With a potential, phase 3, next year which will allow for more flexibility on the allocated amount by the council.

NJ asked the question about will there be more flexibility around catchment an sustainability. NB confirmed we will still be looking at the sufficiency without destabilising private providers, or other schools.

NB also confirmed that market engagement around Early Years SEND provision has also started, for provider private or schools to consider.

b. Early Years - Position following DfE Restating the Guidance on Charging

NB presented the paper, giving the local issues within Worcestershire, with the effects hitting harder in the private sector. Within Worcester we believe the sector is working appropriately, with the expectation of some parents out reaching the requirement.

It was noted with thanks to NB for putting in briefing as soon as guidance was released, to explain this to the providers. EY and finance have also supported the sector with checking requirements. WSF wished to thank these teams for their support and speedy action.

c. Early Years – Consultation – Inclusion Funding and Graduated Response

SW presented the report concerning the inclusion funding for Early Years, the aim of the paper and consultation to try and match the funding to the right pupils at the right time. WSF has been asked to agree the consultation for a change to the funding model for April 2026.

WSF agreed unanimously to support the consultation to take place so that the findings can be brought back to WSF for consideration and the recommendation to the Councillor with Responsibility agreement.

12. School Block

a. Transfer from School Block to HLN 2026/27

RP presented the paper to the school. WSF considered this and then voted unanimously to adopt the transfer of 0.5% of the school block to the HLN block for the financial year 2026-27.

WSF continues to support this as a measure to support the HLN block, but also knows that it is only aiding, with additional funding for HLN being what is needed.

b. De-delegation for Mainstream schools and Central Block 2026/27

RP presented the paper to the school. WSF considered this and then voted by sector for the de-delegation and increase in charges, and for the expenditure of the Central Block for the financial year 2026-27.

c. Funding Mechanism for Schools 2026/27

RP presented the paper to the school. WSF considered this and then voted unanimously to adopt this request from the council for financial year 2026-27, that funding mechanism should be the same as prior year taking into consideration that they had agreed agenda item 12a.

d. Disapplication Exceptional Premises 2026/27

RP presented the paper to the school. WSF considered this and then voted unanimously to adopt this request from the council for financial year 2026-27, to submit a request for a continuation of this disapplication for the three schools.

e. Falling Rolls Funding 2026/27

RP presented the paper to the school. WSF considered this and then voted they would like the council to consider this mechanism, then bring this back to WSF for review and agreement for the next financial year.

f. Amalgamation of Abbey Park First and Nursery & Abbey Park Middle 2026/27

RP Presented a briefing paper to WSF on the amalgamation of the two schools as part of the Pershore Education Review, and the funding stream that are normal in these situations, for the current financial year and next financial year.

13. Maintained Schools' Balances

RP Presented the School balances to WSF for reference, no comment from WSF on specific matter from the report were raised.

14. Pupil Premium Plus

MS gave a quick briefing on what the funding that the Virtual School receive for Looked After Children, and a plea to all to push the message to other schools that we have money, which we are using, but if we could push more to schools so they can target this for individual pupils this would be useful.

MS took away suggestion from the meeting for way to communicate this message with schools more widely.

15. Section 19 Funding

MS presented the paper around Section 19 and to give further information to WSF. He confirmed this is part of us being as transparent with forum on the funding and cost of this service.

The funding is part of the High Needs Budget and is costing in the region of about £5 million last year. So again, is another increase within the overspend of this budget compared to prior years, especially pre pandemic.

16. Any other business

None

Meeting ended.

The meeting closed at 5.23 PM.

Date of next meeting

27 November 2025 at 2 pm via Teams