



May 2026

**Re: The Crisis of School Funding in West Sussex – A Call for an urgent review of the National Funding Formula to ensure fair funding**

Dear Tom Rutland MP,

We are writing to you as a collective of Headteachers from across West Sussex to express our profound and growing concern regarding the chronic underfunding of our schools. Despite years of advocacy through the Worth Less? campaign and the introduction of the National Funding Formula (NFF), West Sussex remains one of the lowest-funded local authorities in the country.

Our schools are at a financial breaking point, having had our budgets stretched repeatedly over recent years to cover unfunded and increasing costs. While we continue to strive for the best outcomes for our children, the disparity between our funding and the actual cost of operating in this region is no longer sustainable.

**The Failure of the Area Cost Adjustment (ACA)**

The fundamental flaw in the current funding model is the lack of a meaningful Area Cost Adjustment (ACA) for West Sussex. While our neighbours in Surrey and parts of Buckinghamshire receive significant uplifts, West Sussex is treated as if it has the same cost base and cost of living as the least expensive regions in the North of England.

This is a geographical and economic oversight. We are competing for the same pool of teachers and support staff as authorities that receive higher funding, yet we are expected to do so with significantly fewer resources in a highly challenging recruitment and retention environment.

**A High-Cost Reality**

West Sussex is consistently ranked among the most expensive areas in the UK to live and work. The disconnect between our "Rest of England" funding status and our South East reality is stark:

- Property Prices: As of 2025/26, the average property price in West Sussex has reached £437,000, compared to an England and Wales average of roughly £350,000.

- **Affordability Gap:** In districts like Chichester and Mid Sussex, the median house price is now 11 to 12 times the median annual salary, far exceeding the national affordability ratio of 7.5.
- **Rental Pressures:** Private rents in the county have risen by an average of 4% annually, with the average monthly rent in Mid Sussex now reaching £1,395.

For our staff—particularly early-career teachers and support staff—living within a reasonable distance of their workplace is becoming a financial impossibility. This further contributes to the recruitment and retention crisis that directly impacts the stability and quality of education for our students.

## The Legacy of "Worth Less?"

You will be familiar with the **Worth Less?** campaign, a grassroots movement led by West Sussex Headteachers that garnered national attention. Its legacy, unfortunately, is one of unfulfilled promises. While the campaign succeeded in highlighting that West Sussex was the third lowest-funded authority in the UK, the subsequent "fixes" have failed to close the gap, with percentage uplifts from the NFF floor not making an impact due to the low starting point and the lack of an ACA uplift which creates a recruitment crisis, especially for schools so close to the Fringe area.

In 2026/27 West Sussex schools still have the seventh lowest primary unit of funding (PUF) of £5,511.74 (England average £5,931.78, South-East average £5,662.72), and the fifth lowest secondary unit of funding (SUF) of £7,125.58 (England average £7,679.90, South-East average £7,360.89). Even with recent incremental increases, the "uplift" has been swallowed by rising energy costs, unfunded pay awards, and the soaring costs of SEND provision. We are effectively running up a down-escalator.

## Our Request

We can no longer "do more with less." The current formula ignores the unique economic pressures of the South East. We urge you to represent your constituents by demanding:

1. **A Review of the ACA:** To ensure West Sussex is recognised as a high-cost area, reflecting the reality of our housing and labour markets.
2. **Minimum Per-student Funding Levels:** That truly reflects the cost of living in the South East, ensuring our children are not "worth less" than those in neighbouring counties.
3. **Sustainable Long-Term Investment:** To move away from emergency "sticking-plaster" grants and toward a settlement within the NFF that allows for long-term strategic school planning.

Our children deserve an education that is funded fairly and sustainably. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the specific financial challenges facing schools within your constituency.

Yours sincerely,

**The West Sussex Secondary Headteachers' Association**

