

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON  
THURSDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2006 AT SUNDERLAND CIVIC CENTRE**

The following members of the Forum were present: -

Mrs Y Gray (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Sunderland South) – Chair of Forum  
Mr D Ambrose (Governor Rep. – Secondary)  
Mr H Brown (Governor Rep. – Primary)  
Mr J E Clarke (Governor Rep. – Secondary)  
Mrs S. Collingwood – Early Years & Childcare Partnership  
Dr P Collins (Governor Rep. – Secondary)  
Mr A Falconer (Governor Rep. – Primary)  
Mr M Foster (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)  
Mr J Lishman (Governor Rep. – Primary)  
Mr C Short (Governor Rep. – Primary)  
Mr R Wilkinson (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)  
Dr E Yeates (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)

Together with: -

Mr D May – Finance Manager  
Mrs S Mitchell – Project Development and Business Support  
Mr S Scrafton – Governor Support Team  
Mrs V Thompson – Principal Finance Officer - Schools  
Mrs G Wall – Head of Strategy & Performance  
Mrs D M Mitchell (substitute for John McKnight)

*The Chair welcomed Mrs D M Mitchell who was attending in place of Mr J McKnight.*

**Action Points**

**06/29 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mr V Bovill (Non-schools Group – Teaching Associations)  
Mrs J Dowson (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Washington)  
Mrs S Carter (Headteacher Rep. – Nursery)  
Mrs D Elliott (Governor Rep. – Special)  
Mrs V Ingleton (Governor Rep. – Nursery)  
Mrs A Mackay (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Sunderland North)  
Mr J McKnight (Headteacher Rep. – Special)  
Dr H. Paterson – Director of Children's Services  
Mrs J Hobbs (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Hetton/Houghton)  
Councillor Mrs P. Smith – Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

**06/30 Minutes of previous meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2006**

The minutes were approved as a true record.

**06/31 Matters arising from the minutes**

Workforce Remodelling Training – Lynda Brown was compiling attendance figures for courses and this information would be provided at the next scheduled meeting.

Broadband Connectivity – David May reported that the Broadband that Sunderland operated on provided more functionality than home based broadband packages as they were built upon a range of fibre circuits (LAN extension services). The contract was re-negotiated 16 months ago, with a substantial increase in performance at no added cost. There remained 2 years to run on this contract. Broadband funding had been devolved to schools in 2005/06. DfES have advised that this be treated as a retained grant in 06/07.

School Meals – Colin Ranson would be invited to a future meeting to update.

Inclusion and Achievement Service Forum – Following the expression of concern by the Primary Headteachers' Area Chairs & Secretaries Group that the Forum had not met for over a year meetings have since taken place.

School Budgets – It was noted that schools had received indicative budgets for 2007/08 and many had received visits from their finance officers.

Criteria for Licensed Surplus Applications – This referred particularly to applications with regard to funding reserved as sinking funds specified by grant awarding bodies. An example of this would be a fund to replace astro turf, which only had a particular life span.

Looked After Children – Sandra Mitchell reported that there was a need to go back through previous notes of meetings to establish exactly what was agreed. There was some confusion regarding child protection/looked after children and the context of the changes made.

**06/32 Feedback from Standards Fund Monitoring Group**

Yvonne Gray reported that as the minutes of the last meeting were not available she would not be giving a report. The minutes of the last meeting would be included with the papers of the next scheduled meeting.

**06/33 Constitution of the Schools Forum**

It was noted that CSMT had considered all comments from members of the Forum at a meeting in May 2006 before arriving at their decision. The agreed revised constitution reflected an all-inclusive approach. Members were invited to make comments.

Howard Brown was concerned that with Houghton Kepier gaining Headteacher representation on the forum and the possibility of having a governor elected on to the forum this could lead to over representation.

John Lishman was concerned that representation was biased towards Headteachers and that it would be a Headteacher decision-making body.

**Action Points**

Lynda Brown to provide workforce remodelling training statistics.

Colin Ranson to be invited to a subsequent meeting of the Forum.

Sandra Mitchell to review LAC decisions

Standards Fund Monitoring Group minutes to be supplied to Forum members at next meeting

Peter Collins expressed his concern that historically John Williams the then Director of Education had help set up the Governors Association, which would work in tandem with the LA. This had certainly not been the case regarding the constitution of the Forum. It was considered that the Forum had worked very well and there was some deliberation as to why it needed changing.

Governor representatives were concerned with the comment in the CSMT briefing note that there were significant concerns around the two-way communications in respect of governor representatives. It was felt that LA Officers had disengaged with dialogue with governors, and governors had been disenfranchised.

It was again stressed that all comments had been considered by CSMT and it was emphasised that statutorily the constitution of Forum had to be reviewed and changed.

It was suggested by governor representatives that the constitution was a fait accompli from the start and clearly did not reflect governors' responsibilities in schools for Ofsted etc.

The election process was being administered by the Governor Support Team and it was suggested that there would need to be careful monitoring of applications to consider any dual representation.

Governor Support Team to proceed with Schools Forum elections

**06/34 Update on BSF/Academies**

Members were provided with an update.

Ministerial approval had been given for Sunderland's Model on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2006. The Business Case would be considered by cabinet on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2006 and would become a public document once approval had been given.

Following this a number of workshop type meetings would be set up to look at facilities management, ICT etc. Similar meetings would also take place to look at traded services.

The question of the three academies being part of the Secondary Partnership of schools was raised. Richard Wilkinson reported that this matter had been discussed thoroughly during the process and it was made clear that the driving sponsors were Northumberland Water (Castle View), Leighton Group (Hylton Red House) and Sunderland Housing (Pennywell) and Sunderland LA would be a co sponsor. For each school Sunderland LA would be have a percentage of the sponsorship to pay.

Initial discussions had been held between sponsors and schools. Further deliberations would be held on governance arrangements etc.

**06/35 Update on departmental restructuring**

The appointment for the Deputy Director was currently in the middle of the process, long listing had taken place and shortlisting would be held at the beginning of the week of 10<sup>th</sup> July 2006. The process for the appointment of Heads of Service was underway and would be completed by the end of the week of 10th July. Some colleagues had agreed to go. Further information would be available when appointments had been made.

Further information to be provided on departmental restructuring when available.

**06/36 Extending Vocational Opportunities**

It was noted that it was a requirement to offer an extended vocational curriculum and that this would be formalised with the requirement to offer a new diploma across 14 vocational areas by 2013. It was further noted that it would not be reasonable to expect that any one school could deliver the full range of vocational provision and schools were working in partnership with other schools and providers to increase the vocational offer to all pupils. Hub schools had been identified and agreed in the 14 named areas.

To support the partnership delivery, and in recognition of the significant space required to deliver certain vocational courses, the focus for delivery for many courses would be Harraton and Pallion Skill Centres accessed by children from all schools. They would be under the governance and management of two schools namely Biddick and Sandhill View respectively.

Sandra Mitchell outlined proposals of how funding would be allocated to the schools for management, administration and transport.

A number of questions were raised relating to vocational provision. Some reference was made to the provision being linked to employment needs. It was noted that an audit of provision had taken place and this was linked to Pathways into Employment. Richard Wilkinson reported that the Sunderland model was based around partnerships with the City of Sunderland College, Sunderland Schools, Sunderland Housing Group and the LA. The LA had allowed Biddick School to develop this partnership fully by allowing them to develop the Harraton site. It was anticipated that by Christmas the site would also cater for Hair and Beauty. St Robert's Engineering could be placed at Harraton and when Usworth School closed the Motor Vehicle Hub would be placed at Harraton.

Richard Wilkinson reported that the project had got to where it was today because it was initially considered as a good idea. The provision was Quality Assured via provision organised through the 14-19 steering group. Harraton Centre had achieved the Silver Award. Mike Foster did point out that it was important not to forget that the focus of the Skills Centres was to fill the void that was required by young people. Members asked to be circulated with a list of schools with their allocated diploma course hubs.

The problems associated with the funding issue shortfall were discussed. Richard Wilkinson reported that his governors had considered this and had recognised that there was an acceptable risk, which they were willing to take.

Some discussion took place regarding possible other vocational centres across the City.

Forum Members agreed the following recommendations:-

- To allocate funding to meet the premises costs of the two skills centres
- To allocate funding to meet management and administration costs of the two skills centres

Forum members to be provided with a list of vocational hubs.

- To allocate funding to meet the maintenance and repair of premises and equipment at the two skills centres
- To allocate funding for the provision of transport for the two skills centres
- To allocate £30,000 for additional support to develop vocational provision
- Consider the allocation of funding to meet the costs of works experience placements
- Agree to the balance of funding being used to support specific vocational activities in agreement with the 14-19 Steering Group and to receive a report on the allocation and use of this funding on an annual basis
- Note the intention to develop unit costs for vocational courses.

#### Action Points

Forum members agreed to the recommendations contained in the report.

#### **06/37 Summary of Revenue and Capital Outturn Report Presented to Children's Services Leadership Team**

This report provided a summary of the outturn position of Children's Services for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006. It focussed on key areas.

##### Revenue

There was a surplus of £260,000 at the end of the financial year despite established Redundancy provision of £400,000 being made to meet known redundancy costs in schools in 2006/2007.

The above funding would be used for the establishment of ICT provision within Children Social Care of £115,000 to fund committed ICT developments and also the continuation of Ring fenced policy for Out of City Placements of £136,000 and Derwent Hill of £58,000.

All of which would reduce the uncommitted surplus figure to £66,000, which would be used to re-instate a grant taken as part of the 2006/07 options and the remaining as a contribution to the Information, referral and tracking system.

The establishment of the £400k provision had restricted the Directorates ability to respond to developments and one-off initiatives that assisted service improvements.

The directorate was reviewing what options were available to it to take forward some of these priorities.

##### Capital

There had been a significant underspend on Capital. This was largely due to devolved formula capital being underspent by £1,531,000, Easington Lane Primary being delayed due to extensive service diversions and inclement weather by £935,000 and Children's Centres slipping by £548,000. Officers in the Capital and Finance teams needed to review the accuracy of the estimate information so that the profile matched the timing when expenditure was to be incurred.

Forum members noted the report on Revenue and Capital Outturn

#### **06/38 Unallocated School Resources 2005/06**

The report had been circulated with the agenda and was to allow members of the Forum to consider proposals for the distribution of unallocated school resources arising in 2005/06 from unallocated ISB contingency and rates surpluses.

ISB Contingency

At the end of 2005/2006 there was an unallocated sum of £118,000. The Contingency sum was now mainly used for newly finalised or rebanded statements or new statemented pupils moving into the area.

It was thought prudent at this stage to add the brought forward sum of £118,000 to the 06-07 sum of £144,000 to create a contingency sum of £262k. Thus reinstating the contingency sum to that originally planned, prior to reduction in order to meet MFG.

A further report would be brought before the forum later in the financial year.

Rates Surplus

There was a surplus on the rates budget of £533,000 at the end of 2005/2006 and the reasons for this were:-

- Reclassification by Valuation Officer of Castlegreen as a special school resulting in a refund and budget saving totalling £124,000.
- George Washington costs being less than previous provision made by £58,000.
- Other refunds, over provisions and miscellaneous savings £147,000.
- Cumulated previous years underspend £204,000.

It was recommend that £83,415 be retained as a prudent sum to meet any future shortfall in the budget. Leaving an unallocated sum of £450,000.

It had been noted that the Directorate had to establish a redundancy provision of £400,000 to fund known costs in 2006/2007. This had resulted in funding shortfalls for a number of Directorate wide initiatives (Implementation of referral and tracking system and preparation for the JAR).

It was proposed in recognising the budgetary pressures faced both by schools and the directorate within 2006/2007 that half of the unallocated sum be utilised by the authority in meeting school redundancy costs with the remaining balance being distributed to schools via the formula mechanism.

**06/39** **Scheme of Delegation guidance – Response to DfES consultation**

Members noted the report.

**06/40** **Year End Balances 2005/06 – Consideration of Licensed Surplus Applications**

David May took members through the report and gave the 2005/06 End Year Position. It was pleasing to note that all parties had worked closely to reduce school balances from £6.7m to £4.6m a decrease of 31% and that the number of schools above the limits had reduced from 19 (2004/05) to 10 (2005/06).

Licensed deficits for the following schools listed had been approved for 2006/07:-

Action Points

Further report to be submitted to the Forum on ISB contingency

Members of the Forum agreed the proposals within the report on use of unallocated sums.

Hylton Red House School  
 Southmoor School  
 St Aidan's Catholic School  
 Usworth School  
 Farrington School  
 Biddick Primary School  
 Burnside Primary School  
 Grange Park Primary School  
 Hylton Red House Primary School  
 Southwick Primary School  
 St Cuthbert's RC Primary School  
 South Hylton Primary School  
 Pallion Primary School  
 Castlegreen Community School  
 Sunningdale School

Applications for licensed surpluses - 10 applications had been made for licensed surpluses. 7 from Nursery Schools; 1 from a Primary School and 2 from Secondary schools.

Members were reminded of the criteria that should be used when accessing applications.

Within Nursery schools common themes seem to be emerging surrounding commitments into this term and lateness of receipt of funding from external sources.

The forum was asked to make recommendations to each individual request to the Director for consideration. Taking each in turn:

Hetton le Hole Nursery - agreed  
 Hetton Lyons Nursery - agreed  
 Houghton Nursery - agreed  
 Hylton red House Nursery - agreed  
 Mill Hill Nursery -agreed  
 Oxclose Nursery - agreed  
 Pennywell Early Years Centre - agreed  
 Quarry View primary – Planned surplus that had been used in 06/07 to avoid redundancy implications - agreed.  
 Thornhill School – As last year delays in the building work causing excess surplus. Work planned to be completed September 2006 – agreed with the proviso that this was monitored and reported at the next scheduled meeting that it had been signed off.  
 Usworth School – School closing July 2007 and the surplus was being used to ensure no deficit would arise at the time of closure - agreed.

Members agreed to recommend to Dr Patterson that all applications for licensed surpluses be approved.

#### **06/41 Free Meals**

The report had been produced in response to a request made by Headteachers at a meeting with the Director of Children's Services in March 2006. It set out fully the issues around eligibility and registration of entitlement, gave contextual information for schools and detailed current local and national developments which reflected the ongoing national debate and inconsistencies/conflicts between different government departments. This information would prove very helpful to schools.

Sally Collingwood asked for some clarity for Infant/nursery colleagues regarding whether nursery pupils were counted in the PLASC figure and, if so, whether they could register for free school meals. There

was a need to check the PLASC and it was worthwhile spending time with parents when they were filling in forms.

It was suggested that parents should not be required to complete forms on an annual basis and simply sign a proforma stating circumstances had not changed. Sandra Mitchell suggested that it was necessary to be robust when collecting information.

It was noted that CSMT had agreed to further work on a range of areas and Schools Forum agreed that this issue was worth exploring, especially if Sunderland families were being offered Working Families Tax Credits, which was putting schools at risk financially. Benefit distribution was in the interest of all Sunderland Schools. Further investigation would be held and information would be considered at the next scheduled meeting.

**06/42 Date and time of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Forum was scheduled for November after half term in order to facilitate the re-constitution.

**Action Points**

Benefit distribution to be investigated further and considered at the next meeting.