

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON THURSDAY 11TH JANUARY 2007 IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, SUNDERLAND CIVIC CENTRE

The following members of the Forum were present: -

Mrs Y Gray (Headteacher Rep. – Church of England Primary) – Chair of Forum
Mrs T Bevan (Headteacher Rep. – Junior)
Mr H Brown (Governor Rep. - Secondary)
Mrs D Butler (Governor Rep. - Secondary)
Mr J Clarke (Governor Rep. Secondary)
Mrs S Collingwood (Headteacher Rep. – Infant)
Mrs D Elliott (Governor Rep. - Special)
Mr M Foster (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Mr J Hallworth (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Mrs T Hambleton (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Hetton/Houghton)
Mr M Hartnack (Governor Rep. - Primary)
Mrs A Hodgson (Headteacher Rep. – Community Primary Sunderland South)
Mr A McCourt (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Roman Catholic))
Ms G McDonough (Non-schools Group – Voluntary sector)
Mr J. McKnight (Headteacher Rep. - Special)
Mrs J McLagan (Governor Rep. - Primary)
Mrs M D Mitchell (Non-schools Group – Pupil Referral Unit)
Mrs T Stoker (Headteacher Rep. (Community Primary Sunderland North))
Mr R Wilkinson (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Cllr L Williams (Non-schools Group – Early Years & Childcare Partnership)
Mrs S Wright (Headteacher Rep. – Community Primary Washington)
Dr E. Yeates (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Church of England))

Together with: -

Mr D May – Finance Manager
Mr J G Robinson – Governor Support Manager (Clerk to the Forum)
Ms V Thompson – Finance Service
Cllr Mrs P Smith – Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

07/01 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mr K Moore – Deputy Director of Children's Services
Mrs S. Hyland (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Foundation))
Mrs S Carter (Headteacher Rep. - Nursery)
Mr D Ambrose (Governor Rep. - Secondary)
Mr D Litchfield (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Mrs A Mackay (Headteacher Rep. – Roman Catholic Primary)
Mrs M Snaith (Governor Rep. – Primary)
Mr C Short (Governor Rep. - Primary)
Mr S White (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Post 16))

Action Points

07/02 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

07/03 Minutes of previous meeting held on 23rd November and 18th December 2006

The minutes were approved as a true record subject to the addition of Mr J Clarke's apologies for the November meeting.

07/04 Matters arising from the minutes

School Meals – The Consortium Board would be considering the Forum's request for information showing the number of children consuming school meals over a specified period.

Membership of the Forum (Teaching Unions) – The Clerk confirmed that this vacancy was still unfilled and that correspondence had been sent to Mike Johnson (NAS/UWT) to seek clarification of the trade unions' request for additional representation. Unfortunately, it was known that Mr Johnson was currently suffering ill health and Howard Brown (NUT) would be seeking to progress this matter. The question of the current vacancy would therefore continue to be held in abeyance.

Membership of the Forum (Nursery Governor) – The Governors Association and the Governor Support Team had still been unable to attract a nursery governor to join the Forum. Efforts would continue.

Membership of the Forum (Children's Trust) – The vacancy for a representative of the Children's Trust had been discussed again by the Board but no nominations had been made. Instead, it had been suggested that a 'minutes exchange' arrangement be entered into. Members of the Forum agreed that this was appropriate.

Workforce Remodelling training – A detailed report on workforce remodelling training was circulated at the meeting. Some members of the Forum believed that training course varied in usefulness and sometimes schools felt it was better to lead such training themselves. Schools often felt that they needed individualised training. Members discussed the implications of single status and acknowledged that the two did overlap. It was noted that there were some events not offered through the Local Authority. Members asked how Jim Cook was identifying and developing good practice, and also how impact of the training was being monitored. It was suggested that, at some point, an evaluation would be needed but the Chair replied that the appropriate forum to discuss this would be the SFMG. David May would feed comments back to Jim Cook as appropriate.

Standards Fund Monitoring Group – The Clerk confirmed that the membership of the SFMG was nearly complete. The first meeting of the reconstituted SFMG would take place on 1st February 2007. Feedback would be given at the next meeting of the Schools Forum.

07/05 Children's Services Structure Update

There was little additional information to impart regarding the new structure. The next phase of realignment was now ongoing. More detail would be provided at a subsequent meeting.

Action Points

Consortium Board to meet to consider question of no. of meals being consumed

Vacancy for teacher union rep. held in abeyance. H Brown to attempt to progress

Nursery Governor place still to be filled

Children's Trust Board still to make nomination. Instead, a minutes exchange would be organised.

David May to feed back comments received at the meeting re. workforce remodelling training to Jim Cook

07/06 **BSF/Academies**

Work was ongoing to ensure that the project met the approaching deadlines. Richard Wilkinson noted that the rules of engagement with BSF changed from time to time. One example of this was in relation to ICT but would apply equally to other areas of managed services. Concerns existed about the possibility of centrally managed services (i.e. where a contractor was engaged) being compulsory under the terms of BSF as this was not conducive to the autonomy of schools. It was not clear whether schools or the Authority had a choice over aspects of this. John Hallworth reminded members that BSF in Sunderland would be implemented in two phases and, although only phase one schools were affected at present, the discussion was taking place amongst all secondary Headteachers. Linda Williams highlighted the importance of ensuring that the City's school system was not fragmented as a result of Academies and BSF.

07/07 **Indicative Budget Position 2007/08**

A report informing members of the indicative budget position on Schools Block and Non-Schools Block Budgets for 2007/2008 had been circulated in advance. The report also gave an update on Standards Fund Grants for 2007/08.

David May highlighted the ongoing cost of redundancies of school based staff. He made it clear that, out of a budget of £1.5 million, £1,1 million was taken up by past redundancy costs. David highlighted that the regulations allowed redundancy costs to be scored against schools block other budget and hence against the Dedicated School Grant (DSG). Use of this flexibility in the current year would create a budget of £1.2 million. This would allow provision to be made for the Local Authority to assist schools in managing falling rolls.

Members of the Forum discussed the potential of redundancies (both centrally employed and school based) surrounding EiC funded projects and other initiatives where grant funding would cease in 2008. David May informed members that a piece of work was underway to identify all posts dependent upon grant funding ending on 31st March 2008. This report would focus on all children services staff and would be presented to Children Services Leadership Team to assist the budget planning framework. Members of the Forum questioned what exit strategies were being considered to deal with this scenario. David confirmed that his report would address exit strategies that already existed and where they needed to be developed. He added that the Finance and HR teams were already working closely together to deal with the impact of these funding changes at an individual school level. In reply to questions, David confirmed that the use of surplus monies in the school's main budget would be considered where redundancies were being proposed by the school, although there were certain aspects that could be legitimately excluded from such considerations.

The Chair questioned what would be the alternative if the Forum did not approve the change allowing part of the DSG to be used to support redundancy costs. David responded that, in these circumstances, the redundancy costs would need to be re-examined and one option was to make the individual school making redundancies responsible for such costs. This, however, would compound the problem for the school in question.

David May to produce report by March 2007 showing possible impact of cessation of grant funding in 2008

The proposal was that a sum of £500,000 be made available from the DSG to support the ongoing redundancy costs and the Chair asked whether this would be sufficient to meet the demands upon this funding. David May confirmed that this would not allow a great deal of flexibility but he estimated that it would be enough for 2007/08. The department was also looking to create more capacity in the HR team to help to manage this. One development was to establish a redeployment policy that all schools could sign up to and be the first port of call when looking to recruit staff. The Chair stressed, however, that any such transfer of surplus staff needed to be carefully negotiated with the governors of the receiving school.

Trish Stoker commented that some primary schools were now finding it very difficult to deliver the full curriculum due to lack of capacity and she asked whether the Authority could consider more creative uses of redundant staff to support schools in this situation.

Richard Wilkinson highlighted the changing skills demands in secondary schools because of the vocational curriculum. He therefore stressed that any redeployment proposals needed to recognise this.

David May was asked to clarify responsibility of redundancy costs in respect of Academies. He confirmed that the Governing Body would be responsible in these schools. John Hallworth emphasised the importance of working with these schools in view of the collaborative model chosen for the City.

Another proposal presented in the report was in relation to the Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS) and monitoring of DSG, which would require additional support from both the Finance Service and Internal Audit. In order to provide appropriate support to schools, it was proposed to use £55,000 of DSG monies to provide this support. Dorothy Mitchell asked for more detail over how the £55,000 would be used if this proposal were approved. David highlighted the additional demands placed upon the Finance Team as a result of FMSiS and monitoring DSG. There would also be the need for increased frequency of audit inspections. Because these directly benefited schools, David felt that it was appropriate to deduct the required additional amount from DSG. Dorothy Mitchell responded that, whilst this was only a comparatively small amount of money, she was unconvinced that the principle of deducting monies from the DSG was correct. Richard Wilkinson answered that the service that was being offered by internal audit was cost-effective and would benefit schools. FMSiS needed to be validated and he stressed that this was cheaper than employing an external verifier. David May confirmed that all schools had agreed to use the Authority's Auditors as FMSiS verifiers in preference to an external provider. He added that Audit could not meet these new requirements with existing staffing levels.

Having discussed the Authority's proposals, members of the Schools Forum unanimously agreed to: -

- Note the report
- Support the establishment of a Redundancy provision of £500,000 to be funded from DSG.
- Support the reinstatement of the Contingency provision to a prudent level
- Approve the probable breaking of the Central Expenditure Limit as a result of these proposals

Forum supported the establishment of redundancy provision from DSG and related proposals presented by the Authority, and approved the probable breaking of the CEL.

- receive further reports throughout the budget process.

07/08 Schools Block Other Budget 2006/07

Members received a report from the Authority showing the position of the Schools Block Other Budget.

The Schools Forum were reminded that the Schools Block Other Budget was derived from Section 52 and formed the Directorate's element of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The introduction of the DSG necessitated increased monitoring of Schools Block Other Budgets. Current forecasts suggested that, a surplus in the region of £70,000 could arise on Schools Block Other Budgets in the current year. It was likely that the Non-DSG funded element of Directorate spend would have a corresponding overspend. This had arisen in the following areas:

- Targeted Support to Schools - £68,000. As yet no allocations had been made from this budget in year.
- Behaviour Support - £12,000. This had arisen within KS1 Behaviour Group due to staff slippage. The service had been maintained during this period, although recruitment had now taken place.
- Staff Costs Supply Cover - £15,000. The Authority funded the first three months of suspensions at schools. A higher than normal level of suspensions had resulted in this forecast overspend.
- Other miscellaneous underspends - £5,000.

David May explained that the Authority were seeking to use £70,000 surplus to support one-off costs arising from redundancy. He explained that the £68,000 'Targeted Support' monies was intended for schools in financial difficulties and had not been needed this year. Some Headteachers at the meeting expressed their surprise that such funding existed. Primary Headteachers felt that schools should be made aware that such funding was held and the criteria for distribution. David May noted the comments.

Having discussed the proposal, the Forum supported the proposal that any 2006/2007 underspend against Schools Block Other Budgets be used to fund redundancies costs incurred.

07/09 Implications of Dedicated Schools Grant and Financial Management Standard in Schools

A report from the Authority outlined the resources implications associated with the introduction of the Dedicated Schools Grant and Financial Management Standard in Schools. There had been discussion surrounding this item and the Authority's proposals under item 07/07. Following a vote, members of the Forum agreed by a majority to support the proposal for top slicing the DSG by £55,000 to establish posts in the accountancy and audit services to meet the requirements of the DSG and FMSiS.

07/10 Section 52 Benchmarking Tables 2006/2007

Section 52 was the main source of benchmarking data. Recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), Annual Performance Assessment (APA) and Value for Money (VfM) exercises had emphasised the importance of reviewing the data in order to ensure that there was a full understanding of the reasons for the comparative position and to provide an indication of where action could be taken to

Action Points

Forum supported use of 07/08 'schools block other budget' surplus in respect of redundancies

members of the Forum agreed by a majority to approve the proposal for top slicing the DSG by £55,000 to establish posts in the accountancy and audit services to meet the requirements of the DSG and FMSiS.

Action Points

improve the position. The Authority's report provided an initial evaluation to the 2006/2007 benchmarking tables, this would be reviewed in detail in the coming months, including reviewing trends over years and contacting other Local Authorities to understand major variations.

It was noted that, in the past, there had been discussion around the Authority's use of free meals eligibility criteria and deprivation factors. David indicated that a report would be made available for a future meeting of the Schools Forum in connection with this.

David May replied to questions regarding Private/Voluntary/Independent Fees for Education of Children Under 5. This had risen slightly from £57 per pupil in 2005/2006 to £59 per pupil in 2006/2007 as a result of the increased funding to provide for 38 weeks provision. Mr Hartnack asked what was the impact of these monies going out of the maintained sector and whether this represented good value. David May replied that the selection of such nursery places was a matter of parental choice and he reminded members that all such establishments were subject to OFSTED inspections. Linda Williams pointed out that there were comparatively few children in the private/voluntary/independent sector in the City. She added that the government encouraged Authorities to have a mixed market. Nevertheless, the Authority held the budget and would tackle any quality issues.

With regard to Child Protection, it was noted that overall spending was above average. The spend per pupil had increased slightly from 2005/2006 due to an increase in the element of the Inclusion and Attendance Team being charged here. David May was asked to bring more detailed information regarding spending in this area.

Dorothy Elliott drew attention to the changes affecting Home to School Transport. Depending on the outcome of current discussions, there could be significant changes in respect of SEN pupils, use of extended services etc. David May confirmed that work was ongoing within the Council to review transport expenditure.

By comparison with other Authorities it was indicated in the figures that Sunderland spent less on SEN. Val Thompson made it clear that this figure related to centrally retained expenditure and was lower because Sunderland had delegated the majority of its funding to schools. Because every Authority handled its SEN provision differently, there was no accurate comparator for spending between Authorities in this area.

With regard to SEN expenditure, Sally Collingwood asked how Headteachers' views could be sought now that the Education Service Forums had been dissolved. The Clerk explained that discussions regarding the future of Service Forums were ongoing within the Authority at present. However, there was clearly scope to discuss issues concerning funding at the LMS/LMSS Review Group. The Chair noted the perception of mainstream Headteachers was that there was a lack of clarity around SEN funding and this needed to be addressed.

Members of the Forum noted the report.

Information regarding free meals/deprivation criteria to be provided at a subsequent meeting

David May to bring details of spending on child protection to subsequent meeting

07/11 Review of Schools' Funding Formula 2008/2011

A report from the Authority informed members of the process and timescales for the review of the formula used to distribute delegated funding to schools for the multi-year budget period 2008/2011. This process would be undertaken by the LMS/LMSS Review Group established for this purpose and comprising of Headteachers and school governors. As there was a great deal to discuss with the move towards a three-year budget, a two-day residential conference of the LMS/LMSS Review Group would be needed in the summer but a preliminary meeting was likely to be needed before this.

Val Thompson urged representatives serving on the LMS/LMSS Review Group to commit to the process and make every effort to attend the meetings. There was some discussion around the possibility of additional governors serving on the LMS/LMSS Review Group. Yvonne Gray also wished to record her interest in serving on the LMS/LMSS Review Group in her capacity as Chair of the Schools Forum.

Sally Collingwood stressed the need for minutes of the LMS/LMSS Review Group to be produced and circulated to Headteachers. Val Thompson confirmed the officers of the Governor Support Team would be involved in this process for this reason.

07/12 Date and time of next meeting

A schedule of dates of the Schools Forum and Standards Fund Monitoring Group had been agreed as follows: -

<u>Schools Forum</u>	<u>SFMG</u>
15 th February 2007	1 st February 2007
22 nd March 2007	8 th March 2007
17 th May 2007	3 rd May 2007
5 th July 2007	21 st June 2007
27 th September 2007	13 th September 2007
29 th November 2007	15 th November 2007

The venue for future meetings of the Schools Forum was a matter for further consideration.

Further discussion to take place around membership of LMS/LMSS Review Group at next meeting of Forum

Venue of future Schools Forum meetings to be decided