

## CITY OF SUNDERLAND

### MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON TUESDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2005 AT SUNDERLAND CIVIC CENTRE

The following members of the Forum were present: -

Mrs Y Gray (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Sunderland South) – Chair of Forum  
Mr H Brown (Governor Rep. – Primary)  
Mrs S Carter (Headteacher Rep. – Nursery)  
Dr P Collins (Governor Rep. – Secondary)  
Mr A Falconer (Governor Rep. – Primary)  
Mr M. Foster (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)  
Mrs P Gibson (Governor Rep. – Secondary)  
Mrs J Hobbs (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Hetton/Houghton)  
Mr J Lishman (Governor Rep. – Primary)  
Mrs A Mackay (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Sunderland North)  
Mr J. McKnight (Headteacher Rep. – Special)  
Mr C Short (Governor Rep. – Primary)  
Dr E Yeates (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)

Together with: -

Mr T H Walsh – Acting Director of Education  
Mr J G Robinson – Governor Support Manager, Sunderland LEA  
Mrs G Wall – Head of Strategy & Performance

#### Action Points

#### **05/39 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllr P Smith – Portfolio Holder for Education  
Mr D Ambrose (Governor Rep. – Secondary)  
Mr J E Clarke (Governor Rep. – Secondary)  
Mrs D Elliott (Governor Rep. – Special)  
Mrs S. Collingwood – Early Years & Childcare Partnership  
Mr K McDermid (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)  
Mrs V Ingleton (Governor Rep. – Nursery)

#### **05/40 Minutes of previous meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2005**

The minutes were approved as a true record.

#### **05/41 Matters arising from the minutes**

There were no matters arising.

#### **05/42 Further Consultation on Building Schools for the Future, Academies and school re-organisation options**

The LEA had completed its first round of consultation meetings on Building Schools for the Future, Academies and re-

organisation options. Sunderland, unlike most other LEAs, then proceeded to consult at a second round of meetings with more refined proposals. Mr Walsh reminded the Forum that the focus of the consultation was to consider the falling pupil numbers in secondary schools around the City, the Building Schools for the Future programme and the possibility of City Academies.

Schools involved in the second wave of BSF would not benefit from refurbishment or renewal for several years. Mr Walsh reminded the Forum that the renewal of St Anthony's and St Aidan's RC schools was problematic as it was difficult to identify suitable sites.

Phase one of BSF had already started with Oxclose School benefiting from 'Quick Wins' funding. The work on this school was likely to be completed in 14 months. In the Washington area there would be three refurbishments and one new build. The LEA would probably seek to offer this as a package in the hope that it would not attract a PFI bidder. By limiting the involvement of PFI partners, this helped to minimise the 'funding gap' referred to at phase one. Mr Walsh also reminded the Forum that the establishment of Academies would also help to address the funding gap.

Howard Brown argued that the funding gap was not narrowed by the development of academies because, at phase two, there would be a reduced number of schools to share the PFI costs. Therefore the cost per school was greater, particularly at phase two. Dr Collins pointed out the LEA figures had not been calculated on this basis. Mr Walsh replied that it would depend where the Academies were established but he confirmed that having academies would narrow the funding gap.

Howard Brown expressed the view that phase two of BSF was unlikely to happen. Mr Walsh replied that it was government policy.

The responses to phase one consultation were outlined: -

- A large majority of respondents had answered yes to the question of whether the Council should proceed with the BSF programme
- A large number of respondents had answered that BSF should not link to the academies programme, although there had been support from a number of respondents
- The majority of respondents preferred the Sunderland Academy model to the 'government' model.
- Just over half of respondents answered that the Council should look at reorganisation in Sunderland North

Members of the Forum were informed that the Authority was pursuing academies based on the Sunderland model.

With regard to the proposals for the Washington area, Howard Brown pointed out that consultees had previously been told that there were only two ways of getting new schools: PFI or Academies. He therefore questioned where the third way had come from. Mr Walsh explained that there was always a possibility of traditional funding for new builds but he could still not be sure that this was possible. BSF represented the whole programme and included PFI. He added that it would be very difficult at phase two to construct a building package that did not attract a PFI bidder. Mr Brown asked for confirmation that it was still possible to build a new school using traditional funding methods. Mr Walsh explained that there were different types of builder; some would be attracted by a PFI contract and some would be attracted to the Washington package.

Mr Brown asked whether the non-PFI school could be moved to another part of the City instead of Washington. Mr Walsh answered that this was not really possible. The demography of Washington meant that redevelopment was needed and this was the area where action would be taken.

In Sunderland West, Sandhill View would remain at around 900 pupils but would have vocational facilities. The Pennywell development would mean that Pennywell, Quarry View Primary and Barbara Priestman School would be replaced by one all-age school (4-16) with appropriate specialist facilities. This would either be a PFI school or a City Academy. At present the funding implications were being investigated with the government as neither PFI or academy funding was normally applicable to primary schools. Mr Brown questioned how a 4-16 school could take on Barbara Priestman pupils who were up to 19 years of age. He questioned whether this conflicted with equal opportunities. Mr Walsh explained that not all post-16 pupils at Barbara Priestman were studying sixth-form work. Mr Brown believed that this needed to be carefully considered. Mr Walsh confirmed that the LEA would be discussing this with the DfES.

Yvonne Gray asked why this all-age campus was only being considered at Pennywell. Mr Walsh replied that the idea had been considered for Hylton Red House but there had been no interest expressed in the idea.

Mr Short asked for clarification of the projected numbers for the Pennywell development. Mr Walsh explained the whole new school would accommodate approximately 920 pupils although it could not be assumed that there would be a 100% transfer to the new school from key stage two.

In Sunderland North, members were reminded of the urgent need to address falling rolls. Details were given of primary-secondary pupil transfer rates at Hylton Red House at Hylton Red House and Castle View Schools. Only around 80% of pupils from feeder primary schools chose to transfer to Hylton

Red House. Castle View was close to 100% transfer. Castle View would remain a viable school despite its falling numbers. Monkwearmouth had falling numbers but did not fall to anywhere near the level where it would become unviable.

The proposals for Sunderland North were that Hylton Red House and Castle View Schools were replaced with a 'federated' school on two sites. The reasons for federation were outlined. Hylton Red House was the school most at risk but served a large catchment area. It was expected that there would be an improvement in standards at both schools. Hylton Red House could not be a specialist school with current levels of attainment but, if it became an academy, it would become a school with a specialism. If Hylton Red House had been close, it was feared that this would discourage local youngsters from attending school. There was strong support in the Council for maintaining provision on the Hylton Red House site. Mike Foster supported the aim of protecting communities but asked whether there was any possibility of pupils transferring to Monkwearmouth. Mr Walsh replied that this was a possibility but it was important to get numbers right at Monkwearmouth and improve standards at the new school. Monkwearmouth was aware of the need to address its own standards and was conscious of nearby developments in South Tyneside. Mr Walsh confirmed that the closure of Hylton Red House had been considered but this would have raised issues for Castle View and Monkwearmouth.

Colin Short felt that the LEA had made the right decision in protecting the Hylton Red House Community. He believed this also allowed for future expansion. He expressed the view that it was unfortunate that the LEA had not taken the same view in the early 1980's when Ryhope School had been closed.

Yvonne Gray recognised that there were opportunities presented by the federation of Castle View and Hylton Red House. Ann Mackay believed that the LEA was right to retain Hylton Red House provision. She commented that parents did resist placement at Hylton Red House but could be persuaded by the new school.

Mr Brown recalled that in the initial proposals there was a suggestion that TUPE conditions would apply if schools became academies. He therefore questioned the impact upon staff under the revised proposals. Mr Walsh explained that there were many issues that needed to be carefully considered. Normally with a new school, a Temporary Governing Body would be established and they would take decisions on staffing. Existing staff would normally have an opportunity to apply for a position at the new school but it was a Governing Body decision. Mr Brown felt that the answers had been more specific at the first round of consultation. Mr Walsh was confident that the governors of the two schools would manage

this situation and that quite a lot of current structures would be needed on both sites.

Mr Brown asked whether there was any chance of a new build under BSF but not through the academy or PFI route. Mr Walsh answered that this was unlikely, as the package would certainly attract a PFI bidder. Mr Brown calculated that the value of the Castle View/Hylton Red House package would be similar to the Washington building/refurbishment package. Mr Walsh explained that because refurbishment was included in the Washington package, this would be less attractive to PFI bidders.

In the first round of consultation, all respondents were being invited to comment on the need for Sunderland North re-organisation. In this second round, only Sunderland North was being asked about the proposals affecting this area.

The timetable for consultation was outlined. At the end of the process, the School Organisation Committee would be considering proposals but the DfES would decide the issues surrounding academies. The DfES would want a feasibility study which would take several months. It would take two years to establish the new schools including planning, tendering procedures etc. The target date was September 2008.

John McKnight noted that there was a great deal of detail in the presentation about the Castle View/Hylton Red House development but relatively little detail about the Pennywell changes. In response, Mr Walsh confirmed that this development was also planned to be effective from September 2008.

Yvonne Gray questioned Mr Walsh about the Sunderland model of academy. She asked him to confirm that in the event that the DfES refused to allow the Sunderland model, the City would refuse to proceed with academies (as this message had been given by Harry O'Neill at a briefing session for governors). Mr Walsh replied that this had already been made clear to the DfES and that, if the outcome was that the national model was imposed, the Council would resist. However, the DfES could still ultimately impose the academies. In these circumstances, the LEA would need to re-consider many aspects of what had been consulted upon. Using government criteria, probably only Hylton Red House fitted exactly the government's definition of a school that should become an academy. Dr Collins pointed out that the government was determined to have 200 academies and therefore Hylton Red House looked vulnerable. Mr Walsh agreed that this school was vulnerable but pointed out that the new main emphasis was on schools that were failing. Sunderland did not have any failing schools although the new

inspection regime could reveal issues in any school. Mike Foster commented that the Sunderland model would help the government to achieve its target of 200 academies.

Colin Short remarked that the SOC was an important body and he questioned where it fitted with academies. Mr Walsh was unable to give a definitive answer but this would be clarified in the event that the DfES turned down the Sunderland model.

Howard Brown asked for further clarification of the proposals that would be presented to SOC. Mr Walsh confirmed that SOC would need to approve school reorganisation proposals but there were different levels of decision making in relation to academies. SOC would, for example, need to approve the closure of Barbara Priestman, Pennywell and Quarry View Primary. This was a complex picture but ultimately the problems of poor buildings, falling numbers and inclusion could all be tackled by the development at Pennywell.

Mr Brown noted that academies could apply different terms and conditions for their staff. He asked whether agreements such as single status would affect academies. Mr Walsh replied that, with the Sunderland model, teachers would be registered with the GTC and adhere to local terms and conditions. With the national model, the situation was unclear. Dr Collins commented that, even at a national level, there were now moves to require academies to register teachers with the GTC.

Mr Walsh concluded his presentation by explaining how to respond to the consultation exercise. He then withdrew from the meeting.

Members of the Forum proceeded to discuss the matters arising from the presentation. They debated the implications of PFI funded new schools and believed that this method of funding was storing up trouble for the future.

The view was also expressed that there appeared to be little option with academies. Members discussed the likelihood of being allowed to run the Sunderland model of academy. It was pointed out that, even under the Sunderland model, the Authority was still surrendering control of two or three maintained schools. It was recognised, however, that at least if the Sunderland model was allowed, there was some possibility of co-operation in terms of admissions, exclusions etc and the co-sponsors were likely to be education-friendly. Nevertheless, there were doubts that the government would accept the conditions attached to the Sunderland model.

There were doubts that phase two of BSF would ever happen. It was suggested that Sunderland should simply resist any moves to have academies (like South Tyneside had done).

Furthermore, because of the level of unknown costs it was difficult for the Forum to comment upon the matter.

It was commented that what was actually under consideration was the likely demise of the LEA. It was feared that any promises made by the government would simply be broken.

One member commented that the government's policy was to make the 'best schools' accessible to parents and give them more choice. It was, however, pointed out by other members that it was not possible to define what constituted the 'best schools'.

Having discussed the issues of Academies, Building Schools for the Future and funding issues, members of the Forum found themselves in an invidious position. The Forum did not consider any of the options to be palatable and was therefore unable to give a collective view on the proposals as presented to them.

The decision of the Forum would be communicated to the LEA. Members of the Forum were encouraged to also respond individually to the consultation.

**05/43 Feedback from recent DfES 'School and Local Authority Funding Implementation Conference'**

Copies of a DfES Good Practice Guide for Schools Forums had been circulated with the agenda papers. The Chair had attended a DfES conference which she had found useful. Gill Wall indicated that Sandra Mitchell was producing a summary of the action points that needed to be taken forward. This could be considered at the next meeting of the Forum. The Chair was pleased to report that Sunderland Schools Forum was already operating many of the points of good practice referred to in the DfES document.

Section 52 financial figures were available on the internet. Mr Lishman was unhappy that this data had not been published in the same way as in previous years

Although it was not related to this agenda item, reference was made to the Chair of the Forum's letter to schools and Chairs of Governors drawing attention to the increasing surpluses in schools. On behalf of the Special Heads Group, John McKnight reported that there had been concerns about the tone of the letter. One special school Headteacher did not understand why it was important to avoid excessive surpluses. Indeed, it was pointed out that schools were being recommended to have some surplus to cope with the financial implications of workforce reform. Responding to this, Mike Foster indicated that there had been no issues raised by secondary Headteachers about the letter. Yvonne Gray commented that she had received positive responses to the letter with only one special school Headteacher raising concerns (the same Headteacher as

**Action Points**

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Forum to consider summary of action points at next meeting

previously mentioned). Colin Short felt that it had been inappropriate that the letter had been sent on St Paul's C.E. Primary School letterhead.

With regard to surpluses, it was noted that the Forum had requested progress updates on those schools that were given authorisation to operate licensed surpluses. The Forum requested that an updated position be given at a subsequent meeting.

**Action Points**

Forum asked for updates on those schools who had been given authority to operate with licensed surplus

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
Mrs Y. Gray  
Chair of Schools Forum

Administered on behalf of the Schools Forum by:



**Sunderland  
City Council**

Education Governor Support Team