

CITY OF SUNDERLAND

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON TUESDAY 13TH SEPTEMBER 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 D Ambrose (Governor Rep. – Secondary)
Mr H Brown (Governor Rep. – Primary)
Mr J E Clarke (Governor Rep. – Secondary)
Mrs D Elliott (Governor Rep. – Special)
Mr M. Foster (Headteacher 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)

Together with: -

Mr T H Walsh – Acting Director of Education
Mr J Magog – Acting Finance Manager
Mrs V Thompson – Financial Controller
Mr J G Robinson – Governor Support Manager, Sunderland LEA
Mrs G Wall – Head of Strategy & Performance
Mrs S Mitchell – Project Development Manager, LEA

Prior to commencement of the meeting the Acting Director of Education explained the success in pupil attainment achieved by Sunderland in this year's results. The Forum was pleased to note this success. Attendance rates had also improved, particularly in primary schools, and exclusion rates were continuing to fall. Members of the Forum attributed this success to the hard work of children, schools and LEA staff.

Action Points

05/36 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllr P Smith – Portfolio Holder for Education
Dr P Collins (Governor Rep. – Secondary)
Mr A Falconer (Governor Rep. – Primary)
Mr K McDermid (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)
Mrs S Carter (Headteacher Rep. – Nursery)
Mrs V Ingleton (Governor Rep. – Nursery)
Mr J. Busfield (Headteacher Rep. – Primary)

05/37 Consultation on Building Schools for the Future, Academies and school re-organisation options

Mr Walsh began by making it clear that the purpose of the meeting was to seek the Forum's views. He drew attention to

the various ways in which individuals could respond to the consultation exercise.

The presentation to the Forum was not just about academies. The most important issue was secondary school rolls and how the building schools for the future programme should be implemented. All secondary schools were to be renewed or refurbished by 2015-2017. In phase one the bid was for £95 million (likely to increase) and the first major project was Oxclose Community School. There were also developments at Sandhill View and Biddick which would create new construction centres to promote vocational learning opportunities for pupils of all schools. This project demonstrated partnership in action.

One of the options referred to in the consultation paper was the possibility of an all-age campus replacing Pennywell and Quarry View Primary Schools, with Barbara Priestman School on the same site.

The second phase of BSF was £130 million. The estimated cost of works currently required in secondary schools was £30 million. This sum did not exist to enable works to be undertaken.

PFI was the funding vehicle for new schools. Mr Walsh explained how under this arrangement the building was funded by private finance and the building leased back to the LEA. Under this arrangement the PFI contractor provided facilities management. The cost of this PFI arrangement meant that there was a funding gap, which was estimated at around £500 per pupil per year for 25 years. This equated to approximately £173,000 per school for a typical seven-form-entry school. Under PFI, the leasing back arrangement would not end until around 2040. The funding gap was therefore a long-term issue at both national and local level. There were no monies available to the Authority to cover this funding gap.

Mr Walsh proceeded to outline the government's vision for City Academies. He stressed that Sunderland did not need new additional school establishments, as this would exacerbate the problem of surplus capacity. With academies the sponsor had a major influence on how the school was run and would have places on the Governing Body. The Governing Body of an Academy was very different to the Governing Body of a maintained school. Academies were independent schools funded mainly by the government. Academies made their own arrangements for admission of pupils, exclusions policy, post-16 provision etc. However, the establishment of academies would help to narrow the funding gap.

The Sunderland Model of Academy was, like the government's, intended to raise standards where results fell below a certain

level. An academy under the government's model or the Sunderland model would need to have a specialism. Under the Sunderland model, the City Council would be a co-sponsor and the Council was already in discussion with potential sponsors but Mr Walsh was not able to reveal their identity at present. All potential sponsors had agreed to sign up to the Council's policies on sixth form provision, admissions, SEN provision, exclusions policy etc. It was intended that the Sunderland model of Academy would work with other partners. If two or three Academies were to be established, the Council would procure these as a package.

Under the Sunderland model of Academy, there would be an Education leadership Board. This would be an advisory body for academies and all maintained secondary schools.

Secondary pupil numbers were expected to drop from 18,618 to 14,000 in 2016/17. There would therefore be a reduction of 20% in 8-9 years. In the past, the LEA and schools in Sunderland had managed falling rolls very successfully. Planning needed to ensure the right number of places in the right geographical locations. Figures shown at the meeting illustrated the gap between school capacity and pupil numbers. The Washington gap was smallest because of the impending closure of Usworth School.

Mr Walsh did not now consider an Academy at Washington to be feasible as the results of Washington School did not warrant its replacement with an Academy.

Numbers were falling rapidly at Pennywell School but results were improving and this factor could help pupil numbers. If Pennywell were to be closed, this would create another set of complex issues for the pupils in the area.

Sunderland north had real problems with falling rolls. Monkwearmouth School was stable and likely to remain in this position. Hylton Red House School was, however, suffering a significant fall in pupil numbers and projections were that it could decline to 500-600 pupils. The options in Sunderland North were: -

- to retain all three secondary schools with smaller capacities
- close Hylton Red House and increase capacity at Monkwearmouth and Castle View
- Amalgamation of Hylton Red House/Castle View as a new school on the same site or as a federated school with the two existing buildings. This would either be a PFI school or a new Academy

Those schools involved in phase 2 of BSF were highlighted. There was a problem in identifying suitable sites for the re-building of St. Anthony's RC School and St Aidan's RC School.

The Coalfields area also showed a substantial fall in pupil numbers but figures did not reflect the extra-district pupils from the Durham LEA area that were attracted to Hetton School.

Mr Walsh outlined the timescale for consultation. The second round of meetings was to consult on more refined proposals. After being presented to Cabinet there would need to be statutory consultation and then the School Organisation Committee would be the decision making body. It was possible that the DfES could impose their own model of academy rather than the Sunderland model.

Doug Ambrose asked for clarification of the SOC decision making process and whether they would take notice of responses given by consultees. Mr Walsh answered that it was the LEA who would take note of the responses received and this would determine the proposals presented to SOC.

John McKnight asked where the £1 million contribution would come from for each academy that the Council would co-sponsor. He also asked when it would be revealed who the other sponsors were. Mr Walsh answered that the £1 million would be found from capital receipts. When school land was disposed of the Council allowed this money to be reserved for education use. This was capital money, not revenue and would be a one-off investment. With regard to sponsors, this was being kept confidential at present but when all of the agreements and sponsors had been approved by the DfES, and then the sponsors could be revealed. Mr Walsh assured the Forum that all of the potential sponsors were Sunderland based or had connections to Sunderland. The LEA was working to ensure that the 14-19 sector was protected, there would be no competition on pupil admissions etc. The LEA was working towards a legal contract.

Howard Brown questioned whether it had already been stated that sponsors would be revealed on 17th November. Mr Walsh replied that this was the expected date for government approval but was not guaranteed. If the government did not approve the proposals by then, the sponsors would not be revealed.

Dorothy Elliott asked about the role of the Education Leadership Board and whether this would introduce another tier of governance. Mr Walsh answered that the Leadership Board would be an advisory body and there would be mechanisms to ensure that the vocational, private and voluntary sectors had a voice on this Forum. It was hoped that the board would be led by a significant figure locally.

Mrs Elliott felt that the Sunderland model of academy was better than the national model but she questioned what guarantees could be given in view of the government's determination that academies should be independent. Mr Walsh replied that there

were no guarantees at this stage. The LEA would go back to the government and highlight the extent of consultation that had taken place. If the government did not want to follow the Sunderland model and imposed their own, the LEA would urge the DfES to consult widely themselves.

Howard Brown expressed the view that all of the wave 2 schools were being sacrificed for the two or three academies. Mr Walsh explained the problems with PFI funding. The LEA had looked at need and prioritised which buildings needed most attention. Everyone would benefit but the questions for the consultation were about methods and funding.

Mike Foster asked when a response would be received from the DfES about acceptance of the Sunderland model. Mr Walsh replied that there was no meeting date planned yet but it was hoped that the model would be properly developed by half term when the Cabinet would consider it. After that the LEA would meet with the DfES to seek their views before the SOC met.

John Lishman asked for clarification of whether this funding gap would impact on just secondary schools or on all schools. Mr Walsh confirmed that only secondary schools paid for Sandhill View.

Howard Brown asked for further information regarding 'quick wins'. Sandra Mitchell confirmed that this was funded through a BSF grant. This was a direct grant. It was not known whether there would be any quick wins in phase two.

John McKnight asked for clarification about Capital Receipts and whether this was something that the Schools Forum should take a decision on. Mr Walsh answered that this was not something that required the decision of the Schools Forum. The Council already had the required amount of money but more was expected by the end of the financial year.

Howard Brown questioned how the LEA had decided which schools were included in phase one and which would be put back to phase two. Sandra Mitchell reiterated that this was entirely based on building requirements.

The response of the Schools Forum to the specific questions raised by the LEA's consultation was as follows: -

- (i) *in principle, do you agree or not agree that to provide the best quality secondary school education the council should proceed with the Building Schools for the Future programme?*

By a majority, members of the Forum did agree that the council should proceed with the BSF programme.

After a vote, Forum agreed that the Council should proceed with BSF

Howard Brown objected to this because the capital programme had been successful. He did not want to see the development of any PFI schools or Academies. Doug Ambrose added that the current system was providing the results that were needed without the conditions attached to PFI or Academies. However, Mike Foster pointed out that schools refurbished or improved under the BSF programme would not be PFI funded but, for new builds, this was the only way forward. John McKnight agreed that there were no alternatives and that BSF was the best of a number of bad options.

- (ii) *In principle, would you be in favour or not of linking the Building Schools for the Future programme with academies?*

By a majority the Forum agreed that they were not in favour of linking BSF with academies.

Forum agreed not in favour of linking BSF with Academies

- (iii) *If academies were to be built in Sunderland would you be in favour of: -*
- *the national model of academies?*
 - *the 'Sunderland Model' of academies?*

Mike Foster highlighted the success achieved through partnership working within Sunderland. Whichever model was chosen, he believed that it would have no bearing on the outcome. Mr Foster commented that the government could not be trusted on this issue and the best efforts of the LEA to use its own model would be overturned.

Howard Brown added that there should be more options given in the question. He pointed out that the Governing Body of an Academy could sell off land, change staff conditions of service, employ unqualified teachers etc. **In the light of the Forum's answer to the previous question it was agreed that the Forum was not in favour of either of the two options given in this question.**

Forum was not in favour of either of the two options re. Academies given in the LEA's consultation document

- (iv) *Are you in favour or not of re-organisation in Sunderland North? This question refers to the fact that pupil numbers are falling across Sunderland and in particular the position in Sunderland North (Castle View and Hylton Red House Schools)*

It was recognised that there was no alternative but to agree to some form of re-organisation in Sunderland North. This was necessary rather than desirable.

Forum agreed some form of re-organisation was necessary in Sunderland North

Howard Brown was unsure of exactly what this question meant. Sandra Mitchell confirmed that there would be more detailed proposals in the next round of consultation.

Howard acknowledged the excellent record of Sunderland LEA in re-organisation of school provision in the past but he questioned whether there was more to this question than at first appeared. Sandra replied that re-organisation was set in the context of the City.

Colin Short commented that many demographic projections did not take account of the stability of the population in a housing estate. Because residents tended to stay for a long time, younger people eventually took places and numbers of children in these areas could therefore grow in the future and demand for local school places could change. It was important to leave room for growth.

John Lishman agreed that the Sunderland North situation needed to be tackled but he questioned why, on the basis of statistics presented at the meeting, there were no proposals for the Coalfields area of the City. Sandra Mitchell replied that extra-district pupils from Durham LEA were not shown in the projected figures for the Coalfields area. However, under BSF these two schools were likely to be re-built as smaller schools.

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

There would be a further meeting of the Schools Forum at 9.00 a.m. on Tuesday 11th October 2005 as part of the second round of consultation on this issue.

05/38 **Consultation on a modified method of distributing the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2006-07 and 2007-08**

At this point the meeting became inquorate as Yvonne Gray and Dorothy Elliott withdrew. Mike Foster took over a Chair and the meeting proceeded on an informal basis. Sandra Mitchell also withdrew.

James Magog introduced himself to the Forum. He tabled information which summarised the consultation on school funding changes. The proposals related to Ring-fenced Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), Standards Fund Grants and Schools Financial Management. The changes would also affect the way that Schools Forums were constituted and how they operated.

The Forum considered whether a response was appropriate.

It was pointed out that the Schools Forum spent a great deal of time ensuring that the formula met local needs. Therefore Sunderland had some good practice which it could share with other areas.

Action Points

Forum's response to the BSF/Academies consultation would be forwarded to the LEA

Forum to meet again on 11th October to consider second round of consultation

It was felt that there was insufficient detail known about the Standards Fund Grant. Schools needed to know how much they could expect to receive from standards fund, as it was clear that schools could not operate without this funding.

The Forum questioned what criteria would be used for spending of Standards Fund monies in the future. James Magog did not believe that there would be any new restrictions.

Signed _____

Mrs Y. Gray
Chair of Schools Forum

Produced by:
City of
SUNDERLAND

Education Directorate
Governor Support Team