

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS FUND MONITORING GROUP
HELD ON THURSDAY 15TH NOVEMBER 2007 AT PORTLAND SCHOOL**

Members of the SFMG present were: -

Mrs J Chart (Headteacher Rep. – Special) - Chair
Mrs D Elliott (Governor Rep. – Special)
Mrs Y Gray (Chair of Schools Forum)
Mrs S Hyland (Secondary Headteacher)
Mrs M Johnson (Headteacher Rep. – Community Primary Washington)
Mrs J Lowther (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Sunderland North)
Mr T Walker (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Hetton/Houghton)
Dr E Yeates (Secondary Headteacher)

Together with: -

David Alexander – Principal Finance officer
Lynda Brown – Head of Standards
Gary Robinson – Governor Support Manager

Action Points

MG07/43 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mrs M Brabban (Headteacher Rep. – Nursery)
Mrs D Butler (Governor Rep. – Secondary)
Mrs K Elliott (Headteacher Rep. – Special)
David May – Finance Manager

MG07/44 Minutes of previous meeting held on 13th November 2007

The minutes were approved as a true record.

MG07/45 Matters arising from the minutes

Grant 101a (Special Educational Needs) - Lynda Brown reiterated that the monies that the SFMG and Schools Forum had assigned to Farringdon School for ASD provision was for the benefit of the whole City and was not intended to benefit Farringdon School individually. Lynda explained how the process had developed. Funding had been spent on refurbishment of the area where this was accommodated and also on the development of the provision within the school. It was made clear that all secondary schools had been offered the opportunity to accommodate this. Equipping the provision was a one-off cost and was being funded by the Local Authority, as it was a City-wide strategy. In response to questions, Lynda confirmed that the referral of children was through the assessment/statementing process. Secondary Headteachers had been consulted about these arrangements.

School Development Grant – At their last meeting the SFMG had agreed to recommend to Schools Forum that additional School Development Grant be allocated on the basis of September 2007 pupil numbers (not January 07 PLASC). The Schools Forum had approved this recommendation.

Nursery free meals – The question raised at the last meeting had been referred to the Schools Forum. It was now clear that nursery pupils could be entitled/eligible for free meals if they received education before and after lunch. However, the Local Authority did not receive top level funding for this provision as they were not statutory school age, and this could prove potentially costly. There had been a development, however, which would enable schools to meet the cost of this provision from 3-4 year old flexible pathfinder monies. It was made clear that this would be for one year only as an interim measure. There remained questions, however, about how this could be sustained. Linked to this, the method of ensuring accountability in the use of early years funding was still open to debate.

Building Schools for the Future (BSF) – Members of the SFMG had requested a detailed analysis of what the grant of £7,805,000 would be spent on. Authority officers informed members that this was allocated as follows: -

Sandhill View ICT - £1,177,000
 Washington - £776,000
 Oxclose ICT - £1,369,000
 Castle View Academy - £925,000
 Pennywell Academy - £3,556,000

The above figures had been circulated with agenda papers and Dorothy Butler (who was not present) had asked that a more detailed breakdown of how these funds were actually to be spent be provided to the SFMG. Dr Yeates supported this request. The Chair questioned whether the SFMG needed this level of detail and Lynda Brown felt it was important to avoid the SFMG monitoring detail that was monitored elsewhere. Dorothy Elliott expressed the view that more detail than just the bare figures was needed and Dr Yeates believed that this was necessary to enable the SFMG to report effectively to the Schools Forum. Lynda Brown noted these comments but members needed to understand the context of the spending plans. She confirmed that a BSF monitoring group did exist and she would supply details of these governance arrangements. The Chair concluded that the SFMG needed the right balance of detail and challenge. David Alexander would therefore provide an outturn of capital expenditure.

SFMG would be given details of BSF governance arrangements

D Alexander to provide further details of BSF capital expenditure

MG07/46 Standards Fund Report 2006/07

Very detailed information was supplied in relation to the 2006/07-outturn position along with individual grant reports from budget holders.

Members proceeded to consider these submissions from grant holders. It was noted that the Computers for Schools (Grants 125 and 210) had not been spent. An extension had been granted by the DCSF to allow expenditure to be made up until 31st December 2007 as the difficulties associated with this grant were recognised. David Alexander was confident that this would be resolved by December. It was explained that an order could not be placed for the equipment until names of

pupils had been received from secondary schools. There were still two schools that had not submitted their responses. Secondary Headteacher representatives asked how soon pupils would get their computers when this had been finalised. Lynda Brown responded that information would be e-mailed to secondary schools.

Another grant where there was an underspend was in respect of e-learning credits. In the current year there had been £5,000 identified for Private Nursery settings but there had been no take-up. This was being reviewed and, if it was judged that take-up was unlikely, it was proposed that balances would be added to the amounts to be devolved to schools and issued before the financial year-end. The Chair felt that it was unfortunate that these resources were not being taken up by the PVI settings when schools could have used the money. Yvonne Gray asked for clarification of why this public money was being given to the PVI settings. David Alexander explained that the Authority acted as a banker. Dorothy Elliott asked whether the PVI settings could be given a deadline by which to respond, and it be made clear to them that the money would be redistributed to the maintained sector if unclaimed. David Alexander answered that this was a valid suggestion and he would discuss this possibility with Early Years colleagues.

Members discussed the other individual reports provided by budget holders. Overall the quality of information provided to the SFMG was commended and represented an improvement over the information supplied by budget holders previously. Some of the commentaries were helpful in understanding the impact that the funding provided.

MG07/47 Standards Fund Report 2007/08

Centrally retained

A report was provided which appraised members of the current grant position for 2007/2008. An appendix to the report showed all grants notified to date, and identified amounts to be devolved to schools, by means of formulae, either stipulated by the DCFS or recommended by the Standards Fund Monitoring Group to the Schools Forum. Revised Spending Plans are enclosed in respect of: -

- 101h Sustainable Modes of Travel to School
- 107 Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP) Targeted Support for Primary Strategy
- 108 Targeted Support for Secondary Strategy: Additional
- 112 Primary National Strategy
- 203 Targeted Capital Fund
- 302 Flexible Funding to support 14-19 Partnerships
- 305 Extended Rights to Free Travel

The LA had been advised of the following changes to grants since the last meeting: -

- 101 School Development Grant - this grant had been increased by £35,000, to reflect and be devolved to Portland school, designated as an SEN Specialist school from 1st September 2007.
- 105b School Meals Grant - this grant had been reduced by £1,234, from the DCFS estimated figure
- 115 School Improvement Partners - this grant had been reduced by £1,729 due to an error by the DCSF in calculating the CPO element of the grant

Action Points

Secondary schools would be notified of arrangements for Computers for Schools

D Alexander to discuss with Early Years the possibility of giving PVI settings a deadline for taking up e-learning credits

203 Specialist Schools Capital- this is a new grant of £100,000 in respect of Portland School

Spending Plans were in place for grants, and financial information to the end of October (Period 7) had been circulated to members with agenda papers and, where appropriate, grant holders had been requested to submit a re-profiled budget.

Advanced Skills Teachers

The LA had an agreed target of 35 Advanced Skills Teacher posts, and funding for them by an agreed formulae, was devolved to schools, and formed part of the School Development Grant.

The School Improvement Officer with responsibility for this area had advised changes within schools from the commencement of the autumn term, and the relevant funding had been transferred, however, 3.5 posts remained unfilled. It was the intention to re-advertise, but the outcome would not be known until later in the term. The result was there was potentially £35,081 of savings, which if not used for AST appointments, must be passported to schools. At the September meeting of the Standards Fund Monitoring Grant, it was agreed to redistribute the then balance of School Development Grant of £116,307, by means of pupil numbers (PLASC Sept 07), and it was recommended for consistency, for any earmarked AST funding which remained after this AST recruitment exercise has taken place, be distributed in a similar manner. It was noted this allocation would not take place until January, as there could be potentially appointments up until Christmas, as this money was a "windfall", it would not be included in the guaranteed per pupil increase for 2008-2009. The Standards Fund Monitoring Group agreed to recommend to the Schools Forum, the method of allocating the balance of School Development grant remaining after suitable Advanced Skills Teachers had been appointed, be by pupil numbers in line with their previous decision on the SDG.

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Devolved to Schools

A breakdown showed the financial position of school budgets as at end of October 2007. It was noted that there were some schools that had spent very little or nothing from their 2007/08 allocation despite being half way through the financial period.

Members were reminded of their terms of reference in respect of centrally retained and devolved standards fund monies. The group debated whether it was appropriate for them to scrutinise how schools were using their delegated resources. The Chair expressed the view that the group did need to be aware of how schools were spending and, if necessary, to question the effective use of monies. Sue Hyland highlighted the autonomy of schools in using their delegated funding.

The SFMG discussed whether they had a remit to challenge schools over their deployment of Standards Fund monies, as there were other lines of accountability such as Audit, Finance Liaison Officers and OFSTED. It was noted that, although guidelines were given to schools on how to use delegated Standards Fund monies, this could not be enforced by the SFMG.

Dorothy Elliott proposed that this debate be had at Schools Forum level. Yvonne Gray (Chair of the Forum) agreed that this was appropriate but the Forum would need a lead from the group.

It was ultimately agreed that David Alexander, Lynda Brown and David May would look again at the Terms of Reference for the SFMG and bring back for further discussion at the next meeting.

Area Based Grant

David Alexander reported that the 2008/09 circular had just been published. He would provide a summary of changes at the next meeting of the SFMG.

As announced in the recent Comprehensive Spending Review, a number of grants previously channelled through the Local Area Agreement (LAA), and various other specific grants, would now come through a new Area Based Grant (ABG) with effect from April 2008. The Government believed this would reduce the reporting burden on authorities and allow greater flexibility in the use of funding. The ABG was different from the LAA as it was completely un-ring fenced and could be used by the Local Authority in any way they considered fit to achieve their priorities. The Authority's report highlighted the following grants that would be transferring to the ABG: -

- Special Educational Needs
- Study Support – National
- Study Support – Excellence in Cities
- School Support Staff – Training & Development
- Excellence in Cities – CLC Revenue
- Excellence in Cities – Learning Mentors & LSUs
- Excellence in Cities – Primary Funding
- Behaviour Improvement Programmes (BIP)
- Advanced Skills Teachers
- ICT Infrastructure (Matched)
- EIC – Sandhill View EAZ
- EIC – Castle View EAZ
- EIC – Sunderland Light Zone
- Extended Schools
- Primary Strategy – central co-ordination
- Secondary Strategy – central co-ordination
- Secondary Behaviour and Attendance – central co-ordination
- School Improvement Partners
- Education/Health Partnerships (Healthy Schools)
- School Travel Advisers
- Choice Adviser
- School Intervention Grant
- Flexible Funding to Support 14-19 Partnerships
- Sustainable Models of Travel to School Grant
- Extended Rights to free travel

This announcement had only recently been made, and decisions on how resources will be allocated, and priorities quantified had yet to be finalised. Any decisions taken, affecting Standards Fund will be reported to the SFMG.

Headteachers were surprised that these monies were not ring fenced and that the ABG would include grants in respect of other Council services such as environment, highways etc. Officers noted that the ABG could be more or less than the amount needed but it would be for the City Council to decide how monies were used.

Action Points

D Alexander, L Brown and D May to consider the terms of reference for SFMG for further discussion at next meeting

D Alexander to provide a summary of 2008/09 circular at next meeting

This transfer of funding away from Standards Fund in favour of the Area Based Grant raised further questions about how the SFMG should operate in future.

MG07/48 Any other business

There was no other business raised.

MG07/49 Date and time of next meetings

The next meetings of the SFMG were scheduled for: -

Thursday 31st January 2008 at 1.30 p.m. (Portland School)

Thursday 6th March 2008 at 1.30 p.m. (Portland School)