

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON
THURSDAY 15TH FEBRUARY 2007 AT LEECHMERE CENTRE**

The following members of the Forum were present: -

Mr H Brown (Governor Rep. - Secondary) – Vice-chair in the Chair
Mr D Ambrose (Governor Rep. - Secondary)
Mrs T Bevan (Headteacher Rep. – Junior)
Mrs D Butler (Governor Rep. - Secondary)
Mr J Clarke (Governor Rep. Secondary)
Mrs S Collingwood (Headteacher Rep. – Infant)
Mr M Foster (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)
Mrs A Mackay (Headteacher Rep. – Roman Catholic Primary)
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 T Stoker (Headteacher Rep. (Community Primary Sunderland North))
Mrs K Wilkinson (Governor Rep. – Nursery)
Mr R Wilkinson (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Cllr L Williams (Non-schools Group – Early Years & Childcare Partnership)
Mr S White (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Post 16))
Mrs S Wright (Headteacher Rep. – Community Primary Washington)

Together with: -

Mr D May – Finance Manager
Mrs S Mitchell – Partnership & Planning (SEN & Behaviour) Manager
Mr K Moore – Deputy Director of Children's Services
Mr J G Robinson – Governor Support Manager (Clerk to the Forum)

Action Points

07/13 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mrs Y Gray (Headteacher Rep. – Church of England Primary) – Chair of Forum
Mrs J Brown (Non-schools group – Teaching Associations)
Mrs S Carter (Headteacher Rep. - Nursery)
Mrs D Elliott (Governor Rep. - Special)
Mrs S. Hyland (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Foundation))
Mr D Litchfield (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Mrs M D Mitchell (Non-schools Group – Pupil Referral Unit)
Mrs M Snaith (Governor Rep. – Primary)
Dr E. Yeates (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Church of England))

07/14 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

07/15 Membership of Schools Forum

An updated membership list had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

The Non-schools Group Teaching Associations place had now been filled by Jill Brown (NUT).

The Nursery Governor position had now been filled by Mrs K Wilkinson and she was welcomed to her first meeting.

07/16 Consultation on School Budgets 2007/08

David May provided details of 2007/08 national resources, the Council Budget Position and its impact on Children Services. David reminded members of the national framework for the Dedicated School Grant.

The provisional settlement for 2007/2008 confirmed the Indicative settlement announced in the previous year. Sunderland had a 2.7% increase. Inbuilt floors and ceilings within the system protected some Authorities but also scaled back any potential grant increases. As an Authority, Sunderland supported the use of floors.

Council Tax levels and percentage increase were once again a real issue. Recent experience suggested that any increase over 5% would be subject to capping action by the government in one form or another

The Council's own budget position was then outlined. Pay awards had been accounted for at 2.5%. Price increases had been applied as appropriate. Spending commitments would continue to be reviewed and refined. David referred to funding changes in respect of adult services and the Youth Offending Service which would mean a reduction in the reliance on time limited funding.

David informed members that all services within Children's Services had been required to put forward 6% savings from their areas. Some had been accepted by Cabinet. Members of the Forum asked for details of the savings that were to be processed. David replied that the closure of one children's home would bring savings of £390,000. Other savings included a review of management costs across social care and a £500,000 cut in the training budget and the deletion of some vacant posts. The Deputy Director commented that the department had tried to get the right balance.

David May reminded the Forum that the DSG could only be used to support schools. The minimum funding guarantee equated to 3.7% but, because of falling rolls, a school's budget overall might not increase. David replied to questions and confirmed that indicative budgets had been given to schools. It was not yet possible, however, to identify which schools would suffer losses.

The Schools Forum was reminded of its powers in respect of the Dedicated Schools Grant. The Forum could: -

- Approve the increase of central expenditure above the limit

- Agree the nature and amount of any contingencies included in the centrally retained part of the schools budget block.
- Apply local variations to the MFG
- Approve changes in formula components.

The national increases applied locally meant that schools would receive an increase of 3.7% in the main school budget and the standards fund (last year the increase was 3.4%).

David May reminded members of the decisions taken at the last meeting of the Forum which would allow the Authority to break the central expenditure limit due to the reinstatement of the Contingency provision to a prudent level and the provision for redundancies at schools from within the DSG in line with revised regulations.

Beyond 2007/08 there were a number of questions regarding DSG linked to wider review of school funding including the basis for distribution, whether any specific grants would merge with DSG, the level of MFG if any. There were also the questions of an autumn pupil count date and whether the Schools Forum would have more decision making powers. The Forum would be asked to consider the issues as appropriate.

Howard Brown commented upon the Chancellor of the Exchequer's intention that maintained schools were funded to the same level as in private schools. Despite this, Howard believed that school budgets were becoming more difficult to manage and he questioned whether this trend was likely to continue. David May was unable to give any indication of what would happen with school funding in the future. It was clear, however, that the Chancellor was using savings from falling rolls to fund MFG.

07/17 Minutes of previous meetings held on 12th January 2007

The minutes were approved as a true record.

07/18 Matters arising from the minutes

School Meals – David May would contact Colin Ranson again to ascertain whether information showing whether the number of meals being consumed had increased as a result of the recent initiatives could be shared with the Forum.

Workforce Remodelling training – David May confirmed that the Forum's comments regarding workforce remodelling training had been fed back to Jim Cook. The matter had also been discussed by the Standards Fund Monitoring Group and it was now felt that the issues were resolved.

Cessation of grant funding in 2008 – The Forum had requested a report setting out the implications of the cessation of grant funding in 2008. David May felt that the appropriate time to consider this would be July, as the position would become clearer by then.

Use of free meals in deprivation criteria – One of the proposed improvements was that a qualifying family would only need to fill in one form for free meals instead of multiple forms for each child. This process would also need to reflect any changes in corporate application forms (such as for housing benefits). Sally Collingwood questioned whether this would include nursery pupils and also how

David May to contact Colin Ranson re. number of meals consumed

this would be affected by the flexible nursery entitlement. She further pointed out that children who were eligible to receive free meals were included in PLASC figures but, despite this, the child did not receive a free meal unless they stayed for education in the afternoon. In these circumstances, a school did not receive the deprivation funding and Sally therefore felt strongly these cases should also be excluded from PLASC figures. David May acknowledged that this was an issue that needed further investigation. Richard Wilkinson added that this was an area where more co-ordination was needed at the centre as this had a major impact upon schools' funding.

Spending on child protection – a question had been raised at the previous meeting regarding the Authority's spending on child protection. David May reported that he would be looking into this area and would bring information back to the Forum at a subsequent meeting.

JAR – Keith Moore gave feedback on the JAR inspection. The Authority had received the initial stage of feedback and the report was expected to be received in mid-March. There would then be a ten-day period for any factual inaccuracies to be corrected. The final report would be issued in mid-May. Until the final report came through, the department could not share the findings but broadly the process was felt to be a positive experience. Keith thanked all of those who had been involved in the process in some way for their participation. Naturally, there would be some challenges and further detailed reports would be submitted to the Forum at a later meeting.

Venue of SF meetings – Further to the discussions regarding the venue for Schools Forum meetings, it was understood that the Leader of the Council had now given permission for SF members to use the members' Car Park at the rear of the Civic Centre. It was therefore agreed that SF meetings would return to the Civic Centre.

07/19 Children's Services Structure Update

Keith Moore confirmed that the next stage of the re-structuring process was ongoing and there would be more clarity at the next Headteachers' termly meetings. There was now one vacancy in the senior leadership team as Gill Danby had left her position as Head of Resources. Interviews for this position would take place in March and there had been considerable interest in the post.

07/20 BSF/Academies

An outline business case would be submitted to the Academy Board next week. The project was said to be on track. There had been three briefings with staff groups affected by the transition to academies. It was recognised that the Authority needed to ensure that these staff were engaged in this process and the feedback from staff of the existing schools had been largely positive.

The BSF project was now moving very quickly. The procurement process was critical to ensure that the buildings opened on time.

Opening dates for new build September 2009 in the case of academies replacing Hylton Red House and Castle View, and also the new Washington School. However, the opening date for Pennywell's academy would be September 2008 but in the existing building.

Action points

David May to provide more information on child protection spending

Further updates on JAR at subsequent meetings

SF meetings to be held in the Civic Centre

There had been a process of engagement with sponsors of the new academies to arrive at the final decision on opening dates. The Local Authority had been involved in these discussions. Howard Brown expressed the view that it was pointless to open the new academy in the existing Pennywell building and to move Quarry View Primary children to this site.

Michael Hartnack asked how much had been spent by the Authority on consultants' fees related to BSF and Academies. Keith Moore confirmed that consultants had been used, as this was a normal part of the process. Whilst it was a substantial amount of money he was not in a position to release the exact amount of money at the meeting.

Richard Wilkinson commented that this was a source of frustration to school staff. There were some real issues involving devolved capital, which was being discontinued to schools affected by refurbishment or renewal. Because capital funding also included ICT monies, this meant that schools could not invest in this equipment in the run up to the new build or refurbishment. Richard added that health and safety requirements in the existing buildings needed to be addressed over the next three years.

Simon White reported that Beverley Scanlon had attended a meeting of his school's Governing Body. When discussing facilities management at BSF schools it was not clear who was in control. Governors had been told that capital funding would be withdrawn on the basis of having a new building. However, Simon pointed out that his building would only be partially renewed and this meant that parts of the building over fifteen years old would continue to be used without capital funding. Governors did not receive answers to their questions but had been asked to sign up to the agreements in principle. Dorothy Butler reported that her school's Governing Body had also been asked to take a decision without being given reasonable time.

Secondary Headteachers said that they felt 'bullied' into taking actions and were not given any option but to comply as, if they did not sign up, the business case would be nullified. Governing Bodies were also said to be angry about this. It was felt that the autonomy of schools was being eroded, as Governing Bodies were not given any choice. It was stressed that a great deal more work was needed to keep Governing Bodies informed and engaged in decision making. Mike Foster felt it important to make it clear that there were seven schools involved in wave one of BSF and the focus should not just be on academies.

Keith Moore accepted that there was a need to communicate. He pointed to the engagement with Headteacher groups and the publicity material produced. He informed the Forum that it was intended to engage with governors groups.

Richard Wilkinson accepted that there had been some improvements in communication since the early days of BSF and he also accepted that the DfES set unreasonable deadlines. Keith acknowledged that the Authority's role was to communicate this interface.

Simon White also accepted that communication had become better and smarter but he had still needed to persuade the BSF team to speak with his Governing Body. He felt that this should not be the

case and there should be consistent communication/consultation across the seven schools.

With regard to consultants' fees, Howard Brown questioned whether this money could have been spent elsewhere. Howard believed the amount involved to be in excess of £1 million. Keith Moore responded that the government required the use of consultants but he could not confirm the figure quoted by Mr Brown. The money involved was ring fenced to BSF and there were infrastructure costs associated with BSF. Keith gave an assurance that Education had not suffered as a result of this process. He did, however, offer to bring further details back to the next meeting of the Forum.

Action Points

Keith Moore to bring details of spending on BSF consultants to next meeting of Forum

07/21 Minutes of Children's Trust

As it had not been possible to attract a representative from the Children's Trust to become a member of the Schools Forum, it had instead been agreed that there would be an exchange of minutes. The minutes of the January Children's Trust meeting had therefore been circulated. Among the items considered by the Children's Trust, the Deputy Director highlighted the following: -

Workforce development – With the move to CAF and ISA it was seen as important to commit to workforce development to promote joint working. Sunderland had a good record with projects such as BEST and BIP and this would be an extension of these projects. Keith understood the frustration that services and schools felt in identifying appropriate help. Earlier intervention steps would result in easier access to services and would probably be based on baseline arrangements. Keith was confident that Children's Services was moving in the right direction.

CYPP – A revised Children and Young People's Plan was needed and it was hoped to make this more useable and user-friendly. There would be a consultation event on the CYPP to be held on 7th March 2007. The deadline for completion was short and consultation was therefore beginning. There had already been 556 comments from young people themselves. It was noted that the Schools Forum needed to be consulted on the revised CYPP and it was agreed to invite a speaker to the next meeting of the Forum.

Consultation on the revised CYPP to take place at next meeting of the Forum

ISA update – The plan was that the national child index would roll out from April 2008. Keith Moore referred to the Laming Report which instigated moves to the Children's Services agenda. With regard to the development of the Lead Professional role, it was recognised that schools were critical to this process. Primary Headteacher members at the meeting sought clarification of how they and their staff would be affected by this. It was noted that there would be a presentation to the next Headteachers' termly meetings by Dave Hills. The Deputy Director indicated that he was happy to arrange a presentation to the Schools Forum on the developments in CAF. Members agreed to invite a speaker to a subsequent meeting.

Presentation on the practical implications of CAF on schools to be given at a subsequent meeting of the Forum

07/22 Feedback from the Standards Fund Monitoring Group

Members were reminded that, because the SFMG was now a formal committee of the Schools Forum, it had been agreed that any

decisions taken by the SFMG would need to be ratified by the Forum.

At the last meeting of the SFMG, the following recommendations had been made: -

- That £140,000 balance in the School Development Grant be distributed to schools on per-pupil basis
- To exempt three grant areas from the Local Area Agreement
- To approve distribution of Grant 116(b) on flat rate basis
- To approve adjustment in 2007/08 in respect of the closure of Usworth School
- To approve that all Standards Fund grants be taken up

The Forum agreed to endorse all recommendations made by the SFMG.

Action Points

Agreed to endorse all recommendations from the SFMG

07/23 Membership of LMS/LMSS Review Group

There had been brief discussion at the previous meeting about who would serve on the LMS/LMSS Review Group. David May reported that the membership of the group needed to be constituted as reported to the Schools Forum in January to maintain the correct balance of representatives. Nominations had been received from all groups.

07/24 SEN Partnership Developments Update

Sandra Mitchell was welcomed to the meeting. She tabled information at the meeting outlining the process for proposed amendments to SEN provision in the City. Sandra referred to a Cabinet report which provided an update on current provision and advised cabinet members of how the Authority sought to deliver services. The report also sought the cabinet's permission to consult on possible amendments in two phases. Sandra noted that there had been a change in pupil population. SEN cases were becoming more complex and there were also behavioural problems to consider. Provision therefore needed to respond to these changing demands. MLD provision now existed in mainstream through the hubs and spokes model. Through a 'lead school' role in each geographical area support would be offered to mainstream settings. Savings had already been achieved by the changes that were made.

Venue of future Schools Forum meetings to be decided

One of the issues identified by autism outreach team was the need for a high level of Educational Psychology Support. It was therefore hoped to allocate an EP on a 0.5 basis to support the autism outreach team.

Resourced provisions for autism in some secondary schools would support other mainstream secondary schools. Developments were needed to take account of BSF. One schools was already operating with another to follow.

More secondary provision was needed for complex physical and medical difficulties in addition to the places available at Oxclose. The Authority needed to invest in a six-place provision and it had been agreed that some of the resource to support this would be based at Oxclose School. The pathway would be through the Oxclose cluster (nursery/primary/secondary).

Simon White commented that provision was being made at his own school and the school budget was funding the necessary changes at a cost of £24,000 to ensure accessibility. With reference to the

discussion earlier in the meeting, Simon stressed that this flexibility would not be possible without devolved capital. This comment was noted.

More work needed to be undertaken with Early Years nurture provision.

Sally Collingwood questioned Sandra regarding funding to infant/primary schools for ASD children awaiting a statement. Sandra explained that funding would follow the child. Sally highlighted the length of time that it took to produce a statement and made it clear that resources were not delivered early enough to support these children. Sandra felt that there were opportunities to support children at an earlier stage irrespective of whether they were statemented or not. Sally emphasised the pressure on an infant or primary school's budget in making provision for these children. She had already suggested that funding for these children should be backdated to the infant/primary school in view of the duration of the assessment and statementing process. Other Primary Headteachers at the meeting supported this view.

Keith Moore drew attention to the two-stage consultation process in reviewing SEN provision. Phase one proposals related to EBD provision have the effect of improving capacity at Maplewood to enable greater support and outreach work with mainstream primary schools and create assessment places. The phase one consultation would begin after half term. Phase two proposals involved a longer timescale with consultation due to begin in June 2007. One of the intentions was to consider ASD provision in secondary. This phase of consultation would also examine MLD provision in the light of the re-designation of Castle Green School. CAP provision would also be included in this review. This was likely to involve a two-part consultation with implementation by September 2008. Sandra reminded Headteachers of changes affecting CAPs in recent years which had resulted in the redistribution of funding for unfilled CAP places.

Sally Collingwood welcomed the SEN review but stressed the need for changes to be made soon to address the current difficulties. She commented that failing to address this could result in falling standards.

Cllr Linda Williams highlighted the importance of any formal agreements being dealt with by schools' Governing Bodies, as this had not been the case in the City in the past.

All Headteachers felt that Governing Bodies needed to understand the role of lead schools and other changes to SEN delivery. It was agreed that this would be conveyed to governors through the Governor Support Team's Agenda Booklet.

Howard Brown reiterated Sally Collingwood's point regarding retrospective funding for infant/primary schools making provision for children whilst assessment and statementing was progressing. Sharon Wright suggested that the Authority make an interim payment to primary/infant schools making provision for such pupils. Sandra felt that it would not be possible to backdate funding but she could address how proxy places were funded.

On a different matter, Mike Foster expressed the view that the measure of attendance levels at a school should reflect the specialist provision made in settings such as at Oxclose. Attendance statistics were adversely affected by the specialist nature of this provision.

SEN report to be included in summer 2007 termly agenda booklet

Keith Moore felt that the Authority needed to carefully consider the comments made at the meeting.

07/25 Indicative Budget Position 2007/2008

The Authority's report on the indicative budget position for 2007/2008 was noted for information.

School budgets would be issued after half term.

07/26 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>
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

Action Points

Authority officers to consider comments received at the meeting regarding SEN provision and funding issues