

## CITY OF SUNDERLAND

### MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON THURSDAY 20<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 D Ambrose (Governor Rep. – Secondary)  
Mr J E Clarke (Governor Rep. – Secondary)  
Dr P Collins (Governor Rep. – Secondary)  
Mrs D Elliott (Governor Rep. – Special)  
Mr A Falconer (Governor Rep. – Primary)  
Mr M. Foster (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)  
Mrs P Gibson (Governor Rep. – Secondary)  
Mrs V Ingleton (Governor Rep. – Nursery)  
Mr J Lishman (Governor Rep. – Primary)  
Mrs A Mackay (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Sunderland North)  
Dr E Yeates (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)

Together with: -

Mr J Magog – Acting Finance Manager  
Mr J G Robinson – Governor Support Manager  
Mrs S Mitchell – Assistant Head of Service - Finance  
Mrs G Wall – Head of Strategy & Performance  
Mr C Ranson - Asst Head of Community Services (Facilities Management)  
Mr G Guthrie - Strategic & Statutory Support Services Manager

#### Action Points

#### **05/44 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mr H Brown (Governor Rep. – Primary)  
Mr J. Busfield (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Washington)  
Mrs S Carter (Headteacher Rep. – Nursery)  
Mrs J Hobbs (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Hetton/Houghton)  
Mr J. McKnight (Headteacher Rep. – Special)  
Mr C Short (Governor Rep. – Primary)  
Mrs S. Collingwood – Early Years & Childcare Partnership

#### **05/45 Budget Planning Framework 2006-2007**

Copies of the Cabinet report were given in advance for information. This was a Council-wide report and was not specific to education or to schools.

An announcement was expected soon on council tax capping.

Among the details contained in the report, the expected level of resources available to the Council was given. The report also set out the spending commitments including pay and pension increases. A substantial rise in energy costs was projected and

this was a matter of concern to members of the Forum. Whilst energy costs were not yet confirmed but reflected the end of a contract negotiated by the Authority several years ago. Members of the Forum stressed that these vastly inflated energy prices needed to be reflected in the LMS formula.

Other budget considerations were the Passenger Transport Authority levy, debt charges and landfill taxes. Dorothy Elliott asked whether the government's transport bill had been considered.

Given the pressures on funding, each Directorate had been asked to bring forward 6% savings. The Forum was assured that in education this would be all achieved in the LEA block. As a result, the LEA was facing a difficult situation for next year.

A question was raised about the Gershon report and how it would impact on schools. James Magog indicated that information would be released soon.

School funding changes had been explained at a previous meeting.

There would be further reports to the Schools Forum on the budget planning framework. It was hoped that George Blyth would attend the next meeting of the Forum in December.

John Lishman had submitted a question in advance of the meeting around budget surplus provision and what might happen in subsequent years. He was concerned that there could be a reduction in the current surplus limits. Gill Wall replied that there was no intention to change the current limits of 5% for secondary and 8% for all other schools as these were based on good practice. Members of the Forum were pleased to note that no changes were planned.

Yvonne Gray noted that in the school SEF there were questions regarding statistics of the school. In addition to data such as staff numbers, Headteachers were also asked about the budget and, where the school had a surplus over 5%, they were asked to give a reason why. This 5% appeared in the SEF for all schools despite the limits for primary schools being set at 8%. Sandra Mitchell clarified that OFSTED recommended a 5% limit for all schools but the DfES and LEA recommended 8% for primary, special and nursery schools.

There would be a report on current surpluses in schools at the December meeting.

#### **05/46 Transitional School Meals Funding**

Colin Ranson and Graeme Guthrie presented the report to the Forum. The purpose of the report was to advise the Schools Forum of Sunderland's allocation of the recently announced funding package aimed at transforming school meal provision

#### **Action Points**

George Blyth to attend next meeting of the Schools Forum

Report on current school surpluses to be brought to next meeting of the Forum

across the country, and of the strategy being developed in partnership between Community and Cultural Services (C & CS) Education, Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust (STPCT), and schools, to optimise the potential of this funding.

There were already two elements to the funding. Some schools were part of the consortium but some were outside of the Authority's contract. The consortium had considered this City-wide approach. Some meetings had also taken place with schools outside of the contract.

Graeme explained the funding that had been given to the Authority. The LEA was the lead agent and the proposal was that the resources be pooled to enable the initiative to benefit children. This was also compatible with the Every Child Matters key outcomes.

The development of the Food in Schools programme afforded the opportunity to make an impact on the health of Sunderland's children and young people. A City-wide Dietician would be employed to advise schools. The scheme also looked towards healthy meals uptake, and accredited additional training for school kitchen staff and others involved in school meals provision in schools. This would form part of a fully joined up approach.

There had been some initial discussions with the DfES who were keen to support the proposal as an innovative approach. They would showcase Sunderland as an example of good practice.

A question was raised about the education of parents in healthy eating. Graeme confirmed that part of the Nutritional Adviser's role would be to advise parents, governors and others. Therefore the proposal looked towards close partnership with parents. There was already information circulated for parents but what was being proposed would be even broader.

Once the government's changes impacted, there would be a major change to service delivery. It was recognised that children still had the choice to walk out of school and purchase food from local shops or bring an unhealthy packed lunch into school. It was therefore crucial that the programme was expanded to bring it into homes.

The Sunderland Echo was supportive and would give positive publicity.

Colin Ranson pointed out that the pooling of monies was not happening in other Authorities. Only by taking this approach could these possibilities be achieved.

John Lishman asked about costs in future years. Colin Ranson responded that the hope was to reduce costs as the programme went on. The proposal included some contingency.

Pat Gibson enquired as to whether school kitchens were suitably equipped to deliver and whether they could cope. Colin Ranson replied that the kitchens were in a position to cater for this at present but if the aim to increase the uptake of meals was accomplished, this could have implications for the kitchens.

Dr Collins asked for clarification of what schools were being asked to sign up to. He was unclear about how those schools that were not part of the consortium could benefit. He also questioned whether it was value for money to employ another nutritionist. As no alternatives were presented, more clarity was needed about why this was the best way forward. Dr Collins believed that more consultation was needed outside of the consortium. He also pointed out that there would be implications for local shopkeepers if all pupils chose to eat in school in the future. Colin Ranson considered the impact on local shopkeepers to be immaterial if it resulted in children eating healthier food. In reply to Dr Collins' other points, Colin explained that all schools would receive DfES funding but the proposal developed by Education, C&CS and STPCT was that schools pool these resources. Dr Collins suggested a variation on the proposed theme whereby training for staff should be part of the package and incentives left to individual schools. Colin Ranson noted this suggestion. Mr Ranson understood from initial discussions that all schools would want to participate in the programme but, if the Forum agreed the proposal, meetings would take place with individual schools. With regard to the extra nutritionist, it was explained that after consultation with the STPCT it had been identified that many young people needed advice on diet. All menus in the future would need to be nutritionally analysed to enable information to be supplied to parents.

Doug Ambrose asked what accreditation standards would be applied to school cooks and whether they would need to spend time out of school to receive training and, if so, whether they would be paid. Colin Ranson answered that the qualification was likely to be the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health Level 1. Costs had been factored in, so there would be no detriment to kitchen staff. Depending on ability levels there could be opportunities to progress to Level 2. There would be different levels of accreditation as the need for training was not limited to kitchen staff. Front line midday staff would also need training. Colin also raised the possibility of governors, parents and teachers becoming involved.

Dorothy Elliott asked whether special schools were included in the proposal and she highlighted the particular difficulties for special schools. Colin Ranson confirmed that special schools and nursery schools were included. These schools were very important to the consortium. The particular requirements of special schools were cited as another reason for employing a nutritionist.

In conclusion, Colin Ranson indicated that he was working with the DfES to try to get the DfES model rolled out across the country. The DfES had confirmed that this was the right approach.

The Forum was then asked to make a decision on whether the proposal should go forward. The Forum agreed unanimously to support the proposal provided that a decision on use of grants remained the decision of the individual school.

**05/47 Reports from sub-groups**

LMS Review Group - Sandra Mitchell pointed to the work that was ongoing with banding of SEN pupils and how to fund special schools within their role of supporting inclusion in mainstream. The LMS group was now reviewing the band descriptors to see how it would impact on schools.

A CAPS concept paper was also presented to the LMS Review Group and discussions were ongoing about how to fund empty CAP places. Changes would release money to fund other schools where provision was being made. This work was progressing and physical, sensory and behaviour were all being taken into account. Language Unit provision was still being assessed and there would be further discussion.

The impact of remodelling and PPA time were also under consideration. There would be further reports back from the LMS Review Group as discussions progressed.

**05/48 DfES Good Practice Guide Action Plan**

Sandra Mitchell had produced an action plan and copies were tabled at the meeting. She highlighted some of the decisions that needed to be taken in response to the forthcoming changes to the Schools Forum membership and role.

One example was to decide how representatives should be elected. Currently this was done by a democratic election process in Sunderland and the Forum expressed their satisfaction with current system operated by the Governor Support Team.

Dr Collins commented upon the changing role of the Forum. He stressed the need to raise awareness amongst Authority officers of the new status of the Forum. He believed that this was particularly the case with officers from outside of the Education Directorate. It was agreed to this point to the action plan.

The status of sub-groups needed consideration along with the level of information given to the Forum. Conflicts of interest also needed to be considered along with the timing of LMS Review Group, Standards Fund Monitoring Group and Schools Forum meetings. It was suggested that the timing of meetings could be considered as part of planning for the annual cycle.

**Action Points**

Forum agreed to support the proposal for the use of transitional school meals funding, provided that decisions on the use of grants was left to the individual school

Further reports back from LMS Review Group to be presented at subsequent meetings

Members of the Forum happy with the current election arrangements administered by the LEA Governor Support Team

Action Plan to be updated to include action point re. raising awareness amongst LA officers of the changing status of the Schools Forum

Timing of LMS Review Group, SF Mon. Group and Schools Forum meetings to be considered as part of annual plan

The possibility of creating a Schools Forum website was raised. It was suggested that, if this were to be pursued, it would be easiest to use the City of Sunderland website as the platform. This would have cost implications and Mike Foster questioned how relevant the website would be and who would want to access it. The Chair replied that there was a growing interest in the Forum's activities from governors and Headteacher, particularly through the increased publicity afforded by the Governor Support Team. It was agreed that this matter would be considered in greater detail at the next meeting and Gill Wall would prepare a paper for consideration.

## Action Points

Further consideration to be given to possibility of Schools Forum website at December meeting. Gill Wall to prepare a paper for consideration.

### **05/49 Clarification of expenses for Forum members**

The Forum had set a policy in 2003 regarding eligibility of Forum members to claim expenses. In the light of recent enquiries from individual members of the Forum, it had been found that the policy needed greater clarity. One example was whether a teacher employed by another Authority could be reimbursed for releasing the employee to attend Forum meetings and, if so, the mechanism that would need to be used. There were questions about affordability if all members of the Forum took advantage of the expenses policy (for example, if Headteachers claimed reimbursement for attending Forum meetings).

A further consideration was whether the times of Forum meeting should be changed from a morning to after schools had closed.

After discussion, it was felt reasonable that, in principle, employees of other LEAs should be able to claim reasonable supply cover expenses. However, there were concerns expressed about the inclusion of the current policy that members could claim for loss of earnings.

It was agreed that a revised policy would be prepared by LEA officers and presented to the Forum at its next meeting for further consideration.

Revised policy on expenses to be prepared by LEA officers and presented to Forum at next meeting for consideration

### **05/50 Date and time of next meeting**

Meetings of the Forum had already been scheduled as follows: -

- Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2005
- Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2006
- Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2006

All meetings to be held in Committee Room 2, Sunderland Civic Centre at 9.30 a.m.

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