

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON
THURSDAY 22ND MARCH 2007 AT SUNDERLAND CIVIC CENTRE**

The following members of the Forum were present: -

Mrs Y Gray (Headteacher Rep. – Church of England Primary) – Chair of Forum
Mr H Brown (Governor Rep. - Secondary)
Mr D Ambrose (Governor Rep. - Secondary)
Mrs T Bevan (Headteacher Rep. – Junior)
Mrs J Brown (Non-schools group – Teaching Associations)
Mrs D Butler (Governor Rep. - Secondary)
Mrs S Carter (Headteacher Rep. - Nursery)
Mr J Clarke (Governor Rep. Secondary)
Mrs S Collingwood (Headteacher Rep. – Infant)
Mr M Foster (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Mr M Hartnack (Governor Rep. - Primary)
Mrs A Hodgson (Headteacher Rep. – Community Primary Sunderland South)
Mrs A Mackay (Headteacher Rep. – Roman Catholic Primary)
Ms G McDonough (Non-schools Group – Voluntary sector)
Mr J. McKnight (Headteacher Rep. - Special)
Mrs J Mclagan (Governor Rep. - Primary)
Mrs M D Mitchell (Non-schools Group – Pupil Referral Unit)
Mr C Short (Governor Rep. – Primary)
Mrs T Stoker (Headteacher Rep. (Community Primary Sunderland North))
Mrs K Wilkinson (Governor Rep. – Nursery)
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)
Dr E. Yeates (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Church of England))

Together with: -

Mr A Davey – Principal Finance Officer
Mr D May – Finance Manager
Ms K Parry – Projects Manager (joined the meeting later)
Mr J G Robinson – Governor Support Manager (Clerk to the Forum)
Mrs V Thompson – Principal Finance Officer
Cllr P Smith – Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services

07/27 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mrs D Elliott (Governor Rep. - Special)
Mr J Hallworth (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Mrs T Hambleton (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Hetton/Houghton)
Mrs S. Hyland (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Foundation))
Mr D Litchfield (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Mr A McCourt (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Roman Catholic))
Mr K Moore – Deputy Director of Children’s Services
Mr R Wilkinson (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)

Action Points

07/28 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

07/29 Minutes of previous meetings held on 12th January 2007

The minutes were approved as a true record subject to the addition of Colin Short's apologies for absence.

07/30 Matters arising from the minutes

School Meals – David May reported that he had some initial dialogue with Colin Ranson regarding the Forum's request for information showing whether the number of meals being consumed had increased as a result of the recent consortium initiatives. This was likely to be discussed by the Consortium Management Board and David May would report back to the Forum at its May meeting.

JAR inspection – David May confirmed that the department had received some initial feedback from the Inspectorate. There was no information available on the findings of the inspection yet.

Spending on BSF Consultants – David May reported that by the end of 2006/07 spending on consultants would be £770,000. The consultants' role had been to develop the Sunderland Model of Academy, the Outline Business Case and taking the project forward. The Authority was now considering whether it had the capacity in house to progress the project to its next stages.

CAF – The Chair noted the decision to invite a speaker to address the Forum regarding CAF implications but had taken the decision to defer this to a subsequent occasion. She commented that, whilst this was interesting, it was not strictly the business of the Forum.

SEN amendments – A report was to be included in the termly agenda booklet in the summer term. Responding to the suggestion that there should be retrospective or interim funding for infant age SEN children, Val Thompson indicated that the funding was not available for this at present but the LMS/LMSS Review Group could consider whether something could be included in the formula at an earlier stage. Sally Collingwood reiterated that the mainstream infant sector were effectively providing assessment places for such pupils and should be funded accordingly. Val replied that it was difficult to retain monies for cases that might enter the system. Howard Brown repeated the need for funding to be backdated and it was hoped that Sandra Mitchell had noted the comments. Sally highlighted the complex cases that were being placed in the infant sector. She added that there were SEN pupils with obvious needs entering from other countries but schools sometimes still had to wait fourteen months for funding. There needed to be recognition of complex cases earlier and funding provided accordingly.

07/31 Children's Services Update

David May reported that Paul Campbell (currently employed at Darlington Authority) would be taking over from Gill Danby as Head of Resources. The next stage of the review of the department was due in May 2007.

David May to report back to Forum at May meeting re. number of meals consumed

07/32 BSF/Academies Update

The project was now to progress to procurement stage.

Simon White reminded members of the Forum that there were three categories of school affected by BSF (Academy, new build and partial refurbishment). He pointed out that, under the BSF programme, his school would benefit from a 20-25% refurbishment. There was an assumption that the building would therefore be of a high quality and therefore needed no capital funding. In reality, however, up to 80% of his school building would be fifteen years old or more. He therefore questioned the logic of withdrawing all capital funding from schools affected by BSF. David May replied that these were rules from the DfES and the Authority was responding accordingly. Simon confirmed that the Governing Body of his school had written to the Diocese who would be making representations to the DfES regarding this matter. Mike Foster commented that governors should not be put in this position. The Chair responded that the DfES were sometimes more willing to consider representations from Governing Bodies than from Local Authorities. She stressed that it was very difficult to communicate such concerns to the DfES. Nevertheless, members of the Forum felt that this message needed to be conveyed to the DfES and questions should be asked. It was agreed that Mike Foster would take this matter up with the Project Management Board.

Copies of the latest newsletter from the BSF Communications team were circulated at the meeting. It was noted that this contained an inaccuracy relating to the age range and number of pupils in one school. Dr Yeates expressed concern at this error and felt that it might give the impression that the Authority did not know its schools. Members of the Forum shared his concern. The inaccuracy would be fed back to the BSF Communications team.

Mike Foster to take up questions about withdrawal of capital funding with BSF project management board

BSF team to be informed of inaccuracy in BSF document

07/33 Minutes of Children's Trust

There had been no further meetings of the Children's Trust.

07/34 Feedback from the Standards Fund Monitoring Group

Insufficient members had been in attendance at the last meeting of the SFMG to constitute a quorum in accordance with the terms of reference agreed by the Schools Forum. It was therefore not possible to proceed with formal consideration of the business. Members proceeded to discuss certain items on an informal basis.

Yvonne Gray pointed out that the SFMG was a formal monitoring group and provided much more challenge and monitoring than in the past. David May reinforced that the SFMG had a key role to play.

Reports that were informally considered by the SFMG had been reproduced in their entirety for members of the Schools Forum and circulated with agenda papers. David May highlighted the apparent underspending in some schools' standards fund codes. This was due to the way that different schools managed their finances. David was hoping to standardise this for monitoring/reporting consistency. David informed the Forum that the DfES were now looking at both the main school budget and standards fund codes together in the context of the 5%/8% limits on surpluses. This had important implications.

The SFMG had received a presentation on school travel plans. Doug Ambrose questioned whether schools were taking this sufficiently seriously in terms of training children on use of the road including the Highway Code, experience of motor vehicles and pedestrian training. Yvonne Gray noted these comments and noted that the recent JAR inspection had shown that there were improvements to be made in Sunderland in child road safety. Simon White informed colleagues of the steps that schools had taken in formulating a travel plan. In his school's case he had worked long and hard to address problems of what happened outside of the school site but the only measure taken by the Authority was to apply a short additional area of zigzag lines to the road. Simon added that the school had been commended for its work on road safety by the HSE but the school could do nothing outside of the gates. As a Police officer, Michael Hartnack confirmed that the Authority's Highways department was the correct point of contact over such issues as they liaised with the Police. Yvonne Gray felt it was important to demonstrate that all parties were working together to tackle this. Simon White had asked for a meeting between Highways, the Police and himself to discuss the issues but had been unable to secure this. Mr Hartnack offered to try to progress this.

Mr Hartnack to try to arrange meeting between police, Highways and Simon White re. road safety

Dr Yeates commented that his school travel plan had been approved one year ago but resulting changes were still going through planning and legal obstacles. He felt that no one in the City was taking road safety seriously enough. Councillor Pat Smith responded that this was an unfair comment and she had herself attended sessions with the police who had indicated that Sunderland did not have a major child safety problem. She added that the Council had taken steps to reduce the number of incidents. Susan Carter spoke positively of her own school's experience in dealing with the Council over road safety improvements. Councillor Linda Williams highlighted the responsibility of parents to ensure child safety but also commented upon the inconsistent advice to schools over travel plans in her area of Washington.

Having discussed the failure to achieve a quorum at the last meeting of the SFMG, it was agreed that a quorum of eight members was an appropriate level to ensure adequate representation and would continue unchanged.

Quorum for SFMG to remain at 8 members

07/35 Unallocated School Resources

An unallocated contingency was held centrally for each financial year. The amount held at the beginning of 2006/07 the contingency held was £337,393 which was retained for: -

- supporting SEN pupils whose statement was finalised after the main school budget was allocated or whose bands were re-designated
- savings made from reduction in CAPs to be used for specialist SEN provisions established during the year.

As sum of £105,106 was forecast to remain at the end of the financial year. The contingency for 2007/08 had been reinstated to an adequate level and it was therefore proposed to distribute the 2006/07 balance to schools within the financial year based on pupil numbers. The Authority's report also made specific reference to rates surplus and school year end balances.

Having considered the report members of the Forum agreed to: -

- Support the proposal for re-distributing contingency underspends on the basis of pupil numbers.
- Support the proposed distribution of rates underspend on the basis of pupil numbers.
- Consider the distributions as part of licensed surplus considerations.
- Receive future reports on unallocated ISB contingency and rates positions as necessary.

Action Points

Forum supported the Authority's proposals to redistribute unallocated school resources according to pupil numbers

07/36 Scheme of Delegation Amendments and Licensed Deficit Protocol

David May reported that the Authority was looking to create formal monitoring and control arrangements for schools in licensed deficits. John McKnight and Colin Short declared their support for this proposal but felt that it should also apply to licensed surpluses.

Yvonne Gray asked how much surplus was currently in the system at present. David May reported that at March 2006 the total surplus in schools was £4.6 million. Yvonne felt that the Authority and the Forum needed to look carefully at this in the light of these sizeable surpluses. The DfES recognised the problem of surpluses at a national level (£1.6 billion surplus at a national level) and there was always a danger that monies would be taken away from schools because of this.

David May informed members that this policy was currently being developed and that further reports would be presented to the Forum at subsequent meetings.

Further reports on scheme of delegation amendments to be submitted to the Forum at subsequent meetings

07/37 Free School Meals

Tony Davey had prepared a detailed report on the issue of free meals which had been circulated with agenda papers. This was a response to previous discussions within the Forum over the use of free meals data as a measure of deprivation. Tony gave a presentation at the meeting. This was an ongoing piece of work which was affected by national factors.

Tony explained that reductions in benefits such as income support and job seekers allowances had an impact on deprivation criteria. Data was not available to show the number of households in low income employment. Tony provided an explanation of working tax credit.

The Authority felt that it was necessary to look at problems associated with accessing these benefits. The application form had been reviewed and officers were looking at software packages with historical data. It was hoped to implement this from May. There was also a national database which showed national insurance numbers and eligibility. It was hoped that this would be on line from September 2007. Information was needed to at the outset to make this meaningful. Tony was talking to officers responsible for marketing to consider how parents could be encouraged to take up their eligibility and it was hoped that schools would participate in this. Statistics showed that many people did not take up the entitlement, possibly for fear of stigma.

With regard to publicity, the Chair felt that a clear advertisement in local press would be beneficial. Tony confirmed that marketing were already engaged in this. The cost was likely to be between £12,000 and £15,000. Trish Stoker stressed that the literacy level needed to be right in the advertisements to ensure that the message was understood by the target group.

Simon White asked for clarification of how extra-district pupils were included in free meals figures. Tony confirmed that these families would apply for free meals benefit in their own Authority area but the pupils were included in the Sunderland school figures.

Michael Hartnack raised the possibility of an item being included in the termly agenda booklet for governors to raise awareness.

On a different but related point David May reminded members that the Authority and schools needed to try to increase uptake of healthy meals.

Members of the Forum noted the report and thanked Tony for his presentation. Tony offered to provide updates at subsequent meetings.

07/38 DfES Consultation on School Funding

David May gave a presentation at the meeting. He made it clear that this was for information and not part of the formal consultation process.

David asked the Forum how responses to the consultation should be fed back. Formal consultation events could be planned for Headteachers and governors.

Howard Brown felt that individual schools should be encouraged to submit responses in addition to the collective response from the Local Authority. David May accepted this point and would provide schools with an electronic copy of the documentation to enable them to respond accordingly.

To fit in with this consultation phase David proposed changing the date of the next meeting of the Schools Forum to 24th May 2007. The proposed change of date was agreed by the Forum.

Agreed to change date of next meeting to 24th May 2007

07/39 Funding for Schools in Financial Difficulties

Members were reminded that the Authority retained funding within the Schools Block 'other' to support schools in financial difficulties. The funding was retained in accordance with regulations which stipulated that the Schools Forum be consulted on proposed distribution of the funding. In 2006/07 a sum of £68,000 was provided to support schools in financial difficulties. No allocations had been made from this budget and, as agreed by the Schools Forum in January 2007, any underspend against Schools Block 'other' funding was to be used to fund redundancy costs incurred. The Forum confirmed that the funding would be used for this purpose.

Confirmed that Schools Block 'other' funding would be used to fund redundancies

07/40 Indicative Budget Position 2007/08

A report was presented which informed members of the updated indicative budget position on the Schools Block and Non-Schools

Block Budgets for 2007/08. Members of the Forum noted the report. There were no comments or questions.

07/41 Consultation on Children & Young People's Plan

Karen Parry was present at the meeting and she provided a presentation on the progress of developing the CYPP. This was a three-year plan which needed to be reviewed each year.

Karen outlined the government guidance on reviewing the CYPP. Publication of the CYPP annual report would replace the APA and JAR self-assessment. The review must include assessment and analysis of progress and improvement. The needs assessment should be refreshed and priorities, actions and targets updated. The views of children, young people and families needed to be reflected in the plan and there must be a proactive approach to diversity and provision made to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups. The plan must be subject to Race and Disability Equality Assessments and should align ECM and Standards agendas.

New duties and requirements were highlighted. Local Authorities needed to consult with schools, school forums, schools admission forums and strategic education partners such as diocesan authorities. Schools needed to have regard to the CYPP when doing their own strategic planning. Local authorities were expected to secure positive activities for young people and carry out a childcare sufficiency assessment every 3 years. Authorities needed to broaden the scope of information provided to parents, and produce a parenting strategy.

Karen drew attention to the process for reviewing the plan. The review would be completed by 1st May 2007 and ready for submission to DfES on 14th June 2007. The review would focus on: -

- Needs assessment
- Priorities, actions and targets
- Finance and resources
- Performance

Work on strategic aspects of the plan would be undertaken throughout 2007-08. The review process would generate two documents. These were a CYPP Annual Report 2006-2007 which would report on progress made against each of the 32 priorities in the plan in 2006-2007. There would also be the updated CYPP for 2007-2009 with the agreed priorities, and actions and targets to deliver on them.

Karen referred to stakeholder engagement. She explained how the planning network had been reviewed to include more partners. She confirmed that 2000 children and young people had contributed to the refresh of the needs assessment and a large-scale consultation was planned for March 2007. An exercise to engage parents and carers was planned for March 2007. The timescale for consultation and reporting was described.

Emerging priorities from the consultations so far were: -

- Teenage Pregnancy And Sexual Health
- Mental And Emotional Well-Being
- Obesity
- Road Safety
- Parental Behaviour
- Victims Of Crime
- Bullying And Racism

Educational Attainment
 Affordable and Local Leisure Activities
 Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour
 Environmental Issues
 Advocacy And Mentoring
 Transport Costs
 Accommodation
 Work Training And Further Education

Karen explained that the above priorities were likely to change in the light of consultation.

Karen outlined the implications of the CYPP for schools. She made it clear that there was a duty to have regard for CYPP when schools were undertaking their own strategic planning. This would be taken into account by OFSTED inspectors after October 2007 and needed to be reflected in School SEF forms.

Karen invited questions or comments.

Doug Ambrose asked whether the draft CYPP had been sent to Chairs of Governors. Karen confirmed that it had been distributed to all Chairs of Governors. Dorothy Butler commented that more than just Chairs should be involved. Karen responded that an item would be included in the summer term agenda booklet for school governors for their information.

Simon White pointed out that schools received a high volume of e-mails and this was not always a reliable way of ensuring that Headteachers received items. Yvonne Gray felt that communication was a key issue. Sally Collingwood felt that the termly agenda booklet was the best way to solicit comments from Headteachers and governors. Simon White added that a summarised document to each Headteacher group would also be helpful. Karen noted these comments.

Mr Ambrose questioned whether the plan included road safety. Karen confirmed that the plan did cover road safety.

Mike Foster felt that there was nothing contentious in the list of priorities and the plan needed to show that all parties were moving towards the same objectives.

Members discussed how schools could fulfil their part in implementing the CYPP. Headteachers felt that they were already doing this as schools had been operating the Every Child Matters agenda for some time. It was commented, however, that schools needed greater detail about how they could access assistance, funding, initiatives etc. It was further pointed out that areas of need were already shown in each individual school's SEF and the Local Authority could have regard to this.

Doug Ambrose queried whether post-16 pupils were included in the CYPP and whether it would be directed to such students. Karen replied that it would be shared with colleges but it was for them to decide how it should be dealt with. Simon White added that the students in the three Catholic sixth forms also needed a voice.

Karen felt that there was a will on all sides to engage with this process

but accepted that there were issues of communication to be considered. She was happy to receive any comments regarding the CYPP either by phone or by e-mail.

07/42 **Date and time of next meeting**

Schools Forum

24th May 2007 (changed
from 17th May 2007)
5th July 2007
27th September 2007
29th November 2007

SFMG

19th April 2007 (changed from
3rd May 2007)
21st June 2007
13th September 2007
15th November 2007

Action Points

Members of
Forum invited to
submit further
comments on
CYPP to Karen
Parry