

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON
THURSDAY 23RD NOVEMBER 2006 AT THE STADIUM OF LIGHT**

The following members of the Forum were present: -

Mrs Y Gray (Headteacher Rep. – Church of England Primary) – Chair of Forum
Mrs S Carter (Headteacher Rep. - Nursery)
Mr D Ambrose (Governor Rep. - Secondary)
Mrs K Bennett (Headteacher Rep. – Junior)
Mr H Brown (Governor Rep. - Secondary)
Mrs D Butler (Governor Rep. - Secondary)
Mrs S Collingwood (Headteacher Rep. – Infant)
Mr M Foster (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Mr J Hallworth (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)
Mr D Litchfield (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Mrs A Mackay (Headteacher Rep. – Roman Catholic Primary)
Mr J. McKnight (Headteacher Rep. - Special)
Mrs J Mclagan (Governor Rep. - Primary)
Mr C Short (Governor Rep. - Primary)
Mr S White (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Post 16))
Mr R. Wilkinson (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Cllr L Williams (Non-schools Group – Early Years & Childcare Partnership)
Mrs S Wright (Headteacher Rep. – Community Primary Washington)
Dr E. Yeates (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Church of England))

Together with: -

Mr G Guthrie – Strategic & Statutory Support Services Manager, CCS
Mr D May – Finance Manager
Mr K Moore – Deputy Director of Children’s Services
Mr C Ranson – Asst Head of Community Services (Facilities Man)
Mr J G Robinson – Governor Support Manager (Clerk to the Forum)
Ms V Thompson – Finance Service
Cllr Mrs P Smith – Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services

The Clerk reported that there had been a change in the membership of the Forum. Mr G M Wilson (Non-schools Group – Voluntary Sector) had now been replaced by another representative of the Council for Voluntary Services.

06/53 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mrs G Danby – Head of Resources
Mrs S. Hyland (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Foundation))
Mrs D Elliott (Governor Rep. - Special)
Mr A McCourt (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Roman Catholic))
Mrs M D Mitchell (Non-schools Group – Pupil Referral Unit)

Action Points

06/54 School Meals Strategy Update

Colin Ranson and Graeme Guthrie were welcomed to the meeting. They had been invited to give an update on the school meals strategy.

Colin explained that two streams of funding had been available last year. Grant A was held by the City Council (£174,000) whilst Grant B was delegated to schools (£123,677). The majority of schools had agreed to give their share of the money back to the Authority's programme.

The funding in respect of the current year was outlined. Grant A was £288,000 and its uses included retaining a dietician, food in schools co-ordinators, incentives and prizes. This funding was also used to increase the cost of food on the plate (i.e. ingredients) together with the development of an ICT system to enable monitoring and consultation. Grant B (£118,000 for the current year) was again delegated and schools were invited to buy back. These resources were used to cover the salaries of in-school workers, training expenses and food in schools programme.

By December a total of four hundred sessions would have been held with food in schools co-ordinators. The development of initiatives around healthy eating for a number of stakeholders was outlined including family sessions, work with the football club, the 'cook it' project and BME groups. Recipe books were to be given free. There was also the development of a packed lunch leaflet and the service was producing a DVD on the work that food in schools co-ordinators were undertaking. The most recent development was the 'passport to health' where it was intended that every child would receive a personalised version with rewards linked to physical activity and curriculum based prizes. In secondary schools the cashless system would include points for healthy lifestyle choices.

All schools should have received literature showing how monies had been spent (copies were made available at the meeting). Sunderland was recognised by the DfES as one of the leading Authorities in this area and was cited nationally as the best use of funding, skills, knowledge and resources. The activities of the food in schools co-ordinators had also been highly commended. Colin had given a presentation to Councillors as it was important that they understood the work that was going on.

Howard Brown asked for further clarification around the money that was delegated to schools. Colin explained that the monies were devolved to schools who could decide whether to use it to procure food or alternatively could buy back into the consortium. Howard felt that some of the activities described by Colin should have been dropped in favour of buying more food. He commented that children were complaining that portions were too small. Colin felt that the cost of the food was subjective and the questions had been raised previously. He pointed out that efficient procurement, production and quality control meant that costs were less than would otherwise be the case. There was now additional food cost on the plate in primary schools as it had been found that the spend per pupil was not at suggested levels (50p per pupil). The levels of spend per pupil in secondary already matched the recommendations (65p). Colin added that it was not just about how much was spent but also about changing attitudes and influencing lifestyle choices. This was why the additional activities were important.

In reply to questions, it was explained that the funding referred to by Colin was for a specific purpose.

David Litchfield asked whether it would be possible to provide figures showing the number of pupils taking school meals over the past five years to evaluate trends and ascertain how the consortium was working. Colin confirmed that this information could be provided but pointed out that national changes also affected the Sunderland position. Some schools had seen a fall in the number of pupils consuming school meals although some improvement was likely because of ongoing initiatives. Nevertheless it was acknowledged that there had been an increase in demand for packed lunches. It was clear that initiatives would take time to have the necessary impact.

Mr Litchfield explained that his request for the data was to ascertain whether there was a general trend or whether there were individual school issues. Colin agreed to refer the request for statistics to the Consortium Board. He noted that there was a variation in the quality of meals provided by individual schools and he accepted that some were inadequate. The consortium's aim was to bring consistency in the standards of provision.

Colin was questioned about recent publicity on local television for the free meals for a week campaign and also about how this was costed. Colin explained that the funding for this initiative came from the Consortium. Schools within the consortium contributed an amount and OneCall drew off the funding it needed to provide the catering. Because of falling take-up some surplus monies existed in the system and it had been agreed that free meals would be offered for a week to pupils in consortium schools. With regard to the media coverage, Colin explained that he had been invited to take part in a radio interview and TV interviews for the BBC and for ITV. As he had needed to act quickly, a school needed to be selected as a setting for the interview. Redby Primary was available and this was the reason it had been chosen.

Members of the Forum asked whether the free meals for a week would become a rolling programme. Colin replied that due to operational practicalities this would need to be done over a period of time (e.g. in year groups). All schools in the consortium would benefit from this initiative. The non-consortium schools had been discussed and, while there was communication with these schools, the free meals were not offered in these cases as the schools had chosen to keep the money themselves.

In reply to a question regarding incentives and prizes, Colin confirmed that the value of prizes was the same in primary and secondary but the items offered were different.

Councillor Williams welcomed the free meals for a week initiative but commented that she had been embarrassed by the dining facilities in some schools. She felt that the consortium needed to urgently move ahead with securing improvements. Colin Ranson agreed with this suggestion in principle but in practical terms there was not enough money available to upgrade all that needed refurbishment to acceptable levels. David May pointed out that there was an upgrade programme in place through the capital allocation.

Colin Ranson to refer request for figures showing no. of pupils consuming school meals to consortium board

Colin Ranson was thanked for his attendance at the meeting. He made it clear that OneCall staff were always willing to be contacted with any questions or issues. Colin and Graeme withdrew from the meeting at this point.

06/55 Minutes of previous meeting held on 20th October 2006

The minutes were approved as a true record.

06/56 Matters arising from the minutes

Membership of the Forum (Teaching Unions) – The Clerk reported a letter from Mike Johnson (NAS/UWT) in connection with the vacant place for a non-schools member representing teaching associations. Mr Johnson's correspondence was sent on behalf of the three teaching unions (NAS/UWT, NUT and ATL) and formally requested two additional seats be made available on the Forum to enable each of these unions to be represented. Members of the Forum discussed the request. They noted that, if this was allowed, the non-teaching unions might need to have a representative also. On behalf of the NUT, Howard Brown spoke regarding the matter. Having heard Howard's comments and noting the correspondence, members of the Schools Forum felt that more clarification of the request was needed. The letter appeared to request that the Forum be re-constituted to enable two additional non-schools members (i.e. with voting rights). However, Mr Brown felt that the unions would be satisfied with being given rights of attendance at Schools Forum meetings (i.e. they did not need to be full members of the Forum). Members of the Schools Forum noted the fundamental difference between these two positions. If the Forum were to be re-constituted, this would be a matter for the Local Authority and it would be necessary to ensure that the correct balance between 'Schools members' and 'Non-schools members' was maintained as a result of this exercise. If, however, the request was for rights of attendance as non-members of the Forum, this would be a matter determined by the Schools Forum itself. The Forum deferred any decision on the matter pending clarification of this point. The Clerk would communicate with Mr Johnson to seek the necessary clarification.

Further clarification to be sought from Mike Johnson re. Request for additional teacher union places on the Forum

Membership of the Forum (Nursery Governor) – The Governors Association had supported a nursery governor nomination to fill the vacancy. Unfortunately, the nominee had rejected the appointment. This matter would be discussed further between the Governors' Association and the Governor Support Team.

Govs Association still to fill Nursery Governor place

Membership of the Forum (Children's Trust) – The vacancy for a representative of the Children's Trust had been discussed again by the Board but no nominations had been made.

Children's Trust Board still to make nomination

Workforce Remodelling training – A full list of employees who had attended workforce remodelling training was made available at the meeting. David May would discuss with Jim Cook to provide summarised figures. Headteachers noted that there were other courses that did not lead to a qualification and also some events not offered through the Local Authority.

David May to discuss request for additional information with Jim Cook

06/57 **BSF/Academies**

A speaker had been requested to provide an update on the BSF programme but unfortunately had proved unavailable. A written summary was provided instead.

David Litchfield one minor inaccuracy in the written summary and commented that there was a lack of detail on the works and deadlines involved.

Richard Wilkinson felt that the Forum needed to be aware of the processes involved in BSF. Clearly the programme needed to be adhere to the terms of the government's grant distribution and Richard felt that the conditions attached to this was leading to instability in the workforce and uncertainty among parents. The Authority had asked secondary schools to nominate a member of the senior leadership team to spend three days per week on the BSF implementation strategy. This presented real difficulties for schools and could impact on standards. Mike Foster highlighted the stress on his staff as a result of the building works and secondary Headteachers were now questioning the capacity within the Authority to handle this programme. Dorothy Butler reinforced this view and made it clear that the work done by the BSF team to date was not good enough. Simon White added that Governing Bodies were not being given clear information. This comment was supported by other members of the Forum and it was also felt that the Forum itself had not been properly consulted.

David Litchfield commented that Sunderland was well behind the responses of other Authorities. This programme was crucial and it impacted upon all schools. Councillor Williams was concerned that the only communication with the Governing Body was through the Headteacher and, as a Councillor, she had received other concerns about the programme.

The Deputy Director noted the concerns expressed at the meeting and responded to some of the criticism. He recognised the importance of consultation and communication. The need for a detailed presentation to members of the Forum was clear and a further meeting of the Forum would be arranged.

Susan Carter noted that the problems identified regarding the BSF programme were similar to those experienced by schools participating in the development of Children's Centres. David May highlighted the Schools Forum's limited role in relation to Children's Centres and Early Years funding.

06/58 **Children's Services Structure Update**

Mr K Moore (Deputy Director) introduced himself to members. He was pleased to have joined Sunderland's Children's Services and he outlined his experience in other north-eastern Authorities. He recognised the sense of vision that existed in Sunderland. Mr Moore's background was in Social care but he also had experience of education and learning. He believed that the Every Child Matters agenda was critical to raising and maintaining standards.

Deputy Director to take back comments re. BSF

A detailed presentation on BSF to be given at a further meeting of the Forum

A paper was to be presented to the relevant committee of the Council outlining the next stage of departmental restructuring. The detail could not be shared yet but would be outlined at a subsequent meeting of the Forum.

Mr Moore felt that this was an exciting time with a lot of opportunities to improve provision for young people in the City.

06/59 **Membership and terms of reference of Standards Fund Monitoring Group**

A report showing the membership and proposed terms of reference for the Standards Fund Monitoring Group had been circulated with agenda papers. This reflected the decisions taken at the last meeting of the Schools Forum in relation to the future arrangements for the SFMG. Members of the Forum approved the membership and terms of reference as described in the report. Stakeholder groups would be asked to make nominations to fill vacancies.

David May indicated that the Leader of the Council had requested that an annual report from the SFMG be presented to Children Services Review Committee and Cabinet to demonstrate best value from the resources available.

Secondary Headteachers commented that they were compiling a list of groups that they were being asked to serve on. They pointed to the increasing demands on their time and they wanted that Authority to take this into account to minimise the burden on secondary Headteachers.

06/60 **Schools Block Other Funding**

A report had been circulated in advance of the meeting. David May described how funding was derived and what was included within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The Authority was requesting some flexibility within the DSG for legitimate expenditure. David made particular reference to redundancy costs for school based staff, which had amounted to over £1 million in the current year. In the context of falling rolls it was necessary to have this debate about how these costs would be met in the future.

David replied to questions from members of the Forum. He confirmed that, if unspent, the funding would be carried forward for use in future years. David made it clear that in certain instances redundancy was legitimate expenditure (i.e. anything that was pupil led). He drew attention to the financial pressure on the Authority this year because of redundancy costs.

The Chair asked how surpluses held by schools could be used to support redundancy costs. Colin Short noted that any reduction at the centre impacted on schools. If central support was reduced, schools always suffered. David clarified the distinction between MFG and DSG.

Members of the Forum stressed the need for clarity in what was being discussed. This comment was noted.

Action Points

Information regarding next stage of departmental restructure to be provided at a subsequent meeting

Membership and terms of reference for SFMG were approved. Nominations to be sought from stakeholder groups where vacancies existed.

Forum noted report on Schools Block Other funding and agreed to receive further reports as part of the estimate process.

06/61 Changes to Scheme of Delegation

Copies of this report were tabled at the meeting. Val Thompson explained that a response had been awaited from the DfES and this had now been received.

Val highlighted the section concerning the control of surplus balances. She felt that the Sunderland arrangement was successful (5% limit for secondary, 8% for other schools) but the DfES were proposing a change in the way that this was calculated to become a percentage of the subsequent year's budget. Val did not feel that this was

appropriate and had communicated her view to the DfES. The DfES had advised that, as long as the Schools Forum agreed, the scheme could remain unchanged. Members of the Forum did not feel it was necessary to change the current arrangements.

The report made reference to the introduction of Financial Management Standards in Schools. It was expected that all Sunderland schools would be using Internal Audit for the external assessment of FMSiS.

Val confirmed that Finance Liaison Officers were setting indicative 07/08 indicative budgets as part of the move to multi-year budget forecasts.

Val explained the issuing of a Notice of Concern to a school where there were financial issues to be addressed. Under the current system the only sanction was withdrawal of delegation. The Notice of Concern would therefore formalise what already happened in Sunderland and the Authority would welcome the inclusion of this in the scheme of delegation.

Doug Ambrose suggested that the LMS scheme of delegation should be made available to all members of Governing Body Finance Committees. Val had no objections to this but the Clerk felt that it would be more appropriate to make this available on the Governor Support Team's website. Val Thompson also offered to provide a glossary to accompany the scheme of delegation.

Members of the Forum noted the changes to the scheme of delegation to conform to the Secretary of State's direction. They agreed that the current scheme of delegation worked effectively.

06/62 Date and time of next meeting

An additional meeting of the Schools Forum would be arranged before Christmas to discuss BSF.

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>
11 th January 2007	1 st February 2007
15 th February 2007	8 th March 2007
22 nd March 2007	3 rd May 2007
17 th May 2007	21 st June 2007
5 th July 2007	13 th September 2007
27 th September 2007	15 th November 2007
29 th November 2007	

Action Points

Forum agreed to retain current scheme on control of surplus balances in schools

Val Thompson to provide Scheme of Delegation and accompanying glossary for inclusion on Governors' website

Additional meeting of the Forum to be arranged before Christmas to discuss BSF