

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON THURSDAY 23<sup>RD</sup> FEBRUARY 2006 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)  
Mrs S. Collingwood – Early Years & Childcare Partnership  
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)  
Mr J. McKnight (Headteacher Rep. – Special)  
Mr C Short (Governor Rep. – Primary)

Together with: -

Mr D May – Finance Manager  
Mrs S Mitchell – Project Development and Business Support  
Dr H Paterson – Director of Children’s Services  
Mr J G Robinson – Governor Support Manager  
Mrs G Wall – Head of Strategy & Performance  
Mr C Ranson - Asst Head of Community Services (Facilities Man)  
Mr T H Walsh – Acting Director of Education

Action Points

**06/10 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mr V Bovill (Non-schools Group – Teaching Associations)  
Mr H Brown (Governor Rep. – Primary)  
Mrs S Carter (Headteacher Rep. – Nursery)  
Mr K McDermid (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)  
Mrs J Dowson (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Washington)  
Mrs J Hobbs (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Hetton/Houghton)  
Mrs A Mackay (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Sunderland North)  
Councillor Mrs P. Smith – Portfolio Holder for Education  
Mr R Wilkinson (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)  
Dr E Yeates (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)

**06/11 Minutes of previous meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2006**

The minutes were approved as a true record.

**06/12 Matters arising from the minutes****Action Points**

Extended Schools presentation – There were some concerns expressed that members of the Forum had not seen the Extended

Schools Implementation Plan at any time prior to the last meeting. It was further suggested that a detailed report should have appeared in the School Governors' Termly Agenda Booklet. Gary Robinson explained that sections/services within the Directorate were invited to submit suggestions for inclusion in the Governor Support Team's publications.

The Director added that the Schools Forum and school governors should have seen the national strategy. Dr Collins commented that there were many developments that governors were not informed of. Dr Paterson took note of this comment and would inform services within the Directorate of the need for increased communication with Governing Bodies.

Members of the Forum asked if there was any additional money available to support the implementation of extended services in schools. Gill Wall replied that she was unaware of any additional funding but this would become clearer when the final Council settlements were received.

Centrally retained funding – Colin Short questioned officers about rumours that £1 million of unspent monies had been sent back to the DfES. He had spoken to Councillor Mrs P Smith about this and she was not aware of any such information. Officers also denied that there was any unspent funding sent back to the DfES. Although there were some individual areas where there had been an underspend, the amounts involved were relatively small.

Nevertheless the Forum wished to ensure that there was closer monitoring of centrally retained funding areas. The Forum asked that the Standards Fund Monitoring Group consider how this monitoring should take place. Lynda Brown (who would be the Authority officer responsible for working with the Standards Fund Monitoring Group) would be asked to attend the next meeting of the Schools Forum.

Schools Forum website – Yvonne Gray, Gary Robinson and Pat Gibson would meet an officer from Corporate ICT to consider next step in development.

Director to communicate with services within the Directorate to advise of the need for better communication with Governing Bodies

Standards Fund Monitoring Group to consider arrangements for monitoring centrally retained budget sources.

Lynda Brown to be invited to next meeting of Schools Forum

**06/13 School Meals – Food Cost Per Meal**

A report had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The purpose of this report was to advise the Forum of the food cost per meal in both primary and secondary schools where CCS provided the service. Colin Ranson described the evaluative exercise and referred to the national school meals debate. He commented that the recent television programme that had prompted the national debate did not reflect the ability of many Authorities to provide a nutritious meal at a comparatively low cost. The government was expected to announce an increase in the minimum spend on a school meal to 50p in the primary sector and 60p in secondary.

The food cost in Sunderland was currently 43.3p in primary schools and 74.6p in secondary (calculated on information from periods 1-10 in 2005/06). It was pointed out, however, that the food cost per meal

between individual kitchens could vary due to a number of factors including the number of meals produced, wastage, regenerated meals, portion control and adult meals.

It would become an OFSTED requirement that nutritionally balanced school food was provided and schools would be required to educate pupils in healthy choices.

Due to the government's likely insistence on placing a mandatory minimum unit cost per meal on school meals, a portion of Sunderland's allocation of the DfES funding to transform school meals had been identified for this purpose.

Colin Ranson was asked whether he felt that the lower spending in Sunderland would make a difference in procurement and delivery. He answered that the most important consideration was quality of the food provided rather than just the amount spent on the food on the plate. It was entirely possible that two Authorities could provide the same food at different costs due to procurement, staff efficiency and other considerations. It would be possible in the future to nutritionally analyse all food provided.

The Director reported that she had visited a number of schools and found the quality of meals to be variable. She therefore asked how both nutrition and presentation of the product was quality assured. Colin Ranson answered that Headteachers had the opportunity to give feedback using comment cards. There was also independent auditing with an annual report and regular monitoring and evaluation. Colin accepted that there were some significant differences between schools but he indicated that the investment programme would address this. The service already knew where improvement was needed. Dr Paterson replied that Headteachers had many issues to deal with and the comment card was a weak method of feedback as completing these would not be considered a priority for most Headteachers. The Director noted the independent auditing referred to by Colin but questioned him about how 'softer' monitoring could be undertaken. Colin recognised that there was no formal mechanism to monitor this but it was difficult to measure.

Dr Paterson stressed the importance of ensuring that the food was attractive to pupils. Colin Ranson commented upon the need to ensure the right method of communication with children and felt that it was important to build this through school councils and liaison with pupils/parents.

Colin Ranson replied to questions about the lack of any alternative options in his report. He confirmed that the government recommendations would mean a minimum spend of 60p per meal in the secondary sector but this figure was already exceeded in Sunderland. He was therefore confident that the product would comfortably meet requirements in cost and nutritional value. Colin pointed out that his report was intended to be for information only and this is why he did not present any alternative options. Colin assured the Forum that additional monies to raise the cost of primary school meals would be met from the government funding whilst no increase was needed in the secondary sector.

In reply to questions, Colin Ranson confirmed that there was funding available for consultation with pupils in all sectors. He also indicated

that OneCall was receptive to meetings with school councils.

In response to a question, Colin accepted that there were different practices in schools about how meals were counted. He assured the Forum that Sunderland was ahead of the game in terms of making meals healthy but the service was finding some resistance from children who would not eat the new healthy choices. Even some staff were now turning away from school meals because of the healthy options. There needed to be incentives to promote healthy meals and a pilot was about to start.

Colin was asked whether menu options and nutritional values could be published in the Sunderland Echo. He replied that there was no reason why this could not happen. Members of the Forum felt that that this information needed to be easily understood by parents and pupils. Colin noted this suggestion.

Members of the Forum agreed to note Colin Ranson's report and thanked him for his attendance. Colin withdrew at this point.

#### **06/14 Discussion re. Deprivation Indicators**

Sandra Mitchell drew attention to the report that had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Appended to the report was a copy of representations made to the DfES regarding the use of free meals criteria and their response. Sandra felt that the DfES were trying to make the same links as the Local Authority and this would be helpful.

Sandra made it clear that the LA did not just use free school meals as an indicator of deprivation. The report showed the range of factors that now used in this measurement. The IMD 'super output' data was now available and this gave a much more accurate picture.

Working families tax credit changes had affected areas like Sunderland and Sandra confirmed that the issue of free school meals criteria had been raised nationally. The Authority would continue to urge the DfES to use measures other than free meals entitlement.

Mike Foster applauded the Sunderland model of deprivation indicators and felt it entirely inappropriate that the DfES was still using the outdated measure of free meals to distribute monies. He was shocked that the DfES still felt that half of Sunderland's secondary schools were receiving deprivation funding, whereas only three were now eligible. The Forum felt that the DfES needed to be given real examples of how their criteria affected schools.

Dr Collins added that the DfES needed to recognise that, whilst free meals eligibility might fluctuate, the educational ability of the children did not change. He felt that it was pointless to possess IMD data if it was not used.

Sally Collingwood noted that schools had to persuade parents to fill in the free meals application form, and this was particularly difficult for those schools with high levels of ESL. It was felt that the criteria should not be dependent upon parents making claims, and should instead be an automatic entitlement. Sandra Mitchell replied that there were data protection issues but the Authority was aware of the issues.

Members of the Forum reiterated that DfES officials needed to understand the issues. Terry Walsh commented that he knew the DfES official who had responded to the Forum's representations and he felt that he did understand the issues. Members of the Forum raised the possibility of the DfES representative attending a meeting of the Schools Forum, as this was such an important issue. Terry Walsh considered it unlikely that he would attend such a meeting.

Sandra Mitchell replied to questions about how the IMD data was produced. This was an issue that the Forum could discuss at its next awayday.

Mike Foster asked the Director whether there was any possibility of streamlining the sharing of information between Education and Social Services with the integration into Children's Services. Dr Paterson confirmed that there was communication and work was ongoing. At present the two Directorates were still being run separately but they were coming together at the top and a decision would then be taken as to how services were delivered. Dr Paterson also referred to the integration of health. She commented that this would be a long journey but uppermost in the objectives would be to ensure that the needs of youngsters were met. The Director felt that Sunderland was forward thinking and she confirmed that there would be consultation with Headteachers and Chairs of Governors about the restructuring.

The Director of Children's Services withdrew from the meeting at this point.

The Forum agreed to note the report on deprivation factors but felt that further discussion/consultation was needed with the Schools Forum. Sandra outlined how the Authority would be responding and confirmed that some specific examples would be given to the DfES. Education Finance would prepare a response but the Forum asked that their views be reflected in the submission. The DfES official who had written to the Authority about the matter would be invited to attend the next Forum awayday.

Forum to consider IMD data production at next Forum awayday

Response to DfES on use of free meals criteria to be formulated by Education Finance. Forum's view to be reflected in this submission

DfES official to be invited to next Forum awayday

## **06/15 Monitoring of Funding Streams**

Gill Wall tabled documentation showing all Children's Services funding streams (these were not all related to Education). There were a number of figures that were to be confirmed, as the final position was not yet known.

All funding streams were monitored through the Children's Services Leadership Team including Standards Fund grants but Gill indicated that there would be no problem in supplying copies of these reports to the Schools Forum. Members of the Forum thanked Gill for this and agreed to receive copies of the reports that were considered by the Department's management team.

Forum to be given copies of CSMT funding monitoring reports

## **06/16 BSF/Academies update**

Terry Walsh had been invited to attend the meeting to give an update on progress with the BSF programme. He began by stressing that any consideration of this programme must be linked to consideration of falling rolls. Falling rolls was the key element and needed accurate planning to ensure stability in the future. BSF was the vehicle by which falling rolls would be managed.

As was widely known, Usworth School would close but there were no other closures planned. However, some secondary schools would have significantly smaller rolls and there needed to be a strategy to deal with this situation to support schools.

The BSF programme would involve some refurbishments and some rebuilding. It was unrealistic to expect rebuilds in most cases. Refurbishment was probably the best value and better for the schools concerned. This would also help to address the funding gap.

Sunderland was one of the first Local Authorities to be selected for the BSF programme but a condition of this was that the Council considered Academies. Initially Academies had been rejected but the Council had been asked to consider them again. At this point the Sunderland Model of Academy was developed which had some similarities to the government model but some significant differences. There had been meetings with the DfES who had allowed the Authority to undertake public consultation. This had been the largest public consultation in twenty years.

Sunderland Model Academies would follow the Authority's policy on admissions, post-16 provision, work on inclusion and would not be in aggressive competition with other schools. National conditions of service would apply for staff.

There had been independent evaluation on behalf of the DfES and the Council and this had been undertaken by Mike Tomlinson in the past few weeks. Mr Tomlinson had visited proposed Academy schools and met with staff, pupils, governors and then with representatives from the Council. He had then consulted with the College, all political groups, the LSC and unions. Some parties had expressed reservations and there had been a range of views and opinions. A meeting with potential sponsors and then a meeting with lead sponsors had taken place. Sponsors had made clear their expectations. Following this, there had been a meeting with secondary Headteachers (and Quarry View Primary).

There had also been meetings with other sponsors who were interested in pursuing Academies under the government model.

A draft report was expected soon and a report would be submitted to both the DfES and the Council. The Authority had made it clear that, if academies were built, these would be to the same capital standards as any other school. Mr Walsh felt that the government position had moved slightly on some issues.

After responding to the Forum's questions, Mr Walsh was thanked for his attendance and he withdrew from the meeting. The Forum was very much aware of the need to ensure that the right decisions were made in developing the BSF programme.

## **06/17 LMS Update**

Sandra Mitchell tabled a report at the meeting giving an update on the LMS/LMSS review.

There had been a question raised by one of the Primary Headteachers' Area Groups about the process of consultation with Headteachers about the proposed changes. Sandra confirmed that all Headteachers had been given an opportunity to respond to the

consultation irrespective of whether they had attended the recent briefing sessions.

The views of Headteachers were sought following a presentation of proposals to Headteachers at the consultation meetings. The meetings were attended by 64 people and only 18 response forms were received. The collated responses were appended to Sandra's report.

Details of feedback from the consultation were given. There was strong support for the changes proposed by the LMS/LMSS review group with only two respondents disagreeing with them on the basis that they would prefer to see the impact on budgets before committing to supporting them. The following changes would therefore be included in the 2006/07 and 2007/08 models:

- Funding for free staff meals removed from each sector model
- All leadership posts in the model moved up the scale
- Clerical support in secondary schools revised to include a post at principal officer level
- Increase Scale 2 from 0.3 to 0.6 in model for collection of meals monies
- NNEB increased from 1: 40 to 1: 30 in primary model
- Teaching assistants revised in primary model
- Funding for Modern Foreign Language Assistant increased to £8,000 in secondary model
- Technical support revised in all sectors
- SENCo time increased in nursery model

With regard to workforce remodelling factors, there was strong support for the changes proposed by the LMS/LMSS review group. The current non-contact time within the model would therefore be stripped out and the following PPA time, at M6 teacher grade would be included in the 2006/07 and 2007/08 models:

- Deputy Headteachers at 0.05
- Assistant Headteachers -primary at 0.04, secondary at 0.06
- SENCos at 0.08
- Other teaching staff at 0.1

There was also strong support for the changes proposed by the LMS/LMSS review group in relation to Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (TLRs). The management points currently in each model form of entry school would be replaced by TLRs on the basis of information supplied by schools on their proposed structures.

On the question of meals utilities, there was strong support for the changes proposed by the LMS/LMSS review group. Therefore the new formula would be included in the models and schools would assume responsibility for payment of all utility costs associated with the provision of meals.

There was also strong support for the proposals relating to repairs and maintenance for non-accidental damage. Therefore the new formula would be included in the models, although it would affect only one secondary school currently.

With regard to changes affecting Pay Grants, there was some support for the proposal to distribute pay grant funding on the basis of pupil numbers rather than on actuals. However, the overriding response

was that it created too much turbulence for school budgets and was inequitable. The revised proposal was that Forum members were asked to consider was to adopt the following phased approach over a 4 year period:

- Year 1 -distribution of 75% of funding based on a snapshot from January payroll information and 25% based on January PLASC numbers
- Year 2 -distribution of 50% of funding based on a snapshot from January payroll information and 50% based on January PLASC numbers
- Year 3 -distribution of 25% of funding based on a snapshot from January payroll information and 75% based on January PLASC numbers
- Year 4 -distribution of 100% of funding based on January PLASC numbers

Sandra was questioned about the late receipt of pay grant monies which made it difficult for schools to manage their funding accurately. Sandra confirmed that it would be easier to process when pay grants were mainstreamed and there was no reason why this problem could not be addressed for 2006/07

The written responses indicated support for the proposals concerning Personalised Learning, however, opinions expressed during the meetings suggested that other data could be used to better target the available funding (e.g. IMD). Further modelling would therefore be undertaken for further consideration.

There was strong support for the proposed changes to the CAPs units. SEN staff were currently assimilating pupils across to the new bands and any surplus funding identified would be utilised to support inclusion elsewhere within the mainstream sector. Early indications were that the re-banding of the pupils within the units would result in minimal funding being released as the bands better reflected the higher levels of need of pupils now within the CAPs units.

During the consultation there was strong support for the proposed banding descriptors for pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs in special schools. The bands would be used to distribute funding in the special school model and to give equivalence of funding in the mainstream models.

There was little response to the proposals for the use of funding within the special schools' ISB to support inclusion. Numbers and revised bands had been agreed for special schools and had been modelled. In addition, there was also a small amount of headroom, i.e. funding above inflationary increases as compared to 2005/06, to be distributed. The draft model was fully funded and left sufficient residual funding to support those areas of inclusion identified as essential, with a minimal amount potentially available to fund the desirable areas.

Planned places for nursery classes and schools had been reviewed and revised to take account of falling rolls. Funding released from the reduction in surplus places would be used to provide three additional January places in most nursery classes to meet the demand for places for younger 3 year olds. Additional January places would also

be available in nursery schools, funded from removal of surplus places in that sector.

PLASC data had been made available from 22<sup>nd</sup> February and it was anticipated that budgets would be sent to schools in the week commencing Monday 6<sup>th</sup> March following consultation. Members of the Forum expressed concern that schools had not yet received their budgets. Sandra replied that before budgets were distributed the Authority wanted to share data relating to the remodelling of the budgets. The Forum agreed that the LMS/LMSS Review Group would be the most appropriate body to undertake this consultation but stressed that this group would need to meet quickly.

The Chair asked whether any responses had been received from the consultation regarding the current 8% limit on surpluses for schools other than secondary schools, as there had been comments from two Area Primary Headteachers' groups about this matter. A number of Primary Headteachers had felt that in view of the uncertainty surrounding single status implications and the financial consequences of this change, the Forum should take a more reasonable view about the limits on surpluses. Members of the Forum discussed this matter but felt uncomfortable about waiving these limits, particularly as OFSTED used a 5% maximum surplus in making their judgements. Whilst they felt it would ill advised to make any changes to the current limits, they could look at this matter again if appropriate.

Members agreed to note the results of the consultation and agreed to implement the principles underpinning those proposals for which there was strong support. They also agreed to further modelling and consultation on those proposals for which support was not strong. The Forum agreed to the revised pay grant proposals.

#### **06/18 Date and time of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Forum was scheduled for 9.30 a.m. on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2006 at Sunderland Civic Centre.

Consideration was given to the pattern of future meetings of the Forum and it was suggested that dates would be set as follows: -

- July 2006 – meeting to consider applications for licensed surpluses

(fresh elections to take place in September 2006 – membership changes likely)

- October 2006 – Awayday (full day session) incorporating routine meeting
- December 2006 – routine meeting
- Early February 2007 – routine meeting

#### **Action Points**

Forum agreed that LMS/LMSS Review Group should meet quickly to consider the remodelled budgets before budgets sent out to schools

Forum discussed suggestion from two Area Primary Heads groups that 8% surplus limit should be adjusted because of single status. Forum agreed that this would be unwise but could consider this further as appropriate.

Agreed to implement changes where consultation had shown support but further modelling to be done in the case of other proposals

Forum agreed to revised pay grant proposals

Further consideration to be given to 2006/07 schedule at next meeting