

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON
TUESDAY 25TH APRIL 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 V Bovill (Non-schools Group – Teaching Associations)
Mrs S Carter (Headteacher Rep. – Nursery)
Mr J E Clarke (Governor Rep. – Secondary)
Mrs S. Collingwood – Early Years & Childcare Partnership
Dr P Collins (Governor Rep. – Secondary)
Mrs J Dowson (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Washington)
Mrs D Elliott (Governor Rep. – Special)
Mr A Falconer (Governor Rep. – Primary)
Mrs P Gibson (Governor Rep. – Secondary)
Mr J Lishman (Governor Rep. – Primary)
Mrs A Mackay (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Sunderland North)
Mr J. McKnight (Headteacher Rep. – Special)
Mr C Short (Governor Rep. – Primary)
Dr E Yeates (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)

Together with: -

Mrs L Brown – Acting Head of Standards & Quality
Mr D May – Finance Manager
Mrs S Mitchell – Project Development and Business Support
Mr J G Robinson – Governor Support Manager
Mrs G Wall – Head of Strategy & Performance

06/19 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mr H Brown (Governor Rep. – Primary)
Mrs V Ingleton (Governor Rep. – Nursery)
Dr H. Paterson – Director of Children's Services
Mrs J Hobbs (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Hetton/Houghton)
Councillor Mrs P. Smith – Portfolio Holder for Education
Mr R Wilkinson (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)

06/20 Feedback from Standards Fund Monitoring Group

The minutes of the last meeting of the Standards Fund Monitoring Group had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Those members of the Forum who were also members of the Standards Fund Monitoring Group were pleased to report that the meetings of this group had improved and were now much more effective. They praised officers for being more responsive.

Action Points

Lynda Brown had been asked to attend this meeting of the Forum, as she was now the officer responsible for working with the Standards Fund Monitoring Group. Among the items discussed at the last meeting of the S.F. Monitoring Group, members asked for details of how Targeted Behaviour and Improvement monies had been used. Lynda Brown reported that she was liaising with David Alexander and she would present a report to the next meeting of the group. Similarly she would be in a position to present a report to the group on Extended Schools funding and workforce remodelling funding.

Proposals for the use of Primary Strategy funding (grant 107) and Secondary Strategy (grant 108) had been considered by the S.F. Monitoring Group. In the case of Grant 107 the group wanted this to be taken back to Area Primary Headteachers' Groups for consultation. It was noted that this was primary Headteachers' first opportunity to influence how centrally held funding was used. The group had also asked for an explanation of why last year's Primary Strategy Funding was underspent.

Lynda Brown made it clear that officers were willing to be challenged by the S.F. Monitoring Group. She confirmed officers' intention to be mature, transparent and open towards the monitoring group. Officers would be circulating full details of spending profiles from each budget area along with relevant guidance. A further improvement was that information was now circulated in advance of meetings.

Members of the Schools Forum welcomed the new and fresh approach of Lynda Brown and David May. They hoped that the new way of working would lead to the end of significant underspends. David May indicated that the only monies that had been returned to the DfES last year was teacher threshold pay grant funding (there was no way of retaining this).

The Standards Fund Monitoring Group sought the approval of the Schools Forum to take decisions on grant areas. The Forum unanimously agreed this.

Lynda was asked whether Workforce Remodelling training had been well attended. She confirmed that there had been a good level of attendance and she would soon be able to supply actual figures.

Sally Collingwood asked for clarification of Broadband Connectivity funding. David May noted her question and would look into the matter with a report back to a subsequent meeting of the Schools Forum.

06/21 Minutes of previous meeting held on 23rd February 2006

The minutes were approved as a true record.

06/22 Matters arising from the minutes

Communication with Governing Bodies – Further to the comment at the last meeting that some services did not supply information for school governors (e.g. Extended Schools), the Director of Children's Services had undertaken to remind services within the Directorate of the need for better communication with Governing Bodies. Gill Wall undertook to ensure that this had happened.

Forum agreed to delegate decision making powers in relation to Standards Fund grant areas to S.F. Monitoring Group

Lynda Brown to compile figures on take-up of workforce remodelling training

David May to clarify funding for Broadband Connectivity

Gill Wall to ensure that services within the Directorate were advised of the importance of communication with Governing Bodies

Action Points

School Meals – It was noted that the Director had expressed concern about variability in quality of meals provided in different schools. David May confirmed that there was a programme of work to address meeting to address them regarding this matter this. Members of the Forum agreed to invite Colin Ranson to a subsequent meeting

Colin Ranson to be invited to a future meeting

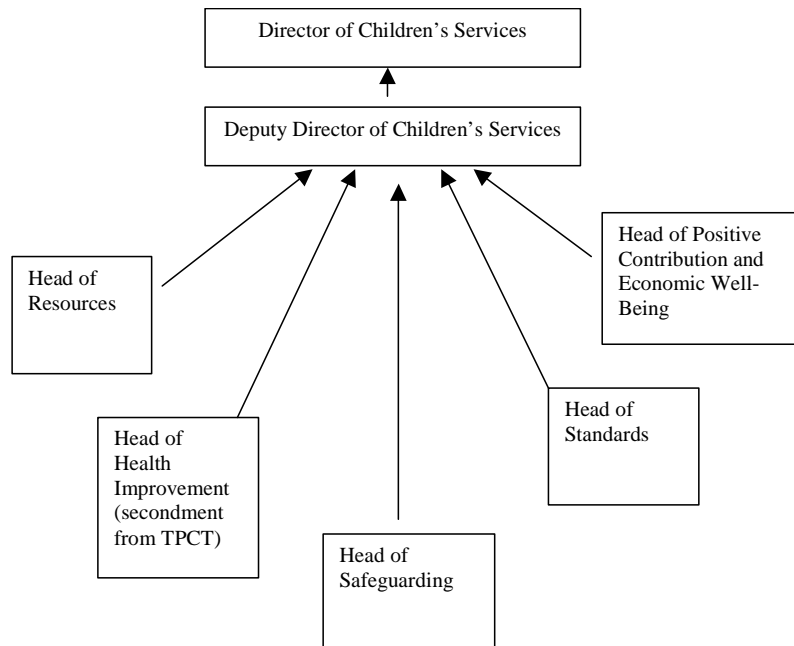
Monitoring of Funding Streams – A year-end report was being produced for the Children's Services Management Team. This would be available to the Forum at its July meeting.

Year-end report on funding streams to be supplied to Schools Forum at next meeting

BSF/Academies – An evaluation by Mike Tomlinson resulted in the application of the Sunderland Model of Academies as proposed by the City Council being accepted in principle (Check wording with Beverley). The timescale was now very limited. Members of the Forum asked whether a single officer was responsible for carrying forward the BSF programme. It was explained that currently Beverley Scanlon was responsible for this but this could be affected by the new Children's Services management structure. Members of the Forum agreed that BSF/Academies would be placed as a standing item on the agenda for each subsequent meeting.

BSF/Academies to be a standing item on Schools Forum agenda

Re-structuring of Children's Services – Gill Wall explained the proposed management structure was based on the five outcomes of Every Child Matters together with a Deputy Director. The Deputy's role was about transformational change that needed to be made. The leadership team structure was currently proposed as follows: -



Each of the above would have broad based job descriptions and this would then inform the next level of management. The proposals would be submitted to Cabinet on 18th May and appointments would follow for the Deputy Director (national advertisement) in July. Heads of Service posts would be appointed in late July and other levels would then follow. Heads of Service posts were ring fenced internally.

When the new structure was established the Schools Forum would need to consider what implications this had upon their own organisation.

06/23 Role of the Schools Forum

A report had been circulated in advance of the meeting and an addendum was tabled at the meeting. The report reflected statutory guidance.

David May suggested that before the autumn term awayday he would circulate a questionnaire to newly elected members of the Forum to ask them to identify their training needs. This was agreed by the Forum.

Dr Collins questioned whether it was intended that there be a more systematic approach to reporting to the Schools Forum. He commented that the LMS Review Group looked at the funding but not at the overall strategy. He stressed that the Forum should not just consider how much was allocated to particular budgets.

The Chair noted that the Primary Headteachers' Area Chairs & Secretaries Group had expressed concerns about the Inclusion & Achievement Service Forum failing to meet for over one year. This Forum was now starting to meet again but Headteachers were very concerned that decisions had been made about SEN funding without consultation with the Service Forum or the Schools Forum.

Vince Bovill commented upon the major changes in Inclusion & Achievement service areas. He felt that the Schools Forum should have been made aware of the developments. He further suggested that the Inclusion & Achievement Service should have representation on the Schools Forum. It was pointed out that there were regulations limiting how many non-school members were on the Schools Forum and some restrictions on who could fill places. Sandra Mitchell commented that the PRU was a possible non-school member.

Sandra Mitchell pointed out that under new Schools Forum regulations each member could only be a representative for one group. This meant that Headteachers who currently represented their sector (e.g. primary or secondary) and also represented a Diocesan Authority could no longer perform both roles.

Dr Collins remarked that, alongside the new constitution, the Schools Forum should also consider which officers were invited to attend meetings.

Members of the Forum discussed communication with the electorate. It was noted that there was feedback to most Headteacher groups and that there was an ongoing programme of reporting to school governors through the Governor Support Team Agenda Booklet. The Forum discussed whether there should be an alternative method of communication. Most of those present favoured the Agenda Booklet as the best system of communication.

Dorothy Elliott observed that, compared to other Authorities, Sunderland was a successful Schools Forum.

Agreed that David May would circulate questionnaire to Members of Forum after forthcoming election to identify training needs.

Current methods of communication were confirmed as the most appropriate to fulfil the requirements of the Forum's role

06/24 Constitution of the Schools Forum

The Children's Services Management Team had looked at the Schools Forum constitution requirements from September 2006. Once the Management Team had some proposals these would be circulated to all members of the Forum for comment. The Chair reminded members that the Authority would take the final decision on the constitution of the Forum.

Schools Forum constitution proposals to be circulated to all members for comment.

06/25 LMS/LMSS Review and Final Budget Allocations

A report had been circulated in advance of the meeting along with minutes of the LMS/LMSS Review Group meeting.

In reviewing outstanding areas the outcomes of the review of Special Schools Funding had been considered and were agreed in terms of the revised funding arrangements achieving the intended outcomes. Partnership Agreements, which detailed the services to be delivered and the expected outcomes within the agreed funding, were currently being considered.

Forum noted the actions taken with regard to outstanding areas from the LMS/LMSS review

Having seen the modelled outcomes of the revised proposals it was agreed that Pay Grants should be implemented over a four year period as proposed at the last meeting of the Forum.

Personalised Learning - the report explained that the funding distributed locally mirrored the national basis for allocation and included primary, secondary and special school pupils. Funding for extending the vocational curriculum (£241,000) had not yet been allocated and a paper was currently being prepared for consideration by the 14-19 Steering Group and Secondary Heads. It was intended that this funding would be distributed during 2006/07 once the most effective use of this resource had been agreed.

Funding for Unit Provisions - The outcomes of the review of provision required had been shared and noted. Schools with Unit Provision had been funded for 2006/07 in line with the outcomes. With regard to funding released from Curriculum Access Provisions (CAPs) for new ASD provisions, this had been retained currently, subject to the outcomes of SEN service review and identification of the most appropriate schools/basis for delivery of future provision. It was anticipated that this funding would be distributed during 2006/07 to identified schools to enable them to establish the provisions required prior to receiving pupils in September 2007. This matter would be discussed again with the Schools Forum.

Schools Forum to be given further information on funding for Unit Provisions when available

Application of MFG - The level of funding available had enabled all schools to be funded at the level of the MFG. The Schools Forum had previously agreed to excepting two areas from the calculation. These were nursery places and unit provisions. Following calculations of the impact, only the unit provision exception was applied.

Forum noted the application of the MFG other than in exceptional circumstances

The report referred to the changed funding arrangement for 2006/07 and future years with regard to the use of January PLASC data as the basis for the full year funding. Whilst the Authority must comply with this requirement, there were a number of schools in exceptional

circumstances where this was inappropriate (primarily linked to school closures and amalgamations). The cases where the MFG had been disappplied were as follows:

- Venerable Bede – Application of MFG would have meant no funding was received by the school to reflect a whole year of intake in September. The amendment made was to fund 180 pupils from September.
- Usworth School – This school was due to close in August 2007 and had no intake in September. In addition the current Year 9 pupils would transfer to other schools for September. The adjustment required to reflect this was to reduce the funding for pupils currently in Year 9 and Yr 11 from September. An equivalent adjustment was made to the schools receiving the pupils (Biddick, Oxclose, St Robert's and Washington).
- Pallion and Havelock Primary Schools would both close in August 2006 and the successor school, Highfield Community Primary, would open in September. Pallion and Highfield had both received budgets based on a full year effect, adjusted to ensure sufficient funding was available to meet the minimum funding guarantee for Highfield Community Primary.
- Southwick Primary School Annex would close in August 2006 and pupils would be relocated to the Southwick main site. Southwick Primary School's budget included a full year effect budget for the costs of the Annex to reflect the costs associated with its closure.

Forum agreed the action taken with regard to disapplication of the MFG in exceptional circumstances

Other Funding for Schools - The application of MFG related to main schools budget but also had an impact on other funding received by schools where January 2006 PLASC data was the basis for allocation. The same schools would have received an inappropriate level of standards fund and other funding. The Authority had contacted DfES to make them aware of the position and to seek approval to adjust funding in line with MFG changes. Whilst DfES offered alternative options to address the position, the impact of the options was not comparable to the MFG changes. These options had been implemented in the most appropriate way for affected schools.

Forum noted the position with regards to other funding for schools

Central Expenditure Limit - the Central Expenditure Limit (CEL) provided schools with the reassurance that the non-ISB elements of the schools' block were not increasing at a faster rate than the ISB. For the year 2006/07, using the DfES calculator, the Authority was in breach of this limit but only because of the position of Personalised learning and Unit Provision funding (as previously reported). Had the funding been delegated at the beginning of the year the CEL would have been met for 2006/07. Pending distribution of these amounts and the additional Personalised Learning Allocation for 2007/08, the CEL would also be breached in 2007/08. However, should a methodology for allocating this funding be agreed prior to finalisation of the 2007/08 budgets, then the CEL would not be breached for this reason.

Agree to the breach of the CEL as a result of unallocated sums subject to the Forum being consulted further on the matter

Forum noted the potential for the CEL to be breached in 2007/08

School Budgets - School Budgets for 2006/07 were distributed as proposed in the week commencing 6th March. An additional requirement as part of the national review of funding necessitated that schools were provided with two-year budgets, the second being on an indicative basis. Indicative budgets for 2007/08 were to be distributed to schools following the end of term break.

On behalf of Secondary Headteachers, Dr Yeates urged the Authority to give details of 2007/08 indicative budgets as soon as possible, even

if this meant that headroom was excluded. Sandra Mitchell confirmed that this was possible and would make the necessary arrangements.

06/26 Criteria for Licensed Surplus Applications

A report had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The purpose of the report was to allow members of the Forum to consider proposals for amendments to the criteria for licensed surplus applications with regard to funding reserved as sinking funds specified by grant awarding bodies, and to highlight the increased relevance of the exclusion of any funds held in relation to community activities.

The report reminded members that the Schools Forum had agreed a system for licensed surplus applications to be considered against criteria. These applications were currently based upon a level of surplus above 5% in secondary schools and 8% in primary, special and nursery schools. This continued to be in line with DfES suggested guidelines and incorporated into the Sunderland scheme of delegation, and as such no amendment was proposed. At the next schools forum meeting, members would be asked to consider licensed surplus approvals from schools for the year ended 31st March 2006.

As stipulated within the scheme of delegation, funds held in relation to Community Activities were not taken into account unless added to the budget share surplus by the school as permitted by the Authority. The minimal operation of community facilities in previous years, and the reliance of grant funding to run such schemes, meant that there had been no instances of separate year-end balances being held for community activities. It was likely that going forward, this situation would change as more fee earned income was generated. As such separate community balances would be held, either in surplus or deficit, and these would be outside the scope of any surplus applications reported to the schools forum.

A member of the Forum questioned whether schools that had been given money for extended schools building would need to apply for a licensed surplus application where this showed as a surplus balance. Officers explained that this would be acceptable as it fulfilled the existing criteria.

The report explained that the scheme of delegation stated three circumstances under which a school may hold a balance in excess of the stipulated threshold; planned capital works, planning for volatility in pupil numbers and funding reserved as matched funding. The Authority was aware that grant awarding bodies often stipulated the requirement for a sink fund to be established in order to upkeep/renew the asset benefiting from the grant award. It was proposed to add such a scenario to the list of circumstances under which a school may hold balance in excess of the stipulated threshold, where a school could demonstrate that this is a direct stipulation from the grant awarding body. If approval for holding such a fund was subsequently agreed by the Schools Forum, a separate balance would be held for that purpose, and the Authority would only permit draw down for the stipulated purpose, unless the Schools Forum approval was provided.

In reply to questions, it was commented by officers that there had always been issues around the conditions applied to grant funding. Schools therefore needed to plan for these. The Chair added that too many exceptions to the 8%/5% limits would see overall balances rise.

Action Points

Sandra Mitchell to circulate indicative 2007/08 budgets to schools sooner than originally planned

Having considered the report, the Forum agreed to the continuation of the current threshold levels for reporting a licensed surplus, agreed to note the exclusion of Community Activity Funds from Licensed surplus applications and Agreed the inclusion of provision of sink funds as a reason under which a school could hold balances in excess of the stipulated threshold.

06/27 Deprivation Review

Members of the Schools Forum had previously discussed the DfES request for a statement on how deprivation was funded within the funding formula for schools. Members of the Schools Forum had asked that their comments be included in the statement. Officers confirmed that this has been done where possible throughout the statement. The draft statement was attached to the Authority's report.

The statement explained how the Authority had moved away from free meals criteria and showed the exact percentages of the split in available funding in each sector. It was noted that the changes in the criteria that were used had an impact on school budgets. The statement went on to explain how much was allocated through this method and the difference between the highest, lowest average in each of the sectors.

Members of the Forum commended the paper but some members questioned the comment that the use of free meals criteria "had some merit". It was argued that this measure had little merit although this view was not shared by all of those present. In the light of this discussion a minor amendment would be made to the statement.

It was observed that the way that benefit changes acted as a proxy for free school meals was disproportionately large.

Sally Collingwood pointed out that Looked After Children did not receive any funding allocation and this was a need to be addressed. Sally added that she did not recall being consulted about the cessation of this funding. Sandra Mitchell offered to look into this matter to seek clarification. The Chair agreed that this was a key question as LAC was a group that needed to be given extra support.

Sally also asked for clarification of deprivation funding for pupils in nursery schools and those in nursery classes (in primary/infant schools). Sandra responded that pupils were in nursery provision for a much shorter time and the Authority did not have the robust data to use in respect of these children. Therefore IMD was used. Susan Carter felt that it was worth modelling again as there was such a marked difference between nursery and other sectors. Sandra explained that this would need to be considered through the LMS/LMSS Review Group.

06/28 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting of the Forum was scheduled for 9.30 a.m. on Thursday 6th July 2006 at Sunderland Civic Centre.

Action Points

Forum agreed to the continuation of the current threshold levels for reporting a licensed surplus.

Forum agreed to note the exclusion of Community Activity Funds from Licensed surplus applications

Agreed the inclusion of provision of sink funds as a reason under which a school could hold balances in excess of the stipulated threshold.

Sandra Mitchell to clarify points about Looked After Children funding

Forum noted response to DfES on deprivation funding and suggested some minor amendments.