

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON  
THURSDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2008 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 D Ambrose (Governor Rep. - Secondary)  
Mrs T Bevan (Headteacher Rep. – Junior)  
Mr H Brown (Governor Rep. - Secondary)  
Mrs S Carter (Headteacher Rep. - Nursery)  
Mr J Clarke (Governor Rep. Secondary)  
Mrs S Collingwood (Headteacher Rep. – Infant)  
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 A McCourt (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Roman Catholic))  
Ms G McDonough (Non-schools Group – Voluntary sector)  
Mr J McKnight (Headteacher – Special)  
Mrs J McLagan (Governor Rep. - Primary)  
Mr C Short (Governor Rep. – Primary)  
Mrs T Stoker (Headteacher Rep. (Community Primary Sunderland North))  
Mr R Wilkinson (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)  
Cllr L Williams (Non-schools Group – Early Years & Childcare Partnership)

Together with: -

Mrs K Atkins – Principal Finance Officer, Schools  
Mr P Campbell – Head of Resources  
Mr D May – Finance Manager  
Mr J G Robinson – Governor Support Manager (Clerk to the Forum)  
Cllr Mrs P Smith – Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services  
Ms N Vokes – Prospective representative for Early Years PVI settings

*The agenda for the meeting had been distributed late to members. Officers offered an apology for the delay, which was caused by the ongoing work dealing with school budgets.*

*Nikki Vokes was the prospective representative for Early Years PVI settings and her appointment to the Schools Forum would be finalised very soon. She was welcomed to her first meeting.*

**Action Points**

**08/13 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from: -

Mrs D Butler (Governor Rep. - Secondary)  
Mrs D Elliott (Governor Rep. - Special)  
Mr M Foster (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)  
Mr D Litchfield (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)  
Mrs A Mackay (Headteacher Rep. – Roman Catholic Primary)  
Mr I Reed (Non-schools group – PRU)  
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))

**08/14 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**08/15 Minutes of previous meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2008**

The minutes were approved as a true record.

**08/16 Matters arising from the minutes**

08/08 (Diplomas) – It had been intended to bring a report on Diplomas to this meeting. David May explained that the 14-19 Steering Group would be considering this and a report would be brought to the next meeting of the Forum.

Report on Diplomas to May 2008 meeting

08/08 (Day 6 Provision) – Officers had been asked to provide greater clarity around how additional resources for Day 6 provision would be used. Officers explained that it had been intended to invite Sandra Mitchell to attend this meeting of the Schools Forum but the PRU had been subject to an OFSTED inspection and this had taken priority. Colin Short asked whether officers could report back on the PRU inspection but officers were not in a position to feed back at this stage.

08/09 (EAL funding) – Val Thompson had clarified that EAL funding was included in respect of pupils aged 5 or under. Sally Collingwood asked whether the Forum could see some figures for this. David May did not have these figures but indicated that the information would be available from the Performance & Information Team. David undertook to obtain these figures and supply them to members at the next meeting.

D May to obtain figures in respect of EAL funding for pupils age 5 and under

08/09 (Infant School funding) – It had been indicated in an earlier report to the Forum that only Infant and Nursery Schools would be benefiting from the additional 0.5 additional TA post in the formula changes. However, Sally Collingwood referred to a report supplied to the January meeting of the Forum, which appeared to show that all primary schools with nursery classes would also be benefiting from this change. Sally therefore asked whether the original information was wrong. David May would seek clarification of this point.

D May to clarify whether only Infant and Nursery Schools had benefited from additional 0.5 TA funding or whether all schools with nursery classes had received this.

08/12 (meetings of the Forum) – It was agreed that the next meeting of the Schools Forum would be held on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May instead of 15<sup>th</sup> May to avoid conflict with the Primary School SATs week.

Next meeting of Forum to be held on 22<sup>nd</sup> May to avoid conflict with SATs week

**08/17 Feedback from Standards Fund Monitoring Group**

The SFMG had met on 31<sup>st</sup> January and 6<sup>th</sup> March 2008 and minutes had been circulated with agenda papers.

At the January meeting the group had discussed the impact of academies on the standards fund allocation to the Authority. Richard Wilkinson expressed serious concerns about the effect of academies on collaborative projects. He cited the example of Skills Centres which were only viable with all schools involved. These centres would be jeopardised by a reduced number of schools. The success of this project (which was nationally recognised) was due to the strength of partnership. The changing position of academies and also the possibility of Trust Status meant that these successes might not be sustainable. Paul Campbell noted Richard's comments and commented that, whilst academies were independent schools, under

the Sunderland model of academy there would continue to be Local Authority involvement and influence. Richard highlighted the distinction between a school being a partner in a joint venture and simply engaging a provider.

David May indicated that the paper that would be produced on Diplomas would address the points that Richard had raised. It would then become clearer what impact the academies would have on the wider financial provision.

Colin Short felt that, in the interests of all schools, the question needed to be addressed in advance of the academies opening. John Hallworth commented that this issue was critical to the success of the schools system in Sunderland. He stressed that the lead sponsors would need to be committed to the partnership and asked how much influence the Local Authority could have in this partnership. Paul Campbell confirmed that the Local Authority were not in control of the academies but was working closely with partners. Officers offered to clarify how academy decisions were made at the next meeting.

At next meeting officers to provide clarification about how academy decision were made

Among the items discussed at the March meeting of the SFMG, Colin Ranson had provided a report on the School Lunch Grant 2008-11. The total value of the School Lunch Grant was £240m over three years. Each Authority would receive a share of £80m for each year of the grant, based on 70% pupil numbers and 30% free school meal numbers. Sunderland's allocation for the year 2008/09 would be £457,046. Unlike the transitional school meals funding there was only one grant and this was allocated via the standards fund with an expectation that all Authorities consulted and agreed with the Schools Forum on how the funding should be shared out locally. The purpose of the School Lunch Grant was to focus on increasing school lunch uptake, specifically by helping to keep the price of a school lunch down. The grant could be used in the following four ways:

- To pay for ingredients costs for school lunches
- To pay for labour costs of catering staff
- To buy small pieces of kitchen equipment
- To support the implementation of the nutrient-based standards through paying for nutrient analysis software and the expertise to operate the software

Having considered the proposals for the School Lunch Grant, the SFMG agreed to retain the role of the dietician. They also agreed that the remaining funding should be distributed to all schools to support ingredients costs using a formula based on uptake instead of pupil numbers.

Raj Singh had given a presentation on Standards Fund Sustainability for Extended Schools 2008-9. The SFMG had approved Raj's proposed use of this funding but there had since been a question as to whether this related to use over the academic year or financial year. This point was to be clarified.

Clarification needed as to whether Extended Schools Sustainability funding proposals related to academic or financial year

Terry Hambleton noted that extended schools monies had only recently been credited to school budgets and needed to be spent quickly. She stressed that there was a need for better forward planning to enable schools to plan their expenditure. The Chair responded that sometime monies came into the Local Authority late and this could be a factor. David May reported, however, that he was working with Extended Services on these issues. The Chair added that officers were now more aware of scrutiny than in the past.

Presentations had been given to the SFMG on the Secondary and Primary Strategy Targeted Support. SFMG had approved the proposed use of these funds. It was noted that much of the money was for supply cover.

One of the initiatives covered in the Primary Strategy was 'Every Child a Reader'. Sally Collingwood asked for clarification of the specified level of reading referred to in the minutes. Gary Robinson would provide Sally with a copy of Sue Morgan's original report.

Sally Collingwood to be supplied with copy of Sue Morgan's original report on PNS

### **08/18 Minutes of Children's Trust**

The draft minutes of the last Children's Trust meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2008 had been circulated to members of the Forum.

In response to a question, Paul Campbell explained that the Children's Trust was a commissioning body for Children's Services.

Councillor Smith pointed out that there was a Primary Headteacher representative on the Trust and she asked whether there was any feedback to the Headteacher groups. The Chair explained that there were four area groups and with just one representative it was difficult to ensure that feedback was given. Councillor Smith suggested that someone from the Children's Trust attend a meeting of the Schools Forum to explain the role. The Chair responded that there was a vacant place on the Forum's membership for a representative of the Children's Trust but it had not been possible to persuade anyone to take up this position. It was noted that Dorothy Butler was a member of the Children's Trust although she sometimes could not attend. Councillor Smith acknowledged that attendance was difficult for all members of the Trust.

Michael Hartnack expressed the view that it was unclear what the Children's Trust did and how it fitted together with other groups. Some other members of the Forum supported this. Councillor Mrs Williams commented that this had been discussed at the Children's Services Review Committee. She felt that it would be helpful to have a simplified version of how the groups (Children's Trust, Children's Trust Strategic Partnership, CS Review Committee etc.) fitted together but that this should not be too detailed.

Richard Wilkinson suggested that the Forum also be given a structure of the Children's Trust and how each person was elected/appointed.

It was agreed to invite Norma Hardy to the next meeting of the Schools Forum to respond to these points.

Norma Hardy to be invited to next Forum meeting to explain role of Children's Trust

### **08/19 Feedback from 14-19 Partnership**

It was understood that Angela O'Donaghue would become the 14-19 representative on the Schools Forum but she had been unable to attend this meeting due to a scheduling conflict with another meeting.

John Hallworth pointed out that he was also a member of the 14-19 Partnership.

Doug Ambrose welcomed the feedback provided to the Schools Forum from the 14-19 Partnership. This had been in response to his representations to Lynda Brown.

The 14-19 Partnership had discussed the 'Aimhigher' project. There was also a separate strategy called Aim Higher for disabled pupils that was being run by Social Care staff and it was felt that it could be confusing having two similarly named strategies. Nevertheless, Richard Wilkinson felt that this had been one of the most successful grants that schools had received, as it encouraged opportunities for young people and had a genuine impact.

**08/20 Progress report on approved Applications For Licensed Surplus**

Susan Carter declared an interest in this matter, as one of the reports related to her own school. Members noted the declaration but did not consider it necessary for Susan to withdraw in this instance.

The Authority had produced a report to update members of the Forum of progress in individual schools with regard to the licensed surplus applications approved by the Director of Children's Services and City Treasurer, following recommendations by Forum members in July 2007. A further report was submitted to the Forum in November 2007 detailing the progress of the applications at individual school level, and members of the Forum requested a further progress report in February/March 2008. A condition of approval of licensed surpluses was that a structured and regular monitoring of progress was undertaken by the Finance Service Liaison Officers. Progress of the balances remaining, following the report of November 2007, was given in the report.

The schools detailed in the report were: -

- Hetton Lyons Nursery School
- Hetton le Hole Nursery School
- Millfield Nursery School
- Holley Park Primary
- Columbia Grange Special School

All schools were said to be on track with their approved projects with the exception of Columbia Grange. The Schools Forum was asked to consider a request from Columbia Grange School for the approval of a revised estimate in connection with the Alterations to playground project.

John McKnight expressed the view that the Forum needed to support schools in this licensed surplus position but he felt that the Forum should look carefully at such applications from any school. Paul Campbell confirmed that Columbia Grange were seeking a variation of the previous agreement and this funding applied to their 2006/07 surplus. A separate decision would need to be taken at the July meeting of the Forum on any 2007/08 surplus from the school.

Michael Hartnack commented that the situation at Columbia Grange School should not have been a surprise if the project was being carefully managed and monitored. Sally Collingwood pointed out, however, that sometimes there were circumstances which were beyond a school's control. David May informed members that the monitoring was robust but he supported the view that schools should be made aware of the need to give updates to the Forum at regular intervals throughout the year.

Susan Carter reported that she had been asked to give a report on her surplus and she asked whether Columbia Grange had been asked to

do this and at what stage. Paul Campbell felt that the process was in place to ensure that licensed surplus monies were spent appropriately, but he accepted that the timing of reports back to the Forum might need to be reviewed.

Michael Hartnack asked whether there were issues at Columbia Grange which would require the input of a Local Authority officer to assist with project management. Paul Campbell responded that the Authority could advise the school but the process needed to be clarified.

It was agreed that a clear communication needed to be sent to Columbia Grange School to explain that the Forum had reluctantly agreed to allow the variation to the surplus application, but that the Forum was disappointed that this had not been drawn to their attention earlier. David May raised the possibility of monthly reports from the school.

David May would compile a letter to Columbia Grange on behalf of the Chair of the Forum. David would also visit the school to discuss the matter with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors.

Forum reluctantly agreed to allow variation to surplus application from Columbia Grange School but a communication would be sent to the school in connection with the matter. D May to compile letter on behalf of Chair. D May would also visit the school

Copy of Columbia Grange letter to be supplied to other members of the Forum at next meeting

## **08/21 Area Based Grants**

A report was presented to update members of the School Forum on the development of an Area Based Grant (ABG) to replace a number of previously ring-fenced grants. This came into operation from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008.

Seventeen grants previously received within Children's Services had ended and were now part of a single ABG. The ABG was no longer specifically ring fenced to the activity or the Directorate. Children's Services had extended the commitment to a number of areas of activity previously funded through discontinued grants for a period of between six and twelve months and a full budget review would be carried out in each area of activity to inform spending decisions for 2009/10 and beyond.

Trish Stoker noted that the funding for 2008/08 had been allocated largely on the basis of 2007/08 funding. She asked, however, whether any decisions had been taken in respect of 2009/10 ABG funding or beyond. Paul Campbell indicated that there would be discussion with budget holders.

The Chair reminded colleagues that the City Treasurer had attended the November meeting of the Forum to discuss Area Based Grants and members had stressed the importance of the Schools Forum being included in consultations on the ABG. Paul Campbell explained that, ultimately the decision would be taken by Government Office North-East (GONE) with the Local Authority but there was no reason why the Schools Forum could not be involved in discussions on a regular basis.

Richard Wilkinson acknowledged that the Council could take the decision on how to use the ABG but it was in the interests of all schools that the Schools Forum had an opportunity to influence this. He felt, for example, it would be useful for the Forum to know about the EIP (Education Improvement Partnership) activities.

Paul Campbell responded to questions and commented that the Council would be looking again at whether existing spend across the

Council reflected priorities. Whilst there were no grant conditions attached to ABG, it was necessary to consider how the use of monies equated to the intended outcomes.

Lorraine Johnson had attended Area Primary Headteacher Group meetings to promote the EIP memorandum of understanding but Sally Collingwood and Terry Hambleton commented that it was unclear what schools were being asked to sign up to. Trish Stoker felt, however, that the message was to get as many schools as possible on board and then they could shape the initiatives.

Richard Wilkinson explained that it was only at a very late stage that it had been known that EIP monies would be available and this was why the project had not been fully planned yet. He stressed that this was an opportunity to keep something from the success of EiC. Terry Hambleton noted this but responded that there had been too many unanswered questions when it had been considered at the Primary Headteachers' Group.

John Hallworth pointed out that there were representatives from Primary Headteachers on the EiC Management Board which had considered the EIP proposals. He added that there were individual standards fund grants ending and that this would have an impact on individual schools.

The Chair asked how schools could help to shape the agenda for use of Area Based Grants. She expressed the view that the Schools Forum was the most appropriate body to do this, as it had a truly representative membership from across the City.

David May confirmed that during 2008/09 all service areas would undertake a full base budget review. This would consider the use of the ABG within service areas and specific areas of activities previously covered by specific grant.

Cllr Mrs Williams commented that there had been a lack of consultation with school governors in the decision making process. She asked for the support of other Forum members in raising the profile of governors.

## **08/22 Schools Block Other Budget 2007/2008**

A report outlined the position of the Schools Block Other Budget, which was contained with Section 52 expenditure and forms the Directorate's element of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

The DSG required increased monitoring of Schools Block Other Budgets and current forecasts suggested that an underspend in the region of £23,000 could arise on Schools Block Other Budgets in the current year.

As discussed at earlier meetings, the Authority, subject to the agreement of the Schools Forum, were able to charge costs associated with the termination of employment to the Schools Block, where there was an overall saving to the Schools Block Budget.

In line with the approach taken last year it was proposed that, in order to maintain an appropriate level of funding for school based redundancies in future years, that any underspend on the Schools Block Other Budget be ring fenced for School redundancies.

The Forum agreed to approve that any 2007/2008 underspend against Schools Block Other Budgets was used to fund redundancies costs incurred.

**Action points**

Agreed to use 07/08 Schools Block Other Budgets for school redundancy costs

**08/23 Update Budget Position 2008/2011**

David May reported that there had been delays in getting budgets out to schools. This was due to LSC monies arriving late.

Confirmation had been received from the DCSF of Early Years Pathfinder monies. David had met with representatives of the Private, Voluntary and Independent providers and monies had been allocated to maintained schools. In mid-March the DCSF said that there was a problem with national funding. Schools had therefore been advised not to spend this money and, if the school budget was based on these resources, they might need to declare redundancies (these could always be halted if money was confirmed).

Details of indicative 2009/10 and 2010/11 funding would be issued to schools very soon. Susan Carter asked whether Nursery Schools would also receive their indicative budgets for the next two years. David responded that next year's budget would be sent out but this would have caveats.

**08/24 Date and time of next meeting**

Meetings of the Forum were arranged as follows: -

- Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2008 at 9.30 a.m.
- Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2008 at 9.30 a.m.
- Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> September 2008 at 9.30 a.m.
- Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2008 (full day)

An item which was suggested for the next meeting was Daycare Costs – Sustainability Plan.

Daycare Sustainability Plan suggested as item for future agenda (July)