

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON
THURSDAY 27TH SEPTEMBER 2007 AT SUNDERLAND CIVIC CENTRE**

The following members of the Forum were present: -

Mrs Y Gray (Headteacher Rep. – Church of England Primary) – Chair of Forum
Mr H Brown (Governor Rep. - Secondary)
Mr D Ambrose (Governor Rep. - Secondary)
Mrs D Butler (Governor Rep. - Secondary)
Mrs S Carter (Headteacher Rep. - Nursery)
Mr J Clarke (Governor Rep. Secondary)
Mrs S Collingwood (Headteacher Rep. – Infant)
Mrs D Elliott (Governor Rep. - Special)
Mrs T Hambleton (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Hetton/Houghton)
Mrs A Hodgson (Headteacher Rep. – Community Primary Sunderland South)
Mrs A Mackay (Headteacher Rep. – Roman Catholic Primary)
Ms G McDonough (Non-schools Group – Voluntary sector)
Mrs J McLagan (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)
Dr E. Yeates (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Church of England)

Together with: -

Mr D Alexander – Finance Team
Mr J G Robinson – Governor Support Manager (Clerk to the Forum)
Mrs V Thompson – Principal Finance Officer

07/68 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mrs T Bevan (Headteacher Rep. – Junior)
Mrs J Brown (Non-schools group – Teaching Associations)
Mr P Campbell – Head of Resources
Mr M Foster (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Mr J Hallworth (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Mr M Hartnack (Governor Rep. - Primary)
Mr D Litchfield (Headteacher Rep. – Community Secondary)
Mr D May – Finance Manager
Mr A McCourt (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Roman Catholic)
Mr J McKnight (Headteacher Rep. - Special)
Mr C Short (Governor Rep. – Primary)
Cllr P Smith – Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
Mr S White (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary (Post 16))
Mrs K Wilkinson (Governor Rep. – Nursery)
Mrs S Wright (Headteacher Rep. – Community Primary Washington)

Action Points

07/69 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Mrs L. Williams declared an interest in the discussion regarding early years funding. Primary and Nursery Headteachers also questioned whether they should declare such an interest as their schools would be affected by this decision. The declarations of interest were noted but it was not considered necessary for these members to withdraw during discussion.

07/70 Minutes of previous meeting held on 24th May 2007

The minutes were approved as a true record with the following amendment: --

Page 5 – it had not been noted that Cllr L Williams withdrew from the meeting during consideration of the Lambton Primary School application for a licensed surplus.

07/71 Matters arising from the minutes

07/59 (nursery free meals entitlement) – It was now clear that nursery pupils could be entitled/eligible for free meals if they received education before and after lunch. However, the LA did not receive top level funding for this provision as they were not statutory school age. Val Thompson confirmed that this could prove potentially costly.

There had been development, however, which would enable schools to meet the cost of this provision from 3-4 year old flexible pathfinder monies. It was made clear that this would be for one year only as an interim measure. Sally Collingwood welcomed this development but questioned whether the Authority had considered how nursery free meals could be habit-forming and educate children in healthy eating which could carry forward into primary school. Val Thompson confirmed that Children's Services officers were to speak to Community & Cultural Services officers regarding the cost of this provision and the potential benefits.

Howard Brown asked whether it would be possible for all nursery pupils to receive free meals funded by pathfinder monies irrespective of whether they qualified on the grounds of deprivation. Val responded that this would be a matter for each setting to consider but the Local Authority would expect schools to maintain parity with other sectors. Also, such provision could create the wrong expectations amongst parents.

Terry Hambleton questioned whether free meals figures would affect the school's deprivation factors and whether this could be recognised in the PLASC. Sally Collingwood felt that Authority officers were already aware of the arguments around this.

07/67 (5% clawback of surplus balances) - Members discussed the new funding measures which meant that 5% of all surplus school funding would be clawed back for redistribution (not just the part over the specified 5%/8% limits). The Forum did not welcome this change. They awaited further details and guidance but would need to develop a mechanism for redistribution of these monies.

Val Thompson confirmed that the level of surpluses in school budgets was £1.6 billion nationally. Sunderland City Council would argue that much of its schools' balances was committed and some surplus was

just sensible financial planning. Several years ago the DfES introduced clawback arrangements for excess funds exceeding specified limits and all Local Authorities had included this mechanism in their LMS schemes. However, the discussion had moved on and the Authority would be required to calculate all balances for the purpose of the 5% clawback. The Authority would need to work with the Schools Forum to agree how to redistribute the 'recycled' money to all schools.

Richard Wilkinson pointed out that schools were sometimes required to earmark monies to replace items such as sports pitches, which had limited a lifespan. For example, it was a condition of Sport England funding that monies were set-aside for this purpose. Such cases would need to be taken carefully into account when deciding how the clawback scheme would operate. Val replied that it was not yet clear whether committed balances would count towards this calculation but the DCSF logic was that, if a school had managed to retain a surplus, they could afford to lose 5% of the balance. Richard answered that, in these circumstances, his advice to secondary colleagues would be to overspend or to seek Trust status. Val responded that Trust schools would be treated exactly the same as other maintained schools in this exercise.

Howard Brown noted that the Schools Forum would make the decision on how the monies that were clawed back would be redistributed and he questioned whether the Forum could agree to a formula which ensured that no schools were disadvantaged. Val Thompson replied that it would not be possible for the Forum to apply a like-for-like formula.

Dorothy Elliott asked whether the government would be consulting about this. Val Thompson answered that they had already done so as part of the national consultation on school funding.

There would be further discussion at the November meeting of the Schools Forum and the Chair encouraged maximum possible attendance to ensure that all sectors were involved in this important discussion.

07/65 (school meals) – The Forum had asked that the Authority delay changes to the school meals contract as they were concerned that the new contract would place more responsibility on the client. However, Community & Cultural Services had now implemented the change.

07/66 (school place planning review) – Val Thompson reported that she was to become the School Place Planning Manager within the Authority from November. There had been changes to the timeline for the consultation process and the Forum would receive updated details of this at the November meeting. Terry Hambleton commented that school staff were feeling insecure about this and needed information on what was happening. Val Thompson noted this comment and would pass it on to Paul Campbell.

Maximum possible attendance at November meeting encouraged in view of important decisions on 5% clawback of funds

School Place Planning to appear on agenda for November meeting

07/72 Feedback from Children's Trust

The minutes of the Children's Trust meeting held on 10th July had been circulated to members. The item relating to lack of easy access to the Local Safeguarding Procedures would be raised through the Primary Headteachers' Area Chairs & Secretaries Group.

07/73 Feedback from Standards Fund Monitoring Group

The last meeting was held on 13th September 2007. Among the items discussed were: -

- Members of the SFMG had been reminded of the need to treat some sensitive financial information as confidential
- At an earlier meeting, the group had agreed to allocate some unspent SEN monies to developing ASD provision at Farringdon School. They had asked the Authority to specify how accountability would be ensured. There was some discussion about whether the monies earmarked would be used for Capital works or for the employment of staff. It was felt that it would be helpful to be supplied with an accurate breakdown of how the monies had been spent. David Alexander indicated that details of spending would be given to the SFMG at their November meeting.
- The Authority had provided a report which set out the position of Standards Fund 2006/07 at July 2007. Central grant holders had been requested to provide a synopsis for the November meeting to advise members of the SFMG of the impact of the grant with as much quantifiable information as possible.
- It had been noted that there very large underspends in school standards fund allocations. David Alexander confirmed that these issues were being addressed with schools by the Finance Liaison Officers. It was not yet known what would be classified as committed expenditure at March 2007. In many cases, staff had been wrongly coded and the underspends would be rectified when this had been changed.

Richard Wilkinson pointed out that schools were planning exit strategies in anticipation of the end of EiC funding. However, at the EiC Management Group information had been received that funding might be extended although it was not known what form this would take. David Alexander could not offer any clarification on extension arrangements at this stage but the SDG was to continue. There were new regulations for 2008/11 which meant that BIP would continue. Richard responded that schools had been consistently told to plan exit strategies in 2008 and, as a result, some contracts had not been renewed.

- The new limits on school finances being carried forward would in future include some parts of standards fund monies. The balances still held by some schools in their standards fund codes could mean that schools exceeded their specified limits.
- The Sunderland South Area Primary Headteachers' Group had raised questions around free meals for nursery pupils. This had been discussed earlier in the Schools Forum meeting.
- Members had discussed the 2007/08 School Development Grant. After this had been distributed there was £116,307 to be distributed to schools. It had been agreed to recommend to the Schools Forum that the additional SDG monies be allocated to schools on the basis of September 2007 pupil numbers (not January PLASC).

This proposal was presented to the Forum for consideration. It was noted, however, that Primary/Infant/Nursery schools would be disadvantaged by a September allocation in view of the January intake of nursery pupils. It was therefore proposed that the SFMG recommendation be amended to allow an extra nine places to allow for nursery intake. The Forum was asked to vote and it was agreed unanimously to implement the amended proposal.

Action Points

Forum agreed that spare monies in the DSG would be distributed to schools according to September 2007 pupil numbers (not January PLASC) but an adjustment would be made to compensate for January nursery intake.

07/74 Reflecting Deprivation In The Local Schools Funding Formula

Every Local Authority was required by DCSF to complete and return a template to demonstrate the extent to which funding from the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) and from the schools block of the DSG, was targeted at deprivation to mirror the amount hypothecated for deprivation within the DSG at Authority level. The template was used to inform discussions between the Children's Services Adviser (CSA) from Government Office North East (GONE) and the Director of Children's Services and other senior officers at a meeting on 24th September. Completion of the template was prescribed by DCSF with little scope for discretion. There was an expectation that each Authority should be targeting at least 80% of the hypothecated amount to the most deprived schools. The template was completed and returned by the deadline and additional background information had been prepared to inform discussions. The LMS/LMSS review group had considered the template and the extent to which funding from the ISB was currently targeted towards deprivation. They would further consider the implications following the outcome of the aforementioned meeting.

Yvonne Gray had accompanied Authority officers at the meeting with GONE. GONE had been shown statistics which illustrated how the gap between deprivation and attainment had been narrowed using key stage 3 data. GONE had taken back a revised template and their feedback was awaited.

Yvonne confirmed that work had not been done in isolation, as there had been extensive discussion at the LMS/LMSS Review Group. GONE had been complimentary about Sunderland's consultation arrangements.

07/75 Extending Vocational Opportunities

The Authority's report set out progress made on the development of the Skills Centres and invited views on the allocation of funding.

The report described progress made since the "Extending Vocational Opportunities" report received by the Forum in April 2006 and gave details of the 2007/08 allocation of funding. Members were reminded that that they supported the allocation of the £241,000 additional funding received in 2006/07, specifically aimed at extending vocational opportunities for pupils aged 14-16. The funding was split between the two skills centres located at Harraton and Pallion and accessed by pupils from all schools.

All 14-19 year old students would be entitled to take one of fourteen vocational diplomas by 2013. In order to be given the opportunity to develop and deliver the Diplomas Local Authorities, through their 14-19 Teams, were invited to submit detailed bids for funding. Sunderland was one of the most successful bids. Of the five diploma lines for which funding was available for 2008, Sunderland was successful in

attracting funding for four. In addition, Local Authorities were also invited to bid for capital funding, for which Sunderland was successful in securing the largest capital bid nationally.

The basis of the success of the bids was directly attributable to the excellent collaboration between schools, the Local Authority and other partners that enabled the creation of the two skills centres. The DCSF were impressed with the innovative model and had requested that they be kept informed of its progress through the Funding and Organisation Pilot.

The funding available was via the ISB and could be delegated to individual secondary schools by formula. However, members were reminded that the Forum had supported Secondary Headteachers' agreement that the £658,000 available for vocational funding for 2007/08 be pooled and used to support the development of the Harraton and Pallion and to fund some joint vocational provision at Castle Green and Springwell Dene schools.

Richard Wilkinson explained that this was a major challenge and the only way that it could be achieved was through working in partnership. No individual school could deliver this. The Harraton Centre was a major management commitment but was a model that was being acclaimed at a national level. Richard outlined the facilities on offer and commented that there was potential to work with primary school colleagues. Richard invited members of the Forum to contact him if they wished to visit the Centre.

Doug Ambrose commented that this was part of the 14-19 agenda and asked whether the College would benefit from vocational funding post-16. Richard Wilkinson stressed that the funding was for 14-16 provision and there was separate funding channelled through the LSC for post-16 provision.

The funding arrangements for 14-16 vocational provision were confirmed around the Harraton and Pallion Skills Centre collaborative models.

07/76 Pathfinder – Extended Flexible Free Entitlement for Eligible 3-4 year olds

A report was presented to inform members of the Pathfinder project and the formulae used to allocate funding to settings to support the delivery of the extended and flexible entitlement. Members were invited to offer views on the bases used for the funding formulae developed for allocation of funding to settings to support the delivery of the flexible and extended entitlement.

In September 2006 Sunderland Local Authority was successful in its bid to be a pathfinder project for the flexible, extended entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds. The extended offer was that all 3/4 year olds had an entitlement to 15 hours per week of free early years education. In addition there was an expectation that some settings would offer the free entitlement flexibly, between 8am-6pm. Not every setting would be

expected to make the offer flexibly and funding for the Pathfinder project was intended to be used to support different models of delivery in the maintained and Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sectors.

The funding arrangements for 14-16 vocational provision were confirmed around the Harraton and Pallion Skills Centre collaborative models.

The funding available to support settings in trailblazing the offer was in two discrete parts:

- i) £757,684 to support the basic provision of the additional 2.5 hours
- ii) £904,198 to support delivery of the increased entitlement on a flexible basis

The distinction between the two funding streams had been made because the first, or its equivalent, would be available to settings beyond the pathfinder period, and would be included in the Authority's DSG. The second was linked to Sunderland LA being a pathfinder for DCSF to assist with monitoring the project and reflect the potential findings to aid future planning when this scheme was rolled out nationally by 2010. This funding would not therefore be available beyond March 2008.

A funding formula had been developed for distribution of the £757,684 basic funding to maintained settings for the delivery of the extended offer. The LMS/LMSS review group agreed the principles of the methodology used, which was an extension of the model currently used to distribute funding for the entitlement to 12.5 hours of free education, and the modelled outcomes.

Funding for the extended offer in the PVI sector had been allocated on a pro rata basis, based on the current funding allocation methodology. The numbers used were actuals for the summer 2007 term and estimated numbers for the autumn and spring terms. The balance of this funding stream had been allocated according to a weighting assigned to each setting, based on the extent to which they were currently offering flexibility of places.

The £904,198 funding for delivery of flexible places had been allocated on a weighted basis to reflect the extent to which individual settings have stated they would offer flexibility. A contingency of £60,000 had been retained for movement of pupils within the PVI settings and for settings that may further develop their provision flexibly. The report described the methodology applied and showed the distribution to individual settings.

Members' views were invited. Howard Brown questioned why schools not offering flexibility should not receive their fair share of the first funding element. Val explained that this part of the funding was for incentives and this was how the LMS/LMSS Review Group had agreed it should be distributed. Howard maintained that this part of the finding should be distributed equally but Susan Carter responded that flexible provision was expensive. Sally Collingwood felt that the arrangements advocated by Howard would give schools money for not providing flexibility and this was not appropriate. Val Thompson reiterated that the second funding element would not be received next year.

Terry Hambleton served on the LMS/LMSS Review Group and she made it clear that, when taking decisions, Headteachers on the group did not look at the implications for their own schools. Instead they took a wider view to ensure that the funding was used to best effect. Susan Carter added that the LMS/LMSS Review Group had spent a great deal of time discussing this issue and the deal being proposed was considered fair. Howard Brown commented that he remained unconvinced by the arguments behind the proposal.

Howard reminded members that, earlier in the meeting, the Forum had noted that this flexibility funding could be used to meet the cost of nursery free meals and, despite this, there were some schools that were not benefiting from the funding. Trish Stoker remarked that all schools had been given an opportunity to take part in the flexible provision within their cluster. Schools that were offering this provision were taking a certain amount of risk. Terry Hambleton added that the use of monies to support free meals for nursery pupils would not have influenced the LMS/LMSS Review Group decision. Linda Williams stressed the high costs and organisational problems associated with this provision and this justified the weighting in favour of schools offering flexibility.

It was pointed out that the two pots of money were for all setting including private, voluntary and independent providers. The PVI settings had previously been funded from a different grant which was now to be incorporated into the DSG. A single formula would need to be applied across all settings from next year and an Early Years subgroup of the LMS/LMSS Review Group had now been formed. PVI representatives would need to be involved in this. There would also need to be a PVI representative on the Schools Forum from 2008. This would be discussed at subsequent meetings.

Sally Collingwood highlighted the disparity in costs, accountability and quality of provision between the maintained and PVI settings. Other Headteachers supported Sally's view that there were many issues to be considered around PVI settings to try to ensure that they were on the same footing as the maintained sector.

Howard Brown commented that the PVI settings received too much funding from the state and expressed the view that they could only offer flexibility because of their lower cost base. Susan Carter asked how much would be used by the private sector to fund profit.

Val Thompson pointed out that the DCSF had asked Local Authorities to undertake an audit of costs in PVI settings. The Authority would need to consider the profit element. Susan Carter remarked that maintained schools were not allowed to make a profit. Val noted the comments but the Authority had no choice but to implement the national regulations.

Richard Wilkinson questioned whether this was an opportunity to look towards quality assurance from the PVI sector and to insist that they used qualified staff in the same staff ratio as the maintained sector. Linda Williams felt strongly that the PVI representative on the Schools Forum would need to have a clear understanding of their role and would need to respect confidentiality.

The Forum ultimately agreed by a majority to support the distribution mechanism as recommended by the LMS/LMSS Review Group.

07/77 Free School Meals

A report had been prepared to update members on the progress of changes identified in a previous report presented in March 2007. Members were reminded that the numbers of young people who qualified for free school meals were reducing year on year. In an effort to reverse this trend a number of options were suggested. Children's Services Finance had procured a grants and benefits package that sat

Forum noted the need for PVI representative on the Schools Forum from 2008. This would be discussed at subsequent meetings

Forum endorsed the LMS/LMSS Review Group recommendations on distribution of pathfinder flexible provision funding

within EMS. Staff training had been completed and the Authority was now awaiting access to the system to be able to transfer records from the current system. This would create the benefit of being able to store historical records that could be used for purposes or targeting/marketing, and as it was linked to EMS changes, schools/address changes would occur within the system. The Authority would also be able to run reports on a number of parental details that would assist in future planning and marketing.

Members of the Forum noted the report.

07/78 **Date and time of next meeting**

Schools Forum
29th November 2007
(full day)

SFMG
15th November 2007