

CITY OF SUNDERLAND

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON MONDAY 7TH MARCH 2005 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)
Mr J Busfield (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Washington)
Mr J E Clarke (Governor Rep. – Secondary)
Mrs S. Collingwood – Early Years & Childcare Partnership
Dr P B D Collins (Governor Rep. – Secondary)
Mrs D. Elliott (Governor Rep. – Special)
Mrs P. Gibson (Governor Rep. – Secondary)
Mr J Lishman (Governor Rep. – Primary)
Dr. H.H. O’Neill (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)
Mr K McDermid (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)
Mr J. McKnight (Headteacher Rep. – Special)
Mr C Short (Governor Rep. – Primary)

Together with: -

Mr J.G. Robinson – Governor Support Manager, Sunderland LEA
Mrs G. Wall – Head of Strategy & Performance
Mrs S. Mitchell – Acting Head of Service (Strategy & Performance), LEA
Ms V. Thompson – Financial Controller, LEA
Mr M. Golding - Head of Inclusion & Achievement
Councillor Mrs P. Smith – Portfolio Holder for Education

The Forum agreed to the attendance of all of the LEA officers at the meeting.

05/14 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mrs A Mackay (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Sunderland North)
Mr M. Foster (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)
Mrs J Hobbs (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Hetton/Houghton)
Mrs S Carter (Headteacher Rep. – Nursery)
Mr H. Brown (Governor Rep. – Primary)
Mr A Falconer (Governor Rep. – Primary)
Dr E. Yeates (Headteacher Rep. – Secondary)

05/15 Update on Service Area – Inclusion & Achievement

Mike Golding was welcomed to the meeting. He commented that there were some significant changes in his service area. Pat Glass was now spending half of her working time as part of the project team to develop Children’s Services. Glynis McManus (a former Headteacher) had been employed to assist with Pat’s Education duties during this period. The change would be communicated to all Headteachers in a letter later in the week.

Action Points

Mike referred to developments in Autism outreach work on hubs and spokes. Columbia Grange was the central hub and Barbara Priestman was also in receipt of some funding to support secondary provision. The Authority wanted to appoint a speech therapist to work in this area. Sunningdale had already started to work with Social Services nurseries and there was now provision for children as young as 18 months at Sunningdale.

Portage training was to be relocated. Ian Reed would sit on the PRU Management Committee to add vocational work and bring together the planning and use of resources. Maplewood was in discussions with the LEA about how it worked with the PRU.

There was currently one vacancy for an Educational Psychologist and one senior post was still vacant. This would be filled from within the service. There was now an extra full time member of staff in the Child Protection team. Sensory Impairment was now a full partnership based around Sandhill View.

A full morning conference with Secondary Headteachers had been successful. Arising from this, a working party focussing on key stage 3 and 4 provision had been set up. Consideration was being given to the possibility of a 'federation' of schools for the purpose of sharing best practice and the work of partnerships.

Dr Collins questioned Mr Golding about the issue of excluded pupils. Mr Golding replied that he was confident that protocols and processes were in place to ensure that cases of exclusion beyond fifteen school days were being identified and provided for. He could not, however, guarantee that every pupil would engage in the process. He confirmed that BIP schools were providing cover up to fifteen days.

Sally Collingwood asked about children entering nursery or reception classes who had complex needs but did not a statement. She pointed out that there was no additional funding for such children and Headteachers wanted something to be done to address this. Mike replied that an Associate Headteacher had undertaken a review of this and the conclusion was not to change current practices. He commented that there always would be some pupils entering the system with such needs. Sally pointed out that there was now no 'safety net' and schools needed to spread resources very thin. This was difficult to manage. Mike explained that the old 'health and safety money' was now incorporated into the main school budget. Headteachers raised the issue of failure of identification of needs at private nurseries and questioned whether there was appropriate liaison with the private sector.

05/16 Update on Review of SEN/CAP Provision

Mike Golding reminded the Forum that the LEA had made a commitment to review special schools/CAP funding in 2006 linked to the proposed transport bill. The DfES had now changed its approach on mobility allowance. It had previously been thought that families already had the money to tackle home-school transport through

mobility allowance and that therefore LEAs should be paying for this. Some LEAs had tried to address this but the DfES now took the view on initial court cases that it should not be means tested and not fully consulted on. The DfES were now urging caution.

With special schools there was an annual review of banding anyway. The LEA was in a position to give additional funding to special schools to support mainstream provision. Also, because of the nature of pupils at Springwell Dene and Maplewood Schools, the LEA was involved in a 'spend to save' exercise. It was made clear that this provision was not cheap.

Mr Short highlighted the problems with current funding at Springwell Dene School which meant that the school was receiving less money. Mike commented that figures would become more transparent after further discussions with Headteachers of special schools.

There had been a recent analysis of CAP places and it had been found that the pupils were mainly 'band 4'. The LEA was looking critically at the situation and needed to consider the number of CAP places. These were different issues to those faced by special schools. There would be changes to CAP funding from 2006.

The Chair raised the possibility of a working party being set up to consider SEN funding. Dr Collins added that he felt that the Schools Forum was supposed to be consulted on any changes to SEN funding. Mike Golding replied that in his view this was not necessary as there was no change.

Sandra Mitchell referred to consultation on school funding changes from 2006. It was not expected that any changes would take place during a three-year period. It was therefore important get the arrangements right from the outset. She wished to suggest that the Schools Forum consider the constitution of the LMS Review Group. She asked that the Forum give consideration to this.

Vince Bovill asked about divergence in key stages and specifically asked where key stage 3 provision would sit. Mr Golding replied that there were ongoing discussions about this. Mr Bovill also asked about any likely impact on jobs as a result of any changes. Mr Golding did not feel that there were any job security issues to be considered. This was about maximising use of available resources.

Mike Golding repeated the need for a working party to be set up and a two-day session to consider the funding issues. The Chair agreed that an early start was necessary. The membership of the working group would be decided. Mr Golding added that the Forum should give a steer on the direction that the working group should follow.

05/17 Minutes of previous meeting held on 3rd February 2005

The minutes were agreed as a true record subject to the following amendment: -

05/08 'she' should read 'Sandra'.

Action Points

Forum asked to consider constitution of LMS Review Group

05/18 Matters arising from the minutes

EiC funding - It was felt that this needed to receive attention at subsequent meeting.

Membership of sub-groups – This area would be considered at the full day meeting in the summer term.

U3 grant – Val Thompson explained that the figures in respect of the upper pay spine grant funding were still not finalised. She explained how the calculations were made. DfES guidance stated that management allowances needed to be taken into consideration. The variation could be £170 - £673 per person using this formula. The Forum did not understand the logic behind this complex formula and believed that this was absurd. They requested more detail from Val about the figures.

Members of the Forum proceeded to discuss the implementation of TLRs and changes to management structures in schools.

Infant Class Size Funding – It was confirmed that there was a sum of £170,000 to support the infant class size pledge. Val indicated that the decision was taken that if this funding was not used it would be available for distribution. However, there were some schools that still needed support for employing an additional teacher to comply with the class size limits. This was historical and had originally been funded through a standards fund grant, now assimilated into the ISB block recognising that some schools would still need this added support (e.g. where they had unusual standard numbers). Val explained that there was no formula for distributing this money. Instead it was considered each year by the Capital & Admissions Team. Sally Collingwood observed that unusual class sizes would be growing issue with falling rolls and she asked whether schools could apply for class size funding. In reply to another question, Val indicated that it was not the case that schools which refused to have mixed age classes would receive this money. She informed the Forum that each case was looked at individually. She added that there was a phasing out arrangement in place.

BSF – Doug Ambrose reported that he had attended a meeting organised by regional trade unions which had suggested that the BSF programme was a threat to local democracy and could threaten the existence of LEAs. He pointed out that the Local Education Partnership was to be 80% privately controlled with only 5% LEA input and 5% Quango Government agency. This was a serious threat to everyone in education as the partnership would have involvement in staff appointments, building issues etc. Doug felt that this would represent a serious erosion of accountability. BSF was a secondary programme but it had been suggested that primary might be invited into this local education partnership. Doug believed that this was an attempt at local control by the government. Mr Ambrose asked that the Governors Association and Headteacher organisations consider how this could be resisted. Sandra Mitchell explained that there were

Action Points

EiC funding to be discussed on subsequent agenda

Membership of sub-groups to be considered at summer term awayday

Val Thompson to provide figures on upper pay spine grant funding for next meeting
Chair to draft response.

Further reports to be included in LEA's termly agenda booklet

different models of local partnerships and Sunderland was not likely to aim for such a model which removed local control. Unfortunately, Harry O'Neill was not present at this part of the meeting and he would be asked to reply to this. Forum members were concerned that the model might be imposed (like decisions on an academy).

On the subject of City Academies, Dorothy Elliott pointed out that academy staff did not need to be registered with the GTC and there was no requirement for them to do so.

Communication – The Chair raised the possibility of minutes of Schools Forum meetings being shared with Area Headteacher groups. It was agreed that this would become an item on Headteacher group meetings where possible.

05/19 Update on budget position

At the last meeting the Forum had discussed potential additional resources. It was reported that the situation had now changed again.

School budgets were sent to schools later than planned because of the constantly changing position. On calculation of the ISB and MFG requirement consistent with PLASC data, it had become apparent that the reduction in pupil numbers compared to previous estimates meant that previously agreed priorities in relation to EAL and IMD costing £198,095 could be accommodated from within the ISB. In addition, an additional £30,000 would be needed to support schools where budgets had fallen by more than 3%. This could be met from existing budget outside of the ISB. This being the case the distribution of the additional £532,000 previously discussed needed to be reconsidered. Following consideration and discussion it was decided to maintain the sector distribution as previously shared with the Forum, and distribute the whole sum by reference to the formula. This was shown as an additional allocation on school budget statements. The Forum were asked to note the report from Sandra Mitchell and the action taken with regard to the allocation of ISB funds to meet agreed priorities and the additional one-off allocation.

Dr Collins referred to paperwork sent schools and felt that there were confusing messages. In reply to a question from Dr Collins, Sandra confirmed that budgets took the MFG into account.

Headteacher groups had asked about additional funding to special schools to support inclusion in mainstream. Sandra highlighted efforts to make this more transparent as resources were linked more closely to the needs of the individual pupil. It was suggested that it was important to be more open about how this money was used and how much it cost to make provision. Mainstream schools needed to be clear about resources into special schools and the responsibilities of the special schools. The changing role of special schools to support inclusion was discussed.

John McKnight referred to the number of pupils educated outside of the City and noted that this number had fallen. This resulted in a

Action Points

Harry O'Neill to be asked to reply to the points raised by Doug Ambrose re. Local Partnerships

There would be a further discussion at the next meeting of the Forum

Where possible, minutes of Schools Forum meetings to be considered by Area Headteacher groups at their monthly meetings

significant saving to the City. Nevertheless, special schools were finding budget settlements to be tough. John stressed that the additional money for inclusion was propping up every special school and they could not run without it. John felt that the whole banding and funding regime needed to be considered. These were issues to be considered by the proposed working party.

Sally Collingwood asked for clarity on funding for nursery classes. She questioned how schools received additional monies for additional places, as this was not clear on the budget statement. Val Thompson replied that funding did include an additional six places that each nursery had received and monies were therefore already in the budget. Val understood that the cost per pupil differed from school to school. Sally repeated her request for a more detailed breakdown of the budget.

Vince Bovill asked for feedback on how to fund PPA time from September. He noted that the Secretary of State was claiming that schools were generously funded but Vince believed that there was lots of informal feedback from schools on the impact of school funding and many were finding it difficult to implement this requirement of remodelling. Val Thompson replied that there were different approaches to setting the budget used by different schools. The situation was being managed to a certain extent but it was clear that the process was not fully funded.

The Chair drew attention to published proposals on new school funding arrangements. Sandra Mitchell undertook to provide a summary to all members of the Forum and the Chair would consider whether a briefing would be appropriate.

The Chair would communicate with Sandra Mitchell regarding the constitution of the LMS/LMSS Review Group. Arising from this group, there may need to be smaller groups and the Chair felt that this was an opportunity to assist understanding of special school funding. Because all special schools were different it was suggested that all seven schools should be involved. John McKnight suggested a sub-group specifically for LMSS funding which could bring back recommendations to the LMS/LMSS Review Group. John stressed that special school Headteachers were the people who understood the issues. He did not believe that the LMS/LMSS Group itself was the appropriate forum for determining special school funding.

05/20 Date, time and venue of next meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Forum was the full day summer term session to be held on Monday 20th June 2005. Venue and other arrangements would be determined.

Action Points

Sandra Mitchell to provide summary of consultation on new funding arrangements.
Chair to consider whether a briefing was appropriate

Chair to communicate re. Setting up LMS/LMSS review group and sub-groups

Venue and other arrangements for full day June session to be determined.

Signed _____

Mrs Y. Gray
Chair of Schools Forum