

## SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS FUND MONITORING GROUP HELD ON THURSDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2005 AT PORTLAND SCHOOL

The following were present: -

Mr T H Walsh – Acting Director of Education (in the Chair)  
Mr J G Robinson – Governor Support Manager, Sunderland  
Gillian Mitchell (New Silksworth Infant) – Representing Sunderland South Primary Headteachers  
Yvonne Gray – Representing Sunderland North Primary Headteachers (with their permission)  
Tom Walker (Burnside Primary) – Representing Hetton/Houghton/Shiney Row Primary Headteachers  
Margaret Brabban (Usworth Colliery Nursery) – Representing Nursery Headteachers  
Jennifer Chart (Portland) – Representing Special Headteachers  
Kathryn Elliott (Columbia Grange) – Representing Special Headteachers  
Peter Collins (Houghton Kepier) – School Governor  
John Lishman (Bexhill Primary) – School Governor  
David Alexander – Finance officer  
Jim Cook – School Improvement Officer  
Dawn Shearsmith – School Improvement Officer  
Margaret Nolan – SIO support staff

#### Action Points

#### **05/01 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from:

Elisabeth Bowman (Southmoor) – Representing Secondary Headteachers  
Dorothy Elliott (Portland) – School Governor  
Sarah Conn – Finance officer

#### **05/02 Minutes of previous meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2005**

The minutes were approved as a true record subject to the addition of apologies for absence received from Margaret Brabban.

#### **05/03 Matters arising from the minutes**

There were no matters arising.

#### **05/04 Financial Report 2004/05**

David Alexander circulated copies of the 2004/05 closedown. There were no problems with schools which had generally maximised spending of available resources. Any overspends were recharged back to the school's main budget.

There were, however, some underspends from centrally retained codes. These included: -

- School Development Grant – Resources had been over-allocated to Authorities
- Targeted support for the Primary Strategy – There were some unallocated funds. These were intended to be monies for supply to release teachers for courses. The funds could not be used for other purposes.
- Specialist Schools Capital – The balance would carry forward
- Behaviour Improvement – Monies were allocated from the previous year
- Playing for Success – Did not spend the full amount. This money could not be retained.
- School Travel Plans – Did not spend the full amount. This money could not be retained.
- Capital – Balances carried forward except for SEED challenge. This funding could not be used because schools had not made requests. This underspend could not be retained. Headteachers were surprised that SEED challenge monies had not been requested and asked whether action could be taken to avoid this in the future. It was pointed out that the Capital Management Team had not written to schools to invite them to apply for this funding this year. David Alexander noted Headteachers' comments and he undertook to remind budget holders of the need to communicate with schools where monies remained unclaimed.

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#### **05/05 Financial Report 2005/06**

Copies of an expenditure statement were tabled at the meeting.

Since the last meeting the Authority had received targeted School Meals Grant and School Meals Grant (devolved). These grants ran through 2007/08. The Schools Forum had already received a full presentation regarding the proposed use of these monies.

Again, there were no problems with schools use of standards fund.

With regard to retained areas, the following were highlighted: -

- 1(b) Study Support – The budget was £52,000. The level of expenditure was affected because of the receipt of extra income for summer schools.
- School Support Staff Training & Development – The budget was enhanced by HLTA training & assessment (£69,000). Jim Cook pointed out that phase one of the qualification process had now ended and there would now be a gap until January when phase two would begin.

**Action Points**

- Grant 15 – Extended Schools – There had been a large amount of salary slippage. Remodelling training expenditure was only starting to have an impact now.
- Targeted Behaviour Improvement – a large amount of slippage had occurred. Recharges would not come through until later.
- ICT infrastructure/Broadband Connectivity – one budget was overspent and one was underspent. When combined, expenditure was on target.

Tom Walker asked whether assurances were in place to ensure the best quality use of money instead of just trying to ensure that balances were cleared. Mr Walsh replied that the information tabled at the meeting was purely a financial report and the group may need to consider whether an additional type of report was needed or whether there should be reports back from Headteachers to give details of the impact upon schools. It was agreed that the next meeting of the group would include a discussion on how to handle evaluative reports. The group would also consider how to identify those standards fund grants that were not directly monitored by other groups (such as EiC).

Headteachers asked whether there was a systematic procedure for monitoring outputs. Mr Walsh answered that there were processes in place including reports to the DfES, Cabinet and Council. There was also a monitoring group for EiC. He added that monitoring meetings had hitherto involved some Headteachers but the DfES now did not wish Headteachers to be part of this process.

Mr Walsh felt that the group needed to consider how to assess value for money. If all areas were scrutinised, some reports would be historical before they reached the group but examination of particular areas could be phased throughout the year.

- Grant 30a – Playing for Success – It was noted that the budget was £90,000 this year. This represented an increase despite a large underspend being sent back last year. Terry Walsh explained that this was a football-based initiative in conjunction with the Stadium of Light. It was now hoped that the management and training element could be brought across to be under the control of the Authority rather than the football club to make it more effective in educational terms. The group highlighted the importance of ensuring that a similar underspend did not recur. David Alexander explained some of the reasons for the underspend. Some claims from the football club had been rejected. Under public sector fund monitoring there would be a different level of scrutiny.

At next meeting, group to consider whether additional reports needed to monitor the best quality use of budgets. Also to consider how to handle evaluative reports and identify areas not monitored directly by other groups

David Alexander reported that nothing had yet been received regarding 2006/07 funding. This might necessitate another meeting of the group when the details were received.

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### **05/06 Workforce Remodelling**

Jim Cook understood that there were some concerns about spending patterns in the past twelve months. He explained that the workforce remodelling grant was a specific three-year programme. In the first year the amount of money had been small but this had increased in years two and three. Sunderland started six months late because Jim had not been appointed until mid-year. What had happened in subsequent years was that monies had arrived in March but spending was on the basis of September-September.

In the first year there had initially been a roll-out of training. Some resources were also bought in advance. A regional conference had been re-charged to other participating Authorities.

In the second year the training had been around PPA time to enable schools to prepare for implementation.

The need had now changed to become a re-structure around TLRs and this was the current year's priority. Therefore the nature of the work had changed. Jim was also ensuring that PPA time was in place sustainably. He highlighted the need for events relating to dedicated headship time.

Jim replied to questions regarding consultancy expenditure. He explained that the team was himself, Jenny Ellis, Jill Owens and two Primary Headteachers (the salary costs were reimbursed to the schools concerned). There were no additional external consultants as there was already a large amount of expertise available.

Tom Walker noted that the group had previously discussed how monies could be used creatively to ensure that the resources were available to schools. As a result of these discussions, schools had received £1,000 each to help with the implementation of PPA time. Headteachers felt that this had been an effective use of the monies. Jim did not believe that the same situation would arise this year.

Yvonne Gray asked whether there was money in the grant being used for additional personnel. Jim answered that this was not the case but monies had been used to back-fill Personnel Advisers' costs.

Jim replied to questions regarding the link between extended schools and remodelling. From 2007 onwards the extended schools funding would need to pick up these issues. Jim

confirmed that extended schools and remodelling were linked and that there was communication between the responsible teams.

Jim noted the difficulty in persuading people to sign up for HLTA training. This could mean that some money was sent back as it could not be used for another purpose.

**05/07 Primary National Strategy Central Co-ordination**

Dawn Shearsmith explained that there were two grants. One was for central co-ordination and the other was totally devolved to schools through published criteria. When Dawn had become responsible for this budget there had been a sizeable underspend in central co-ordination. This was because the salaries budget was organised in such a way as to create an ongoing underspend. There was every possibility that this could happen again for this reason. She confirmed that only 30% was spent at this stage of the year whereas it should be around 67%.

Dawn therefore had some proposals for the use of the underspend. She proposed the funding of transition projects in clusters. This would also facilitate networking of schools and action research with the University of Newcastle. Dawn explained that this was money to be exclusively used for the primary sector. She commented upon the need to be pro-active (e.g. monitoring of attendance levels at courses as a result of PPA time). The possibilities included developing some booster classes for schools that were not in the highest category of deprivation. Dawn invited other suggestions on the use of this funding. Headteachers were pleased to note that the level of attendance at courses was to be monitored as releasing teachers represented a real problem for schools. Terry Walsh added that the DfES also needed to understand this when determining how funding was to be distributed. However, Mr Walsh believed that the DfES were more likely to respond to representations from Headteacher associations rather than Local Authorities.

Jennifer Chart warmly welcomed support with transition activities. However, Headteachers pointed to the difficulty in releasing teachers to undertake such projects. Dawn referred to the possibility of employing a learning mentor to work with schools around transition. This was likely to be delivered in particular clusters but members of the group pointed out that this was already happening in some areas and it was commented that someone should not just be employed for the sake of it. Dawn responded that the intended focus was on the Washington area because of the closure of Usworth.

**05/08 Any other business**

A breakdown of individual school expenditure tabled at the meeting showed wide variations in spending (from 2% to 134%). David Alexander explained, however, that capital receipts had an impact upon this figure and when adjustments were made the variations would be much less.

**05/09 Date and time of future meetings**

The following meetings were arranged: -

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2006 at 1.30 p.m.

Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2006 at 1.30 p.m.

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2006 at 1.30 p.m.

The venue for all of the above meetings would be Portland School.

Administered by:



Education Governor Support Team