

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS FUND MONITORING GROUP
HELD ON THURSDAY 1ST FEBRUARY 2007 AT THE STANNINGTON CENTRE**

Members of the SFMG present were: -

Mrs Y Gray (Chair of Schools Forum)
Mr H. Brown (Vice-chair of Schools Forum)
Mr T Walker (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Hetton/Houghton)
Mrs J Lowther (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Sunderland North)
Mrs M Brabban (Headteacher Rep. – Nursery)
Mrs J Chart (Headteacher Rep. – Special)
Mrs K Elliott (Headteacher Rep. – Special)
Mrs D Butler (Governor Rep. – Secondary)
Mr J Lishman (Governor – Primary)
Mrs D Elliott (Governor Rep. – Special)

Together with: -

Lynda Brown – Head of Standards
Clive Bulmer – School Improvement Officer
David Alexander – Principal Finance officer
David May – Finance Manager
Gary Robinson – Governor Support Manager

MG07/01 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:
Dr E. Yeates (Secondary Headteacher)
Mrs M D Mitchell (Pupil Referral Unit)
Mrs M Johnson (Headteacher Rep. – Community Primary Washington)
Mrs G Mitchell (Headteacher Rep. – Infant)
Mrs B Handford (Headteacher Rep. – Junior)

MG07/02 Membership of Standards Fund Monitoring Group

A membership list showing the membership of the re-constituted SFMG was noted. Vacancies existed for a Secondary Headteacher, a Primary Headteacher to represent Sunderland South and a Nursery School Governor. Otherwise all places had been filled.

MG07/03 Terms of Reference of SFMG

The SFMG had been re-constituted in line with the revised membership of the Schools Forum. The Forum had now formalised the SFMG's status as a sub-group of the Schools Forum. Detailed terms of reference describing the membership of the SFMG and method of appointing representatives had been prepared and were noted. The terms of reference also described the remit and proceedings of the group. The SFMG would now be a body which

Action Points

Places still to be filled – 1
secondary HT, 1
Primary HT
(S'land South) and
1 Nursery Gov.

recommended action to the Schools Forum. Officers of the Authority had, in the past, been members of the SFMG alongside governors and Headteachers. Because the SFMG was now a sub-group of the Schools Forum, this would no longer be the case and officers would only attend to advise the group or where invited.

MG07/04 Internal Monitoring Arrangements

A report from the Authority described the process adopted by the Children's Services Directorate to monitor Standards Fund budgets. The report showed how all identified budget holders were required to submit a detailed spending plan together with the monthly budget monitoring arrangements. Members noted the report.

MG07/05 Election of Chair and Vice-chair of the SFMG and determination of term of office

Before asking for nominations for the offices of Chair and Vice-chair the Clerk explained that it was necessary to determine the length of term of office that they would serve in this capacity. Views were invited on the matter and it was resolved that both the Chair and Vice-chair would serve a four-year term.

Nominations were then invited for the Chair. Dorothy Elliott and Jennifer Chart were proposed and seconded for the office of Chair. They withdrew from the meeting and a secret ballot took place. By a majority vote it was resolved that Jennifer Chart would be elected as Chair of the SFMG. Mrs Chart and Mrs Elliott returned to the meeting and were informed of the result.

Jennifer Chart
elected as Chair of
SFMG for four
year term

Nominations were invited for the office of Vice-chair. Dorothy Elliott was proposed, seconded and duly elected unopposed to the office of Vice-chair.

Dorothy Elliott
elected as Vice-
chair of SFMG for
four year term

MG07/06 Minutes of previous meeting held on 12th September 2007

The minutes were approved as a true record, subject to the following amendments: -

Kathryn Elliott should read Katherine Elliott

MG06/27 – The paragraph concerning workforce remodelling should read as follows: -

MG06/11 (workforce remodelling) A document on Remodelling Consultants was tabled from Jim Cook. Members of the SFMG were concerned that the information provided did not address any of the questions previously raised. There was some debate regarding whether schools had received value for money from remodelling consultants and whether this represented an effective use of monies.

MG07/07 Matters arising from the minutes

MG06/29 (ASTs) – Richard Hegarty had attended the last meeting to discuss the AST programme. It was reported that Richard had been charged with developing an AST strategy and there would be a working group of Headteachers set up. David Alexander highlighted changes in relation this funding. The AST grant had ended in 2006 and now formed part of the school development grant.

Action Points

MG06/27 (workforce remodelling) – There had been discussion concerning the impact of workforce remodelling training at the Schools Forum. A breakdown of which school staff had accessed workforce remodelling training was available. There had been positive feedback from Primary Headteachers following the recent training offered by Jim Cook in relation to performance management.

MG06/31 (travel plans) – Dorothy Elliott highlighted the latest developments in relation to school travel. David Alexander pointed out that the responsible officer was Leyton Rahman (Development & Regeneration) but he understood that small sums were available to schools to support such developments as ‘walking buses’. Headteachers at the meeting indicated that there had been no contact with them regarding walking buses.

MG06/31 (choice advisers) – It was confirmed that a sum of £30,000 was available this year and a further £30,000 next year to support choice advisers. It was understood that after two years this would become mainstreamed. The Children’s Services Leadership Team had considered this and were trying to integrate the choice adviser with the Children’s Information Service. Members of the SFMG raised no objections to this suggestion.

MG07/08 AST Strategy

As mentioned earlier in the meeting, there would be consultation with a group of Headteachers over the future strategy. Information would be brought back to the SFMG when discussions had taken place.

SFMG to receive further reports on AST strategy after working group met

MG07/09 Capital School Travel Grants

A report from the Authority set out how monies had been allocated in the past three years. The Chair felt that there was a lack of understanding around this. Headteachers were uncertain over how funding was accessed. Tom Walker added that it also appeared to be a very bureaucratic process for a relatively small amount of money.

It was agreed that copies of the Authority’s report on Capital School Travel Grants would be shared with Headteacher groups.

Report on Capital School Travel Grants to be shared with HT area groups

It was further agreed that Leyton Rahman would be invited to attend the next meeting of the SFMG to provide clarification

Leyton Rahman to be invited to next SFMG meeting

MG07/10 Standards Fund Outturn Report 2005/2006

A report from the Authority advised of the outcome of revenue budget monitoring and reflected the position of 17-month budgets, the revenue element of which ended on 31st August.

A breakdown of all grants during this period was provided. It was made clear that the grants listed in the report as being unclaimed were grants that the Authority was not eligible to apply for.

Members noted the report for information.

MG07/11 Standards Fund Report 2006/2007**Grants 210 and 125**

Clive Bulmer was present at the meeting to address the group regarding the Computers for Pupils initiative that he had discussed

with the SFMG last term. Clive circulated information regarding the scheme. A new working party involving secondary Headteachers was now established and was starting to take decisions. Seven schools had already said that they would like the Authority to manage the initiative on their behalf. There was an assumption that the other schools would also prefer this and there was an indicative amount of how much money would be made available to each school under the scheme.

It was expected that there would be a mini-competition from six approved companies to supply the hardware. The preference was that computer equipment be delivered directly to children's homes rather than to schools.

Grants 210 and 125 were for specific purposes. It was expected that schools themselves would identify which pupils should qualify to receive a free computer. One of the questions would be whether the pupil's home had a landline telephone connection, as connectivity was an issue that needed to be addressed unless an appropriate wireless solution could be found.

It was recognised that there needed to be an acceptable home/school agreement, as the hardware would always belong to the school. However, it was not clear how this would be enforced. Unfortunately the money available could not be used by the school to pay for insurance for the equipment.

With regard to connectivity, it was possible that parents would be asked to contribute to the costs to make this sustainable.

Clive outlined plans for combining 2006/07 and 2007/08 funding. Because tendering was involved, the procurement procedure could be delayed.

This was a secondary only initiative. For a sum of £641 per pupil, it would be possible to supply a very high specification machine. There had been some pilot schemes around the country.

Howard Brown suggested that it might be cheaper to pay for connectivity via Sky satellite rather than a BT line.

Members of the SFMG asked how the effectiveness of the initiative would be evaluated. Clive indicated that BECTA would be evaluating. There was also an expectation that families (i.e. parents) would be included in using the machines to raise their ICT skill levels.

Clive was thanked for his presentation and he withdrew from the meeting at this point.

Other grants

The Authority's written report described how grants had been used. It showed the centrally retained grants and who was responsible. The amounts allocated to each school were also set out. It was recognised that it was important to maximise the spending of available resources from these budget codes. David May confirmed that there was a significant element of challenge. The 2006/07 funding period would end in August.

School Development Grant

David Alexander explained that the SDG comprised a number of grants and totalled £15.7 million. He explained the process of guaranteed allocation. A total balance of £148,000 remained to be allocated to schools. It was important that this allocation was done as this affected next year's budget. It needed to be distributed on a fair and transparent basis and it was suggested that this should be through a per pupil allocation to be consistent with the basis of distribution of SF grants. The sums available to be distributed were around £60,000 for secondary sector and £80,000 for the primary sector. Secondary Headteachers had taken a decision to give their shares to Castle Green School to support The Third Way provision. Governor representatives present at the meeting pointed out that this should have been discussed with secondary school Governing Bodies. Lynda Brown noted this comment and undertook to remind secondary Headteachers of their responsibility to consult their Governing Bodies on financial matters.

Yvonne Gray questioned whether a per-pupil allocation was the most effective way of distributing this funding as it disadvantaged smaller schools. David Alexander replied by outlining the wide differences between individual schools in all sectors because of different grants that made up the School Development Grant.

Following discussion it was agreed to recommend to the Schools Forum that the remaining monies in the SDG be distributed to schools on a per-pupil basis.

MG07/12 Standards Fund Report 2007/2008

A report had been issued in advance and additional detailed information was tabled at the meeting. Some Standards Fund grants would become part of the local area agreement. This affected mostly those grants held by the Authority. One example of change was in respect of Extended Schools Development (Grant 104) which would be handled over a 12 month rather than a 17 month period, and subject to a maximum carry forward of 5%. In order to maintain the current flexibility the Authority was seeking to exclude this from the LAA along with Grant 115 (School Improvement Partners) and Grant 117 (Education Health Partnerships).

A detailed report was included in respect of Grant 116(b) – Music at KS2. The report suggested that the method of distribution to schools and PRU with KS2 pupils be by a flat rate (approximately £1,600 per school).

Pupil numbers were prescribed as the basis of distribution by the DfES. Some adjustment in respect of Usworth School was sought as this school would be closing in August 2007. Under this proposal the schools receiving the pupils transferring from Usworth would benefit. Dorothy Butler declared an interest in this item, as she was a governor of Washington School which stood to benefit from this variation. This was noted by the SFMG.

The SFMG agreed to recommend the following to the Schools Forum:-

- That Grants 104, 115 and 117 would be excluded from the Local Area Agreement

Action Points

Lynda Brown to remind Secondary Heads of need to consult Gov Bodies before entering into financial agreements

Agreed to recommend to Schools Forum that £140,000 balance in SDG be distributed to schools on per-pupil basis

Recommendations to be made to the Schools Forum to exempt three grant areas from the LAA

- The method of allocating grant 116(b) to schools and PRU with KS2 pupils be by flat rate
- The numbers used to calculate grants in receiving schools be adjusted to take account of an additional 44 pupils transferring when Usworth School closed in August 2007.
- That all grants be taken up.

Further recommendations would be brought to the next meeting of the SFMG.

MG07/13 **Date and time of next meetings**

Meetings of the SFMG were scheduled as follows: -

8th March 2007 at 1.30 p.m. (Leyton Rahman to be invited to attend)

3rd May 2007 at 1.30 p.m.

21st June 2007 at 1.30 p.m.

13th September 2007 at 1.30 p.m.

15th November 2007 at 1.30 p.m.

It was agreed that meetings would be held at Stannington Centre.

Action Points

Schools Forum to be asked to approve distribution of Grant 116(b) on flat rate basis

Forum to be asked to approve adjustment in respect of Usworth closure

Forum to be asked to approve that all grants be taken up