

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS FUND MONITORING GROUP
HELD ON THURSDAY 23RD MARCH 2006 AT PORTLAND SCHOOL**

The following members of the Forum were present: -

Lynda Brown – Acting Head of Standards & Quality (in the Chair)
 Gary Robinson – Governor Support Manager, Sunderland
 David May – Finance Manager
 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
 Kathryn Elliott (Columbia Grange) – Representing Special Headteachers
 Peter Collins (Houghton Kepier) – School Governor
 John Lishman (Bexhill Primary) – School Governor
 David Alexander – Principal Finance officer
 Sarah Conn – Senior Finance Assistant

Action Points

MG06/01 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Jennifer Chart (Portland) – Representing Special Headteachers
 Dorothy Elliott (Portland) – School Governor
 Mrs E Bowman (Southmoor) - Headteacher Rep. – Secondary

MG06/02 Minutes of previous meeting held on 1st December 2005

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

Page 2 second bullet point – ‘finds’ should read ‘funds’.

MG06/03 Matters arising from the minutes

05/05 (School Support Staff Training & Development) – The amount
 available had increased to £86,750).

05/05 (budget monitoring) – Tom Walker reiterated the importance of
 ensuring scrutiny of how money was spent rather than just ensuring it
 was used. It was essential to ensure best value. This view received
 strong support from other members of the group. Lynda Brown
 commented that she completely agreed and her intention was that the
 Standards Fund Monitoring Group provided real support and
 challenge to Authority officers. Gill Wall had informed the Schools
 Forum that budgets were scrutinised by Authority officers and there
 were some funding areas that had their own scrutiny group. David

May confirmed that there were arrangements within the department for monthly budget monitoring. David added that he intended to extract information from monthly reports to provide relevant information to the Schools Forum. He was pleased to report that these processes were starting to work.

05/09 (schedule of meetings) – It was felt that there may be a need for additional meetings of the Standards Fund Monitoring Group. The timing of meetings also needed to be appropriate.

MG06/04 Financial Report 2005/06

School budgets

Any overspend in a school's standards fund budget would be recharged to the main school budget at the end of March (i.e. before the main school budget was shut down). Previously the timescale for such recharges was later and as such the figures did not reflect the true position. This change would mean a more accurate position.

Nursery schools had spent a lower proportion of their standards fund budget than other sectors. Margaret Brabban explained that Grant 316 was spread over two years. There were also building issues in nursery schools, partly because of Children's Centres.

Overall, there were no great issues with school standards fund budgets.

Centrally retained budgets

Two versions of the breakdown of centrally held budget codes had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The later document was more updated than the version issued with the agenda papers.

Lynda Brown and David Alexander met regularly and they had looked at the original version on a line-by-line basis. They had identified those areas that should have been devolved to schools. One particular budget holder planned to start spending in September and this needed to be taken into account. Budget holders had now been told to plan over a 12-month profile and asked to give details of any exceptions.

Tom Walker noted there were significant differences between the two versions of the papers circulated in advance. Lynda Brown gave examples of committed budget expenditure on salaries. David May felt that what was needed was a projected outturn alongside actual spends. He would also ensure that a written report was circulated in advance of subsequent meetings to accompany the figures. Lynda Brown made it clear that this information was intended to be useful working documentation.

David Alexander tabled a written report at the meeting. This was intended to advise of the outcome of Period 11 revenue budget monitoring review for 2005/2006. The information reflected the position of a 17-month budget.

Special Educational Needs (Grant 1A) – A revised budget was now in place and partnership payments were still to be actioned. The group asked for clarification of partnerships. It was explained that partnerships included sensory partnerships, physical difficulties

D. May to ensure written report circulated in advance of future meetings to accompany figures. Projected spend figures also to be included alongside actual spends.

partnership. This was something that would be continued and was not just for one year.

Study Support (1B and 1C combined) - This grant included a £30k contribution from the School Improvement Service for summer schools which would take place in the summer term.

School Meals (5A and 5B combined) – There had been a late start to the project but posts were currently being advertised. Of £157k devolved, only £122k had been ‘bought back’. Proactive measures were being taken to increase this and plans would be revised to take this into account and reported to the School Meals Consortium.

Teachers Threshold Grant - Payment in respect of Teachers M6 to Upper 1 Threshold payment plus on costs only. Payments generated from payroll data and March yet to be actioned. An underspend of £200k was predicted which was 100% grant funded and would be returned to the DfES. There was no way of avoiding sending this money back to the DfES.

Mini EAZs – These were independent of LEA and each Management Group agreed spending plan.

EIC Primary Funding - Additional funding of £17k had gone out to schools since the report was produced which had reduced the balance to £3k.

Targeted Behaviour and Improvement - The balance this year was distorted with £290k of income brought forward due to the late start of the original grant. EiC had their own Management Group which agreed spending plans. The group was given an assurance that this money would be spent by the end of the year. This grant had been questioned before at the Standards Fund Monitoring Group and members wanted to know how the funding had been used.

Members asked for details of how Targeted Behaviour and Improvement monies had been used

Extended Schools - The Extended Schools team were currently in the middle of extended schools remodelling training (national programme) which began late January and ran (and intensified) until July. These costs would be reflected in the final outturn.

With regard to extended schools, David Alexander confirmed that there were monies that had not been devolved to schools. He reported that yesterday a proportion of this money was devolved to school clusters. Lynda Brown made it clear that this money should have been passed to schools earlier and this would happen in the future. Under these devolution arrangements each participating school would have a separately identified ‘CO’ code and this money could be carried forward from year to year.

Clarification was now available regarding how schools should be reimbursed for extended schools training.

The group asked whether schools were aware of how this was working. David Alexander explained that the arrangements had been made clear to the Extended Schools Team and it was disappointing if this information had not been given to schools. Gillian Mitchell commented that there needed to be very clear communication to schools about this sum of money.

David May felt that there needed to be a single point of contact for schools in dealing with financial issues rather than dealing with a

number of different budget holders. Headteachers supported this suggestion but pointed out that there were additional issues surrounding those schools that would become Children's Centres.

Lynda Brown offered the group an opportunity for a meeting to discuss aspects of extended schools funding. The group asked, however, that Lynda Brown take up the issues on their behalf. David May commented that, unless he persuaded otherwise, the unspent monies were surplus to requirements and he wanted this to be investigated.

The group proceeded to discuss workforce reform monies. Schools did not feel that they were benefiting at all from funding. Like the extended schools budget, there seemed to be significant amounts of money available for training (which school staff did not have time to undertake) but no money to deliver. The group asked for details of how many school staff had accessed the training.

Playing for Success - The LA and SAFC Foundation were currently in a TUPE process with regard to the centre manager. Upon conclusion of this, outstanding claims would be processed. This area would be subject to close scrutiny when this change took place.

School Travel Advisors – It was noted that just £29 had been spent from this code. It was explained that this initiative was operated by the Development & Regeneration Directorate and was recharged at the end of the year to the Education budget. It was explained that the role was in relation to school travel plans.

Headteachers felt that some of the individual grant areas were unclear. Lynda Brown accepted that guidance needed to be carefully studied and the spending profile considered in line with this.

LEA Support for Workforce Remodelling – Last year Jim Cook had given a sum of around £74,000 to schools to support facilities for PPA time. This had been welcomed but the group questioned how other monies had been spent. It was not clear to Headteachers how this large amount of money was used. The group felt that this was an area which demonstrated the need for close scrutiny to ensure value for money. Lynda Brown acceded to the group's request for workforce remodelling spending to be analysed for the past two years.

Grants 4 and 7 were devolved but, in spite of this, were significantly underspent. David Alexander explained that Grant 4 could only be used specifically in respect of ASTs. Yvonne Gray highlighted the difficulties for schools with regard to releasing staff.

Members welcomed the introduction of an overall summary and looked forward to planned further improvements. Members were reassured that monitoring would be more thorough in the future. Lynda Brown felt that these were necessary steps forward.

MG06/05 Update on 2006/07

Details were circulated at the meeting.

Personalisation was a new grant and would amount to £5,000 for primary schools and £40,000 for secondary schools. The intention was to provide greater personalised learning for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Action Points

Lynda Brown asked to take up issues surrounding extended schools funding on behalf of the SF Mon.Gp.

Officers asked to ascertain how many school staff had accessed workforce remodelling training and extended schools training

Lynda Brown to arrange for an analysis of workforce remodelling spending over past two years and present findings to group at a subsequent meeting.

Broadband Connectivity was now centrally retained. The majority of ICT funding was now in devolved capital funding.

2006/07 budgets had now been distributed to schools.

MG06/06 Items for recommendation to Schools Forum

Proposals for the use of Primary Strategy funding (grant 107) and Secondary Strategy (grant 108) were circulated with agenda papers. The managers of each of these initiatives had formulated these proposals.

Grant 108 - It was agreed that Mrs E. Bowman (secondary Headteacher representative) would be asked for her views before proceeding with any consideration by the Schools Forum.

Grant 107 – The group wanted this to be taken back to Area Primary Headteachers' Groups before proposals were put to the Schools Forum. Guidance notes would accompany the report. Whilst it was noted that the timescale was limited, the Standards Fund Monitoring Group felt that a slight delay would not be detrimental.

The group asked for an explanation of why last year's Primary Strategy Funding was underspent.

Music Standards Fund – An allocation of £17,569 was available for key stage 2 music

It was agreed to seek the approval of the Schools Forum to allow the Standards Fund Monitoring Group to take decisions on these areas.

MG06/07 Any other business

There was no other business raised.

MG06/08 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting of the Standards Fund Monitoring Group was scheduled for 1.30 p.m. on Monday 15th May 2006 at Portland School.

Action Points

E. Bowman to be asked re. proposals on Grant 108

Grant 107 proposals to be considered by Area Primary Heads Groups

Dawn Shearsmith to be asked for explanation of why last year's Primary Strategy funding was underspent

Schools Forum to be asked to delegate responsibility to S.F. Mon. Gp. For decisions on grant areas