

**NOTES OF AN INQUORATE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS FUND
MONITORING GROUP HELD ON THURSDAY 8TH MARCH 2007 AT THE
STANNINGTON CENTRE**

Members of the SFMG present were: -

Mrs J Chart (Headteacher Rep. – Special) – Chair of SFMG
Mrs M Brabban (Headteacher Rep. – Nursery)
Mr H. Brown (Vice-chair of Schools Forum)
Mrs D Butler (Governor Rep. – Secondary)
Mr T Walker (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Hetton/Houghton)
Dr E. Yeates (Secondary Headteacher)

Together with: -

Lynda Brown – Head of Standards
David Alexander – Principal Finance officer
Gary Robinson – Governor Support Manager
Leyton Rahman – Principal Engineer (Traffic) – Development & Regeneration

Insufficient members were in attendance at the meeting to constitute a quorum in accordance with the terms of reference agreed by the Schools Forum. It was therefore not possible to proceed with formal consideration of the business. Members proceeded to discuss certain items on an informal basis.

MG07/14 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mrs Y Gray (Chair of Schools Forum)
Mrs J Lowther (Headteacher Rep. – Primary Sunderland North)
Mrs D Elliott (Governor Rep. – Special)
Mrs K Elliott (Headteacher Rep. – Special)
Mrs B Handford (Headteacher Rep. – Junior)
Mrs M Johnson (Headteacher Rep. – Community Primary Washington)
Mr J Lishman (Governor – Primary)
Mrs G Mitchell (Headteacher Rep. – Infant)
David May – Finance Manager

MG07/15 School Travel Plans

Leyton Rahman was in attendance. He gave background information on how school travel plans had developed. In 2003/04 the Department of Transport had considered how travel to school affected congestion. It was calculated that up to 17% of morning traffic was parents taking children to school. The government decided that, because generally children lived close to the school they attended, it was necessary to encourage other forms of travel to school.

Action Points

In 2004/05 it was decided that there should be a travel plan. This was something that Sunderland had already started to develop. From 2005/06 the DfES set a grant to councils. Sunderland received £30,000 p.a. to employ travel advisers and it was expected that Authorities would review the arrangements in place for school travel plans. The target was that by 2010 all schools would have a travel plan. A school's PLASC included statistics on pupils' method of travel to school.

In 2006/07 the grant was transferred to standards fund and the government had assured that this would continue to 2007/08. Recently the government had developed Local Area Agreements and travel plans would be delivered through this route. The target in the LAA was therefore that all schools would have a travel plan in place by 2010.

Mr Rahman made reference to the need for continuity and recruitment/retention of staff to deliver this strategy. Sunderland employed School Travel Plan Advisers but there had been staff changes. There were now two posts in the structure to try to maintain some continuity. It had not been possible to recruit to the post and the grade was affected by single status. In the interim, agency staff had been employed. This was costly but helped to bring matters forward.

There were now sixteen approved travel plans in place in Sunderland schools. Mr Rahman commented, however, that schools had not been receptive to the new initiative. He added that the information on the PLASC was only mandatory if the school had a travel plan in place.

A capital grant of around £3,000 per primary school plus £5 per pupil and £5,000 per secondary school plus £5 per pupil was available. The Local Authority role was to promote the travel plans in schools and help development. The travel plan needed to be developed in conjunction with all teachers, parents, neighbourhood residents and others.

It was clear that some Headteachers viewed this as an added burden. Mr Rahman understood this and would offer all possible assistance to schools to implement.

The target for Sunderland was that 108 schools would have a travel plan and challenging targets had been set to achieve this. The difficulties in achieving the target were highlighted. There were now three people working to achieve this and Mr Rahman was confident that fourteen schools would have a travel plan in place by September 2007.

Some funding had been made available to promote cycling and walking to school. The amounts available were not great. Mr Rahman cited walking buses as an example of what had been done but some of these had folded because of management problems such as recruitment/retention of volunteers and CRB checks. The success of walking buses depended on willing volunteers but a rota could be developed if monies were available.

The idea of travel plans was not just about tackling congestion. It also reflected safety of pupils and the healthy school initiative. Walking to school was considered more beneficial to children than taking part in PE.

Mrs Chart asked about the bureaucracy involved in developing a travel plan. Mr Rahman replied that the production and quality of the document was specified and his department had developed a sixteen-step programme towards this. The intention was that this made the process simpler.

Members asked whether the Authority still promoted cycling proficiency. Mr Rahman confirmed that this did still happen but was now called cycling training and as long as children took part in the activity they would receive a certificate and a badge.

Mr Rahman informed the group that the Local Authority had given legal powers of a school crossing patrol warden to those involved in walking buses.

Dorothy Elliott indicated that the government would give monies to schools to support administration of walking buses. She also referred to the position of special schools and the school travel panel had looked at this. The need to be innovative was recognised. Dorothy would bring more information from the school travel group when this was available.

Mr Rahman indicated that Local Authority staff were accountable to regional travel advisers.

Howard Brown asked whether funding would continue after the school travel plan had been approved. Mr Rahman responded that the money was a one-off grant and funding would not continue. Mr Brown therefore asked why the PLASC needed to include these figures. Mr Rahman answered that this would become compulsory anyway but the way that information was collected was for the school itself to determine.

Leyton Rahman was thanked for his attendance and he withdrew from the meeting.

MG07/16 Standards Fund Reports

It was disappointing that business could not be transacted due to the low numbers in attendance. The Schools Forum had agreed the terms of reference for the SFMG (which was a sub-group of the Forum) and, in the light of this, the Forum would be asked to consider whether the quorum of eight was appropriate.

David Alexander explained that there were no major issues but he highlighted that there was a new grant to promote secondary standards. Because of the basis of distribution Pennywell would receive £60,000 and Quarry View Primary would receive £30,000. Funding needed to be focussed on developing basic skills, particularly in English and mathematics. This grant was fully devolved and there was no contribution from the Authority.

Howard Brown questioned what would happen if Pennywell School overspent in the standards fund budget codes in view of its impending transition to academy status. David Alexander replied that any overspend in standards fund would be deducted from the main school budget. He could not give an answer to what would happen to any overspend in the main school budget.

Grant 117 was for Education/Health partnership (healthy schools) and an allowance of £79,213 had been given to the Authority.

Schools Forum to be asked to consider whether quorum was appropriate for the SFMG

A set of spending plans for all standards fund grants were tabled at the meeting. David Alexander asked that any feedback be given at the next meeting of the SFMG. These would be circulated to all absent members.

Jennifer Chart asked for clarification of the music strategy within the Authority and how the standards fund grant supported this. Headteachers also wanted to know whether schools had an SLA for music provision and, if not, why this was not the case. It was agreed that Steve Auster (City Music Co-ordinator) would be invited to attend the next meeting of the SFMG to provide clarification.

David Alexander confirmed that all standards fund budgets had been issued to schools.

It was noted that a number of schools had considerably under spent on standards fund codes.

MG07/17 **Date and time of next meetings**

The next meeting of the SFMG was scheduled for 3rd May 2007. As this was now the day of the local elections and some schools were taking an INSET day, it was agreed that the date of this meeting would be changed to 1.30 p.m. on Thursday 19th April 2007 at Stannington Centre.

Action Points

Members asked to give feedback on spending plans at next meeting of SFMG

Steve Auster to be invited to next SFMG meeting

Meeting on 3rd May re-scheduled for 19th April 2007