

SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held on 17th October 2007

Present

Primary School Teachers:	Ron Lawrence, Sue Meckiff, Sue Robertson and Mrs I Vassallo
Secondary Head Teachers:	Kathy Griffiths and Meryl Davies
Primary Governors:	Mr T Corkett, Betsy Johnstone, Paul Chick and Nick Webb
Secondary Governors:	Andrew Downes (Chairman) Janet Bell, and Ms J Mogridge
Special School Representative	Viv Hinchcliffe
Non-School Representatives:	David Bridger (Vice-Chairman) and Mrs A Regester

Also present

Gillian Pearson (Director of Children & Young People)
Rob Carling (Head of Children and Young People Finance)
Mandy Russell (Children and Young People Finance Group) with Gill Bratley (Principal Finance Officer)
Sherryn Arthur (Data & Finance Management Officer)
David Pearson (Head of SEN)
Helen Long (Democratic Services)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Doreen Fellingham, Isabel Vasello and Karen Raven.

The Chairman welcomed Viv Hinchcliffe, a new member, to the meeting.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13th SEPTEMBER 2007.

It was agreed that the minutes of the 13th September 2007 would be considered at the next meeting of the Schools Forum.

4. PROPOSED CHANGES TO FUNDING ADDITIONAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

At the previous meeting members of the Forum had considered an update on the Review of SEN/AEN funding. They were asked to recommend that the Portfolio Holder be asked to agree to a full consultation with all schools on proposed changes to the way in which AEN/SEN resources are distributed to mainstream schools. The Forum did not give their approval at that meeting and asked that further details be prepared for their consideration. They also asked that the relative weightings attached to estimated KS4 results be reviewed.

Since the meeting the SEN Working party met to discuss the proposals again. They recommended that transitional arrangements for managing the changes in funding to schools were made for a two year period.

It was planned that schools would also be consulted on the approach to be adopted for those children who required particular consideration should the new methodology be adopted i.e. children with age appropriate (or above) attainments who had Physical/Medical, Sensory, Behavioural or Social/Communication needs and required a high level of individual support in the classroom and/or at unstructured times. Two possible approaches were outlined in the consultation materials. The Working Party were of the view the proposed new methodology adhered to the agreed principles underpinning the work.

The Director of Children and Young people explained that under the proposed changes, in relation to Primary schools, some schools stood to gain in the region of £800 - £98,000. However other schools could lose between £500 - £49,000. There were particular concerns regarding 1 f.e. school.

The situation for Secondary schools was a range of gains and losses. There could be losses of up to £100,000 but others could gain up to £200,000. This combined with the claw back on school balances, which would see an average 5% based on 06/07 balances might potentially, threaten the viability of some schools.

Forum members repeated the need for a protection mechanism which would enable the Forum to review individual cases where the combination of factors could threaten their viability. They also raised a number of other concerns:

- Funding for those children who were not underperforming but had other special needs that would require additional support, such as those on the Autistic spectrum
- Students arriving from overseas, some of whom had special needs.
- The Fisher Family Trust estimates which took into account gender. This would have a detrimental effect on single sex girls schools. However officers stated that this had been factored into the estimates.
- Short timescale for the consultation

Given the number of concerns raised members discussed whether the timetable was viable. In conclusion they felt that it was not. It was agreed that it would be sensible to delay the implementation date to April 2009. This would then allow for officers to consult fully with Head Teachers to make them fully aware of the implications, listen to and address their concerns before going out to consult parents. They wanted a firm timeline which they would consider at the next meeting and for the Working Party to continue to have regular meetings so that the proposals could be taken forward for implementation, subject to consultation, in April 2009.

The Forum requested that the Director of Children and Young People and Head of Children and Young People Finance considered a mechanism for dealing with the small number of schools who would be in a difficult situation if the proposals were implemented or indeed other proposals generally.

The Forum then considered the issues they wished the Working Party to address;

- The Terms of reference of the working party to be extended to include consideration of 3 & 4 year olds
- Look at students who had behavioural needs linked to SEN with the possibility of these being funded from a separate funding "pot".
- Consider and be able to demonstrate the fairness of the most significant winners and losers under the eventual proposals
- Consider the administration savings and demonstrate how these would come back to schools
- Consider how to ensure that, once they have the funding, schools spend it on SEN. Can we reasonably require schools to demonstrate they do spend this element of their funding only on additional and SEN needs?
- Investigate why the formula means that Junior schools are losers under the proposals
- Consideration of the issues surrounding overseas students
- Reassurances that the formula does not disadvantage single sex girls schools.
- Develop consultation material for parent's in a way that enables them to understand the proposals including the statementing process.
- Make it clear so that members of the forum , not on the working party, can understand and have time to consider the implications.

- Develop a comprehensive timeline between now and April 2009 which allows sufficient time for an education and lengthy consultation programme

The Head of SEN thanked the members of the working party for their effort and commitment and this was re-iterated by the Chairman.

For 2008/09, the Schools Forum was advised that council staff will vet the latest available numbers of Action, Action Plus and statemented pupils so that the January 2008 headcounts would be properly and consistently developed by schools.

AGREED that:

- (1) The implementation date for the proposals be deferred until April 2009 to allow for full and thorough consultation with schools and parents; and**
- (2) That the working party be asked to consider the points outlined above; and .**
- (3) The Director of Children and Young People and Head of Children and Young People Finance be requested to consider a mechanism for dealing with the small number of schools who would be in a difficult situation if the proposals were implemented.**

5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members agreed to the next meeting on Thursday 13th December at 4.30pm at the EDC. However since this was agreed it has been noted that this would clash with the meeting of the Children and Young People Portfolio Holder, therefore subject to confirmation the date of the next meeting would be Tuesday 11th December at 4.30pm at the EDC.

Chairman

The meeting ended at 5.50 pm