

SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held on 27th January 2009

Present

Primary School Teachers:	Sue Meckiff and Ron Lawrence
Secondary Head Teachers:	Meryl Davies, Karen Raven and Kathy Griffiths
Primary Governors:	Nick Webb
Secondary Governors:	Andrew Downes (Chairman), Janet Bell and Jenni Mogridge.
Non-School Representatives:	Alison Register (Early Years) and Mrs Mary Riley (Catholic)

Also present

Gillian Pearson (Director of Children & Young People Services)
Rob Carling (Head of Children and Young People Finance)
Mandy Russell (CYP Finance Group)
Gill Bratley (Principal Finance Officer)
Helen Long (Democratic Services)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Kathy Griffiths, Viv Hinchcliffe, Barbara Rhymaun, Tony Corkett, David Bridger, Elaine Hamilton, Sue Robertson and Tricia Spedding.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 2nd OCTOBER 2008 and 27th November 2008.

The Minutes of the meetings held on 2nd October 2008 and 27th November 2008 were agreed.

The chairman commented that, given a timetable of meetings was set at the last meeting; he was disappointed that the first two meetings on the list had been changed.

4. THE DEDICATED SCHOOLS' GRANT 2009/10 - 2010/2011 REPORT NO. DCYP 08164

The Schools Forum considered a report which provided details of the Indicative Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG) settlement for the two year

period 2009/10 to 2010/11. The Portfolio Holder would be requested to agree the proposals contained in this report as a basis for consultation with the Schools' Forum, Head Teachers, Governors, and other interested parties.

Officers explained the final settlement figure would not be known until May or June so they had to carry out their own estimation.

The forum carefully considered the schedule of use. They highlighted a few areas of concern:

The overspend on the AEN/SEN: Officers explained that £2m would be the estimated full year effect. It currently stood at £1m as not all the children started at the same time and so an estimation had to be made.

The majority of this overspend was on out borough placements. It was hoped the proposal to use the Woodbrook site, as an extension of Riverside, to provide specialist provision for children with Autism would reduce future spending.

Early years; As the data on 3 and 4 year olds was unreliable it was difficult to plan. The Early year's representative on the forum explained that from September 2009, 25% of the children in areas of deprivation would be entitled to an increase in their "free" hours; therefore there would be an increase in the number of sessions. The Head of Children and Young People Finance explained that this would be funded from the Standards fund.

In addition it was explained that parents of children with disabilities should be able to access 5 sessions of provision a week but this was not being provided and there was a waiting list which meant the borough was not fulfilling its statutory obligations.

Planned Maintenance; this would continue to be funded by DSG. It would be increased each year until it was all funded from DSG.

Contingency; £400,000 would be freed up to support all the other expenditure that had been identified

College Provision; this was for pupils who were on the verge of exclusion. A member raised concerns that this provision was paid for by the schools and if pupils had a variety of provision needs the funding should be available elsewhere.

Pupil referral Service; The Schools budget had been "topped up" from council tax spending but this was not sustainable and so there had to be a funding change.

Children's Social care; the education element of the Children in Need Team was outside the Schools budget but there had to be a target. Consultation had taken place with Governors and Head teachers and although there had been questions on the technicalities there had been no contradiction on the proposal. The consultation closing date would be 6th February 2009.

RESOLVED that the report is noted and a further report is brought to the next meeting on 24th February 2009.

5 POCKETS OF DEPRIVATION FUNDING REPORT NO. DCYP 08161

The Schools Forum considered a report which provided further information on the distribution of the Pockets of Deprivation funding. The Schools' Forum was asked to reconsider the impact of the Minimum Funding Guarantee on the final distribution the Pockets of Deprivation Funding.

In November 2008, the Schools Forum reviewed the final distribution of the Pockets of Deprivation funding, and the impact of the MFG. The Forum considered three options:

- (1) To treat this as an exception and override the MFG on this occasion.
- (2) Adhere to their principles but take a pragmatic approach and agree to distribute the £60,000 to schools using the agreed formula.
- (3) Adhere to their previous decision but accept that the Portfolio Holder can use his powers to override it.

The Forum voted on this proposal and option 3 was agreed.

In December this decision was reported back to the Portfolio Holder by the Director of Children and Young People Services. The Director advised that, following the Schools' Forum decision, there had been significant concerns expressed at the meetings of Cluster Group Chairmen and the full meeting of the Primary and Special School Head Teachers. The Director also expressed a concern regarding the extent to which future streams of funding from DCSF to Bromley could be affected by the method of distribution and the ability of the Authority to prove that funding had been appropriately targeted to schools, and that the intended outcomes for children and young people had been achieved.

It is resolved that:

- (1) the Director of Children and Young People Services refer the decision of the Schools' Forum to the Secretary of State regarding the matter of withholding deprivation funding to schools being funded at the Minimum Funding Guarantee for variation place and for funding to schools to be adjusted accordingly if permission is given;

- (2) that officers meet with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Schools' Forum to explain the rationale for the above recommendation.

However, having reviewed the powers and responsibilities of the Schools Forum the actual process was:

For MFG changes affecting up to 60% of pupils: -

Local Authority	- Proposes
Schools Forum	- decides
DCSF Role	- adjudicates where Forum does not agree LA proposal

Therefore, the Portfolio Holder did not have the power to override the Forums decision, but needed to approach the Secretary of State to give a view on this.

The Director of Children and Young People was keen that this issue be resolved internally without the need to involve the Secretary of State. The Director met informally with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Schools Forum to agree that the issue be brought back to the Forum for further discussion.

She addressed the Forum. Setting out the wider context of the issue and agreed that the wider contextual issues of the decision had not been fully presented in the past. She explained the rationale behind the funding and the effect the decision of the Schools' Forum would have on the schools.

The Forum again debated this issue. The methodology and distribution could not be re-visited, which the Portfolio Holder accepted. They raised concerns that if the money was distributed to the schools in receipt of MFG it would have a "knock on" affect for the following year. The Head of Children and Young People Finance explained that it would only be agreed for one year but if the Forum had strong feelings about it getting caught up with next year's MFG he could write to the Secretary of State requesting that this element is taken out the funding.

In conclusion the Forum agreed that the remaining £60,740 should be distributed to the 17 schools who had not yet received any funding due to them being in receipt MFG funding. However they wanted it to go out with a caveat which explained that this was the distribution rationale for this year only and those schools in receipt of MFG would need to be aware that this could change in subsequent years.

RESOLVED that by a unanimous decision the forum agreed that those schools where their Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) is higher than their formula should receive the pockets of deprivation funding for 2008/09. The distribution method previously agreed was for one year only and will be reviewed for 2009/10.

6. BISHOP JUSTUS – PHASE OUT OF THE MFG

The Schools Forum considered a report which provided information on the proposal to phase out the MFG support to Bishop Justus School over a 3 year period.

In October 2008 the schools forum had considered a report updating the proposal to phase out MFG support to schools and were asked in particular to consider how this would impact on bishop Justus School.

Officers presented updated background information and outlined a proposal to phase out the additional support over the 3 years. At which time the school would be fully operational as an 11-19 age school and would operate within the funding formula allocation.

From September 2008 the school would have its full compliment of years 7 to 11 pupils. In September they would admit their first 6th from intake into year 12, which would move through to year 13 in September 2010.

Although theoretically full there were a number of reasons why the school should still be considered as an opening school and required the appropriate level of support during this period. Officers had met with the Head teacher and Bursar to discuss this in detail and the Forum considered their reasons. However the Forum did not feel able to make a decision based on the reasons given by the school. As neither the Head Teacher of the School or the Chair of Governors were present it was agreed that a decision should be deferred until the next meeting on 24th February and that the school should be invited to make a short presentation to the forum outlining their case.

RESOLVED that this item is deferred until 24th February and the school be invited to make a short presentation to the Forum outline their case.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

SEN/AEN working party.

There had been delays in reaching a conclusion and Karen Fletcher-Wright had been asked if the Council were intending to review funding and whether the decision was to move this forward. The Chairman said that a lot of work had been done already but that there was a risk this would be out of date if this was not progressed soon. The Head Of Children and Young People finance stated that it was the Council's intention to seriously consider funding.

Increase in the free entitlement for Early Years Sessions

The Forum representative for Early Years explained that at a recent Provider's forum meeting several providers expressed concern that the extended 'free entitlement' could jeopardise their sustainability. They were currently able to charge for additional hours i.e. if they open for three hours

they could charge for the additional half hour. Removing this financial flexibility meant they would be totally dependant on the Nursery Education Funding which at the present level, would not cover their full costs. Additionally some sessional providers said they would opt to open only in the morning, thereby offering just one session a day, rather than two. If this happened it could significantly reduce the number of childcare places offered across the borough.

8. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

All meetings are at the EDC unless otherwise stated.

Tuesday 24th February 2009 @ 4.30pm

Thursday 23rd April 2009 @ 4.30pm

Thursday 16th July 2009 @ 4.30pm

Thursday 24th September 2009 @ 4.30pm

Thursday 26th November 2009 @ 4.30pm

Chairman

The meeting ended at 6.35 pm