

THE CUMBRIAN SCHOOLS FORUM
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
19 JANUARY 2004

PRESENT

Mr A Abernethy (Carlisle Secondary)
Mr A Alston (Foundation Secondary)
Mr S Bowditch (Special Schools)
Mr C Brooksbank (Foundation Primary)
Mr C Clarke (South Lakeland Secondary)
Mrs R Denby (Small Primary Schools)
Mrs T Eyre (Copeland Primary)
Ms S Gaston-Parry (Copeland Secondary)
Mr S Halfpenny (Carlisle Primary)
Mr T Hobson (Eden Secondary)
Mr B Kirk (Labour Group – CCC representing Mr D Clarke)
Mr C Rafferty (Allerdale Primary)
Mr R Rodgers (Eden Primary)
Mr A Rutter (Teachers’ Professional Associations)
Mr P Shaw (Allerdale Secondary)
Mrs J Stocker (Cabinet Member – Observer)
Mr E Tumelty (VA Catholic)

Officers in attendance:

Mr D Johnston (Education)
Mr A Hodge (Education Finance)
Mr C Stewart (Corporate Procurement)
Mrs N Shiels (Education)

The Chair welcomed Conway Stewart, Corporate Procurement and Nicola Shiels, Education to the meeting

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mr P Chappelhow (Conservative Group – CCC)
Mr D Clarke (Labour Group – CCC)
Mr J Douglas (VA C of E)
Mrs E Moffatt (Barrow Secondary)
Mr M Woodburn (South Lakeland Primary)
Mr M Yearsley (Community and VC Secondary)
Jacqui Raw (LSC)

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 NOVEMBER 2003

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2003 were agreed as an accurate record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

i) School balances – estimated at 31 March 2004

The Forum had recommended that one of the working groups consider in more detail issues relating to capital, surpluses/deficits and longer term planning. The most appropriate group would be determined later in the meeting during consideration of Item 9 on the agenda – Forum Working Arrangements.

ii) Supply List

CAPITA were now consulting with schools regarding the provision of a supply list. It was also reported that a group made up of LEA and CAPITA and representatives of the Forum had been established to consider issues relating to the provision of a supply list.

iii) Scheme for Financing Schools – Proposed Changes

Cabinet had taken into account the views of the Forum when it had considered the school meals issue. This had also been called in by Learning and Recreation Scrutiny Panel. All other recommendations from the Forum had been agreed by Cabinet. It was also suggested that it would be helpful for Forum Members to receive a summary of Cabinet decisions in future.

4. SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS WORKING GROUP

It was confirmed that a letter expressing concerns over Post 16 Funding for statemented pupils would be sent to LSC.

Strategic Facilities

There was some debate regarding strategic facilities, the pattern of SEN provision and Inclusive Cumbria. The Forum felt that it was important to have access to research into the types of provision and how it was funded, but it needed to determine whether this fell within the remit of the Forum.

It was evident that a number of different groups discussed similar issues independently of one another and it was important to attempt to bring these discussions together.

Specialist Teaching Service (STS)

There was general support for increased funding for STS. However it was felt that there should be some further examination of SEN provision across Cumbria. It was also suggested that in future, when the Forum was asked to make a decision to increase provision, the desired outcomes be specified to allow the benefits to be measured at a later date.

The Forum then agreed that funding for STS should be increased in order to enhance provision by three teachers.

Child Protection Meetings – Supply Cover

The Forum agreed that there should be no change to the current scheme and that schools continue to meet the costs from their budget.

5. BUDGET 2004-05 UPDATE

The Forum considered a report which updated them regarding the 2004-05 budgetary position. The Government had announced the draft Revenue Support Grant Settlement for 2004-05 on 19 November. The overall increase in the Formula Funding Share for Cumbria was 5.5%, however, the increase across individual services varied. For the Education Budget the increase would be 6.8% for the schools block and 3.5% for other, including LEA.

The Secretary of State for Education had estimated that cost pressures faced by schools in 2004/04 would average 3.4%. As a result Government had guaranteed a minimum increase per pupil of 4% together with a 4% increase in a schools fixed costs. Other elements of a schools funding would also be increased on the same basis. Funding from the LSC for School 6th Forms and received via the LEA would be increased by 4% together with Standards Fund and the School Standard Grant (SSG). There would also be changes regarding the scale to apply for the payment of School Standards Grant (SSG). All schools would however receive either a 4% increase on their pupil School Standard Grant or the value of their announced SSG band for 2004-05, whichever was the higher.

The proposed additional costs to be met from the schools budget in 2004-05 were also illustrated.

The group debated some specific issues that had been identified before noting the current position regarding the budget for 2004-05.

6. USE OF HEADROOM – SCHOOLS IN FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

The Secretary of State had empowered LEAs to utilise excess funding over and above a minimum 4% increase to all schools, and for which the Schools Block budget to the LEA had been increased, for the purpose of assisting schools with financial difficulties.

The Secretary of State required that the LEA passport the full increase in the Schools Block Funding to the Schools Budget. However, the Forum was asked to consider the possible utilisation of some of the increase over and above what was needed to implement the minimum schools guarantee, to assist schools with an expected revenue deficit at 31 March 2005.

The Chair drew the Forum's attention to the strong direction from the Secretary of State that LEAs should be looking to discourage schools from having deficit budgets within the next few years.

The Forum discussed the report at length. There was a great deal of concern relating to the use of any additional available funding to reduce some of those deficits perceived to be the 'worst'.

Taking into account the strong reservations of the Forum, and having been put to the vote **the Forum recommended the:-**

- i) **targeting of available resources to schools that met the criteria set out by the Secretary of State, and**
- ii) **a scheme based on the following proposals that would distribute approximately £400K - £450K and met criteria as set out by regulations :-**
 - a) **Estimated deficit at 31 March 2004 (based on current information) to exceed 17.5% of the schools' S52 allocation**
 - b) **Targeted additional funding to equal the excess above 17.5% with a maximum to any one school of £200,000**
 - c) **Payment of the additional funding to be dependent upon an approved budget deficit action plan being in place to enable the LEA to monitor the schools' use of funding. Failure of schools to adhere to the plan will result in the withdrawal of the additional funding and the LEA would reserve the right to temporarily withdraw delegation.**

7. SCHOOL MEALS – ROLE OF CORPORATE PROCUREMENT UNIT AFTER DELEGATION OF SCHOOL MEALS BUDGET TO ALL SCHOOLS

The Forum had before them a report that reviewed the work undertaken by the Corporate Procurement Unit on behalf of the LEA with regard to school meals. A representative of the Corporate Procurement Unit was available to respond to any questions from members of the Forum.

Following some debate, **the Forum agreed to support the future role of the Corporate Procurement Unit on behalf of the LEA as set out in the report, and the Forum recommended that funding of £134,000 be retained for this purpose.**

8. STANDARDS FUND 2004-05

A report was presented which identified the principal changes to the Standards Fund for 2004-05, set out the provisional allocations to schools for the Schools Development Grant and highlighted the remaining funding to be allocated. A number of individual grants had been terminated and amalgamated with the School Development Grant. As a result of the changes there was an unallocated amount and the Forum were asked to consider whether to distribute the remaining balance on an amount per pupil basis or by a flat percentage grant increase to all schools.

Taking into account that the Forum had in previous decisions favoured per pupil allocations - **the Forum**

- i) noted the Standards Fund allocations already notified, and**
- ii) recommended that the balance of the Schools Development Grant (£419,000) be allocated to individual schools on an amount per pupil basis.**

9. FORUM WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

The Members of the Forum considered a report, which reviewed the operation and working arrangements of the Schools Forum, since its establishment in January 2003. During the year five sub groups had been established to consider issues relating to social deprivation and funding, school size issues, special educational needs, contracts for schools and school funding – formula operation. However these groups found there had been occasions when the work of one or more groups crossed that of another.

Having been in existence for approximately one year it was considered timely for the Forum to review its operation and that of the sub groups.

Following some discussion, **the Forum agreed that the sub groups should be rationalised as follows:-**

School size – including funding issues relating to the school size

SEN, Social Deprivation, Access and Inclusion

School Budget Group – to include deficits, balances, contracts and capital formula

It was also agreed that as the work and responsibilities of the Forum was wholly related to funding and financial issues relating to schools, the term of office of the current Chair and Vice-Chair be exceptionally extended to 31 March 2004. All future appointments to these offices would be made annually at the first meeting of the Forum held in each new financial year.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

School Milk

It was reported that LEAs could, if they wished, provide school milk for pupils. Cumbria did not do so. As a result of delegation of the catering budget the provision of milk would become the responsibility of school governing bodies.

If a governing body decided to provide milk for pupils, then any pupils entitled to Free School Meals would be entitled to free school milk.

Dates of Future Meetings

It was agreed that the provisional meeting scheduled for 25 February 2004 was not needed now. The next meeting of the Full Forum would be held on 25 May 2004.

In the meantime it was important that the newly agreed sub groups began working. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Full Forum together with the Chairs of the Sub Groups would have an early meeting to agree some dates. In order that the sub groups were able to work properly they would need to be properly constituted and substitutes should be allowable.