

THE CUMBRIAN SCHOOLS FORUM

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 MAY 2004

PRESENT

Mr A Abernethy (Carlisle Secondary)
Mr R T Alston (Foundation Secondary)
Mr S Bowditch (Special Schools)
Mr P G Chappelhow (Conservative Group – CCC)
Mr C Clarke (South Lakeland Secondary)
Mr R Coy (Allerdale Primary – representing Mr C Rafferty)
Mr J Douglas (VA C of E)
Mrs T Eyre (Copeland Primary)
Ms S Gaston-Parry (Copeland Secondary)
Mr S Halfpenny (Carlisle Primary)
Mr S Hetherington (Foundation Primary – representing Mr C Brooksbank)
Mr T Hobson (Eden Secondary)
Mrs E Moffatt (Barrow Secondary)
Ms M Pickthall (Cumbria LSC – Observer)
Mr A Rutter (Teachers' Professional Associations)
Mr P Shaw (Allerdale Secondary)
Mrs J Stocker (Cabinet Member – Observer)
Mr B Thomas (CEYDCP and representing Rev I Davies, Diocesan Authorities)
Mr E Tumelty (VA Catholic)
Ms S Woodburn (South Lakeland Primary – representing Mr M Woodburn)
Mr M Yearsley (Community and VC Secondary)

Officers in attendance:

Mr D Johnston (Education)
Mr A Hodge (Education Finance)
Mrs N Shiels (Education)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Nominations were invited from members for the position of Chair. Mr R Alston was nominated by Mr A Abernethy and seconded by Mr J Douglas. An e-mail from Mr M Hrynkow was read out in which he nominated Mr S Halfpenny for the position of Chair. This was not seconded. There were no further nominations. It was therefore agreed that Mr R Alston continued as Chair of the Cumbria Schools Forum for 2004-05.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Nominations were invited from members for the position of Vice-Chair. Mr A Rutter was nominated by Mr A Abernethy and seconded by Mr J Douglas. There were no further nominations. It was therefore agreed that Mr A Rutter continues as Vice-Chair of the Cumbria Schools Forum for 2004-05.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mr C Brooksbank (Foundation Primary)
Rev I Davies (Diocesan Authorities)
Mrs R Denby (Small Primary Schools)
Mr M Hrynkow (Barrow Primary)
Mr C Rafferty (Allerdale Primary)
Mr D Southward (Labour Group – CCC)

The Chair welcomed Marjorie Pickthall, Cumbria LSC to her first School Forum meeting.

4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2004

Mr B Thomas requested that his apologies be added to those listed. The minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2004 were then agreed as an accurate record.

5. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

6. CHANGES TO SCHEME OF DELEGATION 2004-05

The Schools Forum considered a report that identified all the approved 2004-05 changes to Cumbria's Scheme for Financing Schools and the formula for allocating budget resources to schools. In accordance with legislative requirements all schools, governors and other interested parties had been consulted. Their views had been considered by the Schools Forum and following their recommendation, Cabinet and County Council determined the changes that were implemented. The approved changes for 2004-05 were detailed in a Fair Funding newsletter that was attached as an appendix to the report. The newsletter had also been issued to all schools. During the debate the following specific issues were raised:-

- i) SEN Statements – There was a continued problem regarding post 16 SEN funding, particularly at Stainburn School. The LSC formula for allocating resources to sixth forms did not include a component for students with special educational needs. The formula had been nationally agreed, but it had been recognised that there were difficulties. Work was currently underway to change the formula but it was not expected that this would come into effect until April 2005. In Cumbria it had been agreed that a reconciliation exercise would be carried out which would compare numbers of statements with actual funding received. The initial reconciliation

exercise had not highlighted any particular problem areas, however the exercise was due to be repeated and particular attention would be paid to Stainburn School. The Schools Forum noted the strength of feeling regarding this issue.

There was also a request as to whether it would be possible to give any exemption to the five special schools regarding S52 formula allocation for pupils with statements. It was accepted that exemption would not be appropriate, however further discussion outside the Forum may be necessary.

- ii) Non-Teaching Union Convenor – The Schools Forum had decided that a full time Unison Trade Union convenor to support non-teaching staff in schools would not be funded. Schools would, however, be reimbursed for the cost of absence while staff were engaged on trade union duties. It was reported that Unison were expressing dissatisfaction at not being able to properly represent their members in schools. The Vice-Chair suggested that it may be appropriate for one of the sub-groups of the Schools Forum to revisit this issue.

The Schools Forum then noted the agreed changes to the Scheme and Formula for the year 2004-05.

7. MEETING SCHEDULE 2004-05

A schedule of dates of meetings of the Schools Forum during 2004-05 had been drawn up based on the pattern and frequency of meetings that had been held during 2003-04. The first round of sub-group meetings had also been scheduled during October 2004. However, as it was more difficult to predict how frequently the sub-groups would need to meet further dates would be agreed as appropriate. Members of the Schools Forum were asked to note the following dates and also share them with the constituency they represented:-

Schools Forum Meetings

Tuesday, 21 September 2004

Wednesday, 17 November 2004

Friday, 14 January 2005

Monday, 7 February 2005 (provisional)

Wednesday, 20 April 2005

Schools Forum Sub-Group Meetings

Thursday, 8 July 2004 – Schools' Budget Working Group

Tuesday, 5 October 2004 – School Size Working Group

Thursday, 7 October 2004 – SEN, Access & Inclusion, Social Deprivation Working Group

Wednesday, 13 October 2004 – Schools' Budget Working Group

8. WORKING GROUP MINUTES

There were three sub-groups of the Schools Forum, each of which had met twice since the meeting of the Schools Forum held on 19 January 2004.

i) SEN, Access and Inclusion, Social Deprivation - The Working Group had met on 2 March and 13 May 2004. At the first meeting of the group a number of issues had been identified which that had been considered further at the next meeting. The meeting of the group held on 13 May had considered specific issues including: -

a) Social Deprivation – Child Protection Meetings – The group had agreed that they would not support the centralisation of funding for child protection meetings.

b) SEN Structure (role of Special Schools/Strategic Facilities) – The Principal Education Officer SEN had made a presentation to the group. A number of concerns had been expressed and they were reiterated by members of the Forum. These included: -

- Concerns that parents were not being made aware of the different types of provision that were available.
- What was the strategy? Would there be a role for special schools in the future?
- Finance issues, concerns regarding funding following strategy.
- Need for a proper analysis of where a child's needs could be best met - special school or strategic facility.
- Special school staffing issues, training resources.
- At Risk Register – feeling that LEA may be failing in its duty in this area.

The Cabinet Member for Education had noted the comments that had been raised and she agreed to discuss the issues with appropriate officers within the Education Directorate.

This was an ongoing area of work and a further report would be made to a future meeting of the sub-group. The Schools Forum then noted the minutes of the SEN, Access and Inclusion, Social Deprivation meetings held on 2 March and 13 May 2004. The Forum also agreed that funding for Child Protection Conferences should continue to be delegated.

ii) Schools Budget Working Group – The Working Group had met on 9 March and 4 May 2004. Specific issues discussed at the meeting held on 9 March had included the provision of a supply list and the use of headroom money.

The meeting on 4 May had further discussed the supply list, which was now progressing. Another large area of work identified by the budget group was to consider and develop financial benchmarking data for schools.

The group had also considered non-pupil-led funding but there had been general agreement that it would not be progressive to reduce the level of pupil-led-funding. The group had however noted the strong feelings of colleagues in small schools regarding the disparity between primary and secondary schools.

Schools Forum then noted the minutes of the Budget Working Group meetings held on 9 March and 4 May 2004.

- iii) School Size Working Group – The working group had met on 8 March and 5 May 2004. The first meeting had discussed at length the remit and name of the group and had identified areas of future work. The group had agreed that they should consider the viability of schools set against a background of falling roles and a necessity for some change.

The meeting on 5 May had considered the definition of a small school and had looked at comparisons with other authorities. A number of issues had arisen and as a result the group had agreed that some modelling work should be undertaken regarding the notion of minimum funding for a school. The members of the Schools Forum debated at length “strategic schools” for Cumbria and the development of a number of principles or criteria that should be met for a school to be in existence. These might include time taken to travel to place of learning, minimum number of pupils, etc. It was accepted that some of these issues were very sensitive and if progress was to be made it would be important for whole school communities to become involved. The Chair felt that it might also be helpful to elected members if this work was commissioned and developed through the Schools Forum.

There was also some discussion regarding differing amounts of head teacher teaching time. In the case of small schools this could be viewed as a subsidy to the budget. The Schools Forum felt that this should be incorporated into the modelling exercise as well as an element relating to the implementation of workforce reform. The Chair concluded that this was an ongoing piece of work, however a number of very useful comments had come from the debate. Other items considered on 5 May had been federation issues and the correlation between size of school and budget balances.

The Schools Forum then noted the minutes of the School Size Working Group meetings held on 8 March and 5 May 2004.

9. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT ISSUES

A report that set out a number of issues intended to help good financial management within schools was presented. A number of changes to the formula, Scheme for Financing Schools and working practices were also proposed.

- i) Pupil Date Used in the Formula – The current formula allocated funding for mainstream school AWPU by using two pupil count dates. These were the actual numbers from the January preceding the financial year, plus an estimate of the pupil numbers for the following January. It was possible for the LEA to fund schools using actual January numbers only. Schools would be funded for the full financial year based

on these figures and there would be no pupil adjustment in the following year. One member of the Schools Forum had previously worked in an authority that had a similar arrangement and he reported that it had worked very well, although there had been a built in mechanism for large increases in pupil numbers.

In general however there was little support for the change and the Schools Forum agreed the current arrangements should remain unchanged.

- ii) Bank Accounts for Schools in Deficit – At its meeting on 9 March 2004 the Schools' Budget Working Group had recommended to the Forum that the Scheme be changed to consider the removal of bank account facilities for schools with an unapproved deficit. Where a school operated such a deficit the LEA had to find additional funding to enable the school to operate but it had no control over how the funds were spent.

The Schools Forum endorsed the recommendation that the scheme be changed to consider the removal of bank account facilities for schools with unapproved deficit.

- iii) Three Year Budgets – The LEA currently produced budget allocations for the forthcoming financial year, which were distributed to schools in February before, the financial year beginning in April. The LEA had also produced an Excel “budget calculator” which enabled schools to enter their estimated future pupil numbers and future allocations would be calculated. Schools currently produced a budget for the forthcoming year in May. By the end of October an amended budget was to be produced which should include an outline budget for the following year. There was however a lack of medium to longer term budget planning and this was felt to be one of the reasons that some schools experienced financial difficulties. An option would be for the LEA to produce three-year budget statements for schools. Schools would still submit budgets based on the financial year only, but it would also be possible to show, for information, the academic year allocations. Estimates such as this would have to be based on a number of assumptions, eg future funding levels and pupil numbers.

In return, schools would be asked to submit to the LEA, an outline budget for the period covered by the three year allocation. Development of three year budget plans could also allow a school to seek approval for an exceptional deficit.

The LEA had also begun to work on the production of financial benchmarking data. The Schools' Budget Working Group would be assessing and commenting on the data at a meeting on 8 July. It was intended that the data would be issued to schools in September.

There was a lot of support for the development of three year budgets from the Schools Forum, however, some concerns were expressed regarding difficulties in securing accurate estimates of pupil numbers. Another concern related to the financial/academic year and associated difficulties regarding budget planning.

The Schools Forum:-

- a) **recommended changes should be made to the scheme and working practices to allow the production of three year budgets;**
 - b) **supported the continued work to produce financial benchmarking data.**
- iv) Budget Surpluses – The Schools’ Budget Working Group had asked that the Forum consider setting a maximum permitted general reserve to be held by schools of 5% or £20,000, whichever was greater, and to identify a list of permitted categories of spend for which schools could retain balances in excess of this figure. DfES had published regulations which stated that providing the LEA had produced three year indicative budgets, it would be allowed to set certain controls on large surpluses. The figures suggested were 5% for secondary schools and 8% for primary schools.

In discussing this issue a number of members pointed out that there were often valid reasons for a school holding a surplus budget. It was expected that the exceptions should account for the majority of these. However, the funding allocation for each was intended to benefit the pupils during that year and therefore well developed school plans ought to be in place.

The School Forum agreed the principle that controls be set on large surpluses at 5% for secondary schools and 8% for primary schools. All schools would be consulted regarding the proposed change.

10. SOCIAL INCLUSION FUNDING

At its meeting on 19 November 2003, the Schools Forum had resolved that the equivalent funding to that formerly received through the social inclusion (standard fund) grant should be retained and distributed to schools in 2004/05 on the same basis as for 2003/04. The Forum were now asked to consider the basis of the allocation for 2005/06. This was primarily an issue affecting secondary schools and a number of reservations had been expressed regarding the current arrangements.

The Schools Forum therefore recommended that:-

- i) **the SEN, Access and Inclusion, Social Deprivation group re-examine the arrangements and explore alternative arrangements for allocating the totality of resources for children with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties;**
- ii) **the CASH Access and Inclusion group be invited to express a view regarding this issue.**

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- i) LMS Working Group – The Cabinet Member for Education reported a recent Cabinet report had highlighted that the LMS Working Group had not met for at least 12 months. The opinion of the Forum as to whether or not it was appropriate to re-convene the group was sought. There was general agreement that the LMS Working Group was no longer required, however, it was pointed out that County Councillors who were not members of the Schools Forum were not precluded from becoming a member of any of

the sub-groups. The Schools Forum would welcome representation from each political group on each of the sub-groups.

It was therefore agreed that all groups officers should be circulated with the schedule of dates for 2004/05 and be invited to send a representative to each sub-group. Mrs Stocker would also report back to Cabinet.

- ii) Strategic Area Review – P Shaw expressed some reservations regarding the company employed by LSC to compile the Barrow Strategic Area Review report. The report had been weak and had required some further work. Ms Pickthall agreed to report the concerns back to LSC. The company (BMG) were now beginning to collect data in West Cumbria and Mr Shaw expected to report back further to the next meeting of the Forum.
- iii) Attendance – Concern was expressed regarding attendance at the sub-groups and the Forum. A register of attendance would be published to all members and should be reported back to constituencies. The possibility of the dates being included in the County Council diary was also discussed, however, the diary had already been published for 2004/05. In order for Schools Forum meeting dates to be included into the County Council diary for 2005/06 it was **agreed that a schedule of meeting dates would be agreed no later than the end of January 2005.**
- iv) Ill Health Retirements – D Johnston reported that he had written to Corporate HR colleagues to instruct them that they had no power to charge schools for additional costs relating to ill health retirements of employees who were members of the Local Government Superannuation Scheme.

The meeting ended at 11.50am

PR/NS
25 May 2004