

THE CUMBRIAN SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 JANUARY 2006

PRESENT

Mrs E Barraclough (CCC, Liberal Democrat Group – Observer)
Mrs N Bates (Community and Voluntary Controlled Primary Schools)
Mrs J Blacklock (Small Schools)
Mr S Bowditch (Special Schools)
Mr C Brooksbank (South Lakeland Primary)
Mr P Chappelhow (Cabinet Member, Children’s Services – Observer)
Mr C Clarke (South Lakeland Secondary)
Mrs T Eyre (Copeland Primary)
Ms J Farebrother (Nursery Schools)
Mr M Hrynkow (Barrow Primary)
Canon D Jenkins (CE Diocese)
Mr C Kirkup (Eden Secondary)
Mr K Little (CCC, Labour Group – Observer)
Mrs T Macur (Cumbria Governors Council – representing Mr A Bryant)
Mrs J Mansfield (Community Secondary Governor)
Mrs J Marshall (Barrow Primary)
Mrs L Moffatt (Barrow Secondary)
Mr M Murphy (Carlisle Secondary)
Mr C Rafferty (Allerdale Primary)
Mr R Rogers (Eden Primary)
Mr A Rutter (Teachers’ Professional Associations)
Mr G Seward (Foundation Primary Governor)
Mr M Smith (Copeland Secondary)
Mr E Tumelty (RC Diocese)

Officers in attendance:

Mr A Hodge	(Education Finance)
Mr D Johnston	(Education)
Mr H Slater	(Education)
Mr G Wilson	(Education Finance)
Mrs N Shiels	(Education)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Nominations were invited from members for the position of Chair. Mr A Rutter was nominated by Mrs T Eyre and seconded by Mr C Clarke. There were no further nominations. It was therefore agreed that Mr A Rutter be appointed as Chair of the Schools' Forum.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Nominations were invited from members for the position of Vice-Chair. Mr C Clarke was nominated by Mr S Bowditch and seconded by Mrs L Moffatt. There were no further nominations. It was therefore agreed that Mr C Clarke be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Schools' Forum. Mr Clarke accepted the appointment, but on a temporary basis. There were still a small number of vacancies on the Forum and it was felt that one of the new representatives might wish to take on this role at some point in the future.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:-

Mr A Bryant (represented by Mrs T Macur)
Ms M Pickthall
Mrs I Roberts-Green

4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 DECEMBER 2005

The minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on 12 December 2005 were agreed as an accurate record.

5. MATTERS ARISING

There was a query relating to the school standards grant for special schools (slide 5, presentation attached as an appendix to the minutes). Officers undertook to provide a written response. There were no other matters arising.

6. PRESENTATION – INTRODUCTION TO THE ROLE OF THE FORUM

Officers gave a presentation that was intended to provide an introduction to the Schools' Forum for new members, as well as confirm changes to working arrangements that had been reported to the previous Forum.

The Government had established Schools' Forums as statutory groups to advise LEAs regarding funding issues but Forums now had some statutory responsibilities and were no longer just an advisory body.

The Cumbrian Schools' Forum was made up of 21 school members plus a number of non-school members and observers. Elected members now had observer status. In order to maintain some stability in the membership of future Forums, the previous one had agreed that there should be a rolling membership with the current terms of appointment lasting two, three or four years. Members in future would serve for periods of three years. Each constituency was now able to make their own arrangements for determining representation on the Forum. Previously, the LEA had been responsible for arranging appointments.

There was some discussion as to how the constituencies would undertake the process of determining representation and it was agreed that this needed some further thought. There was a view, however, that it might be possible for a constituency to request that the LA undertook the process on their behalf.

Quorum for meetings would be 40% with members being encouraged to seek substitute representation to attend in their place, as necessary. Any member that failed to attend, or secure appropriate representation, for three subsequent meetings would be replaced as a member of the Forum.

The roles and responsibilities of the Schools' Forum and the Local Authority were outlined and members expense claims, communications, information services eg. website were also explained. The length and arrangements for meetings was discussed. It was agreed that full Forum meetings should be scheduled as full day meetings so it would be appropriate to provide lunch for all full Forum meetings. The business would then either conclude with lunch, or break and continue after lunch into the afternoon.

Finally, the Forum considered whether meetings should be private or public. There was a general view that the meetings should remain closed. The minutes were however public documents and the agenda and reports could be made available to schools, interested parties, etc.

7. SCHOOLS BUDGET 2006-07

A report was presented that sought the views of the Forum on the proposed allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2006-07.

From 1 April 2006 the Local Authority would receive funding for the Schools Budget (both delegated and centrally retained) through a Dedicated Schools Grant. This grant would be pupil related and the Secretary of State had indicated that the increase for 2006-07 would be 6.8% per pupil. However, this included extra funding of approximately 1.8% per pupil for various additional "top ups" eg personalised learning.

The final amount payable to the Authority would not be known until May and would be determined by the actual pupil numbers returned to the DfES in the PLASC data in January. It was proposed that formula shares be issued based on the Authority's estimated January pupil count and any adjustments would be made the following year. The balance of grant payable (to the Authority) would be similarly carried forward (debit and credit). For Cumbria it was estimated that the cash increase on the DSG would be 5.3%. Allocating the funds as set out in the report would result in an increase of 5.3% in delegated funding to schools and a 4.3% increase (excluding Early Years) in centrally retained funds.

During the discussion, the Special schools representative again expressed his concerns relating to the funding of the five special schools. The officers attending the meeting dealt with a number of questions relating to aspects of the budget. **The Forum did however identify a number of areas where they felt some additional information would be helpful. These included Pupil Referral Unit expenditure, non-maintained special schools, behaviour support services and combined services.**

The Forum, therefore, noted the report and requested that a further report be presented to the next meeting on 7 February that would address the issues that had been identified.

8. SCHOOLS BUDGET - CENTRAL EXPENDITURE

A report seeking the views of the Forum to the inclusion of permitted additional expenditure as identified by the Secretary of State as a charge against the Schools Budget was considered.

There were two changes, detailed as follows:-

- Expenditure incurred in borrowing money for the purposes of facilitating the modernisation and rationalisation of the school estate provided the revenue savings that would be achieved were equal to, or more than, any expenditure that would be incurred in borrowing the money.
- Expenditure in respect of the dismissal or premature retirement of, or for the purpose of securing the resignation of any person employed in a maintained school where the revenue savings that would be achieved were equal to or greater than the costs incurred.

In discussing the report, there were some concerns regarding the proposals relating to dismissals, premature retirements/resignations of staff and the **Forum therefore requested that some further information be provided.**

The Forum did however recommend that a charge be made against the Schools Budget (central expenditure) for costs incurred on the cost of borrowing money to facilitate school modernisation and rationalisation, but only where the savings exceeded the costs.

9. SCHOOL FUNDING 2006-07 AND 2007-08 (FORMULA ALLOCATIONS)

The Forum considered a report that identified specific additional funding included in the DSG, and suggested how it might be allocated to schools through the formula. The additional funds would specifically be for government priorities. These are set out below together with the manner in which the Government has determined the allocation to the Authority.

- Key Stage 3 personalised learning £1,081,000. This has been allocated to the Authority on the basis of 50% low prior attainment; 15% on the basis of pupil numbers aged 11 to 15; and 35% on the basis of deprivation.
- Primary personalised learning £805,000. Allocated on the same basis as KS3 but using pupil numbers aged 5 to 10.

- Practical learning options for pupils at aged 14 £406,000. Distributed on the basis of numbers of pupils aged 11 to 15.
- Workforce reform £634,000. Distributed on the basis of the numbers of primary aged pupils in each Authority.
- Early Years extension £511,000. Distributed on the basis of the numbers of 3 and 4 year old pupils in private, voluntary and independent settings.

The Forum were asked to give their views on the proposals to

- allocate funding for personalised learning, as set out in the report, and
- ensure that of the total available funding, the nursery and primary sector receive an increase of 0.6% greater than the secondary sector in order to reflect the additional pressure arising from Workforce Reform.

There followed a lengthy debate during which there was a significant discussion relating to personalised learning and the method of allocation that was being suggested. The suggested method of allocation included a deprivation element and it was pointed out that the Government felt that there was a link between personalised learning and deprivation. This was discussed at length, as was the 'definition' of personalised learning.

The Forum did express the view that because of the additional commitments placed on the primary and nursery sectors, that whatever the final distribution of funding between the sectors was, that the primary and nursery sectors should receive an extra weighting of 0.6% in line with the Government's advice and requirement as reflected in the Minimum Funding Guarantee to all schools.

Before determining the method of targeting the remaining additional funding, the Forum requested further detail to be presented to the next meeting of the Forum.

10. PERFORMANCE RELATED PAY

A report that considered the funding options after the withdrawal of the direct grant for performance related pay on 31 March 2006 was presented.

At it's meeting in September 2005, the Schools Budget Working Group had recommended that the funding formerly distributed to schools for Performance Pay (Threshold, Leadership etc) should be distributed to schools as a percentage increase on AWPU values, but also taking into account the value of statements. The group had recognised that the distribution of the grant could not continue to be made on the previous basis because the specific grant had ceased. The equivalent funding had been added into the national total of the Dedicated Schools Grant but the amount that was returned to individual authorities was not the same as in previous years and the DSG was not based on numbers/costs of teachers progressing on the pay scales. Also, the previous basis (ie actual promotions) would become increasingly outdated as teachers moved schools, left the service, new teachers were promoted and others appointed.

The report outlined how the grant would be allocated and asked the Forum to confirm or reject the recommendation of the Budget Working Group.

There followed a further long debate that focused around two options set out in the report :-

- (a) A transitional budget, which attempts to replicate the grant and is based on actual salary costs. This would be paid by the LEA to schools separate from the main formula budget. The increasing cost of more teachers receiving performance related pay would be met by an ongoing reduction in the AWPU values in the main formula budget, or
- (b) Incorporating the value of the grant into main formula budget for schools. In line with the Schools Budget Working Group recommendation a formula budget is proposed based on a 3% increase in statement values and an average 5% increase in AWPU values.

During the debate, it became apparent that a number of Forum members were concerned that the issues had not been given sufficient consideration, and should have been discussed in more detail. This was a difficult area that would have differing effects on schools dependent upon the staffing arrangements within the schools. There was a general acceptance that the method of allocation would need to change.

The Forum, therefore, agreed the principle that it was necessary to change from a targeted grant to a formula budget but requested that further modeling work be undertaken prior to the next meeting on 7 February 2006. This modeling should replicate the current arrangements, as far as possible and move towards incorporating the former funding in the schools funding formula.

11. STANDARDS FUND 2006-2008

The Schools Forum considered a report that gave the latest information on the Standards Fund Grant Allocation. In July the Secretary of State had announced new arrangements for School Funding from 2006-07. This had included the rationalisation of specific grants.

The School Development Grant would increase in 2006-07 by 3.4% per pupil. All schools would receive this increase on top of their aggregate allocations for 2005-06. The Local Authority should devolve the balance of grant unallocated to schools, in a fair and transparent manner. There would be no increase in the centrally retained element.

The report proposed two possible options for the distribution of the balance:

- A fixed amount per pupil (flat sum)
- Percentage increase on all AWPU values

The South Lakeland secondary school representative asked whether there were any particular changes that schools should be aware of and it was confirmed that the LA would write to all schools setting out any changes.

The Forum then noted the report and recommended that the balance should be allocated on a per pupil basis, based on the January pupil count.

12. FORUM WORKING GROUPS

The Forum considered a report that gave details of the previous working groups and their membership. The Forum were asked to review the current working groups and identify the

working groups that were required for 2006-07, as well as terms of reference and membership as appropriate.

There were some concerns expressed relating to the under representation of some of the sectors at previous meetings of the working groups, in particular the Budget Working Group. It was recognised that colleagues were busy and participation in working groups as well as the Forum was time consuming. The possibility of working groups having some members that were not members of the Forum ie. school bursars was considered as a possibility. The Chair, however, felt that the groups should be made up largely of Schools' Forum members but with some co-opted members.

There was some discussion regarding the work of the Schools Organisation Forum and it was suggested that perhaps it would be useful for there to be a standing item on the agenda of future Schools' Forum meetings – School Organisation Forum – Update.

It was agreed that the working groups should continue as outlined in the report but the membership of each group would need to be reviewed. In advance of the next meeting of the School's Forum, members would be asked to indicate which groups they would be interested in joining. Provisional membership of the groups would be drawn up, to be finalised at the next meeting.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Schools' Forum would be held on Tuesday, 7 February 2006 at Newton Rigg, Penrith.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Loan Scheme for Schools: The Forum agreed that the Scheme for Financing Schools should be amended to include a sentence relating to the Local Authority's ability to loan money to schools in specific instances.

PR/NJS
26 January 2006