

THE CUMBRIAN SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 MARCH 2006

PRESENT

Mrs J Baskerville (Carlisle Primary – representing Mrs I Roberts-Green)
Mrs N Bates (Community and Voluntary Controlled Primary Schools)
Mrs J Blacklock (Small Schools)
Mr C Brooksbank (South Lakeland Primary)
Mr P Chappelhow (Cabinet Member, Children’s Services – Observer)
Mr C Clarke (South Lakeland Secondary)
Mr A Dickenson (Barrow Secondary – representing Mrs L Moffatt)
Mrs T Eyre (Copeland Primary)
Mrs J Farebrother (Nursery Schools)
Canon D Jenkins (CE Diocese)
Mr C Kirkup (Eden Secondary)
Mr K Little (CCC, Labour Group – Observer)
Mr M Murphy (Carlisle Secondary)
Mr D Natrass (Voluntary Aided Primary)
Mr C Peale (VA Secondary)
Mr C Rafferty (Allerdale Primary)
Mrs J Richardson (Allerdale Secondary)
Mr R Rogers (Eden Primary)
Mr A Rutter (Teachers’ Professional Associations)
Mr G Seward (Foundation Primary Governor)

Officers in attendance:

Mr A Hodge (Children’s Services Finance)
Mr D Johnston (Children’s Services)
Mrs N Shiels (Children’s Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:-

Mr B Abram
Mrs E Barraclough
Mr S Bowditch
Mr A Bryant
Mrs J Mansfield
Miss J Marshall
Mrs L Moffatt (represented by Mr A Dickenson)
Ms M Pickthall
Mrs I Roberts-Green (represented by Mrs J Baskerville)
Mr M Smith
Mr E Tumelty (RC Diocese)

2. MEMBERSHIP

Mr David Natrass, representing Voluntary Aided Primary Schools was welcomed to his first Forum meeting.

The Forum also noted the appointment of Mr Bob Abram as Foundation secondary representative. Unfortunately, Mr Abram was not able to attend the meeting and his apologies had been presented.

3. BUSINESS OF MEETING

Item 6, Sure Start Funding was withdrawn from the agenda.

4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7 FEBRUARY 2006

Subject to an amendment under item 5, matters arising, that officers would undertake to provide a written response to a query raised by the special schools representative relating to an alleged reduction of the special schools standards grant, the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on 11 January 2006 were agreed as an accurate record.

5. MATTERS ARISING

Schools Funding – Additional Responsibilities: At the meeting on 7 February 2006 the Forum had discussed how the extra funding that the Government had included in the DSG for both 2006/07 and 2007/08, to meet the costs arising from additional responsibilities, should be allocated. After a lengthy discussion, the Forum had recommended that the additional funding should be allocated to replicate, as far as possible, the basis of the allocation that the Secretary of State had used in distributing the funding to local authorities.

The South Lakeland secondary schools representative was concerned that other Forum members had not fully appreciated the implications that the recommendation could have on some schools, and that the recommendation would determine the allocation of funds for additional responsibilities for a period of two years. In allocating the funds, different

schools would receive different amounts and some Forum members felt that this could result in disparities between schools that would be inequitable. There was also a view that insufficient time had been spent considering this issue. It was therefore suggested that some further work should be undertaken which would review how the allocation for additional responsibilities had affected individual schools' budgets in the current year, with a view to making possible changes in future years.

The Forum members confirmed that they were content with the recommendation, as it had been agreed on 7 February. This issue would however be considered further by the Budget Working Group as part of the ongoing work related to the review of the formula.

6. WORKING GROUP MINUTES

Only the SEN, Social Deprivation, Access and Inclusion Working Group had met since the last meeting of the Forum. The group had met on 27 March 2006 (previous day); the notes of the meeting were not therefore available. The Chair of the group gave a verbal report of the meeting.

SEN, Social Deprivation, Access and Inclusion Working Group: 27 March 2006 – Stuart Goodall had attended the meeting to respond to questions that had been raised about the use of funding for PRUs, Behaviour Support Services and the Combined Services Budget. The group was given an explanation of how the identified funds would be used in schools. This would include particular initiatives such as preventative work and early intervention work relating to behaviour. The group had welcomed the explanations and the opportunity to ask further questions but they did ask to receive further feedback on the use of the funds later in the year.

The group had also discussed a report that had identified the Authority's allocation of funding for 2006-07, which was targeted to meet the additional costs in schools arising from Social Deprivation. The Secretary of State had requested that all authorities identify and provide by 5 May, a report on the current practice and policy for distributing funding targeted to meet the effects of social deprivation in schools. The factual information would be submitted to the DfES but it was proposed that the working group undertook research in schools to establish:

- the teaching methods and other services provided to target results of deprivation
- the existing budget and distribution to schools
- practices in other local authorities

The group discussed this at length and agreed to undertake some further work. They also discussed whether or not basing the allocation of deprivation funding on free school meals was the most appropriate method. A colleague, now based in one of the secondary schools had already undertaken some research into this issue and the group had resolved to invite her to attend their next meeting to give a presentation on the work.

7. SCHOOLS' FORUM – FUTURE PRIORITIES

A presentation was given that summarised the current budget situation and looked forward to the work that the Local Authority and the Schools' Forum would wish to undertake during the next and future years.

The presentation covered 2006-07 funding, budget timetables and other budget issues.

2006/07 Funding

- Budget allocations had to be completed by 31 March 2006. The process had been more difficult this year as two year budgets were being prepared. There had also been some difficulties for secondary schools regarding the application of the minimum funding guarantee. There had also been some problems related to incorrect PLASC data, which was currently being dealt with.
- Dedicated Support Grant – funding this year would be based on actual pupil numbers and the final allocation would not be available until June. Colleagues within Children’s Services finance were working to try to ensure that provisional allocations were as close as possible to the actual allocation. It was hoped that there would not be a significant difference but, if there were, the County Council would seek the views of the Schools’ Forum about how to deal.
- Standards Fund – allocations were almost finalised although confirmation was awaited from the DfES regarding summer schools. School bursars could consult a ‘calculator’ that would calculate a schools minimum entitlement. The total amount available for school development grants and the various standards fund grants would increase by 3.4% per pupil.
- School Standards Grant – there were a number of school standards grants still to allocate. At the end of the process some transitional relief could be available for schools that had previously received LiG in 2005/06. This was to be replaced by a similar grant that was based on free school meals. If, when all grants had been allocated, and the total grants, compared with last year had reduced by 2 or 2.5% then some transitional funding could be available.

Budget Timetable

- School Meals Grant – all schools would receive a grant
- Social Inclusion Funding – secondary schools should have received this recently
- 2007/08 and 2008/09 Budgets – these were almost prepared although it was emphasised that amounts were provisional and were likely to change
- June 2006 – DfES would confirm the actual allocation

Other Budget Issues

- Deprivation – this had been identified as a government priority. The SEN, Access and Inclusion, Social Deprivation working group had discussed this in detail on 27 March 2006, as reported by the chair of the group earlier in the meeting. This would be an ongoing area of work for the SEN Group and the Forum.
- Formula Review – the work that the Budget working group had started would be ongoing
- Minimum Funding Guarantee – the Forum would need to consider this annually
- Budget Adjustments – there would no longer be budget adjustments related to pupil numbers
- Personalisation – SSG would increase in 2006/07 but would be weighted towards pupils with low attainment and deprivation. Discussed earlier, see above.

- Combined Services Budget – directly related to the Children’s Services agenda. However, any spending on combined services, from the schools budget, would need to be justified and there should be a test of proportionality. DfES had written to the Chairs of Schools’ Forums asking them to inform DfES if the Forum was unhappy with their LA spending.
- Reports on School Budgets – regular monitoring reports would be produced which should raise understanding about all that was included in the budget.
- Timetable for 2007/08 – there was scope for adjustments to be made over the period but a timetable for any adjustments would need to be agreed.
- FiMS – Standard – this was a statement of how a secondary school was financially managed and it was envisaged that a similar standard would be phased in for primary schools over two or three years.
- Behaviour Support Services – further discussions were required regarding the purpose of the funding and how it was spent.

8. CONSULTATION PROCESSES – THE ROLE OF THE FORUM

Although some issues had already been identified for consideration the Chair felt that it would be useful to establish a timetable showing what the Forum wanted to achieve and by when.

- For longer term planning, a schedule of work could be drawn up. As part of this exercise, each working group could also prepare a plan of their work and this could feed into the overall plan. The work plans could then be circulated to all members of the Forum.
- Access to Schools’ Forum, Awareness Raising – ‘people’ should be made aware of the role of the Schools’ Forum and how they could feed in to process. The Chair was to give a presentation to a future Scrutiny Panel.
- Communications – access to other groups was an important consideration eg. Schools’ Forum SEN Working Group and the CASH and PHA A+I groups
Availability of information, access to minutes/draft minutes, etc needed to improve. The summary of recommendations that was produced following each meeting would also be placed on the Schools’ Forum website. It was also suggested that the covering agenda for each meeting should be sent to all schools via the portal in advance of each meeting.
- How did other Forums/Local Authorities work together? Could this be an area that one of the working groups looked at?
- LEA/LA – Forum members to note that the LEA should now be known as the Local Authority (LA).

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Social Deprivation – The South Lakeland secondary representative had a specific request about information relating to LA expenditure. DJ agreed to respond directly.

Monitoring Group – The previous Forum had established a monitoring group. The group had asked Capita to investigate the availability of other systems equivalent to SIMs. To date there had not been a report of any findings. It was reported that the Corporate Procurement Unit was now looking at issues such as this and they were hoping for the involvement of the Schools’ Forum in future discussions.

Headroom – At the meeting of the Schools’ Forum held on 14 January 2005 it had been agreed that headroom funding should be allocated to a number of schools. Each school had been required to ‘match’ the funding that was received. It was requested that a report setting out how those schools had utilised the funding be presented to a future meeting.

Corporate Director – Children’s Services – The Chair confirmed that he had written to extend a standing invitation to the Corporate Director – Children’s Services, or her representative, to attend future meetings of the Schools’ Forum. She had indicated that she would be interested in attending future meetings, dependent upon other diary commitments.

PR/NJS

31 May 2006