

# **THE CUMBRIAN SCHOOLS FORUM**

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 JUNE 2006**

### **PRESENT**

**Mrs J Blacklock (Small Schools)**  
**Mr A Bryant (Cumbria Governors' Council)**  
**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)**  
**Mr P Gardner (South Lakeland Primary – representing Mr C Brooksbank)**  
**Mr B Gummett (Special Schools – representing Mr S Bowditch)**  
**Mr C Kirkup (Eden Secondary)**  
**Mrs J Mansfield (Community Secondary)**  
**Miss J Marshall (Barrow Primary)**  
**Mr D Nattrass (Voluntary Aided Primary)**  
**Mr C Peaple (VA Secondary)**  
**Mrs J Richardson (Allerdale Secondary)**  
**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 (Children's Services Finance)**  
**Mr D Johnston (Children's Services)**  
**Mr H Slater (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  
Mrs N Bates  
Mr S Bowditch (represented by Mr B Gummett)  
Mr C Brooksbank (represented by Mr P Gardner)  
Ms J Farebrother  
Canon D Jenkins  
Mr K Little  
Mrs L Moffatt (represented by Mr A Dickenson)  
Mr M Murphy  
Ms M Pickthall  
Mr C Rafferty  
Mrs I Roberts-Green  
Mr B Thomas

## **2. MEMBERSHIP**

There were a number of colleagues representing absent Forum members who were introduced and welcomed to the meeting. It was also reported that Bert Thomas would represent Canon David Jenkins at future meetings of the Forum.

## **3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 MARCH 2006**

The minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on 28 March 2006 were agreed as an accurate record.

## **4. MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2006.

## **5. WORKING GROUP MINUTES**

The SEN, Social Deprivation, Access and Inclusion Working Group had met on 27 March 2006, which had been the day before the last Forum meeting, the notes of the meeting had not therefore been available. The Chair of the group had given a verbal report of the meeting. The notes of the SEN, Social Deprivation, Access and Inclusion Working Group meeting held on 27 March 2006 were now noted by the Schools' Forum.

School Budgets Working Group: 16 May 2006 – the first meeting of the newly constituted group had been held on 16 May. The group now included a number of Bursars and some new members so the meeting had begun by looking back at the work that had been undertaken by the previous group before moving on to consider the factors that were in the proposed model of expenditure, which was based on the cost of a class.

The representative of South Lakeland secondary schools re-expressed his concerns about the work of the School Budgets Working Group on the model of school expenditure. He was concerned:

- that not all School Forum members were clear and happy with the methodology that was being used.
- about the development of the class based model, as it would always favour smaller units, whether primary or secondary.
- about the large variations that he felt the proposed scheme would produce.

There was a period of time in which to undertake this work and the representative of the South Lakes secondary schools suggested that it would be interesting to explore what was happening in other authorities – were other authorities reviewing their models or was Cumbria in a minority? It was also suggested that it would be helpful to have as many different approaches to the process as possible, by doing this it may help to get as much agreement around the table as possible.

It was stressed that this work was an attempt to achieve fairness of funding and in order to do that colleagues had tried to build up a cost of what a school needed to do.

Taking into account the comments that had been made, the School Budgets Working Group would continue to work on the model of school expenditure. In order to make progress it was important that all sectors participated in the work and attended meetings wherever possible.

The notes of the School Budgets Working Group held on 16 May 2006 were then noted by the Schools' Forum.

## **6. SCHOOL SPENDING PRESSURES**

The Forum considered a report describing the external pressures facing schools that would have an impact upon allocated resources and necessitate changes to the schools formula.

Cumbria's current allocation formula was largely based on historical factors. The initial distribution of available funds in 1990 between the different sectors and types and size of school was largely based upon the then existing pattern of spend. Since then this pattern had remained largely unchanged. Any known and identified pressures not uniformly applicable across all schools arising since 1990 had been targeted to those areas facing the pressures.

Schools in different sectors and of different sizes, over the near to medium term were now facing a number of different pressures which would have a differential impact. If these pressures were not accurately costed and corresponding adjustments made through the formula to ensure all schools had a "fair" allocation of the funds available, it was likely that pupils in some schools would be seriously disadvantaged.

The issues that would need to be addressed included single status, key stage 4 curriculum, equal pay claims, minimum wage, teacher's workload, personalised learning, special educational needs, foundation stage, extended schools, children's centres, school meals, falling rolls and dedicated schools grant. The Forum was asked to note these pressures and suggest any others that should be included.

There was some debate, much of which focussed upon the work of the School Organisation Forum and the possibility of schools closing in the future. Transitional costs of the closure of a school would be an additional pressure but other than that, the cost of school

organisation would not affect the model. Forum members expressed concern about those schools that were involved in the school organisation process and the possible problems that they might face with the potential of pupil numbers declining.

The Forum noted the pressures that had been identified in the report.

## **7. SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS - CONSULTATION ON GUIDANCE CHANGES**

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) was proposing to make changes to the regulations covering the content of Local Authority Schemes for Financing Schools. A report that identified the proposed changes and sought the views of the Forum for inclusion in the authority's response to the consultation was presented.

Under Section 48 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 all local authorities were required to establish and maintain a scheme for financing schools setting out the relationship between the local authority and the schools it maintained. The DfES was now proposing to amend the regulations governing the content of schemes and had asked for the views of Forums and local authorities to its proposals.

The proposals were set out in detail in appendix 1 of the report. They covered four main areas: -

- a) To give local authorities the ability to request a financial forecast from schools covering each year of the new multi-year budget periods.
- b) To give local authorities the ability to issue a notice of concern to a governing body where it felt it was appropriate to do so to safeguard the financial position of the school.
- c) To give local authorities the ability to make the achievement of the Financial Management Standard in Schools compulsory for certain phases and types of schools and declare external assessment of the standard compulsory.
- d) To require all local authorities to include a balance control mechanism in their scheme.

Cumbria already had in its scheme provisions covering the proposed changes at 3(a) and 3(d) above. Details of these were set out in its scheme at paragraph 2.3 "Submission of budget plans" and at paragraph 4.2 "Controls on surplus balances".

The Forum discussed each proposal. Concern was expressed about the validity of year 2 and year 3 forecasts and it was suggested that other pressures could invalidate these forecasts. It was accepted that this work did encourage schools to look ahead but in experience it tended to not be very accurate. The Forum were not supportive of local authorities being able to make the achievement of the Financial Management Standard in Schools compulsory for certain phases and types of schools and there were some concerns expressed about the possible cost. With regard to surplus balances there was a query about the position of Special schools – should they be the same as primary at 8% or secondary at 5%?

An appropriate response would be submitted to the DfES taking into account the comments that had been made.

## **8. 2005/06 AND 2006/07 BUDGET COMPARISONS**

A spreadsheet that illustrated the effect, on budgets, of changes and decisions taken by the Forum in the previous year had been produced. This included the effects of personalisation and the minimum funding guarantee.

The figures were felt to be useful and it was hoped that they would be available in future years. Differing degrees of uplift and volatility were noted. The representative of South Lakeland secondary schools felt that the personalised learning debate had been difficult without an illustration of the net effects. He remained concerned that other Forum members had not fully appreciated the implications that the recommendation would have on some schools and requested that figures illustrating the effect on budgets in the next year be made available to help inform future debate.

It was suggested that some further analysis of the figures would also be useful. This was an area that the School Budgets Working Group could look at further and report back to the Schools' Forum.

## **9. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG)**

Funding for the Schools Budget (both delegated and centrally retained budgets) was provided by central government by way of a Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Notification of the amount of the DSG was made by DfES as an estimate in December preceding the financial year and was based on their estimates of pupil numbers for each authority. In December 2005 Cumbria was allocated an estimate of £247,214m for 2006/07 and £259,623m for 2007/08. The DfES had intended to revise these figures and publish final allocations in May. These were not received until 1 June 2006 and gave Cumbria a final allocation of £246,418 in 2006/07, although the 2007/08 figure remained the same and would not be finalised until June 2007. The reduction was as a result of the recalculation of pupil numbers by the DfES, which differed from the original calculations. Overall, there had been a reduction to English LAs of £90m and DfES had stated that it would not reallocate this money in 2006/07.

The reduction in DSG in Cumbria was £796k. A report that dealt with the reduction was circulated at the meeting. The report set out options for dealing with the reduction and also outlined DfES guidance on the issue. The Forum was asked to state their preference in dealing with the implications of the finalised DSG and the options were: -

- Reduce central and delegated budget in 2006/07 by the required amount
- Carry forward the total overspend to 2007/08
- A combination of (a) and (b)

The report set out two methods of making the reduction in the current year. It was also reported that there would be an additional SSG in respect of personalisation, although actual amounts per school were not yet available. This issue had already been raised with the bursars group who had been clear that they felt that the reduction should be made during the current year.

There was a lengthy debate during which members of the Forum expressed their concerns at the level of reduction. There was however, a general agreement that the adjustments

should be made during the current year although it was felt that the method of adjustment needed some more detailed consideration. There were a number of proposals regarding how best to progress before the **Schools' Forum agreed that central and delegated budgets should be reduced by the required amount during 2006/07 but that the School Budgets Working Group should consider the detail of how best to make the reduction at their meeting on 4 July 2006.**

The Forum felt that schools should be alerted to the situation as soon as possible and there was a strong view that representation should be made to the DfES from the Forum.

## **10. SCHOOL BALANCES**

A report that set out school budget balances as at 31 March 2006 was presented to the Forum, for information. The average surplus had increased from £55k to £64k. Letters would be sent to schools by the end of June asking them to account for any large surpluses. Deficits were improving, in terms of overall deficit, with the average having decreased from £78k to £63k.

The Local Authority continued to work with schools facing financial difficulties.

The Forum noted the content of the report.

## **11. 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. A report setting out how those schools had utilised the funding during 2005/06 was presented to the Forum for information. No further such funding had been made available in 2006/07 or 2007/08.

The Forum noted the report.

## **12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Supply List – Currently, the LA had a contract with Capita to provide a supply list. A paper setting out statistical information relating to the use of the supply list was circulated and the Forum was asked to consider whether the contract should continue.

It was felt that further information was required before the Forum could reach a decision. This issue would therefore be brought forward as an item for the Schools' Forum meeting on 19 September 2006.

In Year Pupil Number Changes – There would no longer be any retrospective adjustments made for changes in pupil numbers but the Forum could consider whether the scheme should be adjusted to allow for changes. It was agreed that a report on this issue should be presented to the next meeting of the Schools' Forum on 19 September 2006.

Contract Monitoring Group – It was reported that the Contract Monitoring Group would be reconstituted to look at Capita, and other, issues. Membership of the group and dates of meetings would need to be set. It was suggested that these details should be resolved at a future meeting of the School Budgets Working Group.

School Organisation Forum – One member of the Forum had received three copies of the Carlisle school organisation consultation document and expressed concern about the cost of producing and circulating the document. This was not the appropriate arena for discussion,

however, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services did accept the points that were being made and agreed to take them back to the Schools Organisation Forum/project team.

Governor Representative Expenses – One of the governor representatives on the Forum raised a query about differing levels of expenses that governors were entitled to claim. It appeared that different groups had different levels of expenses that participants could reclaim. It was agreed that this issue would need some further investigation. Following investigation, a report would be presented to the School Budgets Working Group.

Agenda and Papers – It was requested that the agenda and papers for meetings be circulated two weeks in advance of meeting dates.

ASTs – There was a concern that the level of funding received by schools no longer covered the full cost of ASTs. It was agreed that this item should be considered in more detail, either by the School Budgets Working Group or by the full Forum at a future meeting.

PR/NJS  
July 2006