

THE CUMBRIAN SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 November 2006

PRESENT

Mrs N Bates (Community and Voluntary Controlled Primary)
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)
Mrs T Eyre (Copeland Primary)
Ms J Farebrother (Nursery Schools)
Mr C Kirkup (Eden Secondary)
Miss J Marshall (Barrow Primary)
Mr D Natrass (Voluntary Aided Primary)
Mrs I Roberts-Green (Carlisle Primary)
Mr R Rogers (Eden Primary)
Mr A Rutter (Teachers' Professional Associations)
Mr M Smith (Copeland Secondary)
Mr B Thomas (CE Diocese)
Mr E Tumelty (RC Diocese)

Officers in attendance:

Mr J Swainston (Head of Service – Schools and Learning, Children's Services)
Mr A Hodge (Children's Services Finance)
Ms A Sutton (Children's Services Finance)
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
Mr K Little
Mrs L Moffatt
Mr M Murphy
Mr C Rafferty
Mr G Seward

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2006

The minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on 19 September 2006 were agreed as an accurate record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. UPDATE

Staffing Arrangements – Staffing arrangements to support the Schools' Forum had been revised as follows: -

- John Swainston, Head of Services – Schools and Learning would attend all Schools' Forum meetings.
- Anton Hodge would continue current role.
- Ashleigh Sutton would take a lead support officer role, including supporting the timely issue of agenda and papers, ensuring that agreed actions were followed through after meetings as well as taking a role in the review of the formula.
- Nicola Shiels would continue to provide administrative support to the Forum and the working groups.

Working Arrangements – The following working arrangements had been established to support the work of the Schools' Forum: -

- Dates for meetings of the full Forum and the Schools' Budget Working Group had been scheduled until November 2007.
- Dates of meetings of the SEN, Access and Inclusion, Social Deprivation Working Groups had been scheduled until March 2007, more dates would be arranged, as appropriate.
- A timetable had been produced that set out the scope of the work ahead and worked towards any changes to the formula, that were agreed, being implemented from April 2008.

- Agenda setting meetings for the Schools' Forum would agree the agenda, author and content of reports as well as the deadline by which the agenda and reports would be despatched.

There was a request that reports (to the full Forum) be made available on the Forum website in advance of meetings.

Following some discussion, **it was agreed, in principle, that discussion papers only (no appendices) would be available on the Forum website in advance of meetings.**

Any confidentiality issues relating to reports would be considered at the agenda setting meeting. This group would determine which reports, if any, should not be made available in advance of the meeting.

The practice of the working groups bringing reports to the Forum was discussed. Members were asked to indicate whether they were happy to continue with this practice or would it be preferable to have more frequent meetings of the full Forum. **It was agreed that the working groups should continue to meet and report their work to the full Forum, making recommendations as and when appropriate.**

All members of the Forum would, in future, receive, by e-mail, the agenda and papers for the working group meetings (currently only the working group members received the papers). Only members of the working group would be expected to attend the meetings, however, any member of the Schools' Forum could attend a working group meeting with the permission of the appropriate chair.

Working group reports would not be made available on the website.

Dates of Meetings – Dates of meetings for 2006/07 had been scheduled as follows: -

7 December 2006	Contract Monitoring Group
10 January 2007 Newton Rigg, Penrith	School Budgets Working Group (9.30am) SEN, A+I, Social Deprivation Working Group (1.30pm)
23 January 2007 Newton Rigg, Penrith	Schools' Forum (9.30am)
6 February 2007 Newton Rigg, Penrith	School Budgets Working Group (9.30am) SEN, A+I, Social Deprivation Working Group (1.30pm)
6 March 2007 Newton Rigg, Penrith	School Budgets Working Group (9.30am) SEN, A+I, Social Deprivation Working Group (1.30pm)
27 March 2007 Newton Rigg, Penrith	Schools' Forum (9.30am)
18 April 2007 Newton Rigg, Penrith	School Budgets Working Group (9.30am)

2 May 2007 Newton Rigg, Penrith	Schools' Forum (9.30am)
11 June 2007 Newton Rigg, Penrith	School Budgets Working Group (9.30am)
2 July 2007 Newton Rigg, Penrith	Schools' Forum (9.30am)
12 September 2007 Newton Rigg, Penrith	School Budgets Working Group (9.30am)
2 October 2007 Newton Rigg, Penrith	Schools' Forum (9.30am)
13 November 2007 Newton Rigg, Penrith	School Budgets Working Group (9.30am)
27 November 2007 Newton Rigg, Penrith	Schools' Forum (9.30am)

Members of the Forum to note these dates in their diary.

5. WORKING GROUP MINUTES

The School Budgets Working Group had met on 11 November 2006. In presenting the draft notes of the meeting, the Chair of the group drew attention to: -

- i) School Contracts with Capita – the date of the monitoring group had now been scheduled for 7 December 2006. This meeting would focus on Capita contracts with schools. A notice had been issued via the school portal inviting schools to provide examples of specific issues and concerns for discussion at the meeting. There would be further meetings of this group to look at contracts with strategic partners and others.
- ii) South Lakeland District Council – Sports Centre – the Chair explained that this issue was causing some concern. As legal advice was awaited, it was inappropriate for officers to comment further at this stage. There was some concern about the accurateness of the notes relating to this issue. An amendment to the notes of the School Budgets Working Group would be recommended when the group next met on 10 January 2007.
- iii) School Spending Review – Project Brief – a project brief and timetable for the review of the formula had been produced. At the request of the School Budgets Working Group the timetable had been amended to include specific dates where progress would be reported to Cabinet. This would help to ensure that Cabinet were fully aware of the ongoing review and how it was progressing.
The Cabinet Member for Children's Services welcomed this approach as it would help to keep the other members of Cabinet up to date with progress.

The Schools' Forum then received the draft notes of the meeting of the School Budgets Working Group held on 11 November 2006.

6. KS4 PRACTICAL CURRICULUM – 14 – 16 FUNDING

A report that sought the views of the Forum in amending the proposed allocation of KS4 Practical Curriculum funding was considered. Any change to the proposed 2007-08 allocation would require approval by the Forum.

In the proposed DSG allocations for 2006-07 and 2007-08 a number of funds had been earmarked and LAs and their Forums had been encouraged to allocate such funds on a basis relevant to their purpose. One of these funds was for KS4: Practical Curriculum. Following discussions with the Forum, last year, it had been decided that these amounts should be added to the KS4 AWPU therefore sharing them between all KS4 pupils.

However, since the allocation, there had been discussions between secondary school representatives and LA officers regarding the best method of allocating the funds.

The element was not ring fenced but there was a clear intention that it should be used to support additional vocational and practical learning. This was in line with the DfES 14-19 reform programme and the development of Specialised Diplomas. The Area 14-19 Partnerships had an increasing range of responsibilities for development of 14-19 collaborative provision to deliver the county and national 13-19 entitlement. The decision to add this funding to the AWPU made it very difficult for area partnerships to plan such development in a coherent and consistent manner. In addition, it had been announced that the funding for the Increasing Flexibility Partnerships would end at the completion of the 2006. This would decrease available funding for this type of partnership activity by at least £250,000 in 2007/08 and £500,000 in 2008/09.

CASH had also discussed the issue on 14 November 2006. The representative of South Lakeland Secondary Schools explained that there were issues relating to the allocation that still needed to be resolved and proposed that any decision be deferred pending the availability of further information.

As the situation was unclear, **the Schools Forum recommended that any decision should be deferred pending clarification. A further report would be presented to the next meeting of the Schools' Forum on 23 January 2007.**

(This was primarily a secondary issue – it was later reported that primary colleagues would welcome a report that set out in more detail the background to this issue).

7. STANDARDS FUND GRANT 121A (CLEO)

The Forum considered a report that sought their views regarding the allocation of the additional funding from Standards Fund 121a to CLEO, the Regional Broadband Consortium (RBC) for Cumbria and Lancashire. The allocation of standards fund 121a would support the development and improvement of the National Digital Infrastructure for schools.

The Schools' Forum noted the report.

8. SCHOOL MEALS TRANSITIONAL GRANT

A report that provided an update on progress was presented. The Forum was asked to note the report and/or give direction to further work.

At the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on 9 November 2005 the basis on which the schools meals grant would be spent had been approved.

DfES had since announced an extension of the transitional budget from 2008 to 2011. This had resulted in an increase in the level of funding for the period 1 September 2006 to 31 August 2007 but the level of funding per year after 1 September 2007 had not yet been determined. The report outlined ways in which the transitional grant would be utilised and a further progress report would be submitted to the Schools' Forum after September 2007.

During the discussion, several issues were raised. These included: -

- 10% contributions from VA schools
- Future of the Premises Unit – the rising cost of a school meal and number of meals taken
- School meals for under 5s/nursery children
- Balance between Healthy Schools Advisors and Project Officers
- Government agenda – changing priorities?
- Nutritional standards
- Single status and equal pay claim
- School kitchens – refurbishment/new kitchens

The Forum requested that a further report be presented to a future meeting.

This report should set out what was happening currently and looked forward whilst taking into account the issues that had been raised during this discussion.

9. LOCAL AUTHORITY SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS

A report that outlined the directed revisions to Cumbria's Scheme for Financing Schools was presented. The Forum was asked to note the directed revisions and to approve a change regarding the date of budget submissions outlined in paragraph 3.7 of the report.

The directions would have the effect of: -

- a) placing a requirement on all Local Authorities to include a mechanism that controls school surplus balances;
- b) allowing Local Authorities to request multi-year budget forecasts from schools;
- c) allowing Local Authorities to specify how they expect schools to demonstrate their compliance with the Financial Management Standard in Schools; and
- d) allowing Local Authorities to issue a notice to schools whose financial systems, processes and management are of concern.

Following discussions with schools, the LA was also suggesting that the deadline for the budget submission should be moved from 1 May to 31 May. This change would take into account the additional work required to produce a three-year plan plus other workload pressures that impacted on school staff at this time such as closure of accounts.

Each of the directed revisions was set out in detail in appendices 1-4 of the report. The Forum considered each on and commented on two in particular: -

- Appendix 2 – Multi-Year Budget Forecasts – It was requested that any trends that emerged from the three year budget returns, submitted by schools, be reported back to the Schools' Forum.
- Appendix 3 – Financial Management Standard – A number of the secondary representatives expressed their concern at the additional workload being placed upon staff regarding the implementation of the Financial Management Standard in Schools. It was mandatory that all secondary schools achieved the standard by the end of March 2007. Support was available from LA colleagues if required.

The timetable for extending the standard to primary and special schools was likely to be that LAs would be expected to apply the standard to another 40% of schools by April 2008, 40% more by April 2009 with the remainder of schools, plus a reassessment of all secondary schools by April 2010.

Taking account of the comments that had been made, **the Schools' Forum noted the directed revisions (as set out in the appendices to the report) and approved the change regarding the date of budget submissions from 1 May to 31 May.**

10. SCHOOLS BUDGET EXPENDITURE 2006-07

A report that provided details of the Schools Budget 2006-07 was considered. At the time of writing, the only area of 'centrally held' expenditure that was expected to show a variance was for payments to private, voluntary and independent nursery providers. The information was set out in S52 format and Forum members were asked to consider on how the information might be presented in the future. Comments about the information could be fed back to officers at anytime, after consulting with constituents, other colleagues, etc.

The information that had been provided was felt to be informative and the **Schools' Forum noted the report.**

11. SCHOOLS BUDGET 2007-08

A report that highlighted some of the budget pressures currently identified for 2007-08 and the potential impact on the Schools Budget was presented. The Forum were asked to give their views on the issues discussed in the report. It was, however, reported that a more detailed report would be presented to the Forum in January.

In December 2005 a two-year budget settlement, covering the financial years 2006-07 and 2007-08, was given.

The budget for 2007-08 assumed a Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) increase of 5% in cash terms (6.5% per pupil). However in June 2006, the 2006-07 DSG figure was recalculated by DfES and reduced by £796k.

The final DSG for 2007-08 would not be known until after the start of the next financial year, however it should be possible to make an estimate in early February based on pupil number returns from schools and non-maintained nurseries.

For planning purposes at this stage, it was assumed that there would be a 5% cash increase. Other assumptions to be taken into account were that the Minimum Funding Guarantee for schools would be 3.7% per pupil and general inflation would be around 2.5% to 3%

The Central Expenditure Limit would continue to apply and the indicative 2007-08 Schools Budget, set before 1 April 2006, assumed that both delegated and central elements would have the full 5% uplift. This would enable the Minimum Funding Guarantee and the Central Expenditure Limit conditions to be met.

The budget situation for the rest of the County Council, including the non-schools part of Children's Services, was extremely challenging. Anticipated costs for backdated pay, coupled with a disappointing settlement, meant that Children's Services were looking at a total budget that was lower in cash terms, before inflation had been applied, than the total budget for 2006-07.

A number of pressures had been identified but not yet quantified. Transitional arrangements for school organisation and pressures relating to school admissions should also be taken into account. At this stage, however, there were no firm proposals. On 28 November Cabinet would debate and approve budget proposals for public consultation. All schools were encouraged to respond to this consultation exercise.

The Schools' Forum noted the report.

A further more detailed report would be presented to the Forum meeting on 23 January 2007.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no other items of business.

PR/NJS
December 2006