

THE CUMBRIAN SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 March 2007

PRESENT

Mrs N Bates (Community and Voluntary Controlled Primary)
Mrs J Blacklock (Small Schools)
Mr S Bowditch (Special Schools)
Mr C Brooksbank (South Lakeland Primary)
Mr C Bush (Carlisle Secondary)
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)
Mr K Little (CCC, Labour Group – Observer)
Miss J Marshall (Barrow Primary)
Mrs L Moffatt (Barrow Secondary)
Mr D Natrass (Voluntary Aided Primary)
Mr C Rafferty (Allerdale Primary)
Mr R Rogers (Eden Primary)
Mr A Rutter (Teachers' Professional Associations)
Mr G Seward (Foundation Primary)
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)
Mr H Slater (Children's Services)
Mrs N Shiels (Children's Services)

1. **MEMBERSHIP**

The Forum noted that Mr C Peale had resigned as the representative of Voluntary Aided Secondary Schools. A governor representative should represent the Voluntary Aided Secondary constituency and Mr B Thomas agreed to try to secure an appropriate replacement.

It was also reported that Mrs E Barraclough, the Liberal Democrat representative had recently become a member of the Cabinet. A new Liberal Democrat representative would be nominated to join the Forum as an observer.

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from: -

Mr B Abram
Mrs M Pickthall
Ms M Swann

3. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 NOVEMBER 2006**

Subject to an amendment to page 7, item 8 Transitional Funding for School Organisation, the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on 23 January 2007 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no other matters arising from the minutes.

5. **WORKING GROUP MINUTES**

There were three Schools' Forum Working Groups, which had all met since the previous meeting of the Forum on 23 January 2007.

- i) Contracts Working Group – The group had met twice, on 19 January and 28 February 2007.
 - The meetings had discussed Capita issues and concerns about the relationship with Capita regarding services to schools. There had been a change in management. Ian Logan had replaced Liz Fergusson and had been meeting with schools. He was very keen to address the concerns and improve relationships.
 - Individual issues, eg CRB checking, Capita building work etc had been raised and Capita had undertaken to respond to individual concerns.
 - The group had also been looking forward towards the new contract with Capita, the current agreement was due to end March 2008. A number of performance indicators, aimed specifically at schools, had been agreed with Capita. These had been set at a very high level but would enable evidence about Capita to be properly collected.

It was requested that the performance indicators be circulated to all School Forum members.

- It was likely that the remit of the Contracts Group would be expanded to cover all services arranged by CCC for schools.

There was a lengthy discussion regarding CRB checking. Members of the Forum expressed a number of concerns regarding the current process and new guidance that the DfES had issued. It was explained that LA officers were working to prepare guidance for schools and that the intention was that the DfES guidance would be incorporated.

It was proposed that, when the guidance was available, Stephen Mason should present it to the Contract Group.

Officers undertook to feedback, to Capita and appropriate colleagues, the concerns that had been raised and **it was agreed that CRB/Safeguarding would be included as an item on the agenda for the next meeting of the Contracts Group.**

The Forum then received the notes of the Contracts Working Group held on 19 January 2007.

- ii) School Budgets Working Group: The group had met on 6 February and 6 March 2007.

On 2 February the group had continued their work on the review of the formula. They had considered the Cumbria model alongside the models adopted by four other LAs, cost pressures and what type of formula could be appropriate. The group had requested that further work of two models be undertaken:

- Activity Based Costing (ABC)
- To look at elements that should not be funded within the AWPU (XYZ)

The meeting on 6 March had been a budget workshop, rather than a full Budget Working Group. School Bursars and finance officers together with some head teachers had worked through the detail of the ABC model. This work was ongoing and would be reported to the next meeting of the working group on 18 April 2007.

It was reported that the meetings of the Budget Working Group had been purposeful and progress was being made. The Forum received the notes of the working group meeting held on 6 February 2007.

- iii) SEN, Social Deprivation, Access and Inclusion Working Group: The group had met on 6 February and 6 March 2007.

On 6 February the group had considered the social deprivation and personalisation elements and whether there was a better way to distribute these. It appeared that FSM was the simplest method but it seemed to underplay rural deprivation. IMD data was based on information collected at the last census so was at least five years old. Further information from other LAs that used IMD, as well as some modelling using IMD rather than FSM had been requested.

The group had also considered the level of personalisation funding, how it was distributed, other funding available and what effect the funding had.

On 3 March there had been further, more deliberate discussion and the work remained on track but there was still some way to go.

The next meeting of the group would consider SEN and Strategic Facility Funding. Special school heads, and representatives of strategically resourced schools had been invited to attend the meeting.

Subject to some amendments regarding FSM and attainment, the Forum received the notes of the SEN, Social Deprivation, Access and Inclusion Working Group held on 6 February 2007.

6. SCHOOLS BUDGET 2007-08

There was a presentation that gave an update on the 2007-08 budget situation. The presentation covered the following: -

- Increase in DSG and Budgets – The DfES would not confirm the final figure until late May/early June but it was anticipated that DSG would increase by 5% or 6.4% per pupil. Indicative budgets had been issued to schools during the previous week.
- School Allocations – The main formula was expected to increase by 5% but LSC funding would only increase by 4.1%. The Forum had already agreed to allocate £71k (23 January 2007) to support LA HR staff from 1 April 2007 and there would be a request for some additional funding to support personnel administration later on the agenda.
School Standards Grant (SSG) should increase from £11.5m to £ 13.3m, SSG Personalisation should increase from £2m to £3.2 and School Development Grant (SDG) should increase by 3.7%. Social Inclusion Fund should increase by 3% from 2006/07 less demography (pupil numbers and FSM changes) and the Teachers Pay Grant (TPG) should increase by 3% from 2006/07 actual. The TPG would contribute towards the cost of threshold but would not cover the full cost and this would need to be tracked.
A contingency of £250k should then be available to deal with additional and exceptional circumstances eg. through school organisation changes, more exceptional circumstances were anticipated.
- Formula Issues – These included school transitional arrangements where known, personalised learning would be identified separately as would KS4 practical curriculum and there would be no prior year adjustments other than rates. There was a query regarding SEN prior adjustments, officers agreed to look into this and respond to the Special Schools representative.
- 2006/07 Outturn – This was likely to be underspent by £400-500k. Mainly SEN expenditure due to some central SEN budgets having been increased at the same rate as delegated budgets, 5%, but the majority of the costs had been staffing related that had increased by around 3%. This underspend was not expected to continue but it would be rolled forward to 2007/08 and proposals about how to use it would be developed.

- Single Status – A report was presented that set out the possible budget implications, for schools, of the Single Status employment contract arrangements for non-teaching staff in schools.

Single Status was a statutory requirement and schools were responsible for implementing the Single Status employment contract arrangement. This was a CCC exercise but needed to include school based non-teaching staff that would need to be released from their duties at school for a job evaluation interview. All the costs of the job evaluation exercise would be met by the County Council except for the release of school staff for the job evaluation interviews. As a result, there would be a cost to schools.

The report outlined the process that would be followed to undertake the job evaluation exercise and included an indication of the length of time the interviews may take.

During a lengthy discussion a number of concerns were expressed regarding the process, the number of schools that would be involved and the possible length of the interviews. The impact could be greater in small schools as interviews also involved the line manager who was often the head teacher. The practicality of taking staff away from the classroom and the potential impact on the pupils was raised. It was stressed that the intention was, as far as possible, to try to spread the impact evenly across all schools.

It was also pointed out that in special schools up to 80% of the staff employed could be teaching assistants so in these schools the effect of the exercise could be greater still.

A number of Forum members were concerned about harmonisation and the potential impact of the overall exercise. These concerns were noted. They were important issues that would need to be debated and considered, as part of the overall exercise and schools should be encouraged to make representations about their concerns at all levels.

There was a general view that it was important to attempt to ensure that the process did not disadvantage any schools. The Forum discussed the possibility of the costs being met from a central fund, top sliced or from the contingency and underspend that had been discussed earlier in the meeting. A flat rate contribution to each of the schools involved was also discussed.

The Schools Forum felt that further work reflecting the likely cost to schools was needed however, **it recommended that the principle of allocating, to those schools involved, an amount (to be determined) towards the cost of the exercise should be adopted.**

A further report setting out more detail would be presented to the next meeting of the Schools' Forum in May.

- Additional Funding – It had been agreed that adjustments would not be made regarding individual changes in pupil numbers but it was recognised that exceptional changes could cause pressure. It was proposed that additional

funding be allocated to a small number of schools that were facing such pressures.

There was also a process to give additional allocations to schools where the actual value of SEN statements had exceeded MFG. Again, this was a small number of schools.

The Schools Forum agreed that additional funding was allocated as follows: -

Pupils

Ullswater Community College	£ 47,000
Crosscannonby	£ 16,000
Solway	£ 25,000
Hayton	£ 7,000
Settlebeck	£ 18,000
Threlked	£ 8,000
Ireleth, St Peter's	£ 12,000
	£133,000

SEN in Sixth Forms

Kirkby Stephen Grammar	£ 25,936
Ullswater Community College	£ 62,833
Cockermouth	£ 10,575

- School Balances – School balances would form part of an extensive consultation that would take place regarding 2008-2011 funding. The possibility of introducing a levy would be considered.
- 2008-2011 Funding Consultation – This would be a major consultation exercise, the biggest since 1998/99.

There was concern at DfES regarding school balances and as a result funding may not be as generous in future. It was proposed that a levy could be introduced for school balances over a certain level. The Forum expressed some concern about this in terms of longer term budget planning.

Other areas to be included in the consultation would be early years, 14-19 funding, grants and processes ie extending Forum membership to include bursars, 14-19 and early years groups.

A response was required by 1 June 2007 and DfES would expect responses to be submitted by the Schools Forum and the LA however, if a joint response was prepared and submitted it would carry more weight. Schools could also submit individual responses.

It was proposed that this be a substantial item for consideration at the next meeting. The Forum would be able to go through the consultation and determine whether to respond jointly with the LA or individually. The response would also need to feed into the Cabinet and Scrutiny process.

7. PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

In January 2007 the Forum had considered a report regarding personnel administration in schools and had allocated additional funds to meet the cost of HR support staff in the LA from 1 April 2007.

A further report regarding a review of personnel administration was presented. The report set out information regarding the maintenance of a proper record of all employees.

In 1999 personnel administration had been delegated to schools as a mandatory requirement for all LAs. In 2000, CCC contracted out its personnel administration to Capita and most, but not all, schools chose to buy back their personnel administration from Capita.

Management Audit and the DfES had now written to the Authority to formally criticise the lack of proper arrangements for personnel administration of staff in schools in Cumbria.

A recent analysis of the situation in Cumbria had been conducted with Capita. This exercise had highlighted the main difficulties that needed to be addressed. Principally, these were issues relating to the central record of all staff in the LA and possibly those records that were held in individual schools. The implications of the difficulties that had been identified in the current system were that the LA and schools could be exposed to potential claims for damages.

Before the end of March a specification for work to be undertaken by Capita would be agreed with all interested parties. An initial draft specification had been prepared and the target date for bringing all records and systems up to date was January 2010. It would not be possible to implement a new system and update all records in the first year so there would be a period of transition.

The Schools Forum was asked to consider a contribution of £50,000 pa towards the costs in 2007/08. A review would be conducted during 2007/08 and a further report would be brought to the Forum to allow time to consider an amended budget for 2008/09.

In discussing the report the Forum were concerned that having agreed an additional allocation in January, they were now being asked to agree an additional sum. The Forum were also concerned that they were being asked to pay for inadequacies in the current arrangements due to the existing contract with Capita having not been properly defined.

Taking account of the concerns expressed, and some frustration at the current arrangements, the **Schools Forum reluctantly recommended that a contribution of £50K be made from the Schools Budget towards the cost of this service in 2007-08. In agreeing this recommendation, the Forum recognised that the CEL would be breached.**

This was an ongoing issue that would be brought back to the Forum each year.

8. PROVISION OF SUPPLY TEACHERS

At the Schools Forum meeting in June 2006 the benefits and costs of the present system for obtaining supply teachers had been considered. Capita operated the current list at a cost of £30,000 to the schools budget. The list contained approximately 172 names.

The Budget Working Group had revisited the issue on 4 July 2006 and in September 2006 the Forum considered a further report regarding the provision of a supply agency. The main difference between a list and an agency was that the agency would provide the school with a person to carry out the supply cover. With a list, the school had to contact any teachers it deemed to be suitable and find out if they were available for work. There would, therefore, be a management fee for the Agency.

The Forum had requested that competitive prices for the two types of service, list and agency, be obtained. It was reported that the only quotation, to provide a supply list, had been from Capita and the cost would increase:

- £23k for a list of up to 100 supply teachers
- £44k for a list of up to 200 supply teachers

For an agency the commonly occurring figure was an initial start up fee of around £50k plus £ 15 per day.

The Forum discussed the report. Some colleagues felt that the current list was very useful, especially to small schools and on those occasions when schools were struggling to find supply cover, the list was available to access. There remained, however, the question of value for money and it was suggested that the Schools Forum could recommend that the LA retain a sum of £40k to maintain an 'in-house' supply list.

Some further investigation would be required including looking into the contractual obligations with Capita. **It was agreed that a further report would be considered at the next meeting of the Forum in May.**

9. SECURING RESIGNATION, DISMISSAL AND RETIREMENT

A report that considered possible action that could be taken to limit expenditure on securing resignation, dismissal and retirement had been circulated.

A number of Forum members felt that there were personnel issues that should be resolved before any decision was taken. There was also a view that the issues should be discussed by TACG and any other appropriate groups before the Schools Forum were asked to consider and make any recommendation.

The Schools Forum noted the report and requested that TACG and any other appropriate groups discuss the issues raised in the report before a report was brought back to the Forum.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting if the Schools Forum was due to take place on Wednesday, 2 May 2007. The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel would also be meeting on that date.

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Schools Forum would, therefore, be changed to 8 May 2007.

PR/NJS
April 2006