

SCHOOLS FORUM

TUESDAY, 6 JUNE 2006

PRESENT: -

Primary Representatives: Paul Boyles (Chair), Gill Llewellyn and Terri Menham

Secondary Representatives: John Newman and Pat Porter

Special School Representatives: Bob Walker

Diocesan Representatives: Sally Inskip

Observers: Councillor Barrie Thompson

Officers: Peter Sykes, Stuart McGregor, Lorraine Billis, Geoff Hogg, Nick Hobbs and Hitesh Patel

Apologies for absence were received from Lauren Connor, Linda Rankin, Peter Wells and Marinos Paphitis.

1. Minutes

Resolved – That, subject to the amendment of Minute 9 to read ‘Thursday, 11 January 2007’, the minutes of the meeting held on 21 February 2006, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

2. Matters Arising not covered elsewhere

With reference to Minute 7, the Interim Head of Finance advised that it was within the Schools Forum remit to determine whether savings which result from a severance payment may impact on the schools budget. There was no definitive guidance provided on this issue and he enquired whether the Forum would wish to consider each case as it arose, or provide a set of criteria and delegate decisions to the Group Director, Children.

It was agreed that detailed consideration of this matter would be undertaken by the standing sub-committee that would be established with the reconstitution of the Forum.

3. Report from Schools Forum Review Group

The Forum considered a report by the Schools Forum Review Group on a proposed re-constitution of the Forum. Members discussed and clarified the following points:

Substitutes – organisations would be required to nominate a substitute who must be

within the same category as the main member. In the absence of the main member, the substitute would be entitled to a vote.

Parent or Youth Representative – it was determined that it should be a youth representative on the Forum.

Terms of Office – these should be staggered for the schools' members to ensure a continuity of experience, periods of two, three and four years were suggested. Non-school members would be on a fixed-term

Standing Sub-Group – it was agreed that the newly constituted Forum would need to establish a sub-group at its first meeting, when numbers and members would be determined. Comment was made that the sub-group would be able to co-opt people with the necessary skills at any time, in addition to the standing membership.

Press – The Press would be notified of future meetings

Resolved – That, subject to the amendments set out above, the recommendations of the Review Group be agreed and the Swindon Schools Forum be reconstituted accordingly from 1 September 2006.

4. Financial Management in Schools Toolkit / Assessment (oral item)

The Forum was advised that an external assessment of financial management in schools compliance in the secondary schools was to be completed by March 2007. Large primary schools would be assessed the following year followed by the remaining primaries and then special schools. The assessment would be on a three-year cycle for secondary schools but it was not yet known how often it would be required for primary or special schools. There was a possible cost to the schools, as there was additional audit work involved. It was proposed that a pilot visit to a secondary school would be undertaken in July 2006.

It was agreed that a further update would be provided for the October meeting of the Forum.

5. ASPIRE Project and the Impact on Schools (oral item)

The Director, Information Systems and Technology provided an update on the Aspire project and the implications for schools. A briefing note was distributed and the Director responded to questions raised by members.

6. Arrangements for Funding Schools for the Costs of Deprivation

A copy of the response to the DfES was provided for members' information.

7. Review of the DfES School Funding System 2006-07

The Interim Head of Finance distributed a copy of the response to the DfES and advised that any comments should be directed to him and he would try to refer them on to the DfES.

In addition, details of the final 2006/07 Dedicated Schools Grant was passed

to members who were advised that a report on how it was proposed to distribute the additional £287,000 would be submitted to the next meeting.

8. Scheme for Financing Swindon Schools - DfES Consultation

The Forum considered a report concerning a DfES consultation on proposed amendments to Guidance on the Scheme for Financing Schools.

It was agreed that because of time constraints, members would consider the consultation document and pass any comments to the Deputy Head of Finance within two weeks in order that a response could be sent to the DfES by 30 June. A copy of the response would be circulated to all members.

9. Special Educational Needs Transport

The Forum considered a report regarding a specific aspect of Special Educational Needs (SEN) transport expenditure.

Several members expressed concern and stated that they would wish to know the actual amounts involved in each case. It was suggested, and agreed, that the criteria should stipulate that it related solely to children who had been placed outside of the Borough and who were now brought back to a Local Authority school.

Resolved – That subject to the amendment detailed above, it is agreed in principle that SEN transport costs as defined by Regulation 1 of the School Finance (England) Regulations 2006 can be charged to the schools' budget in 2006/07 and 2007/08 up to a value of £50,000 per annum.

10. Review of Teachers' Pensions (oral item)

Members were advised that with effect from 1 January 2007, the rate of teachers' superannuation contribution would be increasing. Written notification would be issued to all schools

11. Dates of Future Meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted.

12. Interim Head of Finance

The Interim Head of Finance, Peter Sykes, advised that this would be his last Forum meeting and that his successor would be Stuart McGregor. The Chair and members thanked Peter for his past work and wished him well for the future.