

SCHOOLS FORUM

WEDNESDAY, 31 JANUARY 2007

PRESENT: -

School Members: Gill Llewellyn, Primary Headteacher
Terri Menham, Primary Headteacher
Debbie Kalynka, Primary Headteachers
Paul Kohn, Primary Headteachers
David Easter, Primary Governor
Steve Colledge, Secondary Headteacher
Steve Flavin, Secondary Headteacher
Rachael Matthey, Secondary Headteacher
Peter Wells, Secondary Headteacher - **Chair**
Bob Walker, Headteacher

Non-School Members: Sally Inskip, Diocese Representative
Phil Baker, Trade Union Representative
Debbie Waldron, Early Years Representative

Officers: Ian Bickerton (Director of Local Provision), Martin Coles (Director of Quality and Standards), Geoff Hogg (Director of Services to Children and Young People), Stuart McGregor (Group Finance Manager), Lorraine Billis (Deputy Head of Finance for Schools), Patrick Weir, Karen McMahon (Aspire Programme Team), Helen Harris (Committee Officer).

Apologies for absence were received from Paul Boyles (Primary Governor) and Pat Porter (Secondary Governor).

26. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2006, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Steve Flavin (Secondary Head Teacher) remarked on the need for a clear statement setting out the roles and responsibilities of the Forum, and its impact on later decisions made by the Council. It was also commented that it would be helpful to have two-way consultation and if the Forum's views were not taken into account when decisions were made, then an explanation should be provided.

Resolved – That the Director of Local Provision submit a report to the next meeting to define the roles and responsibilities of the Forum

27. Aspire Update

The Director of Business Transformation submitted a report to provide an

update on the Aspire programme and its implications for schools.

The Forum was advised that the Council and Capita had now reached agreement and the partnership would commence on 1 February 2007.

Members expressed concerns relating to the level of targets set as performance indicators, cost of the monitoring process and safeguards for any payroll issues. Representatives of the Aspire Programme Team advised that the level of targets set were all equal to or higher than the current performance levels, with a three year rolling programme of review to ensure further and continuous improvement. It was confirmed that monitoring costs had been factored into the contract and also that measures were in place to safeguard any payroll issues. All aspects of the payroll service were incorporated within the performance framework, with accuracy rated as a high-level indicator and so carrying a higher weighting within the performance payment mechanism.

Steve Flavin (Secondary head Teacher) remarked that it would be helpful to have information on the baseline figures that were used to set the targets. The Chair also enquired when the end of year report would be submitted to the Forum and that he would like to see included details of the target set, whether Band was triggered, the baseline target and amount of progression and what influence the Forum could have on future targets. The Aspire Programme representatives agreed that this was how they envisaged the reports would be set out.

Resolved – (1) That the report and the implications for schools be noted.
(2) That the proposed arrangements for engagement with schools as the Aspire Partnership develops be endorsed.

28. Report from School Forum Sub Group

The Director of Local Provision presented a report by the Group Director Children to inform the Forum of the recommendations of the Schools Forum Sub Group from its meetings on 8th and 15th December 2006.

The discussion centred around the proposal to provide one-off funding from the 2005/06 carry-forward for alternative education provisions SCEP, Stepping Forward and Close to Home for 2007/08 to replace the grant funding that was being discontinued. None of the initiatives had ever been directly funded by the Council but had always been supported by grants from other sources. They all provided a vital service but if funding was not available they would have to close. The one-off payment was suggested as a way of continuing the provision whilst other avenues were explored.

It was also explained that the item for funding specialist equipment was not specifically for special schools but would fund all schools across the Borough. Specialist requirements had increased over the years, but the budget hadn't and recently identified needs had resulted in an overspend. An increase in the budget was required on a continuing basis.

Resolved – That the report and the recommendations of the Sub-Group be noted.

(The Chair made a non-prejudicial declaration of interest, as he was a Trustee of Stepping Forward).

29.**Funding for New Schools**

The Forum considered a report by the Group Director Children, which introduced an issue raised by a primary school representative regarding the impact of the funding formula on new schools.

Terri Menham (Primary Head Teacher) explained that for any child starting school between September and 31 March, seven months funding was provided. For new schools however, this funding then stopped and was not provided for the summer months, even though the child would be at the school for the full 12 months. This provided serious financial difficulties because to comply with government legislation on class sizes, it would be necessary to set-up new classes but it was financially not viable.

It was generally agreed that this was an issue that needed a general solution, as it would affect all new schools and not just the current one in question. Various suggestions were put forward to resolve the immediate issue for 2007/08 but it was agreed that officers should investigate all possible solutions and submit a report to the next meeting with their findings.

Resolved – (1) That the Group Director Children submit a report to the next meeting with proposals on how any financial assistance could be provided to new schools during 2007/08.

(2) That the Group Finance Manager consider the issue of continued pupil funding for new schools when reviewing the funding formula for future years

30.**Schools Budget Balances 2005-06**

The Forum considered a report by the Group Director Children, as presented by the Director of Local Provision, regarding the allocation of the brought forward balances from the Schools Budget 2005-06.

Concern was expressed that the carry-forward was being used to provide emergency one-off funding for various initiatives when long-term solutions needed to be found. It was stressed that one-off funding was only required to allow investigations into alternative sources of funding to be carried out. Notification that the grants were ceasing had come too late for alternative provision to be found for 2007/08 and there was a very real danger that pupil exclusions would increase if the support these initiatives provided had to cease. However, it was agreed that funding for 'Out of School Provision' should be reduced to seven-twelfths of the amount recommended in paragraph 2.2 of the report.

Resolved – That, subject to the following amendments, the unspent balance from the Schools Budget 2005-06 be allocated as set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report:

- The 'Out of School Provision' be amended to 'Financial Year 2007-08' and reduced to seven-twelfths of the recommended sum.
- The Per Pupil Distribution be determined as 'primary schools - September 2006 pupil numbers.'

31.**Schools Budget 2007- 2008**

The Director of Local Provision presented a report by the Group Director Children concerning the proposed schools budget for 2007-2008.

Resolved – (1) That officers investigate the possibility of increasing the central block by £35K to support the proper funding of specialist equipment that is required on an annual basis.

(2) That subject to (1) above, the overall Schools Budget as set out in Appendix A to the report be endorsed

32. Schools Funding Formula for Individual Schools Budget 2007-08

The Director of Local Provision presented a report by the Group Director Children to seek agreement to the Schools Funding Formula for 2007/08.

The Chair remarked on the difficulty of financing all the changes a school needed to make when it moved from a split site to a new single site. The current formula did not allow all the changes to be incorporated into one financial year and he suggested that two years would be more realistic. It was acknowledged that there were difficulties for all split site schools and that difficult decisions had to be made within very tight timescales.

Resolved - (1) That the proposed revision to the Schools Funding Formula for 2007-08, as set out in paragraph 2.5 of the report, be agreed in accordance with the recommendation of the Schools Forum Sub Group.

(2) That the proposed Schools Funding Formula for the Individual Schools Budget 2007-08, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be agreed.

33. Standards Fund 2007-08

The Forum considered a report by the Group Director Children, as presented by the Director of Quality and Standards, concerning the Standards Fund grant allocations for 2007-08.

Resolved – (1) That the Standards Fund grant allocations for 2007-08 be noted.

(2) That the grant for 116b Music at Key Stage 2 be retained and its scope broadened in accordance with the proposal in Appendix B to the report.

34. Future Meetings

The Forum noted that the next meeting would be held on 13 March 2007 with future meetings taking place on 10 July 2007, 2 October 2007, 22 January 2008 and 29 April 2008.

Gill Llewellyn (Primary Head Teacher) requested that an item on funding for Reception children who delay their school entry be included at the next meeting.