

SCHOOLS FORUM

WEDNESDAY, 28 MARCH 2007

PRESENT: -

School Members: Gill Llewellyn, Primary Headteacher
Terri Menham, Primary Headteacher
Debbie Kalynka, Primary Headteachers
Paul Kohn, Primary Headteachers
Paul Boyles, Primary Governor - **Vice Chair**
Rachael Matthey, Secondary Headteacher
Peter Wells, Secondary Headteacher - **Chair**
Bob Walker, Special Headteacher

Non-School Members: Debbie Waldron, Early Years Representative

Officers: Ian Bickerton (Director of Local Provision), Geoff Hogg (Director of Services to Children and Young People), Stuart McKellar (Director of Finance), Hilary Pitts (Group Director Children), Karen Murray (Interim Group Finance Manager), Lorraine Billis (Deputy Head of Finance for Schools), Helen Harris (Committee Officer).

Apologies for absence were received from Chris Davies (Primary Headteachers), David Easter (Primary Governor), Steve Flavin (Secondary Headteacher), Pat Porter (Secondary Governor) and Sally Inskip (Diocese Representative).

35. Chair's Statement

The Chair welcomed the Director of Finance, Stuart McKellar, to the meeting and invited him to comment on the Forum's role and how he saw it fitting in to the Council's structure. The Director remarked on the important role the Forum had in determining how the schools' budget was allocated. There would always be financial challenges to be faced and he saw its role as helping to find a way forward.

The Chair advised that the quality of support provided by officers was important. He saw their role as helping to inform the decisions made by the Forum and he welcomed their input as to the wider implications of any decision, as sometimes that could make a difference to what was finally decided.

36. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2007, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

37. Schools' Forum - Roles and Responsibilities

The Director of Local Provision presented a report by the Group Director Children to inform the Forum of its role, responsibilities and legal powers.

An enquiry was made as to how much impact the Forum's advice had on Cabinet decisions and whether the Cabinet was aware of the Forum's legal powers. The Director of Local Provision stated that there was a need to engage with Councillors and to publicise the Forum's decisions. Although executive Councillors could no longer be members of the Forum, the Forum may wish to invite them to attend meetings as observers. The Chair asked therefore whether it was possible to invite the relevant Councillors to attend meetings on occasions to provide feedback on decisions that had been made. The Group Director Children also stated that enquiries would be made on the possibility of the School Forum and Admissions Forum minutes being submitted to the Cabinet meetings.

The Chair commended the report as showing the current position of the Forum and advised that an annual update would be required.

Resolved – That the report be noted and endorsed.

38. School Funding Changes and Deprivation Review

The Forum considered a report by the Group Director Children, as presented by the Director of Local Provision, regarding the Government's consultation on the future of school funding arrangements from 2008/09 and also relating to local arrangements for deprivation funding.

Members were provided with feedback from the DfES Funding Conference that was held on 23 March 2007. It was stated that, in real terms, education funding had increased over several years but growth generally would now be tailing off over the next few years. Key priorities that had been identified were a reduction in deprivation, continued improvement in attainment and closure of the social class gap. It was pointed out by the DfES that there was a 24% gap in GCSE's A* - C between professional and non-professional families. The key issues involved were capacity to deliver, efficiency, personalisation, extended schools and 14 to 19. It was intended that would be more devolution to schools and greater flexibility in the use of the Dedicated Schools Grant. The areas that were the subject of the consultation and on which views were sought included:

- Minimum Funding Guarantee – should it continue?
- 0 to 5's and 14 to 19 education
- Should there be a stronger role for the Schools' Forum?
- School balances
- A focus on deprivation.

The Director of Local Provision referred to the proposal in the consultation document relating to the distribution of funding, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, and commented that he was not sure which of the two options would be the most beneficial for Swindon. The Director of Finance advised members that a case was being put forward as to why Swindon, along with Brighton and Hove, should be treated differently and if this was accepted, then there would be three possible options but it was impossible to say which would be better for Swindon at

this stage. The Forum generally discussed the best way to approach and respond to the consultation and review. It was agreed that any issues that members wished the sub-group to consider should be channelled through the Deputy Head of Finance for Schools (Lorraine Billis). The Chair requested that the Forum be advised of the Chair of the sub-group, if one was appointed and also that a copy of the notes from the Conference be attached to these minutes.

Resolved – (1) That Option 2, as set out in paragraph 2.8 of the report be approved as the means of reviewing school funding arrangements from 2008/09 and deprivation funding.

(2) That Option B, as set out in paragraph 2.9 of the report, be agreed as the means of responding to the consultation on school arrangements from 2008/09.

39. Schools Block Budget 2007-2008

The Deputy Head of Finance for Schools presented a report by the Group Director Children regarding the Schools Block Budget for 2007-2008.

Members were advised that the final amount of the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2007/08 would not be known until June. It was therefore proposed to bring a report to the next meeting when details were known and information could be provided on the likely demands on the contingency fund.

Reference was made to the recommendation at the last meeting concerning the one-off funding for Out of School Provision (Minute 30). It appeared that there had been some confusion as to how the three initiatives were currently funded, when the funding would cease and what was required to secure their continuation. Members agreed that the aim was to ensure full provision until the end of the financial year, 31 March 2008, and that the full £200K initially proposed should be allocated for that purpose.

Resolved – (1) That the revised income projection for the Dedicated Schools Grant 2007/08, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted.

(2) That, subject to it being noted that an additional £35K be added to the special equipment budget, the Local Authority be authorised to implement the revisions to the Schools Block Budget 2007/08, as set out in Appendix B to the report.

(3) That the Local Authority be authorised to make supplementary one-off payments to Orchid Vale and Red Oaks Schools of £11,290 each in 2007/08 to reflect the financial difficulty they may experience due to the unpredictable flow of pupils in a new school, in accordance with the proposal set out in Appendix C to the report.

(4) That the initial proposal to allocate £200,000 from the unspent balance of the Schools Budget 2005/06 to secure Out of School Provision until 31 March 2008 be confirmed and agreed.

40. Local Public Service Agreement Grant

The Group Director Children referred to the Local Public Service Agreement grant that had been delegated to schools during 2002. The purpose of the grant was to raise the level of attainment at GCSE and Key Stage 2. Peter Wells (Secondary Head Teacher) stated that there had been improvements in the secondary sector and confirmed that the funding had been well spent within the secondary schools. Paul Kohn (Primary Head Teacher) also confirmed that the funds had been well used within the primary sector and referred to the exemplary reports received by some of the schools.

41.

Funding Formula for Swindon Schools

The Director of Local Provision distributed a letter dated 14 March 2007 from the Head Teacher of Bridlewood Primary School regarding the school's funding and advised that it was proposed to bring a report to the next meeting.