

SCHOOLS FORUM

THURSDAY, 1 NOVEMBER 2007

PRESENT: -

School Members: Nick Capstick, Primary Headteachers
Lauren Connor, Primary Headteachers (**Chair**)
Chris Davies, **Primary Headteachers**
Debbie Kalynka, Primary Headteachers
Terri Menham, Primary Headteacher
Paul Boyles, Primary Governor (**Vice-Chair**)
David Easter, Primary Governor
Steve **Colledge**, Secondary **Headteacher**
Steve Flavin, Secondary Headteacher
Rachael Matthey, Secondary Headteacher
Bob Walker, Special 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 Quality and Standards), Geoff Hogg (Director of Services to Children and Young People), Karen Murray (Group Finance Manager – Children Services), Lorraine Billis (Deputy Group Finance Manager - Schools), Gareth Cheal (Admissions Manager) and Hilary Pitts (Group Director Children)

Councillor Nick Martin attended in respect of Minute 12.

Apologies for absence were received from Peter Wells (Secondary Headteacher).

8. Appointment of Chair

Members were advised that Peter Wells (Secondary Headteacher) had resigned as Chair of the Forum. Nominations for a new Chair were therefore requested.

Resolved – That Lauren Connor (Primary Headteacher) be Chair of the Schools Forum.

(Lauren Connor in the Chair)

9. Minutes

Steve Flavin (Secondary Headteacher) stated that although the Forum made recommendations, it did not receive any feedback as to whether these had been endorsed, which would be extremely useful.

Resolved – (1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2007 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.
(2) That future agendas include a standing item following consideration of the Minutes, to provide the Forum with information on the outcome of previous resolutions.

10. Primary School Places

Gareth Cheal (Admissions Manager) presented a report by the Group Director Children to inform members of changes to the arrangements for admission to reception, where the parent decides to defer admission until Term 5.

Resolved – (1) That the report be noted.
(2) That the Admissions Manager contact all headteachers to further the consultation on admissions for September 2009.

11. Consultation on Possible Changes to Discretionary School Transport in West Swindon

The Forum considered a report by the Group Director Children, as presented by Ian Bickerton (Director of Local Provision) regarding a consultation that was taking place on possible changes to the discretionary school transport in West Swindon.

Mr Bickerton explained that free school transport was provided on a discretionary basis to parents in West Swindon who had chosen to send their children to The Ridgeway or Bradon Forest Schools. There was now spare capacity at Greendown Community School and projections indicated that numbers would further reduce. The Cabinet had agreed that a review should be undertaken and a widespread consultation was taking place with a report on the outcome going back to Cabinet in January 2008. Any changes would be effective for secondary admissions from September 2009.

Rachel Matthey (Secondary Headteacher) queried why this arrangement was still in place after 20 years, when nothing had been provided to help the children in the North Swindon area. Both Ms Matthey and Steve Flavin (Secondary Headteachers) advised that the headteacher of Greendown Community School, Clive Zimmerman, was very unhappy with the consultation process as it appeared to be dominated by Bradon Forest. Mr Bickerton stated that a letter informing Bradon Forest parents of the proposal had been issued by that School. However, the Authority had issued questionnaires only to parents living in West Swindon with children at primary schools from Reception to Year 5, as had originally been agreed.

Members noted that currently there were about 600 pupils from West Swindon attending Bradon Forest School and that the only cost to the Council was for transport, as the pupil funding was allocated directly to the school. Steve Colledge (Headteacher, The Ridgeway School) remarked that the school would face serious problems if numbers were to drop significantly. It was stated however that consideration would be given to the possibility of continuing the transport arrangements but with parents paying the costs, for those who wished to do so.

Resolved – That the Forum supports the proposal to withdraw the discretionary free school transport to The Ridgeway and Bradon Forest Schools for pupils in West Swindon, to be effective for new pupils from September 2009

12. Swindon Schools Asset Management Plan Project

Ian Bickerton (Director of Local Provision) introduced a report by the Group Director Children regarding funding for the Swindon Schools Asset Management Plan (SScAMP) project.

Councillor Nick Martin was in attendance for this item and the Group Director Children provided a summary of the background and funding arrangements for the system. It was stressed that the Forum considered the maintenance of SScAMP was the landlord's responsibility and should therefore be funded by the Council, and not from the schools' budget. The Forum stressed that the SScAMP database was a significant improvement on the previous system used and in view of the amount invested in it so far, there was an urgent need to ensure that it was maintained and updated.

The Forum noted that Capita were reviewing all the Council's asset management systems and that they were already in discussion with the Group Director Resources on ways to rationalise the systems overall. They would be considering the SScAMP database as part of this review, with a report back in mid-December 2007.

Councillor Martin noted the Forum's views and agreed to feed them into the review process.

Resolved – That the report and the current situation regarding SScAMP be noted.

13. Schools' Devolved Formula Capital - Approval Process - Proposed Changes from 2008/09

Ian Bickerton (Director of Local Provision) presented a report by the Group Director Children regarding proposed new arrangements to be implemented from 2008/09 for the use of Devolved Formula Capital by schools.

Resolved – That the new arrangements to be introduced from 2008/09 for the use of schools' Devolved Formula Capital, be endorsed.

14. School Balances 2006-07

The Forum considered a report by the Group Director Children, as presented by Ian Bickerton (Director of Local Provision) regarding the outcome of the review of schools carrying forward surplus balances from 2006-07.

Resolved – That the Forum recommends to the Local Authority that schools holding surplus balances may retain those balances for the purposes reported to the Local Authority prior to the commencement of the financial year.

15. Schools Block Budget Monitoring 2007/8

Ian Bickerton (Director of Local Provision) presented a report by the Group Director Children regarding the latest budget monitoring information to the end of September 2007, in respect of the Schools Block Budget for 2007/8.

Resolved – (1) That the 2007/08 financial projections in respect of the Schools Budget for the current financial year be noted.
(2) That the Group Director, Children continue rigorous and robust monitoring of the

Schools Block budget and to bring budget monitoring reports to future meetings of Schools Forum.

16. Schools Block Contingency 2007-08

Ian Bickerton (Director of Local Provision) presented a report by the Group Director Children to provide an update on the Schools Block Contingency budget and to seek recommendations in respect of revenue funding for admission arrangements where the Local Authority require exceptional changes to existing arrangements.

Members of the Forum considered and made recommendations on the three submissions for additional funding from the Schools Block contingency budget that had been received.

Abbey Meads – Members were sympathetic to the situation, however it was noted that the school's surplus balance at 2006/07 year end exceeded the 8% limit and the Forum had already determined that the school should retain the full amount.

Haydon Wick – Members were informed that since the application had been made numbers at the school had risen to 37. In view of the increase the original request was considered to be null and void.

Bridlewood – This was the second submission the school had made, the first one having been rejected, but the position was still the same. However, members agreed that the sub-group and officers would investigate ways of providing suitable mechanisms to avoid the situation arising in the future.

Resolved – (1) That the sub-group along with officers investigate ways of introducing suitable mechanisms to provide schools with appropriate funding during periods of both expansion and contraction in pupil numbers.

(2) That the applications for funding from Abbey Meads, Haydon Wick and Bridlewood Primary Schools be not agreed at the present time for the reasons set out above.

17. School, Early Years and 14-16 Funding 2008-2011

The Forum considered a report by the Group Director Children, as presented by Ian Bickerton (Director of Local Provision) setting out the proposals of the Schools Forum Sub Group (the Sub Group) in respect of amendments to the Swindon Scheme of Delegation, Finance Regulations for Schools and the Swindon Funding Formula 2008-2011 and advising of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) requirements in respect of funding for 2008-2011 which are not the subject of consultation.

Members considered each of the proposals, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, and agreed all the recommendations with the exception of:

- Proposal 10 – Concerns were raised about the effect inaccurate free school meal data had on the proposal. Steve Flavin (Secondary Headteacher) pointed out that the PLASC data used only provided information on the number of free school meals taken up, not the number of pupils who were actually eligible, which could be a lot higher. Geoff Hogg (Director Early Years and Pupil Services) explained that parents were being encouraged to register their eligibility, even if

meals weren't taken, and this information was also being collected. He acknowledged that it might be possible to combine the two strands of information to reflect the situation more accurately but it would be necessary to ensure there was no duplication within the figures and that there was a clear audit trail. The Group Director made it clear that she supported a fair allocation under the formula to all schools for children in socio-economically disadvantaged circumstances.

- Proposal 18 – In the light of funding issues considered elsewhere on the agenda, it was felt that the sub-group should reconsider this proposal and include a decrease in numbers within the proposal.

Resolved – (1) That the Forum recommends to the Local Authority that the proposals of the Sub Group, set out in Appendix A to the report, are implemented from 1st April 2008 to 31st March 2011.

(2) That, with regard to Proposal 10 set out in Appendix A to the report, the method of allocating funding be endorsed in principle but that the Sub-Group reconsider the proposal with regards to (a) allocating headroom funding to support the allocation, and (b) the pressures on headroom funds.

(3) That, with regard to Proposal 18 set out in Appendix A to the report, the Sub-Group reconsider the proposal to include a decrease in numbers within the recommendation.

(4) That the proposals of the Sub Group relating to the Swindon Scheme of Delegation be approved.

(5) That the requirements of the DCSF in respect of School, Early Years and 14-16 Funding for 2008-2011 be noted.

(6) That the Sub-Group carry out a review of the Forum's membership, with the revised membership to be in place from 1st April 2008.

(7) That the potential funding implications of the proposals as shown in appendix A, annexes 1, 2 and 3 are based on the current schools data be noted.

(8) That the Forum agrees that the proposals from the Schools Forum Sub Group are considered alongside other priorities within the dedicated schools grant at the Schools Forum meeting 22nd January 2008.

18. Early years Update

Karen Murray (Finance Manager children Services) informed members that the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) would be providing funding for an additional two and a half hours early years provision. An across-Borough cost analysis would need to be submitted to the Forum before a budget could be set and investigations were already under way. It was anticipated that a full report would be submitted to the January meeting, following consideration by the sub-group.

19. Next Meeting

Steve Flavin (Secondary Headteacher) requested an item on the crisis surrounding the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks, as they were very disruptive for schools in general. It was suggested that a representative from Human Resources should be invited to attend the meeting.