

SCHOOLS FORUM

TUESDAY, 17 JUNE 2008

PRESENT: -

School Members: Nick Capstick, Primary Headteachers
Lauren Connor, Primary Headteachers (**Chair**)
Chris Davies, Primary Headteachers
Debbie Kalynka, Primary Headteachers
David Easter, Primary Governor
Steve Flavin, Secondary Headteacher
Rachael Matthey, Secondary Headteacher
Peter Wells, Secondary Headteacher
Bob Walker, Special Headteacher
Kevin Gray, Secondary Governor

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

Officers: Ian Bickerton (Director Access and Provision), Martin Coles (Director Quality and Standards), Sue Wald (Director Strategy and Commissioning), Geoff Hogg (Director Early Years and Pupil Services), Karen Murray (Group Finance Manager Children Services), Huw Ford (IT Business Partner), Kirsty Cole (Head of Corporate Finance) and Frank Knight (Project Manager Workforce Modernisation).

Apologies for absence were received from Terri Menham (Primary Headteacher), Paul Boyles (Primary Governor and Vice-Chair) and Jan Downie (14-19 Partnership).

1. Minutes

Resolved – That the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 April be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

2. Feedback from Meeting on 29 April 2008

Ian Bickerton (Director of Access and Provision) presented a report by the Group Director Children to provide feedback on the recommendations made at the previous meeting.

With regard to the item Harnessing Technology, Huw Ford (IT – Children Services), distributed a paper setting out the key differences between Merlin and VLEs. He advised that the Education ICT Group had considered the issue and decided that a VLE was not appropriate and therefore there would not be any compensation for schools that had already purchased such a system.

It was noted that a further report on the School Development Grant 2008/09 would be submitted to the next meeting.

3. CRB Policy - Review

Ian Bickerton (Director of Access and Provision) presented a report by the Group Director Children to provide an update on the review of the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) policy/guidance for schools by the Local Authority (LA).

He advised that head teachers' comments had been taken into account and a benchmarking exercise undertaken. The guidance would now be changed to bring the CRB checks in line with those of other authorities. If necessary, cases would be considered on an individual basis, but they would still need to comply with statutory regulations. It might be a different situation for staff moving from a foundation or voluntary aided school to a community school and that aspect would need to be clarified. He confirmed that the revised guidance would have immediate effect.

Members welcomed the changes to the LA's guidance but commented that it seemed harsh for employees joining from another authority. It was difficult enough to recruit staff and this was likely to provide another hurdle. Steve Flavin (Secondary Headteacher) referred to the potential loophole regarding teachers who worked for supply agencies and were therefore not employees of the authority or the school, and to work experience visits by pupils where it was not possible to impose CRB checks. He suggested that guidelines should be in place to cover these situations. Although it was stated that safeguards were already in place, Mr Bickerton confirmed that he would ascertain whether any specific guidelines were in operation.

Resolved – That the Forum notes and welcomes the revised guidance relating to Criminal Records Bureau clearance and provides comments as above.

4. Schools Block Outturn 2007-08

The Forum considered a report by the Group Director Children, as presented by Karen Murray (Group Finance Manager-Children Services), advising of the Schools Block Outturn 2007-2008 and the individual school's year-end balances.

Mrs Murray distributed a revised Appendix D to the report and explained that Options 1, 2 and 3 were as the original report. Option 4 included top slice provision for SENRAP of £171k and also £50k for Early Years and £50k for BME. Members agreed that small schools protection should be included within the calculations. The Chair clarified that the Early Years and BME money was not to fund specific teams but to enable the set up of new processes. In order to monitor what benefits had been achieved, the groups would be asked to report back to the Forum at the year end.

Resolved – (1) That the Schools Block Outturn 2007-2008 of £705k underspend be noted.

(2) That the one-off surplus of £705k be allocated as set out in Option 4 of the revised Appendix D to the report distributed at the meeting.

(3) That the Local Authority undertake a detailed review of the individual schools

balances as at 31 March 2008 that fall above the current thresholds for each type of school, and a further report be submitted to the Forum with the outcome of the review.

5. Single Status Arrangements for Schools

The Directors of Finance and Human Resources submitted a report regarding the potential financial impact of the Single Status project.

Kirsty Cole (Head of Corporate Finance) and Frank Knight (Project Manager, Workforce Modernisation) attended for this item and Ms Cole introduced the report. She referred to paragraph 2.15 of the report and requested guidance on the preferred funding areas for investigation, although it was appreciated that costs were currently unknown and further reports would be needed as information became available.

Members considered and discussed the implications of Single Status and raised the following points and concerns:

- Much was made of potential pay increases but it was known that a great number of people would have a pay freeze. It would be helpful if this aspect was given equal prominence.
- Cost of implementing would be a huge problem for school budgets and there was a great deal of concern at the lack of any estimate of the potential burden.
- The danger of working to a generic job description did not take into account local conditions or the fact that Swindon was one of the lowest funded authorities.
- The role and responsibilities of certain posts varied between schools, for example a business manager.
- Special schools had a far higher number of teaching assistants compared to mainstream schools but there was no guidance as to possible funding requirements.
- The possibility of redundancies should also be considered and evaluated in the process.

Mr Knight explained that until the job evaluations had been completed, it was not possible to give any estimate of the cost burden for schools. Information from other authorities showed considerable variations of between 4% and 12%, depending on the type of authority. Reference was made to the need for schools to set a balanced budget, but that was not possible without any information on costs. As a guide, Ms Cole advised that the rest of the Council had allowed for an average 4% increase over a three-year period but that the increase for schools was expected to be lower due to a significant proportion of jobs being considered for single status within schools being at the lower end of the pay scales.

It was generally decided that without any information on potential costs, it was impossible to put forward any proposals on the areas of funding to be investigated.

Mr Knight further suggested that he attend each meeting of the Forum to give a brief update on the situation.

Resolved – (1) That, once the job evaluations have been completed and the

council has undertaken an assessment of the likely financial impact of single status on schools, a further report be submitted to a future meeting to include the estimated costs to schools of single status.

(2) That Frank Knight ((Project Manager Workforce Modernisation), be requested to attend future meetings to provide an update on Single Status.

6. Early Years Flexible Offer

Sue Wald (Director of Strategy and Commissioning) presented a report by the Group Director Children regarding a project plan for the delivery of the flexible offer for early years education.

Resolved – That a report be submitted to the next meeting with (a) proposals on how the £50k funding should be used, (b) an amended project plan to include more realistic timescales, and (c) clarification as to whether the extended entitlement is specifically for education or childcare provision generally.

7. Parent Support Advisers

The Forum considered a report by the Director of Strategy and Commissioning with proposals for the delivery of Parent Support Advisers, (PSA) following consultation with Headteacher representatives from SASH, ASSSH and SAPH and further consultation with extended services clusters and the Schools Forum Sub Group.

Sue Wald (Director of Strategy and Commissioning) referred to the revised report and explained that revisions had been made following the Sub-Group meeting on 10 June. Bob Walker (Special Headteacher and Chair of the Sub-Group) also gave an explanation of the Sub-Groups reasoning behind the revised proposals.

Resolved – (1) That the proposed model for the management of Parent Support Advisors and four senior Parent Support Advisors be agreed as follows

- Each extended services cluster receives funding to employ and manage the Parent Support Advisers based on an agreed funding formula.
- The Standard Fund funds and primary schools employ two senior posts for Central South (specialism BME) and Central North (Transition). Each of the Standard Fund posts will be employed by a nominated primary school who will also manage the Parental Support Adviser for the cluster.
- The Local Authority funds the senior post for North (specialism mental health) and South (specialism young people with challenging behaviour).

(2) That Option A: Funding for extended services is maintained 2008 – 2011 at the funding level of 2007/08 with additional funding for Parent Support Advisers who will be recruited as new additional posts, be agreed as the method for the financial allocation of Parent Support advisers and Extended Services for the delivery of Parent Support Advisers.

8. Educational Procurement Centre

Ian Bickerton (Director of Access and Provision) submitted a report to provide information about the outcome of a meeting with Department for Children, Schools & Families (DCSF) representatives regarding the Educational Procurement Centre

and the opportunity for schools to improve their procurement capability through the Schools Procurement Partners (SPP) service.

Resolved – That the Forum notes the report and supports the proposal to further explore with schools the improved procurement capability initiative.

9. Next Meeting

The Chair advised that following a letter from SASH, an item on place funding for education other than in school would be an agenda item for the October meeting.

10. Farewell

The Chair advised that this was the last meeting to be attended by Martin Coles (Director Schools and Learning) and Geoff Hogg (Director Services to Children and Young People). On behalf of members, she thanked them for their significant contribution to the work of the Forum and wished them well for the future.