

SCHOOLS FORUM

TUESDAY, 11 OCTOBER 2011

PRESENT: -

School Members: Nick Capstick, Primary Headteacher
Lauren Connor, Primary Headteacher
Chris Davis, Primary Headteacher
Paul Boyles, Primary Governor
David Easter, Primary Governor
Peter Crockett, Special Headteacher
Derek Fry, Special Governor
Steve Colledge, Secondary Headteacher
Wendy Conaghan, Secondary Headteacher
Maureen Harries, Secondary Headteacher
Andy Hazelton, Secondary Governor
Lynne Fletcher, Swindon Academy

Non-School Members: Elizabeth Band, Trade Unions
Debbie Waldron, Early Years Representative

Officers: Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager)
Sarah Higgins (Deputy Group Finance Manager, Schools)
Mandy Wishart (HR Business Partner)
Paddy Bradley (Director Schools and Learning)
Ian Bickerton (Director Access and Provision)
Sue Wald (Director Strategy and Commissioning)

Apologies for absence were received from David Warren (Primary Headteacher), Rhian Cockwell (Primary Headteacher), Rachael Matthey (Secondary Headteacher) and Ram Thiagarajah (BME).

6. Appointment of Chair

Members were advised that Lauren Connor (Primary Headteacher) had resigned as Chair of the Forum. Nominations for a new Chair were therefore requested.

Resolved – That Peter Crockett (Special Headteacher) be Chair of the Schools Forum for the meeting of the 11th October 2011.

7. Minutes

Further to Minute 3, Ian Bickerton (Director of Access and Provision) advised the Forum that due to the necessary information not being available in time, the report on Gorse Hill's funding request would not be available until the next meeting in January 2012. If there was a wider need for an extra meeting of the Forum before the next scheduled one in January 2012, then the report could be considered at that time.

Resolved – (1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th July 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

(2) That the possibility of a further School Forum Meeting in December 2011, be noted.

8. Consultation on School Funding Reform

Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager) submitted a report informing members of the issues and potential implications arising from the latest Department for Education (DfE) consultation on school funding reform.

Mr Haley advised that this was the second stage of the consultation process reminding Members that the Local Authority had submitted a stage one response covering key principles on 25th May 2011. This more detailed consultation sought to deal with the historical inequalities of the existing “spend plus” funding formula. He confirmed that the proposal sought to replace the previous formula with a “needs based” system which could be beneficial for Swindon as we currently received lower than average (127th lowest) Dedicated Schools Grant funding.

Mr Haley confirmed that Swindon had been approached by the “f40” group which represented the 40 lowest funded education authorities. He advised that Councillor Renard had agreed that Swindon would join this group and that he and Swindon Borough Council officers would be attending conferences aimed at information sharing and to progress the current consultation.

Mr Haley explained that the national school funding review sought to simplify the present system and that, with a few exceptions, he was generally supportive of the latest proposals as the move to a system of national funding of individual schools now seems less likely. The role of Schools Forum’s looked likely to be retained and in some areas actually strengthened to take more decisions and be less consultative. He referred to the proposed changes and summarised the key issues for members which included;

- The introduction of 4 separate funding blocks – schools, High needs pupils, early years and LA retained services.
- Limiting the range of local formula factors
- Limiting the ratio between primary and secondary Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) funding (Swindon secondary rates are marginally above regional averages as illustrated in the benchmarking comparisons circulated at Annex C)
- The possibility of the Education Funding Agency (EFA) having a role in monitoring/policing local formula
- LA’s having a more direct role in determining the value of academy funding
- Ensuring Schools Forums remain proportionately represented and have increasing powers
- Extending the scope of Pupil Premium eligibility

In response to a query regarding the ratio of the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) funding, Paddy Bradley (Director Schools and Learning) advised that benchmarking was undertaken against statistical neighbours and this reflected demographic factors and performance.

Although the timetable for DfE imposed changes remained unclear, Mr Haley

advised that as the guiding principle of the reform was to simplify funding, the Forum should consider taking steps to achieve this. He outlined a number of areas where he felt that local funding arrangements were perhaps unnecessarily complex.

Resolved –That the School Forum:

(1) Notes the main issue and potential implications that arise from the Department for Education consultation on school funding reform.

(2) Notes and where appropriate supports the Local Authorities responses to issues raised in the consultation. The consultation document had been circulated to Forum Members at the meeting as Annex A but the deadline was on 11th October 2011 and would be sent by the Local Authority after the Forum meeting to meet the DfE deadline.

(3) Notes that the Department for Education are not proposing changes to the Dedicated Schools Grant funding system until 2013/14.

(4) Agreed that from 2012/13 local funding would be simplified as follows:-

- a. PSA/Extended Services Cluster funding will be allocated to individual schools to enable them, if they wish, to pool funding within clusters.
- b. The value of former Threshold Pay Grant funding is maintained within sectors but redistributed as an uplift to AWPU and SEN place funding factors.

(5) Agreed that a meeting of the School Forum Sub-Group be held to discuss the Local Authority's other recommendation to maintain 2012/13 funding across sectors and minimising changes to individual schools by transferring the following into Age Weighted Pupil Unit and Special Educational Needs place funding;

- A. Former Standards Fund grants
- B. Previous ministerial priority funding.

9. Schools Forum Membership

Ian Bickerton (Director of Access and Local Provision) presented a report on the membership of the Schools Forum in the light of the number of schools converting to Academy status and seeking agreement to any changes in membership. He advised that these proposals were submitted to the Forum following discussions with the Department for Education. Members were reminded that membership of the Forum would be based on a fair and proportionate representation of both academies and maintained schools.

Members discussed the two proposals as set out in paragraphs 2.6 and 2.8 of the report. They noted that the present of the Forum was not representative of the current schools set up. Members agreed that the Forum must represent schools and academies at the current standing and membership was not to reflect undefined future structures.

Resolved: (1) That the Secondary School membership be amended to 3 Academy Headteachers, 1 Maintained School Headteacher and 2 Academy Governors.

(2) That in the short term and pending discussions at the next Forum meeting, Primary Schools representation continues to be 5 Maintained School Headteachers, 3 Maintained School Governors. .

(3) That the membership for Special Schools be confirmed as presented in

the report as 1 Maintained School Headteacher and 1 Maintained School Governor.

(4) That Swindon 0-19 Academy continue to have a separate representative on the Forum at the present time and cover primary Academy schools.

10. Local Authority Central Services Equivalent Grant Consultation

Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager) presented a report on the potentially very significant detrimental financial implication for the Council arising from a Department of Education (DfE) consultation regarding the transfer of funding from Local Government arising from the Academy Conversion Programme.

Mr Haley advised that this short term consultation by the DfE advised that additional funding needed to be deducted from Local Authority's (LA) formula grant to pay additional grant to those schools which have converted to Academy status. He stated that on conversion to academy status, schools receive two allocations of additional funding (Local Authority Central Services Equivalent Grant - LACSEG) in addition to their local fair funding formula allocation of funds. Mr Haley informed members that two options had been included in the consultation and both would result in very significant reductions to funding for the Council. Swindon would be particularly disadvantaged if funding was cut proportionate to the number of school converting in each area (£1.3m in year grant cut rising to £1.8m next year) and this matter was of great concern to all LAs. Swindon has been working with the Local Government Association (LGA) and other local authorities to challenge a number of DfE proposals. Fundamentally, LA's view is that the LACSEG formula will result in Academies receiving very significantly more funding than maintained schools which will also disadvantage LA core service provision.

Mr Haley explained the basis of the LACSEG calculations, including its effect on the Dedicated School Grant and on the LA's core funding highlighted the impact a reduction in funding may have on service provision. He advised that irrespective of the outcome of the LACSEG, children services would have to make significant savings in 2012/13 including some areas that directly affect schools ie;

- Reduced funding of school redundancies and early retirements (This matter would be progressed via the schools forum sub Group)
- Cessation of support for free school meal pupils attending curriculum related residential visits
- Reduced teaching and learning consultants and other deleted posts arising from the Local Authority's "Stronger Together" organisational review

Members were informed that John Gilbert (Group Director Children and Adult Social Care) and Councillor David Renard (Lead Member for Children Services) had responded to the consultation on behalf of the LA in line with LGA guidance.

Resolved

(1) That the potential impact on Local Authority (LA) funding arising from the Department of Education (DfE) consultation regarding the Local Authority Central Services Equivalent Grant (LACSEG) funding, be noted.

(2) That the Local Authority's response to the consultation (Annex A) sent on 17th August, be noted.

(3) That the Forum notes the areas of likely LA spending reductions in 2012/13 pertaining to schools for 2012/13.

(4) That the subsequent response from the DfE regarding the funding transfers be presented to the Sub-Group for their consideration.

11. Final Dedicated Schools Grant Outturn 2010-11

Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager) presented a report regarding the final position of the 2010/11 retained Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget and provided information on the final position on the Standards Fund (SF) grant following the DfE decision not to pay the final instalment of 2010/11 SF grant which would have been £516,935.

Resolved

(1) That a final underspend of £49,492 achieved on the 2010/11 retained budget which has been carried forward within the Section 251 outturn statement, be noted

(2) That the Forum notes that a net balance of £234,944 of Standards Fund grants has been carried forward from 2010/11.

(3) That, further to (2) above, the carried forward should, at this stage, be earmarked to offset pressures on the retained budget as reported at Agenda Item 8.

12. Final Dedicated Schools Grant and Pupil Premium Settlement 2011-12

Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager) presented a report with details of the final Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) settlement for the 2011/12 financial year.

Mr Haley advised that the settlement for 2011/12 was £137.630m and that this represented additional funding over and above the Local Authority estimate. The Forum noted that an additional £0.316m of DSG funding would be received directly relating to additional early years pupils which had been underestimated by the Local Authority in March. This would greatly assist in covering increased demands on the Early Years Single Funding Formula which were separately reported at Agenda Item 8.

Mr Haley also advised the Forum on the minor difference between the forecast settlement and final settlement of the Pupil Premium. He advised that this related to alternate provision pupils which his team felt had been marginally under funded.

Resolved

(1) That Swindon's final Dedicated Schools Grant settlement covering the 2011/12 financial year is £137.630m, be noted.

(2) That the Schools Forum agree that the additional funding received of £0.316m be allocated to the Early Years Single Funding Formula to offset pressures on the retained budget.

(3) That the School Forum notes that the final Pupil Premium allocation for 2011/12 was £1.733m.

13. Retained Dedicated Schools Grant Budget Position 2011-12 and 2012-13 Proposals

Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager) provided a report on the latest position of the 2011/12 retained Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget and proposals for reducing retained spending in 2012/13. He advised that as at the end of August 2011, there was a projected overspend of £198,000 against the retained

DSG budget which had mainly arisen due to increased demand on Out of Borough placements and on the Early Years Single Funding Formula. He advised that this position would improve to a projected underspend of £86k subject to the Forum agreeing to allocate funds carried forward from 2010/11

Members of the Forum were also updated on proposed reductions to the 2012/13 retained budget following the areas of increased delegation developed with the Schools Forum and its Sub Group leading to the setting of the 2011/12 budget. The LA would be formulating further proposals to maximising delegation of funds to achieve as close to equity of funding between maintained schools and Academies as was possible.

Resolved

(1) That, based on information available at the end of August, the in year projected overspend of £198,000 on the retained DSG budget, be noted

(2) That an Early Years Sub-Group be appointed comprising of representatives from primary schools and the private, voluntary and independent sector to discuss the Early Years Funding Formula.

(3) That the Forum agrees the allocation of the 2010/11 retained budget underspend of £49,492 to ameliorate the projected 2011/12 overspend.

(4) That the Forum agrees to provisionally allocate the unspent Standards fund balance of £234,944 to further alleviate the projected 2011/12 overspend.

(5) That the Forum agrees to the Local Authority developing proposals for the reduction of centrally retained spending on schools in challenging circumstances and redundancies/early retirements.

(6) That the Forum agrees that any funding released from the retained budget in 2012/13 is applied an inflationary uplift across all 2012/13 funding factors other than those areas where specific funds are delegated to named schools.

14. Review of Early Retirement & Redundancy Policies and Trade Union Facilities Agreement

Ian Bickerton (Director of Access and Provision) presented a report regarding the present Early Retirement and Redundancy Policies and Trade Union Facilities Arrangement Payments. He appraised the Forum on the implications of Maintained schools converting to Academies. Areas discussed included the reimbursement of teacher Trade Union representatives attending training courses. Mr Bickerton confirmed that as maintained schools converting to academies received a share of the budget through the Local Authority Central Services Equivalent Grant process, he proposed that from the beginning of the 2012/13 financial year, Academies themselves funded these activities. He recommended that the Trade Union Facilities Agreement be reviewed, via the Joint Consultative Committee (which was a meeting with trade unions) with a report and revised agreement coming back to the Forum.

With regards to the Early Retirement and Redundancy Policy, Mr Bickerton confirmed that the redundancy budget was under pressure. He highlighted the legislative background and advised the Forum regarding the two options available. In Option 1, the Local Authority retained DSG funding and in Option 2, the Local Authority delegated funding to schools. Members were advised that discussions would be undertaken with Trade Unions and Legal and a report presented at a

future meeting of the Forum.

Resolved – (1) That consultation with Trade Unions be undertaken on reviewing the Trade Union Facilities Agreement as set out in Section (a) of the report.

(2) That discussions with Trade Unions be undertaken regarding the Early Retirement and Redundancy Policies as set out in Section (b) of the report.

(3) That the position regarding the funding of school redundancy costs as set out in Section (b) of the report, be noted.

(4) That the Forum notes the two options on how pressure on the retained redundancy budget could be managed in future.

(5) That a report regarding the Trade Union Facilities Agreement and Early Retirement and Redundancy Policies be presented to a future meeting of this Forum.

15. School Balance Survey 2010-11 and Proposals for a New Scheme to Monitor Balances

The Forum considered a report by Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager) regarding the analysis of final 2010/11 school revenue balances based on information provided by schools. The report went on to outline proposals for the introduction of a revised scheme for managing and monitoring excess balances which he sought to develop via the Schools Forum Sub Group. He explained that the scheme being proposed would not come into effect in 2012/13 but that the proposed parameters would be operated on a trial basis for a further year before implementation and no “claw back” would be undertaken of March 2012 balances. Mr Haley advised that the Local Authority's prime aim was to improve forecasting of school balances by all schools, emphasising that in his view the majority of Swindon schools were already managing their balances commendably.

Resolved

(1) That the Schools Forum notes the values of committed (£5.2m) and uncommitted (£2.5m) funds at 31st March 2011 as identified by Swindon Schools, which totalled £7.7m.

(2) That, with regard to the introduction of a new scheme, the Schools Forum Sub Group be requested to work with the Local Authority to:-

a) Develop the schedule at Annex B to agree a range of permitted areas with appropriate values, timescales and controls against which committed balances can be earmarked.

b) Develop appropriate “maximum per pupil limits” for uncommitted balances along the lines proposed in table 3

c) Develop appropriate parameters which measure the effectiveness of schools in forecasting their year end balances prior to the year end along the lines proposed in table 4 but recognising different sized primary school budgets

(3) That a new scheme is implemented, applicable to 31st March 2012 balances, on a trial basis without any funds being clawed back, which require the completion of survey forms during the Autumn term and after the financial year end .

(3) That the outcomes of the new scheme be reviewed during 2012 with a view to live implementation from 31st March 2013.

(4) That the Forum supports the Local Authority's proposal to request that Academies provide completed balance surveys as described in 2.19 of the report.

16.

Date of Next Meeting

The Forum noted that the scheduled next meeting would take place on Tuesday, 17th January 2012 at 4.00 p.m. in Committee Room 6, Civic Offices, Swindon. Further to Agenda Item 3, an additional meeting may be scheduled in December 2011.