

SCHOOLS FORUM

TUESDAY, 17 JANUARY 2012

PRESENT: -

School Members: Nick Capstick, Primary Headteacher
Lauren Connor, Primary Headteacher
Chris Davis, Primary Headteacher
Rhian Cockwell, Primary Headteacher
Janet Urban, Primary Head teacher
Paul Boyles, Primary Governor (**Vice-Chair**)
David Easter, Primary Governor
Robert Jackson, Primary Governor
Peter Crockett, Special Headteacher (**Chair**)
Derek Fry, Special Governor
Steve Colledge, Secondary Headteacher
Rachael Matthey, Secondary Headteacher
Wendy Conaghan, Secondary Headteacher
Julie Tridgell, Secondary Headteacher
Andy Hazelton, Secondary Governor

Non-School Members: Elizabeth Band, Trade Unions

Officers: Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager)
Sarah Higgins (Deputy Group Finance Manager)
Paddy Bradley (Director Schools and Learning)
Anne English (Principal HR Officer, Schools)

Apologies for absence were received from Lynne Fletcher (Swindon Academy), Maureen Harries (Diocese), Debbie Waldron (Early Years Representative) and Andrew Miller (16-19 Partnership).

17. Appointment of Chair

Resolved – That Peter Crockett (Special Head Teacher) be appointed as Chair of the Schools Forum.

Peter Crockett in the Chair

18. Minutes

Resolved – (1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

(2) With regard to Minute 9, Paddy Bradley (Director Schools and Learning) advised that a further report on the Forum membership would be submitted to the March meeting.

19. New Scheme to Monitor and Manage School Balances

Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager) presented a report with proposals for a revised scheme for monitoring and managing school balances.

The principles for the scheme had been determined at the last Forum meeting which the Sub Group had since developed into the detailed scheme that was now proposed. Mr Haley stressed that the main focus of the revised scheme was to improve forecasting of the year end balances and to provide a fair and transparent method of reporting. He emphasised that the majority of schools were already managing their balances effectively and advised that the scheme would be implemented on a trial basis for the first year to allow for any refinements to be made. There would therefore not be any claw backs during 2012.

Resolved – That the Schools Forum approves the revised scheme to monitor and manage school balances, which maintains a focus on the parameters of acceptable levels of committed and uncommitted balances and the assessment of the effectiveness of schools' forecasting of end of year balances.

20. Retained Dedicated Schools Grant Budget Position 2011-12

The Forum considered a report by Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager) with information on the latest position of the 2011-2012 retained Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget. He commented on the improved situation since reporting to the October meeting and when asked, stated that he was fairly confident that the projections were accurate and that an increase in the amount of underspend was likely at the year end.

Resolved – That the Schools Forum notes that:

(1) Based on the information available at the end of November an in-year underspend of £248,000 is projected against the 2011/12 retained DSG budget.

(2) The Local Authority is provisionally forecasting that approximately £500,000 of funding will be carried forward from 2010/11 and 2011/12 for distribution as part of the 2012/13 budget setting process.

21. Gorse Hill Primary School Funding 2012/13

Paddy Bradley (Director Schools and Learning) presented a report with information from Gorse Hill Primary School regarding its request for discretionary additional funding for 2012/13.

Lauren Connor (Primary Head Teacher) commented that information on the school's balances had been included with the report to the July meeting and this information was important as there had been high amounts shown. Rachael Matthey (Secondary Head Teacher) remarked that care was needed to ensure that all the costs related to the amalgamation, as some of those detailed appeared to relate to a normal rolling programme of expenditure. There was also no reference to any savings that had been made as a result of the amalgamation.

Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager) advised that the impact on Gorse Hill's balances arising from the amalgamation were still being analysed and meetings had been arranged with the school to discuss the details. He stated that

the school was not asking for the total amount of £211,382 shown on the schedule but for the maximum discretionary amount of about £58,000. Although it appeared that full discretionary funding had been provided to amalgamating schools in recent years, the Local Authority was no longer receiving increases in the amount of Dedicated Schools Grant which could readily cover these costs. He suggested that greater care was now required to ensure that discretionary funds were needed, as this would be at the expense of other schools. Wendy Conaghan (Secondary Head Teacher) remarked that the School Governors had made the decision to amalgamate on the basis that funding would be available and it was not possible to reverse that decision once made. This was the first amalgamating school that had been asked to provide such detail with the request for discretionary funding.

The Chair commented on the valid points that had been made but stated that the Forum needed the full facts before it could make an informed decision.

Resolved – That the report and schedule of amalgamation costs provided by Gorse Hill Primary School be noted but that the final decision on this matter be taken at the Forum meeting on 6th March 2012 after the Local Authority finance team had assessed the school's overall financial position and their projected balances following amalgamation and confirmed the overall Dedicated Schools Grant position for 2012/13.

22. Review of Early Retirement & Redundancy Policy and Trade Union Facilities Agreement

The Forum considered a report presented by Paddy Bradley (Director Schools and Learning) concerning the review of the existing Early Retirement and Redundancy Policy and Trade Union Facilities Agreement in the light of maintained schools converting to academy status and the need to achieve value for money for the Dedicated Schools Grant. Mr Bradley commented on the report, advising that the Sub-Group had reviewed both policies and the Trade Unions had been fully consulted. The Trade Unions were opposed to any redundancies in principle, so although they agreed with the financial arrangements, they did not agree with the overall policy.

With regard to the Trade Union Facilities Agreement, Mr Bradley referred to paragraph 2.3 of the report containing three options for revised arrangements from 1 April 2012 and advised that Option 3 had been endorsed both by the Education Joint Consultative Committee and by the Sub-Group. Members were also advised that the arrangements would be reviewed after one year.

Resolved – That the Schools Forum:

(1) Notes the consultation that has been carried out on the Early Retirement and Redundancy Policy for teachers and support staff and the Trade Union Facilities Agreement, both with the Education Joint Consultative Committee and through the Schools Forum Sub-Group.

(2) Endorses the revised Early Retirement and Redundancy Policy and Trade Union Facilities Agreement attached as Appendices 1 and 2 to the report to be implemented from 1st April 2012, subject to the final consultation with recognized Trade Union representatives and the Education Joint Consultative Committee, with a further report being submitted to the March meeting of the Forum if it proves necessary following the final consultation.

23. Dedicated Schools Grant and Local Formula Issues 2012-15

Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager) presented a report on the estimated Dedicated Schools Grant and Pupil Premium position, the indicative centrally retained budget requirements and various issues relating to school funding in 2012/13.

Mr Haley explained that there was a statutory duty to issue individual school budget shares by 31st March but it would not be possible until the January census figures were known. This report set out the provisional, estimated amounts for 2012/13 and final details would be submitted to the Forum's March meeting. He talked members through the report, commenting on any new aspects and the level of funding compared to the current year and explained the implications.

Members noted the provisional figures and the continuing pressure on the centrally retained elements of the budget. The Forum agreed that Sub-Group meetings would take place on 16th and 23rd February at 9.30 a.m. at the Drove Children's Centre to discuss the retained budget in greater detail.

Mr Haley referred to the Trigger Funding element of the retained budget detailed in paragraph 3.4D of the report and suggested that the Forum might wish to consider amending the policy or referring it to the Sub-Group for further consideration. Members agreed that this aspect should be reviewed by the Sub-Group but that changes to 2012/13 funding were unlikely.

With regard to the Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF), paragraph 3.4E, members remarked that they did not understand the wording used in the changes they were being asked to agree, as set out at the end of paragraph 3.4E. However they were assured by Rhian Cockwell (Primary Head Teacher) that the Early Years Reference Group (EYRG) included proper representation of all Early Years Providers and on that basis they endorsed the recommendations set out, in this instance.

Mr Haley commented on the changes to the funding of Special Schools (paragraph 4) to recognize the changes in demand since their base funding was set in 2008. Changes were also planned for the Special Resource Provision (SRP) attached to mainstream schools throughout the Borough but it had not been possible to complete the work in time for inclusion within the budget proposals. The Forum was advised that additional funding of approximately £500,000 would need to be allocated to Special Schools and approximately £250,000 to SRP's.

The Forum noted the information regarding the Local Formula Rationalisation (paragraph 5) and the proposals that were considered at the October meeting to simplify funding allocations and to redistribute former grant allocations in line with the removal of all ring-fencing and recent Department for Education guidance. Since October, the Sub-Group had met on four occasions to consider the proposals and details were now submitted for the Forum's consideration. Mr Haley talked through the various proposals, emphasising that whilst individual changes had been debated and supported by the Sub-Group, the cumulative effect on some schools indicated to the Local Authority that further work was needed. It was noted for example that Warneford School would receive a significant reduction as a result of the revised Specialist School Funding allocation and there was general concern at

the overall inequality in the proposed redistribution of funding, and the fact that there would be a phased implementation in some instances but not in others. In view of the concerns, no formula changes were agreed and the Sub-Group was asked to reconsider the issues. In formulating revised proposals, the Local Authority was asked to consider increased Pupil Premium funding, that the changes were appropriately phased in and also to show the overall impact on schools expressed as both a cash and a percentage change.

The Chair concluded by thanking Steve Haley and Sarah Higgins for their work in compiling the detailed information in the report.

Resolved – That the Schools Forum:-

(1) Notes the Local Authority's provisional estimate of Swindon's 2012/13 Dedicated Schools Grant of £138.344 million and the Pupil Premium of £3.644 million settlements compared to the current year.

(2) Notes the Local Authority's provisional estimate of the centrally retained budget requirement for 2012/13 of £17.218 million, as set out in Appendix B to the report.

(3) Agrees the changes to the Early Years Single Funding Formula as set out in paragraph 3.4E of the report in this instance, having been assured that the Reference Group that considered the proposals was truly representative of all Early Years providers.

(4) Requests the Schools Forum Sub-Group to reconsider the proposed changes to the local fair funding formula in respect of the former Specialist School Funding and former Standards Fund and Ministerial Priority Funding in general, taking into account (a) how the Pupil Premium could be used (b) how the funding is allocated, and (c) the overall impact on schools, with a possible lower impact in 2012/13 and a greater one in later years, with information being submitted to the March meeting.

(5) Notes that changes in provision and funding of Special Schools will be required in 2012/13, provisionally estimated at an additional annual cost of £500,000, as detailed in paragraph 4.4 of the report.

(6) Notes that changes in provision and funding of Special Resource Provision in mainstream settings will be required in 2012/13, provisionally estimated at an additional cost of £250,000, as detailed in paragraph 4.5 of the report.

(7) Notes the timetable leading up to the issue of 2012/13 delegated school funding allocations set out in paragraph 7.1 of the report.

(8) Agrees that two meetings of the Schools Forum Sub-Group are held on 16th and 23rd February to enable the Local Authority to share information and develop proposals regarding 2012/13 funding.

(9) Agrees that the following items are excluded from the Minimum Funding Guarantee calculation, (a) Cluster Funding, (b) Former Threshold Pay Grant, (c) Former Standards Funds Grant, and (d) Former Ministerial Priority Funding.

24. Date of Next Meeting

The Forum noted that the next meeting would be on Tuesday, 6 March 2012 at 4.00 p.m. in Committee Room 6, Civic Offices, Swindon.