

SCHOOLS FORUM

TUESDAY, 6 MARCH 2012

PRESENT: -

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

Non-School Members: Maureen Harries, Diocese
Peter Smith, Trade Unions

Officers: Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager)
Sarah Higgins (Deputy Group Finance Manager)
Ian Bickerton (Director Access and Provision)
Paddy Bradley (Director Schools and Learning)

Councillor David Renard was also in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from Derek Fry (Special Governor), Debbie Waldron (Early Years Representative), Andrew Miller (16-19 Partnership) and Ram Thiagarajah (BME).

25. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2012 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Minute 18 – Ian Bickerton (Director Access and Provision) advised that with the agreement of the Chair, a report on the Forum's membership would be submitted to the next meeting. The Forum was reminded of the decisions taken on the membership at the October 2011 meeting, including the changes to the composition of the School Members (head teachers and governors) for secondary schools. The school membership needed to reflect the situation within the Borough but with a series of schools converting to academy status over the next few months, it was sensible to wait until numbers were more settled.

Minute 22 – Ian Bickerton stated that there had been further discussions on the Trade Unions Facilities Agreement and it had been considered by the Education Joint Consultative Committee on two occasions. The result was a few relatively minor changes to the Agreement and a copy was distributed for information.

26. Schools Forum Sub Group Terms of Reference

Steve Haley (Group finance Manager) submitted a report with draft Terms of Reference covering the scope and operation of the Schools Forum Sub-Group.

Resolved – That the Schools Forum agrees to the adoption of the Terms of Reference set out in paragraph 2 of the report in respect of the Forum's Sub-Group.

27. Monitoring of School Balances

Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager) presented a report with information on the projected 2011/12 year end balances of Swindon schools. He advised that this report followed on from the ones submitted to the meetings on 11th October 2011 and 17th January 2012 regarding the new trial scheme. Details of the estimated year end balances were shown in Appendix A and although it did not include any information from the Academies, they would all be asked to provide the same details for information purposes in April. Mr Haley again stressed that the focus of the new scheme was to improve financial forecasting and there would not be any claw back of excess balances during 2012.

Resolved – That the Forum notes the estimated value of committed and uncommitted balances which Swindon schools expect to have available after closure of the 2011/12 financial year.

28. Dedicated Schools Grant and School Funding 2011/15

The Forum considered a report by Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager) regarding the estimated Dedicated Schools Grant and Pupil Premium position for 2012/13 and other school funding issues.

Mr Haley talked members through the report, commenting on the various items and highlighting the decisions required by the Forum. He remarked on the Pupil Premium funding, with particular reference to the allocation for Looked after Children, as there was an element of discretion allowed in its allocation. The proposal was to continue with the current method of distribution and details of how this worked out were included at paragraph 2.8 of the report. Rachael Matthey (Secondary Head Teacher) stated that whilst she was happy to agree the proposal for 2012/13 the method should be reviewed each year and not automatically carried forward.

Mr Haley referred to the centrally retained budget position and commented on the 2010/11 underspend that was available for distribution during 2012/13, along with the projected underspend for 2011/12. A summary of the potential funding to be carried forward to 2012/13, totalling £590,000, was detailed in paragraph 3.5 of the report.

Reference was made to the revised funding scheme for Special Schools that was the subject of a report elsewhere in the agenda. Although a similar approach to funding the Borough's Special Resource Provision was to be developed, Mr Haley advised that it had not been possible to complete this for 2012/13 but it would be prepared for implementation in 2013/14. Nick Capstick (Secondary Head Teacher) commented on the number of Special Resource Provision (SRP) Units based in mainstream schools and stressed the need to ensure that SRP funding issues did not detrimentally impact on the mainstream schools.

The Chair referred to paragraph 5.4 of the report regarding the request for discretionary funding following the amalgamation of Gorse Hill Infant and Junior Schools. He proposed that the Forum's Sub-Group should consider the issue and provide advice to the Local Authority on behalf of the Forum. Members endorsed this proposal but stated that the Sub-Group would need to include a representative from each phase of education.

Mr Haley concluded by advising that individual school funding allocations would be issued as soon as possible, but certainly by 12th March 2012. Once 2012/2013 details had been cleared he would then consider future years to provide an indication of each settings funding levels for 2013/14 and 2014/15.

Resolved – That the Schools Forum:

(1) Notes and agrees the Local Authority's estimate of Swindon's 2012/13 Dedicated Schools Grant of £139.838m and the Pupil Premium of £3.829m settlements compared to the current year.

(2) Notes and agrees the Local Authority's proposals on how the Looked after Children Pupil Premium is to be utilized during 2012/13 but determines that there should be an annual review of the allocation method.

(3) Notes and agrees the Local Authority's proposed centrally retained budget requirement for 2012/13 of £18.015m.

(4) Agrees the changes in provision and funding of Special Resource Provision in main stream settings in 2012/13 which will result in additional costs of £325,000.

(5) Notes that local formula changes have been developed in consultation with the Schools Forum Sub-Group and Swindon Head Teacher Associations which are summarized in Section 5 of the report.

(6) Agrees to the use of retained underspends from 2011/12 to provide one off transitional support funding of £590,000 to limit individual school funding reductions arising from formula changes in 2012/13 to no more than 2.5%.

(7) Delegates authority to the Forum's Sub-Group to consider the request for discretionary funding following the amalgamation of Gorse Hill Infant and Junior Schools and to advise the Local Authority accordingly.

(8) Notes that the Local Authority estimates that £125.552m will be available for distribution via the local formula to schools and academies in 2012/13.

(9) Notes the conclusions and guidance relating to school funding beyond 2012/13.

29. Special Schools Funding Review

Steve Haley presented a report to inform members of a new funding system for Special Schools. He advised that the revised system had been developed in conjunction with the Association of Swindon Special School Headteachers (ASSSH)

and would be implemented from 2012/13. Overall, the new funding formula provided a fairer way of allocating funds but the Local Authority appreciated the impact it would have on the two Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) schools that would have reductions in funding for the next three years because of the change. Peter Smith (Trade Unions) commented on the reduced budgets and the possibility of staff redundancies, with the subsequent impact on children.

Resolved – The Schools Forum:

(1) Notes the background, context and principles to the review of Swindon's Special School Funding system.

(2) Supports the Local Authority's proposed introduction of a new Special School Funding system with effect from 2012/13.

(3) Notes and supports the Local Authority's intention to develop a new methodology for the funding of Special Resource Provision for implementation with effect from 2013/14.

30. Local Formula Redistribution Issues

The Forum considered a report by Steve Haley (Group Finance Manager) seeking support to a range of local formula redistribution changes that the Local Authority wished to implement with effect from 2012/13 following a consultation process with the Schools Forum Sub-Group and the three Swindon Associations of Head Teachers.

Mr Haley reminded members of the background to the report and referred them to Appendix A which provided an overview of the current funding of mainstream schools.

During 2011 the Department for Education undertook a consultation exercise which was critical of the complexity of existing local funding formulas and the Local Authority supported its view that the number of funding factors should be reduced. At the October meeting the Forum agreed changes to the re-distribution of certain funding streams and agreed in principle to others, subject to the Local Authority and the Forum's Sub-Group further developing the proposals on the basis that the allocations to individual schools were not significantly affected. Initial proposals were presented to the Forum in January but it was recognized that the cumulative effect of the changes would result in a significant reduction of funding for some schools and therefore further work was needed. The Sub-Group had since met on three occasions and there had also been meetings with the Headteachers associations to refine the proposals. The Local Authority believed that the changes now proposed for 2012/13 improved fairness without significantly affecting individual schools, although it was recognized that it would be detrimental to a small number of schools.

Mr Haley commented on the Authority's concern that some schools seemed unaware that areas of the funding formula were being reviewed. He referred to the various ways that information was disseminated but stressed that whilst the Local Authority had a requirement to consult with the Schools Forum, it was keen to improve communication with schools on financial matters and asked for suggestions from members on how this could be achieved. As an example, John Gilbert (Group Director Children) had suggested that an annual conference on school funding

including any consultation issues could be arranged around November time. Paul Boyles (Primary Governor) requested that all School Forum members be informed of when Sub-Group meetings were taking place in case they wished to attend. Julie Tridgell (Secondary Head Teacher) advised that it was not so much that schools didn't know what was happening, but that in view of the extent of the changes the period of notice was too short.

Peter Smith (Trade Unions) commented on the report, disputing the need to alter the current method of funding distribution. He remarked on how schools were already struggling to show improvement and stated that the proposed changes ignored the needs of pupils. Rachael Matthey (Secondary Head Teacher) stated that it was about two years since the Government had indicated that school funding arrangements needed simplifying. Historically, some Swindon schools had received additional grant funding to meet specific needs at that time. Other authorities that had not received any additional grant funding did not now have the problem of finding a fair way of re-distribution. Swindon had changed dramatically over the years and this needed to be reflected in the funding allocations. Wendy Conaghan (Secondary Head Teacher) advised that the Secondary Heads did not dispute that a re-distribution was needed but there was some concern at the length of notice given in view of the changes being considered.

Mr Haley referred members to paragraph 3.1 of the report and confirmed that the Sub-Group had considered the items listed in Table 1 individually, in relation to the options set out in paragraph 3.2. There had been consensus by the Sub Group and the Primary and Secondary Headteacher Associations on each of the elements and details were provided in Appendix B. Wendy Conaghan (Secondary Head Teacher) highlighted the fact that some schools would lose out but they would be supported by the Local Authority. Mr Haley further advised that to minimise the impact of the funding reduction, the small schools protection funding was being amended to support the four small schools affected. In addition, the underspends from 2011/12 of £590,000 would be used to provide one off transitional support funding to 12 primary and three secondary schools to ensure that no school would lose more than 2.5% of its annual funding as a consequence of the formula changes.

A schedule indicating how each setting would be financially affected by the changes, both before and after the transitional protection funding, was tabled at the meeting for Forum members. These schedules were handed in at the end of the meeting as each school would be receiving its overall 2012/13 funding statement over the next few days.

Resolved – That the Schools Forum:

- (1) Notes the background and context to the proposed local funding changes.
- (2) Notes that the Local Authority initiated a consultation process with each of the three Swindon Headteacher Associations which have shaped the proposals.
- (3) Notes the Local Authority's concerns that communication channels between the Local Authority, Schools Forum members and individual schools may not be as effective as they could be and provides comments as in the body of the minutes.
- (4) Supports the principles and methodologies proposed by the Local Authority relating to the re-distribution of various elements of formula funding.
- (5) Supports the implementation of local formula changes described in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.7 of the report including permanent increased protection for

small schools and the allocation of one off transitional support funding to ensure that no individual school will, as a direct result of these formula changes, lose more than 2.5% of annual funding during 2012/13.

(6) Notes that during 2012 the Local Authority will be undertaking an exercise to review whether alternative methods to free school meals (FSM) and Indexes of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) are more appropriate to distribute funding for Additional Educational Needs (AEN).

31.

Date of Next Meeting

The Forum noted that meeting dates for the next Municipal Year had yet to be finalised but that it was anticipated the dates would be at similar times to the current year.