

DUDLEY SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday, 8th July, 2008 at 6.00 p.m.
at Saltwells Educational Development Centre
Bowling Green Road, Netherton, Dudley

PRESENT

Mrs. Griffiths (Chairman)
Mr. Millman (Vice Chairman)
Mr. M. Bell, Mrs. Blunt, Mr. Conway, Mr. Francis, Mr. Harrington, Mr. Hatton,
Mrs. Hazlehurst, Mr. Hudson, Mr. James, Mrs. Jessup, Mr. Leyshon, Mr.
Patterson, Mr. Ridley, Mr. Robertson, Ms. Smith, Mr. Temple, Mr. Timmins,
Mr. Warner and Mr. Wassall.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Nottingham (Chairman of the Select Committee on Children's
Services of Dudley M.B.C.).

OFFICERS

Mr. R. Watson – Assistant Director of Children's Services (Resources), Mr. H.
Powell – Education Improvement Adviser (both Directorate of Children's
Services), Mrs. K. Cocker – Children's Services Finance Manager, Mrs. S.
Coates – Senior Principal Accountant (both Directorate of Finance, ICT and
Procurement) and Mr. R. Sanders (Assistant Principal Officer (Democratic
Services)) – all Dudley M.B.C.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of
Mrs. Elwiss, Mr. Freeman, Mr. Ingram, Mr. Sorrell and Councillor Mrs.
Walker.

2. ATTENDANCE OF MEETINGS

Further to concern expressed by the Chairman regarding the
attendance record of a particular member of the Forum, it was

RESOLVED

That the Clerk to the Forum write to the nominating body for the
particular member reporting the attendance record and asking
whether or not the body wishes the member to remain as its
representative.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 20th May, 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed.

4. MATTER ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

In relation to Minute No. 7 (updates of the amendments to the Constitution), concern was expressed that a resolution to the issue of Union Representation had not yet been achieved. It was agreed that Mrs. Cocker would follow up the matter.

5. ORDER OF BUSINESS

Consideration of item no. 4 on the agenda (Review of Funding for pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools) was deferred until later on the agenda, pending the arrival of the presenting officer.

6. BREACH OF CENTRAL EXPENDITURE LIMIT (CEL)

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted advising the Forum of the CEL calculation for the 3 year period from 2008 -11 and which also requested approval to a forecast breach to CEL in 2009/10.

The report explained the methodology applied by the DCSF in calculating CEL which involved the determination of a ratio between the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and the Indicative Schools' Budget (ISB), this standing currently at 89:11. The purpose of this was to ensure that the allocation of the DSG increase in funds from one year to another was distributed in line with the initial value of the base budgets. Should the ratio for CEL not be achieved, this would constitute a breach which would be required by regulation to be approved by the Schools Forum.

It was now reported that, owing to the forecast transfer of £230,000 from the ISB for Cradley High School to the schools specific contingency in 2009/10, the CEL for that year would be breached. The sum related to the premises budget for Cradley High School which would be necessary to be retained pending the disposal of the site.

At this juncture, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Resources) updated the Forum on the current position within the Council on Cradley High School. In this regard, he indicated that a draft decision sheet had been published within the previous few days giving notice of the intention to approve the declaration of the site of the school surplus to requirements and to include it in the Council's Land Disposal Programme.

RESOLVED

That the forecast breach of the CEL for 2009/10, due to a technical adjustment in relation to Cradley High School, be approved.

7. SINGLE STATUS AND EQUAL PAY COSTS IN SCHOOLS

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted indicating the funding set aside by Dudley schools to cover single status and equal pay costs and which also contained proposals regarding the mechanism for accessing the funds.

Every school in Dudley had been asked to complete a pro-forma stating the amount the school was proposing to set aside as a contingency for single status and equal pay costs and indicating that, should the setting of the contingency necessitate staffing reductions, whether it was proposed that this would be achieved by the release of vacant posts or through staff redundancies. From the responses received, the funding set aside by schools to cover the liability stood at £2.87 m; 18 schools had stated that they might be able to appoint to some vacant posts or renew temporary contracts and one school proposed to make redundancies.

A discussion ensued on recommendation (c) in the report, in relation to which a number of Head Teachers disagreed with the principle that schools which had set aside contingency funds for single status and equal pay costs over and above the sum of £20,000 recommended should be subject to the same constraints on the withdrawal of the funds in excess of £20,000 as for funding provided for up to that limit.

RESOLVED

That the Director of Children's Services be recommended:-

- (1) That the latest contingency funding set aside by Dudley Schools for single status and equal pay costs of £2.87m be noted;

- (2) That the single status and equal pay costs contingency funding set aside for schools be maintained outside of the local management of school reserves and excluded for clawback purposes at this stage;
- (3) That those schools which have set aside contingency funds of over £20,000 for the purpose of single status and equal pay costs be authorised to withdraw the excess funding from the contingency at their discretion and without reference to the Director of Children's Services, provided that the contingency funding does not reduce to less than £20,000.

8. REVIEW OF FUNDING FOR PUPILS WITH STATEMENTS OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted seeking consideration of the establishment and appointment of a "Task and Finish" Working Group to review the methodology for funding pupils with statements of special educational needs in mainstream schools.

RESOLVED

- (1) That a "Task and Finish" Working Group for the purpose of considering the methodology for funding pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools be established and that the Working Group be appointed with the following membership:

Mr. Francis, Mr. or Mrs. Hudson, Mr. Leyshon, Mr. Timmins, Mr. Warner, Mr. Warren, and one Head Teacher of Primary School to be nominated by the Primary Head Teachers on the Forum.
- (2) That the working Group be authorised to set its precise terms of reference within the purpose stated in resolution (1) above.
- (3) That outcomes recommended by the Working Group be considered by the Budget Working Group.

9. SCHOOL FORUM TRAINING

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted seeking agreement to the undertaking of a Training Programme for Schools Forum Members and which sought consideration of topics for which training should be scheduled.

Discussion also ensued on the preferred format for training, in the course of which Bromsgrove was advocated as an example of good practise.

RESOLVED

That the Director of Children's Services be recommended that the proposals in Appendix A to the report now submitted for inclusion in the Training Programme be approved, together with the following issues:

New Ofsted Framework
Children's Trust and its role
Transfer of Post 16 Funding
Building Schools for the Future strategy

10. CLOSURE OF CRADLEY HIGH SCHOOL

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted setting the current financial position in respect of Cradley High School for the 2008/09 financial year.

A dedicated budget of £633,000 had been set against the latest forecast budget requirement of £730,000, leaving a deficit budget of £97,000. The report confirmed the information provided at the previous meeting that the sum of £594,000 in 2007/08 had been set aside to fund the possible redundancy outcomes of the Cradley High School staff at 31st August, 2008 and that any unspent part of that provision could be released at a later date. The ongoing annual pension commitments, however, amounted to £43,000 and would have to be funded from the Schools Budget.

In relation to staff not redeployed at 19th June, 2008, the report indicated that there were 36 members of staff subject to redundancy and a further 5 members of staff on temporary contracts.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

11. FINAL ALLOCATIONS OF THE DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT FOR THE 2008/09 FINANCIAL YEAR

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted indicating the level of the final allocation of Dedicated Schools Grant for the 2008/09 financial year, as set out in correspondence to Local Authorities from the DCSF dated 19th June, 2008. The expenditure for each Local Authority was set out in the appendix to the report submitted.

In relation to Dudley, the allocation had been confirmed at £188.303m, which compared with an estimate of £188.356m, leaving a shortfall of £0.053 m. This represented a 99.9% accuracy rate for the pupil data submitted by the Council to DCSF in March, 2008. The report proposed that the shortfall be offset against the £86,000 contingency set aside for the purpose, thus leaving unallocated contingency balance of £33,000.

RESOLVED

That the Director of Children's Services be recommended that the final Dedicated Support Grant allocation of £188.303m for 2008/09 be noted and that the shortfall of £53,000 be offset against the contingency of £86,000 set aside for the year, leaving the contingency budget at £33,000.

12. AUDIT COMMISSION SCHOOL BALANCES TOOL KIT

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted setting out the Audit Commission's school balances tool kit data for the period from 2004 to 2007.

The information in the tool kit showed the position on the management of school balances for each Council in the country and indicated that, overall, net balances had risen from £1.537 billion in 2006 to £1.618 billion by the end of March, 2007.

Reference was made in the report to the risk assessment tool which could be used by Local Authorities to help with self evaluation and benchmarking against education statistical neighbours, similar authorities, and regional and national comparators.

RESOLVED

That the issue of Audit Commission Data in respect of schools balances tool kit for the period from 2004 to 2007, and the summary of its contents now given, be noted.

13. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED

That meetings of the Forum in the 2008/09 academic year be held at 6.00 p.m. on the following dates (all Tuesdays):

7th October, 2008
9th December, 2008
24th February, 2009
17th March, 2009
2nd June, 2009
7th July, 2009

14. MR. G. ROBERTSON AND MR. R. WATSON

This being their last meeting of the Forum, pursuant to Mr Robertson's impending retirement and Mr Watson's imminent departure from the authority for another post, the Chairman, on behalf of the Forum, thanked Mr Robertson and Mr Watson for their excellent service and expressed the best wishes of the Forum to them for the future.

The meeting ended at 7.15 p.m.

CHAIRMAN