

DUDLEY SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday 9th May, 2006 at 6.00pm
Saltwells Education Centre, Bowling Green Road, Netherton

PRESENT

Mr Patterson (Chairman)
Mrs Blunt, Mrs Brennan, Mr Conway, Mr Francis, Mrs Griffiths, Mr Harrington, Mr Hatton, Mr James (Substitute for Ms Pearce), Mr Janjua, Mr Leyshon, Mrs Lonergan, Mr Millman, Mr Ridley, Mr Timmins, (Substitute for Mr Bell), Mr Wassell and Mr Williams.

OFFICERS

Director of Children's Services, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Resources & Planning), Assistant Director of Children's Services – Access & Inclusion (Directorate of Children's Services), Children's Services Finance Manager and Mrs Coates (Directorate of Finance, ICT & Procurement) and Mr Jewkes (Directorate of Law & Property) - All Dudley M.B.C.

1. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED

That Mr Patterson be elected Chairman of the Forum for the 2006/2007 financial year.

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Mr Bell, Ms Cartwright, Mrs Hazlehurst, Mr Heavisides, Mr Sorrell and Mr Warner.

3. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED

That Mrs Griffiths be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Forum for the 2006/2007 financial year.

4. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 16th March, 2006, be approved as a correct record and signed.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

In relation to Minute No 3 – Matters Arising from the Minutes, the Chairman requested an update in respect of the correspondence which had been sent to members who had not attended a meeting since being appointed to the Forum. In responding, Mr Jewkes reported that he had written to all the members concerned and had received several responses in the light of which he would be taking appropriate action. He drew particular attention to a message he had received from the representative of the Black Country Learning and Skills Council (LSC) which stated that as the Forum was only consulted on school budgets relating to children under the age of 16, and therefore did not consider the post 16 activity funded by the LSC, the benefit of LSC attendance at meetings of the Forum was questionable.

The Director of Children's Services commented that in view of the integrated 14-19 agenda and the emphasis on a 'joined up' approach between colleges and secondary schools, it was his view that the input of the LSC at Forum meetings would be beneficial. He undertook to contact the LSC regarding the matter.

In connection with Minute No 5 – Schools Budget 2007/08: Indicative Estimate, a member enquired as to whether a meeting between an officer and the Chairs of schools finance committees, as suggested in the minute, had taken place. Following some brief discussion on the matter the Chairman suggested that rather than a private meeting being arranged, future member training in financial management could be provided via an 'open forum' at which questions could be raised. It was widely agreed that this approach would be appropriate.

6. CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

RESOLVED

That Agenda Item No 17 – Hard to Place Pupil Protocol Update, be considered as the next item of business.

7. HARD TO PLACE PUPIL PROTOCOL – UPDATE

The Assistant Director of Children's Services (Access and Inclusion) gave a verbal update in respect of progress on the implementation of the Hard to Place Pupil Protocol.

It was reported that the Director of Children's Services had written to Headteachers and Chairs of Governors in mid-April enclosing a copy of the final draft protocol and asking that Governing Bodies sign up to it by 26th May. The final version had been drafted in consultation with a sub-group of the Headteachers Consultative Forum (HTCF), the Admissions Forum and secondary Heads and Chairs. It was proposed that the protocol would be piloted for one academic year, after which any proposed adjustments to the scheme would be considered. In June the School Support Service Manager would be contacting schools to discuss the detail of how township panels would operate and to arrange relevant training. The Deputy Principal Educational Psychologist (Mr David Scott) would also be working on a weighting system to ensure the equitable distribution of hard to place pupils, consultation on which would be carried out in due course.

In response to a question from Mr Conway, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Access and Inclusion) confirmed that the Local Authority was still understaffed in terms of Educational Psychology and added that as training Educational Psychologists now took three years it was likely that the problem would not be resolved for some time.

In response to a question from Mrs Brennan, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Access and Inclusion) reported that seven responses had been received to the consultation on the protocol. Almost all of the suggestions made in the responses had been incorporated into the final draft.

RESOLVED

That the verbal update be noted.

8. SOCIAL DEPRIVATION STATEMENT

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the social deprivation statement which had recently been completed and submitted to the Secretary of State.

The Director of Children's Services reported that in line with the stipulation in the School Finance Regulations 2006 that Local Authorities (LAs) must take into account in their formulae a factor or factors based on the incidence of social deprivation in schools within their area, a statement had been produced at the request of the Secretary of State highlighting the formula factors in the Dudley Scheme of Fair Funding which distributed funds to schools in respect

of social deprivation or SEN. Copies of the statement, which had now been submitted to the Secretary of State, were circulated at the meeting. The DfES would collate the information in the statements received and would be providing advice to LAs on good practice in relation to adjusting their formulae to maximise fair distribution of funds.

It was noted that the entry in the final row of column 1 of Table 1 should have read 'SEN without statements', rather than 'SEN with statements'. The Children's Services Finance Manager undertook to send an amended version of the statement to the DfES as soon as possible.

The Chairman referred to the section of the statement dealing with the removal of the Free School Meals (FSM) formula factor as a method of distributing funds in respect of social deprivation and its replacement with the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), and asked if the effects of the change would be monitored. In responding, the Director of Children's Services stated that modelling work based on the proposed change would be carried out beforehand to ensure that the outcome would be stable and beneficial.

In response to a question from Mr Ridney, the Director of Children's Services confirmed that social deprivation funding would be targeted into each post code area in the Borough, according to its IMD value. In relation to this, he suggested that a map of the Dudley borough indicating the IMD value of each super output area be circulated to members for their information.

RESOLVED

1. That the contents of the report and of the Statement of Deprivation, be noted.
2. That copies of the map referred to by the Director of Children's Services indicating the IMD value of each super output area in the Borough be circulated to members of the forum for information.

9. DUDLEY SCHEME OF FAIR FUNDING – FORMULA FACTORS

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted advising members on the high cost/low incidence formula factors within the Dudley Scheme of Fair Funding and of the work the Head Teachers Consultative Forum (HTCF) Budget Working Group was engaged in in relation to formula factors.

The Children's Services Finance Manager reported that the Dudley Scheme of Fair Funding was last reviewed in 2002 and that she was currently discussing with the HTCF Budget Working Group the possibility of revising the formula factors. Data relating to the factors currently incorporated in the LMS formula was appended to the report for members' information.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

10. PERSONALISED LEARNING – BUDGET FACT SHEET NO. 4

The Directorate of Children's Services Budget Fact Sheet no. 4 was submitted to the meeting. The Director of Children's Services reported that the fact sheet included details of announcements made in the Chancellor's Budget Statement 2006. It had been distributed to schools on 28th March. The main announcement made in the statement was that additional School Standards Grant Funding was to be made available directly to schools in order to assist them in delivering personalisation and extended services. An additional £220 million would be allocated in 2006/07, which the DfES planned to get out to schools before the start of the next academic year in September, with a further £365 million following in 2007/08. The DfES would be monitoring how the additional funds were utilised, requesting information from schools showing how the money had been spent and how the investment was expected to improve outcomes.

Mrs Coates reported that a 'ready reckoner' was now available which would give an indication of what School Standards Grant funding individual schools could expect to receive. This information would be provided to each school in the Borough prior to the commencement of the 2006/07 academic year.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the Budget Fact Sheet be noted.

11. ALLOCATION OF 2006/07 ONE OFF FUNDING FROM DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on a proposal, previously agreed in principle by the Forum, to allocate the estimated £250,000 surplus in the 2006/07 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to the Full Service Extended Schools who were experiencing financial difficulties in 2006/07 as a result of the Local Authority (LA) withdrawing central budget support. Details of the specific amounts it was proposed to allocate to each extended school, as suggested by

the HTCF Budget Working Group, were appended to the report.

The Children's Services Finance Manager reported that as the former Community Schools which now provided extended services had experienced a more substantial drop in funding as a result of the withdrawal of LA support, Budget Working Group had suggested that they should be allocated £20,000 each, with other extended schools receiving £7,650.

RESOLVED

That the proposal of the HTCF Budget Working Group for the reallocation of the expected surplus in the 2006/07 DSG, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report submitted, be endorsed.

12. PUBLISHED ADMISSION NUMBERS

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the proposed allocation of additional school budget funds in respect of the proposal to increase the Published Admission Number (PAN) of Hillcrest secondary school from September 2006.

The Director of Children's Services reported that although the Forum had previously endorsed the proposal to allocate funds in respect of those secondary schools whose PAN increase was effective from September 2006, which included Hillcrest, the plans for Hillcrest had not yet been considered by the School Organisation Committee, meaning that at the time of school budgets for the 2006/07 financial year being issued, the LA was not permitted to incorporate the additional per pupil funds required by Hillcrest to facilitate the expansion. The School Finance Regulations (England) 2006 did not permit LAs to amend schools budgets in year on a per pupil basis even though the £70,812 required by the school had been set aside in the school specific contingency for 2006/07. The proposals were to be considered by the SOC in the near future, meaning that should they be approved, the Forum needed to consider whether an allocation of funds should be made on a cash value basis being as the financial year had already commenced.

RESOLVED

1. That the contents of the report be noted.

2. That the strategy of making a in-year cash allocation from the school specific contingency to the Hillcrest secondary school in the event of the School Organisation Committee approving the increase of it's Published Admission Number as of September 2006, be endorsed.

13. SCHOOL RESERVES 2005/06 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the projected school reserve balances for 2005/06 outturn.

Prior to the consideration of the item, the Director of Children's Services made a brief statement in relation to Standards Fund allocations. He reminded members of the Forum that as Standards Fund allocations could now be spent over a seventeen-month period, the deadline for utilisation of 2005/06 allocations was now the end of the Summer term. He asked that members of the Forum impress on their respective schools and colleagues that any funds not spent by this deadline would be recalled by the DfES.

In presenting the report, the Children's Services Finance Manager referred to additional data circulated at the meeting containing details of the reserve balances held by all Dudley's primary and secondary schools at the end of the 2005/06 financial year. The figures showed that the amount of funding held in reserve in Dudley schools had risen from £9,969,027 at the close of 2004/05 to £10,485,025 in 2005/06. It was noted however, that schools had set aside a certain degree of those funds in order to balance their school budgets in 2006/07.

The Director of Children's Services expressed disappointment with the figures and confirmed that if, following appropriate investigations, he found that the reserves were not justified he would, following further consultation with the Forum, take action to 'claw back' funds from the schools in question and redistribute them in the 2007/08 school budgets. Members of the Forum expressed support for this course of action. The Chairman commented that if recalling funds was found to be necessary, appropriate action would need to be taken to ensure that the process was fair, equitable and transparent.

Mr Millman suggested that in future it would be useful if data relating to school reserves included percentage values indicating what proportion of schools' budgets were being held back. This was widely agreed and the Director of Children's Services gave an undertaking to arrange for the information to be provided in future.

RESOLVED

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That a report providing an update in respect of action taken by the Director of Children's Services in relation to the finalised reserve balances for 2005/06 be submitted to a future meeting of the Forum.

14. CONSISTENT FINANCIAL REPORTING – 2004-05 DATA

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the benchmarking data compiled by the Audit Commissions Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR) website in relation to Dudley schools' financial transactions during 2004/05. Booklets containing the data had been distributed in separate booklets with the agenda for the meeting

The Education Finance Manager reported that the CFR data relating to 2002/03, 2003/04 and 2004/05 was now available on the Audit Commission website. The 2005/06 outturn would be added in Autumn 2006. Although schools could access general information showing how their school compared with other schools in Dudley, only the LA could access specific information naming the individual schools and showing how the schools compared with each other. This information had been submitted to the meeting and would be made available to Headteachers and Chairs of Finance Committees shortly, on a confidential basis.

Several members of the Forum commented that the information was particularly useful to them in comparing their expenditure with that of similar schools and expressed their thanks to the Children's Services Finance Manager and her team for providing them with it.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report and the CFR data in respect of 2004/05, be noted.

15. FINANCIAL MONITORING – SCHOOLS BUDGET FOR 2006/07 FINANCIAL YEAR

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the proposed financial monitoring scheme in respect of the Schools Budget for the 2006/07 financial year.

The Children's Services Finance Manager reported that under the new School Finance (England) Regulations 2006, Schools Forums were responsible for the allocation and monitoring of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which funded the Schools Budget. A table detailing the allocation of the DSG for 2006/07 over the Schools Budget areas was appended to the report. It was intended that an updated report showing the gradual deployment of these funds during the 2006/07 academic year would be submitted to the Forum on a quarterly or termly basis for discussion and to highlight if and when corrective action was required. The report would be monitored on a monthly basis by the Director of Children's Services in conjunction with the relevant budget holders.

The Chairman raised the question of whether or not exception reporting would be undertaken highlighting to Forum members where changes had occurred in the budgetary position in respect of any of the areas noted in the report. In responding, the Children's Services Finance Manager confirmed that developments would be monitored and fed back to the Director of Children's Services on a monthly basis via the Budget Monitoring Group, and to Schools Forum on either a quarterly or termly basis.

In response to a request from Mrs Brennan, the Children's Services Finance Manager agreed to include statistical information in the report indicating the amount of the original budget which had been deployed at that point in the year and the amount which corresponded to the number of months of the year which had passed. For example, if six months of the year had passed, the figure amounting to 50% of the original budget would be included for comparison with the actual expenditure

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

16. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the medium term financial planning process being pursued by the Directorate of Children's Services.

The Director of Children's Services reported that following the introduction of multi-year budgets by the DfES, it was proposed that a draft Medium Term Financial Plan in respect of the Children's Services Directorate would be submitted to the Forum for approval during the 2006 Summer Term, prior to it being submitted to the Cabinet. The plan would draw upon all funding streams available to the Directorate and would draw together future funding issues including the arrangements for the operation of pooled budgets and the increasing importance of financial cooperation with external partners under 'Every Child Matters'.

RESOLVED

That the proposal by the Director of Children's Services to present a medium term financial plan for his Directorate to the Forum in the Summer term 2006, be endorsed.

17. PRIMARY REVIEW – FURTHER INFORMATION ON COSTINGS

This item was deferred to the next meeting of the Forum pending the collation of up to date statistical data in the light of the pending decision of the School Organisation Committee regarding the proposed discontinuation of Holt Farm primary school.

18. SPECIAL SCHOOLS MATRIX – UPDATE

The Children's Services Finance Manager gave a verbal update in respect of the implementation of the special schools matrix. She reported that a working group had been meeting to undertake the moderation process with regard to the different levels of the matrix and to discuss training plans. Training videos would be distributed to the Borough's special schools from September 2006 to ensure that all would be using the same standardised system of assessing pupils' needs relative to the matrix.

RESOLVED

That the verbal update be noted.

19. SCHOOLS FORUM WORKING GROUP

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the outcomes of the recent meeting of the Schools Forum Working Group.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services (Infrastructure) reported that resulting from a previous resolution of the Forum, a working group had met on 25th April to consider how the business of the Forum, in particular it's meetings, was conducted. There had been general agreement in the group about where improvements could be made and a series of recommendations to the Forum arising from the meeting were included in the report.

RESOLVED

That the following recommendations of the Working Group, as set out in paragraphs 1 - 8 of the report submitted, be approved: -

- i. Schools Forum should continue to meet as now with papers considered initially at Head Teachers Consultative Forum Budget Working Group (HTCF-BWG).
- ii. Schools Forum Agendas should be structured with items for discussion and items for information only.
- iii. The dates of Schools Forum meetings should be published for each financial year setting out the anticipated business.
- iv. Reports submitted to Schools Forum should be short with a clear executive summary. Relevant detail e.g. financial data should be contained in additional appendices unless it can be included easily within a short report.
- v. Agendas and papers will be sent out 7 working days in advance of meetings or earlier if possible.
- vi. Schools Forum agendas should wherever appropriate include elements of training as business is conducted e.g. as part of specific agenda items or specific training events.
- vii. The constitution should allow one third of the membership to change each year. Schools Forum members will still be appointed to serve for 3 years.
- viii. Schools Forum agendas, reports and minutes should be published on www.dudley.gov.uk.

20. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED

That meetings of Schools Forum will be held on the following dates in the 2006/07 financial year.

- Tuesday 11th July, 2006
- Tuesday 3rd October, 2006
- Tuesday 12th December 2006
- Tuesday 6th February, 2007
- Tuesday 20th March 2007
- Tuesday 22nd May, 2007

The meeting ended at 7.45pm

CHAIRMAN