

DUDLEY SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday, 7th October 2008 at 6.00 pm at Saltwells Educational Development Centre, Bowling Green Road, Netherton, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Mrs Griffiths (Chairman)
Mr Millman (Vice Chairman)
Mrs Blunt, Mr Conway, Mrs Edwards, Mrs Elwiss, Mr Francis, Mr Harrington, Mr Hinton, Mr Hudson, Mr Hunt, Mr James, Mr Kelly, Mr Lloyd, Mr Mountney, Councillor Nottingham, Ms Smith, Mr Sorrell, Councillor Taylor, Mr Timmins, Councillor Mrs Walker and Mr Wassall

Officers

The Director 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 MBC

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Mrs Edwards, Mr Hatton, Mrs Hazlehurst, Mr Leyshon, Mr Patterson, Mr Ridney and Mr Warner.

2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor Taylor and Mr Kelly were serving in place of Mr Patterson and Mr Warner respectively, for this meeting of the Forum only.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 8th July 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the addition of the name of Mr Lloyd in the list of apologies for absence.

4. MATTER ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

In relation to Minute 2 (Attendance at Meetings), the Clerk to the Forum reported that the period of office of the member referred to in the resolution had expired on 30th September 2008 and that the member had not sought to be nominated for further service.

In relation to Minute 4 (Matter Arising from the Minutes – Update of Amendments to the Constitution), Mrs Cocker reported briefly on the issues considered at the meeting of the Working Group held earlier in the afternoon on this issue and indicated that a report would be submitted to the meeting of the Forum in December.

In relation to Minute 8 (Review of Funding for Pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools), Mrs Coates reported on two meetings of “Task and Finish” Working Group on this issue that had been held since the last meeting and that another meeting was proposed. A report would be submitted to the Budget Working Group and the Forum once an outcome that could be recommended had been arrived at.

In relation to Minute 9 (Schools Forum Training), Mrs Cocker reported that consideration was being given to the provision of training in two main areas; firstly, for members who needed immediate training on Forum responsibilities as they became new members and, secondly, on arrangements to be made for specialist, ad hoc, training on particular issues. Proposals for a more defined training programme with suggested dates would be submitted to the Forum in due course.

5. PROPOSED ALLOCATION OF 2008/09 SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT – HEADROOM

In accordance with the DCSF requirement that any grant remaining from the School Development Grant (SDG) should be allocated to schools on a fair and transparent basis, after consultation with the Schools Forum, a report of the Director of Children’s Services containing proposals for the distribution of the headroom from the SDG for 2008/09 of £30,576 was submitted.

The proposed distribution of the headroom was set out in Appendix A to the report and was based on a per pupil allocation using the January 2008 School’s Census pupil numbers, the headroom available for distribution being equal to 0.65 pence per pupil.

RESOLVED

That the proposed distribution of the 2008/09 SDG head room on a per pupil basis of £0.65 per pupil, using the January 2008 Schools Census Pupil Data, as set out in detail in Appendix A to the report now submitted, be approved.

6. SCHOOLS RESOURCE PACK

A report of the Director of Children’s Services was submitted advising the Forum of the nature of this interactive website, which was available to assist schools to target spending on pupils with Special and Additional Educational Needs.

The Pack comprised an electronic self-evaluation tool which set out principles of good practice in the strategic management of resources, against which schools could review the ways in which they made decisions about the use of resources; improve the way in which spending was targeted at agreed educational objectives; and identify the extent to which they applied the principles of best value. The aim was to improve transparency in the way that schools spent their SEN/AEN funding.

It was indicated in the discussion that, further to a proposal supported at a recent meeting of the Budget Working Group of the Headteachers' Consultative Forum, the toolkit was being piloted in four schools in the Borough.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report now submitted, summarising the content of the Schools Resource Pack and indicating its availability to Schools, be noted.
- (2) That the piloting of the Pack at the Colley Lane, Halesbury, Redhill and Ridge Schools be endorsed.

7. PROPOSED CHANGES TO DUDLEY'S RESOURCE ALLOCATION FORMULA FOR SCHOOLS

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted stating the latest position with regard to consideration being given to the number of changes proposed to certain formula factors in the mainstream schools resource allocation formula.

The formula had been reviewed by the Budget Working Group of the Head Teacher's Consultative Forum over the previous 18 months and there were now four formula factors proposed for amendment from April 2009. These related to the funding areas of Small Schools Protection, Socio Economic Need, Class Size Supplement and Changing Schools.

Consultation on the recommended changes with Head Teachers and governing bodies, pursuant to the DCSF requirement in that regard, was now proposed over the period from October 2008 to January 2009. The draft consultation paper was appended to the report now submitted and specified the reasons for the changes recommended in each respective area of funding, together with financial details. These issues were expanded on orally by Mrs Coates in her presentation of the report.

In the discussion on this item, with regard to the Changing Schools element, the Director of Children's Services confirmed that further work was necessary on the funding of children for in year transfer and indicated that the issue would be referred to the Forum in due course.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the draft consultation document and the consultation period proposed be noted.
- (2) That it also be noted that any responses can be made through the formal consultation process outlined in the document.

8. WHITE PAPER “RAISING EXPECTATIONS: ENABLING THE SYSTEM TO DELIVER”

A report of the Director of Children’s Services was submitted on the proposals in this White Paper and their implications to the Council.

The White Paper contained details in respect of the Government’s proposals for responsibility for commissioning for 16 – 18 education to transfer to Local Authorities. Reference also made in the report to the major changes proposed to the secondary curriculum and proposals in the Learning and Skills Bill to raise the minimum age at which young people would be able to leave education. In discussing the manner in which commissioning was proposed to be effected, the report indicated that the structure would involve a new national agency to manage the whole process and act as the interface between the DCSF and the Local Authority; a Skills Funding Agency to provide apprenticeships to meet local demand; and that, since further education colleges typically served areas greater than a single Local Authority, Local Authorities would be required to come together in sub-regional groupings to commission further education colleges.

In the discussion, reservations were expressed by the Director of Children’s Services and members of the Forum regarding the level of funding that might be made available. In this connection, the Director was clear in his view that the settlement from the Government for Education and Children’s Services would be increasingly tight and he emphasised that the role of the Forum would be to ensure that the funding available was distributed as fairly as possible. While the return of 14 – 19 education to Local Government was broadly welcomed, certain members made the point that the education of young people not in education or training was more expensive than that for pupils in education.

RESOLVED

That the report and the comments made be noted.

9. UPDATE ON EARLY YEARS PROVIDER REFERENCE GROUP

A report of the Director of Children’s Services was submitted giving an update on recent progress on the work of this Group.

The Group had met on 10th July 2008 to discuss progress made towards the development of the single funding formula for nursery provision and to agree a timetable to achieve implementation of all changes by April 2010, as required by law, and extracts from the meeting were attached as Appendix A to the report now submitted. Timetable dates agreed for Dudley at the meeting were set out in Appendix B to the report.

RESOLVED

That the report and the timetable regarding implementation of a single formula for all early years funding from April 2010, be noted.

10. LEA BENCHMARKING TABLES 2008/09

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted attached to which benchmarking tables recently issued by the DCSF in respect of planned expenditure for the 2008/09 financial year, as produced by Local Authorities, was submitted. The data included all areas of Children's Services including that of Children's Social Care.

In the discussion, the funding arrangements between authorities was raised, in connection with which Mrs Cocker clarified some of the information contained in the statistics. In relation to special education, the inconsistency of charging policies between authorities was raised and, while acknowledging that this was often problematic, the Director of Children's Services emphasised that the intention was to ensure that Dudley charged and was charged fairly for out of borough placements.

Regarding the benchmarking tables in general terms, the Cabinet Member expressed the view that it would be useful for the Forum to look at the figures of Dudley's statistical, as well as geographical, neighbours.

RESOLVED

That the report and the information contained therein be noted.

That the report be received and the distribution of standard funds allocations noted.

The meeting ended at 7.05 pm

CHAIRMAN