

Schools Forum

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday, 3rd March, 2009 at 4.00 p.m. at Blakenall Village Centre, Thames Road, Blakenall, Walsall

Present:- Mr. J. Baker (Chairman)
Mr. A. Davies (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. S. Griffiths
Mr. A.F. Cheminais
Mr. S. Flynn
Mr. G. Crowther
Dame M. Brennan
Mr. J.P. Clarke
Ms. H. Lomas
Mrs. E. Stringer
Mrs. R. Poyser
Mr. G. Deakin
Mr. E. Gee
Mr. F. Hodgkinson
Mr. M. Sweeney
Mrs. M. Letts
Mrs. K. Delaney
A. Basi

In Attendance:- Ms. A. Walton (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)
Ms. J. Taylor (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)
Mr. D. Mortiboys (Walsall Council)

Observers:- Mr. M. Atkins (St. James Primary)
Mr. D. Brownsword (Leamore Primary)
Mrs. T. Duncan (North Walsall Primary)
Mrs. L. Johnston (North Walsall Primary)
Mrs. J. Latham-Bennett (Bentley Drive JMI)
K. Turner

		Action
1. 3.3.09	Apologies Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Mr. M. Barton, Mrs. E. Maher and Councillor Zahid.	

	<p>The Clerk reported that Mr. M. Atkins, Head Teacher of St. James Primary, was attending as a substitute for Mrs. Maher in an observer capacity.</p> <p>In addition, the Clerk had been notified, after the agenda had been despatched, that Sue Bradford had resigned as a Forum Member and had been replaced by Dame Mo Brennan, who had subsequently been invited to attend this meeting. The Clerk also referred to a report on the agenda regarding 14 - 19 Representation and indicated that Mr. A. Basi, Principal of Walsall College, had been nominated by the Strategy Board.</p> <p>Mr. Basi was in attendance at the meeting.</p> <p>The Chairman welcomed new Members to the meeting.</p>	
<p>2. 3.3.09</p>	<p>Minutes - 20th January, 2009</p> <p>Mrs. Stringer referred to page 8 of the minutes, resolution (1) and pointed out that no formal vote had been taken on the decision. The Chairman indicated that, in his recollection, the Forum had taken votes on all issues although they may not have been recorded. Mr. Hodgkinson endorsed the Chairman's view.</p>	<p>Approved as a correct record.</p>
<p>3. 3.3.09</p>	<p>Matters arising from the minutes</p> <p>Item 6 - Start-up costs for Building Schools for the Future/Primary Capital Programme (BSF/PCP)</p> <p>Mrs. Letts referred to a comment made that increasing DFC contributions should be re-examined and asked whether this would be a future agenda item. Mrs. Walton confirmed that the issue was included on the Forward Plan.</p> <p>Mr. Cheminais suggested that S.52 balances should be published locally. Mrs. Walton confirmed that the information could be provided but pointed out that, every year, balances and commitments were increasing. In reply, Mr. Cheminais indicated that the increase in commitments was due to accounting procedures not being as good as they should be and</p>	

	<p>this resulted in unrealistic figures. The Chairman pointed out that there was a Balance Control Mechanism which needed to be applied more rigorously.</p> <p>Julie Taylor explained that the DCSF measured percentages and that a letter had been sent out to schools on 6th February reminding them of the nearness of the end of the financial year and asking them to bring their accounts up to date and reduce their balances. On the question of a 'cut-off point', Mr. Mortiboys indicated that this would be mid April. He added that the Council Recharge Information dates would be made available. Julie Taylor asked that a bullet point of other issues could be included so that officers could ensure that they are processed in the current financial year. She asked that information on these issues be provided to her.</p>	Dan Mortiboys to action
<p>4. 3.3.09</p>	<p>Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)</p> <p>There were no items to be considered in private session.</p>	
<p>5. 3.3.09</p>	<p>14 - 19 Partnership Representation</p> <p>A report was submitted and outlined by Julie Taylor.</p> <p>The Forum noted that Amarjit Basi, Principal of Walsall College, had been nominated as the Walsall 14 - 19 Strategy Board representative on the Forum. The Chairman welcomed Mr. Basi to the meeting.</p>	
<p>6. 3.3.09</p>	<p>Primary Capital Programme</p> <p>A report was submitted and outlined by Avril Walton.</p> <p>The Chairman asked whether there was a strategy for mobile classrooms. Avril confirmed that replacement of mobile classrooms was referred to in some schemes but, where mobiles had been part of the main school accommodation, they would be replaced. In normal circumstances, they would only be temporary accommodation.</p>	

	<p>Mrs. Letts referred to an article in the Express and Star newspaper which indicated that the Council had turned down funding from the DCSF. She had spoken to Councillor Ali, Cabinet portfolio holder for Children's Services, who had refuted the information in the article. Avril confirmed that the article was incorrect and explained that the allocation had not been turned down. The Council had an option to draw down capital a year early. The Council had indicated that it had a programme for spending money and would not be taking up the offer of drawing down early. Funding would be drawn, but not a year early, and the funding was not BSF funding.</p> <p>The Forum asked whether there was a timescale for the programme. In reply, Avril indicated that there was not a timescale and that the £2 million not allocated to the schemes referred to in the report would be spent and that it was ringfenced.</p> <p>The Chairman referred to the question of mobiles and stressed that, where schools had mobile classroom accommodation, the Authority needed to know, in advance, what their condition was.</p> <p>The report was NOTED.</p>	All
<p>7. 3.3.09</p>	<p>Start up costs in respect of the Primary Capital Programme and Building Schools for the Future</p> <p>A report was submitted and outlined by Julie Taylor.</p> <p>The Chairman asked what the normal bond rate would be. In reply, Mr. Mortiboys indicated that the Treasury Manager was working on this at the moment but he expected it to be significantly lower than 2.5% referred to in the report in view of the current financial climate.</p> <p>The Chairman referred to the fact that three letters had been received from Moorcroft Wood Primary, St. Annes Catholic Primary and St. James Primary Schools asking that there be no top slicing at all.</p> <p>Elaine Stringer referred to the estimated BSF/PCP start up costs detailed in Paragraph 2 of the report and indicated that, at previous meetings, this was an unknown factor. She asked what period this was</p>	

	<p>over and expressed the need for a time limit. The Chairman replied that whatever amount agreed today would be the limit and anything additional would need to come back to the Forum.</p> <p>Mrs. Stringer asked that this be done 12 months before the Schools allocated was needed, so that this would give schools sufficient time to plan.</p> <p>Avril Walton explained that, over the last 20 months, discussions had been punctuated around the need for contributions from schools but that actual amounts were not known at that time. It was only in December, 2008 that the Forum was advised of a figure. She expressed a willingness to report back to the next meeting if the Forum agreed to either 1 or 2 years funding at today's meeting.</p> <p>Mr. Flynn expressed the view that Section 2 of the report was fine and that he supported a 2 year agreement. He also felt that it would be a good idea for possibly a Head Teacher to be represented on the Group.</p> <p>Mr. Hodgkinson felt that this should be a Schools Forum representative, not necessarily a Head Teacher.</p> <p>The Chairman referred to the timescale for funding and indicated that there had been a meeting with Primary Heads where they had expressed their concern that they did not know enough about what was happening with the programme and could not, therefore, commit to 2 years.</p> <p>Mr. Martin Atkins, who was attending the meeting as substitute for Mrs. Maher, indicated that he had written the letter on behalf of St. James Primary and pointed out that a lot of schools were in a very tight budgetary situation and that he could not support schools in anything that compromised this.</p> <p>Mr. Hodgkinson asked what the impact of a 2 year deal would be on schools. In reply, Avril indicated that neither the Council nor the Government knew. The larger costs were front ended and, once set up, the maintenance costs would be significantly reduced.</p>	
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	<p>Mr. Flynn asked what the implications would be if the Forum agreed to funding for 12 months only. Mr. Mortiboys replied that there would be massive implications and it would cause significant issues and would cause problems if entering into contractual commitments.</p> <p>Heather Lomas asked if a one year deal was agreed, would this make BSF more expensive in year 2? In reply, Julie Taylor pointed out that this was a national process. There had been articles about the affordability of BSF and the point had been made that if Authorities did not take up the opportunity, it might not recur again. It was not about buildings, it was about transforming education. All schools would benefit from ICT. It was about the way the whole of education services was provided.</p> <p>At this stage, it was moved and duly seconded:-</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">That funding be agreed for a one year period only.</p> <p>On being put to the vote, the Motion was declared lost, 2 Members voting in favour and 14 against.</p> <p>It was subsequently moved and duly seconded:-</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">That Option 2 be adopted as the preferred, new ISB formula factor to be used to provide the required BSF/PCP contributions for 2009-10.</p> <p>On being put to the vote, the Motion was declared carried, 13 Members voting in favour and 2 against.</p> <p>There followed a short period of discussion, during which, a report for submission to Primary Forum was requested on what money is to be released to schools before the money is released next year.</p> <p>The need for the Forum and Head Teachers to have a mechanism to involve them in discussions on future issues was also identified.</p> <p>The remaining recommendations in the report were then put to the vote and declared carried unanimously.</p>	<p>Avril Walton to action</p> <p>Julie Taylor to action</p>
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	<p>Resolved</p> <p>(a) That approval be given to a contribution of £1.6m to the BSF/PCP set up costs based on the following approximate contributions:-</p> <table data-bbox="427 409 1054 779"> <thead> <tr> <th></th><th>2009-10 £</th><th>2010-11 £</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>DFC</td><td>358,000</td><td>381,000</td></tr> <tr> <td>Extended Schools Grant</td><td>262,000</td><td>200,000</td></tr> <tr> <td>ISB</td><td>980,000</td><td>1,019,000</td></tr> <tr> <td>Total</td><td>1,600,000</td><td>1,600,000</td></tr> </tbody> </table> <p>(b) That approval be given to the variation to the Minimum Funding Guarantee for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 financial years and that formal ratification of the DCSF to this proposal be sought;</p> <p>(c) That Option 2 be adopted as the preferred, new ISB formula factor to be used to provide the required BSF/PCP contributions for 2009-10. However, if DCSF insist on the per pupil methodology, then this will be used as the alternative. Option 2 detailed in the report is namely the calculation of indicative contributions using the ISB contribution as a proportion of the total ISB and the allocation of this to individual schools based on their total budget share;</p> <p>(d) That approval, in principle, be given to the 2010-11 BSF/PCP contribution on the understanding that the ISB element of the contribution may reduce, dependent on the uptake of the Bond Scheme and the recovery of surplus balances at the end of the 2009-10 financial year.</p>		2009-10 £	2010-11 £	DFC	358,000	381,000	Extended Schools Grant	262,000	200,000	ISB	980,000	1,019,000	Total	1,600,000	1,600,000	<p>Dawn Morris to action</p>
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<p>8. 3.3.09</p>	<p>Dates and venues for future meetings</p> <p>A report was submitted.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>(a) That, subject to availability of the venues identified, the timetable for meetings of the Forum be agreed for the year as follows, the meetings to be held at the times and venues stated:-</p> <p>Tuesday, 23rd June, 2009 (Summer) at Blakenall Village Centre, Thames Road, Blakenall, Walsall</p> <p>Tuesday, 6th October, 2009 (Autumn) at Blakenall Village Centre, Thames Road, Blakenall, Walsall</p> <p>Tuesday, 8th December, 2009 (Autumn) at Room TR1 at Beechdale Lifelong Learning Centre, Stephenson Square, Beechdale</p> <p>Tuesday, 19th January, 2010 (Spring) at Room TR1 at Beechdale Lifelong Learning Centre, Stephenson Square, Beechdale</p> <p>Tuesday, 2nd March, 2010 (Spring) at Blakenall Village Centre, Thames Road, Blakenall, Walsall</p> <p>(b) That in the event of additional meetings proving necessary, provisional dates be agreed as follows:-</p> <p>Tuesday, 15th September, 2009 at Room TR1 at Beechdale Lifelong Learning Centre, Stephenson Square, Beechdale</p> <p>Tuesday, 10th November, 2009 at Blakenall Village Centre, Thames Road, Blakenall, Walsall</p> <p>(c) That all meetings commence at 4.00 p.m.</p>	<p>Clerk to action</p>
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<p>9. 3.3.09</p>	<p>Forward Plan</p> <p>A copy of the Forward Plan was submitted.</p> <p>It was AGREED that the Plan be noted.</p>	
<p>10. 3.3.09</p>	<p>Correspondence</p> <p>Correspondence in relation to Item 7 on the agenda had been received and noted during consideration of that item.</p>	

The meeting terminated at 6.05 p.m.