

Schools Forum

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday, 15th June, 2010 at 4.00 p.m. at Blakenall Village Centre, Thames Road, Blakenall, Walsall

Present:-

- Mr. J. Baker (Chairman)
- Mr. S. Flynn (Vice-Chairman)
- Mr. M. Atkins
- Mr. G. Crowther
- Mr. J.P. Clarke
- Ms. H. Lomas
- Ms. M. Cryan
- Mr. A. Davies
- Mr. F. Hodgkinson
- Mr. D. Clough
- Mr. A. Basi

In Attendance:-

- Mr. D. Mortiboys (Walsall MBC)
- Ms. A. Walton (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)
- Ms. S. Wedgwood (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)
- Ms. J. Taylor (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)
- Ms. D. Morris (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)

		Action
1. 15.6.10	Apologies Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Mr. A.F. Cheminais, Mr. D. Brownsword, Dame M. Brennan and Mr. A. Bowater.	
2. 15.6.10	Minutes -2nd March, 2010	The minutes of the meeting held on 2 nd March, 2010 be approved and signed as a correct record
3. 15.6.10	Matters arising from the minutes Single status and equal pay Ms. Walton reported that the single status implications for Walsall schools might not be in the current financial year, schools should be provided	

	<p>with more information as it becomes available. With regard to equal pay for community and voluntary controlled schools, the Council was challenging a number of equal pay claims, some of which had been disregarded by the Court. Julie Black was working on this and it was felt that there could be a knock-on effect for other sectors. Ms. Black was unable to attend the meeting today but did not have any clear detailed timescale to work towards.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>That the information be received.</p> <p>Harnessing Technology Grant</p> <p>With regard to the recent closure of Becta, the Chairman reported that the external advice and guidance would no longer be available. It was understood that the Department for Education could be dealing with some aspects of the work.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>That the information be noted.</p> <p>Early years single funding formula - pilot authority status</p> <p>Julie Taylor informed the Forum that the census data from May had not yet been received and, therefore, the adjustments were not known. An e-mail had been received from the Department for Education indicating that finance for the extension to early years free entitlement to 15 hours was safe for the current financial year and would go forward from September, 2010.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>That the information be noted.</p> <p>Financial arrangements to support the transfer of Sneyd pupils during the closure period</p> <p>Julie Taylor reported that the situation was being managed and would be working through to July, 2011 to contain the costs within the budget that the school was likely to be allocated. There would be no charge on the DSG but the situation could</p>	
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	<p>change. Consideration was being given to ways of managing the situation during the final academic year when small numbers of pupils would be left in the school.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>That the report be noted.</p> <p>Charity of the School Holiday Camp Fund of Walsall (Bryntysilio)</p> <p>Mr. Atkins referred to the process for closing Bryntysilio but under the terms of the lease, this would not be quite as straight forward as reported in the press.</p> <p>Mr. Clarke referred to an e-mail he had received from the Head of the Centre requesting Head Teachers to lobby the Council as the Centre was fully booked to July, 2011 and possibilities of setting up an independent trust were being explored.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>That the information be noted.</p> <p>Retiring Member</p> <p>The Chairman referred to the number of vacancies that were currently occurring on the Forum that needed to be addressed. A number of suggestions were made to increase the membership and it was suggested that this matter be included on the agenda for the next secondary heads meeting as no response had been received for nominations earlier in the year. The outcome of the ballot for Primary Governors was awaited.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>That the information be noted.</p>	
<p>4. 15.6.10</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. 15.6.10</p>	<p>Harnessing Technology Grant</p> <p>A report was submitted.</p> <p>Mr. Read informed the Forum that all schools were charged a fixed rate per phase but the actual cost per school could vary considerably with the largest variants in nurseries. It was unclear whether there would be any further harnessing technology grant after the current year and a mechanism would need to be addressed.</p> <p>The aim had been to help schools to work towards Becta self review framework but Becta had now been abolished and the future was unclear.</p> <p>The charges from schools contributed towards the running costs of the system but did not meet them in full; more information was necessary with regard to the future of harnessing technology funding.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>(1) That Schools Forum agree to the project funding with the principle to maximise capital spending where possible and that:-</p> <p>(a) any unspent funding would be returned to schools and distributed as per the previously agreed formulas for 2010/11;</p> <p>(b) should the allocated project funding be insufficient, priorities be agreed as to whether elements were removed such as the back-up link for secondary schools or that this be funded through revenue budgets or a “cluster” arrangement for adjoining schools where possible, subject to all schools receiving the same level of service;</p> <p>(2) That funding be retained in a separate heading and ring fenced until the future of the work carried out by Becta could be evaluated.</p> <p>Resolved further</p> <p>That this item be included on the Forward Plan.</p>	
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<p>6. 15.6.10</p>	<p>Consultation on the Future Distribution of School Funding</p> <p>A report was submitted.</p> <p>Julie Taylor enlarged on the contents of the report and informed the Forum that the local pupil premium would include £2.5 billion of new money coming from the abolition of Quangos as well as child tax credit and child trust funds. The model would work on an annual basis and would follow the children. This would need to be built into the school budget work over the next three years. The DSG could fund some of the cost of home educated pupils but this would be subject to the new Government's proposals. A response to the consultation had been circulated with the report.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>That the Forum note the early direction of the funding review and that, as there was now a new Government, the policies and principles underpinning the review could be subject to change.</p>	
<p>7. 15.6.10</p>	<p>Review of the Special School Funding Formula</p> <p>A report was submitted.</p> <p>Ms. Lomas referred to problems relating to appropriate banding of pupils as they progressed through the schools and the support they required.</p> <p>Ms. Walton confirmed that there had been a real drive to keep children within their communities and those going out of Borough for care would have such varying individual extreme needs that could only be met by a specialist provider or social health education tripartite system coming together; the numbers of children referred to out of Borough placements was reducing as it was important to keep them at home.</p> <p>In view of the change of Government, Mr. Flynn questioned whether officers should be looking at the broader issues of distribution of funding across all schools, together with any possible savings and the</p>	

	<p>implications thereof. He referred to the possible cessation of harnessing technology funding which would result in increases in school funding with implications arising therefrom.</p> <p>Ms. Walton confirmed that action was already taking place on this but details were still awaited. Ms. Walton confirmed that grants coming into Walsall would include an allocation for Academy children; the Academies recently set up took approximately 3% of central funding whereas grant maintained schools had taken higher percentages from DSG in addition to their allocation of some 3/4% of their budget which related to services they provided themselves.</p> <p>Ms. Taylor stated that if Academy numbers increased, their funding could revert to the original Academy system with an element of SEN and other requirements that would take money away from other schools. The Local Authority had a statutory duty to ensure that pupils received their needs; work would be taking place from September on a funding mechanism.</p> <p>With regard to surplus places costs, the closure of Sneyd would address this problem resulting in less than a 10% surplus and, therefore, a saving. There should be no reduction in DSG or Sure Start grant for this financial year but there were no guarantees beyond that.</p> <p>Ms. Taylor confirmed that work would commence in the Autumn term on funding around Academies and the number of schools gaining Academy status before this impacted on services results. There could be a potential for a major formula change and she suggested that a Sub-Group look at this and refer it back to the Forum. It was suggested that a meeting take place in February to consider this.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>(1) That the contents of the report be noted and work take place on this over the next three years;</p>	
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	<p>(2) That an item be included on the Forward Plan looking at future financial implications following a change in Government and looking forward.</p>	
<p>8. 15.6.10</p>	<p>Implementation of the new contract management governance of the Serco Education Contract</p> <p>A report was submitted.</p> <p>Mr. Mortiboys informed the Forum that the membership of the various bodies was as follows:-</p> <p>Education Contract Executive Board - Director of Children's Services, Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Managing Director, Children's Services - Serco and Elaine Simpson, Managing Director - Serco Education and Children's Services</p> <p>Children and Young People's Scrutiny Performance Panel - As appointed by Council on 26th May, 2010</p> <p>Children's Services Leadership Team - Director of Children's Services, Assistant Director - Universal Services, Walsall Council, Assistant Managing Director - Management and Development (Ms. Walton)</p> <p>Education Contract Management Board - Mr. Hodgkinson and Ms. Lomas were representatives on this body which considered contract variations and KPI's</p> <p>Education Stakeholder Group - not yet implemented</p> <p>Contract Theme Leader meetings - both sides of the contract met with theme leads appropriately</p> <p>Service review meeting - Julie Taylor from Walsall Children's Services - Serco attends</p> <p>Primary, Specials and Secondary Schools Forums - Contract Manager</p>	

	<p>Ms. Lomas requested information on the Transforming Learning Group to consider whether there were any gaps.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>That the paper be received and information on the Group be submitted to the next meeting.</p>	
<p>9(a) 15.6.10</p>	<p>Correspondence from St. Thomas More Catholic School Re: Pupil Referral Unit Provision</p> <p>A copy of correspondence from St. Thomas More Catholic School, together with a report on Short Stay School (Pupil Referral Unit) Provision was submitted.</p> <p>Mr. Flynn informed the Forum that this matter had been raised in the Secondary Heads Groups and there was a perception that the change in provision would result in a saving which should be used to support the “inclusion” agenda. In view of the information contained in the report, Mr. Flynn asked whether there were any other savings in relation to buildings, transport costs and staffing.</p> <p>Ms. Walton confirmed that accommodation costs would sit with the Council and not this budget.</p> <p>Ms. Taylor confirmed that it had been proposed that three satellite centres be set up within the Authority to supplement the PRU. There were concerns that the proposals might not include outreach centres as schools would not back those. More information regarding this matter would be required.</p> <p>Ms. Lomas informed the Forum that the Ruiz Centre had a high staff/pupil ratio to assist in catering for the young people’s psychological needs and, therefore, staffing at the new centres should be equally as high. On that basis, there could be three members of staff for each centre.</p> <p>Mr. Flynn requested that Mr. Barnes attend a secondary heads meeting to report on the previous running costs and new running costs in respect of the facility.</p>	

	<p>Mr. Crowther stated that the information provided related to better outcomes for vulnerable young people, however, the lack of clarity in the report raises doubt that the outcomes for the students in future years would improve .</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>(1) That the correspondence from the St. Thomas More Catholic School and report be received;</p> <p>(2) That more detailed information and figures be submitted to the Secondary Heads Forum and, if necessary, Schools Forum.</p>	
<p>10. 15.6.10</p>	<p>Transforming Learning in Walsall - Financial Update</p> <p>A report was submitted.</p> <p>Mr. Mortiboys outlined the content of the report and submitted a BSF Update.</p> <p>Mr. Mortiboys confirmed that in the event of spending ceasing, the costs would be minimal.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>That the report and update be noted.</p>	
<p>11. 15.6.10</p>	<p>Revised Guidance on the Balance Control Mechanism and indicative Balances Outturn Position as at 2010</p> <p>A report was submitted.</p> <p>Julie Taylor outlined the contents of the report and indicated that Primary Schools should be working towards 4/5% and Secondary Schools towards 2/3% of retained balances. Exceptions to the balance control mechanism need to be investigated and schools should ensure that they could deliver on major development without retaining excessive balances. The Balance Control Mechanism Group was expected to meet in the near future to look at this and indicative school balances as at 31st March, 2010 were key as balances were down over £3½</p>	

	<p>million this year which was due in part to the changes to year end procedures. Properly assigned sums had reduced significantly this year and balances were now reasonable.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>(1) That the Forum note the contents of the report and, as there was a new Government, the principles underpinning the guidance could be subject to change;</p> <p>(2) That the Forum note that as at 31st March, 2010, for the second successive year, there had been a significant reduction in the total level of school balances.</p>	
<p>12. 15.6.10</p>	<p>Forward Plan</p> <p>The Forward Plan was submitted.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>That the Forward Plan be noted and additional items be included relating to:-</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Future financial implications resulting from new Government - looking forward</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Review of the Special Schools funding formula</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Harnessing technology grant</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Revised Constitution</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Transforming Learning Group (Members)</p>	
<p>13. 15.6.10</p>	<p>Correspondence</p> <p>The Chairman referred to the letter from Queen Mary's High School requesting financial support for coach transport for students to and from the sports ground as the school did not qualify for split site funding.</p>	

	<p>The Chairman confirmed that the school budget included funding for curriculum transport and that this situation was not dissimilar to many primary schools transporting children to swimming pools. If the request was agreed, it could set a precedent.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>(1) That Schools Forum decline the request from Queen Mary's High School for additional funding for transporting students to and from the school sports ground;</p> <p>(2) The Forum was informed that, during the 2009/10 funding round, the issue of providing harnessing technology grant for Academies arose and it was decided that Academies be not funded. Sheffield Academy was unhappy with this and had contacted the Department for Children, Schools and Families in February/March who stated that they would come back with more guidance but this had not yet been received. No additional ICT funding was given at that time and in 2010/11, they had received harnessing technology funding and would be drawing down funding now and the question arose whether funding was adequate. The cost would be in excess of £36,000 if funding was allocated to Grace and Walsall Academies; the guidance on this had been followed.</p> <p>The Chairman reported that the DCSF had suggested that the allocation methodology would be for each Local Authority to determine but Academies were in the scope of the grant. Sheffield Academy had received funding for 2010/11 and were requesting last years allocation.</p> <p>Resolved</p> <p>That the request for retrospective funding be declined as the Forum's decision had been made in good faith but the process in place had created this problem.</p>	
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14. 15.6.10	Retirement of Member The Chairman informed the Forum that this would be the last meeting attended by Martin Atkins and the Forum placed on record its thanks to Mr. Atkins for his good work.	
15. 15.6.10	Date and time of next meeting It was NOTED that the next meeting of Schools Forum would be held on Tuesday, 28 th September, 2010 at 4.00 p.m. at Blakenall Village Centre, Thames Road, Blakenall, Walsall.	

The meeting terminated at 5.35 p.m.