

Schools Forum

**Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday, 16th September, 2008 at 6.00 p.m.
at the Beechdale Lifelong Learning Centre, Stephenson Square, Beechdale,
Walsall**

Present: Mr. N. Chomyk (Chairman)
Miss S.M. Bradford (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. M. Barton
Mr. J.P. Clarke
Mr. G. Crowther
Mr. G. Deakin
Mrs. K. Delaney
Mr. S. Flynn
Mr. F. Hodgkinson
Mrs. M. Letts
Ms. H. Lomas
Mrs. E. Maher
Mrs. E. Stringer
Mr. M. Sweeney

In Attendance: Ms. D. Morris (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)
Ms. A. Walton (Walsall Children's Services - Serco)

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1. 16.9.08	<p>Apologies</p> <p>Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Mr. A. Bowater (Observer), Mr. J. Baker, Mr. A. Cheminais, Mr. E. Gee, and Mr. S. Haywood.</p> <p>The Forum was advised that Mr. Haywood had actually resigned from the Forum due to other commitments. The Clerk had commenced the process to find a replacement for Mr. Haywood.</p> <p>The Forum was also advised that Mr. P. Heath had resigned from the Forum and had been replaced by Mr. Simon Griffiths.</p>	
2. 16.9.08	<p>Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)</p> <p>There were no items on the agenda which the Forum felt should be dealt with in private session.</p>	

<p>3 16.9.08</p>	<p>Review of Indicative Budget 2009/2010</p> <p>A report was circulated and outlined by Dawn Morris and Avril Walton.</p> <p>Avril explained that the Authority had been notified in November, 2007 of its indicative DSG (Direct Support Grant) funding for the three funding periods April, 2008 to March, 2011. The allocations use a guaranteed funding unit per pupil (GFU) for each year with the DCSF commitment that the value of the GFU per pupil would remain unchanged from indicative to final allocations. The indicative figures had been largely based on DCSF projections of Walsall 's pupil population for the next three years. When final DSG settlement figures for 2008-09 were received, Walsall's allocation was lower than our estimate, by a reduction of £450k.</p> <p>An investigation had revealed that the validate numbers from the school and early years census was lower than the census data used for the estimate of DSG, the impact of this would have a cumulative effect on the projected numbers used for indicative DSG allocations for 2009 and 2010.</p> <p>Dawn referred to Annex 1 which detailed the impact of reduced numbers on the final 2008 and potential settlement figures. She also referred to Annex 2 which demonstrated the potential impact against published budgets across the multi-year period. She informed the Forum that a meeting had been held with the Council Finance Team where various options and strategies were discussed. The three options were listed in the report, together with officer's views as to their viability.</p> <p>In reply to questions as to how this had occurred, Dawn explained that there had been an over-estimation in respect of figures in the secondary sector. With regard to the primary sector, six schools appear to have completed the PLASC census incorrectly. These errors combined to create a loss over estimate used of £449k in 2008/09.</p> <p>Sean Flynn asked whether there was any redress for the situation. The Forum was advised that amny Authorities kept a central contingency fund in excess</p>	

	<p>of £1m, which they would be able to call on in circumstances such as these. Walsall, however, had chosen the route of maximum delegation to school level, particularly in light of the need to allocate significant funding to the deprivation target.</p> <p>With regard to rectifying the situation, Dawn explained that the Indicative DSG was based on what local estimates of pupil numbers. Should Option 3 be adopted, re-determined Indicative allocations would use the September 2008 school census , the most up to date data available, as the base.</p> <p>Steps had been put in place at Head of Service level to ensure no similar mistakes would be made in the future.</p> <p>Gary Crowther asked, in terms of the Guaranteed Funding Unit, what the DCSF response had been. Dawn explained that the Authority funded the children as recorded and no approach had been made to the DCSF other than to advise them of the differences.</p> <p>It was suggested that the DCSF be informed of the situation and be asked for their assistance in rectifying the matter. Dawn indicated that this could be done but wasn't hopeful of a positive outcome. The Authority was hopeful of being able to cover the shortfall in 2008. If not, it would be carried forward.</p> <p>It was also suggested that, in view of the mistakes made by schools on their PLASC returns, all schools should be alerted to the need to check their figures before they are given to the Authority, and also to the amount of funding lost on this occasion due to the errors made in the returns.</p> <p>Sue Bradford asked if anyone checked if all pupils turned up for school that were expected and, what happened to those who did not turn up?</p> <p>In reply, Avril confirmed that as part of child protection requirements, all children who were due to attend school that didn't were tracked down. There was a 100% success rate on this issue.</p> <p>It was subsequently AGREED unanimously:-</p>	
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	<p>(a) That officers undertake 2009/10 and 2010/11 indicative budget process again, reducing available resources by £1.86m, apportioned, as far as possible, equally across the two years. Schools to be provided with a revised indicative budget share, thus enabling the impact to be built in to their spending plans;</p> <p>(b) That schools be alerted to the need to check the figures they give on their PLASC returns before submission to the Authority and they be advised of the implications for funding if incorrect information is given;</p> <p>(c) That, notwithstanding (a) and (b) above, officers be requested to approach the DCSF, with a letter of support from David Brown, Director of Children's Services, to ascertain whether any assistance can be given to the Authority in rectifying this issue.</p>	
<p>4. 16.9.08</p>	<p>Date, time and venue for next meeting</p> <p>It was NOTED that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday, 7th October, 2008 at Blakenall Village Centre at 6.00 p.m.</p>	

The meeting terminated at 7.11 p.m.