

## **Schools Forum**

**Tuesday 13 June 2006 at 4.00 pm**

**in the large hall at the Education Development Centre, Pelsall Lane, Rushall, Walsall**

### **Present**

Mr. A.F. Cheminais (Chair)  
Mr. R.C. Yeomans  
Mr. J. Baker  
Mr. M. Lee  
Mr. A. Davies  
Rev. C. Thomas  
Mr. E. Gee  
Mr. S. Holtham  
Mr. G. Crowther  
Miss S.M. Bradford  
Mr. J.P. Clarke  
Mr. M. Barton  
Mr. M.J. Chomyk  
Mr. P. Nickless  
Ms. B. Leese

### **In attendance**

Mr. G. McQueen (Education Walsall)  
Ms. D. Morris (Education Walsall)

#### **1. Apologies**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Mrs. Perrins, Mr. Bowater (Walsall Academy) and Mr. S. Haywood.

#### **2. Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 7 and 28 March 2006 were submitted:-

(see annexed)

#### **Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting of held on 7 and 28 March 2006, be approved as correct records and signed.

3. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

The forum was advised that there were no items for consideration in the private session.

4. **Constitution**

The updated constitution for the Schools Forum was submitted:

(see annexed)

The forum was advised that the updated constitution reflected the amendments referred to at the meeting on 7 March 2006 in relation to urgent action and schools members. The forum was requested to formally approve the constitution as set out and consider whether it wished to introduce a “forward plan”.

Reverend Thomas informed the forum that he would be retiring with effect from 31 October 2006 and this would need to be taken into account when considering the election of governor representatives.

Members were of the view that items for discussion annually could be included in forward plan and this could prove useful to trigger early discussion on certain issues, for example, the formula in the spring term and headroom in the autumn and spring terms and the principles that need to be considered prior to the final details.

**Resolved**

- (1) That the constitution be approved;
- (2) That the forum agree to the introduction of a forward plan.

5. **Practical learning**

A report was submitted:

(see annexed)

**Resolved**

That the methodology for distribution of practical learning funds in 2006/2007 be adopted as described in the appendix attached to the report.

## 6. **Scheme of local management (consultation)**

A report was submitted:

(see annexed)

Mr. McQueen outlined the contents of the report and confirmed that with regard to 2(a) the forecast would be required for three years, two years and one year to be consistent with the financial review.

With regard to paragraph 2(b), it was confirmed that the notice of concern and advice for action necessary to improve would be put in place prior to delegations being withdrawn.

The financial management standard set out in paragraph 2(c) would become a requirement by law for secondary schools from 31 March 2007 as it would become a category for inspection by Ofsted and schools would be measured on this.

Paragraph 2(d) related to the level of funds that could be “clawed” back by the LEA, it had been suggested that the clawback be set at 8% for primary schools and 5% for secondary schools.

Members went through the consultation document and a full debate ensued:

The forum discussed in detail the issues that could arise should paragraphs (c) and (d) be introduced. The views of the primary forum had also been taken on board.

### **Resolved**

That the view of the Forum regarding the proposed changes to the scheme of local management of schools be recorded as follows:

- (1) That local authorities be given the ability to request the financial forecast from schools covering each year of the new multi-year budget period, subject to the use of “notional” figures and not “actual” figures.
- (2) That local authorities be given to the ability to issue a “notice of concern” to a governing body where it feels it is appropriate to do so to safeguard the financial position of the school in the case of both deficit and surplus budgets.
- (3) That the proposal to give local authorities the ability to make the achievement of the Financial Management Standard in Schools compulsory for certain phases and types of schools and declare external assessment of the standard compulsory, be not supported.
- (4) That the proposal to require local authorities to include a balance control mechanism in their scheme be not supported.

**7. School meals**

Ms. Morris informed the forum that discussions took place last autumn with the Direct Services Organisation. A meeting with both parties would be held in July to progress the issue further and proposals should be submitted to the autumn term forum meeting to progress a more appropriate method of trading with schools in regard to the purchase of a free school meals service.

**Resolved**

That the update on school meals be received.

**8. Governor representation**

A report was submitted:

(see annexed)

The forum was advised that every governor would be circulated with information relating to the nominees for places on the forum, together with a ballot paper which should be returned to Constitutional Services who would arrange for the opening and counting of the votes. The forum was informed that the Director of Children's Services and/or the portfolio holder would be present at the count and it was hoped that a number of sixth formers would be involved in the process as part of their democracy studies.

**Resolved**

That the report be received and that officers write to the governors who have expressed an interest advising them that their nominations would be the subject of a vote.

**9. Deprivation 2007/2007**

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Members were advised that consideration should be given on the way that deprivation could be factored into the formula in the future.

The government's advice that retracing deprivation should take a more central aspect in the budget setting process could lead to turbulence in the way schools in the Borough were funded. The figure for 2006/2007 was still being worked on and a statement would be circulated to schools at the end of June in order to provide them with as much notice as possible.

## **Resolved**

That the report be received and the item be included in the forward plan.

### 10. **Budget 2006/2007**

A report was circulated at the meeting:

(see annexed)

Ms. Morris went through the points raised in the report.

The DfES had not indicated whether the minimum funding guarantee would continue past 2007/2008.

In response to questions, the forum was advised that further SSG grant would be advanced in September and individual schools would be informed in writing of the actual amount for 2006/2007 and indicative amount for 2007/2008.

Mr. Yeomans raised the following issues:

- (1) Threshold funding – can a breakdown of the table showing the age/ pupil breakdown be provided so that head teachers could see how the money was to be put into the budget;
- (2) Minimum funding guarantee– this was protected through capital, [?] what would happen where a school had spent all their capital? Would they have no minimum funding guarantee as schools would not know about this before the governors had spent all the capital;
- (3) Closing schools – what would happen to the surplus budget of a school that closed?
- (4) Primary forum had been asked if they would like to send a representative to the Council meeting when finance was discussed. This would enable the representative to feedback to the primary forum, the question arose as to whether the forum would buy in expertise to carry this out on their behalf.

The forum was informed that with regard to paragraph (3), balances had been earmarked from the closing schools to meet redundancy costs for staff at the school.

With regard to question (4), the forum was informed of the process of submitting the budget to Cabinet and Council.

Mr. Cheminais stated that the portfolio holder should be invited to attend this meeting. It was felt that a professional input would establish whether the forum was operating in line with the other forums and would be able to look at minutes of other schools forums to draw a comparison.

The forum was informed that Phillip Moss from the DfES had agreed to attend the autumn term meeting of the forum.

In response to points raised on extended schools, the forum was advised that extended schools money would be allocated under the standards fund. It was a matter of increasing concern as to how accounts would be audited and reported on as well as claims for VAT as this could be problematic.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That Phillip Moss be invited to attend the autumn meeting of the forum to observe how it worked and to comment on information submitted to the forum, how the forum operated and give information on the work of other schools forums.
- (2) That an item be included on the agenda for the next meeting relating to extended schools funding.

## **11. Meetings**

### **Resolved**

That the next meeting take place on 12 September 2006 at 6.00 p.m. and additional meeting be included on the 14 November 2006 also at 6.00 p.m.

The meeting terminated at 5.35 p.m.