

SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday 7 March 2006 at 6.00 pm

**in the Large Hall at the Education Development Centre, Pelsall Lane, Rushall,
Walsall**

Present

Mr. N. J. Chomyk (Chairman)
Mrs V. Russell
Mr. A. F. Cheminais
Mr. A. Davies
Reverend C. Thomas
Mr. S. Holtham
Mr. G. Crowther
Miss S. M. Bradford
Mr. J. P. Clarke
Mr. M. Barton
Mr. P. Nickless
Mrs R. Poyser
Mrs E. Perrins

In attendance

Mr. G. McQueen (Education Walsall)
Ms. D. Morris (Education Walsall)
Mrs M. Harmitt (Walsall MBC)

Apologies

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Mr. Yeomans, Mr. Baker, Mr. Gee and Mr. Haywood.

Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting held on 7 February 2006 were submitted:-

(see annexed)

It was **AGREED** that the minutes of the meeting of 7 February 2006, be approved as a correct record.

Matters arising from the minutes

Draft Social Deprivation Statement

Thanks were expressed to those members of the sub-group who had worked on producing the draft Social Deprivation Statement.

The draft was circulated to members at the meeting.

It was **AGREED** that members e-mail either their agreement or suggested amendments to Education Walsall so that the final Social Deprivation Statement can be produced to meet 5 May 2006 deadline; a copy of the final statement to be circulated to all members for information.

Practical Learning – Feedback on Consultation with Secondary Heads

A report was circulated at the meeting:-

(see annexed)

The options for distributing resources for Practical Learning, as detailed in the report and considered at the meeting with Secondary Heads were discussed.

Members were advised that Option 3, to devolve the funding to individual schools or groups of schools for them to purchase provision over and above that which they meet from their individual school budget shares was considered to be the preferred option.

It was reported that one meeting of heads had expressed a preference for resources to be distributed to all schools through AWPU, based on pupil numbers. There was concern about the timescale involved if Option 3 were adopted and whether this would mean that AWPU would be sidelined.

It was noted that it would be possible to devolve funding to both individual schools or groups of schools in 2006/07. The methodology for distributing funding could then be reviewed for 2007/08. It was important, however, to reach agreement on the preferred option at the meeting as delegated budgets would be issued to schools week beginning 20 March 2006.

Following further discussion, it was **AGREED**:-

- To devolve funding for Practical Learning as detailed in Option 3 but that devolution be carried out on the basis of eligible pupil numbers;
- That every secondary school in the borough receive an element of devolved funding;
- That the methodology be reviewed in September 2006, to enable a decision to be made on the formula to be used in 2007/08.

Premature Retirement and Redundancy Costs: Situation to be managed in 2006/07

Members were advised that an unprecedented situation had arisen in Walsall due to changes in school organisation. It had previously been agreed to close Three Crowns Special School and Redhouse Primary School but Cabinet had now received reports concerned with the possible closure of Rushall Community School and Beechdale Primary School.

The closure of these schools would have a significant effect on teaching and support staff at the schools with redundancy or, for those aged 58 or over, premature retirement implications. There would be an impact on the Education Budget as, unlike in the case of Three Crowns and Redhouse Schools, there had been no prior Notice of these proposals. Demonstrable savings on the DSG for Three Crowns and Redhouse School were possible as their closure had been included in the budget planning. The budgets for these schools had been calculated for 5/12 of the year; this meant that 7/12 of their budgets was available to net-off the costs of any premature retirements and redundancies.

However, Education Walsall had no way of knowing at the present time whether demonstrable savings or net-off costs could be made in the case of Rushall and Beechdale Schools. School Forum's formal agreement would be needed if DSG were to be used for this purpose, i.e. savings from Three Crowns and Redhouse Primary Schools were used to net-off costs.

In answer to points raised, members were informed that when a school was closed it was declared surplus to requirements for educational purposes and the Council decided the future use of the land. If the land were sold, the sum raised went to the Council but the money could only be spent on capital/building works; it could not be used for revenue items such as premature retirement and redundancy costs.

Members were informed that in the worse case scenario, the Council could be faced with meeting the high redundancy and premature retirement costs of staff of the two schools since it was uncertain how many of them would be re-employed in other schools. Further, if pupils were displaced, it was not possible to make changes to DSG mid-year. Only the previous January head count could be used so other schools in the borough absorbing these pupils would face intense pressures.

In view of this, Education Walsall sought School Forum's agreement to put in place contingency arrangements. This would mean that savings from the closure of Three Crowns and Redhouse Schools could be used, if necessary, to trigger additional funding for other schools absorbing pupils.

It was **AGREED** that savings from the closure of Three Crowns Special School and Redhouse Primary School be used, if necessary, to net-off these costs.

General Update on the Dedicated Schools Grant

Updated reports on spending pressures were circulated at the meeting:-

(see annexed)

It was noted that it would not be necessary to scale down pro-rata those ISB cost pressures identified for 2006/07 at 17 January 2006 meeting as there had been a significant increase over 2005/06 budgets. The situation could be very different, however, in 2007/08.

In previous years, Education Walsall had been able to call on the unallocated reserve within ISB if an error occurred in the formula or in other circumstances. The new regulations, however, precluded Education Walsall from doing this and the whole of ISB had to be allocated to schools. The only contingency funding available to Education Walsall was that held in centrally retained funding. The report set out these items that Education Walsall wished to include on the basis of this. If Schools Forum agreed, this would allow for a formula to be used whereby funding could be triggered to those schools absorbing pupils as a result of closure.

Any monies unspent at the end of the financial year would be rolled forward for spending.

It was **AGREED**:-

- To approve the levels of funding to be held within Schools Specific Contingency for 2006/07 and 2007/08, as detailed in the reports submitted;
- To approve the proposal whereby the pupil specific element of 7/12 funding available from school closures is kept in contingency and paid to schools absorbing pupils as a result of school closures;
- To approve the Central Expenditure Limits and variations, as detailed in the reports submitted.

Schools Forum Constitution

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

It was **AGREED**:-

(1) To approve the draft Schools Forum Constitution subject to the following amendments:-

- **Urgent Action (page 4)**

To replace this paragraph with the following:-

- An Urgency Sub-Committee will be established of five members (quorum 3) comprising:-
 - 2 head teachers;
 - 3 governors
 - Chair (ex-officio)
- To meet to discuss matters of urgency. Urgency correspondence will be circulated to all members and decisions taken by the Sub-Committee will be e-mailed/sent to all members and reported to the next meeting of Schools Forum;
- The urgency sub-committee will comprise the first five applicable members available to attend a meeting when contacted by telephone.

- **Schools Members (page 2)**

To read:-

(Nominated substitutes to **formally take part** in meetings in their absence)

- (2) To approve the process for electing new Governors to fill the three vacancies through a ballot of all Governors;
- (3) To request that a list of current Schools Forum members and their terms of office be made available for the next meeting;
- (4) To request Education Walsall officers to investigate the possibility of appointing an external consultant who can offer independent specialist advice to members as and when required;
- (5) To note that a budget of £10,000 has been allocated for the use of Schools Forum;
- (6) To consider arranging a training session in respect of the new constitutional arrangements;
- (7) To adopt formally the Constitution (as amended) at the next meeting on 13 June 2006.

Timings of Meetings of Schools Forum

Following discussion, it was agreed:-

- That the start times of meetings continue to alternate between 4.00 pm and 6.00 pm
- That in the event of the cancellation of any meeting, the starting time of the next meeting remain as that previously published.

Any Other Business

There was no other business to be considered at the meeting.

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of Schools Forum will be held on Tuesday 13 June 2006, at 4.00 pm in the Small Hall at the Education Development Centre, Pelsall Lane, Rushall.

Termination of Meeting

The meeting terminated at 8.05 pm.

Chairman:.....

Date:.....