

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM** held in Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, SG17 5TQ on Monday, 28 September 2009

Present:

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| Anne Bell | Jim Parker |
| Neil Bramwell | Ian Greenley |
| Shirley-Anne Crosbie | Caroll Leggatt |
| Sue Howley | Bill McCarthy |
| Sharon Ingham | Chris Vesey |
| Ian Mitchell | |

Apologies for Absence: Malcolm Griffiths
Bill Hamilton
Richard Holland
Ray Payne
Jim Smart

Members in Attendance: Cllr Anita Lewis

Officers in Attendance: Matt Bowmer, Dawn Hill, Sandra Hobbs, Nyree Hone, Nick Murley, Mel Peaston, Patrick Shevlin and Roger Willoughby

L/04/15

Minutes of 29 June 2009 and Matters Arising

RESOLVED to approve the Minutes of the meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Schools Forum held on 29 June 2009 as a correct record and to authorise the Chairman to sign them.

Minute No. L/09/6 - A query was raised about the timescales involved in the development of the statement of readiness in preparation for Building Schools for the Future. Members were informed that further advice would be sought from the Assistant Director Community & Cultural Learning.

Minute No. L/04/7 – Members were advised that schools who were due to have a Financial Management Standard in Schools assessment had been reminded of the guidance available to them whilst preparing their evidence.

Central Bedfordshire Council's Executive was considering on 8 December 2009 a policy which would outline how resources within the council would be targeted to improve provision in schools and early years settings and raise achievement especially that of children and young people in vulnerable circumstances. The Schools Forum would receive an update at their meeting on 25 January 2010.

Minute No. L/04/9 – Members would receive an update on the usage of the amount of Dedicated Schools Grant assigned to Practical Learning Options as it had been devolved to the 14-19 Strategic Partnership. The 14-19 Partnership was shared jointly with and hosted by Bedford Borough Council.

Members received an update on the development of the Children and Young People's Plan. The Plan had been adopted at the Local Strategic Partnership Board meeting on 22 September and at the Central Bedfordshire Council meeting on 24 September 2009. Members requested that this information be circulated to Schools in their newsletter with a link to the Plan.

Minute No. L/04/13 - Members were aware that Kevin Green, Head of Business Finance was no longer working for Central Bedfordshire Council and Nyree Hone would be replacing him.

L/04/16

Early Years Update

The Forum received a report which updated Members on the progress made to date on the Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF) and the feedback from the initial consultation with settings and schools. The Government had acknowledged that nursery schools were more expensive to run and they wanted to see an even market place.

From 1 April 2010 Central Bedfordshire Council would be required to implement an EYSFF for all schools and settings making the free early years entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds. An initial consultation exercise was undertaken during June and July and the results from this were attached at Appendix A to the report. The next phase of consultation was due to be carried out in November 2009 with proposed formulas and what each option meant for the individual schools. There would also be four cross sector consultation meetings during November and Members requested that these meeting dates are advertised and made known to all teachers and governors.

Members discussed the advantages and disadvantages for the maintained schools and the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds. Members stated that there were many differences between the two sections such as PVI settings having different building costs. There was concern that some maintained schools would lose funding especially in the first year. Members also discussed the implications for training teachers and the impact this would have on national private schools.

A final proposal will then be considered by the Schools Forum at their meeting on 25 January 2010. Members noted that Children with Special Educational Needs would continue to be funded by the current mechanisms as would free school meals for children in the early years.

RESOLVED that further information be provided to Members at their next meeting as the EYSFF.

L/04/17

Revision to Scheme for Financing Schools and the Fully Funded Bank Account Scheme

The Forum received a report which updated Members on the feedback from schools following the consultation on the proposed revisions to the Scheme for Financing Schools and the Fully Funded Bank Account Scheme. Five responses to the consultation had been received including a request for the Fully Funded financial returns to be the 15th of the month instead of the 10th or 20th of the month.

RESOLVED

- 1) that four of the five main changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools and Fully Funded Bank Account Scheme be approved
- 2) that a compromise on the proposed date for the return of Fully Funded monthly/quarterly returns of the 10th of each month be agreed as the 15th of each month.

L/04/18

Update Surplus Balances

The Forum received a report which updated Members on schools' surplus balances. The Surplus Balance Sub-Group had met on two occasions where 46 out of the 139 Central Bedfordshire Schools balances were presented as being above the agreed thresholds. Letters were sent to these 46 schools outlining 'minded to' recommendation and detailing further requirements that need to be submitted by 30 September 2009. Failure to submit this information would result in the Sub-Group recommending the additional surplus balance to be 'clawed back'. Balances would not be 'clawed back' if schools provided suitable evidence that this funding was for a particular project.

Members were advised that 27 of the 46 schools exceeded the surplus balance, but were below the additional criteria of £10,000 or one percent of the School Budget Share. It was recommended that these schools be allowed to retain the surplus balance. This additional criterion would only apply for 2008/09 with individual cases being considered for 2009/10.

The Sub-Group was scheduled to meet on 1 October 2009 to consider any additional evidence received from the 15 Schools with 'minded to' recommendations. These recommendations would then be brought back to the next Schools Forum meeting.

Members were informed that the monies 'clawed back' would be used on something that would be a benefit to most schools e.g. ICT infrastructure. It was suggested that these monies be transferred to support the Early Years Single Funding Formula pot.

Members felt that schools needed extra financial training to enable them to handle their finances appropriately.

Members considered each recommendation individually.

RESOLVED

- 1) that the 27 schools exceeding the surplus balance, but below the additional criteria of £10,000 or one percent of the School Budget Share be allowed to retain the surplus balance, be approved
- 2) that the 4 schools where the Sub-Group accepted the information supplied in support of the Schools excess balance, be approved
- 3) the remaining 15 schools with 'minded to' claw back recommendation be subject to an appeals meeting on 1 October 2009 and then considered by the Schools Forum at their next meeting.

L/04/19

Update from the Technical Funding Sub-Group

The Forum received an update on the initial meeting of the Technical Funding Sub-Group. The first meeting was held on 13 July 2009 and a second meeting was held prior to the Schools Forum meeting. The Sub-Group considered three initial areas:

- deprivation;
- ghost funding; and
- armed forces pupils.

The Sub-Group was carrying out further research and would report back to the Schools Forum at their meeting on 25 January 2010 with proposed changes for implementation in April 2010.

NOTED the progress report.

L/04/20

Schools Specific Contingency Budget

The Forum received a report that updated Members on the use of the Schools Specific Contingency Budget. Officers had been asked to remove the following two areas that had received funding from the Budget in the past:

- Hearing Impaired – Parkfields (£1,672), Toddington St George (£1,761) and Language Provision – Lark Rise (£1,720); and
- Contribution to award at Vandyke Upper School of £400.

Officers explained that this funding had been historical and it was unclear how the arrangement had come about. Members were advised that the schools mentioned above had not as yet been notified that this funding was likely to cease. Members requested that the schools be contacted to confirm that they would not be effected with the loss of this funding.

Members would then make an informed decision to remove these areas from the Schools Specific Contingency Budget at a future meeting.

Members noted that the Dedicated Schools Grant shortfall was £4,000 with the final settlement less than budgeted for one pupil.

NOTED the position statement as at period 4 July 2009.

RESOLVED

- 1) that Officers contact Parkfields Middle School, Toddington St Georges Lower School, Lark Rise Lower School and Vandyke Upper School to confirm that they would not be effected with the loss of the funding from the Schools Specific Contingency Budget
- 2) to receive a report back to a future meeting to enable the approval that additional funding of the responsibility points for Headteachers managing additional units and contributions to awards are not to be funded from Schools Contingency.

L/04/21

Schools Forum Budget

The Forum received a report which updated Members on the use of the Schools Forum Budget. At the Schools Forum meeting on 2 March 2009 it was agreed that Central Bedfordshire becomes a member of the F40 Group, representing the lowest funded Local Authorities, at a cost of £2,000. Officers informed Members that Central Bedfordshire had joined the Group, but no representatives had attended the meetings. Members agreed that Officers attend the F40 Group's next meeting and feedback to the Schools Forum what is discussed and who the best representative would be to send to the F40 Group meetings.

Members requested that travel expense forms be circulated to them.

RESOLVED

- 1) that Officers attend the next F40 Group meeting and feedback to the Schools Forum what is discussed and who the best representative would be to attend these meetings
- 2) to circulate travel expense forms to Members of the Schools Forum.

L/04/22

Position Statement on Central Bedfordshire Council FMSiS Assessments & Benchmarking Data

The Forum received a report that updated Members on the current position with regards to schools that had passed the Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS) and the action taken since the last meeting on 29 June 2009.

Members noted that Northfields Technology College was now an Academy and no longer subject to FMSiS compliance, so the number of schools had been reduced from 139 to 138.

Since the last meeting 14 assessments had been fully completed and a further 12 were substantially complete. This meant that only 21 'in progress' assessments had still to be completed and these could now be progressed with the start of the new school term. Further FMSiS training had been arranged for schools in October; 2 of these sessions were nearly full with a final session being held in the evening, but only 3 schools had signed up for this and if uptake was not increased then this session may have to be cancelled. The guidelines had been updated and could be found on the Central Bedfordshire Council Schools Finance website.

Members were advised that there was no recognised national forum at which local authorities discussed and compare their approach to FMSiS. Although Officers had attended a Home Counties Chief Internal Auditor Group meeting which had been dedicated to discuss the various aspects of FMSiS with authorities adopting diverse approaches to completing the schedule of schools to be assessed.

Members were informed that Officers were looking at the whole approach to auditing schools and a report was being made to the Directors at Central Bedfordshire Council. The report would be looking at what would be cost effective and the value of the audit for the Council and the schools. Officers would then report to the Schools Forum seeking their ideas.

NOTED the position statement and the actions since the last Schools Forum meeting on 29 June 2009.

L/04/23

Use of Harnessing Technology Funding to Support Transition to Web Based MIS in Schools

Members received a report on the use of Harnessing Technology funding to support transition to web management information system as it was a national requirement for schools to integrate their management information systems (MIS) with the learning platform and to provide online reporting to parents. After consultation it was clear that the lower/nursery phase schools were far more in a ready state of acceptance of the need to transfer to a web MIS than the Middle/Upper phases. It was estimated that an approximate cost of implementing a web MIS for Lower and Nursery schools would be in the region of £155,000. This amount fell within the savings accrued since April 2009 through negotiation with suppliers for aggregated purchasing.

Members were advised that no common system had been achieved in meeting special school requirements and funding for this system, when it was available, would need to be included in the funding as a pressure.

Members raised concern that they had invested in the Schools Information Management System (SIMS) over recent years and queried whether this would link into the MIS system. Members were advised that this was being looked into. Members also raised that better broadband service was needed and they were advised that improvements to the ICT infrastructure were being made. Members also requested that they be provided with the capital costs of running MIS.

RESOLVED to defer the item until the next Schools Forum meeting on 19 October 2009 as a decision could not be made until further information had been provided.

L/04/24 **Date of Next Meeting**

Members were advised that an additional meeting had been arranged for the 19 October 2009 at 6.00 pm to consider the following items:

- Early Years Single Funding Formula
- Surplus Balances
- Use of Harnessing Technology Funding to Support Transition to Web Based MIS in Schools.

L/04/25 **Close**

The Chairman advised Members that he was looking at best practice of Schools Forums with the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children, Families and Learning. He requested that Members to advise him if they would like to volunteer to be part of this work. Sue Howley advised that she would be interested in taking part.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 6.00 p.m. and concluded at 7.50 p.m..)