

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM** held at Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, SG17 5TQ on Monday, 19 October 2009

Present:

Anne Bell	Bill McCarthy
Shirley-Anne Crosbie	Ian Mitchell
Ian Greenley	Jim Parker
Bill Hamilton	Jim Smart
Richard Holland	Chris Vesey
Caroll Leggatt	

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Ray Payne

Observer: Tom Waterford

Members in Attendance: Cllr Mrs A M Lewis

Officers in Attendance: Dawn Hill, Gezim Leka, Leslie Manning, Rob Mills, Cathy Piotrowski, Patrick Shevlin, Bob Thompson and Sue Tyler

L/04/26 **Minutes of 28 September 2009 and Matters Arising**

RESOLVED

- 1) that, subject to resolution 2 below, to approve the Minutes of the meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Schools Forum held on 28 September 2009 as a correct record and to authorise the Chairman to sign them.
- 2) that the fifth paragraph of Minute No. L/04/18 (Update Surplus Balances) beginning "Members felt that schools..." and concluding "...their finances appropriately." be deleted and the following be inserted in its place:

'Members felt that where schools had issues handling their finances then training should be provided.'

L/04/27 **Surplus Balances**

Further to Minute L/04/18 of the last meeting the Forum received a report which presented the recommendations of the Surplus Balance Sub-Group following the latter's appeals meeting on 1 October 2009. The Forum was aware that at the meeting the Sub-Group had considered additional evidence from 15 schools in Central Bedfordshire which had been found to hold a surplus balance exceeding the prescribed thresholds and which had been subject to a 'minded to' claw back recommendation.

The Forum noted that, following the receipt and consideration of additional information, the Sub-Group now recommended that no claw back of funds be made from any of the outstanding 15 schools.

In response to a query from a Member regarding the validity of the recommendations from the Sub-Group's appeals meeting, given the number of apologies for absence received, the Finance Manager – Schools explained that the minutes of the meeting had been circulated to all members of the Sub-Group to obtain their views on the recommendations.

Another Member commented that whilst some issues remained regarding poor accountancy practices by some schools additional training was being provided and, overall, encouraging progress had been made in this area.

RESOLVED

- 1) that the recommendation of the Surplus Balance Sub-Group that sufficient documentation has been presented in support of the surplus balances exceeding the prescribed thresholds for the 14 of the 15 schools listed in the Minutes of the Sub-Group, dated 1 October 2009, be accepted and no claw back of funds from these schools be imposed.
- 2) that no action to claw back the remaining school's surplus balance subject to the school inserting an additional clause within the Governing Body's financial plan stating that the funding is to be used by the school for its proposed capital project.

L/04/28

Early Years Single Funding Formula

The Forum received a report which sought Members approval of the proposed consultation document for the Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF). A copy of the document was attached at Appendix A to the report.

Members noted that Central Bedfordshire Council was required to implement an EYSSF for all schools and settings providing the free early years entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds from 1 April 2010. The meeting also noted the action being taken to achieve this including the consultation held during the Summer Term 2009 to gain the settings' views on the factors/elements which might be included in the EYSSF and the possible impact on the settings, the construction of a single funding pot for the EYSSF, the construction of possible formulae and their impact on settings, the compilation of an EYSFF consultation document and a formal consultation on the formulae options during November 2009.

The Forum noted that the implementation of any of the different EYSFF options set out in the report could have a potentially detrimental impact on choice and availability of places for funding for 3 and 4 year olds in the maintained sector when compared to the Private Voluntary Independent (PVI) sector. The meeting further noted that the starting point for the redistribution of funding was the use of £3.60, the current hourly rate for the PVI sector, as the base rate.

The meeting was advised that the greatest impact would be felt by nursery schools which were currently funded on the number of places but which in future, would receive funding on the basis of the uptake of provision (hours attended). The overall impact would be to move funding from the maintained to the PVI sector.

Members were advised that, if approved, the document would go out in November to consultation events for schools and settings and a report on the outcome would be submitted to Forum's next meeting in 2010.

A Member referred to the four model funding formulae which had been developed for consultation purposes, each of which had a different impact on schools and settings, and queried whether the Local Education Authority had a preferred model. The Member also sought clarification on the impact by each. Other Members queried the need for four models to be included in the consultation document. In response the Finance Manager - Schools referred Members to Appendix B to the report which provided the information they sought whilst the Early Years Consultant stated that he favoured Model B because he felt it to be the fairest and reflected the needs of nurseries as well as the PVI sector.

In response to a Member's query regarding there being sufficient time to interpret the response data for a report to be submitted to the Forum's next meeting the Early Years Consultant explained that the consultation document was ready to be distributed and the consultation period would close on 30 November. This would allow sufficient time for the response to be analysed and a report be made to the next meeting which would include figures and comments and provide information on how any decision was reached. The Chairman added that consultees would be encouraged to respond in order to obtain as wider number of views as possible.

A Member felt that a reference should be included in the document on the need to ensure that any gains made outweighed any losses. He also commented that the consultation document was 'technocratic' in tone. In response the Early Years Consultant acknowledged that the document was very technical and the Early Years Group had also acknowledged this. It was suggested that, in order to clarify matters, a concluding paragraph be inserted clearly outlining the implications of each of the four options.

RESOLVED

- 1) that, subject to the insertion a concluding paragraph outlining the implications of each of the four model funding formulae the proposed consultation document for the Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF) be approved for formal submission to all stakeholders during November 2009.
- 2) that the comments raised by the Forum be included within the consultation presentations.

L/04/29

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

The Forum received a report which provided additional information regarding the use of Harnessing Technology budget funding to support schools in their transition to a web based Management Information System (MIS). Members had resolved to defer a decision on this item at its last meeting (minute L/04/23 refers) until further information had been provided.

The Assistant Director Learning and School Support stressed that Forum was being asked to endorse the way forward and not a particular product.

In response to Members' queries the ICT/MIS, Learning and Support officer explained that the use of the funding had come about through savings in the centrally retained Harnessing Technology grant accrued from aggregated purchasing and would not be to the detriment of any other service. She referred to the advantages of adopting a web based MIS, as outlined in her report, and the advantages for lower and nursery schools to adopt a common system. She also explained the difficulty that existed in maintaining support for the variety of systems in operation in schools because of the lack of resources. Adopting a common system would overcome this problem and lead to an improvement in efficiency and effectiveness.

Following a further query the officer explained that schools would still retain the ability to choose which learning platform they used but the Council would not be able to guarantee that it could provide full support for it.

The officer explained that a major advantage was the flexibility of the assessment system and that mark sheets could be designed to a school's requirements.

In response to a query the officer explained that this proposal had not arisen out of a national programme.

The Assistant Director Learning and School Support explained that there was a variation in schools' information systems and, as a result, data had been lost. The proposal before Members represented a one-off opportunity to prevent this from happening in the future and for schools to 'future proof' themselves as far as they were able. He stressed that the Council could not instruct schools what to do on this issue but was carrying out consultation by placing the item on the agenda for discussion. The alternative was to leave the matter to individual schools to deal with.

The Learning and Support officer emphasised that the meeting was not being asked to stipulate what system was adopted only that it would be web based.

RESOLVED that Harnessing Technology grant funding be used to support schools in the transition to a web based Management Information System (MIS).

L/04/30 **Date of Next Meeting**

Members were reminded that the next meeting of the Forum would be held on 25 January 2010 at 6.00 pm.

L/04/31 **Membership of the Schools Forum - Oral Report**

The Committee Services Manager reported that of the 17 seats on the Forum only 6 nominations had been received. He asked Members to advise him within the next week if they still wished to continue.

L/04/32 **Close**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 6.00 p.m. and concluded at 7.30 p.m..)