

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM** held at Committee Room 1, Council Offices, High Street North, Dunstable, Beds LU6 1LF on Monday, 8 March 2010

PRESENT

Jim Parker (Chairman)

Anne Bell
Shirley- Anne Crosbie
Ian Greenley
Bill Hamilton
Richard Holland
Sue Howley MBE

Sharon Ingam
Carol Leggatt
Bill McCarthy
Ray Payne
Stephen Tiktin
Chris Vesey

Apologies for Absence: Neil Bramwell
Ian Mitchell
Jim Smart

Members in Attendance: Cllr Anita Lewis

Officers in Attendance: Mr M Bowmer – Assistant Director Financial Services
Mrs E Heaney – Temporary Democratic Services Officer
Ms D Hill – Finance Manager - Schools
Mr R Parsons – Community Services Manager
Ms M Peaston – Interim Committee Services Manager
Ms H Redding – Head of SEN and Inclusion
Mr P Shevlin – Assistant Director Learning & Schools Support

L/04/51 **Minutes of 25 January 2010 and Matters Arising**

RESOLVED

to approve the minutes of the of the meeting held on 25 January 2010 as correct.

The Forum was updated on the following matters arising from the minutes:

L/04/37 – Schools would be advised of the Administration Charge to be levied.

L/04/41 – The impact of FMSiS and how many school were using it would be considered at a later meeting after Audit had conducted a review of how it was being used.

Councillor Anita Lewis advised the Forum that this would be Patrick Shevlin's last meeting of the Schools Forum. The Forum thanked him for his hard work & guidance and wished him all the best for the future.

L/04/52

SEN Review

The Forum received and considered the report providing an update on the Review of Special Schools Funding Formula. Previously, levels of need had been agreed as meeting one of four bands. With the Forum's agreement, Special School Head teachers had worked with officers to draft banding descriptors for pupils who had needs beyond Band 4 and who were currently receiving additional funding agreed by the Provisions Panel.

It was noted that this there were pupils with more complex needs. If the new bands, 5 and 6, were funded through the individual school budget (ISB) this would lead to an additional cost of £494,000. The Forum also noted that the national review of the DSG would impact on the 2011-12 and 2012-13 budgets and that it could be an opportunity to review funding of special schools as part of the overall review of distribution.

The Forum discussed the funding of additional needs; it was noted that currently if a pupil needed additional support the Panel could allocate these funds from the statutory assessment budget. Members were assured that allocating funds from this budget would not in any way affect the likelihood of a child being given a statutory assessment or a statement of Special Educational Needs.

Members asked questions about the number of pupils attending out of authority placements it was noted that these had been significantly reduced by making funding available for children with complex needs. There was still a relatively high degree of movement between Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire; the authority would recoup costs for any pupils in Special Schools who were not resident in Central Bedfordshire.

Members also checked that statemented children with less severe needs were being adequately funded in mainstream schools and were advised that mainstream schools had to demonstrate how they used the funding that was allocated for the specific child's statement and their general SEN budget to support each statemented child.

As the DSG review would be taking place, the Forum decided to revisit funding of Special Schools at a later meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1. that enhancements for bands 5 and 6 should not be included in the ISB for 2010-11**
- 2. that the current model of requesting additional funding for individual pupils with higher levels of need through the Provisions Panel, demonstrating how the pupils meet the descriptors, would continue for 2010-11. There would also be additional moderation of these judgements; this will continue to be funded from the statementing budget for Central Bedfordshire pupils, or through recoupment for out of authority pupils.**

L/04/53

PVI 2010/11 Rate

The Forum considered a report on the Early Years Single Funding Formula. It was noted that the Forum was required to review the rate of payment for Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector for the Early Years Entitlement.

RESOLVED

to increase the PVI sector's hourly rate for the delivery of the Early Years Entitlement for 2010-11 by 2.8% to £3.70 per hour.

L/04/54

School Specific Contingency

The Forum considered a report on the Schools Specific Contingency Budget. The report set out spending for the 2009-10 year to date against the agreed contingency budget.

It was noted that officers anticipated that the General Contingency budget and SEN Contingency budget would be fully committed by the year end due to a number of redundancy costs. The Forum also noted that the policy of funding redundancy costs (where budget led) through the contingency fund may become an issue in 2010-11. Members expressed concern that in some cases redundancies could be anticipated and handled better if schools put in place better financial management systems. It was agreed that this would be considered at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the General Contingency budget should remain at £500,000 for the 2010-11 financial year**
- 2. That the SEN Contingency budget should remain at £480,728 for the 2010-11 financial year.**

L/04/55 **School Forum Budget**

The Forum considered a report on the budget for the Schools Forum. It was proposed that the total budget remain at £5,000 with £2,000 being allocated to maintain membership of the F40 group and £2,000 being allocated to the Chairman to spend on consultancy or administration.

Members were concerned that the remaining £1,000 may not be adequate to cover training and development needs and acknowledged that due to the complexity of issues considered training was required for new members. It was agreed that training and development would be considered at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Schools Forum budget remain at £5,000 for the financial year 2010-11, of which £2,000 be set aside for continued membership of the F40 group and £2,000 be delegated to Chairman of the Schools Forum to fund the commissioning of consultancy and administration support.

L/04/56 **Membership of the Schools Forum**

Members considered a report on membership of the Forum. Members recalled that concerns had been raised at the previous meeting that the membership had not been in line with the Terms of Reference and noted that action had been taken to remedy that. The membership was now in line with the Terms of Reference.

In view of an item to be considered later at the meeting (minute L/04/67 below refers) the Forum deferred consideration of a review of the membership requirements of the Terms of Reference until that point.

RESOLVED:

- 1. To note that the membership of the Forum was now in accordance with the provisions of its Terms of Reference regarding Upper School phase representation.**
- 2. to defer a review of the membership requirements of the Terms of Reference until item 16 of the agenda (minute L/04/67 below refers)**

L/04/57 **Impact of the Council's Budget Decisions - Presentation**

The Forum was updated on recent budget decisions made by Central Bedfordshire Council. It was noted that Central Bedfordshire Council received significantly less government funding than other authorities and had a number of budget pressures to meet.

The former Bedfordshire County Council had established an earmarked PFI reserve, and had used the interest generated by this to fund their annual contribution to the PFI project each year. This reserve had now been used and an additional £½ million would need to be found each year to fund the local authority's annual contribution to the PFI project.

Members discussed the use of the PFI fund in this way and it was agreed that a written response would be circulated to all members of the Forum.

It was noted that budget pressures existed in Children's Services including:

- Looked After Children
- The number of Social Workers needed to support the caseload
- Costs of residential services
- Home to school transport.

These pressures amounted to £3 ½ million pounds and the Directorate had identified efficiency savings to cover these costs.

Members felt that they needed more detail on the budgets and were advised that this information was available on the Council's website, as a report to the Executive. (note: the Medium Term Financial Plan and budget, as submitted to the Executive, can be found on the Council's website at <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/modgov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=577&MId=2988&Ver=4>) Officer agreed to circulate a spreadsheet showing the relevant budget pressures and savings to the Forum.

RESOLVED:

- 1. The oral report regarding the Council's budget including the budget pressures and efficiency savings.**
- 2. To note that information on the PFI fund would be provided to Forum members after the meeting.**
- 3. That budgetary information relating to the Forum would be provided in spreadsheet form to the Forum members.**

L/04/58

Securing our Future

The Forum received an update on the Government's *Securing our Future* discussion paper. It was noted that budgets were increasingly constrained and that schools were being encouraged to work together in partnership to use resources wisely and avoid duplication.

It was noted that School Bursars and School Business Managers had been discussing this paper together and it was suggested that a report from their group should come to the Forum to share and develop expertise in this area. In response to a question about rising utility costs the Schools Finance Manager agreed to highlight this issue at a Schools Finance seminar.

RESOLVED:

- 1. To note the report on Securing our Future.**
- 2. To request a report at a future meeting arising from the Bursars and Business Managers Group's consideration of the discussion paper.**

L/04/59 **Children, Families and Learning Capital Programme**

The forum received a presentation on Asset Management and Schools Capital Programme was delivered to the Forum. Officers agreed to circulate the Council's Asset Management Plan to the Forum for reference.

It was also noted that in the June meeting the Forum would receive a report on the 2010 capital programme and that in January 2011 the Forum would be invited to take part in the consultation on the proposed criteria.

NOTED:

The Asset Management and Schools Capital Programme presentation.

L/04/60 **Dedicated School Grant Update**

The Forum received an update on the Dedicated Schools Grant. Budgets were expected to be sent out week commencing 22 March 2010.

Noted:

The update on the Dedicated Schools Grant

L/04/61 **School Finances**

The Forum considered the report on School Finances. It was noted that a significant number of schools were in a licensed deficit situation and that there were concerns that some schools were not planning ahead for their budgets.

Members of the Forum were very concerned at some of the examples of poor practice discussed and felt that the authority needed to tackle these matters robustly. In the discussion that followed members considered actions taken in other parts of the country to encourage more robust budget management, including the use of Interim Education Boards and disciplinary measures against Head teachers who did not follow correct procurement procedures.

It was agreed that the draft letter should be signed by both the Chair of the Forum and the Deputy Chief Executive, Director for Children's Service.

NOTED:

The School Finances report.

L/04/62

Letter received from Templefield Lower School regarding Deprivation Funding

The Chairman announced that the Technical Funding Group had met to consider the request from Templefield Lower School that the deprivation funding be allocated per pupil. The Forum considered the Technical Funding Group's opinion that to allocate funds in this way would significantly reduce funding in very deprived areas and be contrary to DCSF guidance to direct funds to pockets of deprivation.

RESOLVED:

- **That the Forum respond to Templefield Lower School explaining how deprivation funding was distributed.**

L/04/63

Appeal Holywell Middle treatment of VA DFC Contribution

The Forum noted that Holywell Middle School had appealed to the Forum regarding the treatment of Voluntary Aided Schools' Capital Accounts. Officers reported that advice had been sought from DCSF and had been advised that contribution from revenue to capital works should be actioned at the point that money was spent.

RESOLVED:

That Holywell Middle School be advised of DCSF's guidance.

L/04/64

Fair Funding Briefings for Prospective Parliamentary Candidates

The Forum noted the letter and agreed that the Chairman of the Schools Forum and the Director of Children, Families and Learning should respond jointly.

RESOLVED:

- **That the Chairman of the Schools Forum and Director of Children, Families and Learning make a joint response.**

L/04/65 **Parkfields Middle School**

Members were advised that since the publication of the agenda correspondence had been received from Parkfields Middle School concerning the decision to stop payment to schools for the Headteachers' services in managing the Hearing Impaired Unit. It was felt that stopping the payment without due notice was not reasonable.

It was noted that if payments were to continue it would be £3,512 for all schools paid from the School Contingency.

RESOLVED:

That all schools with Special Units be paid for the financial year 2009-10 but payment ceases in 2010-11.

L/04/66 **Nominations for Middle School Governors to serve on the Schools Forum**

The Democratic Services Officer advised members that they were currently seeking nominations from Middle School Governors to serve on the Forum. One Middle School Governor had expressed an interest but had asked to be put in contact with governors from the Leighton-Linslade area to discuss the role.

RESOLVED:

That Cllr Anita Lewis's, Mrs Howley MBE's and Mr Tiktin's details be passed to the interested governor.

L/04/67 **Good Practice and the Future of School Forum**

Members considered a paper, prepared by the Chairman, suggesting possible improvements to how the Schools Forum operated. Members discussed the suggestions, in particular the following matters:-

Timing of meetings: Some members felt that holding meetings in the evening lengthened an already long day for members, while other members were concerned that people would not be able to take time off work to attend daytime meetings.

Communications: Members agreed that the School Forum needed to be publicised widely. It was suggested that a link to the website be placed on all agendas and minutes and that Child Development Officers be asked to circulate minutes to PVI providers.

Membership and the Terms of References: Members recognised that the volume of work coming to the Schools Forum was increasing and that a number of working groups were being established. If the membership was increased this would allow the work to be spread across members more equitably.

It was decided that a working group would be asked to look at these issues and report back. Jim Parker, Chris Vesey, Bill Hamilton and Sharon Ingram agreed to form the working group.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the report be noted**
- 2. That a working group be established to consider how to improve the effectiveness of the Schools Forum with membership comprising of Bill Hamilton, Sharon Ingram, Jim Parker and Chris Vesey.**

L/04/68

Membership Technical Funding Sub-Group and Agenda Items

It was considered appropriate for the Technical sub group to receive some training in advance of its consideration of the DSG review.

Members noted that the following sub-groups were in place and each Forum member must serve on at least one

Capital group
Early Years reference group
Asset Managements group
Technical group
Terms of Reference and Procedures review group.

A suggestion was made that it would be valuable for the Forum to have a work programme in place which should be considered at each meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1. to note that the Technical Funding Sub Group would receive training provided by Dawn Hill (Schools Finance Manager) in advance of considering the DSG review later in the year**
- 2. to note the sub groups which were in place**
- 3. to adopt the process of a work programme which would be brought to each meeting.**

L/04/69

F40 Dates (Proposed 8 May)

It was noted that the F40 group would be meeting on 8 May 2010.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 6.00 p.m. and concluded at 9.00 p.m..)

Signed..... Date