

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, 29 June 2009

Present:

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|----------------------|---------------|
| Anne Bell | Ray Payne |
| Neil Bramwell | Jim Smart |
| Shirley-Anne Crosbie | Ian Greenley |
| Malcolm Griffiths | Bill Hamilton |
| Sue Howley | Carol Leggatt |
| Sharon Ingham | Bill McCarthy |
| Ian Mitchell | Chris Vesey |
| Jim Parker | |

Apologies for Absence: Richard Holland

Members in Attendance: Councillors Mrs Anita Lewis, Steve Male and Mrs Christina Turner

Officers in Attendance: Stuart Freel, Edwina Grant, Kevin Green, Dawn Hill, Sandra Hobbs, Nick Murley, Patrick Shevlin, Bob Thompson and Roy Waterfield

Also in Attendance: Hazel Fariam - Linslade Lower School

L/04/1 **INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME**

Councillor Mrs Lewis welcomed everyone to the meeting, including Councillor Male, Executive Portfolio Holder for Culture and Skills and Councillor Mrs C Turner, Assistant to the Portfolio Holders for Children's Services and Culture and Skills.

The Forum congratulated Sue Howley on being awarded an MBE for voluntary service to education.

The Forum also congratulated Councillor Mrs Lewis for being appointed the Executive Portfolio Holder for Children's Services. She advised Members that she would be attending the School Forum meetings as an observer in her role as Executive Portfolio Holder.

L/04/2 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED that Jim Parker be elected as Chairman of the Schools Forum for the municipal year.

L/04/3 **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED that Ray Payne be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Schools Forum for the municipal year.

L/04/4 **MINUTES OF 2 MARCH 2009 AND MATTERS ARISING**

RESOLVED to approve the Minutes of the meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Schools Forum held on 2 March 2009 as a correct record and to authorise the Chairman to sign them.

Members were advised that additional funding had been obtained from a different fund stream for the Samuel Whitbread pyramid. The Team Co-ordinator for Executive Services for Schools oversaw the procedure for allocating funding to make sure the system was transparent, although each pyramid had its own co-ordinator.

L/04/5 **EARLY YEARS UPDATE**

The Forum received the following update on the Early Years Initiatives:

- an impact analysis was currently being undertaken to inform a single funding formula, in respect of the counting method for the maintained sector being moved to an actual uptake of provision basis
- progress was being made on the Free Flexible Extended Entitlement (FFEE) which included offers in schools/settings being identified and firmed up by the Childcare Development Officers, promotional material being distributed, parental needs survey information being collated and the criteria being developed for 'one-off' bids to the Childcare Funding Panel
- progress on the placements for 2 year olds was being made with a project plan and a self evaluation form (SEF) in place, criteria was confirmed for parents and settings, an outreach strategy was in place, promotional material and a letter to family support providers was being worked on
- progress on the single funding formula was being made with early consultation being undertaken, the outcomes would be analysed over the summer break, development of the formula and transition arrangements would be progressed, modelling and impact analysis with full consultation would be carried out in October/November.

Members were advised that all childcare providers would be treated equally whether they were private or voluntary.

NOTED the presentation.

L/04/6

SCHOOLS CAPITAL PROGRAMME - PROGRESS REPORT

The Forum received a report that set out the initial Central Bedfordshire Capital Programme for schools, current progress and gave an indicator of future issues.

Members discussed the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme and were advised that the Shadow Executive on 17 March had agreed the draft governance arrangements and management arrangements for the preparation in planning for BSF. The next key stage in the process was the development of a statement of readiness.

Members were advised that the capital project for Dunstable College would not be funded. Dunstable College was originally shortlisted for funding to redevelop the College, but unfortunately it was not one of the 13 colleges chosen.

NOTED the progress report.

L/04/7

POSITION STATEMENT ON CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL FMSIS ASSESSMENT

The Forum received a report which updated Members of the current position with regard to schools which had passed the Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS).

The four year assessment cycle undertaken by Internal Audit and Schools Finance staff commenced in 2006/07. All Bedfordshire schools were notified of the year in which they would be assessed. To date 42% of schools who were programmed to be assessed had passed the assessment. It was explained that in actual terms, 74% of schools had passed who had actually been assessed.

Members did ask that for any future reports that these results were put into context perhaps by benchmarking against other authorities and officers agreed to do so.

Schools were disappointed that there was a backlog as there was a lot of work behind the scenes that went into putting together the evidence portfolios. Officers explained that the backlog had occurred due to the schools submitting their evidence portfolio at the very end of each financial year.

Members were advised that 30 schools were scheduled to be assessed during 2009/10, as well as completion of the backlog of 2008/09 assessments, reassessment of the schools that failed and the schools that passed during 2006/07 were also due for reassessment.

Members requested that thought be given to the guidelines to make them as clear as possible to enable the schools to be confident that the correct evidence was being supplied. Officers agreed to remind the schools due for assessment of the guidance available to them before they prepare their evidence.

In an attempt to reduce any future backlog, officers were preparing a schedule for 2009/10 setting out the date when a school needs to provide its evidence to meet the Standard before the year end. This would help Officers resource the activity in a more effective way.

Officers did acknowledge that as an assessment on its own, the FMSiS was perhaps not the most effective way of adding value to the school. Work would be undertaken to propose a risk based approach to audit work in the future and Officers would ask the Forum to consider and comment upon any new approach.

NOTED the report.

L/04/8

REVISION TO SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS AND FULLY FUNDED BANK ACCOUNT SCHEME

The Forum received a report on the consultation on the revision to the Fully Funded Bank Account and Scheme for Financing Schools. Members were advised of the following five areas that headteachers and governing bodies would be consulted upon:

- to revise the due date for monthly/quarterly financial returns to the 10th of each month instead of the 20th of each month as there was insufficient time for the returns to be reviewed and challenged between the 20th of the month and the 5th/6th of the following month when the SAP period closed
- to clarify the Governing Body of Schools responsibilities in respect of the submission and approval of the School Budget Plan. It was proposed that the word 'full' be inserted before Governing Body in the paragraphs concerned
- to insert a paragraph with regard to Voluntary Aided Schools 10% contribution from Revenue for Capital purposes clarifying that revenue surpluses remain revenue until the monies have been spent
- that the schools in Licensed Deficit submit their monthly monitoring reports by the 20th of the following month, as in the current scheme no date exists for the receipt of these reports
- generally update the scheme to take account of Unitary status, job titles, address, revised appendix 'Earmarked Funds', list of schools and type.

RESOLVED to approve the proposals for consultation with Headteachers and Governing bodies on the revision of dates for Fully Funded Schools Financial Returns and amendments to the Scheme for Financing Schools.

L/04/9

14 - 19 FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

a) 14-16 Practical Learning Options – Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Devolved to Strategic Partnerships

Members were advised about the devolved funding of the DSG Practical Learning Options. Previously the Schools Forum had agreed the funding be allocated to the three 14-19 area groups, as defined by the old district boundaries. Since the original decision there had been a number of changes:

- the two consortia was Mid/North Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire, these consortia remain in place, although the Mid/North cuts across the two new unitary authorities
- Bedfordshire had retained a joint partnership for the two new unitary authorities whereas each area in the country had set up a mandatory 14-19 Partnership which included representatives of Local Authorities, the Learning and Skills Council, Schools and Further Education colleges
- the 14-19 Partnership was the strategic lead for 14-19 provision and was a statutory sub-group of the Children's Trust.

RESOLVED that the amount of DSG assigned to Practical Learning Options be devolved to the 14-19 Strategic Partnership with reports on its usage being reported back to the Schools Forum as diplomas develop.

b) Diploma Funding – September 2009 Cohort

The Schools Forum received a report that advised Members on the process of funding the introduction of Diplomas from September 2009 in respect of the first cohort of students. It was intended that there be four lines of study in Upper schools in the North/Mid Beds Consortium from September 2009, namely Construction & the Built Environment, Creative & Media, Engineering and Hair & Beauty. It was planned that further lines of study would be introduced in September 2010 in both consortiums.

There were a total of 38 students from Upper schools in Central Bedfordshire pursuing the Diploma programme in September 2009. It was also projected that 15 students from Upper schools in Bedford Borough would follow the same Diploma programme. Members were advised that this was a very low uptake as the courses were difficult to market to 14 year olds and their parents.

To enable the programme to proceed there would need to be a form of subsidy. The 14-19 Strategic Partnership and the Upper school headteachers had considered the matter and had resolved to accept a principle of cost neutrality, whereby any schools which have Diploma students would not contribute more, per student, than the appropriate element of the age-weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) for that Key Stage of student. This equated to £1,400 based on a two day a week course and an AWPU at Years 10 and 11 of some £3,500.

Government recommendation was that as well as the Diploma Grant the DSG Practical Learning Opportunities funding be used to enable the financing of Diplomas, as well as the £1,400 contribution from participating schools be used to deliver the programme. Officers circulated the estimated income and expenditure for the financial year 2009/10, with the Diploma programme commencing in September 2009.

The Diploma programme would be for the two year course of the first cohort. It was expected that there would be a wider programme with more students in the second cohort commencing in September 2010. There would need to be a fresh look at how this second and subsequent cohort would be funded.

NOTED the decisions and recommendations of the 14-19 Strategic Partnership and the Upper School headteachers, especially the use of the element of DSG relating to Practical Learning Opportunities.

c) **Children's Trust Progress and 14-19 Commissioning Progress**

The Forum was taken through a presentation that updated them on the progress of the Children's Trust and the 14-19 Commissioning. The presentation set out the following points:

- the background to establishing the Children's Trust including commissioning, delivery and joint accountabilities plus statutory responsibility to develop a Children's Plan
- the implications of establishing a Children's Trust
- developing 16-19 Commissioning across the 14-19 agenda
- the process – Councils had a statutory duty to participate in shadowing this activity so that they can go live in April 2010.

The Children's Plan would be a significant document over the next few years and would include the priorities where funding would be focused towards. There would be a role for the Forum in considering and acknowledging the work being carried out.

The Children's Trust would feed in and out of the Local Strategic Partnership and the two bodies must work closely together to protect children.

NOTED the presentation.

L/04/10 **SURPLUS BALANCES**

The Forum was advised that the Surplus Balance Sub-Group had met twice, during June. It was agreed that the minutes from these meetings would be circulated to the members of the Schools Forum. This would give members the opportunity to review and pass comments on the process followed and detailed recommendations to enable schools to be notified by the end of term. The Sub-Group would need to reconvene to consider those schools below the previous thresholds, if members accept that these should no longer apply.

Members were advised that the Sub-Group's approach to allowable deductions to the surplus balances had been tougher than in previous years, in particular with the recommendation not to continue the additional allowance of 1% of school budget share or £10,000 (whichever the greater).

The Headteacher from Linslade Lower School requested that the surplus monies held by Vandyke Upper School for the Learning Community collaboration, on behalf of all schools in the collaboration, remain in place. Officers advised that many schools earmark funds for particular functions and these funds would remain earmarked, to the extent that they were held on behalf of the Learning Community.

RESOLVED that the minutes from the Surplus Balance Sub-Group meetings would be circulated to the members of the Schools Forum.

L/04/11 **ALLOCATION OF DEPRIVATION FUNDING**

Jim Smart raised concerns regarding the allocation of deprivation funding, although this was likely to change in the autumn. Officers advised that there were two issues:

- the funding provided to bands 4 and 5 of the Acorn Index had individual thresholds and the issue was whether these should be a combined threshold and the funding would be all or nothing once a threshold was reached; and
- whether there should be some tapering introduced.

Officers advised that this could be picked up under the Future Programme item on the agenda.

L/04/12 **SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP**

The Forum received a report that:

- reminded members of the expiry of their current term of office on 31 August 2009 and the need for the Council to seek nominations to the Forum for a new three-year term

- proposed extending members' current terms of office until 31 December 2009, to enable the required nomination and election process to take place during the autumn term.

Members were advised that the extension of the membership was possible as it was considered that this was part of the transition process to the new unitary authority.

Members were advised that as from September 2009 Northfields Technology College would become All Saints Academy. This would entitle them to a place on the Schools Forum, once the Schools Forum Regulations (2009), were enacted by Parliament.

Members were advised that consultation was being carried out on the new Schools Forums (England) Regulations 2009 and could be found at www.teachernet.gov.uk/schoolfundingframework/. Consultation responses should be sent to Schools.Forums@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk by Friday 28 August 2009.

NOTED the Councils intention:

- to seek fresh nominations for membership of the Schools Forum for a new term beginning 1 January 2010 and expiring on either 31 August 2012 or 31 December 2012
- meanwhile to extend members' current terms of office until 31 December 2009 to enable the required nomination and election process to take place during the autumn term 2009.

L/04/13

DATE OF NEXT MEETING(S) AND FORWARD PROGRAMME

Members received a report that set out an outline forward programme for the Schools Forum for the next academic year. The programme was flexible, to respond to national and local policy issues and the actual timings of preparatory work.

Members were advised that the new draft regulations proposed that there be four meetings a year instead of the current three meetings a year. It was agreed that an extra meeting would be scheduled once the new regulations came into force.

There was already an Early Years Reference Group established as a sub-group to the Schools Forum. It was proposed to establish a Technical Funding Sub-Group to look at specific areas of formula funding changes. It was proposed that Neil Bramwell, Shirley-Anne Crosbie become members of the Technical Funding Sub-Group and enquire if Jim Smart was available to sit on the Sub-Group.

Members thanked Kevin Green, Head of Business Finance as it would be his last meeting before taking a new job at Essex County Council.

RESOLVED

- (1) to establish a Technical Funding Sub-Group with Neil Bramwell, Shirley-Anne Crosbie as members
- (2) to enquire if Jim Smart was available to become a member on the Technical Funding Sub-Group
- (3) that future meetings of the schools forum be scheduled for 6.00 pm of the last Monday of each month, this being:

28 September 2009

25 January 2010

28 June 2010

L/04/14

Close

(Note: The meeting commenced at 6.00 p.m. and concluded at 8.15 p.m.)

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