

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Wednesday, 23 June 2010

Present:

Longster (Chair)

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| S Dainty | I Cubbin |
| M Kophamel | E Renshaw |
| G Zsapka | J Kenny |
| I Davies-Foo | D McDonald |
| K Frost | N Reilly |
| J Weise | Potter |

In attendance:

Councillors S Clarke

Apologies

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| Councillors | Dixon | B Cummings |
| | P Sheridan | S Wall |
| | Cogan | A Baird |

40 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

41 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising which were not featured on the agenda.

42 APOLOGIES

43 FITTING ENERGY METERS

It is recommended that Automatic Meter Readers (AMRs) are installed in all schools and that the cost of installation and maintenance be met from the Schools Budget Reserve created for this purpose.

Mr. Dodd reminded members that the Carbon Reduction Commitment Energy Efficiency Scheme came into force on 1st April 2010. As part of its statutory duty, the Council is responsible for administering the scheme on behalf of Wirral schools. Organisations must register and start compiling emissions data for the "footprint" year 2010/2011. The results must be reported by the end of July or the council will be fined £5000 plus £500 for every day overdue. The Council then buys allowances from central Government equivalent to their anticipated CO₂ emissions for the year ahead.

Mr. Dodd explained what schools needed to know and what schools needed to do. Whilst the Council is legally and financially responsible, schools must supply data and help cut energy usage. Whilst the Council should assist schools and share the financial benefits or penalties accordingly, it is in everybody's interests to make the scheme work.

There were a number of benefits of an AMR system but there were financial implications. AMR costs are site specific and some schools will have more than others. The expected annual costs have been calculated and costs after the first five year contract are expected to reduce as the infrastructure will have been paid for. The reserve was created to cover the estimated costs of installing and maintaining AMRs. The capital purchase option was significantly less than the lease option.

Resolved: That the Schools Forum agree to the use of the AMR Reserve as described in order to assist the implementation of the Carbon Reduction Commitment.

44 SCHOOLS BUDGET OUTTURN 2009/10

Andrew Roberts advised that the report was for information and noting. It outlined the year-end position for the 2009-10 budget although the accounts were provisional and subject to audit. The Forum are asked to note the report and the DSG carry forward of £386,303.

The significant variations were described briefly and a number of issues and concerns were raised. The Harmonisation programme in schools was one of the matters raised. The Director commented that there were a number of issues involved and that a report would be brought back to the Forum.

Resolved: That the Schools Forum note the report.

45 SCHOOL BALANCES AS AT 31ST MARCH 2010

The report was for information only and advises the Forum of the school balances as at 31st March 2010.

Mrs. Ashley advised that balances had been reduced from £9.2m to £8.4m which represents a year on year reduction of £0.8m (8%). Mrs. Ashley explained that the total balances included Standards Fund carry forwards, which can be spent up to the following August. The Standards Fund carry forward reduced from £3.3m to £3.0m as at 31st March 2010.

There were a number of schools who were in deficit as at 31st March 2010. The average secondary school deficit has increased from £141,000 to £246,000. Some schools with deficit balances in March 2010 have set balanced budgets for the 2010-2011 financial year. There are 14 schools that have or are seeking a licensed deficit in the current financial year compared with 10 last year.

Mrs. Ashley reported that 5 schools had an excess balance above the 5 or 8%, after standards and cluster funds have been deducted. Excess balance deductions made up to 31st March 2009 are £136, 499. A decision on how this will be re-allocated will be taken at the end of the funding period.

Resolved: (i) That the Forum notes the report.
(ii) That the Forum agree that the levy increases to 8% for excess balances at 31st March 2011.

46 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT RESERVE AND FINAL 2010-11 GRANT NOTIFICATION

Mr. Roberts indicated that the DSG reserve balance of £834,051 referred to in the report included the probable adjustment by the DfE for 2010-2011 in respect of pupil numbers. The DSG for 2010-2011 is calculated from January 2010 PLASC and Early Years Census data. The Schools Budget was set using an expected level of DSG of £193,995,400. The Census data for Wirral has increased the pupil count for DSG by 11 which will result in £49,100.

As part of the decisions taken for the current funding period, the Forum had previously agreed to carry forward any grant balances either from the final grant settlement or year end accounts until the end of the funding period in 2010-2011.

Resolved: That the DSG Reserve balance is noted.

47 BUDGET UPDATE

The report describes the changes to funding within the Schools Budget following the announcement made by the DfE at the beginning of June. Central Government's plans to tackle the national deficit were announced in May. Part of these measures included reductions to Local Authority grant allocations in 2010-2011, specifically reductions in overall DfE Area Based Grants. The announcement from the Secretary of State protected frontline spending on schools, Children's Centres and 16-19 provision in the current year. Literacy, numeracy and one to one tuition initiatives will continue as does the commitment to extending early Years entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds to 15 hours per week.

Mr. Cooper reported that there was an overall reduction in DfE Area Based Grants paid to Local Authorities. For Wirral's Children's Services, ABGs will reduce from £11m to £8.4m, a reduction of £2.643m in the current year. Nationally, the changes account for less than half of the DfE's expected in year savings and a number of other changes had been announced.

School budgets, Sixth Form funding and Standards Funds for 2010-2011 are unaffected. Further details are needed with regard to Extended Schools capital spending.

The reductions in Children and Young People Area Based Grants are significant and affect a wide ranging programme of work and they may also have some impact on the centrally managed Schools Budget. ABGs in respect of SEN and admissions may need to be reduced to meet savings targets. The Council is currently considering the potential impact of these in year reductions and will be considering options as to how they can be managed.

With regard to 2011-2012, few details have been announced. The Chancellor announces his Emergency Budget on 22nd June. This is the first budget of the new Government and it is anticipated that this will contain forecasts for the economy and public finances. The distribution and levels of grants for the Schools Budget will be considered as part of the Autumn Spending Review. The Spending Review report will be preceded by a period of consultation.

Mr. Armstrong also indicated that there would be a cut to Schools Capital. The current situation is manageable provided there were no further cuts during the current financial year.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

48 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) CONSULTATION

Mr. Roberts reported that, in March 2010, the DFE issued a consultation document on proposed changes to the distribution of school funding through the Dedicated Schools Grant. The consultation paper asked authorities a number of questions and had a response date of 7th June. A special meeting of a group of the Forum members considered the questions and agreed the responses.

Whilst the paper is predominantly about national changes, the outcome will have implications for the local scheme. Schools will be consulted on any proposed formula changes in the Autumn Term. The outcome will be the subject of a further report.

The view of the Forum Group was that specific grants were a better way of targeting grants and not knowing the implications of change, it is preferable to keep the existing grant structure.

Resolved: That the Forum note the response to the consultation paper.

49 DEPRIVATION FUNDING CONSULTATION GROUP

Mr. Roberts reported that nominations were being sought for a working group that will examine and review deprivation funding and contribute to the review of the Schools Funding Formula for the 2011-12 budget cycle.

Five Headteachers had already volunteered to join the group. Further nominations were invited.

Mr. Mike Potter put his name forward and this was accepted.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.
(ii) That the nomination of Mr. Potter be accepted.

50 REVIEW OF SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS - UPDATE

The report seeks to update the Schools' Forum on the progress to date of the review of traded services offered to schools by Wirral Council. These services are all up for renewal on 1st April 2011 the agreement period having been extended for a number of services by one year.

Currently, fifteen services are offered and procured through this mechanism. All SLAs, with the exception of Technical Support Services are for a period of three years and are due for renewal on 1st April 2011. A panel of Primary Headteacher representatives from the five Primary Cluster Groups in operation in Wirral together with representation from Voluntary Aided schools and Governors was convened to act as a conduit between schools and Authority service providers. The Panel has considered outline proposals from a number of services. The remaining services will be considered by the end of the summer term.

Mr. Dainty reported that the feedback has been very fruitful and positive.

Resolved: That the Schools Forum note the report.

51 EARLY YEARS SINGLE FUNDING FORMULA REVIEW - UPDATE

Over the previous eighteen months, a working group from the Schools Forum had met to consider how a single formula for Early Years should be designed, taking into account guidance from the DfE and models operated by the pilot authorities. Mr. Roberts advised that the report updates the Forum on the work of the Early Years Working Group and recent information from the DfE. The implementation of the Early Years Single Formula Funding had been delayed one year to April 2011.

The Working Group had considered the work to be undertaken around Nursery Schools and the roll out of extension and flexibility. The Nursery Schools were critical of the formula proposals. They argued that the formula did not sufficiently recognise the costs or the quality of provision. They saw the Formula as being detrimental to their future and that the budget reductions could not be managed. Discussions with Nursery Schools since then have looked at a number of areas.

The Secretary of State has confirmed his commitment to proceed with the increase in early years entitlement for three and four year olds to fifteen hours from September 2010.

Resolved: That the Schools' Forum note the report and the progress made to implement a single funding formula for Early Years.

52 SCHOOLS' FORUM MEMBERSHIP

The Report advises of the increases in membership to the Schools' Forum to take account of the Schools Forum (England) Regulations 2010 and notes a number of changes in membership.

The Academy Representative will be appointed shortly by the Governing Body of the Birkenhead Academy and this will be for one year. Mrs. Mary Mitchell from the Leasowe Early Years and Adult Centre has been appointed as the Nursery School representative for a period of four years. The decision to agree that the Chair of the Wirral Governors' Forum should join this Forum had been deferred from the previous meeting.

Resolved: (i) That it be agreed for the Chair of Wirral Governors' Forum to be a member of the Wirral Schools' Forum.
(ii) That the changes to the membership of the Wirral Schools' Forum be noted.

53 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Academy Update

Mr. Cooper brought members up to date with the situation regarding Academies. He reminded members that one Academy already existed at Birkenhead High School and that the University of Birkenhead Academy was well advanced in the planning stage. It was expected that this would be agreed by the Secretary of State during the Autumn Term and operate from January 2011 and be established using the current premises of Park High and Rock Ferry High schools.

Mr. Cooper also commented about the new Academies Bill currently going through Parliament and that it was expected to become a statute in August. The Act would allow all schools to apply for academy status but those schools who received an "Outstanding" category at their last Ofsted Inspection would be eligible to fast track. A number of primary, secondary and special schools in Wirral had achieved this category but it was noted that special schools were not eligible to apply at present. A number of schools were likely to express interest but it is thought that no school would wish to apply from September this year.

Any school changing status would see major changes to their budgets. Schools that become Academies would take their share of a number of mutual budgets held by the Local Authority. There would be a number of issues to resolve and, if there were large numbers of schools changing status, it may be that the Forum would need to meet and consider the implications. There could also be serious knock on effects for services to schools which are not under the direct control of CYPD such as those provided by the Technical Services Department.

54 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Confirmed that the next two meetings take place on 29th September and 8th December 2010.