

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Wednesday 24 June 2009

Present: R. Longster (Chair)

Schools Group

S. Dainty	M. Kophamel
G. Zsapka	I. Davies-Foo
K. Frost	P. Sheridan
I. Cubbin	B. Cummings
B. Renshaw	S. Wall
A. Newman (vice A. Baird)	J. Weise

Non-Schools Group

P. Hogan	J. Kenny
M. Potter	V. Woods (vice G. Peters)

In Attendance: Councillor S. Clarke Councillor F. Doyle
Councillor J. Green

H. Cooper	D. Armstrong
A. Roberts	P. Edmondson
G. Mount	N. Clarkson
S. Ashley	C. Warburton

Also in Attendance for Item 5:

G. Lester	M. Morris
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Apologies: V. Macdonald S. Hyden
A. Baird N. Dymont

25. **APOLOGIES.**

As above.

26. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 JANUARY 2009.**

Resolved: That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 January 2009 be accepted as a correct record.

27. **MATTERS ARISING.**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

28. **CHAIR'S CORRESPONDENCE.**

None submitted.

29. USE OF INCLUSION FUNDING.

Mr. G. Lester, Head of Egremont Primary School and Mrs. M. Morris, Head of Elleray Park School, gave a joint presentation on the Inclusion Resource Base at Egremont Primary School.

Previously, £30000 had been allocated to all special schools to resource Inclusion Activities. The presentation provided an update on the project between Elleray Park and Egremont Primary Schools. This presentation followed an earlier one from Stanley School.

The aims were to:-

- to extend the range of inclusive educational opportunities for pupils of both schools
- to provide opportunities for staff to share knowledge, skills and expertise
- to enable increased social interaction between pupils of Elleray Park and their mainstream peers
- to ensure consistency with regards to expectations for all children

With regard to the most effective use of the £30,000 inclusion funding, discussions had been held with the Local Authority over the establishment of a resource base. Visits had also taken place to St John Vianneys School and many local mainstream schools.

The class of 9 children were predominantly Foundation 2/Year 1 pupils. It was staffed with a class teacher and 2 teaching assistants. All of the pupils were assessed as benefiting from a more inclusive setting.

There are benefits to both Egremont and Elleray Park pupils:-

- successful participation for all children
- a facility for children to receive small group, one to one support available in special school setting
- impact upon educational achievement
- the opportunity for children to interact and grow socially
- to further the inclusion agenda
- to allow the children to enjoy mainstream experiences

The key messages to success include the vision and commitment of both schools, the fact that it is a self sustaining project financially and that it provides flexibility to work with mainstream staff to optimise pupil inclusion.

Resolved: That Mrs. Morris and Mr. Lester be thanked for their interesting presentation.

30. SCHOOLS BUDGET OUTTURN 2008-09.

Andrew Roberts, Principal Manager (Finance) reported on the year-end financial position for the 2008-09 Schools Budget. He referred briefly to the significant variations included in the written report and to Appendix 1. He reported that the overall under spend was £218,258 and asked that the report be noted by the Forum.

In response to a query regarding an increase in costs of Independent Special School Fees, Peter Edmondson (Head of Branch, Participation and Inclusion) explained that Wirral, through good and successful management had done really well in placing pupils in local Wirral Special and mainstream schools. Through strategic working and early intervention, expectations had been dampened down in terms of placements out of borough. The increase would be mostly down to increased costs.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

31. **DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT RESERVE AND FINAL 2009-10 GRANT NOTIFICATION.**

Mr. Roberts referred to the breakdown of the DSG reserve balance outlined in the written report. He advised that the Forum had previously agreed to carry forward any grant balances until the end of the funding period in 2010/11.

Resolved: That the DSG Reserve balance be noted.

32. **DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT FORMULA REVIEW.**

Mr. Roberts referred to the report. He advised that the DCSF were undertaking a review of the DSG formula. Any changes were subject to national consultation in 2010 and would be implemented from the next three year funding period 2011-14.

The aim of the review was to develop a single, transparent formula for the distribution of DSG which distributes resources in line with relative need. The DCSF intend that the formula should help raise educational achievement, narrow attainment gaps, recognise costs of different groups and areas. It should be transparent, simple and stable.

There were a number of issues for the review to consider. These included Activity Led funding (ALF), Additional Educational Need (AEN), "High cost pupils", Incentives, Area Cost Adjustment (ACA), Sparsity, Pupil Count, the 21st Century School, Academies, Grants and Transition.

Mr. Cooper commented that the ACA was being looked at in some detail. One of the things included involved housing costs. The average cost of housing in the south east was very high but was quite low elsewhere including Merseyside and North Wales. Wirral would come out badly in this case. Things like the RSG would also be affected. The Local Government Association (LGA) was lobbying central government on these issues .

A new national formula would redistribute grant, partly because of the new measures used and partly because the formula will use more current data. As a result, some authorities would be gainers and others would not. There was no indication at this stage whether Wirral would be a gainer or not.

Mr. Frost felt that free school meals figures should be increased. Mr. Roberts advised that the formula was based on 2005/6 figures but that the data

would be updated and would take account of Working Tax Credit so that the formula would reflect the increased need.

It was expected that the development phase led by the DCSF Working Group would be completed later this year. Authorities and schools will be consulted in early 2010. The review is due to be completed in Summer 2010 and implemented in Autumn 2010 as part of the 2011-14 schools settlement.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

33. **SCHOOLS BALANCES.**

Mr. Roberts referred to the written report. He indicated that there was likely to be a deficit budget for 2010/2011.

Asked about deficit budgets, Mr. Roberts reported that there were a number of schools looking to set deficit budgets this year and next. One of the factors is increased energy costs but there were others such as falling rolls. It was suggested that it might be possible to achieve a better price for energy away from the Wirral contracts. Mr. Armstrong advised that it had not been possible to get better rates even through PFI.

Mr. Armstrong also reported that the SEED Challenge could provide matched funding for schools on energy saving schemes in the same way as for security issues.

It was noted that there were 13 Primary Schools and 4 Secondary schools in a deficit budget situation. Some of those with deficit balances in March 2009 have set balanced budgets for the 2009/10 financial year. Those schools still in difficulty were in the process of agreeing licensed deficit budgets with the department, with a view of balancing the budget over a period of three years.

Mr. Roberts clarified the situation with regard to Excess Balances and the levy. The table illustrated the amount to be deducted on a 2% levy. Five schools had excess balances over 5 or 8% after standards and cluster funds had been deducted.

Members of the Schools Forum were asked to endorse the increase of the levy to 5% for excess balances at 31.3.10. Excess deductions stay in the Schools Budget and a decision on how this is allocated is made at the end of the funding period.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.
(ii) (17:0, with one abstention) That the levy increases to 5% for excess balances at 31.3.2010 be endorsed.

34. **IMPROVING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION.**

Further to the original report, a Briefing paper prepared by Graham Mount, Strategic Development Manager, was circulated to members.

Mr. Edmondson updated members on the review of special educational needs provision.

Wirral maintains 11 special schools as well as a Key Stage 4 Pupil Referral Unit and the Wirral Hospitals' School. In addition, it also maintains a number of educational inclusion bases. These facilities provide for the broad range of special educational need and the briefing refers to developments by sector. A number of significant changes have taken place recently and a number of others are under consideration. Where no reference is made, there are no current proposals for change but the review will be on-going and further developments may be expected.

The paper referred separately to the schools with Complex Learning Difficulties, Moderate Learning Difficulties, Specific Learning Difficulties and to those with Emotional, Behavioural and Social Difficulties.

Mr. Edmondson referred in particular to the situation at Gilbrook School.

The Authority maintains 3 schools for children who experience emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. At primary school level, Gilbrook School offers 50 full time places and also makes provision for excluded pupils. For some time, it has been realised that Gilbrook's current premises are restricted and do not lend themselves to providing a full range services for their pupils and families. Following Cabinet approval, the Authority is currently consulting upon a proposal to move to the premises to be vacated by Arrowe Hill Primary School in the summer.

Gilbrook also provides an Outreach Service to mainstream primary schools who choose to buy in. The service is well regarded by those who receive it but is experiencing difficulty in terms of financial viability and the funding model will need to be revisited if it is to continue.

Members were asked to note the report and also to establish a subgroup of the Schools' Forum to review the funding model for the Gilbrook Outreach Service and to consider ways in which future viability may be assured.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.
(ii) That a subgroup be established as indicated and the membership will comprise:- Mr. R. Longster, Mr. S. Dainty, Mrs. G. Zsapka, Mr. A. Baird and Mrs. P. Hogan with additional primary representation.

35. **EARLY YEARS SINGLE FUNDING FORMULA – UPDATE.**

Mr. Roberts referred to the Update report. He reminded members that the Early Years working Group had been set up by the Wirral Schools' Forum to evaluate options for the creation of an Early years Funding Formula.

The Early Years Working group had held a number of meetings to evaluate options for the formula. The DCSF single formula legislation is currently not available but initial work has focused on provider costs and discussing appropriate elements to include in a Wirral funding formula. Initial modelling work had been undertaken to investigate the impact of including elements based on deprivation and quality. A further area under discussion is a flexibility element. In order to be included as an element in a funding formula,

robust and timely direct or proxy indicator data must be available across all provider types.

During the next stages, work will move forward in seeking further information from other Local Authorities to see how they have incorporated different elements into their proposed formulae and what proportions of their budgets have been allocated to each element. A range of models will be produced to evaluate the impact of these elements, singly and in combination compared to existing funding arrangements.

Once legislation is available, the Working Group will evaluate the impact of this including Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) on funding formula options. The Working Group will finalise their work with a range of models provided to the Schools' Forum and schools for consultation. The consultation process will be carried out in Autumn 2009 with feedback reported at the Schools' Forum.

The new Funding Formula will be agreed by the Schools' Forum for implementation from 1 April 2010, the national implementation date.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

36. **TARGETED CAPITAL FOR SCHOOL KITCHENS.**

Mr. Armstrong referred to the written report.

In 2008, the DCSF announced that an additional £100m was to be made available to Authorities for improvements to school kitchens and dining facilities. The aim was to increase the take up of school meals through a wide range of local initiatives. All Authorities were asked to submit an Expression of Interest in December 2008 followed by a formal bid in March 2009. Prior to this submission, the Schools' Forum had been made aware of the content of the bid at the meeting held on 21st January 2009.

The DCSF Standards Fund had been offered to all Authorities on a 50% match funding basis. Due to the huge response to this initiative, Authorities could only be offered 50% of the amount of money requested in March. As a result of this reduction in allocation, Authorities have been asked to share the revised project plans with its Schools' Forum. Whilst it is acknowledged that there will have to be some changes to the planned projects, the emphasis must remain on the implementation of those projects which will result in the greatest impact on school lunch take up.

A table has been produced to illustrate proposed changes to planned projects. Whilst a significant number of the initial projects have been retained, there has had to be a regular emphasis on kitchen refurbishment to meet gas safety regulations and the associated building works. The one change from the position in January is that the 50% allocation does not provide sufficient funding to replace the HORSIA unit at Overchurch Infant School. Alternative capital funding sources will be explored in respect of this scheme.

The forum is asked to approve the changes in the planned projects in order to increase the lunch take up in schools.

Resolved: (18:0) That the changes indicated be approved.

37. SCHOOLS FORUM REGULATIONS 2009 CONSULTATION.

A copy of the consultation draft of the Statutory Instrument for The Schools Forum Regulations 2009 had been circulated previously. A number of changes to the existing regulations had been proposed and a number of consultation questions had been posed.

The regulations had been re-written for clarity. Regulation 4 states that Local Authorities must have members from academies in their area on their Schools Forum. Previously, academies had observer status. Concern had been expressed about the strength of early years representation on schools forums and the consequences of this for the early years single formula which is to be introduced from 2010-2011. The option of changing the composition of their schools members of School Forums from 2011 was being consulted upon in the light of suggestions put forward by some authorities.

The consultation period ends on 28 August 2009.

Mr. Roberts asked for any comments to be forwarded to him via the Chair.

Resolved: That the consultation paper be noted.

38. FUTURE WORK.

- * Early Years Formula Consultation
- * Machinery of Government Change – LSC – 14-19
- * 1st Year of new Funding Formula – need to write to schools regarding changes in deprivation funding and the differences it makes. Feedback report.
- * Other financial issues

39. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR.

(i) Mr. Dainty reported that the PHCG working groups had been looking at Service Level Agreements for Schools and that a revised group was to be established to continue the review and report back.

(ii) The Director commented that co-location of schools on mainstream sites would facilitate greater inclusion both within education and within the wider community. The Cabinet had required the Department to consider co-location of special school on mainstream sites and a number of proposals had been put forward which had met the criteria of the SEN Improvement Test.

Wirral had been advised of its allocation of Building Schools for the Future (BSF) monies. These, combined with funds

available from the Learning and Skills Council, would enable the building of new 21st century schools which were fit for the future and would be provide up to date facilities for some of the most vulnerable pupils.

- (iii) On behalf of the Schools Forum, the Chair wished to place on record his thanks to Moira Curran and Mike Archbold for their work on behalf of this Forum and wished them both a long and happy retirement.