

## DUDLEY SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2007 at 6.00pm  
Saltwells Education Centre, Bowling Green Road, Netherton

### PRESENT

Mr Patterson (Chair)  
Mrs Griffiths (Vice Chair)  
Mrs Blunt, Mr Conway, Mrs Elwiss, Mr Francis, Mr Harrington, Mr Hatton,  
Mrs Hazlehurst, Mr Ingram, Mr Lloyd, Mr Millman, Mr Mountney, Mrs  
O'Neill, Councillor Nottingham, Mr Ridney, Mr Timmins, Councillor Mrs  
Walker and Mr Wassall.

### OFFICERS

Mr J Freeman – Director of Children's Services, Mr R Watson – Assistant  
Director of Children's Services (Resources), Mrs P Rushen – General  
Manager – Catering & Client Services (Directorate of Children's  
Services), Mrs K Cocker – Children's Services Finance Manager, and  
Mrs S Coates – Principal Accountant (Directorate of Finance, ICT &  
Procurement) and Mr Jewkes – Democratic Services Officer (Directorate  
of Law & Property) - All Dudley M.B.C.

#### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of  
Mr Bell, Ms Cosgrove, Mrs Jessup, Ms Leyshon and Mr Sorrell. It was  
also noted that Mr Robertson was in attendance at the meeting as a  
substitute for Mr Rhind-Tutt.

#### 2. MINUTES

##### RESOLVED

That, subject to the removal of the word 'left' from the third  
line of the first paragraph of page 3, the minutes of the  
meeting of the Forum held on 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2007, be approved as  
a correct record and signed.

#### 3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

In connection with Minute Number 3 – Matters Arising from the  
Minutes, further to a request at the previous meeting of the Forum, Mr  
Watson circulated copies of an organisation chart showing the  
structure of the Dudley Children's Trust. The chart indicated the  
relationships between the various groups operating within the Trust

and provided background information in relation to the role and responsibilities of the organisation.

In connection with Minute Number 3 – Matters Arising from the Minutes, Members raised a number of concerns in relation to the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). A Member commented that since the establishment of the CAF, in the vast majority of cases where referrals had been made, the ‘Lead Professional’ had been either a teacher or another education-based officer. Concern was expressed that due to the heavy workload already placed on education staff, it was unlikely that they would have time to act in the ‘Lead Professional’ role, meaning that in many cases referrals would not be made.

In this regard, Members requested that any information which had been collated in relation to the number of referrals made so far, and the proportion of Lead Professionals who were from educational backgrounds, be submitted to the next meeting of the Forum.

In responding to the comments made, Mr Freeman stated that due to the fact that the Local Authority employed a significantly larger number of teachers than, for example, social workers, it was likely that a high proportion of the Lead Professionals would work in education. He expressed his own concern regarding the possibility of an unmanageable number of referrals being made, and commented that a balance needed to be found whereby referrals were only made in the appropriate circumstances.

In connection with Minute Number 3 – Matters Arising from the Minutes, Councillor Mrs Walker reported that she had raised the issue of the settling of accounts by Dudley Property Consultancy (DPC) with the Cabinet Member for Personnel, Legal and Property, who had assured her that work was currently underway to speed up the process to ensure that invoices were issued more quickly following the completion of building work.

#### RESOLVED

That a report on the progress of the implementation of the Common Assessment Framework, including details of the referrals made so far and the Lead Professionals in each case, as referred to above, be submitted to the next meeting of the Forum.

#### 4. CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

#### RESOLVED

That Agenda Item 9 – School Catering, be considered as the next item of business.

## 5. SCHOOL CATERING

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the current School Meals Service, as provided through Catering and Client Services. The report provided information on the current system for the funding of school meals, including the requirement to provide Free School Meals (FSM) to a number of children, and equipment and staffing costs.

It was reported that a fall in demand for school meals in recent years, combined with the Local Authority's efforts to improve nutritional standards by providing healthier meals, had created serious budgetary pressures in relation to school catering. Whilst historically funding for FSM had been provided at £1.05 per meal, analysis undertaken since the introduction of improved school food standards had shown that the actual cost of a meal was in the region of £2.20. Although the Government had provided additional grants in order to help schools provide healthy meals, the funding had not met the full cost of improving standards and consequently a funding deficit had developed. This 'gap' had been met using reserve funds and other incomes. However, these sources of funding were now running dry.

The report set out three options for dealing with the current budgetary situation, and the Forum was asked to consider them and advise the Director of Children's Services as to which would be their preferred course of action. The options included restructuring the arrangement between Catering and Client Services and schools so that either a three choice set meal or a cafeteria style selection would be provided on a 'buy back' basis, and the establishment of individual Service Level Agreements (SLAs) between schools and Catering and Client Services whereby varying levels of provision, and therefore of cost, could be established on a school by school basis.

The General Manager – Catering & Client Services, expressed the view that due to the wide variation in the size and structure of each of the Borough's schools, and the differing facilities available at each school, it would be beneficial for individual SLAs to be established in order that provision could be tailored to the needs of each school.

In responding to the report, several members commented that whilst they appreciated the problems the Local Authority was experiencing with funding school catering, and agreed that urgent action was needed, they felt that they would require further information before endorsing the recommendations in the report. In particular, it was requested that the following be provided: -

- Details of the extent to which some schools were subsidising catering in other schools.
- Details of the effect the adoption of any of the three suggested options set out in the report would have in financial terms.
- Further information regarding the grants provided by the

Government to assist schools in providing healthy meals, and whether or not those funds had been ring fenced.

In summing up the discussion on the matter, the Chairman stated that members had a number of issues which would need to be clarified prior to the Forum agreeing to endorse the proposed reorganisation of school catering. He therefore requested that Mr Watson prepare a follow up report to be submitted to the next meeting of the Forum in order that the matter could be reconsidered at that time.

#### RESOLVED

1. That the information in relation to the School Meal Service and the current financial pressures on that service in terms of the funding provided for the provision of Free School Meals, as set out in the report submitted, be noted.
2. That a report providing further information in respect of the provision of School Meals and the effects of remodelling the financial management of the service, including the level of support provided to schools for the provision of Free School Meals, as outlined above, be submitted to the next meeting of the Forum.

#### 6. SCHOOL, EARLY YEARS AND 14-16 FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS – 2008-11

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the Ministerial decisions taken on 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2007 in respect of the school, Early Years and 14-16 funding arrangements for 2008-11.

Mrs Cocker reported that following the DCSF consultation on the funding arrangements for school, Early Years and 14-16 provision in 2008-11, to which the Forum had provided a response, the DCSF had now announced the arrangements in a Ministerial statement published on 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2007. The report contained a summary of the key decisions made, and a copy of the full statement was appended to the report.

It was noted that under the published arrangements for Early Years funding, the Local Authority would be required to undertake an analysis of the cost of delivering Early Years provision in the private, voluntary and independent sectors. The DCSF required that the outcomes of this analysis be considered by the Forum prior to budgets for the 2008/09 financial year being set which, in effect, meant that the analysis would need to be undertaken and submitted to the Forum before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008. In this regard, it was proposed that a sub-group of the Forum be established to undertake the related work and make recommendations to the full Forum at a later date regarding budgeting for Early Years provision.

Arising from consideration of the report, Members commented that in order for the sub-group to properly analyse the issues involved, it would be necessary to engage representatives of the various sectors of Early Years. It was proposed that the Local Authority arrange for Members of staff whose responsibilities traversed the various sectors to be co-opted as members of the sub-group.

#### RESOLVED

1. That the Ministerial Statement published by DCSF on 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2007, in relation to school, Early Years and 14-16 funding arrangements for 2008-11, be noted.
2. That a sub-group of the Forum comprising Mrs Griffiths, Mrs Hazelhurst and appropriate officers be established to undertake an analysis of the cost of delivering Early Years provision in the private, voluntary and independent sectors in Dudley, and report its findings back the Forum in accordance with the timescales set out above.
3. That arrangements be made for representatives of the private, voluntary and independent sectors to be engaged in the analysis work undertaken by the sub-group.

#### 7. DEPRIVATION FUNDING REVIEW – UPDATE

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the progress of the DCSF review in relation to deprivation funding. The report stated that as part of the review, the Local Authority had been requested to complete a template providing details of deprivation funding in Dudley for the 2007/08 financial year. The report also contained information on changes which would be made to the Local Management of Schools (LMS) formula in Dudley in 2008-11 in respect of deprivation funding.

Mrs Cocker reported that the review had been undertaken with the intention of focussing the deprivation funding provided by the Government in order to ensure that it actually benefited the most deprived children living Dudley, rather than being used for general purposes through the budgeting formula.

It was reported that DCSF had set a mandatory target stating that at least 80% of the funding allocated for deprivation must find its way directly to the relevant children. Dudley Local Authority was not currently meeting this target. It was noted that where DCSF was dissatisfied with progress in this regard, further 'challenge and support' would be provided. It was therefore crucial that the review should be thorough, with any agreed changes being implemented in a planned, sensitive manner.

In responding to a question regarding how Dudley compared with neighbouring Local Authorities in terms of the level of deprivation funding received and the extent to which it was focussed successfully on deprived children, Mrs Cocker stated that work was currently under way to establish the position of comparable Authorities. However, in a national context, she commented that whilst Dudley did have some very deprived areas, they tended to be small pockets, which meant that the level of deprivation funding was lower in comparison Authorities which suffered more widespread deprivation.

#### RESOLVED

That the update in respect of the progress of DCSF review in relation to deprivation funding, as set out in the report submitted, be noted.

#### 8. FORTHCOMING DSG FORMULA REVIEW AND REVIEW OF SCHOOLS FORUMS

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on a consultation currently being undertaken by DCSF in relation to the forthcoming review of the DSG formula and the review of Schools Forums. The consultation document sought the views of the Forum in relation to the terms of reference of the wider review of the DSG formula which would be initiated shortly. The proposed terms of reference for the review were appended to the report, along with a draft response to the consultation. Members were requested to consider the response and propose any amendments they felt appropriate.

It was noted that the Headteachers Consultative Forum Budget Working Group had not yet had the opportunity to consider the draft response as no meetings had been held during the summer break. Mrs Cocker gave an undertaking to seek their views in future where time permitted.

## RESOLVED

That the proposed response to the DCSF consultation in relation to the terms of reference of the forthcoming review of the DSG formula and of Schools Forums, as appended to the report submitted, be approved.

### 9. CLOSURE OF CRADLEY HIGH SCHOOL

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the 2007/08 funding process and the latest revenue budget position in respect of Cradley High School. It was reported that at the end of August the school's revenue budget was operating at a deficit of £174,000. This figure had fallen since the previous update provided to the Forum, due to staff redeployments and other developments.

It was noted that the final appeals for pupils displaced as a result of the Cradley High closure had been heard at the end of September, meaning that the details of which schools would receive those pupils would be confirmed shortly. Following confirmation of these figures, funding for the pupils would be allocated to the receiving schools.

## RESOLVED

That the information in relation to the 2007/08 funding process and the latest revenue budget position in respect of Cradley High School, as set out in the report submitted, be noted.

### 10. SCHOOL RESERVES – UPDATE

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the decisions taken by the Director regarding the claw back from schools of unspent reserves in accordance with Section 4.2.2 of Dudley's Scheme for Financing Schools. A table indicating the schools which had had funds clawed back, and the amounts involved, was appended to the report.

In responding to a question from a Member in relation to the retention of clawed back funds by the Local Authority, Mrs Cocker advised that in situations where schools had withheld funds for a specific purpose, for example when awaiting invoices from DPC, the Local Authority would retain the funds centrally and settle the account on the school's behalf, up to the level of the reserve claw –back, when an invoice was provided.

Mr Watson reported that the Traded Services Management Board would be meeting later in the week and that the issue of the settling of accounts by DPC would be discussed as an agenda item. It was hoped that improvements to the current system could be identified to ensure that schools were invoiced as soon as possible following the completion of building projects.

RESOLVED

That the information in respect of the decisions taken by the Director of Children's Services regarding the claw back from schools of unspent reserves in accordance with Section 4.2.2 of Dudley's Scheme for Financing Schools, as set out in the report submitted, be noted.

11. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) FINANCIAL MONITORING – SCHOOLS BUDGET – 2007/08

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the latest budget monitoring data, correct up to 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2007, in respect of the Schools Budget for the 2007/08 financial year. It was reported that the budget was currently showing a projected overspend of £174,000. This was due to the anticipated net deficit for Cradley High School. It was hoped that this would be mitigated by the end of the financial year and that therefore the Schools Budget would come in on target.

In presenting the report, Mrs Cocker advised that there were still a number of budget pressures within the centrally retained areas, most notably the costs associated with identifying alternative provision for permanently excluded pupils and extra district payments.

RESOLVED

That the information on the latest budget monitoring data, correct up to 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2007, in respect of the Schools Budget for the 2007/08 financial year, as set out in the report submitted, be noted.

12. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) – BUDGET PLANNING 2008-2011

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the expected timescale in respect of Central Government's budget planning cycle for 2008-2011.

Mrs Cocker reported that the Government's forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review would cover the period from 2008 to 2011. In Autumn 2007, DCSF would publish provisional budget data relating to this period, and from this it would be possible to calculate estimates of the Dedicated Schools Grant for the next three years. However, as it was not possible to accurately predict pupil numbers for the 2009/10 and 2010/11 financial years so far in advance, the data would only provide a rough estimate and would therefore be of limited use at this stage.

RESOLVED

That the information in respect of the timescale for the forthcoming 2008-2011 budget period, and the impending receipt of provisional budget data for that period from DCSF, as set out in the report submitted, be noted.

13. LEA BENCHMARKING TABLES 2007-2008

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the Benchmarking Tables recently issued by the DCSF in respect of planned expenditure for the 2007/08 financial year. It was reported that the tables, which were based on data extracted from the Section 52 budget statements issued annually by Local Authorities, were issued by DCSF in order to enable comparison between different areas. A number of spreadsheets summarising the full benchmarking data were appended to the report.

In referring to the data appended to the report, the Chairman expressed concern that Dudley was near the bottom of the tables in terms of the amount of funding received by the Local Authority for each child educated in the Borough. He commented that this situation was indicative of the deficiencies which existed in the funding regime, as an area like Dudley which had some areas of severe deprivation should, if anything, receive more financial support than more affluent Authorities.

RESOLVED

That the information in relation to the Benchmarking Tables issued by the DCSF in respect of planned expenditure for the 2007/08 financial year, as set out in the report submitted, be noted.

14. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on progress in respect of the implementation of the Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS).

Mr Watson reported that the first phase of the implementation of the FMSiS had proved successful. Of the 21 secondary schools in the Borough which had undergone an external assessment, 20 had been judged as having met the standard. The school which had not passed was currently being re-assessed. Further to this, 43 schools were to be assessed during 2007/08. The timetable for this process was included in the report.

In relation to the assessment of the Borough's primary schools, Members expressed concern that unlike secondary schools, they would not have staff with the necessary training to manage the implementation of the standard and would therefore struggle to pass. This would be a particular problem for smaller schools which only employed traditional secretarial staff. In responding, Mr Watson agreed with the sentiments expressed and commented that smaller schools should receive additional support to help them meet the standard.

A Member expressed gratitude to Dudley's Audit Services department for the support they had provided to schools throughout the process of implementing the FMSiS. He stated that that department had provided an outstanding service and had undoubtedly assisted a number of schools in passing the external assessment.

#### RESOLVED

That the information in respect of the progress of the implementation of the Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS), as set out in the report submitted, be noted.

#### 15. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that meetings of Schools Forum would be held on the following dates in 2007/08: -

- Tuesday 11th December 2007
- Tuesday 5th February 2008
- Tuesday 18th March 2008
- Tuesday 20th May 2008
- Tuesday 8th July 2008

The meeting ended at 7.50pm

CHAIRMAN