

DUDLEY SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday 18th March 2008 at 6.00pm
Saltwells Education Centre, Bowling Green Road, Netherton

PRESENT

Mr Patterson (Chair)
Mrs Griffiths (Vice Chair)
Mrs Blunt, Mr Conway, Ms Cosgrove, Mrs Elwiss, Mr Hatton, Mr James,
Mr Johnston, Mr Lloyd, Mr Millman, Mr Mountney, Mr Pepper, Mr Ridley,
Mr Robertson, Mr Warner and Mr Wassall.

OFFICERS

Mr J Freeman – Director of Children’s Services, Mr R Watson – Assistant
Director of Children's Services (Resources), Ms J Porter – Assistant
Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education
Services) (Directorate of Children’s Services), Mr G Johnson – Head of
Performing Arts together with Mr C Jones Deputy Head of Performing
Arts (both Directorate of Children’s Services), Mr I Curnow – 14 –19 Aim
Higher Partnership Manager (Directorate of Children’s Services), Mrs K
Cocker – Children’s Services Finance Manager together with Mrs S
Coates – Senior Principal Accountant (both Directorate of Finance, ICT &
Procurement), Mr R Sanders Assistant Principal Officer (Democratic
Services) and Mr P T Furidze (Democratic Services Officer) (both
Directorate of Law & Property) - All Dudley M.B.C.

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of
Councillors Nottingham and Mrs Walker, Mr Bell, Mr Francis, Mr
Harrington, Mrs Hazlehurst, Mr Hudson, Mr Jessup, Mr Leyshon, Mr
Mountney, Ms Smith, Mr Timmins and Mr R Jewkes.

The following substitutions were also noted: -

Mr Pepper serving as a substitute for Mr Harrington and Mr Johnston
serving as substitute for Mr Sorrell.

15. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 5th
February, 2008, be approved as a correct record and signed.

16. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

In connection with Minute Number 3 – Matters arising from the minutes – Mr Sanders updated the Forum and reported that a report relating to the updating of the Forum’s Constitution was under preparation for submission to a future meeting.

18. CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman reported that a request to move forward agenda item number 12 (Proposals for the Implementation of Whole Class Instrumental Tuition) to follow agenda item number 4 (14 – 19 Diplomas – Update). Consequently, it was,

RESOLVED

That agenda item number 12 be considered after agenda item number 4.

17. 14 – 19 DIPLOMAS UPDATE

A report of the Director of Children’s Services was submitted to update the Forum on the latest developments relating to the 14 –19 Diplomas and seek approval to the funding framework for the 2008/09 academic year.

In submitting the report, Mr I Curnow, the 14 –19 Aim Higher Partnership Manager (Directorate of Children’s Services), referred to the three funding options set out in the report submitted and outlined the advantages and disadvantages of each option. The meeting was advised that Option 2 (partial delegation) was the best option since it was a compromise solution balancing certainty about budgets for schools with uncertainty about costs for schools. The funding framework for the delivery of the Diplomas, through local service providers, was outlined and the Forum informed that an initial allocation of £168,239 would be received based on 176 learner numbers predicted by the Halesowen Partnership. The Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) was expected to respond to the revised estimates of pupil numbers by the end of March 2008 to adjust or confirm the final funding allocation for each local authority.

The Forum noted DCSF guidance 18/207 defining the purpose and scope of the Diploma Formula grant to support additional costs, as set out in the report submitted, of delivering the Diplomas at KS4, for which costs could not be met from mainstream funding. It was also advised that since 2008/09 was the first academic year for the diploma delivery, the funding decision for 2008/09 should not set a precedent for future years and the funding framework for the 2009/10 academic year should be reviewed by the 14 – 19 Strategic Partnership.

Following further discussion on the benefits of adopting funding option 2 over the other two options, it was

RESOLVED

1. That the Forum support option 2 of the diploma funding framework for the 2008/09 academic year only subject to the model not setting a precedent for future years.
2. That the funding framework be reviewed by the 14 – 19 Strategic Partnership for 2009/10 and that a further recommendation on this issue be made to the Forum, when appropriate.
3. That an update on 2008/09 progress and further funding guidance, be provided to the Forum in December 2008.

18. PROPOSAL FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WHOLE CLASS INSTRUMENTAL TUITION

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on proposals for the implementation of Whole Class Instrumental Tuition (WCIT). An addendum to the report, containing alternative proposals in the light of cost considerations was also circulated.

In submitting the report and the Strategic Plan attached as appendices to the report, Mr Johnson, the Head of Performing Arts, assisted by Mr Jones the Deputy Head of Performing Arts, reported on a DCSF drive for all KS2 pupils to have an opportunity to play a musical instrument by 2011. It was reported that WCIT for traditional instruments such as guitars, trumpets and violins, would be integrated into the school curriculum. The Forum was informed that the programme as proposed in the original report, would cost between £1300 and £5200 depending on the size of the school. The key aspects of the alternative proposal were that each school would receive one term of WCIT at a cost of £150 per class and schools would have the option of extending it to the second or third terms at a cost of £575 per class per first term. Thus the overall cost to schools extending the project to a full year would remain unchanged and schools that were able to extend the project to a year would fully meet the government aspirations.

Arising from the presentation of the report and the addendum circulated and in reply to a query on how teachers would cope with the extra workload and whether sufficient skilled music teachers were available to ensure the programme's success, it was confirmed that there was a sufficient number of trained staff to work in support of class teachers to deliver music instrument tuition.

RESOLVED

That the Director of Children's Services be advised: -

That the alternative options in the report and the addendum thereto, be approved for submission to schools and that schools be invited to take up which of the alternatives they consider appropriate to them.

19. SCHOOL FUNDING SETTLEMENT

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the School Funding Settlement for 2008 –11.

Mrs Cocker, in presenting the report circulated updated information on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period 2008 – 11, together with the likely impact for Dudley. It was reported that whereas the latest February 2008 estimates of 47,578 pupils showed an increase of only 2.6 % translating to a DSG of £187.885, the latest estimates based on 47,692.4 pupils meant a 2.8% increase in the DSG £188.356m indicating an increase of 114 pupils and equating to or an increase of £0.471m for 2008/09. Sixty-six of the additional pupils related to the Private Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector, the remainder related to maintained schools.

It was reported that the £0.471m would be allocated to cater for the increase in the Private Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector and the ISB. It was also proposed to use pupil numbers of 46,992 and 46292 to represent the January 2009 and January 2010 census to calculate provisional Dedicated Schools Grants of £192.304m and £197.345m, respectively.

In the ensuing discussion, members raised concerns relating to sufficiency of the funding and expressed concern over bearing the burden of taking in pupils at the request of Social Services without being fully reimbursed. The Director of Children's Services informed the meeting that schools were not expected to fund pupils outside the regulatory framework and undertook to raise the issue of sufficient funding with central government. The Forum was also informed that cases of deprived children would be looked at sympathetically. A member requested and received an explanation regarding the calculation of funding for statements of Special Education Needs (SEN) of less than 15 hours.

Members questioned the level of funding provision from central government given the unknown budgetary implications of setting aside funds in school budgets to fund implementation of the single status and equal pay claims. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that schools were required to make budgetary provision for single status and equal pay claims but cautioned that the financial consequences of this were not yet known. The possibility of staff redundancies to enable schools to meet single status payments as well as equal pay claims, was also raised. The Assistant Director of Children's Services (Resources) informed the Forum that the job evaluation exercise was on schedule, would be followed by the completion and implementation of the new pay and grading structure. The situation regarding the costs of implementing single status would then become clearer and quantifiable.

In response to a related query on the matter, the Forum was informed that 2009 was the expected end date for single status and that equal pay issues would take approximately a further two years to resolve. The reduced funding from DCFS coupled with the negative impact of no-win no-fee lawyers were highlighted as contributory factors to the failure by schools to balance their books.

The Forum, following consideration of the DSG proposals set out in paragraph 19 of the report submitted, as read with paragraph 4 of the updated information provided at the meeting,

RESOLVED

That the Director of Children's Services be advised: -

1. That the 2008/09 DSG budget of £188.356m, be approved.
2. That the distribution of the additional £0.471m in 2008/09, £0.263m to PVI and £0.208m to ISB, be approved.
3. That the provisional DSG budget of £192.304m for 2009/10, be approved.
4. That the provisional DSG budget of £197.345m for 2010/11, be approved
5. That the proposal that funding of maintained nursery pupils, be based on their statutory element for a part-time placement from 1 April 2008 be based on 0.5fte and not actual attendance, be approved but that looked after children and pupil referrals from Social Services be considered sympathetically.

6. That the proposal that funding of maintained nursery pupils, be based on their statutory element for a part-time placement from 1 April 2008, which will remove funding for pupils who are not yet aged 3, be approved but that looked after children and pupil referrals from Social Services be considered sympathetically.
7. That in accordance with paragraph 5 of the report, the decision to allocate £2m of the 2008/09 funding settlement in line with Ministerial Priorities in favour of personalisation, be approved.
8. That the likelihood of school budget re-determinations for 2009/10 and 2010/11 as a result of formula budget reviews, be noted.
9. That the advice of the Director of Children's Services with respect to schools funding single status costs in 2008/09, be noted.

20. FORMULA FUNDING FOR CHANGING SCHOOLS PUBLISHED
ADMISSION NUMBERS (PAN)

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted seeking the Forum's views on the continuation of the formula for funding new pupil PAN increases and the treatment of this formula factor for purposes of calculating the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG).

Ms Coates reported that all local authorities were now required to use the single pupil count to calculate school budgets. The Forum was informed that the new formula did not allow for in-year adjustments to school budgets. Reference was made to how approved PAN increases for funding purposes would operate with respect to three schools in Table 1 of the report. It was reported that there were three other schools where 2010/11 was the final year of funding for PAN increase and these would be funded in accordance with previous School Forum approval.

The Forum was informed that whilst a decision was not required for PAN increases in 2008/09, a request would be made in the Autumn term for the Forum to decide whether, in view of the implications of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and Transforming Secondary Education initiatives, additional PAN increases should continue to be funded thereafter. It was also proposed that in view of it being inappropriate for the MFG to protect any funding which was temporary or for a fixed term, Regulation 25 gave the Schools Forum the authority to approve changes to the operation of the MFG provided the Forum was satisfied that 50% or less of pupils in schools were affected by the change.

RESOLVED

That the Director of Children's Services be recommended: -

1. That the recommendation of HTCF-BWG to review, at a later stage, the funding for new increases in PAN from 2009, be approved.
2. That the proposal for PAN funding to be treated as an excluded item effective from 2008/09 for the purposes of calculating the MFG, be approved.

21. STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) FOR VOLUNTARY REDUNDANCIES IN SCHOOLS

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted consulting on the revised Standard Operating Procedure for Funding of Schools' Redundancies.

Mr Watson reported that given the increasing financial challenges facing schools and the Directorate of Children's Services, it had been considered that this was an appropriate time to review the current SOP, in order to bring clarity in a number of areas. In presenting the report, Mr Watson referred the Forum to paragraph 3 of the report submitted setting out the proposed changes to the SOP. The Forum was also informed that the funds for the redundancies would be financed from a number of sources as identified in paragraphs 4 to 8 of the report submitted.

Arising from the report, members expressed concern about the meaning and effect of the term 'prudent financial management'. The Forum was assured that the term would be judiciously applied in the making of decisions relating to schools' applications for voluntary redundancies funding. It was reported that all available data would be taken into account and proposed budgets would expect to be agreed or challenged. The Forum was informed that the local authority welcomed the views of schools and would not seek to impose budgets. The Forum noted that some schools held large balances and these surpluses needed to be reduced.

RESOLVED

That the Schools Forum, subject to relevant or necessary modification, including further discussions with Union representation, support the application of the revised Standard Operating Procedure for the Funding of Redundancies in schools, attached as an appendix to the report submitted.

22. CLOSURE OF CRADLEY HIGH SCHOOL

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted to advise the Forum of the 2007/08 funding process together with the revenue budget position in respect of the Cradley High School.

Mrs Cocker reported the current budget and staffing positions as set out Tables 1 and 2 of the report submitted. The Forum was informed that although all efforts were being taken to redeploy all remaining staff, funds had been set aside to fund 'one-off' redundancy and lump sum enhancements costs. It was reported that the situation was being closely monitored and a further update would be given to the Forum meeting in May 2008.

Arising from consideration of the report, members requested that in order to enable matching of schools and staff awaiting redeployment, the various areas of speciality of those staff, for example Mathematics or Science, be made available to school heads. Consequently, the local authority could not instruct schools to take on staff awaiting redeployment.

RESOLVED

1. That the content of the report submitted, advising the Schools Forum on the 2007/08 funding process and the latest revenue budget, together with the responses given in respect of Cradley High School, be noted.
2. That further information will be made available to Head Teachers regarding curriculum area expertise of staff awaiting redeployment.

23. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) FINANCIAL MONITORING

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted providing the latest budget monitoring data to 31st January 2008, in respect of the Schools Budget for the 2007/08 financial year.

In submitting the report, Mrs Cocker highlighted the aspects of the budget including the net outturn, forecast variances for 2007/08 and the identified new budget pressure of £146.000 in respect of nursery payments to private providers.

Arising from consideration of the report submitted, a request was received relating to information on the expected savings figures for individual schools in respect of the CAF (Common Assessment Framework). Mrs Cocker undertook to provide schools with the requested information but indicated that this would be approximately £2 to £3 per pupil to be allocated in 2008/09.

In response to a request for training on finance and budgets, the Director of Children's Services undertook to submit a report on training proposals including possible subject areas, to a future meeting of the Forum.

RESOLVED

1. That the 2007/08 DSG Budget monitoring position as set out in Table 1 of the report submitted, be noted.
2. That the Director of Children's Services be requested to submit a Member training proposals report to a future meeting of the Forum.
3. That the Children's Services Finance Manager be requested to provide the Members of the Forum with requested information relating to expected savings figures for individual schools in respect of the CAF.

24. DUDLEY'S SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS – CONSULTATION OUTCOMES

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted to seek the Forum's approval to Dudley's Scheme for Financing Schools, as revised after the recent consultation.

Mrs Cocker reported that there had been a consultation exercise as shown by the responses and proposals in Appendix 1 of the report submitted. It was also reported that discussions were underway in respect of single status costs for 2008/09 and future years and that although the Director of Children's Services had confirmed the claw back mechanism would not be relaxed, the Scheme for Financing Schools would be reviewed to accommodate the setting of Single Status and Equal Pay contingencies. It was also proposed that an item be added to the Controls on Surplus Balances section, to accommodate the acceptance of single status and equal pay contingencies, to a value agreed with the local authority.

RESOLVED

That the proposed revisions to Dudley's Scheme for Financing Schools, as set out in the recent consultation document and including the additional item to be added under the Controls on Surplus Balances section to accommodate the acceptance of single status and equal pay contingencies, to a value agreed with the local authority, be approved.

25. SCHOOL FINANCE REGULATIONS (ENGLAND) 2008

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted to advise the Forum of the DCFS School Finance Regulations 2008.

Arising out of consideration of the report and Appendices, in particular the relevant Regulations, Members commented that the local authority was already complying with requirements.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report submitted, be noted.

26. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that meetings of Schools Forum had been scheduled for the following dates in 2008: -

- Tuesday 20th May 2008
- Tuesday 8th July 2008

The meeting ended at 7.55pm

CHAIRMAN