

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 17th JANUARY 2007 AT HERTFORDSHIRE DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

ATTENDANCE

Chair:

Richard Smith
(From 3.30pm Alan Gray)

Schools members:

Martin Post
Stephen Drake
Alan Gray
Richard Haynes
John Grubb
Alison Saunders
Paul Johnson
Paul Rosen
Peter Brooks
Barbara Snijder

Observers:

Ivor Miskelly
David Lloyd

Officers:

Claire Cook
Simon Pickard
Cheryl Faint
Debbie Orton (item 4)
Steve Saint (item 5)
Janine Bryant (item 5)
Gillian Cawley (item 5)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Annie Brown, Dave Bent, Dave Victor, Christine Marshall and Michael Taylor.

2. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

In response to the request made by members, at the December meeting of the Forum, for further information on Music service costs and participation rates the report "Herts Music Service – Impact of Prices on levels of take up" was distributed as an information item.

Members of the Forum were reminded that induction sessions were available to new members to provide information on the wide range of subjects covered by the Forum. Expressions of interest were invited by Claire Cook.

Members of the Forum were concerned that the partnership areas set for Extended schools and Children Centres should be co-terminus and take into account existing partnerships which have developed over time and work well. The Forum felt that cluster arrangements for special needs follow the extended school cluster basis. Officers noted the Forum's concerns.

4. New mainstream SEN Funding arrangements

Simon Pickard and Debbie Orton attended for this item and presented the paper circulated with the agenda.

The Forum considered and commented on the outcomes of the consultation process. Schools Forum raised concerns about the transition from the current system of SEN Funding to the proposed methodology. Concerns were raised about the administrative burden which will be placed on schools by the new process, particularly on headteachers. The Authority recognised that it requires time to prepare the cases for children who will still need to be represented at panel. However this will be required for far less children than under the current system. It was emphasised that statements system would still continue and is not affected by this change in funding arrangements.

The Forum raised concerns about the use of Free School Meals (FSM) as a formula factor in the predictable needs formula. In response, it was recognised that there are difficulties in the use of FSM as a measure. The Working Group had spent considerable time researching this issue and concluded that FSM provided the best proxy measure with a good correlation to needs.

Schools Forum was interested to hear about the management of the transition to the new system, particularly on the expectations of parents. Debbie Orton explained that there will be 8 sessions in late January/ early February to present information to parents.

Members were concerned that parents are a powerful group and schools would be at the forefront of explaining these changes.

Major concerns were raised by Schools Forum about the financial impacts on Schools and the effect it will have on meeting parent's current expectations. It was felt that whilst the vast majority of schools gained, the potential losses in funding to some schools were of great concern. Schools Forum sought commitment from the Authority that early advice of the SEN funding under the new system should be made to schools so that effective budget planning could take place and aid discussions with parents on the plans for their children. It was agreed that the SEN funding calculations would be circulated to schools after the February half term.

The Forum expressed concern that the consultation process for this complex proposal had been very short. The speed of the process had not afforded the opportunity to consider in sufficient detail the issues raised.

It was agreed that the new arrangements would be reviewed at an appropriate point after implementation.

The Schools Forum endorsed the proposed budget split, exceptional needs allocation process, modified formula funding formulae and enhanced transitional protection arrangements for consideration by the Cabinet as proposed in this paper.

Schools Forum also approved the retention of funding for Special Educational Needs in line with the budget set out in paragraph 7 of the paper, including the £1.7m additional funding, as a centrally retained item within the Schools Budget of the authority.

Schools Forum approved an annual review of the SEN funding arrangements within the forthcoming multi-year funding period 2008-09 to 2010-11.

5. School IT Systems Support MIS Contracts

Steven Saint, Gillian Cawley and Janine Bryant attended for this item.

This paper presented detailed proposals to Forum on pricing for services provided by Schools IT Systems Support. Amendments to the paper distributed with the agenda were notified to the Forum and these are contained in appendix 1 of these minutes.

Schools Forum approved the changes to SITSS MIS charging on a staged basis over two years from 2007/8.

6. Outcomes of Formula Consultation with Schools

Cheryl Faint presented this item. The Forum considered the outcomes to proposal 7-24 of the November 2006 consultation ("The Consultation") on School Funding Arrangements.

In respect of section 6.1 "Cognitive ability test (CAT)" results, officers confirmed that the Authority will continue to support schools who wish to use CAT scores for internal assessment purposes as at present.

A clarification was made on proposals 15 and 16. The Consultation referred to data being collected from PLASC returns in January 2007. The data will be collected from the 618G which is sourced from payroll data as at the School Census date.

Schools Forum raised concerns in respect of paragraph 9.5 of the paper regarding the use of clawed back funds to provide additional funds for the schools capital programme. The Forum asked for the opportunity to learn more about the operation of the Asset Management Plan and in particular to examine how its priorities are set. It was agreed that at a paper on Capital strategy would be brought to the April meeting of the Schools Forum.

School's Forum endorsed proposals 7-24 of the Consultation.

7. Boxmoor House Budget 2006-7 and 2007-8

Simon Pickard presented this paper. Forum asked for clarification on several points. It was explained to Forum that there continues to be costs arising from staff suspended from duties. The proposed budget for "Independent Special School Fees" relates to fees for children who either were or would have attended Boxmoor House.

Members of the Forum noted the forecasted out-turn against the 2006/7 budget and approved the proposed 2007/8 budget for retention within the centrally retained budget of the Authority.

8. Detailed Budget report 2007/8

This paper was presented by Claire Cook, who explained to Schools Forum the financial pressures facing the Authority in 2007/8.

Schools Forum approved the proposal in paragraph 5.4 of the paper to distribute energy inflation in a way that protects the AWPU increases included in the indicative budget shares. Forum also approved the contingency budget as set out in paragraph 5.7.

Schools Forum supported the proposals concerning the distribution of headroom as laid out in paragraphs 7.1 (a. to e.) and 7.3. These will be presented to Cabinet in February.

There was a discussion about the underspend on the budget for private, voluntary and independent nurseries due to a lower participation rate of 85% for three year olds in Hertfordshire than the DfES expected rate of 90%. Moves are being made to address this.

The Forum gave approval for the Central Expenditure Limit (CEL) to be increased to £84.602M for 2007/8 as laid out in paragraph 9.3.

9. Forward Work Programme

Simon Pickard presented this paper.

Forum was reminded that last year's February meeting overran the planned time by a considerable margin. Forum agreed that the agenda may be amended in the event of late funding announcements. If necessary, some papers may be moved to accommodate any urgent business that may arise.

10. Any other business

It was agreed that all future meetings of Schools Forum will start at 1.00pm to include lunch.

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 1.00pm on Wednesday 21st February 2007 at Hertfordshire Development Centre, Wheathampstead.

Appendix One

5. Amendments to “School IT systems Support MIS Contracts 2007/8”

The Forum was notified of amendments to Appendix 1a and Appendix 1b for online support packages to now read as follows;

Appendix 1a

	Primary schools		Middle Schools	
	Basic level	Advanced Data user	Basic Level	Advanced data user
On site Support	√ #	√	√#	√

Appendix 1b

	Secondary Schools		
	Basic level	Intermediate	Advanced
On site support	√#	√	√

√# pre-agreed on-site support

Appendix 2 Table 1

The following amendment was made to table 1 (Appendix 2) SIMS Licence & Maintenance.

% change from current to year 2	Number of children = 220	Should read 3% (not 1%)
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