

Meeting of the Schools Forum

Tuesday 7th July 2009

(4.00 pm, Sapphire Room, Emerald Suite at NLBP)

Attended

- Members:
- Alan Homes (NASUWT)
 - Anthea Aberly (Head, Rosh Pinah)
 - Anthony Vourou (Governor, St John's N11)
 - Dee Oelman (Head, St Mary's & St John's)
 - Gilbert Knight (Governor, Oakleigh)
 - Helen Schmitz (Head, Cromer Road)
 - Jayne Franklin (Head, Childs Hill)
 - Jeanette Adak (Head, Monkfrith)
 - John Marincowitz (Head, QE Boys)
 - Johnathan Hewlings (Governor, East Barnet)
 - Kate Webster (Head QE Girls)
 - Ken Huggins (Governor, The Compton)
 - Kevin Hoare (Head, Finchley Catholic)
 - Mick Quigley (Principal Inspector, Children's Service)
 - Stephen Parkin (Governor, St Mary's High)
- LA Officers:
- Robert McCulloch Graham (Director of Children's Service)
 - Martin Baker (Deputy Director, Children's Service)
 - Carol Beckman (School Funding Manager)
 - Denise Murray (Strategic Finance Manager)
 - Nick Adams (School Services Finance Manager)
 - Linda Parker (Strategic Finance Manager)
 - Val White (Assistant Director,)
 - Tony Lampert (HR Manager)
- Consultant:
- Geoff Boyd (Consultant)
- Clerk:
- Sarosh Malik (School Resources & Support Officer)

Not Present

- Members:
- Angela Murphy (14-19Partnership, Head Bishop Douglas)
 - Gary Tucker (Head, Christ's College Finchley)
 - Hazel Godfrey (Governor, Broadfields)
 - Derrick Brown (Governor, Ashmole)
 - Lynda Walker (Head, Oak Lodge)
 - Elizabeth Pearson (Governor, Livingstone)
 - Jodi Gurney (Head, Hampden Way)
 - Sarah Vipond (Early Years Working Group)
 - Jo Djora (Head, Coppetts Wood)
 - Tim Bowden (Head, Holy Trinity)
- Observers:
- Cllr Fiona Bulmer
 - Angela Trigg (London Academy)
 - Lucy Salaman (LSC Partnership Manager)

1. Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Bulmer, Lynda Walker, Derrick Brown, Elizabeth Pearson, Gary Tucker, Lucy Salaman, Jo Djora and Sarah Vipond.

2. Minutes of previous meeting (12th May 2009)

Proposer: KH

Seconder: AH

3. Matters Arising (On Agenda)

Minute 3.4 –Insurance

Minute 3.7 – Contracts

VW gave an update to the Schools Forum. She said that Barnet Catering are carrying out benchmarking and will report back to the Schools Forum in October. Schools will be able to compare Barnet Catering to other private companies.

VW explained that Barnet Catering is a traded service. If schools choose to tender then they will be supported. DM said that because it is an in house service the LA decide what to outsource.

SP asked about schools buying in to insurance with Barnet as an in house service. He said that the council's insurers give a lower quotation when contacted directly than through Barnet. The insurance section at Barnet cannot give an explanation for this. JH said that at the last meeting it was said that the Head of Insurance would be attending today's meeting. LP replied that Paul Lawrence was not able to make it today and will be invited to the next meeting. SP suggested that information could have been sent out rather than have to wait until October. RMG confirmed that the information will be sent out.

DM told the Schools Forum that contract data will be released to the website by the end of this month. She added there is an internal team monitoring the contracts and they have been given the Schools Forum's meeting dates to work around.

JM asked if schools could go buy into energy contracts. DM explained that all contracts are accessible to schools apart from the ones at the bottom of the spreadsheet. JH queried what 'giving a view' means in relation to the Schools Forum. DM said that only services where schools are the major clients would require the forum to give a view.

DM clarified the query around AIG Insurance. She said she checked it and confirmed that the company is AIG UK not AIG Inc which has been downgraded. She also said that the Leader had been briefed.

KH commented on the first class service that has been provided by the insurance section. DM and LP said they would feed back to the department.

AH said the guidance on 1-2-1 tuition suggested that teachers would receive double pay. JF explained that the teachers carry out 1-2-1 tuition outside of contractual school time.

KH asked whether benchmarking information on the costs of admissions was available. LP said she would follow this up.

TL gave a brief summary of the issues surrounding Nursery Nurses having reported back to the primary heads two weeks ago. He said they were close to agreement with the Trade Unions and further information would be given to primary and nursery heads before the end of term.

4. Items for Agreement

4.1 Balances as at the end of 2008/09

NA told the Schools Forum about the national position at February 2009 when school balances were reported to be £2bn. Funding should be used for current pupils and there is a danger of claw back from the local authority if the balances do not go down. The DCSF carried out a survey at the end of 2008/09 of balances which showed a general downward trend.

NA said that there has been a lot of discussion during last year at the Schools Forum about School Balances and it was agreed that after if there was an increase in balances then there would be a review.

NA explained that all schools which have revenue balances in excess of 5% (secondary) or 8% (nursery, primary and special) of their 2008/09 Budget Shares will be asked to explain their balance and potentially be subject to claw back in accordance with the Scheme for Financing Schools and in accordance with the procedure agreed with the Schools Forum. He said the results of this exercise would be reported back to the Schools Forum.

NA went on to explain the possible contributory factors to high revenue balances shown in his paper. He said that whilst schools are asked to use detailed planning to prevent excess surpluses, schools are also expected to plan to avoid deficits.

NA asked the Schools Forum to note the actions being taken including the proposal to consult schools on a change to paragraph 4.1 of the Scheme of Financing Schools. NA said that he would bring the results back to the Schools Forum to make a decision.

AH asked why there were redundancies if so few schools are in deficit. NA said that redundancies are often linked to children with SEN leaving.

Regarding devolved formula capital DM suggested that the LA could hold the money if the school would otherwise hold it in balances. AA said that DFC funding comes through DCSF and that schools must 'spend it or lose it'. NA told the Schools Forum that VA schools get their DFC from the Government therefore different scenarios apply

MB suggested that tighter wording is needed for Point 5 of the actions. DM explained that the words are from the technical guidance notes.

JM asked the Schools Forum if they agreed to the wording being changed. JH

added that clarification was needed on Point 2 of the actions, asking what the process is. NA explained that the process would be the same as last year. He said that a pro forma was sent asking what is committed and what is unspent. He mentioned that schools have always justified their balances in the past.

JH asked about the Schools Forum's responsibility in this. KH said that the forum is responsible for the 29 schools above the 5%/8% limit. MB suggested that members could work with NA.

DM said that the Government looks at this issue nationally and doesn't look at commitments. MQ added that it's not just the 29 schools, it could affect all schools if Government takes action.

MB suggested schools are reminded about the claw back process. JF explained that schools are already aware and that Schools Forum members have been talking to other Heads and Governors who are discussing the issues. She added that Standards Funds may only be small amounts but they do add up and it would be helpful to have allocations earlier.

JM said that action needed to be decided. NA said two proposals need to be agreed. First proposal is to consult schools on the wording. A second proposal was made that the Scheme be changed for all revenue balances above 5% (secondary) or 8%(primary, nursery and special) to be clawed back unless a sum which is legitimately deferred and assigned is approved by a sub committee of the Schools Forum. NA said that there is no time to do this term. KW asked for the points to be included in the School Circular this term so there is time to think about it. RMG agreed.

JM concluded that two proposals would be sent to schools for consultation. JM asked the Schools Forum to endorse the documents and for the two results of consultation of the two proposals to be discussed at the next meeting.

Unanimous agreement.

4.2 Dedicated Schools Grant 2008/09 and 2009/10 – options of use for underspend

LP presented the paper to the Schools Forum. She said that the figures had been reproduced in this report against the Section 52 lines showing the proposed use of the underspend.

She said Table 2 included the final LSC figures. She told the Schools Forum that the DCSF have announced the final DSG 2009/10 and that the LA were nearly spot on with just an increase of one pupil.

She explained three proposed uses of the underspend: Pupil Place Planning, Nursery Nurses and Asset Management Plans.

LP recommended that Asset Management should be funded as surveys could be used for future investment. She said that if there is better information then there would be better capital allocations. She told the Schools Forum it would

cost £3500 per Primary School and £8000 for Secondary Schools, a total of £400k would be needed. The Children's Service would be allocating £100k and the Schools Forum would be asked to agree an allocation of £175.6k.

LP also mentioned the pressure of BSF. She said that there is a requirement to identify £2.9m - £4m. She explained that funding needs to start being identified from now, subject to the bid being satisfactory.

KH said that there was a lack of playing fields and no funding for these. VW explained that sports provision is being looked at as part of BSF. She said this survey is more about the condition of school buildings.

JM remarked that as the contingency is top sliced from ISB, should it not go back to schools. He also said that if the contingency is too large then less should be allocated next year.

JM went on to say that accurate surveys are needed, but shouldn't the LA be taking the cost on. He added that if the forum contributes towards BSF it could trigger £85m but some schools would never see any of that money.

AH asked if Asset Management would include asbestos. SP explained that an asbestos survey had already been carried out. SP asked who would carry out the surveys. VW said it would be put out to tender. SP recommended approaching RIBA. LP explained that Keith Rowley is given good advice on who to use. DO asked if surveys would just be for community schools. LP said it would be all schools.

VW said that BSF schemes would be starting in autumn and officers need to get in as quickly as possible.

DM told the Schools Forum that additional funding for Asset Management is needed as it can't be carried out with internal funding. MB explained that this unplanned underspend is a one off and that the contingency is set at an appropriate level.

KW told the Schools Forum that the recommendation is right in principle. She said that there is a lot of sensitivity around BSF. The first wave of schools may be lucky but the other schools will not benefit. RMG said that all schools would benefit eventually.

JM concluded that there is £271k underspend with £190k of that from contingency. He said that there are different interests for LA and Schools and that both have pressing issues. He asked the Schools Forum if they agree to fund Asset Management and BSF.

Both – 11 Agreed
BSF only – 1 Agreed
AM only – 1 Agreed

SP asked the LA to check with schools if they have had a recent survey.

4.3 Targeted Capital Fund grant for improvements to school kitchens and dining rooms

VW presented the paper to the Schools Forum. She told the Schools Forum that the DCSF invited expressions of interest for the Targeted Capital Fund grant for School Kitchens. Following an initial expression of interest, Barnet's detailed bid totalled £5.4m. The DCSF have recently advised that rather than select successful bidders, Ministers have agreed that all authorities that submitted should get half of their bid.

VW explained that the LA have to ask the Schools Forum to agree to the projects. AA asked why there is a kosher kitchen at the Tudor School site. VW said that they serve the Jewish Primary schools.

JM asked the Schools Forum if they agreed to the proposal.

Unanimously Agreed.

Proposer – KH

Secunder - JH

4.4 Consultation on the Schools Forum Regulations

CB presented the paper to the Schools Forum. She explained that the DCSF have redrafted Schools Forum regulations and are consulting on a number of changes.

CB said that the DCSF was concerned that academies and private providers should be properly represented. She explained that academies would be able to comment and make decisions about funding for all schools even though academies funding is not made public. CB suggested that a comment to the DCSF should be made on this.

CB asked the forum whether they would be keen to take a view on the sufficiency of nursery provision in the borough. It could be an onerous responsibility but all agreed.

CB explained that some LAs with contrasting geographical localities might wish to have locality representation on the Schools Forum. AH though this would be a matter for the future.

5 Items for Information

5.1 Report of the Early Years Working Group (1st July 2009)

Deferred until the next meeting

5.4 Building Schools For the Future – Update July 2009

VW told the Schools Forum that Barnet was among 9 authorities to be invited to a 'Readiness to Deliver Assessment Panel' on 1st July at the DCSF. The feedback at this panel was generally positive and our submission was regarded as strong. She said there were still a couple of areas being addressed.

VW explained that there were some concerns among secondary heads and although it can't be properly quantified yet BSF will benefit all schools. VW went on further to explain that the current economic climate and a possible change in administration could jeopardize future BSF programmes so it is important to join the scheme as soon as possible. She said that there would be meeting for headteachers within a fortnight.

KH said that transparency is important. TV asked if there were any plans for primary schools. RMG explained that there is a different funding scheme for primary schools. He added that when investment comes through the money needs to be spent quickly. RMG promised to work on a long term strategy for all schools.

RMG apologised for having to leave the meeting early.

5.3 Administration of Free Milk in Schools

VW told the Schools Forum about the company Cool Milk that offers an administration scheme at no cost to Local Authorities, schools or settings. The company can administer the free milk at no cost because their main aim is to offer parents of older children the option of purchasing a daily delivery of milk.

VW explained that currently £17k is set aside for milk in schools. She said most schools are in the scheme and that using Cool Milk would save £17k and free up administration time. JF agreed that at present it is time consuming.

Members were concerned whether free milk would be stopped on 5th birthday or at the end of term. JM asked VW to clarify the situation and talk to primary heads.

VW asked if the LA should go ahead to start Cool Milk in September assuming that she can clarify when a 5yr old child stops receiving free milk.

All Agreed.

7 Any Other Business

No.

8. Dates of future meetings

8.1

Tue 6 th Oct 2009	4.30 pm (with briefing at 4pm)
Tue 24 th Nov 2009	4.30pm (with briefing at 4pm)
Tue 2 nd Feb 2010	4.30pm (with briefing at 4pm)
Tue 18 th May 2010	4.30pm (with briefing at 4pm)
Tue 13 th July 2010	4.30pm (with briefing at 4pm)