

Minutes of the fourth meeting of the Schools Forum held at Brent Town Hall at 6.00 p.m. on Wednesday 3rd December 2003

Attendance

Members of the Forum

Governors

Countess Mariaska Romanov
Stephen Greene
Rochelle Haussman
Pat Anderson
Mike Heiser (Chair)

Headteacher

Martin Earley
Judy Edwards
Vivienne Orloff
Kathy Heaps
Sue Knowler
Terry Molloy
Mike Maxwell
Sylvie Libson

Others

Lesley Benson (EYDCP)
Tony Vaughan (T Union)

Observers

Cllr. Michael Lyon – Lead Member Education Arts and Libraries
Tommy Masters (Learning and Skills Council)

Officers

John Christie	Director of Education	
Martin Stratford	Assistant Director of Education	
Duncan McLeod	Deputy Director of Finance	
Roger Annan	Education Financial Services	minutes

Apologies for absence received from Corinne Van Colle (newly appointed representative of the VA sector) Frank Thomas and Joyce Bacchus. Shailen Shailendra has resigned from the Forum. The Chair thanked George Benham for his work on the Forum and noted that he had been replaced by Martin Earley as a secondary headteacher representative. The Chair also welcomed Mr. Ken Chapman of the Audit Commission as a visitor.

2. Minutes of the second meeting held 2nd July 2003 and matters arising from them

Two amendments were made to the minutes – the addition of the word budget as the penultimate word in line one of item 5 and the correction of the intended finish time of the next meeting in item 9 to 8 p.m.

There were two matters arising:

- It was agreed to defer further consideration of the asset management plan to the next meeting of the Forum.
- Martin reported that advice regarding school journeys had been contracted out and that it would be issued towards the beginning of the next term.

3. Funding Formula review 2004-05

Martin introduced the formula review and went through points from the papers provided. As a result of the consultation some extra models had been provided in the papers for the meeting. He went through the issues arising from the consultation and the resultant proposals from officers. He stressed that accurate figures for individual schools' budgets would not be able to be calculated until the 2004 PLASC data was available (second half of January). September 2003 pupil number data was being used in current calculations. There was no specific funding included for workforce reform or single status issues. He explained the minimum pupil funding guarantee and that it excluded statements of SEN, NNDR and sixth form funding. He also gave details of the teachers pay increase.

There would be growth requirements in 2004/05 due to increases in out Borough costs for SEN (due to unpredicted increased numbers of placements and substantially increased charges from SEN independent schools), additional teacher requirements at the KS4 PRU and increased demands on the home tuition service. These came to around £2m and meant that within the Schools Block budget the non-devolved element would increase by a greater percentage than the increase in funding devolved to schools. This will require the Council to ask the Secretary of State for a dispensation and he asked the Forum to support such a request. The effect of this would be for the Schools budget to increase by 5.5% rather than the 6.8% that would apply without the SEN growth. The 5.5% was still over 2% more than the level of inflation for 2004/05 of 3.4% assumed by the DfES. In cash terms, the extra 2% provides about £2m over inflation and after allowing for the impact of rising rolls that would leave around £1.25m available to schools for workforce reform, single status and other budget pressures.

The original decision to reduce the Standards Fund has been reversed by the DfES. However, the reversal of previously announced reductions by the DfES left the EAL budget short by £0.740m of matched funding for non-devolved Standards Fund projects.

In answer to questions Martin said that final 2004/05 budget decisions and decisions with regard to the funding formula would be made by the Executive on 9th February 2004. The executive Meeting on 8th December 2003 would be making initial decisions on the budget.

Martin said that the DfES had indicated that they did not expect workforce reform to proceed as quickly as expected and that the key year for funding it would be 2005-06.

Sylvie expressed considerable concern about the effect of the non-delegated expenditure increase within the Schools Block that effectively reduced available additional funding to schools from 6.8% to 5.5%. She felt that the Council should look elsewhere for the additional funding and commented that Brent's funding levels for primary education were low compared to those of neighbouring authorities.

Mike Maxwell was concerned that the issues of workforce reform and Teacher Pay and Conditions issues were setting up schools to be in conflict with their staff. Sylvie felt a message should be sent to the DfES from the Forum that workforce reform could not proceed effectively without specific funding being made available for it.

Michael Lyon said that the SEN issues could not be ducked, and explained that the Council was subject to an overall 5.8% ceiling for formula grant increase. He explained the difficulties in raising Council tax in 2004/05 by significantly more than the rate of inflation due to the Government's threat to use their reserve capping powers, particularly in the light of the 20% increase in 2003/04. He was not aware of any compulsory redundancies occurring in 2003/04 in schools. Judy described the needs of the elderly and social service requirements that she came into contact with daily and that these had to be taken into account in the Council's budget. Michael L stressed the needs of other Brent services. Sylvie felt strongly that the SEN increases should be funded from further increases in Council Tax. Sue felt that if the Forum did support the Council's application for dispensation the word 'reluctantly' should be put in any recommendation to the Council. Sylvie wanted additional funding to ensure primary schools got the 6.8% increase. The need to put additional growth into SEN items in the schools block was not disputed, but it should not be at the expense of the funds devolved to schools.

The Chair summed up in three options:

- (a) not to support the application for dispensation
- (b) agree to support the application
- (c) agree but state a preference for Brent to fund a 6.8% increase to schools' devolved funding.

A question was asked about the effect on the budget of non-collection of tax. Duncan said that this did not impact on the issues under discussion.

It was AGREED not to support the Council's application for dispensation and that the additional funding required to meet the growth in SEN needs within the Schools Block should be met by increasing the Council Tax. (9 votes to 2 with 3 declared abstentions).

The Forum then discussed the individual funding formula factor issues raised in the consultation process:

The SEN audit had not produced an overall preference from the options suggested although option 1 had the most support. The Devolved Funding Heads' Group had suggested that funding could be distributed on a basis of 50% by roll and 50% on the basis of action/action plus number with a maximum loss protection factor of 3.5% applied throughout. Martin produced a model of this proposal that showed that the outcome of this would be that a few schools would gain significantly and the majority would be protected. Nursery figures are low. After considerable debate and discussion of further modelling, it was decided that further thought was needed before a decision could be made. It was agreed to ask Martin to produce a further model for the next meeting based on school action and action plus data (option 1) with the values weighted at 1/1.5 as per the current audit bandings.

Social deprivation factor After discussion it was AGREED to use the 200 most deprived Boroughs in London as the basis for identification and model 3 (£2,000 floor) was AGREED as the basis of distribution (5 votes to 3).

Needs-led factor AGREED no change.

Nursery funding Place factor AGREED.

Floors/ceilings It was felt that this had been superseded by national funding decisions. In response to a question Martin explained the absolute minimum increase per pupil would be 3.4%.

John Kelly Project Concern was expressed by the primary sector but this change was agreed after Martin assured the Forum that the additional funding was outside the 5.5% ISB increase and including the factor in the ISB avoided the need to seek further dispensation from the DfES for the project, which would otherwise be in the non-devolved Schools Block.

Funding for reducing numbers No view was taken.

Federation split site factor It was agreed to accept this subject to a three-year limit on its application.

Reduce number of factors AGREED no change.

Primary heads suggested that, in view of workforce reform, the PTR used in the curriculum weighting calculation be changed from 1:26 to 1:24. There was further debate on the funding situation compared to the SSA of the primary sector. Kathy explained that one third of specialist school funding was required to be spent on the family of primary schools associated with each specialist secondary school. Sylvie did not believe that this always happened.

It was agreed that the PTR change should be modelled and discussed further at the next meeting.

Members of the Forum agreed to continue the meeting to 8.15 p.m.

4. Non-devolved items within the Schools Block

Martin went through appendix A of document 2 and the Schools Forum AGREED the items included in the non devolved element of the Schools Block.

5. Other 2004-05 budget issues (new growth, including workforce reform)

The Forum noted the five 2004/05 budget proposals from the Teachers Panel (full passporting; full funding of all pay awards, rising rolls and inflation; restoration of the Trade union Facilities Agreement; full funding of workforce reform and an increase of at least 50% in the funding of non-statemented pupils) and agreed to consider them further at the next meeting.

Other issues had been covered in the discussions recorded above.

6. School Meals Contract

The Forum was asked to agree to the proposals for dealing with the school meals contract as set out in the report at document 10. A further single paper was tabled giving further details of requirements for nutrition and related issues. It was agreed to make no comment on the report. Lesley welcomed the additional nutritional requirements.

7. Standard School Year

The ALG has determined to recommend the standard school year if two-thirds of London LEAs support it. This number has yet to be reached (mainly because several LEAs have yet to take a formal position) and so the proposal is unlikely to go ahead in 2005-06. Agreed to discuss further at the next meeting.

8. Any other business

A suggestion was made that support/training be provided for governor representatives on the Forum. Attention was drawn to an area on the DfES web site aimed at helping Schools Forum members. To be discussed further at the next meeting.

9. Time, date and venue of the next meeting

It was agreed to hold the next meeting on **Wednesday 28th January 2004 at 6.00 p.m.**

As no rooms at the Town Hall are available on that date, the meeting will be held at John Kelly Girls' School.

A suggestion that the meeting be lengthened by 30 minutes was not accepted

The meeting closed at 8.30 p.m.

RA 4.12.03