

ST. HELENS COUNCIL
SCHOOLS FORUM

Draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Schools Forum
Held on Thursday 12th March 2015 at 4.30 p.m. at the Town Hall

Members:

Primary School Head Teachers

- *Mrs C. Cropper, Birchley St Mary's Catholic Primary
- Mrs C. Morris, St Julie's Catholic Primary
- Mr I. Williams, Sutton Oak CE Primary
- *Mrs C. Gowan, Eccleston Lane Ends Primary
- Mrs J. Cottrell, Corpus Christi Catholic Primary

Secondary School Head Teachers and Representatives

- *Mr I. Murphy, Haydock High School
- *Mr C. Sheeran, Cowley International College
- Mr I. Young, Rainford High Technology College

Special School Head Teacher

Mr C. Myers, Mill Green

Primary School Governors

- *Mr T. A. Narayanan, Rectory Church of England Primary School
- *Mrs J. Dearden, Wargrave CE Primary
- *Mr W. Leatherbarrow, Birchley St Mary's Catholic Primary
- Mr K. Aspinall, Rainford Church of England Primary School
- *Mr R. Ferry, Carr Mill Primary

Secondary School Governors

Mr D. Callan, De La Salle
Vacant
Vacant

Special School Governor

- *Mr. W. Bradbury, Mill Green School

Nursery School Head Teacher/Governor

Mrs. M. Smith, Rainhill Community Nursery School

14-19 Partnership

Ms. M. Williams, Carmel College

Union Representative

- *Ms. S. Duncan, Newton le Willows Primary School

PVI Early Years Provider Representative

Ms L. Ashton, Brooklands Childcare

Diocesan and Archdiocesan Representative

Mr. T. Warren

Academy Representative

- *Mr N. Gribben, The Sutton Academy
- Vacant

PRU Representative

- *Ms. J. Johnson

Elected Member Observer

Councillor S. Murphy

*Denotes Members Present

Also Present: Mr G. Tyrer, Business Support Manager
Mr A. Dempsey, Director of Children and Young People's Services
Mrs D. Gilchrist, Principal Accountant for Schools

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Ms M Williams, Mr C Myers, Mr T Warren, Mr I Williams, Mrs C Morris, Cllr S Murphy, Mr K Aspinall, Mr D Callan and Mr I Young.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 15th January 2015

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes

There were no matters arising.

4. Schools Forum Constitution

Mr Tyrer explained that the Schools Forum Constitution and Terms of Reference had been updated in line with guidance and regulations provided by the Department for Education (DfE) to reflect the current role of the Schools Forum.

He stated that there have been no amendments to the current membership arrangements though these would be reviewed in 12 months when the current term of office expires. Membership will be reviewed to ensure that there is an appropriate balance between primary / secondary / special / academy representatives.

Mr Tyrer explained that the Schools Forum is mainly a consultancy body with final decisions being made by the local authority.

The Forum approved the updated Schools Forum Constitution and Terms of Reference.

5. Secondary Schools Delegation / De-delegation

Mr Tyrer stated that this was an outstanding item from the last meeting of the Schools Forum. He explained that the school funding formula had been approved at the last meeting with the exception of the delegation / de-delegation arrangements for secondary schools. Secondary head teacher representatives had since been consulted with and a paper had been supplied to members of the Forum showing the proposed delegation / de-delegation arrangements for secondary schools.

The secondary school representatives agreed to the proposals.

Mr Tyrer informed the Forum that the secondary school governor representative no longer wished to be a member of the Schools Forum and this meant that there are now no secondary school governor representatives. Mr Tyrer stated that governor services would be contacted to request volunteers.

6. School Funding Formula

Mr Tyrer stated that the school funding formula had been discussed at the previous meeting of the Forum and concerns had been expressed by the primary representatives regarding the distribution of funding.

He explained that he had attended a meeting with primary head teachers in January to give an indication of the difference in funding levels across primary schools and to request an initial agreement between head teachers for the local authority to look at the funding formula for primary schools. He explained that there would be no movement of funds between primary and secondary phases, but there would be a movement of funds between individual primary schools.

Mr Tyrer stated that if the majority of head teachers did not support a review of the formula then the local authority would not undertake the work.

Mr Narayanan queried why the review was necessary.

Mr Tyrer explained that some small primary schools were not receiving much funding through the current formula in the deprivation and low prior attainment elements, and also did not receive much pupil premium grant. He stated that this issue was compounded by increases in costs for all schools relating to pay awards, employer's contributions to superannuation and national insurance.

Mrs Gowan stated that some schools felt that they were losing out on both the funding formula and pupil premium grants as they had low levels of deprivation.

Mr Leatherbarrow commented on the impact of some specific children on school budgets. He stated that supporting some children with special needs could have a significant cost for schools.

Mr Dempsey agreed that there were some problems regarding special needs funding and highlighted that the Schools Forum had previously tried to address this. He agreed that some work was needed to re-model the funding formula.

He explained that he would prefer a revised model which led to a marginal adjustment for many schools to give a reasonable amount of support to the few schools that were experiencing difficulties.

Mr Ferry asked if the local authority have to ask permission from the DfE to change the funding formula.

Mr Tyrer explained that the decision lies with the local authority but any amendments need to be compliant with the regulations. He explained that the local authority is required to formally consult with schools and the Schools Forum but ultimately the decision lies with the local authority.

Mr Dempsey stated that the local authority needs to demonstrate that they have properly consulted with schools and the Schools Forum.

Mr Tyrer explained that there were some technical difficulties which would need to be discussed with the DfE ie safeguards in place to ensure schools do not lose too much funding, and a cap in place to ensure schools do not gain too much.

He stated that some basic modelling had been undertaken but the initial results were not ideal as some of the lowest funded schools would lose out. He explained that this would be a time consuming task with lots of modelling required. He explained that some basic models would be compiled and discussed with primary schools.

Mr Leatherbarrow explained that some schools were commencing redundancy procedures now in order to balance 2016/17 budgets. He asked if anything could be done to in 2015/16 to help these schools.

Mr Tyrer explained that there was no straightforward answer to this. He stated that the funding formula distributes funding to schools and it would be difficult to allocate funding to some schools and not others and still comply with the funding regulations. He explained that once the 2014/15 accounts were closed there may be some remaining funds which could be earmarked for certain circumstances but within the regulations.

He also explained that a revised funding formula would not necessarily solve the problem for schools with large predicted deficits in 2016/17, and therefore additional funds through a new funding formula may not be sufficient to obviate the need for redundancies in 2015/16.

Mrs Cropper stated that any additional funds would be greatly received but schools need further information in order to plan for the future.

Mr Tyrer stated that the local authority is aware of which schools are facing financial difficulties but would need to allocate any additional fund within the funding regulations. He explained that the main difficulty with a revised funding formula would be the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) which would limit the amount of funding which a school can lose, and therefore limit the amount of funding to be re-distributed. He confirmed that this would need to be discussed with the DfE.

Mr Leatherbarrow requested that the local authority proceeds with two options:

- remodel the funding formula
- explore interim arrangements to try to reduce redundancies

The Forum agreed with these proposals.

Mr Leatherbarrow thanked the Finance and Human Resources teams for their support through a difficult time.

7. Any other business

Mr Dempsey referred to a recent article in the local press which attributed to Mr Dempsey criticism about the level of parental engagement in their children's secondary school education. Mr Dempsey stated that the article totally misrepresented his comments and their associated context and explained that he would email schools to provide further clarification.

8. Date and time of next meeting

Thursday 9th July 2015 at 16:30pm.