

Schools Forum Budget Working Group

Minutes of meeting held at Blackfriars on 23 April 2007

Attendance: Ledbury Primary School, Fairfield High School, Marlbrook Primary School, St.Pauls Primary School, Lord Scudamore Primary School, Lugwardine Primary School

Malcolm Green, George Salmon, Mike Hobbs, Clive Wilkinson (GOWM)

Agenda Item		Action by whom
1.	<p><u>Social Deprivation Review</u></p> <p>Malcolm Green gave an introductory background to the issue of social deprivation.</p> <p>The Authority received a letter from the DfES in June 2006 indicating that approximately £5 million of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was to be allocated to schools on the basis of Social Deprivation.</p> <p>The authority sent a reply to the DfES showing that we currently allocate £300,000 on purely Social Deprivation factors, based upon Free School Meals (FSM). Other authorities had counted some or all SEN funding as social deprivation and so were closer to their target.</p> <p>Schools Forum were concerned about the gap between the £300k and £5 million, which worked out at £200 per pupil if the full £5 million were to be allocated on purely social deprivation factors. It was felt that some of the lowest funded schools in the county would be severely affected by this, and could make them financially not viable. This was not acceptable to Schools Forum.</p> <p>Schools Forum wrote to Government Office West Midlands (GOWM) highlighting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rural deprivation has not been taken into account; ○ Free School Meals are not a good indicator of deprivation; ○ How much of SEN funding can be classed as social deprivation; ○ The impact of any change on small schools. <p><i>Clive Wilkinson from GOWM then offered his perspective on the issue.</i></p> <p>GOWM had not received any further information or guidance than has already been published to local authorities, however, he indicated that the DfES are keen to see funds being targeted at schools with most challenges.</p> <p>SEN factors could be counted towards the social deprivation target, as long as a good case could be put forward to DfES. The authority may also wish to consider using deprivation indicators other than free school meals, such as ACORN, however he noted that any formula change would create 'winners' and 'losers', for which it would be unlikely that any extra funding would be made available.</p> <p>Malcolm Green referred to the table showing the 'winners' and 'losers' if the authority were to switch from FSM to ACORN level 5 data (most severely deprived). An unexpected outcome was discovered, whereby the most 'deprived' schools within the county would be 'losers' by if</p>	

	<p>funding was delegated using ACORN data. ACORN data appears to spread the deprivation funding more widely than FSM % on roll.</p> <p>George Salmon enquired whether the authority would be able to develop its own formula to distribute social deprivation funding, e.g. using rural deprivation. Clive Wilkinson indicated that if a good case was put forward to show that the funding would be getting to schools with greatest challenges, then it ought to be acceptable.</p>	
	<p><i>Office of School Commissioner</i></p> <p>Clive also added that the Office of the School Commissioner is getting involved with the BSF programme. They are visiting every local authority to challenge choice and diversity (particularly diversity) of school provision. Clive said 'diversity' means Academies or Trusts. They will be looking at school size and spare capacity.</p> <p>Popular and well achieving schools should be expanded, and when re-building, these schools should be made larger to access funding. It is highly likely that the authority will be challenged on the number of schools we have, and their size.</p> <p><i>Federations</i></p> <p>Clive said that 'hard' federations are also being encouraged, with parents sending their children to a 'Trust' rather than just one school.</p> <p>Julie Powell raised concerns that federations may not work in rural Herefordshire, however Clive said that with current recruitment and retention issues, that there are not even 50% of suitable people available to replace retiring heads, and so some schools may have no option but to investigate federation.</p> <p>Julie Powell asked what salary grade was being used for non-headteacher roles, such as 'director of teaching & learning'. Clive said that in his experience, the leadership scale was being used.</p> <p>Several people highlighted that federation does therefore not save money, and may in fact cost more.</p> <p><i>Summary</i></p> <p>George Salmon confirmed that a comprehensive school re-organisation is necessary, and that the authority should work towards a suitable formula to distribute funding based on social deprivation.</p> <p>Clive summarised that the authority should put together options and suggestions to the DfES, highlighting any factors that cause a challenge.</p> <p>Malcolm Green said that further guidance will be given to GOWM and the authority over the coming weeks, and at the moment it would be best to continue to 'think' about what to do, but not to take any rash decisions until we know what is going to be counted by DfES as social deprivation.</p>	
2.	<p><u>Strategic Financial Planning</u></p> <p>The objective is to set out a programme of work over the coming months in order for the 2008/09 budget to be consulted upon early in 2008.</p>	

Tables of 'protection' factors within the current Formula Allocation were distributed, including Curriculum Protection, Floor Area Above Basic, Management Flat Rate, Premises Flat Rate. The total amount per school was given, along with the amounts per pupil.

Malcolm Green said that views expressed to date indicated that the 2 days head's management time flat rate for primary schools should be left intact to avoid increasing the amount of stress put on small school head teachers.

The question was then posed: 'To what extent do schools forum want to pursue the scrapping of the protection factors identified?'

Chris Barker thought that Curriculum Protection was very important and should remain in the formula because it protected the pupils entitlement to education however the Floor Area Above Basic protection could be reduced as it was funding empty premises.

George Salmon assumed that the Primary & High current funding "pots" would remain as at present (i.e. funds saved within Primary would stay within Primary). The steer that he has received from the high schools is that if all the flat rates were scrapped, then it would lead to school closures – however if we make no changes at all, it could also lead to school closures.

Malcolm Green added that 'fixed overheads' account for around 23% of primary budgets and the percentage will rise year-on-year as pupil numbers fall.

Julie Powell mentioned that a review is currently being undertaken by George Salmon, and is it wise for Schools Forum to be taking financial decisions that could pre-empt the outcome of the review?

George Salmon said that if the view was not to reduce budgets of small schools, then federations may be the only option. Chris Barker re-iterated that federations will probably not save any money – although he did think there were educational benefits.

Tracey Kneale said that the review of schools should not just look at small schools, but also the many surplus places in large schools.

Reg Thomas commented that there appears to be a lack of information in order to make a decision. For example, what would individual school budgets be if Curriculum Protection were to be scrapped?

Julie Duckworth was shocked at the lack of resources (including staff) that big schools have to cope with, when compared to a small school. She has now got experience of being a head in both a small and large primary school, and thinks that the amount of protection to small schools is too great.

George Salmon said that it would be possible to publish school Pupil-Teacher Ratios (PTR) or Pupil-Adult Ratios. It would also be possible to indicate what the minimum level of staff should be in a school – although this would almost certainly prove unaffordable.

It was mentioned that surely it is possible for schools to 'share' out some of the fixed costs, to which George Salmon agreed that opportunities where identified by schools could be developed. However ideas imposed

	<p>by the centre often are not well received and do not work. Julie Powell felt that guidance on what works in this area would be gratefully received by schools.</p> <p>Chris Barker said that 'sharing' is sometimes very difficult depending on how close schools are to each other.</p>	
3.	<p><u>School Review Process</u></p> <p>George Salmon said that the first round of consultations have already taken place in most area's. The second stage has now started in the Kington and Weobley areas. Final proposals are being drawn up to formally close Brilley Primary School.</p> <p>He accepted that the pace of the reviews are too slow, and that they need to be speeded up – however due to the impending elections and the new Director, little will happen over the next few weeks.</p>	
4.	<p><u>Priorities and Work Programmed for 2008/09 Budget</u></p> <p>Malcolm Green felt that this has already been covered in the discussions earlier in the meeting, and that he now had a good list of areas that schools forum would like to take forward.</p>	
5.	<p><u>Date of Next Meeting</u></p> <p>Monday 16th July at Blackfriars (tbc), 12:30pm for lunch, meeting to start at 1:15pm.</p>	