



# Buckinghamshire County Council

## Minutes

## SCHOOLS FORUM

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### AGENDA ITEM: 3

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON TUESDAY, 29 APRIL 2003 IN THE IRELAND ROOM, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 3 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 4.42PM.**

#### PRESENT

Headteachers	Tim Andrew Mike Barrie Derrick Fiske Tim Heaton Bob Milne Philip Mitchell Bill Richards Shela Rowan Kieran Salter	Chesham High School Heritage House School Bedgrove Junior School Grendon Underwood School Tylers Green Middle School John Colet School Sir William Ramsay School Oak Green School Aston Clinton School
Governors	Martin Ball Ted Brown Ian Bryant Catherine Hinds Paddy McNeish Dominique Moat Richard Morris Dennis Morse Brian Smith	Hamilton Primary School Sir William Borlase's Grammar School Wendover Church of England Junior School Hughenden Infant School Buckingham Upper School Wingrave Church of England Combined School Sir William Ramsay School Alfriston School John Colet School
Representatives	Michael Moore Janet Riddington Colin Roberts Leslie Stephen	Catholic Diocese of Northampton NUT NASUWT Oxford Diocesan Board of Education
Observer	Sarah Rusby	Learning and Skills Council
Officers	Jane Brown Graham Foulkes Sue Imbriano Alan Mander Raj Popat	Accountancy Manager Head of Contracts Strategic Manager Schools Assistant Head of Finance Group Solicitor

Mrs Imbriano welcomed everyone to the meeting.

## **1 REPORT OF ELECTION ADMINISTRATOR**

The report was presented by Mr Raj Popat who commented that as a result of concerns regarding the first election the Head of Legal and Administrative Services had decided the initial election was not safe and a further election was held which was overseen by Messrs Wragge and Co as an independent party.

The Forum noted that the cost of the new election would be funded from Legal and Administrative Services budget. A member stated he felt the re-election had overshadowed the setting up of the Forum, especially for primary heads and governors who had to be re-elected when the problems had lain in the secondary sector.

## **2 INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES**

Members attending the Forum introduced themselves.

Apologies were received from Mark Scott, Claytons Combined School, Linda Melton, The Wye Valley School and Jenny Wainwright, The Misbourne School.

## **3 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN (TO 31 MARCH 2004)**

Mr Tim Andrews was proposed by Mr Bill Richards and seconded Mr Kieran Salter.

### **MR ANDREWS IN THE CHAIR**

## **4 ELECTION/APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN (TO 31 MARCH 2004)**

Mrs Catherine Hinds was nominated by Dominique Moat and seconded Ian Bryant. Mrs Hinds was duly appointed Vice-Chairman.

## **5 TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Members received the draft document and discussed the following points:

- Alternates:

Discussion centred around the attendance of alternates and whether or not they were eligible to speak and/or vote at meetings. Although members agreed that alternates should be able to attend and speak at the meeting, there concern was some concern about voting powers. Following a resolution proposed by Mr Mike Moore and seconded by Mrs Catherine Hinds:-

**The Forum resolved that alternates be allowed to vote by 13 for and 7 against.**

- Number of Meetings;
- The Formation of Sub-Committees or Working Groups and whether they should have any decision making powers;
- Should meetings be held in public in private;
- Arrangements for calling Meetings;

- Realistic Expenses;
- Minutes.

Members agreed they would like the minutes to be sent out as soon as possible after each meeting.

Members discussed the budget consultation meeting, which was held at Green Park, and in this connection it was confirmed that notes of that meeting would be circulated to the whole Forum.

As a result of the re-elections, the Forum took a view that it did not feel it had time to consider any advice to the County Council about the possible allocation of any new money for the coming financial year. However, the County Council still wished for some measure of consultation. It was therefore considered that an opportunity should be found for representatives and headteachers to be part of that consultation exercise. Notices were sent to constituencies to meet before the decision on allocation of monies was finalised.

With regard to the Constitution, Members agreed that the points raised would be incorporated and a draft would be brought to the next formal meeting. In the meantime the draft Constitution would be considered as a working document until it was formally approved.

## **6 FINAL 2003/04 SCHOOL BUDGET OUTCOME**

The Assistant Head of Finance presented a report on school budgets 2003/04.

It was noted that not all funds had been distributed by the County Council. £3.9m had been held back and was broken down as follows:

- £3.2m for rates, which was added to schools' budget once the final rates bill was known for 2003/04.
- £0.7m for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT) funding. This will also be allocated to schools.

In addition there was a significant amount of Standards Funds not yet allocated. School Achievement Awards totalled £500,000. The government would announce these to schools in the Summer Term.

£1.7m specialist schools' money had not yet been allocated. Schools would shortly be receiving a letter setting out this funding.

In discussion about contingencies and general reserves, the Assistant Head of Finance stated that if the LEA wished to re-determine school budgets it had to seek permission from the Secretary of State. The budget for 2003/04 was set. Funding was held in schools' specific contingency fund in the amount of £300,000, which was available to schools where unforeseen circumstances occurred. It was usually totally allocated each year. This was also used for formula errors which sometimes occurred when setting budgets.

The Assistant Head of Finance circulated the latest version of the Section 52 Statement and members noted that the format had changed considerably. The Forum's running costs would also be included in this Statement.

With regard to the current timeframe for schools setting budgets, members were informed that County Council did not usually meet until the last Thursday in February to approve budgets. Learning Skills Council (LSC) figures were issued during the week beginning 10 March. The Finance Team produced an exercise for a three-year budget for schools this summer. Schools would be given data to enter to assist them in producing three-year budgets. It was noted that schools had until 31 May to produce financial plans.

Members agreed it was important that consistent advice was received by the authority next year so that the Forum had the maximum impact. One of the positive moves would be to urge the LSC to produce their figures earlier. Concern was expressed that the methods used in producing projected budgets created anxiety in schools thus creating a lack of clarity and trust between schools and the authority. It was agreed that if the Forum was to achieve anything it should be a united voice to the authority based on a firm understanding of procedures in setting the Council's budgets.

Although cash and percentage increases were publicised, increases in costs were not. Work was needed regarding the average increase in costs for schools to identify any real term increase. Members felt it was unfortunate that activity led funding was not built into the review of funding.

The Assistant Head of Finance stated that the average increase in primary schools delegated budgets was 15%, excluding Standards Fund. Some 14% was needed to make up costs e.g. 9.5% in teachers' salary funding. Regarding allocations, teachers' costs had increased and standards funds had decreased. 14% was needed in the primary sector for budgets to stand still. Figures in the secondary sector were lower because of the impact of key stage 1. 10.5% to 11% was needed to stand still in the secondary sector.

The Vice-Chairman commented that a huge amount of time by heads of small schools and Chairman of Finances was spent looking at the first provisional budget and being extremely concerned about this. When the actual budget came out there was a significant difference, which meant the budget was probably on target.

The Assistant Head of Finance stated that provisional budgets were issued in order to assist schools. However Members agreed that provisional figures should be a closer match to the final budget than they had previously.

Members agreed that whilst there may not be any worth in receiving the provisional budget figures, as they do currently, notes on major changes in the finance for instance standards funds would be helpful. The Assistant Head of Finance agreed he would continue to notify schools regularly regarding major changes in Finance but was happy not to send out provisional budget figures if Members wished this.

Discussion took place on the balancing of budgets and many Members expressed concerns that even with staff reductions and cuts in training, budgets it would be hard to balance this year and the situation was steadily declining. Members noted the Primary Heads Association was in the process of obtaining reactions from colleagues on this situation. The Vice-Chairman, in her capacity as Chairman of Bucks Association of School Governors, had also discussed this with colleagues and members noted that the consensus of opinion was that schools not setting a deficit budget this year may well do so in the next.

It was agreed to discuss the value of trials on budgets in the discussion with regard to the 2004/05 budget issues.

## **7 INFORMATION/ISSUES DAY – 13 MAY 2003**

Members discussed the format for 13 May and the following points arose:

If the Forum was to be in a position in the Autumn Term to offer serious advice to the County Council on the budget for 2004/05, it needed to begin the planning process now. An understanding of issues from all types of schools in the county was needed in order to speak with one voice. Members agreed they would be interested to know how the political process worked in allocating funding. They also agreed they would like to know more about the way other Forums work. It was agreed that points for discussion would be as follows:

- How can the LEA allocate funds – allowable formula factors;
- Bucks Scheme for financing maintained schools;
- Section 52 Budget Statement 2003/04;
- Understanding the process of budget setting, decisions and constraints, and how funding gets to the schools;
- Setting up a programme of work to be ready for the consultation, by September
- Procedural items.

In terms of the process, Members agreed that the Assistant Head of Finance, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman would work together to produce a programme for 13 May. The day would now start at 9.00 am, to conclude by 5.00 pm.

The possibility of tapping into the work of other Forums was discussed. In this connection the Vice-Chairman agreed to obtain further information through her connection with the National Governors Council and report back to the Chairman.

Discussion took place on the amount of funding available to the Schools Forum. Members noted £35,000 was available for running the Forum and offsetting any costs.

## **8 CONTRACTS**

Graham Foulkes, Head of Contracts presented his report to the Forum.

Points arising from the report were as follows:

- The County Council's buying power was increased by its membership of the Central Buying Consortium that gives the best deal to the customer.
- Property Services also issue Contracts and whilst the Head of Contracts does not manage these, he does help schools when there are problems with their Contracts;
- Recruitment and advertising contracts available through Human Resources and IT Contracts available via IT are let by Contracts staff.
- Competition was important to keep quality levels high and to maintain cost levels;

- Contracts are not mandatory but once the Contract is signed it should be honoured;
- Areas for improvement were Ground Maintenance and Cleaning.

Members were aware of their formal role in Contract work as stated under paragraph 8.3 of the draft Constitution. The Forum would need to look at Public Service and Public Supply Contracts, which were not less than the specified threshold, which was currently £160,000. Contracts over this amount must be advertised in the European Journal and must also be put out to tender.

There are some exclusions to this threshold, which Members would be looking at, including Catering Services.

Members agreed that further information was required on their role in respect of Contracts.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Contracts for his input to the meeting.

## **9 2004/05 SCHOOLS FORMULA SPENDING SHARE PROJECTION**

The Chairman reminded Members that the purpose was to receive the report and note it and to build it into future discussions.

Points arising from the report:

- At its meeting in February 2003, the County Council committed itself to a certain level of spending on schools' items for next year, which was in the region of £218m. The commitment was to spend at the Formula Spending Share (FSS) level;
- Further discussion on the FSS would take place on the away day on 13 May;
- In cash terms the spending level increase would now be some £14m but did not mean an increase in real terms;
- The Cabinet Members for Schools, and Children and Young People had stipulated that the view of the Forum about allocation of funding in the next financial year would be the most significant piece of information to be used in allocating funding.

Schools' funding would increase overall next year by 5.5% in terms of FSS.

**The Schools Forum considered this report and AGREED to discuss how it wanted to move forward on an early view of the possible budget situation for schools in the financial year 2004/05.**

## **10 DATES AND TIMES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

The following meetings were arranged:

- 8 July 2003 at 3.00 pm in the Ireland Room;
- 23 September 2003 at 3.00 pm in the Ireland Room.

**CHAIRMAN**