

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
DERBYSHIRE SCHOOLS' FORUM
Minutes of the Meeting Held on 8th May 2012
At 6.00 pm at County Hall

Present:

Patrick Cook, Mike Davison, Peter Hamer, Atholl Donaldson, Joe Birkin, Peter Thorne, Barry Thacker, Denise Cunningham, Lindsey Partridge, Julie Cadman, Paul Mason, Shirley Harvey, Roger Tomlinson, Philip Sunderland, Linda Du-Roe, Rosemary Mackenzie, John Holmes, Chris Wayment, John Partington, Cathy Tattersfield

Apologies:

Martin Brader, Lesley Hartley, Andrew Cartledge, Philip Searson (now resigned), Andrew Wild, Penny Pennington, Lee Floyd, Phil Moncur, Carole Nelson, Jane Mallett, Alison Bull, Cllr M Longden, Cllr S Ellis, Ollie Pardo, Jim Hickman.

Observers:

Chris Allcock, Ian Thomas, Mary Murkin.

Paul Mason chaired the meeting.

12/09 Minutes of the meeting held on 25th January 2012

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

12/10 DfE Consultation – School funding reform: Next steps towards a fairer system (Rep 502)

Chris Allcock presented a précis of the Department for Education (DfE) Consultation document. He informed the Forum that the Consultation runs until 21 May 2012 and sets out proposals over the short and medium term. The report contains a summary of the proposals. At present the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2013-14 will be largely based on historic levels. Any move to a national funding formula will not take place until at least 2015-16.

The DSG will be subdivided as shown in the paper and some pertinent points were explained. Budgets will now be based on the October count, rather than January as they are at present, and should ultimately allow for earlier publication.

The majority of the Schools Block will have to be delegated but the Forum can decide if some budget items should subsequently be re-pooled. The Primary Forum members will decide for primary schools and the Secondary members for secondary schools; the decisions for each sector can be different.

Appendix 1 shows the centrally held budgets that will have to be delegated with no option for schools to re-pool the funding. The second group must be delegated but can be re-pooled and retained by the Local Authority (LA) on behalf of schools, but not academies, if the Forum agrees. It is expected that the third and final blocks can be retained as these are either historic commitments or statutory functions. DfE clarification on the arrangements for these budgets is still being sought.

The DfE is proposing significant simplification of school funding formulae. No more than ten formula factors will be allowed, of which only seven are currently applicable in Derbyshire. The Education Funding Agency (EFA) will be able to approve additional exceptional circumstances factors but only if the need is significant and affects relatively few schools.

Chris Allcock then gave brief explanations regarding each of the 10 factors. He also stated that it would appear that the DfE wanted to get to a position where all LAs have very similar school funding formulae; once that had been achieved the DfE would have a more even baseline from which to determine a national funding formula.

The DfE has confirmed that the Pupil Premium will continue outside of the DSG for the time being. However, the consultation also states that in the long term the Pupil Premium is the main mechanism for allocating deprivation funding to schools. This could either be as part of a new formula incorporating existing deprivation funding or continuing as a separate grant. For deprivation, LAs will be required to use either the number of pupils known to be entitled to free school meals (straight count or Ever 6) or the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). An example of how the IDACI banding approach might work is included on page three of the report.

The Minimum Funding Guarantee will be used to protect schools in the short term with the rate set at minus 1.5% per pupil for 2013-14 and 2014-15.

The changes to the High Needs Block were explained briefly. It was asked from the floor how Enhanced Resource Schools (ERS) would be funded and whether these would be funded on the same basis as Special Schools. Mary Murkin informed the Forum that special schools and ERS will be funded on an agreed number of places (subject to regular review) at £10,000 per place and then the funding for individually commissioned places will follow the actual pupils e.g. 5/12^{ths} and 7/12^{thd} as pupils move between schools.

There will be minimal change in Early Years funding as Derbyshire already has a relatively simple formula.

Point 3.2 of the report shows the proposed revised regulations for Schools' Forums with further information to follow. Chris pointed out that under item (d) regarding the publishing of Forum papers, minutes and decisions promptly Derbyshire already has a portal on the main Derbyshire website under Education and Learning\Schools\Derbyshire Schools Forum. Chris stated changes may need to be made to the Schools Forum once the detailed guidance had been received.

It was explained in point 3.3 that the EFA can force changes if they feel that the formulae used by local authorities are not compliant with the new framework. If the EFA considers that a LA's formula is not fair, it has the power to re-determine the allocations and deduct the revised sum from the host authority. This can be done even if the formula complies with regulations. The EFA will calculate the budgets for academies.

The Government is looking to change how local authorities are funded and this will be subject to further consultation. It is highly likely that there will be a national funding formula sometime after 2015-16.

Chris explained that an initial LMS consultation document has been sent to schools via the Schools Extranet covering the further delegation of funding to schools. A second consultation document seeking the views of schools on formula simplification is expected to be published later in the summer term.

The Forum noted the timetable for the two consultation documents.

Appendix 3 to the report showed the draft response to the DfE consultation. The questions are those posed by the DfE not the Local Authority. Chris said that the answers will be amended if necessary before returning the response.

It was asked from the floor if Key Stage 1 (KS1) class size funding will continue. The response was that there will no longer be a KS1 class size factor as there will be a block allowance included in the budget and the DfE regard this as sufficient. A member of the Forum felt that as there is still a statutory requirement that KS1 classes have no more than 30 pupils there should still be KS1 funding. Chris Allcock was sympathetic but, under the proposals, this will not be allowed in the new factors as there is limited flexibility with the new formula. He said that whilst it may be argued that schools need this funding, the DfE state in their 'frequently asked questions' that this will not be included as a funding factor. It was asked from the floor if this could be mentioned in Derbyshire's response. It was pointed out by Mary Murkin that this may be seen as an exceptional cost and therefore supported from a centrally held contingency budget, always assuming that schools and the Forum have agreed to re-pool funding for this eventuality and hence funding is available.

The general view from the Forum was that concerns in respect of KS1 funding should be included in the response and this was noted.

The Forum agreed the responses to the remaining questions in the draft report.

12/11 LMS Consultation for April 2013 – Further Delegation

Chris Allcock explained that responses were wanted from schools to judge their feelings on both re-pooling funding (where allowed by the DfE) and the methodology for delegating the additional responsibilities. The closing date for the internal consultation is 29th May 2012 with the responses brought to the Forum meeting on 19th June. The consultation documentation has been included in the Forum papers for information. The document is brief with choices made easier so as to encourage a good response rate.

The table on page 3 shows indicative figures for centrally held budgets and the Schools Forum will have to decide on re-pooling. The rest of the document has been already explained.

The consultation proposals are that wherever practicable all funding should remain delegated to secondary schools, with the exception of insurance, so that secondary schools and academies are funded on a more consistent basis.

It was raised by a union representative that it was thought that all independent special schools have the same flat rate of funding. Mary Murkin explained that the proposal is for a £10,000 flat rate to all ERS and special schools but the 'top up' will vary in respect of different types of setting and this will be complex.

A member of the Forum asked if the document should have been emailed. The extranet is now fully functioning and is now used to release information to schools. However, schools will be contacted, if necessary by LA staff, to encourage responses.

It was raised that special school governing bodies should be encouraged to respond. The Chair asked if responses should be signed by both the Chair of Governors and Headteacher, however, it was felt this would delay the return of the forms. It was also raised from the floor that Governing Bodies often delegate the completion of these documents to the Headteacher as they are not sufficiently interested in finance. It was also raised that some headteachers do not have time to read and respond to documents on the extranet. Chris said that although the new funding formula is complex the document has been simplified and so responding should be easier.

A concern regarding the delegation of maternity costs was raised. If the costs of maternity absences were delegated to secondary schools this could be expensive and the representatives said that they would prefer to be allowed to re-pool the funding.

12/13 Date of Next Meetings

The next meeting will be held at 6pm on 19th June 2012 at County Hall with a possible meeting in July 2012. Members will be notified once this has been decided.