Minutes

SCHOOLS FORUM

Wednesday 15 January 2014
Rooms 4D and 4E, Civic Centre, Oldham
at 5.30pm

Voting Members Present:

Mr Mike Aston  Primary School Governor
Mrs Sue Crowson  Primary School Headteacher
Mr Kevin Fennelly  Special Schools Governor
Mrs Helen Halliwell  Primary Aided Sector Headteacher
Mrs Bev Harper  The Blue Coat School Academy – representing Mrs Julie Hollis
Mr John Meagher  Secondary Maintained School Headteacher
Mr Greg Oates  Primary School Headteacher
Mr Garrie Smith  Secondary Maintained School – representing Mr Matthew Milburn
Ms Lynda Thompson  Pupil Referral Unit Headteacher
Mr Iain Windeatt  Trades Union Representative

Non-Voting Members Present:

Mr Paul Cassidy  Director of Children’s Services
Ms Liz Caygill  Schools Finance Manager, Commercial Services Directorate
Mr Paul Clarke  Finance Manager, Commercial Services Directorate
Ms Vicky Gibbons  Schools Finance Team, Commercial Services Directorate
Ms Wendy Lees  Schools Finance Team, Commercial Services Directorate
Mrs Chris Hill  Associate Assistant Director, Learning
The Clerk undertook the process for the election of Vice Chair of Schools Forum from amongst its own members.

One nomination had been received:

Mr Mike Aston

Further nominations were invited. There were no further nominations.

RESOLVED: that Mr Mike Aston be appointed Vice Chair.

Mr Mike Aston (Acting Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Tim Mitchell, Mr David Mycock, Mr Andy Collinge, Mrs Joy Clark, Mr Matthew Milburn and Councillor A Chadderton.

Declarations of Interest – Members were invited to declare any business or personal interests in the ‘Register of Declaration of Interest’ provided for this purpose.

No relevant declarations were made.

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2013 were confirmed as a correct record.

Arising from minute 5.6 (Schools Forum Constitution), Mrs Sue Crowson understood she had been elected by the Primary Headteachers.

Arising from minute 6.9 (Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Settlement 2013-14), Mr John Meagher requested clarification of the breakdown of PFI monies. In response the Forum was informed that the two schools built initially, some time ago, had capital supported by council revenue contribution to unitary charge, but the more recent school (John Newman School) did not use as much Council capital and the difference was used to subsidise the lower charges.
Ms Wendy Lees asked members to note the guidance which clarified roles and responsibilities of the Schools Forum with regard to decision making and consultation. This information had been included in the Constitution.

Mrs Chris Hill presented the updated constitution in which there had been significant changes.

The main points referred to:

4.1 The membership was set out in the Appendix and the only Local Authority member to have a vote was the Director of Children’s Service.

4.2 Additional members were needed to represent the 16 to 19 sector, Early Years, Maintained Secondary Schools Governors, and Academies.

RESOLVED: that Mr John Bloor be asked to find nominations from the 16 to 19 sector.

ACTION: Ms Liz Caygill

Ms Vicky Gibbons updated members on the 2014-15 funding formula.

The main points referred to:

5.1 The Fair Funding group recommended reducing the cash value of EAL in 2014-15 and reallocating the surplus budget through the Deprivation Factor using the Free School Meals indicator.

5.2 The Fair Funding group recommended that the rent and rates surplus budget be reallocated through the Basic Amount per pupil.

5.3 In the High Needs Block it was recommended that in Resourced Provision the places remaining empty would no longer attract funding. In addition in Special Schools empty places will not be funded except as set out in the transitional arrangements.

5.4 The Growth Fund criteria which funded increased capacity in schools will only fund the places allocated, but there would be a contingency fund for schools with falling rolls.

5.5 Individual schools would no longer be liable for the Carbon Reduction Charges but the DSG would be reduced as a result of paying these.

5.6 The introduction of free school meals for all infants from September 2014 will need to be funded.
5.7 The changes to the 2015-16 National Fair Funding Formula may not be as radical as originally thought and the Pupil Premium will remain separate.

5.8 It was proposed that long service awards and specialist SEN equipment would, from 2014-15, be funded from individual school budgets.

Mrs Chris Hill reported that with regard to the High Needs Block recommendations the local Authority had consulted with schools on empty places and that they were aware that the proposal would have a significant impact on one particular school with a resource unit where 5 of the places were unfilled. She acknowledged that the situation was complex and that there were disparities in the funding for children in the resource unit in comparison to those in special schools.

RESOLVED: (i) that the proposal to amend the EAL funding be approved;

(ii) that the rent and rates surplus budget be reallocated;

(iii) that the current de-delegation budgets continue in 2014-15 for the secondary sector;

(iv) that the current de-delegation budgets continue in 2014-15 for the primary sector;

(v) that the criteria for Growth Fund allocation reflects the actual pupil number;

(vi) that schools fund long service awards;

(vii) that the decision on funding for specialist SEN equipment be deferred to the next meeting after consideration has been given to funding this from top slicing the schools delegated budget.

6  2014-15 DSG SETTLEMENT

Mr Paul Clarke outlined the provisional dedicated schools grant settlement for 2014-15.

The main points referred to:-

6.1 There would be an increase in the Two Year Olds’ funding.

6.2 The Carbon Reduction Charge will be reduced as the local authority will no longer administer the Energy Efficiency Scheme.

6.3 The High Needs Funding for Schools has been adjusted for the deficit.

RESOLVED: (i) that the Dedicated Schools Grant 2014-15 be
approved.

(ii) that the High Needs Funding be reduced to balance the budget.

(iii) that the amount of funding from the Schools Block for central schools services be approved.

7 SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS

Ms Liz Caygill reported on the scheme for financing schools as a follow up from the last Schools Forum meeting. The changes have been required by the Department for Education and comments were invited. Ms Caygill said there may be further minor changes for 2014-15.

RESOLVED: that the Oldham Scheme for Financing Schools effective from July 2013 be approved.

8 LA BUDGET UPDATE

Mr David Hodgkinson gave a verbal report on Oldham Council’s budget position and funding situation. The Council will need to make cuts of £23 million and that all lines of expenditure were being reviewed. There are severe pressures as there is to be restraint in raising Council Tax, and Business Rate income is volatile. Council costs are increasing especially in social care. Between 2009 and 2014 the Council had made savings of £118 million, and a further £83 million has to be cut by 2017, which includes the £23 million in 2014-15.

The current income is £645 million of which £222 million is used for housing and the DSG. Of this one third (£70 million) is from Council Tax, £10 million from grants and £56 million from business rates. The Revenue Support Grant from central government has been reduced from £85 million to £69 million in 2014-15.

Mr Hodgkinson was thanked for his report.

9 SCHOOL BALANCE CONTROL MECHANISM 2013-14

Ms Liz Caygill reported on the changes made to the balance control mechanisms. Currently there are 3 allowable purposes for which schools can retain surplus balances and it is proposed that an additional category of capital funds would be allowed. This would be where a school puts a business case forward to accumulate a surplus to fund a major item which may be considered as a significant building project.

RESOLVED: that the additional purpose for which surplus balances can be retained is noted and approved.

10 FORWARD PLAN

Ms Liz Caygill informed members of the future dates for Schools Forum and the agenda items for these dates as contained in the Forward Plan.

11 SCHOOLS PAYROLL
Mr David Hodgkinson outlined the position with regard to payroll. He explained that Unity Partnership worked with the Council using the Vision system in conjunction with Agresso. The Council are upgrading Agresso and incorporating payroll. It was proposed to set up a working group from the Schools Forum to work together with Unity and the Council to discuss any issues or concerns. Mr Garrie Smith volunteered to be a member of the working group.

**RESOLVED:** that information about the proposed working group be put on First Class.

**ACTION:** Mrs Helen Halliwell and Mrs Sue Crowson

12 **SCHOOLS FORUM PAPERS**

Ms Liz Caygill proposed to cease sending hard copies of the papers to members of Schools Forum unless these were specifically requested. E-mailed copies will be sent out for members to print off.

**RESOLVED:** that only e-mailed copies will in future be sent to members unless hard copies are requested.

13 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting is to be held on Wednesday 18 June 2014 at 5.30pm.

(There being no further business, the Members of the Schools Forum were thanked for their attendance and the meeting was closed at 6.45pm.)