

EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE FORUM

3 FEBRUARY 2004

Chair:	* Councillor Stephenson	
Councillors:	* Mrs Bath * Miss Bednell Gate	* Ismail (1) * Janet Mote * Ray
Teachers' Constituency	Mr R Borman Ms H Cowgill * Ms C Gembala	* Mr P Large * Ms P Langdon
Governors' Constituency	* Ms H Henshaw * Mrs C Millard	* Mr N Rands * Ms H Solanki
Elected Parent Governor Representatives	* Mr Epie	* Mr Sutcliffe
Denominational Representatives	Rev P Reece	* Mrs Rammelt
Arts Culture Harrow Representatives	Mr K Parker	Mr D Pullinger

* Denotes Member present
(1) Denotes category of Reserve Member

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS**RECOMMENDATION 1 - Education Budget 2004/05**

Having given consideration to the 2004/2005 Schools' Budget at their previous meeting, the Forum now received a joint report of the Director of Strategy and Education Financial Services Manager which outlined the total Education Budget for 2004/2005.

The report advised that details of the Authority's financial settlement from the Government had been received and the Council's Formula Grant had increased by 7.4% on the previous year. This compared favourably with the national average increase of 5.5%.

Within this settlement, the Education Formula Spending Share, which was made up of the Schools Formula Spending Share (known as the Schools Budget) had increased by £6.755 million. The report set out the detailed proposals for the allocation of these funds. It was confirmed that provision had been made for the Teachers' pay award, the APT & C pay award, the Local Government pension increase in employer's contributions and other price inflations.

It was further explained that the Authority's overall proposed base budget had been set at approximately £243 million and was now subject to public consultation. This was due to conclude on 6 February. Within the consultation, a number of savings and additional spending options were set out for residents to consider. It was noted that only one of these options – an additional £1.2 million of additional funding for schools- related to education.

The Forum was advised of minor correction to paragraph 6 of the report – it was noted that the meetings of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Sub Committee and the Education Consultative Forum at which the total Education budget was considered had taken place/were taking place on the 20 January and the 3 February respectively.

Following the officer presentation, the Forum turned to discussion of the report and clarification was sought on a number of issues. In response to a question from a Member of the Elected Parents Governor constituency relating to a saving identified in relation to the Special Educational Needs (SEN) contingency budget, the Education Financial Services Manager explained that this saving arose from the fact that contingency funds were now provided for within other budgets. She assured the Forum that special educational needs would continue to be provided for.

In response to a further query it was confirmed that it was proposed to allow £180,000 to assist the Authority in meeting the relevant LPSA government targets to attain the financial rewards attached to the achievements of those targets. It was noted that the first tranche of rewards would not be allocated until the 2006/07 financial year.

In response to a question from a Member of the Teachers' Constituency, the Education Financial Services Manager confirmed that she understood that any deficits reported were inclusive of deficits incurred in the previous financial year. However, she stressed that she could not guarantee that this was true of each individual school as it depended on how schools had calculated their figures.

In response to a comment made by a Member of the Teachers' Constituency, the Chair indicated that, whilst he supported the option of allocating schools an additional £1.2 million in funding, the Council was under pressure to keep Council Tax low, and the Government had given a clear indication that they would cap those Councils that irresponsibly increased the Council Tax without proof of solid support from the Community. He therefore stressed the importance of schools encouraging parents to respond to the consultation.

The Chair reported that the feedback he had received from Headteachers indicated that they recognised the constraints on the Council and on whole felt that the proposed funding would go some way to meet their needs. The Chair also pointed out to the members that surrounding local authorities were dealing with a much more difficult situation and that Harrow was in relatively good position in terms of its financial settlement.

A number of representatives expressed concern that the consultation document had not reach all areas of the Borough. The Chair assured the meeting that letters had been sent to Headteachers and Governors to make them aware of the consultation process and schools had also written to all parents. The Finance Portfolio Holder, who was also present at the meeting for the discussion on this item, informed the Forum that he was keen for feedback from any resident who had not received the consultation document, as it should have been circulated to all household in the Borough as an insert of Harrow People.

A member of the Teachers' Constituency voiced some concern regarding the wording of the consultation which the Chair explained had been formulated by the Council's cross-party Publications Panel. He felt that the wording implied that the additional funding of £1.2 million for schools, an option which formed part of the consultation, would leave schools in a position where they had excess funds rather than reflecting the true situation, that many schools would retain deficits, even with the extra funding. He also argued that the Forum should have been consulted on the wording of the document.

In response, the Chair advised that he did not consider that the text would create confusion among its readers.

The Finance Portfolio Holder also advised that it was not possible or appropriate for all Committees to be consulted before sending out the budget consultation documents and emphasised that the consultation referred to the entire budget and not just to education. He suggested that if someone was not happy with the content of the form there were other ways of conveying that opinion, such as the local press.

A Member of the Teachers' Constituency queried whether the consultation period could be extended. The Finance Portfolio Holder explained that this was not possible since the budget timetable was very tight. In response to a comment made by a member of the Governors' Constituency regarding the problem with central funding, the Chair asked the members to await the outcome of the Council's decision on Council Tax, but he agreed that it can sometimes create a problem when Central Government demand the Local Authority to introduce new procedures but do not provide the funding for it. A number of representatives expressed concern that to truly address the funding difficulties the Authority faced, they needed to lobby the Government vigorously. The Chair pointed out that he had arranged a meeting with both Borough Members of Parliament the following month.

The Chair thanked the members of the Forum for their input.

Resolved to RECOMMEND:

That the contents of the proposed Education Budget 2004/2005 be noted and the comments of the Forum be forwarded for consideration by the Cabinet and Council.

REASON: To meet the budget timetable for consultation for Cabinet to recommend to Council a budget for 2004/2005

RECOMMENDATION 2 - School Term Dates 2005/06

The Forum Received a report from the Director of Strategy (People First) which advised that the working group, formed at the Education Consultative Forum meeting in September, had undertaken consultation on two issues with interested parties: Firstly to consult on term dates for 2005/06 and secondly on setting key principles to govern future decisions on school term dates as the ALG (Association of London Government) was looking to achieve a pan-London consistency on term dates.

There were three models to be considered containing different settings of the three school terms but all adding up to a total of 195 days. The results of the survey showed that Model 1 was the option preferred (58%) as opposed to Model 2, proposed by the ALG.

The interested parties had also been consulted on key principles to follow when setting the term dates such as the fixing of the spring break, length of school day break at Christmas and school year start dates. The analysis of the responses received was set out.

In the discussion that followed, concerns were expressed that the consultation would have had a different result had those consulted known that most other neighbouring Boroughs were considering the model proposed by the ALG. It was also suggested that the ALG should be lobbied to alter its preference of model.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Portfolio Holder)

That (1) It be agreed that School Term dates for 2005/06 be set in accordance with model 1;

(2) that before any decision is taken about setting future term dates, officers attain the position on this matter in neighbouring authorities and across London and;

(3) that the working group be reconvened to consider the information at 2 above and make recommendations to the next meeting of the Education Consultative Forum taking into account the concerns expressed by members and in the consultation about the desirability of having as much consistency in term dates with neighbouring boroughs and across London.

PART II - MINUTES

81. **Welcome:**
The Chair welcomed all Members of the Forum to the meeting and introduced the officers present, a number of whom it was noted were new to the Council.
82. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**
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|--|-----------------------|
| <u>RESOLVED:</u> To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Member: | |
| <u>Ordinary Member</u> | <u>Reserve Member</u> |
| Councillor Thammaiah | Councillor Ismail |
83. **Declarations of Interest:**
- RESOLVED:** To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members in relation to the business transacted at this meeting.
84. **Arrangement of Agenda:**
- RESOLVED:** That all items be considered with the press and public present.
85. **Minutes:**
- RESOLVED:** That having been circulated, (1) the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September be taken as read and signed as a correct record of that meeting; and

(2) the minutes of the special meeting held on 10 December 2003 be taken as read and signed as a correct record of that meeting, subject to the following amendment:

Recommendation 1, 12th Paragraph. Amend final sentence to read: "A member of the Teachers' Constituency observed that a higher level of teacher assistants might be employed to avoid incremental drift and teacher's salary costs".

86. **Matters arising from consideration of the Minutes:**

School Workforce Remodelling Progress

Further to the circulation of an information item regarding this matter, the School Development Services Adviser provided the Forum with a verbal update on the above process which aimed to relieve teachers from administrative burdens and recruit support staff. The model was to be implemented in all schools eventually and provision had been made within the Schools Budget to assist with the costs of implementation. It was noted that so far 19 schools in Harrow were currently interested in the intensive training programme to introduce the remodelling.

In response to a question from the Teachers' Constituency regarding financing the reforms, the officer observed that some schools had been able to do part of the remodelling without extra costs.

A member of the Forum raised concerns about a "blue skies document", that had emerged recently and expressed concern that financial pressures would result in schools employing less fully qualified Teachers and more Higher Level Teaching Assistants, with HLTA's taking whole classes. Both the officers and the Chair assured the Members of the Forum that would not be encouraged in Harrow. It was suggested that the concerns be raised with Headteachers and Governors.

87. **Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no public questions to be received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 15 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

88. **Petitions:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no petitions to be received at this meeting under the provisions of the Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 13 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

89. **Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no deputations to be received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

90. **Education Budget - 2004/05:**

See Recommendation 1

91. **Items raised by the Governors:**

Update on Every Child Matters

The Director of Children's Services briefly outlined the background of the above Green Paper, proposals arising from which were expected to become law shortly. The Green Paper had been the Government's response on how to improve children's care following the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié. The inquiry had revealed a lack of coordination and a failure of relevant agencies to share information, together with an absence of clear lines of accountability. The main aim of the new proposals therefore were to encourage local authorities to reorganise management and departmental structures to ensure that they assisted rather than hampered service provision, that the child was placed at the centre of the process, and that accountability was improved. To this end, it was noted that it was likely that the local authorities would be required to appoint a Portfolio Holder for Children and a Director of Children's Services.

The Director of Children's Services explained that reorganisation in the Borough to meet the these proposals had already begun. Consultation with stakeholders was being undertaken. Following the presentation, Members sought clarification on a number of issues, including the reform of the Special needs statement process. In response to the latter, it was confirmed that this reform was part of the consultation. The Chair suggested that the Forum would benefit from a Seminar on the Structure of the People

First department at a future juncture.

The Borough's response to fining parents for unauthorised absence

The Principal Education Welfare Officer explained that the Government had introduced a number of measures to combat unauthorised absence of which fining parents was one element. The measures would come into force at the end of February and all local Education Authorities would be required to issue guidance to schools accordingly. Harrow was currently formulating such guidance and, once finalised, it was advised that it would be sent to all headteachers and chairs of governing bodies. It was noted that Harrow currently had a good record of low levels of unauthorised absence.

During the discussion which followed, officers confirmed, in response to a query that authority to issue penalties would lie with governing bodies rather than headteachers and representatives of the Governors constituency, the Parents Governor Constituency and the Teachers' Constituency all expressed concern at the welfare/health and safety/security issues that this scheme might give rise to and the conflict of roles for schools.

In response to a further query it was agreed that a letter would be sent to all headteachers and governors advising that guidance on these measures would be forthcoming and that schools be asked to await these rather than formulating their own guidelines.

92. **Update on the Post - Sixteen Consultation:**

The Director of Strategy informed the meeting that the deadline for the return of the surveys on school organisation and increased opportunities for students aged 14-19 was till the end of the week and that a final report would be submitted to Cabinet in March. Cabinet would then make a recommendation to the London West Learning and Skills Council which held the statutory responsibility and funding for making such organisational changes. The response to the survey had been varied but it had been noted that cluster school meetings was a good way of obtaining responses from parents.

The Chair thanked the Director of Strategy for his update.

93. **School Term Dates for 2005/06:**

See Recommendation 2.

94. **Date of the Next Meeting of the Forum:**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum was scheduled to take place on 24 March 2004.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.01 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BILL STEPHENSON
Chair