

EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE FORUM

27 JANUARY 2009

Chairman:	* Councillor Mrs Anjana Patel	
Councillors:	* Husain Akhtar (1) * Mrs Camilla Bath * B E Gate	* Mrs Vina Mithani (3) * Raj Ray * Bill Stephenson
Teachers' Constituency:	† Mrs D Cawthorne † Ms C Gembala † Ms J Howkins	* Ms J Lang * Ms L Money Ms L Snowdon
Governors' Constituency:	Ms H Solanki * Mrs C Millard	
Elected Parent Governor Representatives:	* Mr R Chauhan	* Mrs D Speel
Denominational Representatives:	* Mrs J Rammelt	Reverend P Reece

* Denotes Member present
(1) and (3) Denote category of Reserve Member
† Denotes apologies received

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL

PART II - MINUTES

118. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Members:-

<u>Ordinary Member</u>	<u>Reserve Member</u>
Councillor Janet Mote Councillor Christine Bednell	Councillor Husain Akhtar Councillor Vina Mithani

119. **Apologies for Absence:**

RESOLVED: To note that apologies for absence had been received from Ms J Howkins, Mrs D Cawthorne and Ms C Gembala.

120. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
9. School Term Dates 2010-2011	Mrs C Millard	Personal interest in that Mrs Millard was the Chairman of the Schools Forum. Mrs Millard remained in the room and took part in the discussion and decision making on the agenda items.
10. INFORMATION REPORT – Draft Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2009-10 to 2011-12		
11. INFORMATION REPORT – Proposals for School Reorganisation in Harrow	Councillor Husain Akhtar	Personal interest in that Councillor Akhtar was a governor at Bentley Wood High School. Councillor Akhtar remained in the room and took part in the discussion and decision making on the agenda items.
	Councillor Vina Mithani	Personal interest in that Councillor Mithani was a governor at Glebe First and

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Middle School. Councillor Mithani remained in the room and took part in the discussion and decision making on the agenda items.

121. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2008 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

122. **Matters Arising:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no matters arising that did not appear on the agenda.

123. **Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum procedure rules 16, 14 and 15 respectively.

124. **School Term Dates 2010 - 2011:**

An officer introduced a report of the Director of Schools and Children's Development which outlined the proposals for the school term dates for 2010 to 2011. The attention of the Forum was drawn to the potential models detailed in Annexe A of the report and it was explained that, since the last meeting of the Education Consultative Forum, the Local Government Association (LGA) had produced a model and this was included under the heading 'Model 3'. The officer informed the Forum that it was required to recommend one of the proposed models to the Portfolio Holder for Schools and Children's Development for adoption. The Forum was informed that, if it first wished to consider the models adopted by neighbouring boroughs and regions, it could however select its preferred model but defer its final recommendation until the next meeting. The Forum was advised that the adoption of Model 3 was considered favourable as it was likely to bring Harrow's term dates in line with those of other boroughs. Model 3 also ensured that the Easter Break was encompassed within a designated holiday period.

Members identified Model 3 as the preferred option but stated that they wished to wait until the next meeting before making a formal recommendation to the Portfolio Holder for Schools and Children Development. The Forum requested that the models be updated for the next meeting in order to clearly indicate holiday periods.

The officer requested that the Forum also consider the proposals for the implementation of 'occasional days' and provide comments. He explained that, at present, schools were required to open for 195 days each academic year, with 5 of these days being set aside for training purposes. However, under new proposals, a further three days would be added to the schedule to enable three 'occasional day' holidays to be taken during the school year in order to observe non-Christian religious festivals that were important to the local community served by the school. The officer stated that the implementation of 'occasional days' had the potential to help schools combat the high levels of staff and pupil absence experienced during non-Christian religious festivals. He explained that, if implemented, use of 'occasional days' was not mandatory and schools could instead choose to break for the summer holidays three days earlier.

Following a discussion concerning the use of 'occasional days', Members of the forum raised a number of key issues:

- Religious festivals often resulted in significant unauthorised absences and 'occasional days' could help improve the situation. However, it was not always possible to predict which days individuals would take off and trying to schedule 'occasional days' to suit all staff members and pupils could be problematic.
- Depending on the school and the religious composition of staff and pupils, three days might not be enough to encompass all significant events and, as such, some groups might perceive the use of 'occasional days' as unfair or discriminatory.

- Schools were often forced to use supply teachers during religious festivals due to permanent staff failing to attend. The use of 'occasional days' would help reduce unexpected staff absence and therefore reduce costs.
- The use of 'occasional days' was not compulsory and simply gave schools increased flexibility in managing staff and pupil attendance. As such, Forum Members felt that the proposal should be supported and schools should be allowed to make their own choices.

RESOLVED: That (1) the proposals for 'occasional days' be supported, and

(2) that, whilst having a preference for Model 3, a final recommendation to the Portfolio Holder for Schools and Children's Development on school term dates 2010-2011 be deferred until the next meeting.

125. **INFORMATION REPORT - Draft Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2009-10 to 2011-12:**

The Forum received a report which provided a summary of the Council's draft budget plans for 2009-2010 to 2011-12, as reported to Cabinet in December. The officer stated that comments were being sought from a variety of stakeholders and invited the Education Consultative Forum to ask questions and provide feedback.

Following a number of questions from Members of the Forum, officers clarified that:

- Per pupil funding for 2009/10 had been confirmed as £4,669 (a 3.6% increase on 2008/09) and for 2010/11 as £4,862 (a 4.1% increase on 2009/10). Schools were responsible for ensuring money followed individual students.
- The calculation of the total Dedicated Schools Grant for 2009/10 and 2010/11 would depend on the January 2009 and January 2010 pupil counts respectively.
- The minimum funding guarantee for 2009/10 was set at 2.1%.
- Due to the current economic climate, all directorates, including Education, were required to identify savings.
- The Achievement and Inclusion Service was currently operating with one vacant position, although this was due to be filled shortly.
- Any unforeseen cost increases would need to be absorbed by the directorate.
- A Placements Procurement Team is being created to achieve efficiency gains by reducing the unit cost of placements.
- The service responsible for handling Child Death reviews had seen an increase in central government expectations, and was expecting further demands, as a direct result of the Baby P incident at Haringey Council. It was explained that such reviews were held whenever a child died in suspicious circumstances.

A Member of the Forum commented that the energy currently being used by schools in Harrow had been purchased in advance and, unfortunately, the contract had been agreed when fuel costs were high. However, though it was hoped a new contract could be negotiated shortly, it was suggested that the Council needed to accept that the time of cheap energy had passed and should instead focus on building energy efficient schools.

The Chairman stated that, whilst she supported the development of energy efficient schools, the Forum had to acknowledge that most school buildings in the borough were old and there was little the Council could do to improve their energy efficiency. She also noted that building highly efficient buildings was expensive and not always feasible given budgetary constraints. In response, a Member agreed that initial outlay could be expensive, but that the Council should investigate the grants available from central government. An officer added that the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme set out clear guidelines that Councils should adhere to when building new schools, with the central emphasis being energy efficiency.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

126. **INFORMATION REPORT - Proposals for School Reorganisation in Harrow:**
An officer introduced a report which outlined the proposals for school reorganisation in Harrow and included a copy of the report considered at Cabinet on 15 January 2009 as an appendix. The Forum noted that Cabinet had agreed to the recommendations of the report and that statutory proposals had been published. The Forum was informed that, provided that there were no challenges, the final proposals would be determined by Cabinet at its meeting on 23 April 2009.

The officer drew the Forum's attention to Annexe 2i of the report which detailed how the proposals would impact upon different schools in Harrow. He explained that the Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) had put action plans in place to ensure the transition was as smooth as possible. It was explained that the SRG had considered a range of potential issues and these correlated closely with the main themes that had been raised during the consultation period.

Following questions from the Forum, officers clarified that:

- There was a possibility that some schools would have to initially utilise temporary accommodation due to an increase in pupil numbers. However, such accommodation would be of a high quality.
- The decision to increase Rooks Heath College's planned admission number by 60 students per year had been based, in part, on the forecasting of pupil numbers. Members of the Forum were assured that the college had the capacity to manage the increase.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

127. **Date of Next Meeting:**

RESOLVED: That the next meeting of the Forum take place on 18 March 2009.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.30pm, closed at 8.45 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR ANJANA PATEL
Chairman