

# EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE FORUM

## MINUTES

### 25 JANUARY 2012

<b>Chairman:</b>	* Councillor Brian Gate	
<b>Councillors:</b>	* Husain Akhtar * Mrs Camilla Bath * Janet Mote	* Raj Ray * Zarina Sheikh * Krishna Suresh
<b>Teachers' Constituency:</b>	* Ms A Drew Ms C Gembala Ms J Lang	* Ms L Money Ms L Rowlands † Ms L Snowdon
<b>Governors' Constituency:</b>	* Mrs C Millard * Mr N Ransley	† Mr K Sochall Ms H Solanki
<b>Elected Parent Governor Representatives:</b>	† Mrs A Khan	
<b>Denominational Representatives:</b>	* Mrs J Rammelt	* Reverend P Reece

- \* Denotes Member present
- † Denotes apologies received

#### 71. Attendance by Reserve Members

**RESOLVED:** To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at this meeting.

#### 72. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from A Khan, L Snowdon and K Sochall.

### **73. Declarations of Interest**

**RESOLVED:** To note that the following interests were declared:

#### Agenda Item 11 - Proposals for Constitutional Changes to Education Consultative Forum

Councillor Brian Gate declared a personal interest in that he was a Member of the Constitution Review Working Group. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Councillor Jane Mote declared a personal interest in that she taught at an independent school in Harrow and that her sister-in-law was a teacher at Marlborough School. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

Ms Drew declared a personal interest in that she was a governor at Camrose Primary School. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered.

Mrs Millard declared a personal interest in that she was a governor at two primary schools in Harrow and a member of the Schools Forum. She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered.

### **74. Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2011 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

### **75. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations**

**RESOLVED:** To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received.

### **RESOLVED ITEMS**

### **76. Information Report: Revenue Budget 2012/13 to 2014/15**

The Forum received a report of the Interim Director Finance, setting out a summary of the Council's draft budget for 2012/13 to 2014/15. An officer stated that a range of stakeholders, including Members of the Education Consultative Forum were being consulted on the draft budget, which would be approved by Council on 16 February.

The officer highlighted the following:

- the draft budget had been set in the context of one of the most difficult financial environments in recent years;

- there was a significant reduction in the Local Government Finance Settlement, which would have a significant impact on Children's Services, schools funding and social care funding;
- the £2.4 million funding gap mentioned in the report had now been closed;
- demographic growth in Harrow had led to increased demand in the Council's services generally, and additional funding has been allocated to Children's Services to reflect the growth in the child population;
- significant savings had been identified following the implementation of the new operating model for Children's Centres, and in procurement. Savings were also being made in the areas of Children's Centres and office accommodation;
- there was a cash freeze on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), however, the statutory minimum funding guarantee would ensure that no school would experience a reduction in their school budget greater than 1.5% per pupil, before the pupil premium is applied, and would to some extent protect the schools' funding;
- there was planned and projected growth in the primary school sector and Special Educational Needs provision;
- the Pupil Premium, which was available for disadvantaged children had increased from £488 to £600 per pupil and the eligibility criteria had been widened. However, information relating to how many pupils were eligible to receive free school meals was not readily available from schools and officers were awaiting confirmation of figures from the Department for Education (DfE) in June 2012;
- a policy change by the DfE has necessitated a full review of the expenditure currently funded from the Schools' Contingency Budget. Consequently there have been changes to the Harrow Schools' Funding Formula to ensure that funding is available for the bulge classes planned for September 2012;
- Harrow had received less capital grant than any other outer London borough for its actual pupil growth to date. Officers from Harrow had written to the DfE requesting a fairer allocation.

Following questions from Members of the Forum, officers stated that:

- currently, no school in Harrow was showing a budget deficit. Officers worked closely with schools to carry out financial health checks and forecasting in order to ensure they did not fall into deficit. However, the cash freeze in the DSG may cause some schools to go into deficit in the future;

- an element of schools improvement funding was retained in the Schools' Contingency Budget. Given the DfE changes on Schools Contingency and reflecting that local authorities no longer have responsibility for this area, this funding is now been allocated to schools who will be expected to evolve their own improvement agendas;
- with regard to the Pupil Premium, schools did not have the relevant data about pupils claiming free school meals going back six years, and they did not have data about those pupils who were eligible to claim but did not. The DfE autumn census figures were available and would be circulated to schools in February 2012.

It was noted that the figure in paragraph 20 should read £11, 889K.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

#### **77. Information Report: Inspection Cycle for Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units**

The Forum received a report of the Corporate Director Children's Services setting out the Inspection Cycle for Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

An officer stated that:

- any special schools that received two consecutive outstanding judgements and no change of head teacher since the previous inspection would now be inspected at five-year intervals;
- all other special schools would be inspected within three years of their last full Section 5 inspection;
- PRUs that were judged to be good or outstanding at their previous full Section 5 inspection would be inspected within three years;
- schools whose performance fell below the national benchmark would be part of the sponsored academies programme.

Following questions from Members of the Forum, an officer advised that secure units were inspected separately and not by OFSTED. If Members of the Forum had any specific concerns regarding the Council's role as a Corporate Parent, they should write to the Head of Service Education Strategy and School Organisation in the first instance and he would forward their comments to the relevant officer.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## **78. Proposals for Constitutional Changes to Education Consultative Forum**

The Forum received a report of the Corporate Director Children's Services providing an update on the Education Act 2011 and proposals for constitutional changes to the Education Consultative Forum.

An officer stated that the role of local authorities with regard to schools had changed from that of a provider, to that of a strategic commissioner. This was as a result of changes initiated by the Education Act 2011. Consequently, officers had developed proposals to change the constitution of the Education Consultative Forum (EdCF) to reflect these changes and to re-define the scope of the Forum to ensure that there was appropriate representation from schools, the local community and other relevant stakeholders.

The officer added that the proposed changes aimed at:

- widening the scope of the Forum and extending its membership to include representatives from academies, free schools, denominational schools and early years and voluntary sector providers;
- re-naming EdCF to Education Strategy Consultative Forum (ESCF) to reflect this change in function;
- as with EdCF, the ESCF would not be a decision-making body, but would be an advisory Panel that would make recommendations to Cabinet;
- ESCF would consider all matters relating to the provision of education and schooling in Harrow in the following three broad policy areas:
  - School Organisation and Admissions;
  - Education Excellence;
  - Provision for vulnerable children.

The officer added that the Harrow Admissions Forum (HAF) would be disbanded as there was no longer a requirement for local authorities to have admissions forums. In the future, ESCF would consider admissions arrangement matters.

A denominational representative pointed out that HAF was not simply a reporting body and that its role and remit was wider than that of EdCF. For example, it could refer issues to the Schools' Adjudicator. He asked if such functions would now fall within the remit of ESCF.

An officer advised that HAF was essentially a discussion forum and not a decision-making body. He undertook to provide a report to the next meeting of the Forum to address the comments from the denominational representative.

Following a question from a Member, an officer advised that 'vulnerable children', included Looked After Children (LACs), however, LACs were the

responsibility of the Corporate Parenting Panel, and that ESCF would be responsible for considering the education strategy relating to LACs.

Following a suggestion from a Member, the Chairman stated that there may be benefits and disbenefits to including representation from the Independent Schools Sector in ESCF, and requested that officers look into the possibility of doing this and provide a report at a future meeting of the Forum.

A denominational representative was of the view that attendance at EdCF meetings by co-opted members may be low as they may feel that the Forum did not have any real power and did not carry much weight. The Chairman responded that in the past Cabinet had welcomed feedback from the Forum and that although the Forum may not have responsibility for formulating strategy, it did have influence and was able to guide Cabinet in its decision-making and that the Forum's recommendations were always implemented in full.

It was noted that under the current provisions of the Constitution, Co-opted members were not permitted to have reserves.

In light of the comments, the Forum agreed that the decision on the report be deferred to its March 2012 meeting to allow further consultation to take place.

**RESOLVED:** That

- (1) the report 'Proposals for Constitutional Changes to Education Consultative Forum' be circulated to the following stakeholders, seeking their feedback: the meeting of the Clerks and Chairs on 22 February; Harrow Voluntary Aided Schools' directors; Harrow Faith Schools; the Diocese of Westminster; the University of Westminster, Harrow Campus;
- (2) a further report, incorporating feedback from the above stakeholders be presented at the next meeting of the Forum.

## **79. Primary School Expansion Programme**

The Forum received a report of the Corporate Director Children's Services setting out information on the Council's Primary School Expansion Programme. As requested by EdCF at their last meeting members and officers had written to Ministers and the DfE seeking clarification about the low level of funding allocated by the DfE for the school expansion programme in Harrow. Copies of the correspondence between Harrow Council, Ministers and the Department for Education (DfE) officials were tabled at the meeting.

An officer stated that the 15 December 2011 Cabinet meeting had considered a report setting out the outcomes of the consultation and feasibility studies relating to the Primary School Expansion Programme. The feasibility studies had shown that the costs of expansion would be high, whereas the allocation from the DfE for expansion were low. The decision regarding the final list of schools to be taken forward for permanent expansion had been delegated to the Corporate Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio

Holder for Schools and Colleges. The decision had been taken and a copy of the schools moving forward to statutory consultation was tabled. This list replaced those schools listed on page 46 of the agenda. A further report with the outcomes of the consultation would be considered by Cabinet at their meeting in April.

The officer added that:

- if statutory notices relating to the expansion were published, then a further report would require consideration at the June 2012 Cabinet meeting;
- eight schools had already agreed to take bulge classes in September 2012 and officers were seeking agreement from several other schools to take bulge classes.

Following questions from Members of the Forum, an officer advised that:

- officers had written to Voluntary Aided Schools and Diocesan Schools in Harrow to share the planning and proposals regarding the School Expansion Programme;
- the proposed expansion programme was subject to Capital funding and planning proposals being agreed;
- there was a government initiative to open a Free School in September 2012, and the most likely location was Harrow. However, a site had not yet been identified. The school would offer both primary and secondary places, although there was limited information available about its possible admissions criteria. It was understood that there would not be a faith admission criteria;
- to date, eight schools had agreed to take bulge classes in September 2012 and there was a contingency list of schools that would be approached to offer further bulge classes should the need arise. The officer clarified that bulge classes were where schools were asked to provide an extra class in a particular year group, it did not mean that more pupils were added to an existing class;
- there was an additional capital funding stream available for funding bulge classes;
- in the future, full funding would be provided for bulge classes, even though they may not be full.

It was noted that the second sentence of paragraph 25 on page 49 of the agenda should read: 'The conclusion of this assessment is that the implications are either positive or neutral in that the School Expansion Programme will ensure sufficient school places for the increasing numbers of children in Harrow'.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

**80. School Term Dates 2013/2014**

The Forum received a report of the Head of Service Education Strategy and School Organisation setting out proposals for school term dates for the academic year 2013/14.

An officer stated that a model for term dates in Harrow had been developed based on Harrow's 'Agreed Principles', The Local Government Association's (LGA) Standard School Year and, other available local authority models. He added that the Local Government Association's Standard School Year draft model listed in the report would shortly be circulated to the Chairs and Head teachers and members of the Forum who were not present at the meeting, requesting their feedback by 31 May 2012.

Following questions from Members of the Forum, the officer stated that the three Occasional Closure Days allowed schools the flexibility to choose which additional religious holidays they wished to close on.

It was noted that the first sentence in paragraph 9 on page 55 should read 2013/14.

**Resolved to RECOMMEND:**

That

- (1) Members of the Forum arrange to consult their constituent groups about the proposal at paragraph 9 of the report, and about arrangements for considering proposals in future years;
- (2) a recommendation be made to the Portfolio Holder for Schools and Colleges at the meeting of the Forum in the Summer Term in order to determine the School Term Dates for 2013/14.

**81. Date of Next Meeting**

**RESOLVED:** That the next meeting of the Forum would take place on 7 March 2012.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.22 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BRIAN GATE  
Chairman