

EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE FORUM

MINUTES

10 NOVEMBER 2010

Chairman:	* Councillor Brian Gate	
Councillors:	* Husain Akhtar * Mrs Camilla Bath * Nizam Ismail	* Janet Mote * Raj Ray Krishna Suresh
Teachers' Constituency:	* Ms A Drew Ms C Gembala Ms G Higgins	Ms J Howkins Ms J Lang † Ms L Money * Ms L Snowdon
Governors' Constituency:	* Mrs C Millard † Mr N Ransley	Mr K Sochall Ms H Solanki
Elected Parent Governor Representatives:	(Vacancy)	(Vacancy)
Denominational Representatives:	Mrs J Rammelt	Reverend P Reece

- * Denotes Member present
- † Denotes apologies received

9. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

10. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr N Ransley and Ms Lesley Money.

11. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared and that all the Members and Co-optees would remain in the room during the discussion and decision making on these items:

Agenda Items 9-14: School Place Planning Strategy 2010/2013 – September Update; Schools Capital Strategy 2011/14; School Term Dates 2012/13; School Clothing Grant; Future Operating Model of School Improvement Services; Harrow Pupils’ Attainment and Progress – Summer 2010

Councillor Husain Akhtar declared a personal interest in that he was a governor of Elmgrove School.

Councillor Ramji Chauhan declared a personal interest in that he was a governor of Glebe Primary School.

Councillor Brian Gate declared a personal interest in that he was a governor of St John’s Church of England School.

Councillor Nizam Ismail declared a personal interest in that he was a governor of Stag Lane School.

Councillor Jane Mote declared a personal interest in that her sister-in-law was a teacher at Marlborough Primary School and Nursery.

Annie Drew, representing the Teachers’ Constituency, declared a personal interest in that she was a governor of Camrose Primary School with Nursery.

12. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2010 be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments relating to Minute 3, Declarations of Interest:

- paragraph 4 to read: Councillor Husain Akhtar declared a personal interest in that his grandchildren attended Norbury School and he was governor of Grange First and Grange Middle Schools. He would remain in the room during the discussion and decision making on these items.
- paragraph 7, to read: Mrs C Millard, representing the Governors’ Constituency, declared a personal interest in that she was governor of Grange First, Grange Middle, Cannon Lane Middle and Nower Hill High Schools. She would remain in the room during the discussion and decision making on these items.

13. Matters Arising

Agenda Item 7 – School Place Planning Strategy 2010/13

An officer apologised that figures relating to the number of statemented pupils in Harrow schools had not been circulated to members of the Forum. She stated that there were 456 statemented pupils in Harrow attending special schools.

14. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

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

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

15. School Clothing Grant

The Forum received a report of the Director Schools, Quality Assurance and Commissioning detailing Harrow Council's current policy with regard to the School Clothing Grant. Under the Education Act 1996, local authorities had the power to provide financial help to parents on low incomes to assist them with buying school clothing for their children. However, this was not a statutory duty and the eligibility criteria for financial help were at the discretion of the local authority.

An officer stated that the policy was demand-led and the budget had been overspent in the past two years, adding that the grant had not been reviewed for several years. She stated that the current system was not equitable, in that not many parents knew about the grant or how to access it. The Council resources available were likely to be constrained for the foreseeable future.

The officer outlined four possible options, indicating preference for option 2 (stop paying clothing grants altogether), as this would ease pressure on council resources, and would be in line with the approach of all except one of Harrow's neighbouring authorities. The officer also sought the views of the Forum about option 4 (delegate all/some of the budget to schools), whereby schools would have the responsibility for distributing the funds targeted at those in greatest need, and that proxy indicators, such as free school meals, may be one way of gauging the level of need in each school.

Members stated that they would prefer not to delegate this responsibility to schools, as this would limit the range of children who were able to access the grant. With regard to option 2, a Member stated that the Council should be mindful of removing this grant altogether without full consideration of all possible repercussions. Another Member stated that the Council should aim to cut back on administration costs to ensure that a maximum amount of the budget could be used for grants.

A Member stated that Harrow had pockets of deprivation, and option 3 (continue with clothing grant but adjust to meet the budget available) seemed

to be the most sensible option and should be consulted on, and all possible implications explored fully to ensure that any decision-making was fully informed.

A Member stated that many schools had second hand school uniform schemes which were popular amongst parents and that the cost of school uniforms had been greatly reduced in recent years.

The Chairman stated that a grant of £30 was not a large sum of money, and if central government required pupils to wear school uniforms, then it would have to appreciate that the costs could not be borne solely by local authorities. He added that creative thinking and consultation with all relevant stakeholders was the best way forward and that most schools would probably prefer option 3.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Portfolio Holder)

That option 3 be recommended for consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

Reason for Decision: For the Education Consultative Forum to contribute at an early stage to the consideration of future options for the school clothing grant.

RESOLVED ITEMS

16. School Place Planning Strategy 2010-2013 - September 2010 Update

The Forum received a report of the Director Schools, Quality Assurance and Commissioning, which updated Members on the School Place Planning Strategy as at September 2010 and the plans for September 2011/12 to ensure that there were sufficient places in Harrow.

An officer stated that 5 bulge classes had opened in September 2010, with more expected in 2011. She added that the year 7 intake had been slightly lower than anticipated and that the number of reception class children was rising in line with projections. She stated that high school numbers were more difficult to predict and year 9-11 classes were mostly full, with some spare capacity in years 7 and 8. She added that growth in the primary sector would need to be factored into future planning and officers were looking at permanent expansion in primary school provision from 2012. Meanwhile, co-ordinated admissions and sixth-form 'live' admissions would need to be evaluated after the autumn census.

Following questions from members, an officer explained that nursery places were not covered by statutory provision. She added that under the Schools Standards and Framework Act, infant classes of over 30 children could not span more than a single academic year, hence the introduction of bulge classes. She undertook to provide an evaluative report on bulge classes, and an update on the number of year 7 and year 8 out-of-borough pupils in Harrow schools, which would be done after a full analysis of the autumn census figures.

An officer stated that parents in Harrow were easily able to access information about schools in both Harrow and in neighbouring boroughs when choosing secondary schools for their children. There were no barriers to accessing such information.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) an evaluative report regarding bulge classes be provided at a future meeting of the Forum;
- (2) an update on the number of year 7 and year 8 out-of-borough pupils attending Harrow Schools be provided at a future meeting of the Forum;
- (3) members of the Forum consult their constituent groups and feedback any comments.

Reason for Decision: To consider the progress of the implementation of the Strategy and its implementation.

17. Schools Capital Strategy 2011/14

The Forum received a report of the Director Schools, Quality Assurance and Commissioning, setting out proposals for the development of a Schools Capital Strategy 2011/14 to inform the decision-making for investment in school buildings. The report identified the level of capital available for schools and the priorities which would inform investment. It also proposed consultation with relevant stakeholders to achieve as much agreement and ownership of the strategy as possible.

An officer stated that there was likely to be less funding available in the future and emphasised the importance of agreeing a set of objective criteria for allocating funding. The main aim of the Strategy was to identify which schools were included in the investment programme and where they were ranked on the list, with the list being revised in line with changing circumstances. The officer stated that the schools priority list would be published and be ranked against agreed criteria. Urgent cases would be looked at on a case by case basis and that the list was a good way of ensuring that the process was transparent.

Priorities would include matters such as unsafe teaching accommodation and expansion to accommodate growth. All relevant stakeholders would be consulted. Many schools had their own capital funding and officers were working closely with schools to enable them to manage their own projects if it was felt that the headteachers and governors would be best placed to deliver the programme.

Following questions from Members of the Panel, an officer stated that Harrow had recently completed a number of Autistic Spectrum Disorder projects in schools and were looking at prioritizing local needs. An officer explained that the Equalities Act required the taking of reasonable measures to make public

buildings accessible. However, the cost of making every school in the borough completely accessible would be prohibitive, and there was no legal requirement to do so.

Following a question from a Member of the Forum, an officer explained that Diocesan Bodies included all voluntary aided faith schools.

RESOLVED: That the Schools Capital Strategy 2011/2014 be noted.

Reason for Decision: To contribute to the consideration of a Schools Capital Strategy 2011/2014.

18. School Term Dates 2012/13

The Forum received a report of the Director Schools, Quality Assurance and Commissioning, setting out the proposed school term dates for the academic year 2012/13. An officer reported that neighbouring authorities would be consulted about their planned school term dates.

Members of the Forum undertook to consult their constituent groups about the proposed school term dates and provide feedback at the next meeting of the Forum.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) members of the Forum consider the models provided and consult with their constituent groups;
- (2) feedback be provided to the Director Schools, Quality Assurance and Commissioning by the end of December 2010;
- (3) a report be submitted to the Forum in Spring 2011 with a view to making a recommendation to Cabinet on school term dates for 2012/13.

Reason for Decision: To fulfil the Council's requirement to determine the school term dates for 2012/2013.

19. Future Operating Model of School Improvement Services

The Forum received a report of the Director Schools, Quality Assurance and Commissioning, which set out the current position of the project to develop a Future Operating Model of School Improvement Services. She explained that the consultation would close on 3 December 2010, and the results reported to the next meeting of Cabinet.

It was noted that the government's schools partnerships funding would be significantly reduced and it was expected that a small core of school improvement staff and a few residual statutory duties would remain.

The report anticipated that officers would collaborate with schools to create a Schools Improvement Partnership which could be driven by schools. An

officer stated that one of the consequences of this would be fewer school improvement service staff and fewer grants in the future as the Children's Services Directorate was required to make savings of £450, 000 over the next year.

Referring to the Chairs and Clerks meeting the previous week, a member of the Forum stated that there had been considerable interest and concern about the Harrow Schools Improvement Partnership (HSIP) and schools were prepared to engage with the scheme but would proceed with caution.

A Member of the Forum stated that the main challenge was to narrow the gap between good and satisfactory schools and enable all schools to become excellent, adding that structured support for struggling schools had yielded positive results in the past. However, this required long-term investment and the Achievement and Inclusion Service was best placed to oversee this.

Following questions from Members of the Forum, an officer stated that independent schools sometimes bought their improvement services from the Council, which in turn relied on external consultants to provide these.

An officer stated that joining the HSIP would increase schools' purchasing and commissioning power. However, it would be up to schools to decide if they wished to join the HSIP or preferred to operate independently. The HSIP would require significant numbers of schools to be involved in order to achieve economies of scale and there would need to be a critical mass of schools involved in order to make the scheme viable and attract local authority funding. She added that there was plenty of scope for cross-borough collaboration which would in turn provide cross-borough opportunities for schools.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and a copy of the full consultation paper be provided to Forum members.

20. Information Report: Harrow Pupils' Attainment and Progress - Summer 2010

The Forum received a report of the Director Schools, Quality Assurance and Commissioning, which set out the provisional results for Harrow pupils in the relevant assessments for their age in Summer 2010. It was noted that the results were subject to a number of checks and revisions, such that final results would not be available until 2011, when a further report would be submitted to the Forum.

An officer reported that, as in previous years, the overall picture was optimistic and the results were in keeping with national averages, with Harrow in the top quartile nationally. There had been an improvement in the Early Years Foundation Stage results and officers were working with schools to narrow the achievement gap.

An officer explained the fact that some schools had gone down the results table whilst others had moved up and this was attributable to a number of factors. More pupils had made progress in Maths and English at Key Stage 2

over the past two years. Following questions from members, the officer undertook to circulate information about gender breakdown of the statistics, plus Key Stage 5 figures relating to pupil attainment.

Members of the Forum praised the work of the Schools Achievement and Inclusion team. The Chairman stated that although the report was cause for celebration, it also highlighted those schools which required continued support.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the information about gender breakdown of the statistics and Key Stage 5 figures relating to pupil attainment be circulated to members of the Forum.

21. Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED: That the next meeting be held on Wednesday 26 January 2011.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.33 pm, closed at 9.05 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BRIAN GATE
Chairman