

THE FORUM OF SUTTON GOVERNORS

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Minutes of a meeting held on Tuesday 2nd February 2016 at Civic Offices

Present: There were 19 schools represented as well as Headteachers and Merton Governor Support.

The Chair welcomed the meeting.

Apologies

Carole Cook – Hackbridge Primary, Graham Jarvis – St Cecilia's, Jeremy Dearmer – Beddington Park Primary, Sarah Skeels – Stanley Park Junior, Jenny Sims – Muschamp Primary, Angela Baughan – Spencer Nursery, Helen Matthey – Tweeddale Primary.

Presentations:

Andrew reminded the meeting that there had been previous presentations by Mike Cooper from the Greenshaw Academy Trust, Browne Jacobson and the NGA on the subject of Academisation and, as agreed at the AGM last term, our first speaker is from CSNet.

Andy Withers – The Co-Operative Schools Network (CSNet)

Andy was a recently retired Head of a Primary school and had helped set up a Co-operative Learning Trust in Southampton.

He said that the key is having children at the heart of the organisation. There is a changing education climate. Schools have challenges of curriculum changes, funding and a crisis on terms of recruitment both of senior leaders and NQTs. 35% of leaders want to leave within the next 5 years and 45% of NQTs leave the profession within 4-5 years of starting.

Under the Education and Inspections Act the Secretary of State has a duty to intervene if a school is judged to be inadequate. However, there are still viable alternatives to academies such as Foundation Trusts. What there needs to be is evidence of capacity to improve with a good School Improvement Plan in place. The CSNet has the capacity to intervene and support improvement for their member schools.

Andy spoke about the 2 models – The Co-operative Foundation Trust and the Co-operative Multi Academy Trust (MAT). The key difference being the funding arrangements in that a MAT has a contract with the Secretary of State of the Regional Schools Commissioner and funds come from the Education Funding Agency (EFA). Also under the contract the Secretary of State or the RSC can intervene which can result in a change of sponsor and / or leadership. However,

under either model schools need to trust each other, have a core purpose and adopt the co-operative values. For schools the CSNet offers:

- Local learning leadership
- Strong regional networks
- A share in the national voice
- To encourage global citizenship

Q – The government wants all schools to be academies by 2020. Is Foundation status a stepping stone to academy status?

A – No, it can stay separate and it avoids having the contract with the Secretary of State.

Q- You said the Secretary of State funds academies, how are Foundation Trust schools funded?

A – As now, through the Local Authority

Q – How is the support you offer funded?

A – CSNet takes a subscription from the schools. The amount is calculated on a pro-rata basis depending on size.

Q – How does that money compare with the amount the LA currently top-slice?

A – It is about the same

Q – About how much is the subscription?

A – A school with under 300 pupils - £300, under 500 - £500, a secondary school - £1,000

Andrew thanked Andy for his presentation

William Clapp – a consultant working in the London Borough of Sutton

Andrew reminded the meeting that some time ago the LA was working with Heads and Governors to look at setting up a company to maintain some central services to provide support to schools. Subsequently the Borough had had a bad funding settlement from central government and consequently were looking at a 'spin out' of more services. Initially the LA had been looking at other providers to take on some or all of the services, however nothing came of this. William will update the meeting on the current position.

William started by saying that the LA has 3 key priorities:

- To have coherent, robust education in Sutton
- To help children in Sutton to succeed
- To lower the cost for the LA
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There are continuing talks of a National Funding Formula which may have a negative impact on Sutton. However, even the current financial situation for schools and the Council is not good. The Council could wait and see, but this was unrealistic. They could cut funding and reduce the services, but they did not want that, or they could go for growth, looking at marketing services outside the LA. There were opportunities and threats in this.

Opportunities

- To grow and increase resilience. Economies of scale. Selling services e.g. AIS to other LAs

- Professional development – Brokering support school to school and to schools in other LAs
- Marketing, as Sutton has an impressive reputation for education

Threats

- An increasingly competitive marketplace
- Staff anxieties – major changes in these proposals. There are about 150 staff involved.
- Schools' uncertainty as to what is the Council's view on education

The scope of the 'spin out' has been to transfer all services sold to schools to a new model unless there is no point e.g. payroll as this has a far wider remit than just schools.

The model now being favoured is a Joint Venture Company. The Council would set up a trading company that it owns and controls but also bringing in schools and academy trusts. This would be a limited liability company with profits either ploughed back or used to increase the support on offer. There would be nominal funding from schools and academy trusts. Staff would transfer under TUPE and existing SLAs would transfer as they are, though this may change if budgets change.

Q – Is the proposed model the first example of this?

A – Newham has something like this. Croydon has a smaller partnership. Other LAs are also looking at similar models.

Q – The work that was done before under the 'middle tier' looked at a limited number of services. That also involved the Council putting in funds. Now we have lost 2 years where we would have had the experience of what worked and what did not. It seems that we are just starting again and I don't hold out hope.

Would you consider there needs to be a minimum number of schools required to invest to make it feasible?

A – I am tempted to say no, it could be done without. The problem is that it would not fly as far and as fast. It would be easier to grow if more schools were involved.

Q – You mentioned 150 staff. By transferring them are there any savings? Do we need 150 people?

A – These are key questions to be considered in the run up to the June committee. The business plan needs to be developed and there may still be some reduction between now and September.

Q – You say that the object is to grow business by selling services. What evidence is there that there are people who will buy the services?

A – The market is a key question – what would be a reasonable target for the business? The challenge is that there is expertise in the joint venture company.

Q – What is the evidence that all services would be bought from the same organisation?

A – Individual services are more exposed. There is greater stability in a larger group and losses in one can be mitigated by profits from another.

Q – Is it big enough to be a viable company?

A – I think it is a decent size company.

Q – There must need to be a critical mass of schools buying in.

A – The buying in of services the company provides will provide income.

Q – You will have to have schools take the risk of buying in.

A – The best way to achieve growth is with schools. Schools can pay in but not buy a service or not pay in but want to buy a service.

Q – What are the timescales for this?

A – The proposal will go to the February Children, Family and Education Committee. If they agree it will go for consultation to schools and academies and back to committee in June.

Q – Part of the monies from Community schools would come from what is currently top-sliced. This would not be the case for academies. If all the schools become academies where would the money come from?

A – The top-sliced monies goes back to academies, so the buying in would be from the schools' own budgets

Andrew thanked William for his presentation. He proposed a vote of thanks to both speakers. Andy and William then left the meeting.

A copy of both presentations will be posted on the FSG web-site.

Minutes of the last General meeting – 20 May 2015

They were agreed as an accurate record.

Matters arising not covered elsewhere.

None

Schools' Forum

Andrew said that the original date for the Schools' Forum meeting had been changed to the 15th of December, partly to enable the re-constituted Formula Review Group to meet instead. Consequently a number of people were unable to attend. These included himself, who is actually the Vice-Chair of the Forum and other FSG members - Carole Cook, Jenny Sims, and Sue Smith and several headteachers.

He did report that the funding formula for the coming year is the same as last year.

AOB

Andrew re-iterated that the FSG was still without a treasurer and asked again for anyone willing to volunteer to contact him. He reported that he has paid for the annual hosting of the web-site. He will shortly be sending out the letters for the affiliation fees.

Andrew spoke about what the FSG could be doing in the future. Most of Sutton's schools are, or will be, becoming academies. He asked what direction do members want the meetings to take? The committee had discussed possible speakers –

- A local academy trust or from another academy chain e.g. Harris.
- The Regional Schools Commissioner.
- SGOSS – the independent group sourcing governors

The committee had also discussed having a survey /questionnaire in hard copy and/or on the web-site.

Under its constitution the FSG is non- political and independent. The only event that could be classified as political had been the pre-election Hustings but that had been a special meeting. He raised the question as to whether we should issue a standard invitation to members of the Education Committee? He asked for any comments or suggestions to be sent to him.

Alan McIntosh said that it would be a good idea to have the Regional Schools Commissioner. He understood that the Commissioner was open to come to talk to organisations.

Andrew mentioned a re-structure of CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) in Sutton. There is a consultation which has been sent to Heads and Chairs. He expressed his concern having read the documentation and suggested that this should be an item for FGBs to look at.

Andrew said that he receives numerous adverts via the web-site for their organisations to be posted on the site. He has discounted all except one from the School and Nursery Milk Alliance which draws attention to statutory responsibilities to provide milk at least once a day. The meeting agreed Andrew's suggestion that he put this one on the web-site.

Alan McIntosh mentioned the Academies Show at the ExCel in April. People have to register for this but it is free entry. He had been last year and found it very interesting and informative. He strongly recommended it to members. Mike Cooper echoed this. He said that it was predominately a trade show but with lots of information. There were also a number of interesting seminars and that ministers have attended and have used it to make education announcements. He said that it was good to book and especially to book early for the seminars.

***Mike will forward the link to Andrew to put on the web-site**

Andrew thanked all those who attended and closed the meeting at 9.30pm.

Date of next meeting

THURSDAY 19 MAY 2016, 7.30-9.30pm at CIVIC OFFICES