

Education Building Development Officers Group

Harrogate Conference 2 November 2007

Notes of the Q & A session with DCSF

Sally Brooks, Head of Schools Capital Division, DCSF
Philip Parker, Deputy Director, Schools Capital Division, DCSF
John Kenny, Head of Finance and Programmes, Schools Capital Division, DfES
Jane Briginshaw, Head of Design, Schools Capital Division, DfES

Mik O'Connell, Darlington

Q. Following Jim Knight's announcement that Local Authorities (LA) are expected to fit all new and refurbished schools with sprinkler systems and, as the cost of sprinklers has to be contained within the project costs, can the Department clarify the position in respect of how the installation of sprinkler systems will be funded?

A. The DCSF is aware of the cost pressure for LA's. No additional funding is earmarked for this specific purpose.

Tony Blackman, East Sussex

Q. Many LA's feel that supported borrowing is "unsupported" and there are still problems.

A. Reducing the level of supported borrowing is the first step. LA's need to continue to communicate with DCSF and provide feedback. DCSF need to talk to Department of Communities regarding this for the rest of unsupported borrowing. CLG are expected to announce the supported borrowing figures in November.

Tony Daley, London Borough of Ealing (Pathfinder for Primary Capital)

Q. There is a concern that the increased birth rate and pupil numbers will require temporary accommodation followed by permanent build. Will the Department be providing any new guidance on this?

A. There will be a Basic Need safety valve application. This guidance is expected early next year.

Lindsey Taylor, Norfolk Property Services, Stockport

Q. Following last week's announcement, when will guidance for both strands of TCF be circulated?

A. The Department are currently working on this guidance and expect it to be available before Christmas. The diversity and standards pot will amalgamate existing incentive money for expansion and draw together existing money. There is £8 million there to non BSF LA's. This will be a lump sum allocation for LA to decide their highest priorities for SEN and 14 – 19.

Iain Johncock, Southwark

Q. LA's are trying hard to find guidance on harnessing ICT. Is the Department looking to draw together existing funding streams for ICT?

A. The Department intends to bring together 3 previously ring fenced ICT grants and this will be agreed shortly. There will be a % holdback for LA's for integrated systems. The Department's contact for ICT is Roger Parr.

Joanna Penman, Gloucestershire

Q. Why can LCVAP be grant and modernisation not?

A. Only LA's can use supported borrowing. By definition for any category of school which is not LA eg Voluntary Aided, Academies the Department has no choice but to give as grant.

Gareth Simmons, Plymouth

Q. BSF de waving was mentioned in the Workshop and gave the impression that funding is needed upfront and for LA's to demonstrate readiness to deliver, a Director of BSF must be in post. This is a challenge for LA's with budgetary issues.

A. LA's need to demonstrate that all BSF preparatory work has been completed and that the infrastructure is ready. It is not about having the money but having the commitment and being ready to go.

Norrie Porter, Shropshire

Q. In respect of 14 to 19, there has been no information from the Department about Early Years or Youth funding.

A. The Department will obtain an update on Early Years and inform EBD OG. The Youth area is not as far advanced and the Department is talking to Beverly Hughes, Minister for Children, Young People and Families. There is likely to be a lot of piloting. Any LA's who are doing innovative good work in this area may wish to get involved in the pilot work.

Brian Harris, Cambridgeshire

Q. In the light of the competition requirements for new schools particularly in development areas and the need to commit funding to the successful promoters possibly before allocations are announced - Are the Department giving consideration to the possible difficulties this could cause Authorities?

A. This is a new area and the Department are trying to come up with a system for where funding is allocated with long preparation times. The Challenge for the Department is to have to make commitments and differentiate between different types of demand and timescales in advance of the spending period. Brian reported that Cambridgeshire are happy to be involved in discussion with the Department.

Anne Dixon, John Clark Associates

Q. Further to today's presentation by Jane Briginshaw, is a similar announcement going to be made to the Design Community?

A. Schools Capital Division Design Team regularly participate with RIBA, CABE, and BCSE and deliver conference presentations to designers. JB advised AD to contact her directly for details of the network outside the LA Community.

Nigel Spears, Archdiocese of Westminster

Q1. Question on Voluntary Aided. Some budgets are clearly separated between VA and Community schools and others not so. Will this be a feature of the guidance?

Q2. Question re BSF. I am working with a number of small London Boroughs for example 1 LA does not have sufficient need for a VA school but 2 or 3 Borough's working in partnership would have a need. What are the thoughts of the Department fro regional strategic provision?

A Q1 this reflects the recent history of the Church's development. The VA sector is an important part of a diverse picture of school provision. Newer programmes do not have the traditional split between VA and LA schools and having ring fenced pots of funding protects VA but also limits it. The Department expects LA's to take fair decisions for all the children in all the different categories of schools. In the next year or so the Department needs to bring together some LA representatives (EBDOG) and talk through the funding system which is blind to the type of school or continue with the existing. The Department's vision when talking about 0 – 19 is to have 1 big pot of money. As part of a Pilot it will look at the option of putting all VA and LA money together and work in partnership to plan how to spend this funding. The Pilot will look at areas where LA's have both strong and weak relationships with the VA Sector.

A Q2 The Department is looking at how to make BSF better. This will be looked at in the review of Wave 7 to 15.

Neil Logue, Education for All

Q. Question on Sustainability and the 8 Doorways to Sustainable Schools

There is a large volume of excess furniture coming out of school buildings and LA's have the problem of disposal. Can the Department turn this in to a National Programme for furniture recycling?

A. Ministers have raised this question. It was noted that this is an issue For LA's. It was noted that disposal of furniture which is surplus to requirements is a problem from a local procurement and audit point of view. Conference delegates agreed that a central facility would be welcomed

although Auditors may have a problem with this option. Northamptonshire reported that they use the services of Education for All and this works well.

Tony Palmer, Education Leeds

Q. Given the encouragement for Schools to become independent Trusts, are there likely to be any future funding incentives to encourage more schools to go down the Trust route and, if so, why?

A. There is no funding to encourage schools to become Trusts. The Schools White Paper requires us to have strong independent schools be it Trust, VA, Academy or Community. The Department's view is that any school can be at a different part of the journey. Within the TCF Standards and Diversity fund money is available to support innovative programmes. There is not a financial advantage.

Tony Blackman, East Sussex

Q. When looking at the funding allocations for Modernisation the Department did not use AMP data and communicated the message that AMP data was not very useful. TB made a plea that the Department do not give this message that AMP is not useful as it is very important for BSF and PCP. LA's allocate a large volume of resources on maintaining AMP and consider that it works well.

A. In making changes the Department considered that all the AMP data collected from across the Country would not stand up as Office for National Statistics data. Since the Department became less centrally directed about AMP some LA's have not updated their AMP data as regularly as others. The Department consider that AMP data is very useful but only stopped using it for Modernisation. They want to send out a strong message to LA's advising them to use their AMP data to support BSF, Pilot Strategies and 0 – 19. This evidence is required or LA's will not get the funding.

Kristina Wingeleth, Dorset

Q. Which schools will be affected by modernised Devolved Formula Capital?

A. Data held by the Department identifies all new schools. Less than 1000 schools across the Country are identified as modernised for this spending period and this will change as BSF develops. The Department's definition of modernised is new build or substantially refurbished (80%). Going forward every school covered by BSF will fall into the modernised category. PCP is to be looked at.

Nigel Spears, Archdiocese of Westminster

Q. Do Trustees have the ability to take out mortgages which are then serviced by the school budget?

A. At the time of GM Schools, legislation was passed to allow schools to borrow on the basis that it was not secured against any asset used for Education. In 1997 the Government widened this. Technically speaking it is possible for all schools to borrow with the approval from the Secretary of State. Any borrowing undertaken by a school would be taken by the Treasury as being money owed and taken off the Department's budget. Trustees are a different legal beast and can borrow without Government approval. If any LA has any questions on this they should contact the Department.

Mik O'Connell, Darlington

Q. The Department has Targeted Capital projects which have committed large allocations of future year's DFC. Governing Bodies are now very worried that the recently created modernisation category could affect DFC. Are there going to be any special dispensations for such schools?

A. This must be dealt with at a local level and for this reason the Department has included in every LA's modernisation funding an extra £50,000. A school will not change from the higher to the lower rate of DFC until the building work is completed.

John Farry, London Borough of Havering

Q. Has the Department given any consideration to what are the consequences of the Trust model over the longer term?

A. The Department sees the LA as the key strategic agent for all pupils and wants to see a diverse range of strong independent schools including Trusts. The DCSF want LA's to involve all schools in planning. There may currently be a feeling of them and us but the Department see LA's taking the lead. The Trust school legislation was structured to ensure that all parties are protected which pushes everyone towards local consensus.