



EDUCATION BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS' GROUP

MANCHESTER CONFERENCE NOVEMBER 13th and 14th NOVEMBER 2003

CONFERENCE NOTES

1. Ged Mitchell Manchester Education Service - Introduction

Ged welcomed all to the conference and thanked the DfES for allowing Manchester to host the pre-launch of Building Schools for the Future and Exemplar Designs. Due to the great interest in this theme, Manchester's conference was the largest EBD OG turnout to date with over 300 delegates on both days, including two Welsh and over 120 English LEAs.

The conference make up was slightly different from the normal conference of EBD OG. Eleven of the top architects' practices in the country came to show case their Exemplary Designs. There was a small exhibit area where some major companies, which have worked and added value to Manchester over the past few years, showed some of the designs and projects undertaken in relation to Building Schools for the Future agenda.

Each delegate was given a pack which included the conference programme, two CDs which contained all the programmes and case studies relating to the workshops, a CD entitled The Ravensbury Story, "Property Matters" (a maintenance guide for Manchester schools), information on 'cabe', 'mtech' and 20/20 Design and various booklets on Manchester itself.

The speakers were welcomed:

- Richard Leese, Leader of the City Council
- Shirley Turner, Chair of the EBD OG Standing Group
- Sally Brooks, Divisional Manager, Schools Capital and Buildings Division, DfES
- Philip Parker, Schools Capital and Buildings Division, DfES
- Mukand Patel, Divisional Manager, School Capital and Building Design Unit, DfES
- Robert Osborne, Partnerships for Schools
- Ian Glaister, Assistant Chief Education Officer, Manchester LEA.

2. Richard Leese Leader of Manchester City Council

Richard Leese told the conference he was delighted to welcome the delegates to what was a very important conference. He referred to Manchester as a sleeping giant, a giant that over the past decade has come back to life. It left the nineteenth century a world class City and it has entered the twentyfirst century once again as a City of international

significance. This has been achieved largely by building on strength, strengths that include the professional and financial services sector within the city, second only to London within the UK. Over the past decade or so there have been some significant regeneration successes. For example the city centre has become a success story from every point of view, an area that in 1990 had around 500 residents, has now over 10,000 and probably by 2005 the residential population will have doubled again to around 20,000 people within the City Centre.

In the 2000 Index of Multiple Deprivation, Manchester was officially the seventh most deprived Local Authority area in the country. There are also very low levels of educational achievements, although as Richard saw educational attainment as being absolutely fundamental to the long term regeneration and long term health of the City. In the City's attempt to drive up educational standards, we need to link Manchester's knowledge capital initiative which is taking the entire intellectual capacity of the city, not just within the HEIs but going all the way down into communities and turning that intellectual capacity into economic growth and economic benefit.

There is, of course, an unprecedented level of investment going into new and refurbished schools at the moment, and Manchester is absolutely delighted about that level of investment. It does mean that educational conferences become even more important in their potential for sharing good practice and the need to network ideas throughout the country.

3. Ian Glaister – Assistant Chief Education Officer

Ian briefly ran through what Manchester was experiencing in terms of education at present and also the feeling about how Building Schools for the Future will impact on that.

Ian touched on the current provision of education in Manchester in terms of the school population, diversity of the schools and the general condition of the education building stock.

He then gave an overview of the future vision for education in Manchester which was part of our recent BSF expression of interest, and touched on the following issues:

- transforming secondary education;
- retention and commitment of staff;
- the effective use of ITC;
- domains of influence;
- special educational needs.

4. Shirley Turner Chair of EBD OG

Shirley referred to the last conference in Cheshire and how each conference is surpassing each other. She went on to inform the conference on the work of the Standing Group and the many meetings the group attends on behalf of the delegates.

NOF

At the last conference in May delegates asked the Group to have some discussions with NOF regarding the bureaucratic processes and difficulties encountered by authorities undertaking works associated with this funding. The Group is sorry to feed back that it has not got a lot better in the attempt to improve the situation due to Sport England's reluctance to consult.

The AMP Appraisal Processes

AMP appraisal processes have been carried out during the recent months and the Group is reliably informed that the conference should know what the outcome is for their own individual LEAs and how the Group has been appraised.

Targeted Capital Fund

Targeted Capital Fund has been much talked about earlier this year and caused some concern amongst the Standing Group that the TCF did not appear to bear much relationship to AMP philosophy and prioritisation for each LEA.

The announcement for the recent TCF bids is now likely to be in early January 04.

"Every Child Matters"

The Group has also looked at the green paper "Every Child Matters" this could have a huge impact on the organisation of some LEAs where setting up children's services may be a new experience for them.

Modernisation Funding

The amount of funding allocated to the DfES's Modernisation Funding has caused lots of concerns, in particular, around the levels of funding available from 2005/06 onwards.

The Group asked a question relating to the to the funding available in 2005/06 at a seminar recently to one of our DfES colleagues who replied "consider 03/04 and 04/05 as a bonus, the normal level was more likely to be 02/03".

Shirley felt authorities would have some concern in their ability to start to build a three year capital programme in partnership with schools if the levels of funding were going to diminish any further and which will reduce the benefits of long term planning.

Popular Schools Funding

Shirley thought that this continues to be a mystery at many levels, certainly as far as the discussions in the Standing Group is concerned, the issues were who is bidding for this, how are they getting their hands on it, how is it being managed, what are the guidelines, although she thought it possible that allocations and the management of the bid may become a little clearer in 2004/05.

Learning and Skills Council

There were originally concerns that allocations to LEAs in August with the requirement to spend by March 2004 was a little unrealistic. The Group also identified that each LEA's experience with liaising with their local Learning and Skills Council was very patchy, very different and not in the least bit consistent.

AMP Network Focus Group

Shirley explained that this was a very quiet little group but that it beavers away, is still meeting, is still very useful for sharing experiences and talking over the issues that surround the AMP. The Focus Group's minutes can be found on the EBD OG website.

The Building Bulletin 77 Revision Task Group

This group has met twice since the May conference and is due to meet again and Shirley represents LEAs on that group. There is a report that has been produced on the Phase One section of the review which records observations and details of the various examples of SEN provision that was researched. It has now been shared for comment and it is currently being updated. The implementation of Phase Two will be discussed in December and when complete it will lead to the new publication of BB77.

The RIBA Schools Client Forum,

Shirley conceded that this forum has been a bit of a mess, she thought it was trying to do something it cannot do and that the last two meetings the delegates' representatives have not been able to attend. This was partly because the dates and venues were changed at the last minute.

School Capital Strategy Consultative Group

Finally this Group has only met once since May and that was last Friday, and that was again for the right reasons. Sally had come into the post and obviously needed to take time to get to grips with all the things that were bubbling around her.

EBDOG Website

The Group would like to thank Chris Gilbert of Birmingham and his team for managing the EBD OG website on our behalf. It is a valuable resource and it is developing all the time.

Future Conferences

Finally Shirley told the conference she looks forward to Plymouth in May 2004.

On behalf of the EBD OG she gave a huge thank you to Ged and his team and in particular Stella and Brian.

5. Sally Brooks – Divisional Manager, Schools Capital and Buildings Division DfES

Building 21st Century Schools

After thanking the EBD OG for inviting the DfES, Sally introduced herself as the new Head of the Schools Capital and Building Division. She briefly wanted to set the scene for Building Schools for the Future and in particular the broader capital strategy. Sally went on to say how it was the first chance for generations to really produce transformational change in school buildings, and reminded everybody that in 1997 there was £750 million a year to spend on school buildings - in 2005/06 there will be £5.2 billion. Although concentrating on secondary schools and building 21st Century Schools, there is also an increase of up to £3 billion, this amount being put into the rest of the school stock.

The DfES Modernisation Agenda.

There is a real change in the approach the DfES is now taking and central government as a whole, to the way that the DfES works, both within the organisation and with the LEA as stakeholders. Sally explained how the Civil Service's traditional strengths lie in strategy and policy but how it is less good at project management and delivery as these are left to the LEAs to undertake. There is a real acknowledgement in central government right from the top, from the Cabinet Office, that the Civil Service and the DfES have to get much better at project management and at real delivery.

There will be a move away from the annual bidding rounds towards reliance on the LEAs to spend the funds in the context of robust asset management plans and the priorities made at local level.

There will be a large difference in the sort of work the LEAs now have to carry out under the Building Schools for the Future programme. Help and support from the DfES, as in setting up Partnerships for Schools and Local Education Partnerships with the LEAs, will be given to spend the £2 billion in order to make sure that these massive investment programmes are going to be delivered, on time and within budget, to improve standards and attainment. It was not just about giving children new warm, dry, safe buildings, but also about making every child, the poor and the rest, believe that they can go to school every day to a building that is uplifting, and inspiring, and to make them feel that they have got a future that is worth something.

6. Philip Parker – Schools Capital and Buildings Division

Philip further expanded on Sally Brooks' presentation on what is happening to the DfEs capital strategy and the drive for localism. There is a genuine move to put more control into the hands of the LEAs through the prudential regime from April 2004, the prudential system and the purpose of it is to enable LEAs to choose to bring in more investment into the system and not to have to just to rely on the capital support that government gives as this should make them feel less dependent on the state hand outs.

One of the concerns which needs to be discussed is how comfortable Treasurer's Departments will feel about taking and borrowing without the revenue support that is there at present.

The recent development of the single capital pot, the fact that different government departments now give increasing amounts of their supported borrowing and grant through this method leaves the local authority level to decide how to manage things more flexibly.

The DfES is trying to reduce the planning and regulatory burden on LEAs and will be coming back to some of the issues around the replacement of various of DfES plans by the new Single Education Plan, and what the DfES has been doing through BSF will make the bidding rounds less burdensome than in the past.

DfES support for capital investment

Philip gave a breakdown on the amount of funding given to authorities

- devolved and formula capital will be 43% of the total funding in 2005/06
- targeted capital will be 14% of the total funding in 2005/06
- transformational funding (BSF) will be 43% of the total funding

He confirmed that the DfES is on track to give LEAs all of their remaining formulaic allocations and the 19 December is the date.

Philip raised the issue in respect of Devolved Formula Capital and to what extent schools that are involved in BSF will have their needs met and to what extent their Devolved Formula Capital will be abated so that it may be available to those other schools.

Targeted Capital Fund was another funding strand which may fall in the DfES' strategy for abatement on authorities that have been successful in securing funding from the BSF programme.

Asset Management Plan Update

Philip confirmed that the DfES clearly believes that there are great benefits in Asset Management Plans and that it has been helping LEAs to improve the standards of Estate Management, spreading good practice and helping LEAs to fit what they do within the sort of central government priorities that are set.

This year's appraisal is focusing on the quality of your condition and suitability data, Local Policy Statement and Statement of Priority which LEAs submitted earlier in the year. The outcome of the appraisals is expected to be sent to LEAs by end of March 2004.

The future of the Asset Management, in particular, the Local Policy Statement will now be included in the development of the Single Education Plan which is being phased in for all local authorities by April 2006.

The things likely to be looked at through the Single Education Plan are progress in tackling needs indicated by AMP data, project quality and delivery performance against Achieving Excellence targets, progress in relation to any compact agreements on asset management or capital issues.

Philip asked delegates how we can we keep asset management developing and keep it improving on the scale it is now. The DfES is thinking about using the School Building and Design Unit territorial architects and contacts working with LEA network groups such as EBD OG identifying and assimilating good practice.

Building Schools for the Future

Although the BSF is a national programme, colleagues from the DfES hope LEAs see it as the opportunity to really realise a local agenda with local authorities in the lead, brokering what local communities, schools, pupils, parents and councillors really want for their local community.

The BSF guidance was issued to LEAs in July 2003 and colleagues from the DfES held 10 meetings around the country to gain positive or negative feedback from the documentation.

The department recently received 53 bids to be part of BSF Wave One Programme, there were 42 which were sort of core wave one proposals and 11 pathfinder proposals for smaller initiatives. We are expecting expressions of interest from the remaining authorities by 19 December to be part of other, future waves.

Philip informed the delegates that the formal announcement of the allocations will be early in the New Year.

The two big concerns the DfES has heard about very loud and clear are finance and affordability and funding of the Voluntary Aided Schools.

7. Robert Osborne – Partnerships for Schools

Robert referred to Building Schools for the Future as the greatest investment programme in a generation in schools infrastructure and services. At the heart of BSF is the ambition to provide a 21st century learning environment for every secondary school pupil in the next 15 years or so, and at its heart it aims to be a catalyst for transformational education change. The programme is of a scale and ambition that demands a different approach, one that levers on past success whilst accessing new capacity in both public and the private sectors.

David Milliband has announced that a new body will be set up which is going to be called Partnership for Schools with the very ambition of supporting local authorities in the delivery of new schools and refurbished schools for the next ten to fifteen years. The partnership will bring together the skills and experiences of three bodies of the Department for Education and Skills, the 4 Ps, and the newly formed Partnership for Schools.

Robert went on to state that many delegates within the conference will have been frustrated, by the lack of strategic funding from central government. This has resulted in ad hoc investment, and repeated bidding format is expensive both in terms of emotion and time for LEAs and indeed the private sector.

Robert then described what Partnerships for Schools will actually do. Firstly it is going to be the national programme manager and secondly will be supporting authorities in planning and delivering their investment programme.

As national programme manager the role will be to drive towards standardisation in terms of contracts, and in terms of process. They also want to use relatively sophisticated knowledge management systems and one of the real values of the body will be to sit in the centre and share good practice across each authority and also advise on things that do not work.

It will also be important that private sector capacity is assessed and not just in terms of construction skills but bidding skills and investment and support. Enormous investments should not be poured into areas that are already overheated.

PFS can provide a lot of assistance with the appointment of advisers, legal, financial, technical, design advisers and maybe putting together panels from whom LEAs can choose, people who are accredited and know what is going on.

PFS, Robert stated, aims to deliver a plan that improves efficiency and cost effectiveness in all phases of development, will support the setting up of long term partnerships were everybody is incentivised in the right way and to assist the private sector to develop the right skills to deliver the Building Schools for the Future programme.

8. Question and Answer Session – see Appendix One

9. Mukand Patel, School Capital and Building Design Unit, DfES

Mukand said he wanted to talk a little about why the DfES is doing exemplar designs, the brief set for the teams, the processes the DfES went through and then how they expected that the designs will be used.

The whole thing started about a year ago when David Milliband first saw Building Bulletin 95 – Schools for the Future, he looked at it and said that it all looked great but where were the plans, where were the exemplar designs of schools for the future?

David Milliband clearly felt that the DfES needed to deal with a vision of the school for the future and what it looks like, and that is why the DfES was at the conference talking about exemplar designs.

The brief set for the teams was transformational change; inspirational buildings with a flexibility in structures, buildings that are adaptable; that are ICT friendly, covers the 14 – 19 agenda, and also covers issues relating to security.

The exemplar designs had to be inclusive buildings. When building new schools, advantage should be taken of the opportunities to get things right in terms of lighting, vision panels, colour etc. A major part of the brief was for good social areas in school buildings, inviting dining areas were needed, particularly in the secondary schools.

One thing the DfES wanted the exemplars to get right was the internal environment, with good ventilation, natural daylight, good acoustics and to look at sustainability. Buildings made out of sustainable materials, which are low energy buildings. It was felt that lots of children really liked the idea of environmentally friendly schools and this can help in the learning process and become part of the curriculum. Buildings should be community friendly.

The initiative was to encourage the design of buildings that lend themselves to “off site” construction techniques. The BSF offers an opportunity to look at off site construction for delivering the programme, they were asked to do a core design and then for a number of variations.

The teams were advised that their core design should be a 6FE school with a 250 + 6th form for a given site, then doing that core design to RIBA Stage C, but then the exemplars were asked to do 12 variations. These are to include variations on the size of schools, so on secondary the DfES has asked for a 4FE school, 8 FE school and 6 FE school without 6th form.

Mukund went on to say that variations on the specialism to the core design would be a science or a technology school but could also be for Performing Arts; PE, languages or business enterprise.

On the primary side, the core scheme is for a 2 FE school with a nursery and the size variations are for a 1 FE and 3 FE with a nursery but one of the teams is also doing a variation of a ½ FE a four classroom.

He went on to say that the DfES thought the designs were inspirational and visually very powerful. The view was that the exemplars had put a great deal of thought into the process to such a degree that they had taken on board an educationalist as part of their teams, as well as the specific schools that they had been partnered with. The outcome is a lot of new ideas and concepts of how learning can take place within various settings.

The exemplars have been asked to produce a 50 page A3 booklet of their design concept and their educational approach for their designs re: sustainability and ICT strategies incorporating all the flexibilities and all the variations as well. The intention is that the DfES will publish these in limited numbers but all of the authorities should get 1 or 2 copies and a further compendium of all designs will also be produced.

Mukund then invited the architects, Feilden Clegg Bradley, DeRijke Marsh Morgan and Walters and Cohen Partnership to give their presentations to showcase their exemplar designs.

Ged closed the day by thanking everyone for their time and effort and said he looked forward to having a chat with some of the delegates at the conference dinner.

He informed all that the next EBD OG conference will be held in Plymouth in May 2004, and looked forward to seeing them there.

Finally, he invited the delegates back tomorrow to attend the Exemplar Design workshops.

APPENDIX ONE

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

DAVE CARTY - MANCHESTER

Question to Robert Osborne

I am very keen that we get consultation as early as possible on the ideas you have outlined to us, interested to hear that you are going to consult in February, is there anyway you can consult with all LEAs now with your early ideas so that there is not just four authorities providing information.

We are at a difficult stage at the moment what we are doing is trying to narrow down the options in respect of legal, finance and procurement issues. Once we have got to that stage we are happy to consult more widely but at the moment we are still at a niggly kind of discussions with financial and legal advisers as to what will work, what might work and what might not. These are broad brush, we want to rule out some of the approaches, not the models themselves, that are not helpful to LEAs and local government i.e. that your officers will find difficulty in signing up to. I think when we have bottomed that out a bit more then we will be happy to consult.

TONY BLACKMAN – KENT

Question to Robert Osborne

We have over a hundred secondary schools, as you probably know, some of those are in pretty poor condition we have probably got more in pretty poor condition than many LEAs all together. We are fortunate in also having two of the government growth areas; we have got Channel Tunnel; we've got an application just come in for a housing development of 7,250 dwellings. You mentioned that you would need to assess the building industry capacity in areas and you wouldn't be pouring investment into areas where they were already over heated, does that mean Kent be featuring?

Yes, I think that's one of the things we are doing as a programme, we are looking to manage quite frankly construction inflation and be very aware of it and I think that we are doing some work now on regional capacity and we are not going to be simply saying well OK there's some mythical assessment that there is not enough capacity in that particular patch therefore we wont go there but we will be very mindful of it when we are assessing what construction price should be, and what we will be accepting in terms of indices on inflation.

PAUL HOLMES – BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Question to Philip Parker

I would like to ask a question of Philip please and introduce it by using the famous 'inclusion' word because there are LEAs out here today who are feeling positively excluded because they know that as far as BSF is concerned they will not be part of the first wave, the second wave or the third wave. What encouragement are you going to give those LEAs, and you did actually hint at something? Perhaps you could expand upon targeted capital which is something I would be very interested to hear from you.

I think there has been a lot of worrying, we have certainly registered that in the meetings we have been having with authorities that BSF was a programme that would essentially rank LEAs from number 1 to 150 and clearly if you are number 146 it feels a very lonely place to be and it's all very far off. I think some comfort I can give to that is what we are trying to do with the expressions of interest, as Robert said, is really to try now and actually map all of the need and all of what you say you want to do and that will help us to build up the overall picture of the programme and really to test our assumptions. I don't think it's going to be simply a case of lining you all up in an order and one can't start till the finish. When you think about some of the authorities and the size of them and this is a programme that we have actually got to finish in a certain time scale you can't leave an authority with a large number of schools just to the last year because it wouldn't be physically possible to do. So although we are partly prioritising on the basis of those published ministerial priorities about standards and deprivation we also have to make that work in a whole programme sense and we have yet to see how that pans out. I have said in some of the meetings I have had, and I may live to regret it, that it may be possible that pretty much everybody has started by the middle of the programme because we have to run it that way, we have got to see how local education partnerships work and how they will fit in and the funding is allocated. But certainly in terms of balancing the whole system will be looking at access to those other pots. It seems to me a reasonably fair thing to be saying that those schools and authorities that are getting that massive BSF investment might have slightly less access to those other capital pots and that we would be adjusting them to give those other authorities a little bit more access but I would like to hear other views on that as well.

JOHN ELLIOTT – SOUTHWARK

Question to Philip Parker

I think the answer you gave to the previous question in relation to abatement of capital funds to the successful BSF authorities, is positively encouraging, however, I feel it should be not a discussion but a positive action.

I am interested to hear what people say and whether, and how strong, you would like us to go on all of that.

JOHN PROCETER – HERTFORDSHIRE

Question to Philip Parker and Sally Brooks

In response to the invitation to come back on the BSF Targeted issue. I would think that there is an issue around LEAs with high levels of deprivation in a sense that BSF only covers secondary schools and as mentioned before there is a great need for investment in primary schools. I've listened to your assurances and this is really addressed to Sally and Philip and it's not a question about waterless urinals but is about Asset Management Planning and I would actually be interested in your re-actions to my end of the telescope. I see teaching environments for the future, I see the forthcoming bike shed for every school initiative, I see the recent ability to convert devolved capital to revenue, I see 57% of capital investment access via a bidding process, I'm beginning to think that Asset Management Planning has had its day and is being gently laid to rest, am I right?

Everything that I hear from you is that you find AMPs valuable. What we are saying at the centre is that we are not going to insist on a fixed type of plan or that it must be done in a certain way and sent in to Mukund and his colleagues to appraise. We are handing AMPs over to you saying local government is intelligent, competent and all of those things, and you know that together we can run that system, so I would like to discuss some of the ways that we would encourage AMPs to continue. We would like your thoughts as well on all other things such as the overall capital strategy, as you know, we are trying to do certain long term strategic planning like BSF and reducing bureaucracy and things that crop up from time to time like school transport and those sorts of things which are immediate concerns of the day and where there is political impetus. I mean I don't think anyone in the hall would argue that environmentalism and sustainability is a bad thing and it's something that needs to be fed in through Asset Management. , We have always got to manage that sort of messy relationship between the sensible things we're trying to do long term and the things that crop up in our day to day business. So we are not perfect, but we are going on that path and my reading is that we are not going back at all from there.

Can I just add that I think what we are saying is that there will be a reduction in the information that we ask of you of Asset Management Plans but we are not looking to end Asset Management Planning. AMPs are deeply embedded within LEAs and you will still need mechanisms for prioritising various projects involving your stakeholders, so local authorities will carry on with AMPs but we will not be asking for a lot of the detailed information that we have asked for in the past and appraising your plans to the extent that we have been doing up to now.

SUSAN SOLLAZZI – WARRINGTON

Statement from Susan Sollazzi

Jumping back to the question before last about the emphasis for targeted funding bids, could I just remind you that those LEAs that are likely to be in the final wave of BSF are also the same ones that tend not to get things like City Academy and City Colleges Education Action Zones etc and so we do feel very much left out in the cold, that's not to say though that you should abandon the view of where the need is greatest but just to take a balanced view. Thank you.

SALLY LIVESEY – WESTMINSTER DIOCESE

Statement and Request to Delegates from Sally Livesey

And I'm afraid I make no apologies to Philip Parker for this being the inevitable question on the voluntary aided sector. I am very glad that Sally said that the DfES wants to be enabling and supporting and to provide that role in the BSF because the 10% contributions for the voluntary aided sector is a real problem when we are talking about millions and millions of pounds, and there are ways in which the VA sector is putting suggestions to the DfES as to how this can be implemented in a more flexible way. I am very glad about that because it would be very detrimental if the VA sector secondary schools were unable to be part of this initiative because of that 10%, that's one point, but I would also make a plea to LEA colleagues here when you are submitting your plans for BSF please do consult with diocese as well as the headteachers involved because diocese may have a different strategic view of their secondary sector than the local headteachers. There are instances where we've learnt that some of our schools are proposed to be demolished and re-sited and have consulted the schools but not the land owners so please do not leave the diocese out of that consultation, and thank you to EBD OG for making this conference open to the voluntary sector as well.

DOUG ELLIOTT - BARNET

Question to Philip Parker

Just want to make the point that in response to Philip's question about balance I think given the earlier comments by the Audit Commission on the uses of devolved formula capital which we would echo I think you really need to be looking at whether devolved formula capital is making any difference, I mean I would argue that in some respects its actually making the problem worse in some schools and I just cannot see it as good value for money.

Devolved Formula Capital does cause debate, you get different views. Heads find it very valuable, local authorities I think have some doubts about how in every case schools use it wisely. It has got very strong support politically, from this government and I don't think its going to go away, but obviously the Audit Commission has raised the point whether the levels have reached about as far as they can go and we will have to look at that. Again its one of those balanced things.

Can I just make a point that adding to what I said that part of the problem with suitability is that many of our schools have evolved to what they are today because of piecemeal investment and devolved formula capital is carrying that on so its actually making the problem much worse than actually solving it in many of the schools.

But at the end of the day you know even with the big transformation of BSF programmes there's an awful lot of schools, including the primaries, and it does give a little bit of power into the hands of the heads to say well I want to get on with this project, this is my priority and just as central government is saying to you we are laying off some of our control you have to recognise some of that from your angle to schools as well, but it's a live debate I know that some authorities think that DFC is used very well also and there is a role clearly for local authorities to guide their schools in how they use it and to influence that and I think that I am right in saying that there is quite a lot around the country and is again something that EBD OG or networks of LEAs might look at.

ANGELA ST JOHN – KINGSTON UPON THAMES

Question to Philip Parker

Hello I'm from Kingston-upon-Thames In Kingston we have been trying to look beyond just education AMP to whole community AMP looking at where our resources are where the primary care resources are and voluntary agencies and so on, and how we can best make use those for the whole community. We have very vibrant NHS lift project in our area and we have made enquiries about whether or not we can build a school as part of the NHS Lift project and apparently we can't, and as far as I am aware we can't build a GP Surgery as part of a PFI education scheme and I just wonder if representatives from the government department can tell us whether we are wasting out time trying to look at whole community AMP if government departments can't join up the funding to help us put that in place.

I think that and I would hope that we can join up. I think that is an interesting point and Robert and PFS will no doubt look at this as to whether our local education partnership idea could deliver non-educational assets. There may be a technical point around whether some money that parliament has voted for education could be used for a GP surgery or visa versa, I admit that there may be something around that, certainly on the single capital pot point we have tried to un-hypothecate and move towards enabling you to have cross service provision. It may be that we haven't got that right yet but I can certainly take that away because we are looking at the whole joining agenda very, very seriously and I'll take that on.

DAVE ROBINSON FROM HULL

Question to Philip Parker and Sally Brook

The question really is about PFI and the affordability gap, and the affordability gap in terms of prudential borrowing if that's the route that more traditional packages go down for authorities with revenue difficulties that could be a real problem as anything more been done to kind of resolve those issues?

Yes a word on affordability because I know it's a big issue. Yes things are being done, I think what I can say is that we are spending at lot of time and a huge amount of effort and energy in sorting out the entire problem with affordability at all levels, at all points in the process and that's why we are taking a lot of time doing it because there are things that we knew about all along around affordability. We don't call it a gap we call it a problem because problems can be solved in theory and I just want to be clear with you all that what we want to do is get to the bottom of it and to be absolutely honest and open and transparent with people as to what we are actually prepared to pay for and what we are not prepared to pay for, and to get everybody understanding that very early on in the process and not to kind of fudge it and people be unclear about what we are doing so we are looking at that we are looking at every single issue around affordability to make sure we have a complete picture of where we stand, what we are prepared to offer and what we are expecting the local authority to offer. We can't be more specific at the moment we should very soon be putting reports up to ministers.

JOHN PARRY - MEDWAY COUNCIL

Question to Philip Parker and Sally Brooks

Philip answering

Just to build on some of the points that were made there I think that the importance of managing expectations must be tackled on that we are in danger, with the best intentions, of having ambitious conversations with schools similar to the one of joining up primary care trust to produce new extended schools, not knowing necessarily what the affordability is going to be we are encouraged to be ambitious, and then we can scale down but there is the risk about the disappointment the credibility of the message givers and I think it must be borne in mind a parallel is brought back to the Victorian age of how there was a scheme of rebuilding that had such an impression, and such a long lasting impression, I mean a big difference is those schools weren't there at that time they were being provided where there were none, this time of course we have schools with histories with regulations and with their own ambitions and it makes it a far more complex process and this needs to be taken into account.

Yes I think what I would say about the whole BSF programme that it is one of balance. We all know it's a balance between spending lots of money on fewer schools and getting absolutely fantastic schools, 21st century schools, with every possible advantage but for fewer schools or looking at that balance as to where we can draw the line in making things really, really good and giving them to more schools. And there is a problem with expectation because what we are saying is that we want fantastic 21st century schools but we know how much they cost and we together are going to have to work out that balance. You know we know how much a really, really fantastic wonderful school will cost and we know that we are not going to fund you at that level, we know what an average school is going to cost and we know that we are going to give you more than that, but it's actually that balance and its managing the expectations, its allowing people to keep their vision, but within sensible boundaries but not loosing sight of that vision. So it is a very, very difficult balancing act that we are doing at the moment and it is not something that is going to go away, you are right, we need to manage expectations.

Sally Brooks, answering

I think part of that we did recognise that the system had been so constrained in the past in terms of the funding that it was worth putting a lot of effort into showing what could be done and I think that's what exemplars are about which is a nice lead into Mukund and the rest of the conference. You know it is about exciting people and I do think that once you have been to a really nice modern shopping centre you don't want to go back to the grotty sort of old one that has not been repaired and hopefully what people will see increasingly as they see these new buildings actually going up is how good they are and just how unacceptable some of those old buildings are for our children.

A final point on the exemplars – one of the reasons we have done the exemplars is to demonstrate that with good inspirational architects and a positive and innovative approach you can actually get really, really good buildings within our cost and space standards.