

EDUCATION BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS GROUP

CHESHIRE CONFERENCE 15TH MAY 2003

CONFERENCE NOTES

1. Ray Baker Cheshire Education Service - Introduction

Cheshire had one of the largest turnouts for an EBD OG conference with approximately 184 people welcomed.

The delegate packs included brochures on Rethinking Construction – Building Best Value Schools, Warnick Educational Buildings, and Willmott Dixon Construction, together with various brochures on Chester/Cheshire, Cheshire's PPP scheme, and the invitation to the next EBD OG conference in Manchester on 13 November 2003.

The speakers were welcomed:-

- Shirley Turner - Standing Group
- Philip Parker, Andy Thompson and Alan Jones - DfES
- Dave Barlow - Audit Commission
- Adrian Terry – Rethinking Construction

2. David Cracknell Group Director - Welcome To Cheshire

David stated what a great pleasure it was for Cheshire County Council to host the event.

David referred to how far the EBD OG conference had come since the 1980's in respect of the increasing size and gender mix. A better understanding of the importance of specialist and general professional development had evolved. "These conferences are as valuable as the investment that every delegate puts into them."

Cheshire has gone through lots of reorganisations and may be facing another one at some stage in the next two or three years. Cheshire has six district councils and is quite diverse, with a population of approximately 674,000 and rising. This part of the country is an area with a very high quality of living. Cheshire has a very high-performing service and was able to out-perform not just national averages, but comparator averages in the league tables.

3. Shirley Turner Of The Standing Group - Review

Shirley referred to the last conference and talked about how the various stages of a project fit together to produce the overall scheme for the betterment of the educational environment for the children.

Since the last Conference the Standing Group had met twice.

Building Schools For The Future.

A response letter to the consultation document could be found on the EBD OG website indicating highlighted areas and areas of concern.

Shirley referred to the 30th April letter on the Teachernet Website and on the LEA mailing page.

Audit Commission Report

The Audit Commission report on improving school buildings raised a number of issues such as the implications for increased Ofsted understanding of issues and where is the promised schools estate management guide which is on its way. Another useful issue was the proposal that schools should be constrained to use their devolved capital and resources to address maintenance problems.

Targeted Capital Fund

Any LEA having technological problems should speak to the DfES. Allocations were made on the due deadline day. There will be more developments about targeted capital fund that will link into the new basic need proposals.

Insurance of School Buildings.

Zurich Insurance were thinking of increasing the excess to 20% of the total cost and were unlikely to insure modular type buildings that do not have sprinkler systems or similar. There were rumours that some insurance companies were looking at post codes of schools in the light of perceived terrorism which may be a prelude to increase premiums, an issue that has an even bigger impact for LEA's.

Section 106 Guidance

The DfES are considering producing some guidance. Updates of meetings are posted on the website.

DfES Website

There are three publications around at the moment, the DfES's publication on Education Building Projects, (found on the DfES website), The Asset Management Plans Data Analysis and the Price Waterhouse Research Brief about building for better performance, an empirical assessment of the learning and other impacts of school capital investment.

School Organisation Plan legislation

The changes have been published recently and they are minimal.

Statutory Instruments can be found on the HMSO website:

www.hmso.gov.uk

NOF

A number of Authorities have experienced problems with NOF and, in particular, with Sport England who are requiring more provision than was originally intended. Questions about minutia details are being asked. The delay this is causing is jeopardising matched funding. The standing group has had a very positive meeting face to face with Stephen Dunmore. Unfortunately the response that was written subsequent to the meeting was less than positive. The Standing Group will write to NOF.

The EBD OG website.

The website was established by Chris Gilbert and his team in Birmingham.

The EBD OG web page address is:-

- www.bgsi.ebdog.
- Dialog box Password protected.
- Username: ebdog (all in lower case)
Password: ebdog (all in lower case)

On average the site takes about 20 hits a week and with 150 LEAs it is being well used.

Strategy focus and task groups:-

The AMP Network

Minutes of the meetings of the Focus Group can be found on the website.

Building Bulletin 77

A task group has been set up with members of the standing group on it. The DfES are working with their consultants.

- Stage 1 is an information-gathering process. The DfES are gathering data about room sizes, talking to Heads and staff about what works and what doesn't work with the new special needs projects.
- Stage 2 is the production of the guidance document.

The RIBA client forum

This has met a couple of times and the next meetings for this Group are;

- 17th September
- 10th October

The VA Board

The VA Board has not met recently, the DfES are carrying out a post implementation of the changes of the liabilities and responsibilities to see how it is going.

Some Personnel Changes in the Capital Group.

- In March, Ken Beaton was promoted to become Director of Finance at the Department of Transport.

- Philip Parker has taken over from Richard Wilkinson.
- Sally Brooks from Haringey LEA has been appointed as Ken Beaton's replacement.

Future Conferences

13th and 14th November in Manchester.

Three more outline dates,

- May 2004,
- November 2004 – Probably held by West Sussex
- May 2005.

4. PHILIP PARKER OF THE DfES - UPDATES

Building Schools for the future

Schools will be able to use their 2003/4 devolved formula capital for revenue purposes but only in specific circumstances.

Public spending figures from the last 20-30 years have shown that there was a period of about 20 years when funding was running at under a billion nationally in England. There wasn't the money in the system to do the maintenance and schools fell into disrepair. Over the last few years that money has started to grow, enabling the backlog of repairs to be caught up and the building of some whole new schools. With the increase over the current spending review period, this year, the next year and the year after, we've got an extra two billion on top of the five billion. Building schools for the future is going to be about two billion of the five billion.

A series of regional whole day events have been organised. Guidance will be available probably between December and March so that it is clear about what has to put together in an application by July.

The DfES want every LEA to have in mind the picture of 21st century facilities for every secondary pupil within the next ten to fifteen years.

TCF

The money that comes through for TCF each year for new projects is really quite a small percentage. The criteria had been changed to allow every LEA to put in three projects and three VA projects, however the DfES was three times oversubscribed and had to disappoint two-thirds of bids.

5. ANDY THOMPSON OF THE DfES - EXEMPLAR DESIGNS

Andy Thompson explained the background.

Due to the considerable increase in overall spending (700 million in 96/7 to an anticipated five billion in 05/06) there is going to be a massive strain on resources. There are good and bad examples of procurements both conventional and PFI. The context of Exemplar

Designs needs to be set on the basis of establishing an ability to deal with volume but using best practice benchmarks.

Six secondary school designs and six primary designs have been developed, two of which will be on tight urban sites. The designs will be developed to what is the equivalent to RIBA Stage C sketch design stage.

A range of different generic approaches will be looked at and it may be expressed in terms of campus style, courtyard, pavilion approach. It is intended to develop a range of variations on a core school size.

Pathfinder authorities will be the first ones to consider using the exemplar designs.

6. ALAN JONES OF THE DfES - THE FUTURE OF AMPS

The achievements from the AMP process would be key to identifying needs and solutions. The Government would be looking towards, by 06/07, a single education plan. However, asset management plans and AMP appraisal were really about trying to raise the quality of the processes which will be essential to delivering the Building Schools for the Future vision and the vision for other capital programmes.

As in previous years, DfES will be asking for two key documents, the local policy statement and a statement of priorities. However, the CPA3 star authorities would be exempt from supplying a statement of priorities other than on a voluntary basis. On the local policy statement side all authorities would be exempt except those which had a 01 grade last year. The submission date for these documents would be the end of this year provisionally. Guidelines would be published later in the Summer on the appraisal framework.

By the end of this month all will have supplied data. DfES were asking again for some sample project details to help get a feel for what projects are actually being delivered and also to inform their field work. They would be asking for some limited performance indicators on the projects for which details were supplied last year and on how authorities had invested their science and technology bid money. They want to re-start their visits to authorities.

The external partners would be assessing the data over the period June to October and the conclusions of that appraisal would be fed into the formula allocations at the end of this year. They would be looking at the appraisal process taking place some time between December and January. They would be making capital allocations in December and may need to make some retrospective adjustments to gradings.

DfES wish to make some fairly radical reductions in the planning burdens. Later this year they would produce a paper setting out some of the ideas on how asset management plans are taken forward post the planned rationalisation period.

DfES will still need to collect some data through the single education plan, probably through the single common data set which is a system through which authorities will be providing data to a whole set of policy teams through the Department. DfES will be producing a similar analysis of this year's data set to show how the performance of the school building stock has changed over time.

Good asset management planning must continue at the local authority level but DfES intervention and engagement with authorities will need to be very much in proportion to their confidence in their systems.

7. DAVID BARLOW OF THE AUDIT COMMISSION - IMPROVING SCHOOL BUILDINGS

Three reports were discussed:-

- Improving School Buildings report.
- PFI and schools
- Money Matters - the way that schools use all of their resources.

Improving School Buildings is largely based on the fact that jointly with Ofsted, they had inspected all LEA's so evidence base is mostly from those inspections along with a series of fieldwork and commentators.

The reports are inspected and judgements made on two areas.

- Asset Management - planning in education,
- Property Services - delivery of building projects, repairs programmes etc

Improving the Strategic Links

Very few authorities were good or excellent in the education asset management planning with the most important area for development being school improvement links.

Overall challenges -

- Improving The Strategic Links
 - Getting yourself there into the whole school improvement debate, making sure that your capital investment is there as part of that.
- Developing Better Relationships With Schools
 - to make sure that the resources that are in schools are used effectively.
- Obtaining Value For Money
 - making sure that all of those resources are delivered effectively and the
 - making sure that revenue and long-term central local authority capital resources continue to be put into preventative maintenance so that we don't get into the same hole that we did in the early 1990's about the condition of school buildings.

8. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

BOB DUTTON FROM LEICESTERSHIRE.

Question to PHILIP PARKER.

"In the context of the LID exercise is there any weighting going to be given to any of those criteria? In the process that LID's going through at the moment, are any further criteria beginning to emerge that could inform the bidding process?"

The work our Local Implementation Division (LID) has been doing has been around the modelling and seeing where this could lead us. We have put in the bid guidance the four things that we think are very important. Building needs is going to be important in terms of making sure that the funding goes where it is needed. For some authorities it will make sense to work with all of the secondary schools in one go. For some larger authorities that won't be possible. For some authorities it may make sense to actually work cross borders.

DOUG ELLIOTT, LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET.

Question to PHILIP PARKER.

"We had some concerns in connection with the funding of primary schools. As an authority we assessed last year out of about 100 primary schools 23 would need to be replaced within the next 10-year period. We put in a bid for a PFI in January, which amounted to £94 million, but unfortunately, the document says the scale of investment needed to improve premises is much more likely to be found from within the formula capital funds provided to local education authorities. Where would we find that scale of funding

.....there will be three billion available for other needs for other authorities that are not in the early phases of BSF for primary schools and for other things.

JEFF FLETCHER, BOLTON LEA.

Question to PHILIP PARKER.

"You gave us an indication of aspects of the timetablewhen would we have to have submissions back?"

..... then we are talking about the end of October. One possibility would be to move back the announcements to the end of March, then the authorities will have three less months for procurement.

RON GREGORY FROM OLDHAM LEA

Question to ANDY THOMPSON

"We were one of the authorities that were fortunate enough to get targeted capital fund to build a new primary school. Allocation was in this financial year, should we now be waiting to use your exemplar designs in which case we would need our capital fund re-profiling, or should we carry on and design the school as we were intending to?"

The immediate answer is don't wait for exemplar designs unless any of your programmes fit in with that.....

PAUL HOLMES FROM BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Question to PHILIP PARKER.

"What encouragement can you give to LEA's that have high standards, relatively high social-economic factors but poor buildings that are coupled with problems with teacher recruitment and retention."

We've secured an agreement with the Treasury across the Government for a long-term output that we want to aim for 21st century facilities for all secondary pupils. You have available to you large amounts of formula funding which can be used along the way so keep working on your strategic plans, thinking where you are going and use your money wisely in the meantime.

"Will teachers sort of move off to the areas that have been done?"

The amount of funding is going to be there irrespective. The funding is going up to five billion and that will be spent. For the launch year it's going to be very tough but there is going to be a balance between the fourth criterion, capacity to deliver may have a higher waiting in the first year than further on down the line.

GREG DURKIN, CITY OF SALFORD.

Question for PHILIP PARKER and ANDY THOMPSON

"With regard to the Building Schools for the Future programme you mentioned a national procurement body to undertake the works with the significant capital investment that's going in 2005/2006. How do you see that body? Do you see it as a doing body, enabling body or undertaking body? Where do the LEA's fit in with that

We have been looking at the example of the National Health Service and the joint ventures that have been put together there. It is intended to be an enabling body rather than a doing body.....

JANICE BECK, SURREY.

Question for PHILIP PARKER

..... Can you give assurances that there will be flexibility within the system to allow LEA's which are able to deliver programmes independently or with other LEA's that could happen independently of whatever national body is set up?"

.....The national body and Exemplar Designs will act as benchmarks. If you want to go it alone, you will have to bear in mind those benchmarks in future and if you are varying from the benchmarks you have to justify it in your own terms in terms of the costs and the needs and so forth.

JO HUMPHREYS, SHROPSHIRE.

Question to DAVID BARLOW

"The Audit Commission report on improving school buildings raised a lot of interesting issues which I assume the DfES will be responding to. Will LEA's be given the opportunity to see that response?"

Yes you will.....

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE.

Question to DAVID BARLOW and PHILIP PARKER

"Specifically about devolved formula capital, will it be going to schools in relatively small amounts not driven by need?"

PHILIP

It's a balance. What we've tried to put over in that document is that we've got a very large amount of money available and we're splitting it up in different ways.....

DAVID

The Audit Commission Report has said that there is a place potentially for things like devolved formula capital and schools controlling some projects but we think that too much resources are going into that as a proportion of the total. It would be better if more of the resources were linked to building need because there is huge variations needed for building investment in different schools.....

PHILIP

On the one hand we say it's important to address need and yet on the other hand we get representations that we shouldn't keep rewarding people who have not done the maintenance.....

TONY BLACKMAN, KENT.

Question to PHILIP PARKER

"..... Places like Ashford, which is due to double in size, something like 40 primary schools over the next 20/30 years will be needed and 8 FE secondary schools. Has there been some joint thinking between DfES and other parts of government, on how the funding for the massive infrastructure that will be needed for that links into the funding being poured into schools? I am just wondering how that fits into the BSF programme and how BSF then fits in with other government priorities?"

Where there are new homes there is a need for new schools. We are working with ODPM on that, the Thames Gateway is particularly far advanced in terms of its planning and its

number crunching. We need to work with youso I can only assure you that we are aware of it and it is a very serious issue.

9. ADRIAN TERRY OF RETHINKING CONSTRUCTION - BUILDING BEST VALUE FOR SCHOOLS

The Company is trying to pick up on a number of themes and link these in with some of the agenda items that LEA clients are being asked to take up.

There is a role for the client to actually take the lead and to insist that the industry delivers more in terms of value. Their mission statement is to lead radical improvement in constructionthe document being launching at the Conference is seeking to do this and to disseminate it to the wider industry.

Coventry City Council and Suffolk County Council were among case studies described.

The Company see this as an opportunity to change their/LEAs' ways of working to improve performance and make work more enjoyableAdrian.terry@rethinking.org.uk

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The remainder of the day was taken up with a choice of workshops (Implications of the DDA and SENDA, Procurement via Partnering – the Cheshire Experience, Volumetric Building – Is Modular Build The Answer?) and conference dinner in the evening. The following morning, a coach took a party of delegates to visit Hartford High School (a stand-alone modular block to provide 3 art rooms), Charles Darwin Primary School (3 classroom extension by modular construction) and Parklands Community Primary School (part of a PFI development).

A more detailed version of the conference content is available.

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KP/RGM