

## Note of discussion with local authority staff

8<sup>th</sup> September 2015

### Group 5 Chair: Liam

The discussion was dominated by the impact of the teacher numbers agreement, although there was also discussion about the school estate and shared services. Interesting theme arose questioning whether a teacher was always the best professional to tackle the attainment gap – given the role of early intervention, family support and school college partnerships we should consider a more diverse range of professionals than just teachers when seeking to reduce attainment gap.

### Teacher numbers agreement means:

- **less flexibility** and scope for making savings which means:
- **cuts fall on other staff** – particularly less well paid staff such as janitors, cleaners and administrative staff and support staff. These are parents of the children that we are targeting with Attainment Challenge, and yet we are cutting their jobs in order to protect ‘middle class’ jobs of teachers.
- **there is a growing gap between terms and conditions of teachers compared to other local authority staff** strength of teacher unions referred to. (Reference to protecting middle class, well paid staff at the expense of others).
- **cuts fall more heavily on other parts of the budget** because teacher salaries take up such a large proportion of spend, protecting them requires large cuts elsewhere (have to shed more lower paid jobs instead of shedding one teaching job). Other parts of the budget includes social work – so the most vulnerable people suffer due to reduced service
- **cannot reduce staff where there are falling rolls** because agreement relates to absolute teacher numbers as well as pupil teacher ratio. If agreement is to be kept should at least move back to a ratio, and consider the ratio nationally rather than in each individual local authority.
- **cannot spend on other areas** – such as responding to increasing ASN demand, unless we do so with a teacher – but other professionals might be better to meet the child’s need.
- **flexibility in DSM is reduced** – there is no flexibility in the spend at the margins in DSM budgets which means less money for books in schools.
- **cannot be creative about delivering attainment improvements** – in early intervention before P1 and in senior phase staff other than teachers can contribute to closing the attainment gap. Teacher numbers agreement might actually clash with the desire to close the attainment gap.
- **teacher quality might suffer.** Recruitment difficulties combined with teacher numbers being ring fenced means that there is less or no choice of candidate – this could impact on quality. Are we focusing on quantity at expense of

quality? Suggestion that fewer teachers, but v. high quality teachers, supported by various other support staff might get better outcomes than just more teachers and large cuts to support staff/early intervention/ family services.

- **it's a focus on inputs not outcomes**
- **fewer savings realisable from school rationalisation** as no longer possible to make the staff savings in teachers.

## **School Estate**

Presumption against closure of rural schools makes it difficult to manage the school estate.

Maintenance budgets under pressure, means some school buildings are in 'terrible state'

Budgets under such pressure that some councils question whether they can find the the local authority financial contribution to develop a project under the Scottish Schools for the Future programme.

## **Shared Services**

Slightly more mixed views on this issue. The scale of savings from shared services between councils, in terms of education services, was questioned. Most councils have reduced their central education staff, so the potential savings of sharing such central staff was probably quite small.

Camilla Kidner  
SPICe  
8<sup>th</sup> Sept 2015