

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools' Forum held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 27 February 2019 at 9:30 am.

PRESENT

C Pearson (Chair)
Director, Three Rivers Learning Trust

Headteacher Representatives

C Bradshaw
M Deane-Hall
M Hall

J Kennedy
E Potts (substitute for C
Hodgson)

Governor Representatives

K Faulkner
S Harker
S Heminsley

I Walker
B Watson
G Wilkins

Academies Representatives

G Atkins
K McGrane

S Wild

Early Years' Representative

None present

Trades Union Representatives

R E Woolhouse

16 - 19 Provider of Education Representative

J Bell (substitute for J Cooper)

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OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
S Barron	Head of SEND Strategies
D Jackson	Service Director - Education and Skills
K Norris	Democratic Services Officer
B Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
A Russell	Principal Accountant

Observers: S Liddle (Ponteland Middle School), T Cameron (NCC Administrative Finance Assistant), 3 CIPFA students.

40. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

40.1 Members were advised that Jane Kennedy had submitted her resignation from the Schools' Forum and had requested that Ben Ryder, headteacher of Berwick Middle School replace her as Middle School representative. The Forum was also asked to agree that Kieran McGrane become an academy representative rather than a maintained schools representative.

RESOLVED that

1. Ben Ryder be appointed as Middle School representative of the Schools' Forum.
2. Kieran McGrane be appointed as an academy representative of the Schools' Forum.

41. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Suzanne Connolly, Fay Hartland, Carol Douglas, Katie Morrison, Tom Dexter, Jo Cooper and Deborah Wylie.

42. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

42.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 16 January 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising:

42.2 Minute 33.2: Bellingham Middle School - admission numbers would be known on Friday.

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- 42.3 Minute 33.3: North of Tyne developments - The next meeting would take place on Friday, 1 March. The Director of Education and Skills would provide a written update about the North East Education Challenge thereafter.
- 42.4 Minute 33.4: The third meeting of the FACS Exclusions Task and Finish Group was due to take place the following week and an update would be provided.
- 42.5 Minute 34.1: F40 Group survey re additional funding - results had shown that only one Local Authority, of the 7 who had requested greater than 0.5%, would be reducing its transfer of funding in light of the additional High Needs funding.
- 42.6 Minute 35.6: Haydon Bridge - It was work in progress and a meeting with the RSC was scheduled for Friday. It was noted that £360,000 had been returned to Durham County Council.
- 42.7 Minute 35.9: Free School Programme - this was progressing, work was on-going and confirmation of commitment had been received from two of the three authorities involved.
- 42.8 Minute 37.14 - The Education and Skills Business Manager acknowledged that confirmation had been sought regarding the uplift for key stage 3 middle schools and said £4,050 for that had been reflected in the figures for middle schools, in line with the ESFA recommended figures.

43. COMMUNICATION

(a) FFC Draft Minutes, 4 February 2019

- 43.1 Bruce Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager, referred to the above (a copy of which are filed with the signed minutes of the meeting). Helpful debates had taken place regarding the consultation which was currently underway for Early Years Deprivation Funding, details to be discussed at agenda item 6. The Chair thanked Ian Walker, Chair of the FFC, for the committee's contributions and for calling the meeting at such short notice.

(b) Ponteland High School Letter to Schools' Forum and Response

- 43.2 The Education and Skills Business Manager referred to the letter of 30 January from Kieran McGrane, the headteacher of Ponteland High School, and response, which had been circulated with the agenda papers (copies of which are filed with the signed minutes of the meeting). The Chair said the response had been signed by the Education and Skills Business Manager and approved by himself.
- 43.3 Mr McGrane reiterated his opinion that Schools' Forum should have had the opportunity to discuss the transfer of funds from the DSG to the High Needs Block following the announcement of additional funding for High Needs. He referred to the immense financial pressure on schools, the importance of flagging this up and the need for flexibility. In response Mr Parvin said that additional funding was not announced until after the crucial meeting of the Schools' Forum in November had

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taken place. Following further discussion the Director of Education and Skills acknowledged the importance of being open, honest and flexible around the High Needs Block.

- 43.4 The Education and Skills Business Manager said a meeting of the FFC would be scheduled before the meeting of the Schools' Forum in July so that members could be informed about budgets in advance of the Autumn term. Graeme Wilkins, Chair of the AEN Committee, emphasised the importance of knowing how money allocated to the High Needs Block was being spent, preferably on a monthly basis.
- 43.5 Councillor Daley referred to a debate which had taken place in the House of Commons on Tuesday in which Anne Milton, the Skills Minister, spoke about problems with the way schools received money for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. He also referred to a narrative in 'Schools Week' in which Robert Halfon had said that education should have its own NHS-style 10 year plan. Councillor Daley suggested that the Forum may wish to endorse what was said in writing. Discussion ensued and different opinions about the benefits of a ten year plan were put forward.

AGREED that the Forum endorse what was said about these two issues in writing and that the letters be signed by Councillor Daley.

- 43.6 Graham Atkins made reference to a communication in January regarding pupil premium and £700 being retained from the Pupil Premium Plus funding, which was an increase on last year. He queried the process behind that as it had not been considered by the Schools' Forum. In response the Education and Skills Business Manager acknowledged the point made but said, in Northumberland, Looked After Children were not part of the schools formula.

(c) f40: 'Increase Funding for Schools' Petition

- 43.7 The Education and Skills Business Manager referred to the News Alert from f40 regarding the above (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes of the meeting). He indicated that Forum members were able to support the petition via the link enclosed with the agenda papers.

44. EARLY YEARS DEPRIVATION FUNDING CONSULTATION FOR 2019/20

- 44.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the above report which explored an issue around the additional payments to providers to support disadvantaged children in their settings (a copy of the report is filed with the signed minutes as agenda item 6).
- 44.2 It was noted that the proposal endorsed by the FFC was a hybrid approach over the next 2 years. This would see an adaptation of option 4 where band C was removed from September 2019 and the Pupil Premium Plus model replace IDACI band payments from April 2020.

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- 44.3 FFC had seen the taking up of pupil premium as a positive outcome and felt promoting this would help maximise funding available to providers, however, there had been concerns about timescales being tight and implementation.
- 44.4 The consultation would close on 8 March and to date option 4 was the most popular choice.
- 44.5 Discussion took place about the system being difficult to manage and the length of time taken to collect national insurance information which resulted in delays for pupils to access funding. The Director of Education and Skills agreed to look into this to see if any fundamental changes could be made to address the concerns.
- 44.6 In response to comments that Katie Morrison, the Early Years representative, was not in favour of cuts but, if any, favoured cuts in pupil premium, the Education and Skills Business Manager stated that Katie had responded to the survey. She had expressed concerns about cuts being made from April but was supportive of the recommended approach, whilst acknowledging financial pressures on providers.

RESOLVED that the recommendations of the FFC, as set out in paragraph 44.2, be endorsed by the Schools' Forum.

45. 2018/19 DSG MONITORING

- 45.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the above report which provided the Forum with the latest Dedicated Schools Grant forecast for 2018/19. (A copy of the report is filed with the signed minutes of the meeting as agenda item 7.)
- 45.2 It stated that it was essential to have absolute clarity regarding the High Needs deficit. A number of requests for information had been received, as well as the mandatory statutory returns and although, historically, DSG balances had been pooled, it was suggested that these should be taken forward separately to identify High Needs pressures.
- 45.3 It was not yet known what the position would be around transition but there was recognition, nationally, about the pressures faced. Northumberland was the most sparsely populated county in the country with rural isolation and rural poverty. The Director of Education and Skills suggested the Forum should look at the Bridge Group Report on education and geographical isolation which he said was well worth reading.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

46. SETTING THE DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) 2019/20

- 46.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the above report which provided the Forum with an estimated overall DSG for 2019/20 and the proposed allocation of funds to schools for 2019/20. (A copy of the report is filed with the signed minutes as agenda item 8.)

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- 46.2 The report highlighted an overall fall in DSG funding to Northumberland.
- 46.3 In terms of the Schools Block, the majority of formula funding values were in line with NFF figures but NFF would not have any influence from 2021. Funding should not change from one year to another on a pupil basis.
- 46.4 The Schools Forum was requested to note the formula funding values reflected in Table 1 for the distribution of the Schools Block DSG for 2019/20.
- 46.5 Schools' Forum would be aware of the reorganisation of the Ponteland Partnership. Discussions had taken place with ESFA about the possibility of additional funding to support the transition period but unfortunately ESFA would not provide this and had stated that funding should be redirected from the middle schools involved. Essentially that was the approach being taken, and had been accepted on 20 February, subject to written confirmation. Schools would be advised of their individual budgets imminently.
- 46.6 In response to a request for further clarification regarding the Ponteland Partnership, it was stated that the headteacher of Ponteland Middle School and the Chief Executive of the PELE Trust were informed of the funding situation on Monday, 11 February but, at that time, it had not been known there would be no additional funding. It had not been predicted that the number of pupils requesting to switch schools would be at such a level and everything possible had been done to make a case for special circumstances, however, the EFSA had made it very clear that pupils must be funded in their new school from September. The RSC would determine if the school was still viable but there would be no financial implications to other schools.
- 46.7 The Chair said there were lessons to be learned as previous reorganisations had involved maintained schools within the county structure. Discussion ensued about the current situation being unsustainable and the vulnerability of academies and community schools. In future discussions would need to take place in Schools' Forum and with headteachers about modelling for the unexpected.
- 46.8 Schools' Forum was requested to note the 2019/20 High Needs Block budget of £31,042.770 as set out at Appendix B of the report. Details of the High Needs Deficit from 2018/19 and potential deficit at the end of 2019/20 were also provided.
- 46.9 Discussion took place about whether the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) would result in an overspend for the Schools Block when there was a predicted underspend. The Principal Accountant confirmed the underspend was a result of three school closures this year and clarification was provided about allocations for the following financial year.

RESOLVED that the following information be noted:

1. The proposal for the Schools Block formula values and the impact on 2019/20 School Budget Shares, in line with the Cabinet decision of 15 January, including

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the delegation of the approval of the final formula values to the Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services and Deputy Leader of the Council in line with the principles agreed at Schools' Forum on 21 November 2018.

2. The 2019/20 High Needs Block Budget including the ongoing pressures identified with high needs.
3. The proposed values in relation to the 2019/20 Early Years budget, subject to any findings from the current consultation exercise.
4. The 2019/20 Central Services Budget.

47. EDUCATION AND SKILLS ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

- 47.1 Dean Jackson, Director of Education and Skills, introduced the above report which had been noted by the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 January and a copy sent to headteachers. (A copy of the report is filed with the signed Minutes.)
- 47.2 Printed versions of the report were available upon request.
- 47.3 The Chair expressed the Forum's appreciation to the Director of Education and Skills for his comprehensive report.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

48. 2019 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES

- 48.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager requested approval to move the date of the meeting of the Schools' Forum scheduled for 25 September 2019 to 2 October 2019, the time and venue would remain the same.

AGREED that the meeting of the Schools' Forum scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 25 September 2019 be moved to 2 October 2019 at 9:30 am in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth.

49. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Schools' Forum would take place on Wednesday, 3 July 2019 at 9.30 am in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

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