

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools' Forum held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 12 February 2020 at 9:30 am.

PRESENT

C Pearson (in the Chair)
Trustee, Three Rivers Learning Trust

Headteacher Representatives

M Hall, The Duchess Community
High

A Mead, Cramlington Hillcrest
B Ryder, Berwick Middle

Governor Representatives

S Harker, James Calvert Spence
College
S Hemingsley, Newbrough C of E
Primary

B Watson, St Robert's RC First
G Wilkins, St Wilfrid's RC Primary

Academies Representatives

G Atkins, Hadrian Learning Trust

S Wild, NCEA Castle School

Early Years' Representative - E Chaplin

Trades Union Representative - R E Woolhouse

16 - 19 Provider of Education Representative - Not present

Northumberland County Council Elected Members - Not present

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OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

D Jackson	Director of Education and Skills
L Little	Democratic Services Officer
B Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
A Russell	Principal Accountant
D Street	Commissioner for Early Years & Primary
N Taylor	Head of Inclusive Education Services

Observers: Dawn Convery, Administrative Finance Assistant

39. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

39.1 Members were advised that a nomination for the vacancy in relation to Academy Headteacher on the Forum had been received from Alan Hardie, Chief Executive Officer of the Northumberland Church of England Academies Trust.

AGREED that Alan Hardie be appointed to Schools' Forum as an Academy Headteacher representative.

40. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor W Daley, J Bell, M Deane-Hall, K Faulkner, F Hartland, A Thelwell, D Wylie, S Aviston and C Ponting.

41. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

41.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 15 January 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising:

41.2 It was questioned whether it was still relevant that the minutes still referenced school names in the attendance section. The Chair advised that he found this helpful and the practice should continue.

41.3 Minute 34.4: An update was requested in relation to discussions to retrieve public money from Bright Tribe. It was reported that the current position was not known but an update would be requested from Councillor Daley for the next meeting.

41.4 Minute 34.6: The Director of Education and Skills advised that the interviews were being held on Friday 14 February 2020 in respect of the running of the Free School.

41.5 Minute 36.7: Clarification was requested on information from the DfE regarding potential Council liability for any Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit on the implementation of the National Funding Formula (NFF). The Forum was advised

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that this had been raised with the Service Director - Finance who advised that this Authority had never taken that approach. Unlike some LAs, at Northumberland DSG deficits had been ring fenced and carried forward from one year to the next and while the Department for Education (DfE)'s expectation was that the increased HN resources should enable most LAs to bring this into balance, ring fencing was the suggested approach.

- 41.6 Minute 37.15: Some information was provided later in the agenda regarding the future years' settlements.
- 41.7 Minute 37.18: The Education and Skills Business Manager apologised for the lateness in sharing the Setting of the DSG report to Members of the Forum requesting any comments regarding formatting etc would be welcomed. This would be shared with schools before the deadline 29 February 2020.

42. COMMUNICATION

F40's Submission to Government Review on SEND

- 42.1 The Director of Education and Skills advised that the document circulated and attached to the signed minutes provided a good succinct summary of problems associated with the current way in which funding for SEND was provided. This was a very complicated subject and would be discussed further at the additional meeting of the Schools' Forum which would be held in April.
- 42.2. The number of EHCPs had increased by 25% with 400 additional children now having EHCPs. There had been no overall increase in resources or the number of places available and funding did not follow the child.
- 42.3 The massive struggle for Pre-School Providers was highlighted. It was recognised that early intervention was key to addressing some of the issues, however a lack of support being provided and the amount of additional paperwork having to be completed was causing problems for Providers.
- 42.4 It was not known who, if anyone, was making representations on behalf of pre-schools in Northumberland to the Government's review of SEND. The Commissioner for Primary and Early Years would look into this and if required the Local Authority could make representations on their behalf as it was important their problems and suggestions were put forward.
- 42.5 The Chair advised of previous papers on early intervention by the previous Head of OFSTED, which he had found informative.
- 42.6 It was hoped that revisions to the Code of Practice for SEND would be issued later in the year. It was expressed that this may address current uncertainty over the level of Health contributions where there appeared to be inconsistencies. Therapy provision was a significant factor in influencing parents to seek more expensive independent and non-maintained school places.

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- 42.7 In response to a question regarding the Schools' Forum not being asked to consider different options for the allocation of funding and just being presented with a final option for agreement, it was confirmed that a Sub-Committee considered all options with the fairest and most equitable option being put forward for agreement by the Forum. This had also been in line with the Schools' Forum view to move towards National Funding Formula in a phased manner.
- 42.8 It was clarified that Early Years Providers did two cycles of interventions prior to any application for SEND funding and this could take up to 12 weeks. Difficulties were being experienced due to Providers only being funded for 15 hours of the 30 hours of care and therefore only being able to claim 7 ½ hours additional support. This placed a burden on the Provider for the payment of additional staff and the increase in time-consuming paperwork to complete.
- 42.9 Early Years in the County was funded at the national minimum at £4.00 per hour with some in the country receiving over £7.00 per hour. Information had been sent to Councillor Daley so he was aware of the disparity in funding. The Local Authority had been advised that they should have an inclusion fund, like some other Local Authorities, however this would be funded from both the High Needs Block and Early Years Block, both of which were already under significant pressure. Councillor Daley would continue to try to lobby the Government for more funding.
- 42.10 The Forum was advised that a Nursery School with a Headteacher continued to be funded at a higher level than other Early Years provision. Northumberland does not have any Nursery Schools
- 42.11 The Education Challenge funding through North of Tyne Combined Authority (NOT) would also cover Early Years provision. The financial bid for this was at the closing stage and would cover a 10 year period with a review to be undertaken after 5 years. The initial bid was for £100m over 10 years.

43. SEN UPDATE

- 43.1 An update had been circulated to Schools' Forum Members the previous day (Agenda Item 6) and the Head of Inclusive Education Services provided a powerpoint presentation, a copy of both would be filed with the signed minutes.
- 43.2 The pressures both on schools and Local Authorities had been highlighted at a Headteachers Conference and included curriculum changes; Ofsted/Standards agenda; reduced budgets making it a challenge for schools to fund traditionally upheld means of supporting learners ie additional support staff and increased pressure on High Needs Block; increased requests for EHCP/funding; increased reliance on Out of District Provision; increased requests for specialist placements and limited places available in Local Authority specialist provisions..
- 43.3 Northumberland, along with other North East Authorities, was in the bottom 20 of 150 Local Authorities for the highest number of pupils in specialist provision up to 2017. In Northumberland this equated to 33% of pupils with EHCPs being placed in specialist provision compared to the national average of 20%.

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- 43.4 When questioned if this was bad, Officers advised that the data showed that in Northumberland, fewer learners with EHCPs were being educated in mainstream schools than in other areas. Schools report, at times, that they were unable to meet pupil needs due to funding shortages, with parents then requesting specialist provision. There was a general feeling that parents had a lack of confidence in mainstream schools providing support for pupils with SEN, especially in relation to pupils with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) issues and with difficult to manage behaviour problems.
- 43.5 It was felt that many parents considered that an EHCP provided immediate access to Specialist Provision, which in turn put pressure on places at these specialist providers within the County which resulted in increased Out of County Placements being required. Problems needed to be identified at an earlier stage with targeted resources provided to see if these can be addressed at SEN Support Level prior to consideration of the necessity for an EHCP.
- 43.6 Concern was expressed regarding pressure on teaching staff when pupils who displayed challenging behaviours were kept in mainstream schools without the necessary support being provided.
- 43.7 The Director of Education and Skills advised that the Local Authority (LA) must establish how other LAs maintained the confidence of parents that their child's needs would be met in a local mainstream school . If parents were confident their child's needs could be met in their local school then this would free Specialist places for those who were most at need.
- 43.8 It was reported that a pilot was to commence at Astley High School and Seaton Sluice First School with Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) for pupils with ASD and SEMH needs. Over time it was hoped that a number of strategies would support an increase in the number of learners with EHCPs being supported confidently in mainstream settings and being able to thrive. This would be achieved by developing the school workforce and sharing best practice using a range of strategies including the role of Lead SENCOs.
- 43.9 Additional specialist places had been created in the County with the opening of Ashdale and more would be created with the opening of the Free School allowing more SEND pupils to be educated in the County, reducing the need for more expensive Out of County places.
- 43.10 It was commented that the removal of the SLA for specialist teaching and the provision of a core offer which would be free at the point of delivery was an excellent step forward. It was explained that this core offer would not include a full Education Psychology Service which would continue to be traded. Schools not signing up for the Education Psychology Service would still receive some support but not to the same level.
- 43.11 A two year trial period of the core offer would allow feedback to be provided from schools after one year of operation and an evaluation to be carried out in the

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second year. It was hoped that this would enable schools to have support to identify problems at an earlier stage and prevent escalation.

43.12 Details of the core offer would be circulated to schools after the February half term holiday and would also be provided to Members of the Schools' Forum who also requested a copy of the powerpoint presentation.

43.13 In respect of funding for English as an Additional Language, it was clarified that Schools' Forum could vote on this and top slice for maintained schools, however this was not the case for Academies who would need to pay for the Service. There had not been a great deal of buy-in from Academies however in response to concern that pupils would not receive support, it was clarified that this could trigger another element of funding within the Formula.

44. 2019/20 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) BUDGET MONITORING

44.1 The report circulated with the agenda and filed with the signed minutes as Agenda Item 7, provided information on the revised DSG budget position as of December 2019 following the latest allocations issued by the DfE in November 2019. It was noted that the Early Years Block was expected to underspend by £0.055 million and not £0.55 million as indicated in the report.

44.2 There had been an increase in the overall forecast overspend by £121,000 since previously reported in September 2019 due to the increases in the overspend on Independent Special School and Alternative Provision places, offset by a refund of budget related to the closure of Haltwhistle Upper School. The high cost of placements due to Social Care needs was commented upon with little or no funding being received in respect of Health Care needs. The Forum was advised that this was currently being reviewed.

44.3 In relation to the forecast overspend in the High Needs Block it was noted that significant inroads into the deficit carried forward from 2018/19 of £2 million had been achieved.

44.4 In response to a comment regarding work being undertaken in the background at a strategic level, the Director of Education and Skills advised that there was currently not an overall strategic plan for education, however it was hoped that a plan for education covering the next 5 years would be drafted by the Summer. This could be discussed at the extra Schools' Forum meeting in April as he was very keen for the Forum to become more engaged in the process.

45. SETTING THE DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) 2020/21

45.1 The report filed with the signed minutes as Agenda Item 8 was introduced by the Education and Skills Business Manager. The proposed Formula Values which had been reported to the Forum in January had been submitted to the ESFA by the deadline of 21 January 2020 and confirmation received that these had been accepted.

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- 45.2 The Formula Funding Values for 2020/21 were outlined in Table 1 of the report. It was not possible to provide definitive information regarding additional headline funding announced for education as figures had not yet been confirmed, however an estimate of the likely overall impact up to 2022/23 was also provided.
- 45.3 It was highlighted that not all schools would receive the 4.7% and 4.6% increases for 2021/22 and 2022/23 respectively, it would depend on local circumstances and schools should work closely with the Principal Accountant and Finance to consider the potential implications for their school.
- 45.4 The draft 2020/21 School Budget Share statements for all schools had been circulated to Forum Members and a summary was circulated at the meeting. The Minimum funding guarantee/capping and scaling adjustment was highlighted. It was stated that both these factors were reflected in the same line of the statement, therefore due to how capping and scaling worked, some schools would see a negative adjustment in this line.
- 45.5 The Forum was advised of amendments to the report as follows:-
- paragraph 4.4 of the report should read *Schools Block DSG for 2020/21* and not 2019/20;
 - the first table in 6 - Early Years Block should refer to *Proposed 2020/21 3 and 4 year old rate*; and the second table should state *Additional Deprivation rate paid on basis of pupil premium 0.75* not 0.10 as indicated.
- 45.6 It was confirmed that the High Needs Block was reviewed in-year, however generally only modest changes were made. There were no plans at present to change the banding levels in Special Schools or to look at their whole funding model. This could be something that could be considered in the longer term.
- 45.7 In relation to Appendix B it was noted that work would continue to narrow the gap of the potential annual deficit without transfer and it was hoped that over the course of 2020/21, the deficit from the previous year would reduce by half.
- 45.8 The problems Special Schools were experiencing with cuts to budgets, increasing staffing costs and the changes to types of additional needs were highlighted and the use of Independent Special Schools and the cost of these placements on the High Needs Budget were discussed.
- 45.9 It was thought that more health care provision in terms of additional therapy provision in both maintained and special schools would provide parents with more confidence that their child's needs could be met without having to access independent specialist provision. This linked into the Joint Commissioning Agenda and discussions with the Clinical Commissioning Group.
- 45.10 In respect of Early Years Block it was noted that the allocations were indicative and were based on the January 2019 census figure with no account taken of the subsequent changes in ebb and flow of children, however these would be revised once the January 2020 census data was received. Government had proposed an

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increase of £0.08 in respect of 3 and 4 year olds and an additional £0.10 would be added by Northumberland County Council.

45.11 Reference was made to the decision taken the previous year in that deprivation payments would be based on pupil premium with effect from April 2020, with an additional £0.75 per hour to be paid.

45.12 In respect of the Central Schools Services Block it was noted the majority of the decrease was as a result of a 20% decrease in the historic commitments element of the funding. No indication had been received as to the scale of the reduction or the timescale of the DfEs intention to reduce this. Work would continue to assess and manage the implications.

45.13 A discussion took place regarding the cost of Longridge Towers, however it was stated that a review had been undertaken approximately 3 years ago and it had been found this was the most cost effective solution.

45.14 The Historic Enhanced Pension costs was a total of inflation and fixed rate of contribution.

45.15 The Chair and Members of School's Forum wished that their thanks to staff for all their work on this was recorded. A request was made for papers to be circulated in a more timely manner in order to allow Members time to peruse them.

45.16 **AGREED** that Schools' Forum

1. Noted the formula funding values reflected in Table 1 for the distribution of the Schools Block DSG for 2020/21.
2. Invited the Formula Funding Committee to continue to consider the position as to how to proceed in relation to the NFF, in particular for those values that remained different to NFF.
3. Noted the 2020/21 High Needs Block budget of £34,000,783 as set out at Appendix B.
4. Noted the revised Early Years payment rates for 2020/21.
5. Noted the budget for the Central Schools Services Block would be set at £2,732,756 as set out in Appendix C.

46. 2020/21 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES

46.1 The work programme had not been circulated as there had been no changes.

47. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

47.1 Following discussions, it had been agreed that an additional Schools' Forum would be held at 9.30 am on Wednesday 22 April 2020 in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

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