

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a virtual meeting of the Schools' Forum on Wednesday, 6 July 2022 at 9.30 a.m.

PRESENT

G. Wilkins (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)
St Wilfrid's RC Primary School

Headteacher Representatives

F. Hartland, Kielder Primary

A. Mead, Cramlington Hillcrest
School

Governor Representatives

J. Fisher, Newbrough Primary School
(on behalf of Barbara Mansfield)
K. Faulkner, Collingwood School

B. Watson, St Robert's RC First
School

Academies Representatives

C. Hodgson, West Prudhoe Academy

S. Spark, Hadrian Learning Trust (on
behalf of G. Atkins)

Roman Catholic Diocese – Vacant Post

Church of England Diocese – N. Threlfall

Pupil Referral Unit Representative – Vacant Post

Trades Union Representative – Vacant Post

16 - 19 Provider of Education Representative – W. Stephenson

County Councillor – G. Renner-Thompson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

A. Kingham
B. Parvin

Service Director - Education and Interim DCS
Education and Skills Business Manager

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C. Ponting	Senior Manager – Schools HR
A. Russell	Principal Accountant – Non Team Leader
D. Street	Deputy Director of Education
N. Taylor	Head of Inclusive Education and SEN Transformation
A. Todd	Democratic Services Officer

1. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed Warick Stephenson, from Northumberland College to the Schools' Forum as the new Post 16 Representative.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from N. Brannen, M. Deane-Hall, N. Rodgers, B. Ryder, B. Mansfield (J. Fisher attending as substitute), K. Dickinson, G. Atkins (S. Spark attending as substitute), A. Hardie, C. Pearson, A. Thelwell, S. Wild, D. Wylie, Councillor R. Wearmouth, S. Aviston and D. Cookson.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 16 February 2022, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

4. COMMUNICATION: HN Committee Draft Minutes 20 June 2022

- 4.1 Members received the draft minutes of the HN Committee of the 20 June 2022. (A copy of the minutes has been filed with the signed minutes).
- 4.2 Members were advised that an invitation to attend the meeting of the High Needs Committee of 20 June 2022 had been extended to all members of the Schools' Forum. At the meeting the proposal for distribution of further HN grant to maintained special schools, special academies and the pupil referral unit on the basis of a lump sum was agreed. In relation to maintained schools, the changes were proposed to the way a schools Notional SEN figure would be used to distribute additional SEN funding to the most inclusive schools.
- 4.3 The High Needs Committee also discussed the SEN green paper "SEND Review Right Support, Right Place, Right Time". Members of the High Needs Committee and Schools' Forum Members were encouraged, in consultation with their schools to submit consultation responses in their own right, but a proposed draft response was be circulated in advance of the Schools Forum meeting on 06 July 2022.

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- 4.4 Further developments had taken place since the High Needs Committee regarding the SEN Green Paper. N. Taylor, Head of Inclusive Education and SEN Transformation was invited to update Schools' Forum on the paper as the Government had extended the date to submit submissions on the review to 22 July. She reiterated that it was extremely important that the voice of schools was heard in the consultation.
- 4.5 There were 22 key consultation questions to be answered as part of the review. Briefly Members were advised of some of the suggested ways to tackle the three key challenges identified by the review:
- 4.6 -The first part of the consultation related to a set of national standards that would apply across the whole system which would describe everyone's roles and responsibilities with greater clarity than before including the criteria for decisions to assess EHC plans.
- 4.7 -In terms of local area management there were proposals to have new SEND partnerships, inclusion boards and for those inclusion boards to have inclusion plans. This would help ensure continued partnership work, less duplication and help build on current good practice in Northumberland.
- 4.8 -Regarding finance, it was hoped to create a cap on provisions, price guides to provide more consistency within the system and develop a strong set of framework arrangements around commissioning, particularly on a regional basis.
- 4.9 -On EHCPs, it was proposed to introduce a standardised and digitised EHCP process and template to minimise bureaucracy and deliver consistency. Also, more emphasis on preparation for adulthood.
- 4.10 -Early Years Provision. More emphasis on early intervention and identifying needs. Also improving information sharing protocols between health, social care and education.
- 4.11 -Build expertise and leadership, by consulting on a new SENCO national professional qualification, alongside increasing the number of staff with an accredited SENCO qualification in early years settings.
- 4.12 -Many had stated a preference that both specialist and mixed MATs to coexist. This would allow current local authority maintained special schools and alternative provision settings to join either type of MAT. This would help build on the expertise within specialist provisions and broaden and upskill mainstream schools where necessary.
- 4.13 -To develop a reformed and integrated role for alternative provision.
- 4.14 -System roles, accountabilities, and funding reform. Funding to be better linked to key performance indicators for alternative providers and a minimum

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funding guarantee and or a lump sum so that the alternative provisions were able to plan more effectively.

- 4.15 -The need to identify key metrics that should be used to measure local and national performance. Twenty-one areas had so far been identified which would help track progress around improvement journeys and allow comparisons between areas.
- 4.16 -The review asked how to best develop a national framework for funding bands and tariffs to achieve objectives and mitigate unintended consequences and risks. It was thought this could be achieved by better clarity around funding and placing the responsibilities for local authorities to work with schools and colleges to quality assure the fundings being used effectively. Also, for settings to work with local authorities to facilitate this.
- 4.17 The Council had begun to draft a collaborative response to the Green Paper and the key consultation questions working across different departments related to SEN provision. A workshop had also taken place to gather views. It was confirmed that once the response had been finalised it would be shared with Schools' Forum.
- 4.18 For those wishing to access the documents the link to the Government paper would be recirculated.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

5. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2021-22

- 5.1 A. Russell, Principal Accountant – Non Team Leader presented that report which provided details of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) outturn position for 2021-22 to School Forum members, together with the implications of the outturn and upcoming pressures. (A copy of the report has been filed with the signed minutes).
- 5.2 Members were reminded that at the Schools' Forum meeting in January 2021 the budgets for each block within the DSG were set, with details for the Early Years and the High Needs blocks being agreed at the meeting in February 2021. The DSG allocation was then updated during the year by the DfE to consider school academy conversions, changes to high needs place funding and early years census data. The budget reflected the latest DSG allocation from the DfE issued in March 2022.
- 5.3 It was reported that there was now an overall surplus of £4.033 million at the end of 2021-22 compared to an overall surplus of £0.898 at the end of 2020-21. This was a change of £3.135million compared to the previous year and was a result of underspends across the Central Schools Block, Schools Block and the Early Years Block. There had been a continued impact on expenditure as many services had continued to work from home which resulted in reduced travel and running costs of the services.

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- 5.4 The rise in demand for SEN Support and the Inclusion Service were expected to continue for the foreseeable future and it was anticipated this would be an additional budget pressure on the High Needs block for 2023-24 and beyond.
- 5.5 It was the intention to ring-fence the year end position on each block this year to ensure that funds carried forward would be utilised effectively and to provide services with additional resource to meet the emerging priorities within the specific areas of the Dedicated School Grant.
- 5.6 In response, to a query regarding the underspend this year, it was confirmed that budgets had been set for this year. However, looking ahead at budget setting for the next financial year, Schools' Forum members would need to be conscious of the fact that it had been an exceptional year. Over the next few months officers would be working on a medium-term budget plan to ensure budgets balanced going forward and to be proactive with some of the major pressures coming up in the next few years such as the opening of the Special Free School. It was hoped this piece of work would be available to be considered at the November meeting of the Schools' Forum.
- 5.7 A member commented on the increasing pressures being faced by special schools to take on additional children and asked if this was affecting budgets. In response it was stated that there were pressures on special school budgets, but additional students attracted both additional place and top up funding to support schools. Measures had been put in place to help all special schools, particularly those smaller special schools where they did not have the same economies of scale via the proposed introduction of a lump sum. However, it was an area that would continue to be monitored.
- 5.8 Additional comments were made about the pressure on the special school and that of the mainstream system. It was noted that there was an increased demand without any facility to make change. However, there was the relatively small carry forward, which hopefully could be invested to ensure there were enough special school places (both physical space as well as the expertise within the special schools to take the learners) and help support the mainstream systems.
- 5.9 A Member commented on the schools block and the high needs block funding and the need to ensure one was not used to subsidise another. The Chair advised that the High Needs Committee continued to monitor this and had over the last few years had successfully reduced the transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs block from 1% to 0.25% for the current year. Pressures arose from the continuing high number of pupils transferring from mainstream to special schools increasing the demand for places and therefore the pressures on the HN block.
- 5.10 The Schools' Forum were reminded of the decision a few years ago to transfer funding to support the HINT team. It was reported that the review of the SEN two-year pilot would be considered at the November meeting of the Schools' Forum which would evaluate how successful that decision had been.

RESOLVED:

- a) to approve the carry forward of the 2021/22 Trade Union Facility surplus of £93,463 in line with the request attached at Appendix A.

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- b) to approve the carry forward of the 2021/22 English as an Additional Language (EAL) surplus of £81,280 in line with the report attached at Appendix A
- c) to note the intention to carry forward the respective DSG blocks (Central Services Schools) Early Years, High Needs and Schools Block) on a ringfenced basis into 2022/23.

6. MAINTAINED SCHOOL BALANCES AS AT 31 MARCH 2022

- 6.1 B. Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the report which informed Schools' Forum of the position regarding Maintained School Balances as at 31 March 2022. (A copy of the report has been filed with the signed minutes).
- 6.2 As previously reported schools had been working within a couple of exceptional years and that had been reflected in terms of school figures. Schools had managed budgets very prudently over the course of the two years outlined and should be congratulated in relation to that.
- 6.3 It was reported that in general, as a group, the maintained schools were again showing positive movement in terms of their overall balances. It was pleasing that 73 of the 89 first/primary phase schools were in surplus. The number of schools in deficit overall had not changed. 16 schools remained in the same as this time last year but of those 16 schools, six had managed to now balance their balance and move into surplus.
- 6.4 Seven of the eight special schools had a surplus balance and again had increased over the course of the couple of years. However, as previously discussed there was extra demands placed by the additional numbers, and the need to invest not just in the educational support, but the provision and buildings in relation to special schools was noted.
- 6.5 As in previous years, it was noted that individual school figures would not be brought to the Forum but were subsequently made publicly available later on in the year via the ESFA's Schools Financial Benchmarking Service.

RESOLVED that the report be received for information.

7. SCHEME FOR FINANCING MAINTAINED SCHOOLS 2022/23

- 7.1 B. Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager introduced that report which asked the Schools' Forum to review and approve the revised Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools for the period commencing 1 September 2022. (A copy of the report has been filed with the signed minutes).
- 7.2 It was reported that local authorities were required to publish schemes for financing schools, setting out the financial relationship between them and the schools they maintained. This was reviewed on an annual basis, in consultation with Schools and the Schools' Forum. The draft Scheme was sent out to all via the e-courier on 09 June 2022 with a closing date of 2 July 2022, and at the time of writing this

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report no comments had been received. A copy of the proposed Scheme for the academic year 2022/23 had been circulated with this report, proposed changes had been highlighted in yellow, with the exception of those Schools to whom the Scheme is no longer applicable due to academisation (shown as strike through in Annex A).

- 7.3 Other than the minor change outlined above, no major improvements were proposed by the ESFA or NCC to the Scheme for Financing Schools for 2022/23. The format and the content of the Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools was largely dictated by the requirements of the ESFA, but collaborative work with schools to identify and resolve any potential problems would continue.

RESOLVED that Schools Forum approve the attached draft Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools.

8. 2022 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES

- 8.1 The schedule of dates had been circulated with the agenda papers and a copy filed with the signed minutes.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday, 28 September 2022 at 9:30 a.m.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

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