

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a virtual meeting of the Schools' Forum on Wednesday, 28 September 2022 at 10.30 a.m.

PRESENT

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

Headteacher Representatives

A. Mead, Cramlington Hillcrest
School

Governor Representatives

B Mansfield, Newbrough Primary
School

B. Watson, St Robert's RC First
School

G. Wilkins, St Wilfrid's RC Primary
School

Academies Representatives

C. Hodgson, West, Prudhoe
Academy

G Atkins, Hadrian Learning Trust

A. Hardie, NCEA Trust

Roman Catholic Diocese – Vacant Post

EYDCP-PVI – K. Dickinson

Pupil Referral Unit Representative – Vacant Post

Trades Union Representative – Vacant Post

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

A. Kingham
D.Street
S.Aviston
M. Finlay
B. Parvin

Service Director – Education and Interim DCS
Deputy Director of Education
Head of School Organisation and Resources Team
Head of Inclusive Education Services
Educations and Skills Business Manager

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C. Ponting
A. Russell
N. Turnbull

Senior Manager – Schools HR
Principal Accountant – Non-Team Leader
Democratic Services Officer

10. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 10.1 B. Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager reported that they would be looking to fill a number of vacant posts in advance of the next meeting in November.

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 11.1 Apologies for absence were received from S. Barron, M. Deane-Hall, F. Hartland, N. Threlfall, Councillor G. Renner-Thompson, Councillor R. Wearmouth,

12. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

- 12.1 The Vice Chair, had asked that the Forum's appreciation be recorded within the minutes in respect of Nicola Taylor, Head of Inclusive Education and SEN Transformation for her contribution to the work of the Forum. The Chair confirmed that he had written to her to wish her well in her new job.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 6 July 2022, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair, subject to the above amendment.

13. COMMUNICATION: F40 NFF CONSULTATION RESPONSE SEPTEMBER 2022

- 13.1 B. Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager referred to the DfE Consultation: 'Implementing the Direct National Funding Formula' which had been open for responses between 7 June 2002 and 9 September 2022. (A copy of the Council's response has been filed with the signed minutes).
- 13.2 He thought it would be beneficial to circulate the response to the consultation on the national funding formula (NFF) to set the context before consideration of the formula values and potential formula values for 2023/24 in the next report.
- 13.3 The consultation responses were shared on screen with the following areas being highlighted:
- 13.4 - The principles of fairness, simplicity and transparency.
- 13.5 - Q1 Whether there should be transfers from mainstream schools to local education budgets. F40 were of the view that flexibility should be retained in the new system. The Schools' Forum had agreed transfers in the past

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although the amount between schools block and high needs block had been significantly reduced due to the numbers of high needs students increasing.

- 13.6 - Q2 Whether an indicative SEN budget should be set nationally rather than locally. The response was no, however ESFA guidance on notional funding budgets would be desirable. The notional SEN budget had been amended so that it was more meaningful to schools to reduce the qualification threshold for additional SEN support. A further 30 schools had been funded above the core group of 10 funded previously.
- 13.7 - The Schools' Forum had agreed that there were additional costs for schools operating from split sites. The consultation included criteria and guidance for proposed figures.
- 13.8 - Exceptional circumstances had been agreed for 2022/23 where rental costs had exceeded 1% of DSG totals for 2 small schools. This was £21,000 out of budget of over £200 million budget.
- 13.9 - A minimum funding guarantee was to continue as a factor under NFF.
- 13.8 - Flexible budgeting was essential for income on pupil numbers as well as expenditure on wage inflation etc.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

14. NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA AND SCHOOL FUNDING UPDATE

- 14.1 B. Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager, introduced the report which provided an update on the implementation of the National Funding Formula (NFF) and initial information published by the ESFA in relation to school Funding for 2023/24 including updated NFF values.
- 14.2 Members were reminded of the timetable for the setting of the 2023/24 budget which included circulation of communications received over the summer period, consideration of reports by the Schools' Forum in September and November, consultation with schools in December with budget setting meetings in January and February 2023.
- 14.3 Northumberland fell within Category B where at least 7 out of 9 factors 'mirrored' the NFF. Only the mobility factor differed at 50% of the NFF value. This element had only been introduced in 2022/23 and accounted for approximately £40,000 of the £200 million total budget. It was proposed that the NFF value of £945 be adopted for 2023/24.
- 14.4 The ESFA are introducing "tightening" criteria for 2023/24 requiring authorities to move a funding factor a minimum of 10% closer to the NFF value. The table on page 38 of the agenda pack demonstrate this. This will impact on the mobility factor for Northumberland but will be satisfied by the proposed approach.

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14.4 The following issues were highlighted:

- 14.5 - Overall school funding would increase by 1.9% in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23 with core factors increasing by 2.4%.
- 14.6 - There had been emphasis that additional funding had been received in 2022/23 in the schools block with a 7.9% per pupil increase compared to 2021/22. The same level of increase could not be budgeted for within 2023/24.
- 14.7 - More funding was being targeted at IDACI and Free School Meals 6 factors.
- 14.8 - The Schools Supplementary Grant for schools and high needs had been paid in 2022/23 as a separate grant. They had been introduced to help support schools with the additional costs arising from the 1.5% health and social care national insurance levy and additional inflationary energy costs. These had been incorporated within overall formula values for 2023/24.
- 14.9 - Minimum per pupil funding had increased by 0.5% after the Schools Supplementary Grant was taken into consideration. The Primary and Key Stage 4 totals for 2023/24 should have read £4,405 and £6,033 respectively.
- 14.10 - A 6.3% increase was proposed for High Needs funding nationally which was lower than the 9.6% increase in 2022/23. LAs were expected to receive an increase of between 5-7% per head based on population aged between 2 and 18. This was estimated between £2.1 million and £3 million in Northumberland, although final allocations were awaited.
- 14.11 - The 20% reduction in historic commitment element of the Central Schools Services Block was expected to cover Northumberland's costs in 2023/24. An increase of 2% was expected for ongoing responsibilities although would need to be set against pay and price pressures.
- 14.12 - There was no information as yet for the Early Years block.
- 14.13 - Information would be shared with schools at the earliest opportunity so they could make informed budgeting decisions.
- 14.14 - The ESFA NFF values for 2023/24 were included at Appendix A with 2022/23 data included in the right-hand columns. The FSM6 figures might appear higher due to the Schools Supplementary Grant elements being rolled in.
- 14.15 - The minimum funding guarantee per pupil increase was to be capped by the DfE for 2023/24 at 0.5%. Previously this had been a range of between 0.5-2.0% with the higher level being utilised where possible to give schools the highest possible per pupil increase. Anything above 0.5% would require a disapplication request and approval by the ESFA.

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- 14.16 - School census day was 6 October 2022, it would be important to ensure that returns were correct and completed on time including free school meal applications. Other important deadline dates included:
- 20 January 2023 deadline for submission of Authority Proforma Tool.
28 February 2023 for confirmation of schools budget shared to mainstream maintained schools.
- 14.17 Members of the Forum discussed the lower increase for the minimum per pupil funding. There had been suggestions within ESFA seminars that school balances be utilised to meet budget deficits. However, these could only be used once and gaps tended to be recurring. The ESFA figures had been challenged given the teaching pay and support staff pay increases of between 5.6-10% were expected. It would be increasingly difficult for schools to balance budgets particularly with information not being received in advance. It was expected that the F40 would make additional representations given the number of members affected. In Northumberland, 23 schools had benefitted minimum per pupil funding in 2022/23. It was noted that there was a lot of uncertainty at the present time commented on the uncertainty of the
- 14.18 A Formula Funding Committee meeting be scheduled at 9.30 am on Wednesday 2 November 2022, in advance of the next Forum meeting on 16 November 2022. All members of the Schools' Forum would be invited to attend but particularly Graeme Atkins, Graham Wilkins and Ben Watson as the Chair considered that their views and input would be particularly helpful.
- 14.19 C. Ponting, Senior Manager – Schools HR, stated that the outcome of the pay award consultation for 2023/24 was not expected to be known until the end of October 2022. To date, only the outcome from the Unison ballot was known as results were also awaited from Unite and GMB. The majority of members from all three unions would need to accept the pay award proposals.
- 14.20 A Russell, Principal Accountant reported that the proposed pay award exceeded the estimates for maintained schools which had been budgeted in December 2021. In 2022/23 this was approximately £2 million with the largest increases for local government staff on lower pay bands. It was hoped that there would be additional funding to meet the costs in 2023/24. Reserves would be impacted with 5 or 6 schools expected to go into deficit. The backdating of pay increases would be more problematic for academies whose financial years commenced 1 September to 30 August. It was noted that the situation was hugely volatile, and the Chair hoped there would be clarity in advance of the meeting on 2 November 2022.
- 14.21 The Education and Skills Business Manager reported that they did not anticipate making any disapplication requests at the present time.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The report be noted.

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- b) A further report, as part of formula school funding consultation with the Schools' Forum, be considered at the meeting on 16 November 2022.

15. 2022 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES

- 15.1 The schedule of dates had been circulated with the agenda papers and a copy filed with the signed minutes.
- 15.2 Reference was made to a recent SEN briefing given to the Chair and Vice Chair of the High Needs Committee and the importance that the information be shared with members of the High Needs Committee and / or Schools' Forum members. A brief summary of the update was provided by D. Street, Deputy Director of Education. The Education and Skills Business Manager agreed to liaise with officers as to whether a presentation could be included on the next Schools' Forum agenda on 16 November 2022.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 16.1 The Chair reported that he had given notice that he would be resigning as Chair at the end of the 2023/24 academic year, allowing a period of time to recruit a replacement in the intervening period.
- 16.2 A Kingham, Service Director - Education and Interim DCS, on behalf of officers and members, wished to recognise the work undertaken by the Chair and the commitment he had given to continue until the end of the current academic year. It was helpful that a significant period of notice had been given to enable recruitment of a replacement and hopefully a transition period to enable handover of responsibilities.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday, 16 November 2022 at 9:30 a.m.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

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