

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **SCHOOLS' FORUM**

At a virtual meeting of the Schools' Forum on Wednesday, 18 January 2023 at 9.30 a.m.

#### **PRESENT**

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

#### **Headteacher Representatives**

M. Dean-Hall, Wooler First School  
A. Mead, Cramlington Hillcrest  
School

N. Rodgers, James Calvert Spence  
College

#### **Governor Representatives**

B. Mansfield, Newbrough Primary  
School  
B. Watson, St Robert's RC Primary  
School

G. Wilkins, St Wilfrid's RC Primary  
School

#### **Academies Representatives**

G Atkins, Hadrian Learning Trust

A. Hardie, NCEA Trust

**Roman Catholic Diocese – Vacant Post**

**Church of England Diocese – N. Threlfall**

**EYDCP-PVI – K. Dickinson**

**Pupil Referral Unit Representative – Vacant Post**

**Trades Union Representative – Vacant Post**

**19-19 Provider of Education Representative – W. Stephenson**

#### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

A. Kingham  
S. Aviston  
M. Finlay

Service Director – Education and Interim DCS  
Head of School Organisation and Resources

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B. Parvin  
C. Ponting  
A. Russell  
A. Todd

Head of Inclusive Education Services  
Education and Skills Business Manager  
Senior Manager – Schools HR  
Principal Accountant – Non-Team Leader  
Democratic Services Officer

## **29. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE**

- 29.1 Members were notified that an expression of interest had been received from Richard Carr, Headteacher of the Northumberland Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) to join the Schools' Forum as the PRU representative.
- 29.2 The Forum agreed to this appointment and looked forward to welcoming him at their next meeting.

## **30. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

- 30.1 Apologies for absence were received from N. Brannen, K. Faulkner, C. Hodgson, A. Thelwell, Councillor G. Renner-Thompson and Councillor R. Wearmouth.

## **31. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

Matters Arising:

- 31.1 It was advised that the map identifying the spread of Ukraine pupils across Northumberland would be sent to Members. It was noted that funding for schools was only available to those pupils/families who had come through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.
- 31.2 Discussions were ongoing regarding arranging a Headteachers summit and would be aligned to the SEND Place Strategy, but Schools' Forum would be kept informed of developments going forward.

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

## **32. COMMUNICATIONS**

- 32.1 A note from the Minister of Education was received yesterday which was reinforcing the additional funding coming into schools. Most Members should have received this communication, but it could be circulated again if needed.

**RESOLVED** that the communications be noted.

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### **33. ALTERNATIVE PROVISION TO SUPPORT CHILDREN PERMANENTLY EXCLUDED FROM SCHOOL**

- 33.1 S. Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources updated the Schools' Forum on proposals to undertake a tender to support the provision of Alternative Education for children of statutory school age. (Report filed with the signed minutes).
- 33.2 The report advised that due to the approach of an expiring contract there was a need to undertake a tender exercise in order to create an arrangement to access Alternative Provision with effect from the 1st of September 2023. It was noted that as a result of anticipated levels of expenditure approval from Cabinet was needed to proceed with the tender process.
- 33.3 Members were informed that it was the intention to create a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) which would allow the Council to contract with a variety of pre-qualified suppliers, supporting access to a range of placements across the County for eligible young people. Unlike a framework arrangement, a DPS would allow suppliers to join at pre-agreed points of time, encouraging competition and making it easier for local suppliers to access the arrangement. This would also support the Council in meeting its duties during a time of change and increased demand.
- 33.4 It was envisaged that a DPS would create a more flexible solution providing the Council with improved access to suppliers in order to meet need. It would be for an initial period of 10 years with actual expenditure levels fluctuating in line with demand.
- 33.5 The arrangement would cover the provision of both registered and unregistered providers allowing flexibility as the intentions of the SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper became clearer.
- 33.6 It was noted that the overall aim was to ensure that all pupils received a good education regardless of their circumstances and the setting in which they found themselves in. It was essential that Alternative Provision supported young people to fulfil their ambitions and prepared them for the best possible transition to adulthood.
- 33.7 Members highlighted the impact of COVID which was now starting to show within Northumberland, resulting in a rise in both permanent exclusions and fixed term exclusions/suspensions. In response it was reported that the creation of a DPS would help to establish a mechanism to refer young people into services. Ensuring a coherent core offer of support that schools could subscribe to and drive down exclusions and encourage inclusive practice.
- 33.8 The establishment of Inclusion Panels was also working to support a multi-agency approach to help decide on the most appropriate educational placements for those children and young people who were permanently excluded or at risk of being permanently excluded.
- 33.9 Regarding the spread of demand and suppliers it was reported that part of the Northumberland Strategic Inclusion Strategy was to ensure a good geographical

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spread across the whole of the county. The north and west of the county were areas that were more difficult to find alternative provision, but it was hoped that DPS would encourage further suppliers to want to work within Northumberland along with existing providers.

- 33.10 It was noted that whilst it remained a challenge both nationally and locally the Northumberland Strategic Inclusion Strategy was in place to support children, young people, their families and schools to ensure every child and young person had access to the most suitable education setting to meet their needs and were supported in order that they achieved their potential. This included access to Alternative Provision.
- 33.11 It was suggested that an event could be arranged, particularly in the west, between the Council, schools and potential providers to show and demonstrate that there was demand for services. In response, this suggestion was welcomed, and it was proposed that S. Aviston and G. Atkins discuss further outside of the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that Schools' Forum:

(a) note the information presented in this report which includes the proposal to create a Dynamic Purchasing System to support access to Alternative Provision. This will support the Council in fulfilling its statutory duty to ensure that full time schooling is provided from the 6th school day and that appropriate contractual arrangements are in place by the 1st of September 2023.

(b) note that whilst the value of this contract is approx. £1,500,000 per annum which suggest £15,000,000 over a 10-year period, expenditure levels are driven by fluctuating demand and will vary year on year.

#### **34. SETTING THE DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) 2023/24**

- 34.1 B. Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager informed the Schools Forum of the DSG settlement for 2023/24, as provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on 16 December 2022, and the proposed formula values for the allocation of funds to Schools for 2023/24. (A copy of the report has been filed with the signed minutes).
- 34.2 Members of the Schools' Forum representing maintained mainstream schools were asked to agree on a phase by phase basis to the de-delegation in respect of the services listed for 2023/24 using the per unit values, and estimated overall values as set out within the report.
- 34.3 It was noted that the recommendations agreed with the Schools' Forum on 16 November 2022 formed the basis for a consultation with all schools carried out between 17 November and 16 December 2022. The responses received following the consultation were detailed within the report including the clear agreement and support for the decisions taken by Schools' Forum in relation to capping and scaling, the potential transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block and the increasing the Split Site value.

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## **Early Years Block.**

- 34.4 Members were reminded that since April 2017 the Early Years Block had been subject to a National Funding Formula. The Northumberland Early Years National Funding Formula hourly rate for 3 and 4-year-olds had increased by a further 26p to £4.87 for 2023/24. Unfortunately, 13p (£425,991) of this reported uplift would include a proportion of the Teacher Pay and Pensions Grant. This grant had historically gone directly to schools and had not been recorded as part of the Early Years Block.
- 34.5 It was noted that the Northumberland Early Years National Funding Formula hourly funding rate for 2-year-olds had increased by 6p to £5.63 for 2023/24 with the rate received being passed on directly to providers.
- 34.6 It was noted that the Disability Access Fund (DAF) annual rate had increased to £828 for 2023/24 and had been successful in supporting providers with inclusion and engaging more high needs learners in early years provision.
- 34.7 It was advised that the Early Years Pupil Premium hourly rate had increased by 2p to 62p per hour for 2023/24. There had been a dramatic increase in the take up of the Northumberland Pupil Premium Plus funding to support deprived children since the introduction of a new digital eligibility checker.
- 34.8 The Early Years Block expenditure beyond the hourly rates, SEND and deprivation payments also included the Early Years Team. The national minimum “pass through” level of funding was 95% of 3-and 4-year-old funding. However, historically Northumberland setting had always received a pass through of above 95%.
- 34.9 The report detailed the initial allocation for the Early Years Block for 2023/24 as £19,157,114. It included an initial allocation for 3 and 4-year-olds and an initial allocation for disadvantaged 2-year-old children. However, all these allocations were indicative and based on the January 2022 census, they would be further revised in the light of the January 2023 and January 2024 census data.
- 34.10 It was noted that the proposal for 2023/24 rates were based on the principles of-
- Passing on the full uplift for all 2-year-old providers
  - Passing on the full relative uplift for all 3 and 4-year-old providers
  - Passing on the full DAF uplift to providers
  - Maintaining the Northumberland Pupil Premium Plus rates. It has been agreed with Corporate Finance that this could be funded from within the overall EY DSG.
- 34.11 A Member expressed a worry regarding the less than three percent increase in the funding rate. It was stated that this would cause significant challenges for not only PVIs but all school settings. It was asked what could be done to report back concerns raised. In response it was advised that this could be considered by the Formula 40 Group who could then collate wider views, concerns and communications around this issue.

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## **High Needs Block.**

- 34.12 The latest estimate High Needs Block (HNB) allocation for 2023/24 was £51,072,682. However, this was before any deductions. It was believed that the current 2023/24 allocation after these deductions would be £48,216,682.
- 34.13 Work was continuing on the detail of the total requirements within the High Needs Block, and it was recommended that the total 2023/24 budget for the High Needs Block be set at this time, with the detailed breakdown of that funding into the various services being provided to the Schools' Forum meeting on 15 February 2023. It was felt that setting the overall total for the High Needs Block was necessary at this time as final decisions in relation to the Schools Block must be made before the deadline of 20 January 2023 for submitting the APT and final mainstream school formula values to the DfE.

## **Schools Block**

- 34.14 The 2023/24 Primary unit of funding (per pupil figure) was £5,059.28 and the Secondary unit of funding at £6,222.64, giving a per pupil allocation of £215,114,179. The addition of a fixed amount in respect of Growth and Premises of £3,931,346 would result in a total Schools Block of £219,045,526, before the deduction for rates of £2,533,172, as set out in Annex 1 of the report.
- 34.15 As agreed by Schools Forum at the meeting on 16 November 2022 and the subsequent consultation with schools, a maximum transfer of £541,280 of the Schools Block to the High Needs block was available. Work was still ongoing in relation to the final submission to the ESFA but it was proposed to reduce the proposed transfer marginally in order to fully fund the National Funding Formula (NFF) values, including the increase to the Mobility Factor, without using capping and scaling.
- 34.16 A 0.5% Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) was being proposed. This was the maximum it could be set at without making a disapplication request to the ESFA.
- 34.17 No disapplication requests had been made to the ESFA in respect of 2023/24 School Funding. Also, there was no further contribution to the growth fund, or the falling rolls fund was anticipated in 2023/24.
- 34.18 As agreed at the 16 November 2022 Schools' Forum meeting, and in conjunction with the associated 17 January 2023 Cabinet report, the decision on the final formula values would be delegated to the Joint Interim Director of Children's Services.
- 34.19 As in previous years, it was intended to provide maintained schools with their 2023/24 budget via the Schools E-courier bulletin by the ESFA deadline of 28 February 2023. The equivalent figures for academies were to be included for illustrative purposes only.

## **De-Delegation**

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34.20 It was noted that in January 2022, a separate paper was prepared for Schools' Forum on de-delegation following the removal of the School Improvement and Monitoring Grant and the opportunity for local authorities to recover this funding via de-delegation. In practice Northumberland decided to give both maintained schools and academies the option to buy in to services via the established Services to Schools SLA portal. The proposals for de-delegation were therefore unchanged.

### **Central Schools Services Block**

34.21 It was reported that the 2023/24 allocation for this block was £2,268,990, a figure lower than the 2022/23 allocation. This reduction in the historic element was expected and had previously been reported.

34.22 It was questioned whether there had been any additional information received regarding the Government's thoughts on LA led multi academy trusts. It was reported that at this time schools had as much information as the Council did.

### **RESOLVED** that the Schools' Forum:

- (a) note this report and the information provided in respect of the various elements of the 2023/24 Dedicated Schools Grant.
- (b) note, where appropriate, the various specific budgets within the individual elements of the DSG at the 15 February 2023 meeting.
- (c) note the Early Years Block budget to be set at the DfE allocation of £19,157,114 as detailed in Annex 1.
- (d) note the 3-and 4-year-old rate will increase with a 13p uplift from £4.45 (2022/23) to £4.58 per hour (2023/24).
- (e) note the 2-year-old rate will increase in line with the 6p uplift from £5.57 (2022/23) to £5.63 per hour 2023/24).
- (f) note that the budget for the High Needs Block would be set at £48,216,682, after the deduction by the ESFA for the place funding outlined at Annex 1 of the report.
- (g) agree that the various budgets within the High Needs Block be set at the meeting on 15 February 2023.
- (h) note the budget for the Schools Block to be set provisionally at £219,045,526 including a proposed amount of £457,489 in respect of de-delegation. This figure is reduced to £218,576,043 after the transfer of £469,483 to the High Needs Block.
- (I) note the School budget shares be provisionally constructed based on the formula values shown the final column of Table 1, including an MFG value of 0.5%, subject to any adjustments required once the ESFA's decision is known.
- (J) delegated powers to Joint Interim Director of Children's Services to set the final formula values as agreed at the 16 November 2022 Schools' Forum meeting be noted.
- (k) Schools Members agree on a phase by phase basis to the de-delegation in respect of the five services listed within the report for 2023/24 using the per unit values, and estimated overall values as set out in the final column of Annex 1 of the report.
- (L) note that the budget for the Central Schools Services Block be set at £2,268,990 as set out in Annex 1 of the report.

## **35. 2022 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES**

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35.1 The schedule of dates had been circulated with the agenda papers and a copy filed with the signed minutes a copy of which has been filed with the signed minutes).

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**36. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**RESOLVED** that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday, 15 February 2023 at 9:30 a.m.

**CHAIR**\_\_\_\_\_

**DATE**\_\_\_\_\_

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