



Northumberland County Council

Wellbeing and Community Health Services Group

Education and Skills Service

Meeting: High Needs Sub Committee of the Schools Forum

Date: Wednesday 29th March 2023 Time: 9.30am

Venue: Virtual Teams Meeting

<p>Present: Graham Wilkins Chair and Governor at St Wilfrid's RC Primary School Colin Pearson Director, 3 Rivers Trust Graeme Atkins Headteacher, Hadrian Learning Trust Adele Brown Headteacher, Corbridge Middle Richard Carr Headteacher, PRU Andrea Mead Headteacher Hillcrest</p>	<p>Kath Dickinson (SEND to Learn) Ben Watson Governor, St Roberts RC First School Richard Wearmouth David Street Deputy Director of Education Sue Aviston Head of Schools Organisation and Resources Bruce Parvin Education & Skills Business Manager Amanda Gilchrist SEN Finance Officer</p>
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Notes Lisa Headington

Start time:	Action:
1. Welcome and Introductions	
2. In Attendance See above	
3. Apologies: Abigail Russell	
4. Declaration of personal or pecuniary Interest in any agenda item. No declaration of pecuniary interest declared by members.	
5. TERMS OF REFERENCE The Terms of Reference were last reviewed in November 2020. Typos to be addressed. All accepted on an ongoing basis.	BP
6. DfE HIGH NEEDS SUSTAINABILITY WEBINAR 2023 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PowerPoint Slide Pack • Sustainability in High Needs Systems (guide for local authorities) • Stone King Summary Paper <p>The above papers were circulated prior to the meeting. Bruce Parvin confirmed that the rising number of plans and placements are the key challenges we have. We have some data on looking at the high needs block funding in terms of increase year on year and over the last few years by around 8%. Plans have gone up by over 10% year on year, this has been managed over previous years but because of the high inflationary pressures around pay and price inflation and utilities over the last 12 months, this is resulting in a more challenging high needs block position.</p> <p>Bruce Parvin pointed out the 10 recommendations (page4) of the LAHN sustainability report, which included investment in SEND capacity and leadership,</p>	

<p>strengthening inclusion in mainstream provision and innovative approaches to mainstream funding.</p> <p>There was little if anything, in the papers circulated which people generally disagreed with, but the challenge both for LAs and Schools was finding the necessary capacity and resources to deliver and implement the guidance.</p> <p>There's between 50 and 60 local authorities that are currently under the supervision of the Department for Education, as part of the Safety Valve programme, due to significant High Needs Block deficits implementing savings therein. It is reflective of the great work of this group and the Schools' Forum that we are not currently in that position. This year, a balanced budget was set at the start of the year, it does look like we're going to be drawing on the reserves held.</p> <p>The "in year" spend is about £800,000 which is more than the annual funding available, and Bruce Parvin confirmed that's still with an overspending in year even after the 0.25% transfer from the school's block for 2022/23.</p> <p>David Street asked going forwards, how do we expand services, expand provision, give schools the money they need and the resources they need to deliver throughout next year?</p> <p>Sue Aviston commented that the introduction of the SEND Capacity and Place Planning Strategy was a co-ordinated medium-term approach to increase capacity in line with predicted demand across Northumberland, while still meeting the needs of children and young people as close to their home communities as possible. Parental choice was a key influential factor to be considered also.</p> <p>Graham Wilkins asked whether all SEN children could have their needs met within Northumberland, and whether parental choice was a factor in children going out of county?</p> <p>Sue Aviston confirmed some independent special schools can be four times more expensive than that of the local authority, and therefore no matter how good the local authorities at place planning its own provision, no matter how good schools, forum and high needs committee are allocating the right funding to the right areas of expenditure, if you've got that overruling parental choice that demands these independent schools, the independent schools will support the parental application through tribunal as well because it's a private business. In Northumberland we haven't got many independent schools and we have been able to expand our existing provision and we'll continue to do so.</p> <p>Graham Wilkins Reiterated parental choice is key. PANs in the mainstream sector can be a defence around placement, you can't attend that school because it's technically full, but this may not apply to special schools.</p> <p>David Street Commented that the special schools may be physically full. Our special schools last year grew by numbers on roll by 16%. And some of them are</p>	
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	<p>more than that throughout the year and some slightly less but overall, 16% more places from one September to the next, which is massive amounts of growth. From a parental perspective, if they make a request for a special school, a particular special school being physically full is not a defence.</p> <p>Andrea Mead Commented that It has huge implications for the school parental choice because going over number can be really challenging. We have sensory spaces that are well used, and if you keep adding children to it then we haven't got adequate resources for the children we already have.</p> <p>Bruce Parvin shared the presentation that was shared by the ESFA to the region. The safety valve group worked with authorities with the acute high needs deficits to identify common themes and what lessons could be learned. Good practice examples identified included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a stronger and more consistent mainstream offer; • Positive and Proactive communications with parents; • ASD Capacity building; • Developing clearer and broader range of pathways for Post 16; • Monitoring Specialist provision and holding providers to account; • Financial Processes monitoring impact of placement/provision trends. transition; • Communications with parent's capacity building in relation to ESD managing transition <p>David Street Commented that we know what needs to be done, it's just how do we physically manage to do it within the resources we've got</p> <p>Sue Aviston Commented that it was disappointing, that there wasn't a NE authority in this and if you're going to carry out a study like this, geography does play a part.</p> <p>10:05 Richard Carr (Guest) joined the meeting</p> <p>Bruce Parvin Introduced Amanda Gilchrist, who started working with him just before Christmas. Amanda has done some fantastic work working with the send team and working around data to drive some real improvements over the last three or four months.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	<p>SEND CAPACITY AND PLACE PLANNING STRATEGY</p> <p>Sue Aviston presented the above strategy which went to Cabinet in late 2022. The presented slides will be shared with members after the meeting.</p> <p>This is the first time that Northumberland has set send capacity and place planning strategy, setting out how we will predict specialist and place planning and capacity growth over the next five years, including place increases and capital investment required for predicted future growth. Information is presented on a school partnership basis so that we can plan to have those school places as close to home communities as possible for children regardless of their needs.</p> <p>Northumberland has a very robust mainstream place planning methodology which does ensure the accuracy of predicting the number of school places required across the county consistently achieving between 97 and 98% of parental first preferences.</p>	

There are significant upward trends in both overall EHCP numbers and special school places. Specific increases in relation to ASD and SEMH are evident. We also survey annually the SENCO'S to get that soft intelligence around individual pupils in schools by year, grouping in terms of which pupils we feel will transition into secondary school or into middle school and whether they will or whether they need specialist provision.

Section 4 shows the forecast for demand of specialist provision on a school partnership basis. A lot of the data presented in each school partnership demonstrates there's a growing demand to increase specialist capacity across the whole of Northumberland, not just in one area. If we continue to grow the way that we have done over the last five years for the next five years, we could see that we would require another 700 special school places by 2026 which is a phenomenal number and again that's why we need to look at our graduated approach and inclusive practices in mainstream.

Graeme Atkins stated that David raised a really important point as you and the team around other partnerships, maybe just start to talk to partnerships about numbers and what that might look like over the next few years because each school has got a responsibility.

Section 5 of the of the strategy shows some specific ideas for the individual partnerships and site in order to increase special school capacity.

Members were reminded of the opening of the Gilbert Ward Academy in September 23, although in temporary accommodation initially with 40 places before the DfE complete the new buildings are complete for January 2024. So again, looking at Commissioning 40 places there.

Northumberland Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) relocated at Christmas and are now starting to expand the number of places and the age range. So that is an ongoing development, and we'll see some further increase in capacity from September as well.

There will continue to be demand for special school places, but we just need our schools to adapt and flex, particularly given Northumberland's geography and rurality and our geography, so that we're not putting children in taxis and travelling them from one end of the county to the next. Emily Wilding being our only specialist provision at the minute for SEMH and more challenging ASD.

Graeme Atkins commented that in the West they are considering their own forms of alternative provision, there is a blurring of the lines, perhaps looking at their own AP as well as external AP providers.

Sue Aviston agreed and that's why it's been useful chairing the inclusion panel and looking at where demand is for alternative provision.

	<p>Kath Dickinson (SEND to Learn) questioned specifically in relation to early years and there's a lot of PVI who have children with additional needs.</p> <p>Sue Aviston confirmed there is internal data and information from the portage team as well as our early years team that we triangulate some of that.</p> <p>Colin Pearson commented he was greatly encouraged by the new strategy but raised the question about the relationships with Health and Social Care,</p> <p>David Street fed back that there's definitely a willingness to progress the links between health, social care and us. And there has been some practical work ongoing in around that from a social care perspective. The redevelopment of the early help team, there are social Care colleagues now who were employed just in December who were specifically education based social care. Health in its different facets has gone through some massive changes recently, but even throughout those changes they are remaining as focused on the needs of send learners and how to engage with education better. In principle, we're all in agreement, we are all in it together. If there are needs that are not being met, we are collectively responsible for delivering.</p> <p>Graham Wilkins commented on the need for the right support, in the right place, at the right time and thanked Sue for her presentation.</p>	
<p>8.</p>	<p>HIGH NEEDS FINANCIAL UPDATE</p> <p>Bruce Parvin introduced the report. We came to the committee in June last year to consult about how we were going to distribute the additional high needs funding and we took a decision to increase the funding on a school level basis to our most inclusive schools through adjusting the notional SEN calculation to lower the threshold at which schools could access funding as opposed to increasing individual funding bands attached to individual learners.</p> <p>These changes for the summer term 2022 in summer last year for the summer term with the start of the financial year and we've supported 39 schools and paid £432,000. This represents 27 more schools and a further £284,000 paid compared to 2021/22. At a time when there is increasing pressure on the high needs block to target those most inclusive schools felt the most appropriate course of action, given limitations of resources available.</p> <p>The report also outlined instructions from the ESFA in relation to the distribution of additional HN funding to special schools. The ESFA have taken a very prescriptive approach to the additional allocation of the additional high needs funding to maintain special schools and special academies for 23/24, providing an additional 3.4% increase based on the September 2022 place and top up funding colleagues</p>	

	<p>at corporate. Further details are at the link in the report. It was also confirmed the lump sums introduced in 2021/22 would remain in place.</p> <p>Colin Pearson asked why the ESFA were taking such a prescriptive approach?</p> <p>Bruce Parvin indicated it may be the ESFA’s response to the increasing inflationary pressures. It reduces the LA’s influence as we don’t have any discretion, but we have followed the ESFA’s guidance.</p> <p>Colin Pearson Commented that It's just a bit of a frustration that we're being told centrally that the problem is pretty much the LA’s but we have limited opportunity to influence this.</p>	
<p>9.</p>	<p>SPECIALIST SUPPORT BASES</p> <p>(David Street) informed members about proposals for specialist support bases (SSBs). While we have some really high-quality special schools, but we are in a position where have waiting lists for our special schools. Many LAs are in the same position.</p> <p>At the same time, we've also got some high-quality provision in our mainstream schools. And we've got some exceptionally high need learners having their needs met in our mainstream schools though obviously a much lower proportion is in our special schools. But one of the ways forward that I'm keen to progress is a mixed economy / blended approach. The idea of being a “special” school or a “mainstream” school is almost incidental, it’s a “school” and its attempting to meet the needs of the learners that they've got. If the learners are in their local facility and they can meet the needs or the school's keen to gain the resources to meet the needs of those learners, then we should be doing it.</p> <p>What is the concept for an SSB? Is it specialist provision on a mainstream site? We need to try and broaden the models; in our special schools currently if you open a room, there's a learner in there getting an intervention and everywhere you go, the spaces are filled. Where we do have physical space in mainstream can we provide similar interventions within it, perhaps as part of the blended offer?</p> <p>It is appreciated that resources will be an issue but to take the example of an 8-pupil base. For example, If the SEN learners have an average top up of £6,000 (equivalent to Mainstream Band 4) plus the first £6,000 notional SEN a School is required to find, this would provide a total budget of £96,000. This could cover a well-qualified send teacher and possibly up to 60 hours of TA support. This is simply an illustrative example that could change depending on the needs of the learners, but is intended to provide a standardised fair and transparent way of calculating funding.</p> <p>One area for consideration is if a learner starts at the school part way through school year, so it's after census. Individual Top Up funding is always paid from the pupils start date but if a learner started after the October School Census date,</p>	

	<p>they wouldn't have any notional for that starting 6000, because the learner isn't on the roll, and they won't get that notional for the next year. Could we consider HN Block Support for one year in respect of the missing notional funding?</p> <p>Graham Wilkins asked if there was general support for this proposal to allow David to develop this?</p> <p>Resolved - All agreed</p> <p>Sue Aviston Confirmed it will be a schools forum decision. This group is obviously just a working group. So, supporting the proposal, but a decision wouldn't be made until the formal school's forum meeting.</p> <p>Graham Wilkins Reminded members that the next high needs committee is the 14th of June, which is online again, at 9:30 and we then have school forum, it was originally going to be the 5th of July, but it's now the 19th of July face to face in County Hall.</p> <p>The chair thanked everyone for their input at today's meeting.</p>	
10.	<p>Date of Next meeting</p> <p>HN Committee 14 June 2023 (Virtual – Provisional date – subsequently cancelled)</p> <p>Schools Forum Wednesday 19 July 2023 (Face to Face Meeting)</p>	