

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **SCHOOLS' FORUM**

At a virtual meeting of the Schools' Forum on Wednesday, 15 February 2023 at 9.30 a.m.

#### **PRESENT**

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

#### **Headteacher Representatives**

A. Mead, Cramlington Hillcrest  
School

#### **Governor Representatives**

B. Watson, St Robert's RC First  
School

G. Wilkins, St Wilfrid's RC Primary  
School

#### **Academies Representatives**

G Atkins, Hadrian Learning Trust

**Roman Catholic Diocese** – Vacant Post

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

**EYDCP-PVI** – K. Dickinson

**Pupil Referral Unit Representative** – R. Carr

**Trades Union Representative** – Vacant Post

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

Councillor G. Renner-Thompson (observer)

#### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

A. Kingham

Executive Director - Children, Young People and  
Education

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S. Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
M. Finlay	Head of Inclusive Education Services
B. Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
A. Russell	Principal Accountant – Non-Team Leader
C. Street	Senior Accountant (observer)
D. Street	Deputy Director of Education
A. Todd	Democratic Services Officer

### **37. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE**

- 37.1 Members were notified that an expression of interest had been received from Adele Brown, Headteacher of Corbridge Middle School to join the Schools' Forum as a middle school representative. The Forum agreed to this appointment and looked forward to welcoming Adele at their next meeting.
- 37.2 The Chair welcomed Richard Carr to his first meeting of the Schools' Forum as the PRU representative.
- 37.3 It was reported that D. Wylie, Cramlington Village Primary School was stepping down as a Forum Member. Members extended their thanks to Debbie for her valued contribution to the work of the Schools' Forum, and for the time she was able to devote to attend such meetings.

### **38. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

- 38.1 Apologies for absence were received from N. Brannen, M. Deane-Hall, N. Rodgers, K. Faulkner, B. Mansfield, A. Hardie, C. Hodgson, A. Thelwell, C. Ponting and D. Illingworth.

### **39. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 18 January 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

- 39.1 Matters Arising: It was confirmed that the plan detailing the geographical spread of Ukraine students in Northumberland would be sent to Forum members.

### **40. COMMUNICATIONS**

Nothing to report.

### **41. REVIEW OF SCHOOLS' FORUM MEMBERSHIP**

**RESOLVED** that this report be deferred to a future meeting of Schools' Forum.

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## 42. SETTING THE 2023/24 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT

- 42.1 B. Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the report which sought to inform Schools' Forum of the estimated overall DSG for 2023/24 as notified to Northumberland by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and the proposed allocation of funds within the four DSG Blocks. (A copy of the report has been attached to the signed minutes).

### Schools Block

- 42.2 In line with the position agreed at November 2022 School Forum meeting, and subsequently agreed in the schools' consultation exercise agreeing a maximum transfer of 0.25% to the High Needs Block, a final transfer of £484,983 (0.22%) had been approved.
- 42.3 G. Atkins commented on the SEND Capacity and Place Planning Strategy which sought to outline the developing circumstances around SEND in the county, plus thoughts on how to meet the growing need. A copy of the document was to be circulated to Forum members after the meeting as he thought it was a worthwhile read which discussed the changing landscape. He felt that SEND provision was an increasing issue across all authorities and suggested that more should be done to collectively highlight these problems. It was proposed that the F40 Group was probably the best mechanism to lobby concerns nationally.
- 42.4 D. Street commented on the great work achieved over the last five years regarding SEN and the creative ways Northumberland had managed to balance finances to ensure they had not overspent. However, demand was continuing to rise and put pressure on already tight budgets.
- 42.5 S. Aviston advised that SEND Capacity and Place Planning was a top priority for elected members. A scrutiny working group had been established and there could be an opportunity for views to be fed into this work stream.
- 42.6 A. Kingham advised that a brief report could be presented to the next meeting of Schools' Forum on high needs planning. This was an important issue that would continue to be challenging and agreed that this needed to be front and centre for the foreseeable future.
- 42.7 Sparsity funding had been increased marginally (2.3%) for 2023/24, in line with general funding increases, as opposed to the additional investment seen for 2021/22 and 22/23. Final funding for schools in relation to National Funding Formula sparsity payments had now been finalised at £2.674 million up by £62,000 on the current year's figures of £2.612 million.

Other Issues:

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- 42.8 No additional funding had been set aside from the Schools Block in relation to the existing Falling Rolls or Growth Funds.
- 42.9 The final figure for distribution was therefore £216,027,371 prior to de-delegation. The estimated final de delegated sum was £457,489, though this was subject to change as a result of any further academisation.
- 42.10 Final funding statements would be shared with all schools as soon as possible, ahead of the 28 February deadline. This would be sent via e-courier. However, a more detailed spreadsheet had been created for schools and it was queried whether this more exhaustive document would be more helpful. It was felt that anything to support schools understand their funding would be welcomed. It was suggested several schools be consulted on the documents to see which one would be more beneficial before being rolled out to all.
- 42.11 At this point the Schools' Forum noted the formula funding values reflected in Table 1 for the distribution of the Schools Block DSG for 2023/24.

#### High Needs Block

- 42.12 At the last meeting on 18 January 2023 Schools Forum were informed that the indicative High Needs Block allocation for 2023/24 was £51,072,682 before any deductions as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report. It was noted that this included the HN block equivalent of the mainstream schools' additional grant which was being paid separately to mainstream schools and academies. The transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block had been set at £484,983.
- 42.13 At the January meeting, it was agreed that the more detailed breakdown for services within that budget would be set at the February meeting. The proposed budget was detailed within the report.
- 42.14 The continuing increase in the number of EHC plans, together with the more general inflationary pressures affecting both schools represented the 2 biggest challenges to balancing the High Needs Block budget.
- 42.15 Schools' Forum agreed to note the 2022/24 High Needs Block budget of £49,467,665 as set out at Appendix B to the report.

#### Early Years Block

- 42.16 The 2023/24 Early Years funding block figures and proposed hourly rates were reported to the January meeting of the Schools' Forum, to allow the new rates from April to be sent to providers at an earlier stage. It had been agreed with Corporate Finance that this could be funded from within the overall EY DSG budget.
- 42.17 At this point the rates for the Early Year Block as set out in the report and reported to School Forum in January 2023 were noted.

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## Central Schools Service Block

- 42.18 The 2023/24 allocation for this block was £2,268,990, a figure £185,281 (7.5%) lower than the 2022/23 allocation of £2,454,271. This reduction in the historic element was expected and had previously been reported.
- 42.19 The budget for the Central Schools Services Block as set out in Appendix C of the report was noted.
- 42.20 Following on from the detailed report the Chair thanked all those involved in setting the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2023/24.

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

- a) the proposal for the Schools Block formula values and the resulting 2023/24 School Budget Shares, in line with the Cabinet decision of 17 January 2023 including the delegation of the approval of the final formula values to the Executive Director of Children Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services and Deputy Leader of the Council in line with the principles agreed at Schools Forum on 16 November 2022;
- b) the 2023/24 High Needs Block Budget including the final transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block;
- c) the 2023/24 Early Years Block rates; and
- d) the 2023/24 Central Schools Services Budget.

## **43. 2022/23 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES**

- 43.1 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.

## **44. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 44.1 It was noted that the next meeting would be the last meeting for C. Pearson who was standing down as Chair. However, it was noted that the Chair would not be able to attend the proposed meeting date of 5 July 2023.
- 44.2 It was suggested that the meeting be rearranged to a more convenient date for the Chair and held in person. This would allow Schools' Forum to express their gratitude to Colin for being the Chair for many years and to wish him all the best for the future.

**RESOLVED** that the next meeting be currently scheduled for Wednesday, 5 July 2023 at 9:30 a.m. However, officers would discuss with the Chair to see if the meeting date could be rearranged.

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

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

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