

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools' Forum on Wednesday, 27 September 2023 at 9.30 a.m. held virtually.

PRESENT

Alan Hardie (Chair, in the Chair)
NCEA

Headteacher Representatives

A. Brown, Corbridge Middle School
M. Dean-Hall, Wooler and Glendale
Middle School

A.Mead, Hillcrest School

Governor Representatives

K. Faulkner, Collingwood School
B. Watson, St Robert's RC First
School

G. Wilkins, St Wilfrid's RC Primary
School

Academies Representatives

G Atkins, Hadrian Learning Trust

B. Reed, Gilbert Ward Academy

Roman Catholic Diocese – Vacant Post

Church of England Diocese – N. Threlfall

Pupil Referral Unit Representative – R. Carr

19-19 Provider of Education Representative – W. Stephenson

Trades Union Representative – Vacant Post

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Ch.'s Initials.....

M. Finlay	Head of Inclusive Education Services
R. Greally	Assistant Democratic Service Officer
A. Kingham	Executive Director - Children, Young People and Education
B. Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
C. Ponting	Senior Manager - Schools HR
A. Russell	Principal Accountant – Non-Team Leader
D. Street	Deputy Director of Education

12. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP DETAIL

- 12.1 The committee welcomed Alan Hardie to the Forum who succeeded Colin Pearson as the new Chair. It was acknowledged that Graeme Wilkins would remain as Vice Chair of the Forum and Chair of the High Needs committee.
- 12.2 Ben Watson had agreed to continue as Chair of the Funding Formula Committee.
- 12.3 The committee were informed that Andrew Thirlwell from Bede’s Academy had resigned from the forum due to other commitments.

13. APOLOGIES

- 13.1 Apologies were received from Sue Aviston, Dave Cookson, Dionne Illingworth and Barbara Mansfield.

14. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

- 14.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools’ Forum held on Wednesday, 19 July 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

15. COMMUNICATIONS

- 15.1 Bruce Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the F40 presentation to the forum. The F40 group originated from a group of the lowest funded per head Local Authorities. Northumberland is one of the 42 authorities in the F40 group. The F40 suggested that there was a £4.6 billion deficit or gap in respect of SEND funding.
- 15.2 The communication from F40 highlighted a £4,000 difference per pupil in Schools funding paid across different local authorities and suggested this was unfair. A similar pattern was evident in respect of SEND funding.
- 15.3 It was confirmed that the specialist capacity within the Authority had been increased including spaces within three special schools. Although capacity had been increased

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there had been no indication of how the extra spaces would be funded. It was included in the 2023/24 budget but further growth would have been difficult.

15.4 It was acknowledged that there was a High Needs committee meeting scheduled for 25th October 2023. The profile of High Needs had increased nationally and was expected to be high on the education agenda. An increase in funds was expected but it was unclear how much the increase would be.

15.5 It was discussed that schools and Local Authorities were feeling the pressures of the funding, but it was suggested there was a lack of public awareness. Concerns were raised over public perception and how to raise the issue to a wider profile.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

16. MEMBERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

16.1 Bruce Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the report to the Forum. There had been no further guidance regarding governance from the ESFA since March 2021. It was acknowledged that report was shared at late notice and members were assured that they would have the opportunity to raise any issues at a future Schools' Forum meeting.

16.2 In recommendation 2b) it was asked that members actively promoted the existing vacancies within the forum to interested parties through their networks. When promoting the vacancies members were reminded to share that the Forum was a public meeting with prospective members.

16.3 It was confirmed that members were happy with the current arrangements and still felt that meeting once a year face-to-face in the July meeting should be continued. It was acknowledged in paragraph 4.2 it states that School Forum representatives should be involved with schools located in Northumberland.

RESOLVED that the information be noted

17. USE OF 2022/23 DEDICATED SCHOOL GRANT (DSG) FUNDING BALANCES

17.1 Abigail Russell, Principle Accountant, introduced the report to the Forum. There was a requirement for the Local Authority to consult with the Schools' Forum where the DSG had not been fully spent. The report outlined the intended £2.1 million carry forward for 2024-2025 and the intended use of the £2.5 million carry forward for 2023-2024. The intention was to continue ring fence the blocks of the DSG.

17.2 There was a requirement to use the growth fund created to meet demand for new places at St Benet Biscop and Cramlington Learning Village. It was proposed that the Schools Block reserve be used. Information would be brought to NASH to explain why those schools were chosen.

17.3 There was an estimated growth resulting in significant pressure within the Higher Needs block and it was presumed that the whole reserve would be needed to be

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drawn down. There was a discussion that the using the DSG as a whole to support the Higher Needs block may have been unfair as High Needs covered all areas whereas the Schools Block was largely drawn from maintained schools contingency de-delegated payments. It was confirmed that the Authority could not subsidise the High Needs block.

17.4 It was expected that the 2023-24 DSG would be in a surplus however it could not be confirmed whether the 2024-25 DSG would end with a surplus. There were many pressures that would contribute to the DSG such as the pay award, school reorganisations and inflationary pressures.

RESOLVED that the forum:-

- a) Noted the intended use of £2,434,353 in 2023-24 of the overall carry forward from 2022-23 of £4,501,309 in line with the request at Appendix A.
- b) Noted the carry forward to 2024-25 in advance of £2,066,956 from the overall surplus in 2022-23 of £4,501,309.
- c) Noted the intention to carry forward the respective DSG blocks (Central Services Schools Early Years, High Needs and Schools Block) on a ringfenced basis into 2023-24.
- d) Approved the proposal to use the Schools Block reserve to create a growth fund to meet demand for new places at St Benet Biscop (£83,738) and Cramlington Learning Village (£108,859) covering the period September 2023 – March 2024.
- e) Approved the proposal to use the Central Schools Block reserve to fund the additional pressures on the cost of Independent Special School places at £77,390.

18. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) BUDGET PERFORMANCE UPDATE 2023-24

18.1 Abigail Russell, Principal Accountant, introduced the report to the Forum. The report showed the financial performance of the DSG against the budget 2023-24 to the end of August 2023.

18.2 The DSG allocation had decreased by approximately £2 million due to a number of schools transferring to academies and a decrease in the Early Years funding. There was an expected overspend of £619,000 which was largely due to the High Needs block. It was noted that the High Need block expenditure was in line with the predicted deficit. It highlighted the importance of the work going into the High Need block.

18.3 It was difficult to identify future funding as it was often awarded on an ad hoc basis. It was expected that the DSG would be in a deficit within the next few years, due to High Needs pressures.

RESOLVED that the information be noted

19. NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA AND SCHOOL FUNDING UPDATE

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- 19.1 Bruce Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the briefing note to the Forum. It provided an update regarding the implementation of the National Funding Formula and the initial information provided by EFSA in relation to School Funding for 2024/25.
- 19.2 The Department for Education had confirmed its intention to move to the National Funding Formula. This would mean that Local Authorities would have no discretion in the values of the individual factors used to distribute funding to schools. It was confirmed that Northumberland “mirrors” the National Funding Formula from the financial year 2023/24.
- 19.3 The new policy published by EFSA gave an explicit warning that increases in overall funds available for 2024/25 would be less than those in 2023/24. Final Local Authority level allocations were based on October 2023 School census data and were published in late December 2023. Funding was often provided last minute, on a single year basis, which made medium term financial planning difficult.
- 19.4 There had been no indications from the Government regarding the funding. Members were given an assurance that the team had been clear with the Department for Education about the challenges that Northumberland Schools are facing. They were assured that the Authority was acting as an advocate on their behalf.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

20. 2023/24 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES

- 20.1 The schedule of dates had been circulated with the agenda papers and a copy filed with the signed minutes.
- 20.2 It was highlighted that the next scheduled meeting on 22nd November 2023 was the same date as Chancellor’s Autumn Statement.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

21. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 21.1 There was an assurance that although SATs data held was unvalidated it could be shared with members.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

22. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the next scheduled meeting of the Schools’ Forum will be Wednesday, 22 November 2023. Meetings would continue to be held virtually apart from the July meeting which would be in person.

Ch.’s Initials.....

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

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