



Northumberland County Council

Children, Young People and Education

Agenda Item 7

SCHOOLS FORUM

14 February 2024

High Needs Block funding consultation feedback.

1. Purpose of the Report

To update School Forum regarding the initial outcomes of the consultation exercise with schools on SEN funding.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Schools Forum

- 2.1.** notes this report and agree to wider consultation in order to seek as many views as possible prior to making any formal proposals/changes in order to address the financial challenges and pressures on the High Needs Block.
- 2.2** Note the format and areas for consultation will be delegated to the High Needs sub group with the finding from the wider consultation being reported back to schools forum in the summer term.

3. Background.

- 3.1** The annual consultation with schools in Northumberland on the funding was extended this year to ask schools a number of questions relating to SEN funding in order to develop some new principles and guidance to reduce the predicted overspend within the High Needs Funding Block. The results will help shape the format and ideas for further discussions with all schools.
- 3.2** This report sets out the feedback from the consultation with the aim of the high needs sub group using this feedback to launch a wider consultation in the form of workshops around the county in order to fully engage schools developing solutions to the challenges faced in meeting the changing needs of our children and young people.

4 Key Issues

- 4.1** Although not directly linked to Cabinet approval for setting of the funding formula values. The consultation exercise was extended to ask schools a number of questions relating to SEN funding in order to develop some new principles and guidance in order to reduce the predicted overspend within the High Needs Funding Block. The results will help shape the format and ideas for further discussions with all schools.
- 4.2** The consultation with all schools was carried out between 27 November and 12 December 2023. Where the following 14 questions were asked:

- Q1 - Do you support the Schools Forum Decision to seek a 0.5% transfer from schools block to high needs block for financial Year 2024/25?
- Q2 - Would you be supportive of a larger transfer from schools block to high needs block in subsequent years to help address the current £3m gap in resources?
- Q3 - At what level do you believe Northumberland's MFG should be set for 2024/25?
- Q4 - Do you support the potential use of capping and scaling as part of the 2024/25 School Budget setting process?
- Q5 - Do you support a freeze or reduction in SEN banding rates at the present time, subject to review on an annual basis?
- Q6 - Should Northumberland consider a fundamental review of the banding rates paid?
- Q7 - Should any review of the banding rates paid be done on a "cost neutral" basis, i.e. a redistribution of existing funds, or seek to deliver financial savings?
- Q8 - Northumberland does not currently consider any information in relation to the School Balances held by a school in relation to a request for Top Up funding, or an increase in Top Up funding. Should we?
- Q9 - Do you feel you understand Notional SEN and your Schools Notional SEN figure?
- Q10 - Do you support the use of a schools Notional SEN figure as a mechanism for distributing additional SEN Funding?
- Q11 - Should we require schools to demonstrate how they are using their allocated Notional SEN total across the school before considering requests for Top Up payments?
- Q12 - Would it help Schools if additional School Level Notional SEN payments were made at the beginning of each term rather than the end as is currently the case?
- Q13 - Should Northumberland continue to make Top Up payments to learners without EHCPs?
- Q14 - Should Northumberland review the scope of Top Up payments to learners without EHCPs?

- 4.3** There were 31 responses received during the consultation period. There was overwhelming support for the transfer of 0.5% from the School Block to High Needs Block with 27 schools supporting Schools Forums View. Schools in the main were also supportive of increasing the transfer further with 20 supporting this idea. In response to the question three, 28 schools felt MFG should be set at 0.5%. 22 schools also supported the use of capping and scaling
- 4.4** Cabinet supported the findings from the consultation in relation to the transfer to high needs block, capping and scaling as well as agreeing the level of MFG. Cabinet also understood that there was more detailed work to be undertaken by school's forum in relation to the remaining questions which related to high needs funding.
- 4.5** Attached at appendix one is the feedback from the 31 schools that responded to the consultation. It is recommended that the High Needs Sub Group use this information to launch a wider consultation on options and ideas with all schools on how to address the financial challenges in meeting the increased demand to meet the needs of our pupil population

5 Summary and Conclusion.

- 5.1** There is support from schools shown within the feedback to review bandings on a cost neutral basis and review top ups to non EHCP learners. There was also supported to take a higher percentage of transfer from the schools block to high needs block. There was also some support to review additional notional and the date in which the payment occurs.
- 5.2** Whilst the number of schools responding to this year's funding consultation was higher than experienced in previous years it was still a relatively small sample of the number of schools overall. Officers are therefore recommending, that a wider more interactive consultation is undertaken to engage as many schools as possible in the process.

2024/25 School Funding Consultation for 'School Block' and 'High Needs Block'

<https://haveyoursay.northumberland.gov.uk/education-skills/77258754>

This report was created on Tuesday 12 December 2023 at 09:15

The activity ran from 24/11/2023 to 11/12/2023

Responses to this survey: **31**

1: What is your name?

Name

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

2: What is your email address?

Email

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

3: What is your organisation?

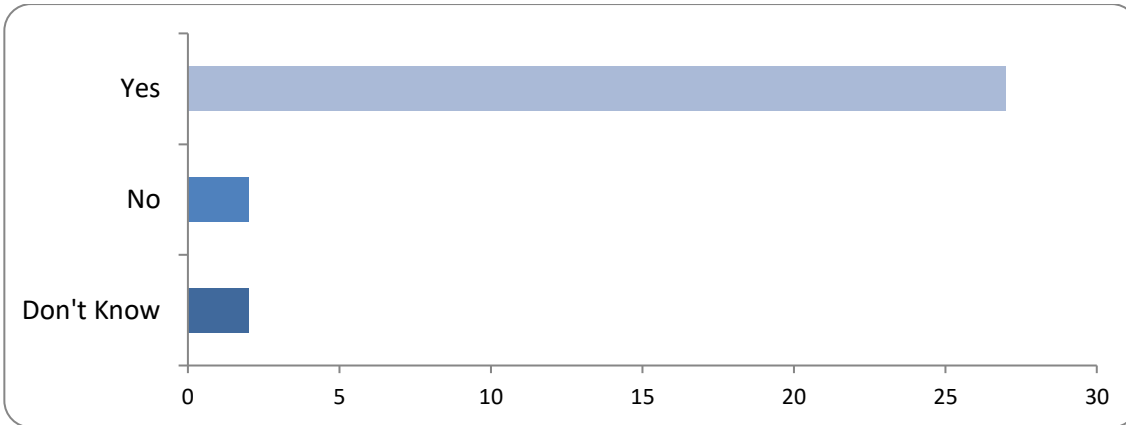
Organisation

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

4: Do you support the Schools Forum Decision to seek a 0.5% transfer (approx. £1.148million) from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block for the financial year 2024/25 ?

Yes/No/Maybe

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

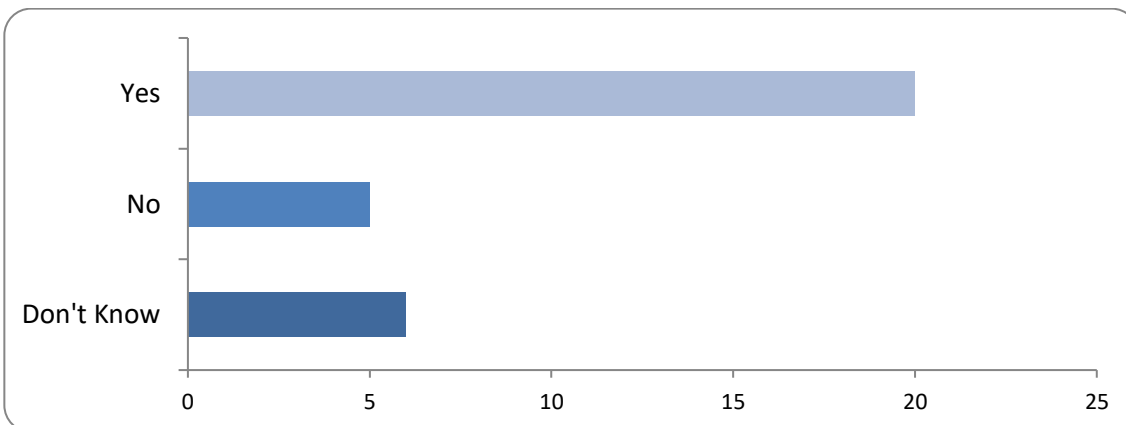


Option	Total	Percent
Yes	27	87.10%
No	2	6.45%
Don't Know	2	6.45%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

5: Would you be supportive of a larger transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in subsequent years to help address the current £3 million gap in resources:

Yes/No/Don't Know

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.



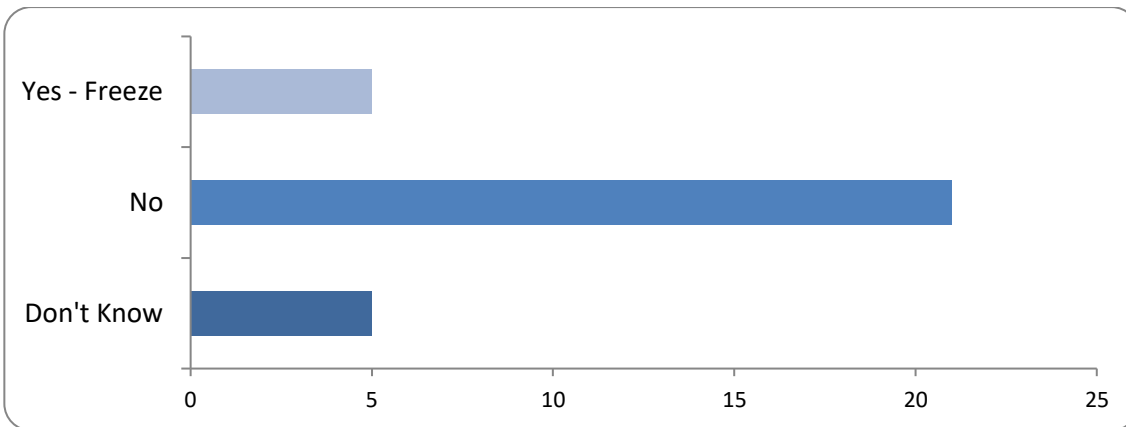
Option	Total	Percent
Yes	20	64.52%
No	5	16.13%

Don't Know	6	19.35%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

6: Do you support a freeze or reduction in SEN banding rates at the present time, subject to review on an annual basis?

Yes freeze; Yes reduction; No; Don't Know

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

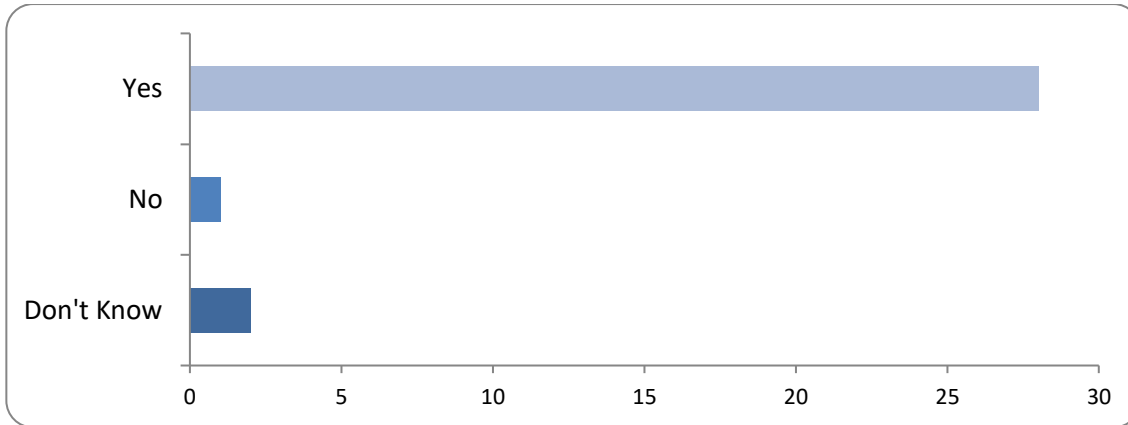


Option	Total	Percent
Yes - Freeze	5	16.13%
Yes - Reduction	0	0.00%
No	21	67.74%
Don't Know	5	16.13%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

7: Should Northumberland consider a fundamental review of the banding rates paid?

Yes/No/Don't Know

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

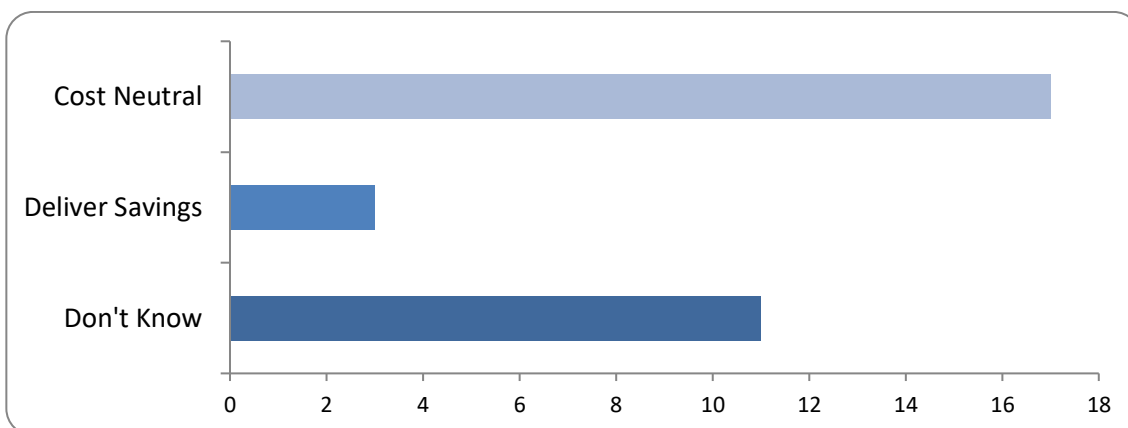


Option	Total	Percent
Yes	28	90.32%
No	1	3.23%
Don't Know	2	6.45%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

8: Should any review of the banding rates paid be done on a “cost neutral” basis i.e. a redistribution of existing funds, or seek to deliver financial savings?

Cost Neutral; Deliver Savings; Don't Know

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.



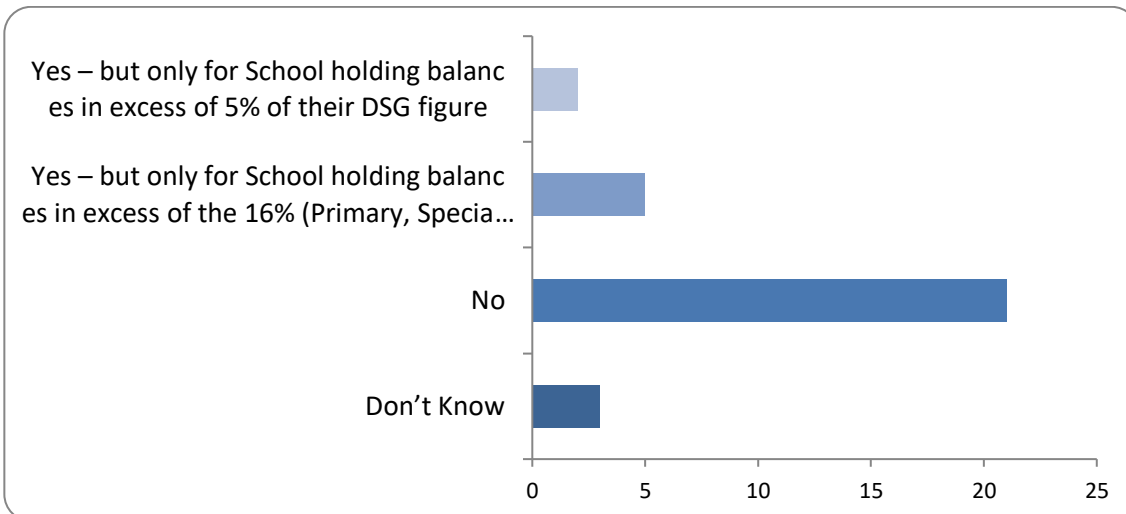
Option	Total	Percent
Cost Neutral	17	54.84%
Deliver Savings	3	9.68%
Don't Know	11	35.48%

Not Answered	0	0.00%
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9: Northumberland does not currently consider any information in relation to the School Balances held by a school in relation to a request for Top Up funding, or an increase in Top Up funding. Should we?

Yes – for all schools holding positive School Balances; Yes – but only for School holding balances in excess of 5% of their DSG figure as laid out in the Scheme for Financing Schools; Yes – but only for School holding balances in excess of the 16% (Primary, Special Schools) or 10% (Secondary/High/Middle Schools) of their DSG figure as laid out in the Scheme for Financing Schools; No; Don't Know

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

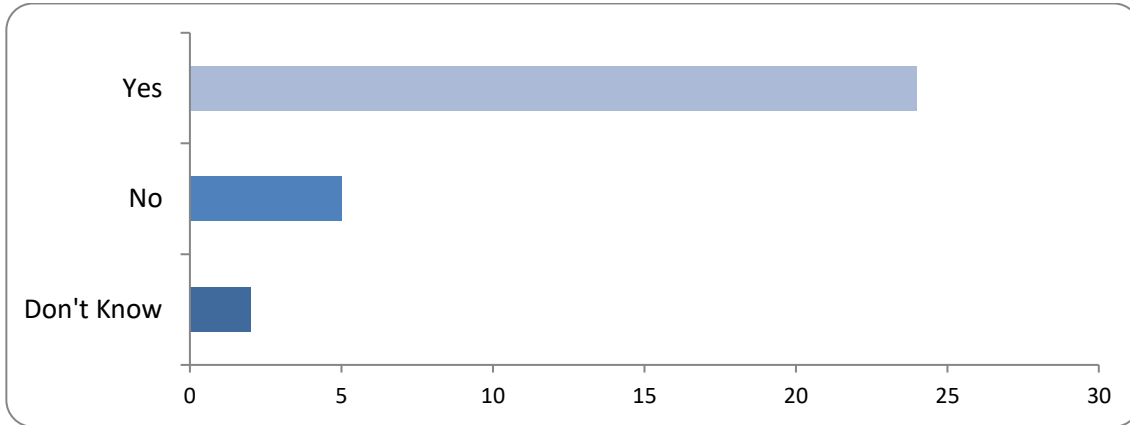


Option	Total	Percent
Yes – for all schools holding positive School Balances	0	0.00%
Yes – but only for School holding balances in excess of 5% of their DSG figure	2	6.45%
Yes – but only for School holding balances in excess of the 16% (Primary, Special Schools) or 10% (Secondary/High/Middle Schools) of their DSG figure as laid out in the Scheme for Financing Schools.	5	16.13%
No	21	67.74%
Don't Know	3	9.68%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

10: Do you feel you understand Notional SEN and your Schools Notional SEN figure?

Yes/No/Don't Know

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

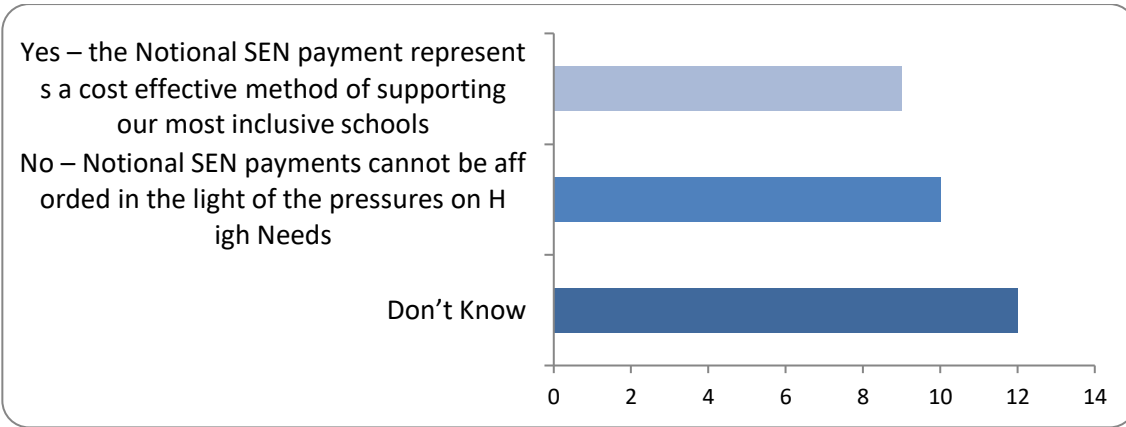


Option	Total	Percent
Yes	24	77.42%
No	5	16.13%
Don't Know	2	6.45%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

11: Do you support the use of a schools Notional SEN figure as a mechanism for distributing additional SEN Funding?

Yes – the Notional SEN payment represents a cost effective method of supporting our most inclusive schools; No – Notional SEN payments cannot be afforded in the light of the pressures on High Needs; Don't Know

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

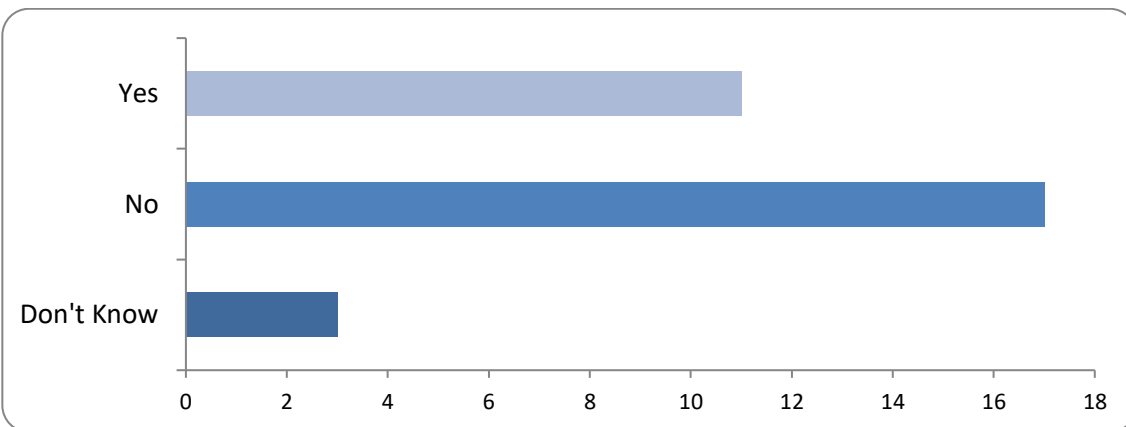


Option	Total	Percent
Yes – the Notional SEN payment represents a cost effective method of supporting our most inclusive schools	9	29.03%
No – Notional SEN payments cannot be afforded in the light of the pressures on High Needs	10	32.26%
Don't Know	12	38.71%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

12: Should we require schools to demonstrate how they are using their allocated Notional SEN total across the school before considering requests for Top Up payments.

Yes/No/Don't Know

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

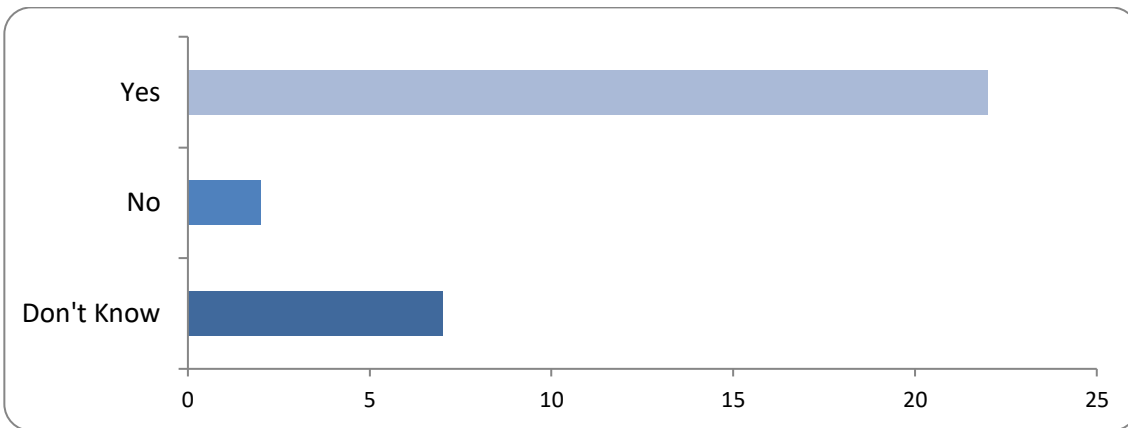


Option	Total	Percent
Yes	11	35.48%
No	17	54.84%
Don't Know	3	9.68%

Yes	11	35.48%
No	17	54.84%
Don't Know	3	9.68%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

**13: Would it help Schools if additional School Level Notional SEN payments were made at the beginning of each term rather than the end as is currently the case?
Yes/No/Don't Know**

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

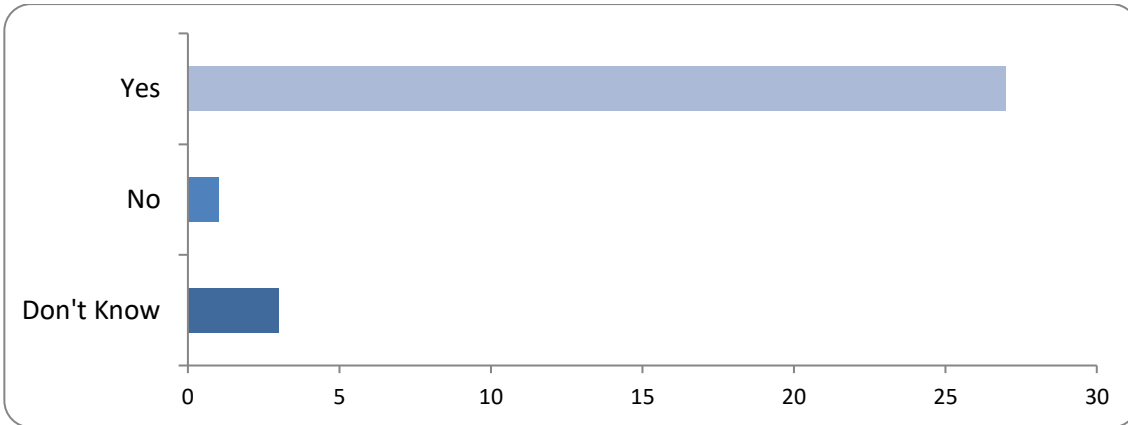


Option	Total	Percent
Yes	22	70.97%
No	2	6.45%
Don't Know	7	22.58%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

14: Should Northumberland continue to make Top Up payments to learners without EHCPS?

Yes/No/Don't Know

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

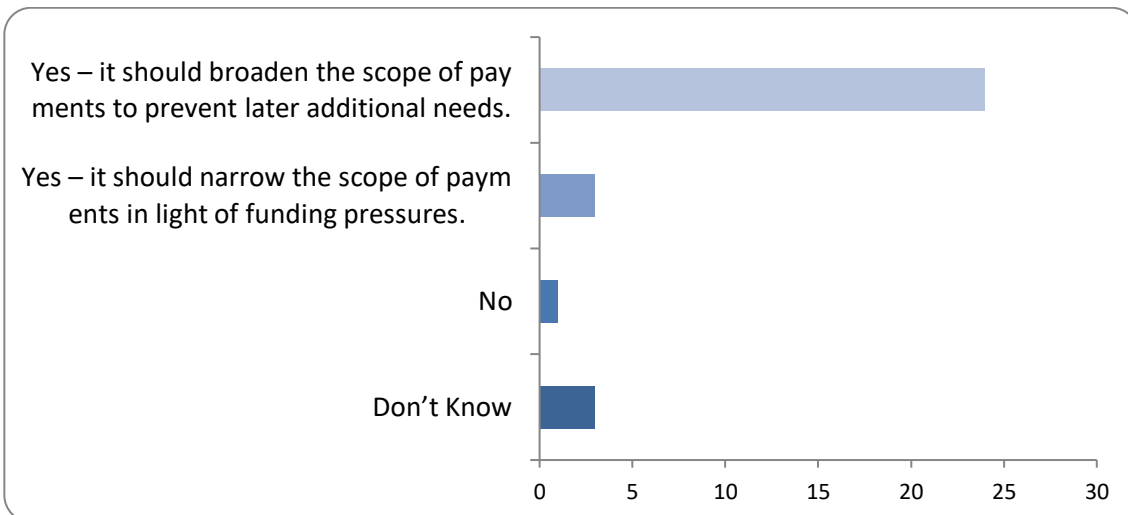


Option	Total	Percent
Yes	27	87.10%
No	1	3.23%
Don't Know	3	9.68%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

15: Should Northumberland review the scope of Top Up payments to learners without EHCPs ?

Yes – it should broaden the scope of payments to prevent later additional needs; Yes – it should narrow the scope of payments in light of funding pressures; No; Don't Know

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.



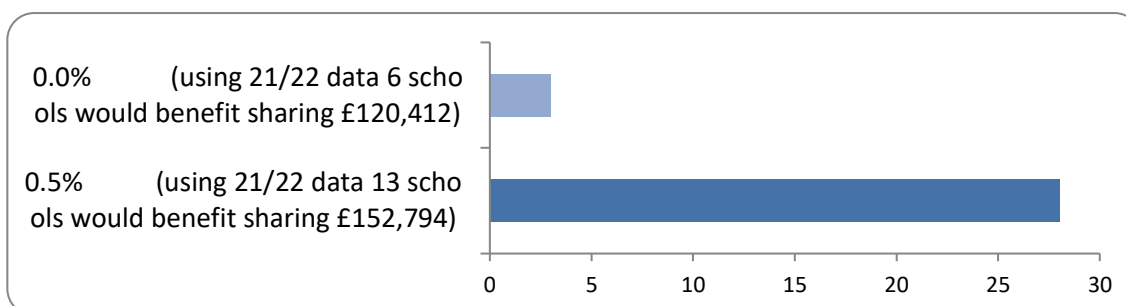
Option	Total	Percent
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Yes – it should broaden the scope of payments to prevent later additional needs.	24	77.42%
Yes – it should narrow the scope of payments in light of funding pressures.	3	9.68%
No	1	3.23%
Don't Know	3	9.68%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

16: At what level do you believe Northumberland's MFG should be set for 2024/25

0.0% (using 21/22 data 6 schools would benefit sharing £120,412); **0.25%** (using 21/22 data 6 schools would benefit sharing £131,350); **0.5%** (using 21/22 data 13 schools would benefit sharing £152,794)

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

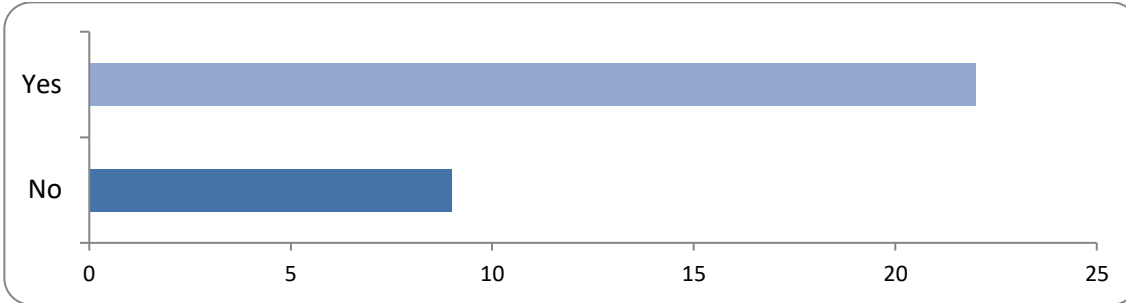


Option	Total	Percent
0.0% (using 21/22 data 6 schools would benefit sharing £120,412)	3	9.68%
0.25% (using 21/22 data 6 schools would benefit sharing £131,350)	0	0.00%
0.5% (using 21/22 data 13 schools would benefit sharing £152,794)	28	90.32%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

17: Do you support the potential use of capping and scaling as part of the 2024/25 School Budget setting process?

Yes/No

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	22	70.97%
No	9	29.03%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

18: Please use the box below for any other comments that you have in relation to School Funding or SEN Finance:

Comment

There were 14 responses to this part of the question.