

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools' Forum on Wednesday, 17 January 2024 at 9.30 a.m. held virtually.

PRESENT

Alan Hardie, NCEA
(Chair, in the Chair)

Headteacher Representatives

A. Brown, Corbridge Middle School	A. Crawley, James Calvert Spence
M. Deane-Hall, Wooler and Glendale Middle School	College (substitute for N. Rodgers)

Governor Representatives

K. Faulkner, Collingwood School	B. Watson, St Robert's RC First School
B. Mansfield, Newbrough CE Primary School	G. Wilkins, St Wilfrid's RC Primary School

Academies Representatives

G Atkins, Hadrian Learning Trust	J. Wilson, The Duchess's
J. Holmes, Malvins Close Academy (part of Wise Academies Trust)	Community High School

Roman Catholic Diocese – Vacant Post

Church of England Diocese –

EYDCP-PVI – K. Dickinson

Pupil Referral Unit Representative – R. Carr

19-19 Provider of Education Representative – W. Stephenson

Trades Union Representative – Vacant Post

Ch.'s Initials.....

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

S. Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
M. Finlay	Head of Inclusive Education Services
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	Director of Education, SEND and Skills
A. Todd	Democratic Services Officer

32. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP DETAIL

- 32.1 Members were notified of two expressions of interest that had been received to join the Schools' Forum. These were from Joanne (Jo) Holmes, Headteacher at Malvins Close Academy (Primary School - part of Wise Academies Trust) and James Wilson, Co-Headteacher of The Duchess's Community High School.
- 32.1 Members agreed to the appointments and welcomed them both to join Schools' Forum as academy representatives.

RESOLVED that the appointments be agreed.

33. APOLOGIES

- 33.1 Apologies were received from B. Reed, A. Mead, N. Threlfall, N. Rodgers, Councillor R. Wearmouth and Councillor G. Renner-Thompson.

34. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 22 November 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

35. COMMUNICATIONS

- 35.1 Members were informed that the F40 Group had recently secured debate in the House of Commons to discuss SEN provision and funding. A full report on this was being prepared for discussion at the next Schools' Forum meeting.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Ch.'s Initials.....

36. SETTING THE 2024/25 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT

- 36.1 B. Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager informed Schools' Forum of the DSG settlement for 2024/25, as provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on 19 December 2023, and the proposed formula values for the allocation of funds to Schools for 2024/25. (A copy of the report has been filed with the signed minutes).
- 36.2 Regarding school consultations, this year's focussed mainly on SEN. Schools were consulted on the Schools' Forum decision to transfer up to 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. A total of 31 schools responded, numbers far higher than previous funding consultations. Information concerning the responses specifically related to the 2024/25 School Funding settlement and options were contained within the report. Details of the responses to the other SEN consultation questions were to be provided to the next meeting of Schools' Forum scheduled for February.
- 36.3 It was noted that members of the Schools' Forum representing mainstream schools would be asked to agree on a phase by phase basis to the de-delegation in respect of the services listed for 2024/25 using the per unit values, and estimated overall values as set out in the report.
- 36.4 It was noted that Schools' Forum had previously received reports outlining developments in relation to the National Funding Formula (NFF). The November 2023 report outlined the position to date, confirmed Northumberland's position as a local authority that now "mirrors the NFF in all factors". A transfer of up to 0.5% from the School Block to the High Needs Block was agreed, and it was noted that final decisions were delegated to the Executive Director of Children's Services once the final figures were received in December.
- 36.5 In the Chancellor's Autumn Statement 2023 it was stated that there was to be no additional funding available to schools. It was noted that the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant (MSAG) funding paid in 2023/24 had been consolidated into the DSG for 2024/25.
- 36.6 It was reported that Northumberland's total 2024/25 DSG allocation was £316,573,869, (£299,843,517 in 23/24) before any recoupment or deductions for academies, or any High Needs Adjustments.
- 36.7 Other influences on the 2024/25 Schools Block allocated figures were reported as:
- A continuing fall in the overall number of pupils.
 - A continuing shift in pupils from primary (down 476) to secondary (up 223).
 - Further increases in deprivation funding.

Ch.'s Initials.....

- 36.8 It was advised that the DSG remained as a ring-fenced grant subject to formal grant conditions. As in 2023/24, the DSG was split into four blocks and each block would be determined by a separate national funding formula.

Early Years Block

- 36.9 Members were advised that the Northumberland Early Years National Funding Formula hourly rate for 3 and 4-year-olds had increased further to £5.47 for 2024/25. 13p of this reported uplift included the Teacher Pay and Pensions Grant (TPPG). This grant had historically gone directly to schools and not been a recorded part of the Early Years Block. It was proposed that for 2024/25 this be kept within the early years hourly rate and passported to all providers to support the whole sector with rising staffing and business costs.
- 36.10 It was reported that the Northumberland Early Years National Funding Formula hourly funding rate for 2-year-olds had increased by 23p to £7.50 for 2024/25. The Northumberland Early Years National Funding Formula hourly funding rate for under 2-year-olds was £10.20 for 2024/25.
- 36.11 The Disability Access Fund (DAF) annual rate had been increased to £910 and been extended to meet all age ranges for the extended entitlement roll out.
- 36.12 The Early Years Pupil Premium hourly rate had increased by 6p to 68p per hour for 2024/25 and would also be extended to all age ranges.
- 36.13 It was noted that the Early Years Block expenditure beyond the hourly rates, SEND and deprivation payments also included the Early Years Team. The Team supported around 400 providers and families with high quality training, assessment, guidance, Ofsted preparation, SEND, funding, sustainability and business management. Historically Northumberland settings had received a pass through of above 95%. For 2024/25 this was to be over 97%.
- 36.14 Members acknowledged the excellent work carried out by the Early Years Team and supported the allocation of funds to this area.
- 36.15 The initial allocation for the Early Years Block for 2024/25 was £30,293,355. Both the EYPP and the DAF include allocations for 2 year olds and under 2s for 2024/25. It included an initial allocation of £18,271,269 for 3 and 4-year-olds and an initial allocation of £2,857,197 for disadvantaged 2 -year-old children.
- 36.16 Members noted that as in previous years, all allocations were indicative and based on the January 2023 census. In the light of the January 2024 and January 2025 census data the figures would be revised.
- 36.17 The proposal for 2024/25 rates were based on the principles of-
- Passing on the maximum funding possible to providers to support all equally.
 - Maintaining the two-year-old base rate.
 - Passing on the full DAF uplift to providers.

Ch.'s Initials.....

- Maintaining the Northumberland Pupil Premium Plus rates.

36.18 Members welcomed the passing on of the maximum funding possible to providers. This would benefit providers but acknowledged that this would be offset by increases to pay, fuel and other running costs in this difficult financial climate. The potential drop in numbers of fee paying children would also impact on the amount of money coming into PVI Early Years settings. The change in eligibility was also a concern to providers as there could be an increase in demand which might not be able to be met due to building sizes, particularly in those Early Years settings within schools.

High Needs Block

36.19 The latest indicative High Needs Block (HNB) allocation for 2024/25 was £53,831,547, a 5.4% uplift on the 2023/24 figure of £51,072,682. The current 2024/25 allocation after ESFA deductions for High Needs place funding is £50,385,547.

36.20 Work was continuing on the detail of the total requirements within the High Needs Block, and it was recommended that the total 2024/25 budget for the High Needs Block was set at this time, with the detailed breakdown of that funding into the various services being provided to the Schools' Forum meeting on 14 February 2024, together with details of the School Funding consultation responses.

Schools Block

36.21 Members were advised that the 2024/25 total Schools Block was £229,709,652, before the deduction for rates of £2,533,172, as detailed within the report. As agreed by Schools' Forum at the meeting on 17 November 2023 and the subsequent consultation with schools, a maximum transfer of £ 1,148,548 (0.5%) of the Schools Block to the High Needs block was available. This enabled Northumberland to continue to fund all formula values at NFF levels, but this was only possible through the use of £1,060,895 funding allocated to NCC to fund any required growth on a year to year basis, and through the application of capping and scaling measures. Without these measures it would not be possible to fund at NFF levels.

36.22 It was anticipated that there would be no further contribution to the growth fund or the falling rolls fund in 2024/25.

36.23 A concern was raised about utilising the NCC funding available for growth and application of capping and scaling measures to reach the NFF levels. It was questioned whether this was sustainable and whether there would be any long-term implications for using this funding in this way. In response it was confirmed that this had been raised to the EFSA as without cross subsidising from NCC the formula values at NFF level would not be met. This issue would continue to be raised through the F40 Group.

Ch.'s Initials.....

- 36.24 As reported to the November 2023 meeting, the only disapplication request made to the ESFA in respect of 2024/25 is in respect of the transfer of funds between Schools within the Coquet partnership. This had been approved by the ESFA. No further contribution to the growth fund or the falling rolls fund was anticipated in 2024/25.
- 36.25 It was noted that as in previous years, it was intended to provide maintained schools with their 2024/25 budget via the Schools E-courier bulletin by the ESFA deadline of 29 February 2023. The equivalent figures for academies will be included for illustrative purposes only; the ESFA was responsible for the provision of the general annual grant statements to academies for the period from September 2024 to August 2025 by 31 March 2024.

De-Delegation

- 36.26 Members were reminded that the School and Early Years Finance Regulations permitted that certain services could have funding centrally retained by the de-delegation of funding from maintained schools. Academies, special schools and the PRU were free to purchase these services, either through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) or on a Pay As You Go basis.

Central School Services Block

- 36.27 Members were informed that the 2024/25 allocation for this block was £2,157,405. This reduction in the historic element was expected and had previously been reported.
- 36.28 As with the High Needs Budget, the overall budget would be set at £2,157,405 in line with the allocation, with the details of the budget being provided to the February Schools' Forum meeting.
- 36.29 Following on for the detailed report and presentation it was **RESOLVED** that Schools' Forum:
- (a) note this report and the information provided in respect of the various elements of the 2024/25 Dedicated Schools Grant.
 - (b) note the Early Years Block budget to be set at the DfE allocation of £30,293,355 as detailed in Annex 1.
 - (c) note the 3- and 4-year-old rate will increase with a 29p uplift from £4.91 (2023/24) to £5.20 per hour (2024/25).
 - (d) note the 2-year-old rate will be maintained at £7.27 per hour (2024/25).
 - (e) note the under 2-year-old rate will be introduced at £9.87 per hour (2024/25).
 - (f) note the budget for the High Needs Block will be set at £50,385,547, after the deduction by the ESFA for the place funding outlined at Annex 1.
 - (g) agree that the various budgets within the High Needs Block be set at the meeting on 14 February 2024.
 - (h) note the budget for the Schools Block to be set provisionally at £227,176,480, before the deduction of a proposed amount of £444,626 in respect of de-

Ch.'s Initials.....

delegation. This figure is further reduced to £225,606,850 after the transfer of £1,125,004 to the High Needs Block.

- (i) note that the School budget shares be provisionally constructed based on the formula values shown the final column of Table 1 of the report, including an MFG value of 0.5%, and capping and scaling values of 2.13% and 75% respectively subject to any adjustments required once the ESFA's decision is known.
- (i) note that delegated powers to the Executive Director of Children's Services to set the final formula values was agreed at the 17 November 2023 Schools Forum meeting.
- (k) Members of the Schools' Forum representing maintained mainstream schools agree on a phase by phase basis to the de-delegation in respect of the four services listed above for 2024/25 using the per unit values, and estimated overall values as set out in the final column of Annex 1 of the report.
- (l) note the budget for the Central Schools Services Block will be set at £2,157,405 as set out in Annex 1 of the report.

37. 2024 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES

- 37.1 The schedule of dates had been circulated with the agenda papers and a copy filed with the signed minutes.

It was suggested that a meeting of the HN Committee be convened before the next meeting of Schools' Forum in February to discuss emerging funding issues. It was agreed for officers to discuss with the Chair of the HN Committee outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

38. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the next scheduled meeting of the Schools' Forum will be Wednesday, 14 February 2024.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

Ch.'s Initials.....