



# Northumberland County Council

## Wellbeing and Community Health Services Group

Education and Skills Service

Meeting: High Needs Sub Committee of the Schools Forum  
 Date: Wednesday  
 Time: 09.30am  
 Venue: Virtual Teams Meeting

<p><b>Present:</b>  <b>Graham Wilkins</b> Chair and Governor at St Wilfrid's RC Primary School  <b>Graeme Atkins</b> Headteacher, Hadrian Learning Trust  <b>Andrea Mead</b> Headteacher Hillcrest  <b>Barry Reed</b> Headteacher, Gilbert Ward Academy  <b>Richard Carr</b>, Headteacher, Northumberland PRU  <b>Jo Holmes</b>, Malvin's Close Academy  <b>Richard Wearmouth</b>, Councillor  <b>Jessica Conway</b> Head of SEND  <b>Sarah Smith</b> Headteacher, Scremerston First School</p>	<p><b>Ben Watson</b> Business Director          Seaton Valley Federation  <b>Peter Monaghan</b>, Northumberland College (FE Representative)  <b>David Street</b> Director of Education  <b>Bruce Parvin</b> Education &amp; Skills Business Manager  <b>Amanda Gilchrist</b> SEN Finance Officer  <b>Abigail Russell</b> Finance Manager  <b>Callum Street</b> Principal Accountant  <b>James Andriot</b> Headteacher James Calvert Spence College  <b>Hannah Brown</b> TU representative</p>
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Notes Lisa Headington

1.	Welcome and Introductions	Action
2.	<b>In Attendance</b>  See above	
3.	<b>Apologies:</b> Sue Aviston	
4.	<b>Declaration of personal or pecuniary Interest in any agenda item.</b>  No declaration of pecuniary interest declared by members.	
5.	<b>Minutes of the previous meeting/Matters arising from Previous Minutes:</b>  The minutes of the previous meeting were noted and accepted as a true record by those present at the last meeting, G Wilkins (Chair) had submitted apologies and this was recorded.	
6.	<b>FINANCIAL UPDATE (attached)</b>  CS presented an update on the 2024/25 DSG. SEN Top Ups to mainstream and special school continues to be the largest element of this pressure, offset to a small extent by underspending in SEN Support Service teams. As a result of the High Needs pressures, the overall DSG position will move from surplus to deficit with effect from the 2024/25 year end, this is currently estimated as a £6.041 million deficit, with an in-year deficit of £7.200 million. Decrease in independent special schools though have had an Increases in social care placements have resulted in increased independent special school costs, while education placements continue to managed effectively.  The refund on personal budgets have reduced the overall personal budget forecast, but the trend is upwards and this will be much higher in future years.	

	<p>Staffing has been a slight saving due to a health contribution.</p>	
	<p>BP stated that in relation to the £112,000 overspend on notional payment, these are now being paid at the start not end of term to create a small saving where possible. Savings in personal budget have been due to audits carried out by the SEN Finance Officer. GW asked about National Insurance increases, but BP indicated that final information was still awaited regarding this. AR confirmed this. RW indicated that there has been some funding received but this does not cover the full amount.</p> <p>GA confirmed that the growth in top ups had a fundamental impact on the budget, but queried what it was we were trying to achieve ? w To balance the budget or seek further funding via the safety valve programme or other Government SEN interventions. If no further funding it needs to be a change of mindset and expectations with parents. If we obliged to do this then we have no option then we need to accept otherwise we need to cut cloth and work with what we have.</p> <p>JC confirmed this is a national issue and Northumberland were ahead of the game in terms of forecasting and understanding position. Agreed are we getting the outcomes we need and we need to be SMARTer – is the funding meeting the provision in the plan? Need to relook at the EHCP’s and the outcomes that come with that. Northumberland are in a better position than many other authorities across the country.</p> <p>DS stated the desire to spend the money appropriately is reflected in our practice to get the monies into school to make a difference. Impacted greatly by 125% more EHCP’s in 5 years.</p> <p>Need to look at effectiveness and efficiency and best way to save is educate at most local school and while there are costs arising, this is better than alternatives.</p> <p>GW asked about safety value options. DS suggested the options were for increased scrutiny via the safety valve programme, following ESFA advice on how to decrease overspend, or seeking to do this independently . Some research, and references in the PAC January 2025 report, suggested little overall impact. GW asked if deficits were written off as part of the safety valve programme ? BP said this was not the case but the ESFA agreed a contribution as part of a move towards an overall balanced budget.</p> <p>BP suggested it should be considered as part of the overall Education funding system, not in isolation. When the final transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block was being considered, if 1% had been taken, this would have been difficult for school budgets.</p> <p>GA expressed an appreciation that the lower 0.5% transfer has been agreed. A national solution was needed.for SEN. Schools should support inclusion, but needed a balanced approach. GA – it would not be good for central government to mandate and we are doing the right thing but could there be a national solution? SEMH impacts school behaviour and ADHD for extremes which is what impacts exclusion. DS agreed, in terms of meeting need and doing this as close to home as possible.</p>	

	<p>Could the top ups and funding be using these to plug other school funding gaps? GA responded they have not done this but there is a greater amount of higher needs to address which has increased their requests and spending on staffing to support this.</p> <p>JA agreed with Graeme Atkins, need to consider 66% increase in students with SEMH at his school which is having a huge impact on funding and AP and specialist staff. This is 3 times the national average which is having a huge impact on schools as need to be able to finance this.</p> <p>BR indicated a need to be specific re SEND needs; SEMH needs to be explored as there remained opportunities for students to return to mainstream schools. He indicated 20-30% of children in special schools could move back to mainstream and how can we support them back. Parents were central to this.</p> <p>GW agreed that Jessica and David could work on this to get learners back to mainstream</p> <p>GA said it needed curriculum flexibility and creative thinking to allow those back into mainstream. Consequently inclusion increases, exclusions go down, attendance increases. As an authority we should look at schools and curriculum more creatively to address this.</p> <p>GW asked GA if they can provide a report on how they have addressed need and the actual impact this has had longer term. Need to consider the whole curriculum design, interventions and then standard curriculum</p> <p>JH said we need to consider the significant needs coming into early years and the impact this is going to have</p> <p>GW confirmed this reflected his experience in school.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	<p><b>SEN Public Accounts Committee Report January 2025</b></p> <p>BP highlighted some elements for consideration :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SEN system is unaffordable and puts significant strain on local authorities.</li> <li>• Forecast £4.6 billion deficit</li> <li>• Best way to reduce transport costs is to educate a child in their local community</li> <li>• 2.7% – 7.5% of children with plans across the country – we have 6.5% which is higher than national average.</li> <li>• Need to share good practice across schools and areas.</li> <li>• 98% of tribunals are lost by local authorities</li> </ul> <p>It was important for the Government to set out what children with SEN should expect, what inclusive education means and how it could be met.</p> <p>DS said issue is code of practice dictates this already, identification may increase plans and support. He met regularly with other local authorities, and wondered whether a north east response could be taken.</p> <p>AM said we need to look at teacher training and give our teachers the confidence and skills. All should work within a special school to gain this.</p> <p>JC indicated working with health partners important to consider early identification and this was reflected in the parent carer forum and the impact this has on SEN and impact delays have on addressing needs.</p> <p>BP highlighted the reports finding for ICB's to consider SEN as part of wider priorities.</p> <p>Report recommendation was to have plan in place for financial solution by March 2026, should be published by March 2025 where possible.</p> <p>Northumberland have a very small proportion of plans that go to tribunal which is beneficial as cost implication of this. GA asked if we could look at the most 'successful' authorities to see if there are lessons we can learn from them.</p>	

8.	<p><b>SEN and EHCP data</b></p> <p>BP presented the latest data, 4104 EHCPs, 107 (2.6%) increase since mid November reported of 3997.</p> <p>Were supporting 853 Plans in mainstream in 2021 now there are 1445 in mainstream at Summer 2024</p> <p>GW highlighted PAC figure stating 41.6% getting plans within 20 weeks, compared to 60% currently. DS indicated projection for this year was 800 more plans and this is accurate so far.</p> <p>Turn down rate was about 7% and is now 27% so while increasing the agreements are far more robust and this is linked with significance of need.</p>	
9.	<p>DS reiterated that many things that are happening are very favourable and positive. Brilliant work is going on, tribunal figures are low and parents are happy. These represented Northumberland's successes</p> <p>JC noted that the offer in Northumberland is above anything she has seen in other authority areas. Joined up approach is very strong and focus on inclusion and not exclusion and knowledge of SEND is very strong. Great multi agency approach.</p>	
10.	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <p>GW thanked members for their attendance and participation and reminded all of the School Forum date of 19 February 2025.</p>	
	The meeting closed at 10.50 a.m.	