

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools' Forum on Wednesday, 22 January 2025 at 9.30 a.m. held virtually.

PRESENT

A. Hardie, NCEA
(Chair, in the Chair)

Headteacher Representatives

M. Deane-Hall, Wooler and Glendale
Middle School

A. Mead, Cramlington Hillcrest
School

J. Androit, James Calvert Spence
Collage

Governor Representatives

B. Mansfield, Newbrough CE Primary
School

B. Watson, St Robert's RC First
School

K. Faulkner, Collingwood School and
Media Arts College

G. Wilkins, St Wilfrid's RC Primary
School

Academies Representatives

G Atkins, Hadrian Learning Trust

B. Reed, Gilbert Ward Academy

J. Wilson, The Duchess's
Community High School

Roman Catholic Diocese – Vacant Post

EYDCP-PVI –

16-19 Provider of Education Representative – W. Stephenson

Trades Union Representative – Vacant Post

Councillor R. Wearmouth (observer)

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OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

S. Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
L. Dixon	Assistant Democratic Officer
A. Kingham	Executive Director - Children, Young People and Education
V. McLeod	Director of Children, Young People and Families
B. Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
C. Street	Principal Accountant
D. Street	Director of Education, SEND and Skills

01. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 01.1 The Forum received notice of the resignation of J. Wilson, (the Duchess School). J Andriot(Headteacher - James Calvert Spence College) has expressed an interest to join Schools Forum as a maintained secondary school representative and was formally welcomed to his first Forum.

There was a vacancy for a position on the Forum as an Early Years representative. A few interests had been shown in the position however, no one had been appointed the position at that time.

02. APOLOGIES

- 02.1 Apologies were received from D. Cookson, A. Russell, S. Smith, J. Holmes, N. Threlfall and R. Carr.

03. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

- 03.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 27 November 2024, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

04. COMMUNICATIONS

- 04.1 Public Accounts Committee SEN paper (Jan 2025)

B Parvin introduced the report to Forum members. The Forum agreed to an in-depth discussion would take place in the High Needs Committee meeting, scheduled for 5th February 2025 on the Public Accounts Committee SEN paper.

In response to a question, the Forum were informed that the figures on the percentage of children aged 5 to 15 with Education and Health Care (EHC) plans

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were from 2023/24 and had subsequently been updated. The percentage of new EHC plans issued within 20 weeks was around 60% in this year's figures.

It was **AGREED** that the report would go to the High Needs Committee and would be shared before the meeting start date. Key focus on the report was to take place at the High Needs Committee.

05. SETTING THE 2025/26 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT

05.1 B Parvin introduced the report and drew members attention to the recommendations to consider when reviewing the report.

05.2 Schools Forum had previously received reports outlining developments in relation to the National Funding Formula (NFF). The November 2024 report outlined the position to date, confirmed Northumberland's position as a local authority that currently "mirrors the NFF in all factors". The ESFA classified "mirroring the NFF" as being within 2.5% of the respective NFF Factors.

A 2-phase agreement had been made in relation to the transfer of funds from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, involving an initial agreement of up to 0.5%, plus the potential to transfer a further 0.5% subject to the final figures received. This also required the agreement of the Secretary of State for Education. It was noted that final decisions were delegated to the Executive Director of Children, Young People and Education and The Cabinet Member for Inspiring Young People once the final figures were received in December.

The 2025/26 basic Schools Block DSG Grant figure is £244,936,033, which is some £15,226,381 (6.6%) higher than the equivalent 2024/25 figure of £229,709,652. However, this did not represent a like for like comparison, as the Teachers' Pay Additional Grant (TPAG), Teachers Pension Employer Contribution Grant (TPECG) and Core Schools Budget Grant (CSBG) have been rolled into the DSG for 2025/26.

The most significant influence on the 2025/26 Schools Block was the fall in pupil numbers in mainstream schools between reception and year 11. Numbers fell by 253 for 2024/25, but the October 2024 figures showed a further fall of 607 pupils, split between Primary and Secondary schools. Various factors contributed to the fall in pupil numbers such as birthrate or increased numbers of students in special schools.

05.3 Early Years Block (total 2025/26 EY Block funding £42 531 750)

Significant growth to funded entitlements were introduced in 2024/25 as part of the Government support package for working parents. This included the introduction of 15 hours funded childcare for working parents of children from 9 months from September 2024 increasing to 30 hours from September 2025. As a result, there were a corresponding increase in the total Early Years Block for 24/25 of 58% compared to the previous year. This growth continued at a further 40% in 25/26.

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The proposals for 2025/26 rates were based on the 3 principles:

1. Passporting as much funding to providers as possible by maximising the base rates for all.
2. Maintaining deprivation supplement for 3 and 4-year-olds to further support a substantial raise from DfE in EYPP rates and the council's equalities agenda.
3. Maintaining the Send Inclusion Fund (SENIF) budget from this year as we 'test' the full extended roll out.

A presentation was given at this point by D Street. The presentation outlined the proposed local funding formula changes for 2025/26. The proposed changes were:

- 2% retained for central costs across all age ranges (4% allowable)
- 1.5% of 3- and 4-year-old retained for deprivation supplement for this age range only (mandatory) maintaining current budget
- 0.35% across all age ranges for inclusion fund (SENIF) maintaining current budget

Any DAF funding left over would be reinvested into Early Years SEND.

The Northumberland Early Years National Funding Formula hourly rate for 3 and 4-year-olds had increased further to £5.71 (4.4%) for 2025/26.

The Northumberland Early Years National Funding Formula hourly funding rate for 2-year-olds had increased by 22p to £7.72 (2.9%) for 2025/26.

The Northumberland Early Years National Funding Formula hourly funding rate for under 2-year-olds had increased by 27p to £10.47 (2.6%) for 2025/26.

The Disability Access Fund (DAF) annual rate had been increased from £910 (2024/25) to £938 (2025/26) for all age ranges.

The funding rate figures and DfE allocation of £42,531,750 to the Early Years Block budget were **AGREED** by the Forum.

05.4 High Needs Block (total 2025/26 HN Block Funding £58,749,453)

The latest indicative High Needs Block (HNB) allocation for 2025/26 was £58,749,453, a 7.9% uplift on the 2024/25 figure of £54,413,457. These figures were before deductions of £4,178,000 by the ESFA for direct funding of places by the ESFA of Pre and Post 16 in Academies, Post 16 in maintained special schools and post 16 in Independent Learning Providers (ILP) and Further Education (FE) establishments. The 2025/26 allocation after these deductions was £54,571,453. This figure included a £591,000 reduction in respect of the net import export adjustments.

Work continued on the detail of the total requirements within the High Needs Block, and it was recommended that the total 2025/26 budget for the High Needs Block was set at this time, with the detailed breakdown of that funding into the various services

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being provided to the Schools Forum meeting on 19 February 2025. Setting the overall total for the High Needs Block was necessary at this time as final decisions in relation to the Schools Block had to be made before the deadline of 22 January 2025 for submitting the APT and final mainstream school formula values to the DfE.

The Forum **AGREED** that the various budgets within the High Needs Block be set at the meeting on 15 February 2025.

05.5 Schools Block (Total 2025/26 Schools Block funding £244,936,033)

A presentation was given to the Forum.

The 2025/26 Primary unit of funding (per pupil figure) was £5,774.86 (£5,333.55 in 2024/25) and the Secondary unit of funding was £7,091.74 (£6,549.43 in 2024/25), which when multiplied by the pupil numbers gives an initial allocation of £240,498,709 (£215,114,179 in 2023/24). The addition of a fixed amount in respect of Growth and Premises of £4,437,324 gives a total Schools Block of £244,936,033, before the deduction for rates of £2,851,456.

The final Schools Block settlement was some £3.7 million less than the previous indicative allocation published in November, primarily due to the fall in pupil numbers.

It had been agreed through delegated powers to seek a final transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. Subject to the final agreement of the ESFA to the school funding proposals for 2025/26, a transfer of £1,224,081 enabled the School Block to be distributed in line with the funding factors. As in 2024/25 this was only possible after the use of the part of the Growth funding allocation to fund in part the transfer to the High Needs block.

There was an overall School Block allocation to Northumberland of £244.936 million which meant it was not possible to make payments in line with National Funding Factors for 2025/26, which would cost an estimated £245.292 million. With a 0.5% transfer of £1.224 million, the overall shortfall would be £1.580 million. It had been necessary to review rates for Northumberland, and in setting the final rates, officers had avoided any reductions to 2024/25 formula rates for 2025/26, and increased elements such as AWPU by the same % increases across both Primary and Secondary schools.

As part of School Place Planning for September 2025, it had been identified that 2 additional year 7 classes would be necessary in Morpeth at the King Edwards VI (KEVI) Academy. In line with the Growth Policy previously ratified by Schools Forum these were to be funded at AWPU only using Growth funding for the period from September 2025 to March 2026. The cost of this is estimated to be £187,600.

The Forum **AGREED** to note the Schools Block funding and **AGREED** the growth funding of £187,600 to support two additional year 7 classes at KEVI.

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05.6 De-Delegation

The School and Early Years Finance Regulations permitted that certain services were able to have funding retained by the de-delegation of funding from maintained schools expect academies, with approval from the relevant members of the Schools Forum. Academies were able to purchase these services, either through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) or on a Pay As You Go basis. Special Schools and the PRU were not affected by the de-delegation but can also participate through the SLA or on a Pay As You Go basis.

A total of £422,189 was available through de-delegated funding in 4 different services:

- Contingency Fund for School Restructure and Re-organisation costs (£285,108)
- Determination of FSM Eligibility (£21,684)
- Trades Union Facility Time (£46,330)
- English as an Additional Language (EAL) services (£69,067)

The Forum **AGREED** the recommendation that on a phase-by-phase basis to the de-delegation in respect of the four services listed above for 2025/26 using the per unit values and estimated overall values.

05.7 Central School Service Block (Total 2025/26 CSSB funding £2,202,970)

The 2025/26 allocation for this block was £2,202,970, a figure £45,565 (2.1%) higher than the 2024/25 allocation of £2,157,405.

The overall High Needs budget will be set at £2,202,970 in line with the allocation, with the details of the budget being provided to the February Schools Forum meeting.

It was **AGREED** that the Central Schools Services Block would be set at £2.202,970.

06. 2025 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES

- 06.1 B Parvin ran through the work programme and informed members of an error made for the High Needs Committee scheduled for 3rd February 2025, the meeting was scheduled for the 5th February 2025.

AGREED that the work programme be noted.

07. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 07.1 **AGREED** that the date of the next meeting was to be held on 19th February 2025 at 9.30am.

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CHAIR _____

DATE _____

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