

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a virtual meeting of the Schools' Forum on Wednesday, 29 September 2021 at 9:30 am.

PRESENT

C Pearson (in the Chair)
Trustee, Three Rivers Learning Trust

Headteacher Representatives

F Hartland, Kielder Primary	B Ryder, Berwick Middle
N Threlfall, Vincent Edwards Primary	N Brannen, Whalton C of E Primary

Governor Representatives

K Faulkner, Collingwood School and Media Arts College	B Watson, St Robert's RC First I Walker, Duchess' High G Wilkins, St Wilfrid's RC Primary
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Academies Representatives

G Atkins, Queen Elizabeth High Alan Hardie (NCEA Trust), A Crawley (Substitute JCSC)	A Thelwell, Bede Academy S Wild, NCEA Castle
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Church of England Diocese - Nicola Threlfall

Early Years' Representative – Kath Dickinson

Trades Union Representative - Not present

16 - 19 Provider of Education Representative - Not present

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OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
H Bowers	Democratic Services Officer
A Kingham	Director of Education and Skills
B Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
C Ponting	Senior Manager, Schools HR
A Russell	Principal Accountant
D Street	Deputy Director of Education
N Taylor	Head of Inclusive Education Services

13. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 13.1 Mr Parvin took the opportunity to welcome Nichola Brannen from the Federation of Whalton and Longhorsley and welcomed her to her first meeting. There were still vacancies for representatives to join the forum.

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from M Deane-Hall.

15. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 07 July 2021, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising:

- 15.1 The Chair asked that thanks be conveyed to Andrea Todd, Democratic Services Officer for collation of agenda papers and reports which had made it easier to read. Mr Parvin said he would pass these thanks on.
- 15.2 Minute 90.6: No-one had come forward as Chair or Vice Chair of the Funding Formula Committee, but the Chair was aware of two potential candidates and would contact them.
- 15.3 Minute 92.1: Outcome of retrieval of money from Bright Tribe. As Councillor Renner- Thompson was not at the meeting an update was provided by Mrs Audrey Kingham. She had met with the Regional Schools Commissioner who had no plans to recover the money. The matter was between DfE and Bright Tribe but the

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forum's view regarding the matter had been shared with the Regional Schools Commissioner and DfE.

- 15.4 Minute 92.2: The Capital Investment Plan was on the agenda. The new School Organisation Plan would be presented at a later meeting.
- 15.5 Mrs Kingham referred to inaccuracies in the minutes to her name and stated that she was no longer Interim Director of Education and Skills. The Chair gave his apologies and the inaccuracies were noted. The Chair gave his congratulations to Mrs Kingham.
- 15.6 The ongoing nature of the meetings would be virtual for the foreseeable future.
- 15.7 Minute 94.9: The membership, terms of reference and powers of the Schools Forum would be published.
- 15.8 Minute 95.6: Mr Parvin stated that the minute recorded that the Deputy Director of Education had suggested the forum may wish to consider using the surplus DAF to support early years, whilst this was welcomed it would be an authority decision and the prime focus would be to address the underspend of the DAF and how it would be continued to be allocated.

Mr Street added that this was an ongoing work stream to try and allocate to those learners that were entitled to it. There were a number of providers who had not been able to access grants available.

- 15.9 Minute 95.9: There had been a number of Central Government grants available to the early years sector to support them through Covid and loss of income, but some had not qualified. The end of the year finance for the early years team had developed internal grants to anyone in Northumberland who had not been able to get a grant through the business scheme and had demonstrated they had had a loss of income. A number of grants had been paid and if there was any funding left available, it was hoped to get that out to those who were applicable.

16. COMMUNICATION

- 16.1 Mr Parvin referred to the draft minutes of the Formula Funding meeting which were included in the agenda pack. Another Formula Funding committee was scheduled for 3 November, which would take place two weeks before the Schools Forum meeting and would include the formal consultation for 22/23.

(The next agenda item was brought forward)

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17. FAIR FUNDING FOR ALL: COMPLETING THE REFORMS TO THE NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA

- 17.1 Mr Parvin stated that the DfE consultation had previously been circulated and discussed at the Formula Funding Committee. Members received a presentation prepared by the F40 group regarding the DfE consultation which commenced on 8 July and would end on 30 September. He explained the background and the scope of the consultation together with the consultation questions and proposed responses. The presentation would be circulated after the meeting. Any members wishing to submit a response, should do so by the close of play on 29 September.
- 17.2 In response to a comment regarding the moving all Schools to being funded on an academic year basis, Mr Parvin advised that he did have concerns about the impact on the consolidation of maintained school finances into the local authority accounts.
- 17.3 Mr Atkins commented on the benefit of aligning the financial year with the academic year.

18. SCHOOLS FORUM CAPITAL UPDATE

- 18.1 Sue Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources highlighted some of the key facts in the report which initially had been produced for the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and gave an update on the level of investment in academies and maintained schools.

The key issues were:

- A continual challenge for schools and the local authority in maintaining the school estate costs with a backlog of £57m of maintenance, which continued to be a challenge to keep schools safe and open
 - Growing capacity in the demand for places, eg Chantry and Newminster
 - Surplus places where there was not the demand; there were nearly 9000 surplus places in October 2020.
- 18.2 In response to a question regarding surplus places, Mrs Aviston stated that this continued to move upwards; the figures would be in the public domain shortly. There were less children in schools than there were 5 years previously, particularly in the rural counties. The information could be circulated to staff following the Family and Children's Overview and Scrutiny meeting.
- 18.3 A further key issue was securing school funding, due to school partnership changes in its organisation, eg, Ponteland.
- 18.4 Overall, Northumberland County Council had invested a significant amount of funding in all of its schools. Since 2018, over £101m had been invested in delivering the school capital programme with 69 projects delivered in 63 schools,

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ranging from £19,000 to £43m. The detailed programmes were contained within the report.

- 18.5 The school capital investment programme covered smaller projects such as windows, boilers, etc contributing to 48 projects over £4.8m. There had been significant challenges on some of the projects due to Covid, with projects increasing in price and a shortage of materials.
- 18.6 Capital funding had been received from Central Government for nurseries to the value of £446,000.
- 18.7 Projects had been delivered to the value of £7m at St Benet Biscop School in Bedlington, due to reorganisation changes. Additional funding had also been received for educational infrastructure from housing developers with the first project rolled out at Stannington First School.
- 18.8 The next area of growing demand was in Special Schools, current funding from the DfE in growth capacity had been received in the region of £850,000 which did not address levels of demand.
- 18.9 Over the last 21 months, 5 projects of just over £3m had been delivered to special school sites at Ashdale, Hexham Primary and Hillcrest in Cramlington. There had been a successful bid for a special free school in Northumberland which had a target date of September 2022, but this had been delayed due to shortages in the construction market.
- 18.10 There had been two larger school builds at Darras Hall Primary and Morpeth First School, with a spend of £12.6m.
- 18.11 Haydon Bridge had received support investment due to re-organisation for 4 projects of £5.2 million and work had also been carried out at the old Haltwhistle Middle School which had been converted from a middle school to a primary school.
- 18.12 Ponteland School and the Leisure Centre had opened later due to the pandemic. Funding of £43m had brought together the high school, library and leisure centre and also included the fire station.
- 18.13 The first phase of the Academies Project Scheme had been delivered late due to the pandemic, but this had been completed and the second phase was due to be completed in April 2022.

The report was shared on line highlighting some of the projects.

- 18.14 The Chair requested that some narrative comments which had been received were covered in the report, specifically in relation to beneficiaries of S106 funding and when this could be accessed. Mr Parvin stated that he had already responded to the comments but explained that developers' contributions would be received subsequently on the delivery of capacity. Mrs Aviston added that when a

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development was on the watch list, a drive by would take place to consider housing numbers. S106 funding took time to come to fruition with staged payments and any funding being needing justification in terms of additional educational placements. Officers kept in regular touch with schools and the information was also published within the School Organisation Plan.

- 18.15 Mrs Aviston responded to a query regarding access to SCIP funding and advised that data was held for each school and buildings were independently surveyed, ranked and scored, however this could be re-prioritised if individual schools felt they had a case.
- 18.16 The report referred to the breakdown on some of the smaller projects. A specific mention was made to Cramlington Village Primary Schools for an outdoor class by Debbie Wylie and said that Sue and her team had gone over and above what was expected for the outdoor classroom. The room would be able help with speech and listening development and house and offer nursery places which also ran during the holidays. She thanked the team in supporting the application.

Mrs Aviston was thanked for the information.

19. NATIONAL FORMULA FUNDING AND SCHOOLS FUNDING UPDATE

- 19.1 Mr Parvin shared the report online and reported that at the meeting of the Schools Forum in November 2020, a two-step approach had been agreed to the adoption of national funding figures as shown in page 97 of the report. Work was being carried out to smooth the transition and providing a degree of protection to those schools who would benefit.

(Debbie Wylie left the meeting at 10.55).

- 19.2 Provisional figures indicated that funding could be delivered and new information from DSG figures, showed school funding increasing overall. Following the consultation around sparsity, the amount of funding distributed had been increased which was encouraging for Northumberland.
- 19.3 Central Schools services block - there was a reduction to on-going responsibilities which had put pressure on the Council. Engagement had continued with the ESFA in relation to this block, the representations had reflected some of the comments through the consultation.
- 19.4 Mr Parvin referred to the table for the national formula funding for 2022-23 and how much funding was allocated nationally and would mean implications for Key Stage 4 in Northumberland, where the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) figure was currently higher than NFF.

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- 19.5 Free School Meals (FSM) levels had been increased last year and was always subject to affordability, this was seen as an exceptional intervention for 2021/22 and would need to be looked at in terms of the balance for 2022/23 figures.
- 19.6 There were no proposals yet around capping and scaling but needed to be examined to see if it was required for 2022-23 and no growth figure were reflected yet in the provisional figures in Northumberland.
- 19.7 The proposals would be examined in more detail at the Formula Funding meeting on 3 November and the final consultation proposals would be brought back to Schools Forum on 17 November, with consultation with Schools through November and December, final figures received from the ESFA in December and a report to the Cabinet meeting in January 2022.

If any member wished to attend the next formula funding meeting, this would take place at 9:30 am on Wednesday 3 November.

Mr Parvin and his team were thanked for their hard work.

20. 2020/21 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES

- 20.1 Mr Parvin advised that a schedule of dates for the next academic year had been sent out.
- 20.2 The High Needs Committee meeting had been cancelled for October, but a further meeting would take place in December.

21. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would take place on Wednesday, 17 November 2021 at 9:30 am.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

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