

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **SCHOOLS' FORUM**

At a virtual meeting of the Schools' Forum on Wednesday, 17 November 2021 at 9:30 a.m.

#### **PRESENT**

G. Wilkins (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)  
St Wilfrid's RC Primary

#### **Headteacher Representatives**

N. Brannen, Whalton C of E Primary	A, Mead, Cramlington Hillcrest
M. Deane-Hall, Wooler First School	N. Rodgers, James Calvert Spence
F. Hartland, Kielder Primary	College

#### **Governor Representatives**

B Watson, St Robert's RC First

#### **Academies Representatives**

A. Hardie NCEA Trust	S Wild, NCEA Castle
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**Roman Catholic Diocese – N. Threlfall**

**Church of England Diocese – Vacant Post**

**EYDCP – PVI Representative – K. Dickinson**

**Pupil Referral Unit Representative – Vacant Post**

**Trades Union Representative – Vacant Post**

**16 - 19 Provider of Education Representative – Vacant Post**

**Northumberland County Council Elected Member – Councillor G. Renner-Thompson**

#### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Ch.'s Initials.....

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S. Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
S. Barron	Head of SEN Strategy and DCO
A. Kingham	Director of Education and Skills
B. Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
C. Pointing	Senior Manager - Schools HR
A. Russell	Principal Accountant - Non Team Leader
D. Street	Deputy Director of Education
N. Taylor	Head of Inclusive Education and SEN Transformation
A. Todd	Democratic Services Officer

## 22. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 22.1 Following a show of hands, it was **RESOLVED** to elect G. Wilkins, Vice-Chair of the Schools' Forum.
- 22.2 It was noted that due to illness the Chair of the Schools' Forum was unable to attend this meeting. As Vice-Chair, G. Wilkins agreed to chair.

## 23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 23.1 Apologies for absence were received from C. Pearson, B. Ryder, K. Faulkner, S. Hemmsley, G. Atkins, C. Hodgson, A. Thelwell, Councillor R. Wearmouth and D. Wylie.

## 24. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 29 September 2021, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendments:

A. Mead, Cramlington Hillcrest being added to the list of those present at the meeting.

### **Matters Arising:**

- 24.1 Minute No. 15.2: B. Watson had now been appointed as Chair and G. Wilkins as Vice-Chair of the Funding Formula Committee.
- 24.2 Minute No. 15.3: Regarding the outcome of retrieving money from Bright Tribe, it was confirmed that this was a matter between the DfE and the organisation. Officers were not aware of any resolution to try to claw back the public money. However, this was an important issue and the forum's views on the matter would continue to be shared with relevant bodies.

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## **25. COMMUNICATION: FFC Committee Draft Minutes of 3 November 2021**

25.1 The draft minutes of the Formula Funding Committee meeting held on 3 November 2021 were circulated with the agenda papers for information and a copy filed with the signed minutes. It was noted that the reports discussed at the last FFC Committee had subsequently been brought to the Schools' Forum for consideration today.

**RESOLVED** that the draft minutes of the Formula Funding Committee held on 3 November 2021 be noted.

## **26. SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLAN 2021-24**

26.1 S. Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources presented the School Organisation Plan 2021-2024 for Northumberland (which had been circulated with the agenda papers and a copy filed with the signed minutes).

26.2 The plan had already been considered by the relevant Scrutiny Committee, approved by Cabinet and been reported at a recent Headteacher conference.

26.3 It was noted that this was the second iteration of the School Organisation Plan 2021-2024 for Northumberland. This latest version of the plan covered the period 2021 to 2024 but would be subject to annual updates in order to capture changing information or circumstances relating to schools and academies as appropriate.

26.4 Attention was drawn to some additional or expanded sections of the new plan that the Schools Forum noted, in particular:

26.5 Section 4.2 of the Plan: Managing Surplus Places particularly small rural schools, to continue to provide education as close as possible to pupils' home communities. It was reported that the Haydon Bridge Partnership had the highest percentage of surplus places (43%) followed by Berwick (32%). Morpeth had the fewest number of surplus places (7%). There was also an emphasis on addressing surplus places in a way that reduced impact on the environment in support of the Council's Climate Change Plan Action Plan 2021-23.

26.6 Section 4.5 of the Plan: House Building included a table setting out the number of dwellings approved to be constructed by partnership over the next 5 years. It was stated that there were currently 100 houses being built in Haydon Bridge compared to over 1000 in Morpeth.

26.7 Section 7 of the Plan: School Partnerships which highlighted whether individual partnerships would be impacted by the house building (if any) planned for their area and whether there were any proposals for rebalancing of surplus places to be consulted upon as part of the annual Admissions Arrangements consultation. This would ensure that the maximum contribution could be sought where insufficient school places existed to help mitigate against the forecasted rise in demand.

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- 26.8 Section 6.1 of the Plan: Special Education Needs highlighted the intention to identify proposals for expansion of provision to meet the need of children and young people with ASD and SEMH in the county, which were the fastest growing groups of primary need in relation to SEND in Northumberland. The programme of work would support the Council's intention to increase SEND provision within Northumberland to enable children and young people to be educated closer to their home communities and reduce the lengths of their journeys to school.
- 26.9 In reply to a query on school admissions, it was reported that there were still a large number of school appeals being received even though Northumberland continued to have a high success rate in meeting parental preference. Northumberland remained a desirable area for education, particularly from parents living outside of the county.
- 26.10 Clarification was provided regarding developer contributions. It was confirmed that a school would need to be 95% full before a contribution was sought. However, some developers did offer gestures of goodwill to individual schools to help resource things such as IT equipment or school trips.
- 26.11 The Chair praised the team involved in writing this comprehensive and valuable plan which would be of assistance to schools and academies, parents and other stakeholders. The Plan would help them to understand how the availability of school places across the country was monitored, how the need for school places was identified and where necessary, how additional places were delivered and funded.

**RESOLVED** that the School Organisation Plan 2021-2024 for Northumberland be received.

## **27. SCHOOLS BLOCK NFF: SPARSITY CONSULTATION GOVERNMENT RESPONSE AND POTENTIAL CHANGES TO SPARSITY FUNDING 2022/23**

- 27.1 B. Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager provided information on the Government response on the Sparsity Funding consultation exercise and the implications of this for Northumberland Schools. The report was considered in conjunction with the NFF update and consultation update elsewhere on the agenda, and the associated proposals for 2022/23. (A copy of the report was shared with the forum and filed with the signed minutes).
- 27.2 It was reported that following the representations made previously by Northumberland, and the subsequent consultation, three key changes were to be implemented for 2022-23:
- School sparsity distances to be calculated by road journeys.
  - The maximum amount of sparsity funding a school can receive will be increased.
  - A distance taper threshold to be introduced.

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- 27.3 It was stated that the DfE response highlighted that the total allocation via the sparsity factor would increase to £95 million for 2022-23. In terms of the impact for Northumberland, estimated figures at this stage suggested that Northumberland would receive an increase of £719,269 in 2022/23, receiving in total £2.602million of the DfE total of £95 million. In comparison in 2020/21 Northumberland received only £1.175 million.
- 27.4 Therefore, the additional funding to be distributed via sparsity would be beneficial to Northumberland especially some of the more rural schools.

**RESOLVED** that the information provided and the additional £719,269 estimated funding for schools in Northumberland arising from the greater investment in sparsity at a national level, be noted.

## **28. SEN UPDATE**

- 28.1 N. Taylor, Head of Inclusive Education and SEN Transformation and S. Barron, Head of SEN Strategy and DCO provided an SEN update (a copy of the report had been circulated with the agenda papers and a copy filed with the signed minutes.
- 28.2 The update covered the following items:
- The SEND Revisit
  - SEND Strategy
  - Update on Provision of High Incidence Needs Teams Free at the Point of Delivery 20/21
  - Better Futures Project
- 28.3 It was advised that the SEND Revisit had been a three-day inspection. The revisit had been positive with inspectors looking to see whether the improvements the SEND Partnership committed to making had been delivered and whether they were improving experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families. It was noted that the SEND Partnership acknowledged to the inspectors that there was more work to do, particularly in relation to the four key SEND Strategic Priorities.
- 28.4 Regarding the provision of HINT services for 2020/21, it was reported that teams had received and responded to 36% more referrals than in 2019/20, meaning advice had been sought for an additional 290 children/young people.
- 28.5 HINT services had seen an increase in the number of schools referring across all partnerships with a particular rise seen in the Ashington, Ponteland and Haydon Bridge partnerships.
- 28.6 Overall, HINT Services had provided support into 92% Northumberland schools in 2020/21 as opposed to 78% in 2019/20. The rise in the number of referrals indicated that schools were using support services early and referrals based on emerging needs.

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- 28.7 It was reported that a review was currently being undertaken of the Education Health and Care processes and pathways in Northumberland through the Better Futures project. The aim was for Northumberland's EHC systems to be a beacon for outstanding practice to enable families, young people, and children to participate in making well informed decisions about best outcomes.
- 28.8 Members were advised of an increasing demand for EHC needs assessment and specialist placements. A total of 92 EHCPs were written in August/September. The National rate was 3.7% but Northumberland was slightly higher at 3.9%. Also, in September 50 requests had been received for Special School places.
- 28.9 It was noted that the initial implementation of the Better Futures project would be for 6 months, with further developments being strengthened and embedded into the future. The next steps of the project were to hold a series of stakeholder events with schools, parents and carers and other partners.
- 28.10 Following a query regarding inviting early years registered settings to the proposed stakeholder events, it was confirmed that they would be invited to attend and stressed the importance of PVI's being involved in the project as the EHC needs assessment process often began with them.
- 28.11 A question was asked about whether there would be the capacity within the team to manage the increase in demand being seen. It was advised that sustainability and a high standard of service were the main aims of the project to ensure delivery to schools. It was hoped the review would help bottom out and modernise the team to continue to find best outcomes for all.
- 28.12 It was reported that a SEND review had been proposed for spring 2022 which could result in new guidance which would need to be incorporated into the Better Futures project moving forward.
- 28.13 It was envisaged that the forum would begin to receive regular SEN updates and help start to generate discussions around issues such as how to increase support for mainstreamed schools in meeting need as close to home as possible and funding opportunities to help deliver services.
- 28.14 In response to a query regarding out of county placements, it was confirmed that parental choice remained a strong factor in the arrangements. In discussions officers would always encourage parents to consider Northumberland placements but every case would be looked at on an individual basis and based on the individual needs of the child or young person.
- 28.15 It was reported that the challenges being experienced around specialist capacity were not unique to Northumberland. Many other authorities including regional counterparts were experiencing the same issues.
- 28.16 The School's Forum thanked officers for the update and for the continued excellent forward-thinking work being carried out.

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**RESOLVED** that the report, and in particular the contents of Section 5 in the light of the request to continue transfer of funds from the Dedicated Schools Grant into the High Needs Block for 22/23, be noted.

## **29. COMPARISON OF NE SCHOOLS BLOCK FUNDING FORMULA VALUES 2021/22**

- 29.1 The report sought to provide additional insight and assurance in respect of the continuing implementation of the National Funding Formula (NFF) and potential implications for school funding in Northumberland for 2022/23 and beyond. (A copy of the report had been circulated with the agenda papers and a copy filed with the signed minutes).
- 29.2 B. Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the report and advised that the report should be considered in conjunction with the NFF update and consultation and update elsewhere on the agenda, and the associated proposals for 2022/23.
- 29.3 The report and the accompanying presentation compared the 2021/22 funding values for the 12 North East LA's and Cumbria.
- 29.4 It was reported that the basic per-pupil entitlement was a mandatory factor. 6 of the 13 authorities had set their Primary AWPU value in line with the NFF figure with Northumberland setting theirs at a higher figure. At KS3, Northumberland had set their figures in line with the NFF AWPU. At KS4, Northumberland had set its NFF AWPU higher than the figure value.
- 29.5 Deprivation was another mandatory factor which every local authority had to use in their formula. It was reported that all 13 authorities used FSM in their formulas.
- 29.6 It was noted that comparisons based on FSM and FSM6 were relatively straightforward, unlike IDACI where each LA could assign a different value to each of the different bands.
- 29.7 In relation to prior attainment all 151 local authorities were using the indicator. While for Northumberland secondary values were in line with NFF and other authorities, at primary Northumberland has the lowest rate of the 13. This was despite the increase in 2021/22 and highlighted the need to increase primary to move this in line with NFF.
- 29.8 With regard to pupils eligible for funding through the NFF mobility factor it was noted that historically Northumberland had not included this element. However, it was now a feature within the NFF. It was suggested that this may be responsible for £56,063 of Northumberland Schools Block funding, and potentially impact 21 schools.

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29.10 It was stated that since the mobility factor had not previously been used, it was suggested that a similar approach be adopted as last year and move 50% towards the NFF Values. This would allow the introduction of the factor into Northumberland's formula in a phased manner.

**RESOLVED** that the report informing on the consultation in relation to the setting of school funding formula values for Northumberland for 2022/23, be considered.

### **30. NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA & DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) AND CONSULTATION ON 2022/23 FUNDING VALUES**

30.1 B. Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager presented the report which provided further additional information in respect of the continuing implementation of the National Funding Formula, the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and associated 2022/23 Schools Funding information. Information included formal consultation with Schools Forum in relation to funding values for 2022/3 and a transfer from the Schools Block, which had been undertaken in previous years. (A copy of the report had been circulated with the agenda papers and a copy filed with the signed minutes).

30.2 As reflected in the draft minutes of the Funding Formula Committee, the proposal to move towards the full adoption of NFF Values over two years, in two equal steps, in line with that potential 2022/23 deadline was recommended by the group to be the approach Northumberland should take. The estimated available Schools Block DSG of £208.5 million would also support this approach.

30.3 It was reported that it was the local authority's intention to request a transfer from the Schools Block. This transfer would support the continued provision of the Inclusive Education Services offer that was previously funded via SLA charges.

30.4 The cost of the Inclusive Education Service was £2.055 million; the maximum funding to be transferred based on the 2022/23 Provisional Settlement figure would be £1.043 million, with the balance being funded via the High Needs Block. Further information would be provided at future meetings of the Schools' Forum in relation to this.

30.5 It was noted that there had been a further significant fall in 2021/22 Central Services Block funding. The fall in the element for ongoing responsibilities in 2022/23 was a concern as the forecasted shortfall would fall to Northumberland as a budget pressure for 2022/23.

30.6 For 2022/23, the DfE had recently published details of a consultation as to how School Improvement functions would be funded in the future. The current proposal was that School Improvement Grant be cut by 50% for 2022/23 and removed with effect from 2023/24 which would be around £170,000. A further report on this issue would be provided at a future meeting of Schools' Forum.

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- 30.7 No information for Northumberland was available yet in relation to Early Years funding, in line with previous years. Details of the 2022/23 EY funding would be received in December together with the rest of the DSG information for 2022/23.
- 30.8 It was agreed that a paper be produced for the Schools' Forum detailing the Early Years budget plans and how they impacted on settings. It was suggested the paper include details on the challenges faced by nurseries, the impact felt following the rise in the minimum wage and information about the closing the gap project.
- 30.9 It was stated that because of the short timescales between receiving the final 2022/23 DSG settlement in December, the preparation of a report to the Cabinet meeting on 11 January 2022 and the submission of the final figures to the ESFA by 21 January 2022, delegated powers would be sought for the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services to set the final figures, in line with the principles and illustrative figures outlined in this report.

**RESOLVED** that:

(a) the transfer of up to 0.5% of the final value of the Schools Block as an contribution to the costs of SEND Support Services, once the final DSG values are released in December, be agreed for 2022/23.

(b) the funding values for 2022/23 be set in line with the principles outlined in the report; and agree for these to be the basis for the wider consultation with schools be agreed.

(c) the delegation of final decisions on the values to the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, once final funding becomes known in December 2021, in order to enable the required Cabinet report to be prepared and submitted to the 11 January 2022 meeting, and the submission of the necessary return to the ESFA by 21 January 2022 be noted.

(d) a further report be received by the Schools' Forum meeting on 19 January 2021 on the outcome of the consultation with schools and final funding values to be used for 2022/23.

(e) a further report be received by the Schools' Forum in relation to early years funding, budgeting and challenges faced by PVI's.

**31 2020/21 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES**

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

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**32. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Ch.'s Initials.....

**RESOLVED** that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday, 19 January 2022 at 9:30 a.m.

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_

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