

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a virtual meeting of the Schools' Forum on Wednesday, 19 January 2022 at 9:30 a.m.

PRESENT

C. Pearson (in the Chair)
Three Rivers Learning Trust

Headteacher Representatives

N. Brannen, Federation of
Longhorsley and Whalton C of E
Schools
M. Deane-Hall, Wooler First School

A. Mead, Cramlington Hillcrest
N. Rodgers, James Calvert Spence
College

Governor Representatives

K. Faulkner, Collingwood School
B. Watson, St Robert's RC First

G. Wilkins, St Wilfrid's RC Primary

Academies Representatives

A. Alden, NCEA Trust
S Wild, NCEA Castle

D. Wylie, Cramlington Village
Primary School (Free School)
S Sparke (Hadrian Trust)

Roman Catholic Diocese – Vacant Post

Church of England Diocese – N. Threlfall

EYDCP – PVI Representative – K. Dickinson

Pupil Referral Unit Representative – Vacant Post

Trades Union Representative – Vacant Post

16 - 19 Provider of Education Representative – Vacant Post

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

S. Aviston

Head of School Organisation and Resources

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S. Barron	Head of SEN Strategy and DCO
D. Cookson	Head of School Improvement
A. Kingham	Director of Education and Skills
B. Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
C. Ponting	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

K. Summers observing.

33. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 33.1 It was reported that S. Heminsley, Governor at Newbrough Primary School was stepping down as a Forum Member. The Forum extended their thanks to S. Heminsley for his valued contribution to the work of the Schools' Forum, and for the time he was able to devote to attend such meetings.
- 33.2 It was reported that B. Mansfield, Chair of Governors at Newbrough Primary School had been put forward as a suitable replacement. The Forum agreed to this appointment and hoped to welcome her to the next Schools' Forum as she was unable to attend today's meeting.

34. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 34.1 Apologies for absence were received from F. Hartland, B. Ryder, B. Mansfield, G. Atkins (S. Sparke in attendance as substitute), A. Hardie (A. Alden in attendance as substitute), C. Hodgson, A. Thelwell, Councillor R. Wearmouth and Councillor G. Renner-Thompson.

35. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 17 November 2021, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising:

- 35.1 Regarding the outcome of retrieving money from Bright Tribe it was agreed for A Kingham would continue to monitor this issue on behalf of the Schools' Forum. Any updates received from the DfE would be reported to members as and when necessary.

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36. COMMUNICATION

F40 Correspondence with Education Secretary and Schools Minister

- 36.1 B. Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager advised of recent correspondence with the Education Secretary and Schools Minister (copy of which has been filed with the signed minutes).
- 36.2 It was noted that in the correspondence received from the Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP provided further detail on the school funding position.
- 36.3 It was felt that school funding was beginning to get fragmented again which would be challenging for schools.
- 36.4 The Chair welcomed the comprehensive response the F40 Group had received following their letters to central government.

RESOLVED that the correspondence be received for information.

37. SETTING THE 2022/23 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT

- 37.1 B. Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the report which sought to inform Schools Forum of the DSG settlement for 2022/23, as provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on 17 December 2021, and the proposed formula values for the allocation of funds to Schools for 2022/23. (A copy of the report has been filed with the signed minutes).
- 37.2 The report had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 11 January 2022.
- 37.3 It was advised that more information around specific budgets for the individual school elements would be brought back to the February meeting of the Forum.
- 37.4 It was noted that the School's Forum had met, and consultation took place in November with the intention to move towards National Funding Formula from 22/23, which was what had been built into the formula as it currently stands.
- 37.5 Background information was provided which advised of the two-step approach towards the adoption of National Funding Formula values for those values not already in line with NFF figures.
- 37.6 Members' attention was drawn to the overall Schools Block Settlement of £208.5 million, some £5.3 million (2.64%) higher than the equivalent 2021/22 figure. It was advised that the minimum per pupil funding levels had only increased by 2% this year but had resulted in a material effect on some schools.
- 37.8 The main area of growth was the High Needs Block. SEND remained a key focus in terms of government policy. However, the Government had still not published the

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outcome of the SEND Code of Practice review. Once this was available it would be shared with the Forum.

- 37.8 In relation to other influences on the 22/23 allocated figure, it was noted that Northumberland's falling school population would have a direct impact on the overall funding available, accounting for approximately a £800,000 reduction. There continued to be a shift in pupils from primary to secondary where there were higher levels of basic 'per pupil' funding. The impact of COVID and the increases in deprivation funding due to increased primary and secondary numbers attracting free school meal funding were also highlighted.
- 37.9 There was the intention to create a falling rolls fund and seek the opinion of the Formula Funding Committee in developing this in the late spring or summer term.
- 37.10 A question on the falling roll was raised. In response it was confirmed that Northumberland was seeing a steady decline in numbers due to the lower birth rate across the county. This was also being seen in neighbouring authorities although Northumberland's numbers were falling at a slower rate than others such as North Tyneside. It was hoped that the dip seen in the population would start to improve soon.
- 37.11 It was reported that another possible impact on falling rolls, funding and school balances could be as a result of more demand seen for special schools which would decrease pupil numbers in mainstream schools as well as the factors already discussed. It was advised that this issue could be something brought back to a future meeting of the Forum to discuss in more detail.
- 37.12 In response to a query raised regarding SEND, it was confirmed that SEND in the county was occupying most of officers' time at the minute. On average there was a year on year 7-10% average increase in SEND demand, but this year there had been a 19% increase. But it was stressed that this increase had been seen across the country. It was reported that in many cases Northumberland remained better performing in SEND areas than others nationally.
- 37.13 It was envisaged that during the summer term a further update on work taking place around the SEND strategy would be brought to the Forum.
- 37.14 It was advised that there was provision within the Councils Medium Term Financial Plan for SEND provision. Factors including the delay of the free school, the capacity available to grow and the change to the way special school places, particularly out of county placements, were commissioned would all inform the strategies created going forward.
- 37.15 It was commented that from the Inclusive Education Services Team's perspective work was ongoing and fitted closely with the specialist capacity planning moving forward. A report was to be drafted to the Council's Scrutiny Committee in April which could be shared with the Schools Forum to update all on some of the activities being carried out by the team in the summer term.

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- 37.16 It was felt that there was so much potential for change that keeping Members informed on SEND regularly would be very useful and helpful for the Forum.
- 37.17 Members were reminded that following the November meeting of the Schools' forum, schools were asked six questions which sought their views in relation to the position taken by Schools' Forum. The responses received were all in support and agreement with that of the decisions taken by the Schools' Forum.
- 37.18 However, there were some differences in opinion on the question asked around the Minimum Funding. Nevertheless, it was believed that the approach favoured by the Schools' Forum to set the level at the maximum 2% was a sound one, providing the highest possible level of baseline increase to all schools within the financial resources available.
- 37.19 Members were then briefed on the individual elements of the dedicated schools.
- 37.20 Regarding the Early Years Block, it was reported that there was to a 17p increase in the Early Years National Funding Formula hourly rate funding rate. Northumberland would continue to retain less than 5% of the level of 3 and 4 year old funding.
- 37.21 It was noted that the rates had been included within the report to give both PVI providers and community nurseries within schools as much notice as possible.
- 37.22 The deprivation element would be distributed via the early years pupil premium with this already resulting in an increase in uptake of additional funding to support deprived children.
- 37.23 It was queried whether there had been any comparative work done in terms of what other adjacent local authorities' hourly rates were. In response, it was confirmed that Northumberland continued to be at the national minimum. There was a methodology for allocating the rates and different local authorities did have different rates. Northumberland was quite similar to Newcastle, but quite different to Sunderland. If you were in the southeast of the country, the hourly rates being received by providers were significantly higher. It was unclear why this was the case but there were a number of factors that influenced rates.
- 37.24 The Forum thanked officers for all their work regarding the Early Years Block Funding to maximise the pass-through level of funding.
- 37.25 A comment was raised regarding the challenges faced by many to recruit staff, particularly in the southeast of the county. It was felt that the minimum rate restricted local providers when trying to attract stronger staff, especially when competing against neighbouring authorities who could offer staff a more competitive salary. In reply it was advised that workforce development continued to be high on the agenda along with SEND for the Early Years Team. The workforce development aspects used involved offering a comprehensive set of training packages and trying to attract and support the right staff into Northumberland. Early Years setting was a rewarding area of work which the Team continued to

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encourage people to get into. But it was acknowledged that recruitment did remain challenging.

- 37.26 It was reported the latest indicative High Needs Block allocation for 2022/23 was £44,497,569 before any deductions by the ESFA. Work was continuing on the detail of the specific budgets but it was recommended that the total 2022/23 budget for the High Needs Block be set at this time, with a more detailed breakdown of funding for the various services being provided to the Schools Forum meeting on 16 February 2022.
- 37.27 In relation to the Schools Block, it was reported that the 2022/23 Primary unit of funding (per pupil figure) was £4,790.26 (£4,646.45 in 2021/22) and the Secondary unit of funding was £5,905.10 (£5,726.05 in 2021/22), giving a per pupil allocation of £204,379,861 (£198,910,374 in 2021/22). The addition of a fixed amount in respect of Growth and Premises of £4,103,023 gives a total Schools Block of £208,482,884.
- 37.28 Proposed formula values were in line with the previously agreed two step approach to the adoption of NFF figures supported by Schools Forum and previous Schools Consultations. It was intended to use capping of 6% with scaling of 50%, pending the final agreement of figures with the ESFA.
- 37.29 Mobility was also been introduced into the Northumberland funding formula at 50% of the NFF values, as part of the overall transition to NFF.
- 37.30 No further contribution to the growth fund was anticipated in 2022/23, but funding of £25,000 was being set aside for the creation of a Falling Rolls Fund as previously mentioned.
- 37.31 The decision on the final formula values had been delegated to the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, as agreed at previous meeting and at Cabinet. No changes were anticipated at this stage.
- 37.32 As in previous years, it was intended to provide maintained schools with their 2023/23 budget via the Schools E-courier bulletin by the ESFA deadline of 28 February 2022. The equivalent figures for academies would be included for illustrative purposes only.
- 37.33 In relation to De-Delegation, the Government had recently published its response to the consultation on how School Improvement functions should be funded. A separate paper on this matter had been prepared further on in the agenda.
- 37.34 The 2022/23 allocation for the Central Schools Services Block was £2,454,271, a figure £303,082 (11%) lower than the 2021/22 allocation of £2,757,353. This reduction in the historic element was expected and had previously been reported, but the reduction in the per pupil element, and fall in pupil numbers, for ongoing services represents an additional funding pressure for the Council.

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37.35 As with the High Needs Budget, the overall budget would be set at £2,454,271 in line with the allocation, with the details of the budget being provided to the February Schools Forum meeting.

RESOLVED that the following recommendations in the report be approved, as follows:

- a) To note the Early Years Block budget is to be set at the DfE allocation of £17,609,703 as detailed in Annex 1.
- b) To note the 3 and 4 year old rate would increase with a 21p uplift from £4.24 (2021/22) to £4.45 per hour (2022/23).
- c) To note the 2-year-old rate would increase in line with the 21p uplift from £5.36 (2021/22) to £5.57 per hour 2022/23).
- d) To note that the budget for the High Needs Block will be set at £40,822,569, after the deduction by the ESFA for the place funding outlined at Annex 1.
- e) Agreement that the various budgets within the High Needs Block be set at the meeting on 16 February 2022.
- f) To note the budget for the Schools Block is to be set provisionally at £208,482,884 including a proposed amount of £456,529 in respect of de-delegation. This figure is reduced to £207,440,347 after the transfer of £1,042,537 to the High Needs Block.
- g) To note that the School budget shares be provisionally constructed based on the formula values shown the final column of Table 1, including an MFG value of 2%, subject to any adjustments required once the ESFA's decision is known.
- h) Schools' Forum noted the intended retention of £25,000 as a Falling Rolls Fund with no further intended deduction from the 2022/23 DSG in respect of this at this stage.
- i) To note that under delegated powers the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services set the final formula values as agreed at the 17 November 2021 Schools Forum meeting.
- j) The budget for the Central Schools Services Block would be set at £2,454,271 as detailed in Annex 1.

38. 2022/23 DE-DELEGATION DECISIONS

38.1 B. Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager presented the report which evaluated the financial implications and impact of the phased withdrawal of School

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Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant (SIMBG) from 2022/23, and the potential impact on de-delegation and SLA Charges for School Improvement. (A copy of the report has been filed with the signed minutes).

- 38.2 It was stated that subject to confirmation, the estimated loss in SIMBG for 2022/23 was £194,451 based on 50% of 2021/22 funding which totalled £388,901. Any de-delegation request in relation to School Improvement would need to be covered on a direct “per pupil” basis. Full recovery of the £194,451 reduction would therefore cost £12 per pupil.
- 38.3 However, given the late notice of this change from the Government, and the potential impact upon schools, the intention was that the reduction in funding will be met from within the service for 2022/23. Further de-delegation sums maybe requested in future years when the full impact of the removal of the grant from 2022/23/24 was assessed but no further de-delegation sums would be requested in respect of School Improvement for 2022/23.
- 38.4 Officers commented on the frustration felt regarding this recent change and the impact this would have upon schools, especially from a school improvement perspective. It was envisaged that a report on the implications for school improvement for Northumberland would be brought to a future meeting of the Forum.

RESOLVED that agreement was given by mainstream maintained schools to the de-delegation request for 2022/23, including the decision not to seek any further de-delegated sum for School Improvement for 2022/23.

39. 2020/21 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES

- 39.1 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.

40. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

SEN Provision

- 40.1 K. Dickinson, PVI Representative introduced the presentation which had been produced in consultation with K. Summers and E. Sinclair from the Early Years Team. A copy of the presentation has been filed with the signed minutes.
- 40.2 The presentation covered:

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- Narrowing the Gap for Disadvantaged Children Through Early Years Entitlements.
- Early Years Entitlements – Funding Rates.
- Northumberland School Readiness Passport: Offered Universally to all EYFS Providers.
- Northumberland Standards for Working with 2 Year Olds: Available to providers in receipt of funded entitlement for 2 year olds.
- Narrowing the Gap Champions Project: Available to providers in receipt of additional funding streams – Funded Entitlement for 2 year olds, Disability access Fund and Early Years Pupil Premium.
- Quality Improvement Through CPD: Available through subscription to the Early Years SLA.

- 40.3 It was advised that the quality of early years provision was very important. High-quality early years provision had been found to have a positive impact on the cognitive and social development of young children and to impact on their later learning. With early years interventions could helped narrow the gap between disadvantaged children and other children.
- 40.4 Regarding 2 and 3 year old provision it was noted that there was a 97% take up by eligible families, which was really positive. This would allow those children access to quality early years education supplemented by additional funding to narrow the gap. It was noted that a high proportion of providers had been judged good or better by Ofsted.
- 40.5 Settings were using information from the school readiness passport checkpoint to monitor the attainment gap and the number of those disadvantaged children on track.
- 40.6 It was advised that the project would help providers use the funding they had to make positive impacts for disadvantaged children and allow settings to become creative to further help narrow the gap.
- 40.7 Regarding funding it was reported that there was only a 13% take up of eligible DAF funding. It was noted that there was an issue within Northumberland in relation to parents not wanting to take up their disability access fund and other funding available to them. Many parents did not know that they could access additional funding or felt their child would be somehow disadvantaged by it. Settings continued to work with families in order to help as many as possible of those eligible to take up all additional funding available to them.
- 40.8 The Forum was advised of the funding rates for 21-22 compared to 22/23 which had not been released to settings yet. It showed that there was to be an increase across most of the rates which would be beneficial to all.
- 40.9 It was reported that the 2 year old offer was an opportunity to intervene during often a sensitive period of development and ensure that all children, but particularly those who were disadvantaged, had access to the experiences and support needed to

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close the attainment gap and be school ready. It was noted that the entire pot of funding for the 2 year old provision was passed straight to providers.

- 40.10 The Northumberland Schools Readiness passport was a very easy system for providers to use and fed information from The Northumberland County Council Wizard system. The passport system contained information about children attending any school, setting or childminder as part of their funded entitlement, to ensure providers were paid accurately. This included all children who accessed 2 year old 15 hours funded entitlement, and all 3 and 4 years old accessing either 15 or 30 hours funded entitlement. The passport also helped with the reduction in assessment related workload for providers. A link for those wanting further information on the Schools Readiness passport was provided within the presentation.
- 40.11 Further information was provided on the Narrowing the Gap Champions Project which promoted working in partnership with parents and professionals to maximise the impact of the additional funding and use it to improve the services we offer for children in their care. This was a very worthwhile project and had been proven to be very useful to practitioners. It was hoped that more would sign up to become Champions in the future.
- 40.12 The Early Years SLA helped identified priorities of need for narrowing the disadvantage gap. It also provided CPD opportunities available to support identified priorities including Thrive Training for Champions, Oral Health Accreditation and Support for Communication and Language.
- 40.13 In response to a question on the Narrowing the Gap Champions it was confirmed that there was no cost to individual settings to sign up. All that was needed was a commitment to the project for a year. It was hoped champions would drive forward change internally and help to embed positive changes within the workplace through ensuring funding streams for every eligible child were claimed and used appropriately to support and improve their development. The Early Years Team would support Champions by providing them with resources for the workplace, support, good practice advice, peer networking, training and learning opportunities. It was hoped that through this project Champions could create an environment that was supportive and understanding towards children and parents experiencing deprivation, disability, and special educational needs.
- 40.14 It was suggested that the powerpoint slides be made available to enable the information within them to be disseminated to all. It was noted that the Northumberland Education e-courier continued to be a great source of information on the latest strategies, projects and advice on funding along with the regular early years email updates and network meetings.
- 40.15 It was hoped that by becoming a Champion would help enable resources to be shared between settings in the future including sharing outdoor spaces, release for training and staff mentoring.

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40.16 It was reported that through regular meetings with neighbouring authorities, officers could further share good practice, information and ideas with others.

40.17 The Forum thanked everyone involved in the preparation of this presentation which they all found very informative.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) the presentation be noted

(b) the powerpoint slides be sent to all members of the Schools' Forum for information.

41. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday, 16 February 2022 at 9:30 a.m.

CHAIR_____

DATE_____

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