

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a meeting of the **Schools' Forum** held at Choppington Social Welfare Centre, Colliery Road, Scotland Gate, Choppington, NE62 5SR on Tuesday, 14 November 2017 at 9:30 am.

PRESENT

Headteacher Representatives

Mr C Bradshaw
Mr M Hall
Mrs F G Hartland

Mrs J Kennedy
Mr K McGrane
Ms C Davison

Governor Representatives

Mr S Harker

Mr G Wilkins

Academies Representatives

Mr G Atkins
Mrs G Evans

Mr C Pearson

Trades Union Representatives

Mrs J Guthrie

Mr R E Woolhouse

Northumberland County Council Elected Members (Observers)

Councillor W Daley

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs S Aviston
Dr A Johnson
Mrs K Norris
Mr B Parvin
Mrs A Whitehead

Head of School Organisation and Resources
Interim Director of Children's Services
Democratic Services Officer
Education and Skills Business Manager
School Funding and Business Relationship
Manager

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs M Allan, Mrs E Bell, Mr A Day, Mr T Dexter, Mrs L Elliott, Mrs K Morrison, Councillor N Oliver and Mr I Walker.

2. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

- 2.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 27 September 2017, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendment:
Page 6, paragraph 7.11 should read "In response to comments the Interim Director of Children's Services said consideration should be given to a review by the f40 group" rather than of the f40 group.
- 2.2 With regard to Nunnykirk school, the Interim Director of Children's Services stated that a meeting had been held with representatives of the school and the Lead Member for Children's Services. The Council was working with the school to put together a financial recovery package to enable it to continue until, at least, the end of the summer term. He added that 19 children attending the school had special educational needs so it was considered appropriate that the Council should try and help. He confirmed that funds did not affect the Schools' Forum or impinge on other schools. No decision would be made before January.
- 2.3 In terms of the Haydon Bridge Partnership, the Interim Director of Children's Services stated that the authority continued to be concerned about the uncertainty and lack of clarity from all involved about the long term future, not only of Haydon Bridge school but also of the Hexham Partnership. He was hopeful, however, that major developments would take place before the end of term.

3. COMMUNICATION

(a) Communication with Schools' Forum - Letter from National Education Union re de-delegation of trade union facility time.

- 3.1 A copy of the above letter was circulated with the agenda papers for information and a copy is filed with the signed minutes. Trade Union representatives emphasised that it was about supporting staff and encouraging industrial relations throughout schools and stated that pooled funding would enable a higher level of litigation. Discussion ensued about different charging methods. Mechanism was in place for Academies within Northumberland to buy into a central fund and they would be asked if they wished to do so.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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(b) National Funding Formula Letter from Shropshire Council.

- 3.2 A copy of the above letter was circulated with the agenda papers for information and a copy is filed with the signed minutes. It was noted that the letter was a private piece of correspondence. Discussion took place about updates received from the DfE and concerns raised.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

(c) Communication from the following committee meetings:

- **Formula Funding Committee**
- **Additional Needs Committee**

- 3.3 Minutes of the Formula Funding Committee meetings held on 13 October and 1 November were circulated with the agenda papers for information and copies are filed with the signed minutes.
- 3.4 The Education and Skills Business Manager emphasised the importance of having a broad and balanced membership and said representatives from First/Primary schools were needed as presently there were none.
- 3.5 Discussion took place about the complicated process and concerns were raised that funding did not fit with the 3 tier system.
- 3.6 Minutes of the AEN Sub Committee meetings held on 11 October and 2 November were circulated with the agenda papers for information and copies are filed with the signed minutes. It was noted that Felicity Penny had stepped down from the Schools' Forum so a new Vice Chair of the Schools' Forum and new Chair of the Additional Needs Committee would be elected in due course.
- 3.7 The Education and Skills Business Manager stated that a key responsibility of AEN was an overview of the High Needs Block Budget and related funding mechanisms. The importance of links to data and performance information was emphasised and it was suggested that the Schools' Forum would be interested and should receive more performance information in the future, e.g arising from School Census so additional information would be issued.
- 3.8 It was recommended that from January 2018 it would be a requirement that Top Up information was correctly recorded in the January census, in order for payments to be made.

RESOLVED that the information be noted and the Schools' Forum recognise the work done by Mrs Penny and convey its thanks to her.

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4. UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA

- 4.1 The Interim Director of Children's Services introduced the above report which updated members of the Schools' Forum regarding the National Funding Formula (NFF) and sought their agreement for the basis of the consultation exercise to be undertaken on how that should be adopted and the resulting funding allocation mechanisms and budgets for 2018/19 and beyond. A copy of the report is filed with the signed minutes as Agenda Item 5.
- 4.2 The Education and Skills Business Manager provided a slide presentation from the Department for Education entitled 'The National Funding Formula for Schools and High Needs'. The presentation covered background information, what had been announced, what had been published, the structure of the funding system, the schools national funding formula, central schools services formula, high needs national funding formula and high needs national funding formula.
- 4.3 Attention was drawn to details of respective values and changes made, details of which were set out in the report.
- 4.4 It was proposed that the consultation would be based around a transitional protection of 50% of any fall in AWPU values and adding 0.5% minimum funding guarantee (mfg), though this was dependent on affordability.
- 4.5 Appendix B showed illustrative 2018/19 figures for each school, based on October 2016 data. Actual allocations would be based on October 2017 census figures. It was noted that only two schools showed a decrease in funding, these were in relation to historical factors. In terms of transparency, Middle Schools which had closed in the summer term were included.
- 4.6 Officers considered their proposal was the best way forward but were open to suggestions before the consultation took place.
- 4.7 A member asked if it would be possible to attach case studies to the consultation in order to assist with understanding. In response it was stated that every school was treated individually so to try and model on a formula basis would be difficult. The consultation would be driven by key characteristics.
- 4.8 Detailed discussion took place and the importance of timely census data was emphasised, including academies. It was emphasised that this was not a forecast of the 2018/19 actual budget, but an illustrative example to inform the NFF consultation exercise.
- 4.9 Subject to the Schools' Forum agreement to the basis of the consultation, a copy of it would be sent out to schools for their comments.

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- 4.10 The Interim Director of Children's Services confirmed that the Schools' Forum was an independent body of the Council and if a member wished to put a proposal forward through the Chair, they could do so.
- 4.11 Councillor Daley, Lead Member for Children's Services, stated that he was present as a resource for the Schools' Forum. He emphasised his passion for Northumberland and said he would do his best to get the best deal for Northumberland schools. He would listen to what was said in Schools' Forum and represent those views.
- 4.12 Concerns were expressed regarding cuts in key stage 4 basic per pupil funding, in comparison to key stage 3, and the potential impact on High Schools. In response the Interim Director of Children's Services agreed to have discussions with the Lead Member for Children's Services about bringing an agenda item forward. The Chair of the Forum was also to be included in that meeting with the Interim Director and Cabinet member.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The principles and basis of the consultation, as set out in the report, be agreed;
- b) the Interim Director of Children's Services to have discussions with the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Chair of the Schools Forum about bringing an agenda item forward regarding school structures and cuts in funding.

5. SEN - REDUCING HIGH NEEDS OVERSPENDING

- 5.1 The Interim Director of Children's Services introduced the above report which updated members of the Schools' Forum regarding SEN pressures and the potential financial implications arising, and sought agreement to a number of measures to address that. A copy of the report is filed with the signed minutes as Agenda Item 6.
- 5.2 Results of a national ADCS survey were discussed. A key finding highlighted the £139.5 million overspend reported by 68 authorities, at an average of approximately £2million per authority. This was broadly in line with Northumberland's own position.
- 5.3 Key factors in Northumberland's position was an increase in pupils receiving Top Up funding and increasing numbers of "out of county" placements. Within Northumberland, a county wide consultation was being carried out about developing the number of places in special schools and associated issues.
- 5.4 Schools' Forum would be asked for its agreement to support the application to the DfE for the transfer of up to 1% of Schools' Block Funding to High

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Needs Block due to the pressures highlighted, and to fund the development of additional SEN places in Northumberland.

- 5.5 Examples were highlighted from a review which had identified where more than one school had claimed Top Up for the same pupil and schools not fully completing required School Census return information. The recommendation from AEN Committee was highlighted where from January 2018 no Top Up payments would be made if census information was not submitted. The process would incorporate fair allocation of funding where pupils moved between Schools, by retrospective adjustment as necessary.
- 5.6 The current SEN funding mechanism was also highlighted as requiring review in order to evaluate its role and how effectively it aligned support and need.
- 5.7 The Chair encouraged members to accept there was scope for the process to be more efficient and asked them to approve the recommendations in the report.
- 5.8 It was hoped that, if approved, the recommendations arising from the SEN funding mechanism review would be implemented by September 2018.

RESOLVED that

1. Schools' Forum support that Top Up Payment would only be paid when Top Up Status was recorded in School Census data, in line with the new DfE funding allocation procedures from January 2018.
2. The planned review of the SEN Funding Mechanism be noted;
3. Schools' Forum support the application to the DfE for the transfer of up to 1% of Schools Block Funding to High Needs Block to support the growth in our special school places for September 2018.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Acklington First School

- 6.1 The Interim Director of Children's Services provided an update on the above. After considering budget implications and the best interests of the children involved, a decision had been made at Cabinet Committee the previous week that the school would close on 31 August 2018.

(b) Stars in Our Schools

- 6.2 Joyce Guthrie, Trade Union Representative, asked the Schools' Forum to support the above event which was taking place on Friday, 24 November. Unison organised the nationwide celebration of the hard work undertaken by dedicated staff who worked behind the scenes in schools. Every school could take part, free of charge, as there were plenty of resources available to

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help them celebrate. Anyone could get involved including parents/grandparents, school governors, union activists and school support staff. She asked the Schools' Forum for their support.

(c) Item of Correspondence

- 6.3** The Chair stated that he had received a letter regarding charges made to Trusts when adopting new schools. He would pass the letter to the Interim Director of Children's Services for his attention and for an agenda item to be brought to the next forum.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the next meeting of the Schools' Forum be held on **Monday, 11 December 2017 at 1:30 pm** at West Hartford Fire Station.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

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