

# **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

## **SCHOOLS' FORUM**

At a meeting of the Schools' Forum held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 3 July 2019 at 9:30 am.

### **PRESENT**

I Walker (in the Chair)  
Governor, The Duchess Community High School

#### **Headteacher Representatives**

F Hartland, Kielder First

B Ryder, Berwick Middle  
(accompanied by J Kennedy,  
Corbridge Middle School)

#### **Governor Representatives**

K Faulkner, Morpeth Collingwood  
Special School  
S Harker, James Calvert Spence  
College

S Heminsley, Newbrough CE  
Primary  
B Watson, St Robert's RC First  
G Wilkins, St Wilfrid's RC Primary

#### **Academies Representatives**

G Atkins, Hadrian's Trust  
K McGrane, Ponteland High

S Wild, Castle School (NCEA Trust)

#### **Early Years' Representative**

K Morrison

#### **Trades Union Representatives**

R E Woolhouse

#### **16 - 19 Provider of Education Representative**

None present

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## Northumberland County Council Elected Members (Observer) - W Daley

### OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
S Barron	Head of SEND Strategies
D Jackson	Service Director - Education and Skills
K Norris	Democratic Services Officer
B Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
A Russell	Principal Accountant

**Observers:** C Ponting (School Lead, North Tyneside Council), T Cameron (NCC Administrative Finance Assistant), A Smith (National Graduate Trainee), A Thelwell (Principal, Bede Academy), B Harding (Head of Early Years, Bede Academy), A Brewis, Work Experience Student.

### 1. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 1.1 Christina Ponting introduced herself to the Forum stating she was the School HR Lead at North Tyneside Council and a member of their Schools' Forum. She was acting as part time HR Lead for Schools in Northumberland and was now the HR representative at Northumberland Schools' Forum.
- 1.2 The Chair welcomed Ben Ryder, headteacher of Berwick Middle School to his first meeting of the Schools' Forum.

### 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Colin Bradshaw, Maurice Hall, Colin Pearson and Emma Potts.

### 3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 27 February 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendments:

To avoid ambiguity Minute 46.4 should read: In terms of the Schools Block, the majority of formula funding values were in line with National Funding Formula (NFF) figures, but 2020/21 would remain a transitional year where the LA was still able to set its own values. Between 2018/19 and 2019/20 funding should not fall on a "per pupil" basis due to the 0% MFG value.

Minute 43.6 correction of the spelling of Mr Atkins' christian name to Graeme.

#### Matters Arising:

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- 3.2 Minute 42.6: Haydon Bridge - work was on-going regarding the recovery of funds from Bright Tribe. It was reported that a recent ofsted inspection had been positive across all sectors of the partnership.
- 3.3 Minute 42.4: Five meetings of the FACS Exclusions Task and Finish Group had taken place and, although there had been a slight delay with some of the work, good progress was being made. A sixth and final meeting would be required after which the Forum would be updated.
- 3.4 Minute 43.4: It had been intended to hold a meeting of the FFC before this Forum in the belief that more information about funding would be available, however, that information had not been released so the meeting had been deferred.

#### **4. COMMUNICATION**

##### **(a) Letters to Robert Halfon MP (School Funding) and Anne Milton MP (High Needs)**

- 4.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager referred to the last meeting at which it had been agreed that the Forum endorse comments by the above MPs in writing. Letters had been drafted on that basis, signed by Councillor Daley and duly sent (copies of which are filed with the signed minutes of the meeting). A reply had been received to the letter sent to Anne Milton MP (copy filed with the signed minutes) in which a response from the Forum to the 'Call for Evidence' was encouraged.

##### **(b) Letter from Corbridge Middle School Chair of Governors**

- 4.2 A letter had been received from Jo Holmes, Chair of Governors, Corbridge Middle School (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes of the meeting). The Education and Skills Manager had thanked Ms Holmes for her observations which were essentially about premises funding. Historically Northumberland County Council (NCC) had included premises funding when calculating the need for additional funding and Ms Homes had requested this be excluded, suggesting consideration to this be given by the Formula Funding Committee (FFC) when funding was set for 2020/21.
- 4.3 In response to comments Mr Parvin stated that all rate bills were fully refunded to schools but currently that element was included in the minimum per pupil funding. While rates bills had no net impact on individual schools, as all were refunded in full, there was a potential impact cost to the DSG of £190,000 in respect of this, where rates elements were taking "per pupil" funding above the minimum per pupil threshold.

**AGREED** that the next meeting of the FFC consider the request to exclude the premises funding element when calculating the need for additional funding and report their findings back to Schools' Forum.

## **5. SCHOOLS' FORUM MEMBERSHIP**

5.1 The last review of the Schools' Forum membership took place in 2017 at which time the 20 sector appointed representatives were made up as follows:

First/Primary Schools - 8  
Middle Schools - 3  
High Schools - 3  
Academies - 6

5.2 Directions from the Department for Education (DfE) stated that Schools' Forum representatives should be proportionate, which was currently the case as follows:

First/Primary Schools - 8  
Middle Schools - 2  
High Schools - 2  
Academies - 8  
Plus 2 additional special school representatives.

5.3 Fay Hartland and Graham Wilkins have completed their 4 year term and had indicated their willingness to be re-appointed. Approval would be sought for this and formalised at the next meeting.

5.4 In response to a query about early years representation, it was confirmed that Katie Morrison had also exceeded her 4 year term and it was agreed that the Education and Skills Business Manager would discuss this with her.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

## **6. FUNDING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES, AND ALTERNATIVE PROVISION - CALL FOR EVIDENCE**

6.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the above DfE document and the draft response (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes of the meeting as agenda item 7).

6.2 The Service Director - Education and Skills said it was a wide consultation about a major issue and it was an opportune time to make a strong case for extra funding. Due to the growing demand on special needs services it was imperative that funding increased and he encouraged schools to support the response.

6.3 Graeme Atkins emphasised the importance of schools also making an individual response and agreed with comments in the draft response which highlighted that the notional SEN budget did not represent additional funding but was simply based on the respective percentages of elements within the School Budget Share.

6.4 In relation to the £6,000 per pupil threshold, and the suggestion that it should be lowered, Mr Atkins said it should be higher as it was meant to equate to 15 hours provision and did not meet that. He felt it should be stated that the whole area of

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SEND funding was a shambles and, as a Schools' Forum, concerns around £6,000 per pupil should be emphasised more strongly.

- 6.5 Mr Parvin referred to page 15 where it was indicated specifically that the £6,000 threshold should not be lower or there would be a change in the balance of funding to the local authority.
- 6.6 The Head of SEND Strategies said the conversation about thresholds was being had because there was currently not enough money in the system and it was difficult to discuss because there was no option to keep it the same.
- 6.7 Mr Atkins did not disagree with what had been said but felt that more information in relation to SEN pressures should be included to make a stronger point.
- 6.8 In response to comments that many schools had not seen the 'Call for Evidence', Mr Parvin confirmed that it could be publicised again. It was noted that it had been circulated on the e-courier system and it was in the public domain at [northumberlandeducation.co.uk](http://northumberlandeducation.co.uk) It was also suggested that a link be sent to School SENCOs.
- 6.9 Discussion ensued about expressing concerns more publicly and reference was made to press coverage in which Councillor Daley had called on Conservative leadership hopefuls for a schools' funding shake-up. Councillor Daley said it was a perfect time for the Schools' Forum to put pressure on the leadership candidates but, due to the leadership election timescales, a letter must be drafted in the next few days.

**AGREED** that

- 1) Further publicity be given to the 'Call for Evidence' questions relating to funding for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and those who need alternative provision via the e-courier system, with an emphasis on the importance of schools making a response;
- 2) A link to the above be sent to School SENCOs;
- 3) a letter be drafted from the Schools' Forum to the Conservative Leadership candidates, Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt, setting out its concerns about the national funding formula.

## **7. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2018/19**

- 7.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the above report which provided details of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) outturn position for 2018/19 to Schools' Forum members, together with the implications of the outturn highlighted by significant cost pressures within the budget (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes of the meeting as agenda item 8).

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- 7.2 Mr Parvin provided some background information and a summary of the report which set out reasons for overspending and underspending accordingly. There were significant challenges in relation to management of the DSG, particularly pressures around High Needs. Authorities whose deficit balance was greater than 1% of the total DSG would be required to complete a recovery plan. Northumberland County Council was under that 1% margin but would need to manage its budget effectively.
- 7.3 Concerns were raised about pressure on the budget regarding funding for 18 to 25 year olds, the costs incurred by exclusions and the number of pupils with Educational Health Care Plans (EHCPs). In response It was stated that work was being carried out with support workers which had resulted in a reduction in exclusion numbers. The numbers of children and young people with EHCPs in special schools was continuing to rise, due to parental demand and lack of capacity in mainstream schools. Similar problems were reported regionally and nationally, and it was reported that SEN was to be a key Department for Education focus in the current Comprehensive Spending Review.
- 7.4 High Needs funding would continue to be closely monitored.
- 7.5 Concerns were raised about the danger of taking more and more money from the Schools Block to transfer to the High Needs Block. The Education and Skills Business Manager said it was about paying down the deficit as opposed to eliminating it. It was clarified that the deficit carried forward into 2019/20 would be held against the HN block not the DSG as a whole. The 1% transfer had been agreed for 2019/20 as a separate transaction and the overall financial position would need to be considered ahead of any proposal for 2020/21.
- 7.6 It was suggested that the Local Government Association (LGA) should lobby politicians to reinforce the points made to them in the letters sent by the Forum.
- 7.7 The Head of Send Strategies said some benchmarking had been carried out around best practice for funding, to ensure progress was being made, and this could be circulated for information.
- 7.8 The Service Director - Education and Skills acknowledged there would be problems going forward unless there was a cash injection and suggested a SEND summit with headteachers whereby there could be a dedicated day for discussion groups.

AGREED that:

- 1) the overspend on the DSG for 2018/19 would have the first call on the DSG settlement for 2019/20;
- 2) the 2018/19 Trade Union Facility Surplus of £24,469 in line with the report attached at Appendix A be carried forward;
- 3) the monitoring of High Needs funding be noted.

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## **8. NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA UPDATE**

- 8.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the above report which provided further additional information in respect of the continuing implementation of the National Funding Formula (NFF) and potential implications for schools funding in Northumberland for 2020/21 and beyond (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes of the meeting as agenda item 9).
- 8.2 Background information was provided along with a recap of the current position. Reference was made to the figures on page 2 and it was highlighted that when setting the minimum figures in 2019/20 NFF values had been matched. The third table outlined that, historically, Northumberland's values were higher than the NFF and a decision was taken to continue with that where it was financially viable.
- 8.3 The table on page 4 quantified the financial decision taken and showed historical formula values in excess of NFF and estimated values for 2019/20.
- 8.4 Historically Northumberland did not have a free school meals formula legacy and this was introduced at NFF rates for Primary and Secondary schools in 2018/19. Figures remained higher than NFF figures with the total approaching £4.4 million.
- 8.5 The Primary Low Prior Attainment factor had been weighted previously but had been removed for 2019/20.
- 8.6 In response to comments about the anomaly affecting High Schools and Middle Schools, it was confirmed that a letter had been send to the minister last year setting out the Forum's concerns.
- 8.7 Discussion ensued about NFF having been deferred on previous occasions and the possibility that it would not be implemented. It was confirmed, however, that in any event the FFC would remain.
- 8.8 In response to a request, the Education and Skills Business Manager said information had recently been published about the approach of other authorities and he was happy for that to be circulated.

### **AGREED** that

- 1) The report be noted;
- 2) further work be led by the FFC when additional information was released by the ESFA regarding 2020/21;

## **9. EDUCATION GROWTH FUNDING POLICY**

- 9.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the above report which provided information about growth funding being allocated to local authorities using a new formulaic method based on lagged growth data (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes of the meeting as agenda item 10).

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- 9.2 It was felt that the per pupil approach was the fairest way to allow for extra funding and plan for basic needs, and this had been incorporated into the policy.
- 9.3 It was confirmed that the Policy reflected the needs of new builds and extra resources needed as the result of school appeals.
- 9.4 Reference was made to paragraph 3.2, increase in the Published Admissions Number (PAN), where a school would receive growth funding for the increase in their admission numbers for 7 months of the academic year. It was queried what would happen if a planned expansion did not materialise after arrangements had been made and a school was left with expenses it could not afford. Extra funding was only available until March so it was suggested there should be something in the policy to cover that.
- 9.5 Further discussion took place about the census and if there was a possibility that some schools could benefit for the remainder of the financial year if there was a proportion of funding left after children had moved on. The Education and Skills Business Manager said that benefits would only be seen over 7 years and it was about managing the transition to higher numbers.
- 9.6 The Head of School Organisation and Resources said that the policy was still in draft form and the comments of the Schools' Forum would be taken on board.

**AGREED** that the comments of the Schools' Forum be noted for further consideration .

## **10. SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS 2019/20**

- 10.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the above report which provided details about the scheme for financing schools 2019/20 (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes as agenda item 11).
- 10.2 The attention of members was drawn to paragraph 4.9, Licensed Deficits, which stated that the maximum deficit normally approved would be the lesser of 8% of the school budget share or the specific figures quoted according to the phase of the school. This had been updated from 5% and an exceptional circumstances clause had been introduced in conjunction with Corporate Finance.
- 10.3 Paragraph 2.4 should also refer to the use of financial benchmarking.
- 10.4 Paragraph 2.10 highlighted the Government's procurement process for purchasing, tendering and contractual requirements and could be used for benchmarking purposes.
- 10.5 Paragraph 3.6, increasing on-line procurement, credit card and debit card bills must be cleared on a monthly basis with no interest incurred.

**AGREED** that the scheme be accepted.

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**11. 2019 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES**

- 11.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager pointed out that, due to a number of diary clashes, the meeting of the Schools’ Forum originally scheduled for 25 September had been moved back to 2 October with a further meeting on 20 November.
- 11.2 Meetings of the FFC were scheduled for 17 September and 15 October with a later start time of 3:00 pm.
- 11.3 The 16 July date had been retained for FFC to make a decision after receiving further information from the DfE.
- 11.4 Meetings of the Additional Needs Committee were scheduled for 25 September and 23 October at 3:00 pm.
- 11.5 The Education and Skills Business Manager invited members not currently serving on the sub committees to contact him if they were interested in doing so and pointed out that first and primary schools were under represented on FFC.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

As the result of a proposed reorganisation by Wise Academies, confirmation was currently awaited regarding a written request submitted to the EFSA in May for funding of a Primary School in Haltwhistle with effect from September 2019 as opposed to the current First and Middle Schools.

**13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Schools’ Forum would take place on Wednesday, 2 October 2019 at 9.30 am in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth.

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

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

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