

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **SCHOOLS' FORUM**

At a meeting of the **Schools' Forum** held at Choppington Social Welfare Centre, Scotland Gate, Choppington on Tuesday 8 November 2016 at 2.00 p.m.

#### **PRESENT**

Mr. M. Brown  
Governor Representative  
(Ponteland Richard Coates C E Middle School)

#### **Headteacher Representatives**

Mr. S. Griffiths (Bedlingtonshire High School)	Mr. K. P. McGrane (Ponteland High School)
Mrs. F. G. Hartland (Kielder First School)	Mr. M. Deane-Hall (Wooler First School)
Mr. D. Cogle (Atkinson House School) as substitute for Mr. K. Burdis, (Cleaswell Hill School)	Mr. A. Byers (Hadrian Learning Trust) as substitute member for Mr. G. Atkins

#### **Governor Representatives**

Mr. C. Pearson (Morpeth Abbeyfields First School)	Mr I Walker (The Duchess's High School, Alnwick)
Mr. K. Faulkner (Collingwood Special School, Morpeth)	Mr. G. J. Wilkins (Blyth St Wilfrid's RC Primary School)

#### **Trades Union Representatives**

Mr. R. E. Woolhouse

#### **Academies Representatives**

Mrs. D. W. Wylie, Cramlington Village Primary School (Free School)	Mrs. M. Hinson as substitute member for Mr. A. C. Day, Northumberland Church of England Academy
Mrs. G. J. Evans (Bede Academy, Blyth)	
Dr. R. Vaughan (The Three Rivers Learning Trust)	

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## **Early Years/PVI Representatives**

Ms. K. A. Morrison

## **Roman Catholic Diocese**

Mrs. F. A. Penny

Headteacher, Cramlington St Peter's R. C.  
Middle and St. Paul's R. C. First Schools

## **Church of England Diocese**

Mrs. E. Bell (as substitute for Mr. R.  
Bishopp)

## **Post 16 Provider of Education Representative**

Mrs. H. Norris

## **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Mrs. S. Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
Mrs. A. Whitehead	School Funding & Business Relationship Manager
Dr. A. Johnson	Director of Education and Skills
Mr. A. F. Carrick	Commissioner, Special Educational Needs
Ms. J. Walker	Senior Manager, Alternative Education (Virtual Headteacher)
Ms. J. Briggs	Principal Accountant (on behalf of Mrs. A. Elsdon)
Mrs. L. Papaioannou	Democratic Services Officer and Secretary of the Schools' Forum

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOME NEW MEMBERS**

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs. H. Blythe (Headteacher, Choppington First School), Mr. M. Hodgson (Governor, Harbottle CE First School), Mrs. M. Pedley (Governor, Newbrough CE Primary School), Mr. G. Atkins (Headteacher, Hexham Middle School), Mr. K. Burdis (Cleaswell Hill School), Mr. A. Day (Northumberland Church of England Academy), Mr. R. Bishopp (Church of England Diocese), Mr. T. Dexter (Pupil Referral Unit), Mrs. J. M. Guthrie (Unison Trade Union representative), Councillor G. R. Arckless and Mrs. A. Elsdon (Director of Corporate Resources).

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The Secretary of the Schools' Forum reported the following changes in membership:

Appointment:

Mrs. Mary Pedley, Chair of Governors at Newbrough C E Primary School had been appointed as a Governor representative to one of the vacant positions.

Resignation:

Mrs. Louise Rule, Governor of Pax Christi Catholic Academy representing St Benet Biscop RC School had resigned as a Governor and from the Schools' Forum.

It was noted that the following vacancies remained on the Schools' Forum:

One Middle School Governor  
One First/Primary School representatives (Governor).

**RESOLVED** that the position be noted.

## 2. MINUTES

Subject to the correction of a small typographical error at the bottom of page 9, (spelling of Pupil Premium *money*) and insertion of the words "care and health" into the sentence about educational aspects at item 5(b) on page 6, it was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Thursday, 29 September 2016, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

## 3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

With reference to Minute No. 12, *Holy Island and Longridge Towers Report*, Mr. Alan Carrick, Commissioner for SEND, reported that, in response to a specific request in the AEN Committee minutes of 14 June 2016, a total of £7,600 SEN Funding had been given to Longridge Towers School to support two pupils with special educational needs.

At this point in the meeting, the Director of Education tabled a copy of an interesting news article from the BBC website entitled "*Thousands of smaller schools 'financially not viable'*" (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes). The article was of relevance to many schools in Northumberland and, according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, this would imply that around 80% of Northumberland schools are not financially viable. It was noted that the financial challenges facing all schools would be discussed later on the agenda, under "Finance".

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In connection with the Minute No. 4, members requested an update on the position at Haydon Bridge High School. The Director of Education and Skills referred to the recently published Ofsted report on Haydon Bridge High School and the Ridley Hall Boarding Facility. It was noted that Ridley Hall had been found to be 'inadequate' for a number of reasons relating to the local authority not having maintained the shower cubicle doors and fire escapes, and the fact that a fire alarm practice had not been carried out on a regular basis. All other issues related to the need to spend money on the fabric of the building. No staffing appointments had been made at the school during the process of conversion to an Academy, however, the LA had agreed to bolster the short-term staffing ratios in the management of the residential facility and around making Ridley Hall safe, in compliance with Ofsted requirements.

Furthermore, the Director of Education was to meet the Regional Schools' Commissioner (RSC) in Darlington in the next week about the untenable situation and in the hope of resolving a number of issues including Bright Tribe's reluctance to take over Ridley Hall and in the transfer of land, which hopefully would be retained with the caveat that it be used for educational purposes. There was also the issue regarding the Bright Tribe Academy Trust seeking to take over other schools in Haltwhistle.

**RESOLVED** that the position be noted.

#### **4. COMMUNICATION**

##### **(a) Communication with the Schools' Forum**

The Chairman reported that there had been no communications received since the last meeting.

##### **(b) Draft Minutes from Committee meetings:**

- Formula Funding Committee - As Chairman of the Committee, Mr. I. Walker commented that a meeting had been held but he was not yet in a position to report back.  
The School Funding and Business Relationship Manager reported that another meeting of the Formula Funding Committee would be held in December 2016 in order to discuss the change to IDACI bands and to seek discretion to modify the band cash values. There was also a need to discuss Early Years block funding and to reach conclusions.
- Additional Educational Needs Committee - no meeting held.

**RESOLVED** that the position be noted.

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## 5. FINANCE

Members of the Schools' Forum were requested to identify solutions to the financial challenges.

The Director of Education and Skills gave a brief presentation on "*Financial Pressures on Schools - Issues and Possible Solutions*", (a copy of the Powerpoint slides is filed with the signed minutes).

It was noted that the purpose of the meeting was to review the financial position of schools and respond to the DSG predicted overspend, along with Planning for 2016/17/18 years. It was also noted that the Government's much anticipated National Funding Formula had not yet materialised.

The size of the problem was significant, in that the DSG was predicted to overspend by £2.235m by the end of the financial year 2016/17. The overspend was made up of school closures and academy conversions (£1.2m), Schools block (£75k on behaviour support) and High Needs block (£1.479m).

Reference was also made to the additional pressures from 2017/2018 including:

- Alnwick Schools re-organisation (£-423,000)
- More schools becoming Sponsored Academies, with closing deficit budgets (Whitfield £-32,000, Shaftoe Trust £0 and Bedlingtonshire High £-495,000), and
- National Funding Formula issues.

The Director of Education outlined five possible solutions, none of which would be easy, and he invited the members of the Schools' Forum to split into groups to discuss these in more depth and invited any other potential ideas.

Reference was also made to the circulated document entitled "*Mainstream Funding for Northumberland Schools: A description of current arrangements and allocations with options for adjustments to address SEND financial pressures*". The report was written by Mr. Alan Carrick, SEND Commissioner (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes), in order to address a number of questions raised at the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on 29 September 2016.

Following group discussions, the members of the Schools' Forum gave the following responses to the questions posed, as follows:

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**1. Recoup vacant High Needs place funding from mainstream schools (EFA arrangements made in 2013 but the learners are no longer in the system). £120 - £220k recoupment - now or in 2017/18.**

The consensus of opinion was unequivocal and a matter of principle that the recoupment should be made now.

**2. Reduce High Needs top-up funding where the learner also has Pupil Premium. 260-300 learners, depending upon how broadly the policy was applied. £330-£350k reduction in budget pressure - now or in 2017/18.**

There were mixed views to this possible scenario. It was suggested there should be a reduction by 'an amount' but that further research was required on this possible solution.

**3. Move non-statutory SEND and Inclusion services into SLAs in 2017/18. Up to £2 million+ reduction in budget pressure, but this may disadvantage small schools.**

The consensus of opinion was that there should be Service Level Agreements from April 2017 and that work should begin on an SLA exemplar immediately.

**As a follow-up question, if AWPU goes down as £2m is taken from all schools' budgets, and de-delegated for some High Needs functions?**

There was no overall agreement to this possible solution and it was suggested that further work be undertaken on properly costed percentages of a school's budget.

**4. Raise the threshold before High Needs funding is paid to mainstream schools. 1322 learners (Nov 2016). An increase of £1,000 per learner would release around £1,300,000 in budget pressure, now or in 2017/18.**

The general consensus was for further information with regard to "an amount" being agreed rather than £1,000. Should there not be protection of the needs of learners, and perhaps a revised presentable idea to be fairer in order to lessen the impact by sharing.

**5. Claim from schools/academies AWPU funding on a pro-rata basis for pupils with health/medical needs receiving EOTAS tuition, now or in 2017/18.**

One Headteacher made a fair point of there being inequity in the system.

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There was general consensus that this reduction should take place now. If possible, a review be undertaken of AWPU should the pupil no longer in school and transfer the whole across to EOTAS.

The Director of Education informed members of the local authority's bid to DfE to open a free school (academy) for pupils with special educational needs, in order to relieve the demands on other pressures. The criterion specified that the establishment should be on a separate school site, not an existing one, to house 100-150 students, and to be in an area to meet the population of such learners. Possible sites were being considered in Ashington, Bedlington and Blyth areas. It was understood that the DfE hoped to establish 23 such free schools in England.

It was AGREED to circulate the Director of Education's presentation and possible solutions to all members of the Schools' Forum and to invite views from all schools by 1 December 2016. Responses were to be submitted to the Director, the Chairman and/or the Secretary to the Schools' Forum.

**RESOLVED** that the Director of Education's presentation and possible solutions be circulated by email to all members of the Schools' Forum, inviting all views and comments from all schools and partnerships by the deadline of 1 December 2016.

## 6. URGENT BUSINESS

Members of the Schools' Forum specifically requested that officers keep to the proposed timetable of meetings of the Forum for the academic year 2016-17 and for timely circulation of the agenda papers in future. Some members also expressed difficulty with 2 p.m. start times and expressed a preference for a return to 9.30 a.m. for future meetings.

## 7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

**RESOLVED** that the next meeting of the Schools' Forum be held on Wednesday 18 January 2017 at 9.30 a.m. in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth. (The Chairman notified of his apologies for absence in advance of this meeting, owing to a prior engagement).

**CHAIRMAN** \_\_\_\_\_

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

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