

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a virtual meeting of the Schools' Forum on Wednesday, 25 November 2020 at 9:30 am.

PRESENT

C Pearson (in the Chair)
Trustee, Three Rivers Learning Trust

Headteacher Representatives

M Deane-Hall, Wooler First	A Mead, Cramlington Hillcrest
F Hartland, Kielder Primary School and Nursery	B Ryder, Berwick Middle

Governor Representatives

K Faulkner, Collingwood School and Media Arts College	B Watson, St Robert's RC First
S Heminsley, Newbrough C of E Primary	

Academies Representatives

G Atkins, Hadrian Learning Trust	A Thelwell, Bede Academy
A Hardie, NCEA Trust	S Wild, NCEA Castle School
N Rodgers, James Calvert Spence	D Wylie, Cramlington Village Primary

Early Years' Representative - Vacant post

Trades Union Representative - R E Woolhouse

16 - 19 Provider of Education Representative - Not present

Northumberland County Council Elected Member – Councillor G Renner-Thompson

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OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
S Barron	Head of SEND Strategies
A Kingham	Interim Director of Education and Skills
K Norris	Democratic Services Officer
B Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
R Pickering	Senior SEND Manager
C Ponting	Senior Manager, Schools HR
A Russell	Principal Accountant
D Street	Commissioner for Early Years & Primary

67. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 67.1 Following circulation of details of vacancies for Schools' Forum membership via the Headteacher's bulletin and e-courier, Neil Rodgers, Executive Headteacher from James Calvert Spence had expressed an interest in joining the Forum and was in attendance today. Members were asked to ratify the appointment of Mr Rodgers and this was unanimously agreed.

There was still one vacant post and if members knew of anyone interested, they were asked to contact the Education and Skills Business Manager.

AGREED that Neil Rodgers be appointed as a member of the Schools' Forum.

68. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from M Hall, G Wilkins and N Taylor.

69. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 30 September, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendments:

(a) Minute 63.4, should read: It was anticipated that there would be an overall increase of 2 – 3% in **per** pupil funding.

(b) Minute 64.4 should read: At the meeting in February an overspend of **£0.765** million had been predicted.

Matters Arising:

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- 69.1 Minute 60.2: In response to concerns raised about the retrieval of public money from Bright Tribe, Members were advised that, as stated in the previous Minutes, this was still being pursued and members could rest assured that it would not be forgotten.
- 69.2 Page 3: It was queried what additional funding there would be from the DfE to cover COVID costs. In response it was stated that funding in relation to exceptional expenditure costs had been released but did not include COVID costs which were subject to additional scrutiny. Details of exceptional costs would be provided to schools for their October budget report. It was noted that some schools had gone beyond the limit, but their applications had been approved.
- 69.3 Minute 63.7: On a point of clarification members were advised that the reference to a 40% increase was part of the Government's statement that the Teachers' Pay and Pension Grant elements were accounting for just over 40% of the increased Education funding, and while there were increases in school budgets for 2021/22, a significant proportion of it would be accounted for by that Grant.

70. COMMUNICATION

- 70.1 Minutes of the meetings of the Formula Funding Subcommittee dated 14 October and 4 November 2020 were attached for information (copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes of the meeting). The Education and Skills Business Manager wished to place on record his thanks to the Formula Funding Committee for their assistance in formulating the position which had fed into the report for agenda item 7.
- 70.2 The Education and Skills Business Manager referred to continuing dialogue between the Government and f40 in respect of additional funding around COVID and said the paper provided a useful oversight regarding some of the pressures and situations schools may be facing. It was provided for information purposes but may be useful to school governors.
- 70.3 The Chair referred to page 4 which highlighted the noticeable rise in Elective Home Education (EHE) numbers which was an issue he had not been aware of.
- 70.4 In response to a query from Councillor Renner-Thompson about the effectiveness of the f40 group, the Education and Skills Business Manager said, in his opinion, it was an influential group that benefitted from two-way communication with the Government. The Chair agreed stating it was a good briefing which distilled the issues well, made points very clearly and engaged in dialogue with the DfE.

71. SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS UPDATE

- 71.1 Russel Pickering, Senior SEND Manager, presented the above report which provided a briefing in relation to Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Northumberland and incorporated:

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- A review of SEN numbers including the increase in those pupils with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and attending Special Schools;
 - Developments of the new Free School and ARPs to develop additional capacity;
 - The balances held by maintained Special Schools as at March 2020;
 - The commencement of the Northumberland Inclusive Education services (NIES) with effect from September 2020; (SEND Support Services).
- (A copy of the report is attached to the signed Minutes as Agenda Item 6.)

- 71.2 In terms of the current position, the overall SEN numbers had not increased significantly since 2015 but there had been a shift from the number of young people with SEND support to those with formal assessments and EHCPs. Reference was made to the table on page 2 of the report which showed that Northumberland was under the national average for the total number of pupils with SEND and SEN Support, but was above the national average for those with EHCPs, and this placed pressure on the High Needs Block.
- 71.3 In terms of the number of special school placements being sought, the table on page 3 showed a significant increase from 2010 to 2020. Initially, schools had increased class sizes but were having to look at capital projects to extend capacity. The process to manage requests was being considered but Local Authorities had limited grounds to refuse requests and an increase of 9% was reported for the year to January 2021 as at November 2020.
- 71.4 In order to assist with pressures on the budget and increasing numbers, Additional Resource Provision (ARPs) were being piloted from February half term at Seaton Sluice First School and on the Astley High school site. This would give specialist provision on a mainstream site allowing for a higher level of support to be provided to maintain pupils within a mainstream school. The consultation in 2015 had shown there was significant support for this within Northumberland.
- 71.5 it was confirmed that funding for ARPs was based on the number of places. Funding of £10,000 was made up of an AWPU level and a top up level. If all the places were occupied there would be more funding and it was expected that the funding would be used within that year.
- 71.6 Northumberland was in the process of establishing a new free school which was expected to be online in September 2022 and would be located in Blyth. When it was fully opened it would have 80 school places from years 7 to 11 and would assist with pressures, especially around the key point of year 6 when students would be transitioning into secondary school.
- 71.7 With reference to the financial position, details of balances held by Special Schools were set out in the table in paragraph 5 of the report. Many schools were in a healthy position with their budgets, partly because of increased numbers, but it was not always possible to increase capacity and some of the smaller schools were in financial difficulty, details of which were provided. It was noted that special schools did not receive a lump sum element in their funding in Northumberland in the same way as mainstream schools.

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- 71.8 Since September the Northumberland Inclusive Education Services (NIES) had provided a free offer to schools to support them in meeting the needs of SEN pupils in mainstream schools and this was being developed further to better meet those needs and inspire parent's confidence around this. Graphs highlighting activity and levels of support were set out on pages 5 and 6 of the report. These trends would be monitored, and the Forum would be updated accordingly.
- 71.9 Paragraph 7 provided a summary of the type of work carried out and showed there had been 863 interventions. These were over a six week period which was very impressive bearing in mind current restrictions.
- 71.10 Mr Parvin referred to a meeting of the Additional Educational Needs Subcommittee which was being held on 2 December. Some focussed work would be carried out ahead of the scheduled meetings of Schools' Forum in January and February and anyone interested in joining that work should contact Mr Parvin. One size did not fit all and current mechanisms needed to be examined to see that they were fit for purpose for both mainstream and special needs schools. Input would be welcomed from NCEA Castle School and Hexham Priory special schools and invitations had been extended.
- 71.11 Mr Woolhouse asked if there had been any evidence of students being absent from school due to COVID and if interruptions to schooling were having an impact on demands to SEN and behaviour support. In response Mr Pickering said it was a difficult situation but he was not aware of any trends or strong evidence regarding an increase in demand for ECHP assessments. There had been a large number of referrals for emotional wellbeing and behaviour support in Alnwick and this would be looked at to determine the reasons for those referrals.
- 71.12 The Head of SEND Strategies said there was a co-ordinated multi agency hub that had specifically looked at children and young people experiencing social, emotional and mental health needs who were finding it difficult to come back into school or who were experiencing difficulties while at school.
- 71.13 In response to a query from Mr Deane-Hall about movement on supporting the Grove with a capital project, the Head of School Organisation and Resources emphasised that the Council was committed to capacity growth within special educational needs and said funding for this had been identified within the Council's medium term financial plan. Work was ongoing to develop a strategy around investment and where it was needed. Officers were fully aware of the capacity issues at The Grove and this would be given some priority on the list.
- 71.14 In response to a query from Mrs Wylie regarding EHCP applications and funding, The Head of SEND Strategies said a review of the top up funding mechanism had been carried out and short term additional resource (STAR) funding had been brought in. At present there was a relatively low number of learners accessing STAR funding compared to previous years, and consideration should be given to whether there were benefits for Schools to be able to access SEN funding without an EHC plan. It

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was therefore timely that a review of this would take place through the AEN Committee.

71.15 Mr Hardie said there was a historical problem whereby children from Northumberland were placed in special schools out of the area. If there was to be a planned coherent future provision, he queried if it was possible to have the intelligence shared with special schools so that needs could be planned and met more effectively in Northumberland. He also queried if there were any plans for staff from special schools to offer support to children in mainstream schools to enable them to stay in mainstream schools. In response, Mrs Kingham, the Interim Director of Education and Skills, said there was a need to look at Northumberland as a whole County going forward and to reassess priorities. She referred to a meeting the following week with the Heads of Special Schools to look at this work and emphasised the importance of a systematic approach to look at all areas at the same time. This would include capital development, specialist provisions and the use of data to show what was needed. Work would be carried out to help plan more clearly and securely.

71.16 Mrs Kingham said work around the inclusive education service represented a start and it was important to look at how resources within the County could be used and shared. Perhaps some out of county placements could be reconsidered and needs could be met within Northumberland but this could not be confirmed until discussions had taken place and there was a better understanding of exactly what was needed. It would be a strategic decision to take this forward and it was hoped that priorities would be identified within the next year.

71.17 The Chair thanked officers for their excellent report and said he looked forward to hearing more about the proposed strategic approach going forward.

AGREED that the report be noted, and further information be provided to the Schools' Forum in relation to the setting of the High Needs Budget for 2021/22 at a future meeting.

72. NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA & DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) AND CONSULTATION ON 2021/22 FUNDING VALUES

72.1 The report provided further additional information in respect of the continuing implementation of the National Funding Formula, the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and associated 2021/22 Schools Funding information. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed Minutes as Agenda Item 7.)

72.2 Mr Parvin said the report was based very much on the work of the last two Formula Funding Committee meetings and, whilst looking at various modelling options for 2021/22, the final funding details were not yet available. These would be provided mid to late December which gave a short turnaround time between receiving information and the Schools' Forum and Cabinet meetings in January. He emphasised the importance of today's meeting in consulting on the direction of travel for 2021/22 and consultation on that basis was around the four recommendations made in paragraph 2 of the report.

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- 72.3 Reference was made to the DfE's renewed commitment to move to the NFF but there was still some local discretion for the 2021/22 financial year. The NFF could come in as early as 2022/23 and, before adjustments for the introduction of the Teacher Pay and Pension Grants into the funding formula, schools could anticipate an average increase of between 2% and 3% in per pupil funding as was indicated currently by the modelling exercise.
- 72.4 It was important to strip out the potential impact of the Teachers Pay and Pension Grants as portrayed in the table at the top of page 2.
- 72.5 In considering the position for 2021/22, Northumberland was in line with the NFF for the vast majority of formula values and key points for consideration were therefore in relation to values where Northumberland remained out of line. Papers had been presented to past meetings of the Schools' Forum demonstrating the potential financial impact of those.
- 72.6 The 3 keys areas where NCC values remained different to NFF values were set out in the second table on page 2 of the report. In both AWPU Primary and AWPU secondary key stage 4, figures were currently above the NFF but remained significantly below for Primary Low Prior Attainment .
- 72.7 Northumberland could potentially have only two years to move towards the NFF and the Formula Funding Subcommittee recommended that this be accomplished in two equal steps. Various other options had been considered by the Formula Funding Subcommittee but it had been a unanimous decision that a clear and transparent two step approach should form the basis of today's proposal to Schools' Forum. This would provide a substantial increase to those schools receiving primary low prior attainment, offer a degree of protection to schools currently benefiting from the receipt of AWUP rates (which was every school in Northumberland) and most importantly would help the Schools' Forum to have a smooth transition to NFF.
- 72.8 It was emphasised that the single most influential factor in the funding formula for the current year was the continuing increase in the minimum per pupil funding and was estimated to account for the distribution of £2.6 million, a figure £0.9 million higher than last year.
- 72.9 When looking at individual schools, illustrative figures circulated showed there were a number of schools whose projected figures did not alter no matter which option and values were chosen. The situation in those instances was generally where schools were not currently benefitting from high deprivation funding, so the new minimum per pupil funding thresholds were the influential factor in setting their funding.
- 72.10 In terms of sparsity, this had been discussed in detail last year in setting the funding formula for 2020/21 when exceptional formula factors were introduced in presenting Northumberland's case to the DfE around the argument that road distances should be used rather than 'as the crow flies' measures.

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- 72.11 The DfE had increased funding distributed by the sparsity factor for 2021/22 and because Northumberland had greater sparsity than most authorities it would benefit from that. Criteria had not been adjusted to reflect road distances but the DfE had indicated this was being considered in terms of future funding formula roll out.
- 72.12 In 2021/22, it was not intended to change how sparsity funding was distributed and this would continue to be done in line with national formula funding criteria. Levels could not be increased for those schools benefitting from the exceptional factor but they would be supported at the same levels as last year and hopefully the ESFA would reconsider the position and change the mechanism for 2022/23 onwards.
- 72.13 It was still the Local Authority's intention to request a transfer from the Schools Block into the High Needs Block. It was proposed in the recommendation that this would be no higher than 0.5%. Historically Schools' Forum had supported previous transfers in 2018/19 and 2019/20 of 1% which had been reduced to 0.5% in 2020/21. This would be the maximum figure requested depending on final funding figures and the work of the Additional Educational Needs Subcommittee. Further information would be provided to the January and February meetings of the Schools' Forum.
- 72.14 There was a reduction in the historic responsibility's element of the Central Services Block which essentially funded long term Council liabilities around capital funding and historic early pension costs which the DfE had indicated should continue to be met from this block. Details were provided in paragraph 8 of the report.
- 72.15 The Chair queried if the shortfall would be made up from the Council's general revenue if necessary. The Principal Accountant said the Council picked up the majority of enhanced pension costs. Last year the drop in the Central Schools Block had not been expected and there was not sufficient time to go back to the DfE and propose funding be made up to meet the Council's liability. There were elements in the Central Schools Block which would reduce in 2022/23 around prudential borrowing but not in 2021/22. It was hoped the DfE would be understanding of this and provide additional funds for one year. If this was not forthcoming consideration would be given to the Council meeting the expenditure
- 72.16 No information had been released regarding early years funding at this point.
- 72.17 No significant changes had been proposed to de-delegation and further information would be provided at the January meeting.
- 72.18 The next steps were set out in paragraph 11 of the report and a copy of the draft consultation paper was attached at Appendix C. Following today's meeting consultation would take place with schools before recommendations were taken to Cabinet. The results would then be reported back to January's Schools' Forum prior to submission to the ESFA by 21 January.

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- 72.19 Appendix A set out the details of 2021/22 NFF Values and the proposals for NCC 2021/22 values. A slight error was pointed out in the second column from the right which should read Proposed NCC values 2021/22 which would be the proposed values subject to final figures.
- 72.20 THE IDACI Deprivation measures had been updated between 2020/21 and 2021/22 and, the increase in formula values could indicate a decrease in the overall numbers if they were distributing the same amount of funding via the IDACI deprivation index.
- 72.21 Appendix B which had been circulated separately. It was emphasised that this was not a prediction of DSG funding levels for 2021/22 it was a simply a 'what if' scenario if using the 2021/22 levels on the data from the October 2019 census. Discrepancies were caused by using the data from 2019 but this would be updated when the new data was available in December.
- 72.22 The chosen option was highlighted in purple. Schools were working on potential budget projections which would be more sophisticated as changes in data would be picked up. Crucially pupil numbers remained the single most important influential element in any funding settlement.
- 72.23 In line with a suggestion from the Chair, Mr Parvin agreed to amend the consultation document at Appendix C to include space to provide reasons if members were against the recommendations.
- 72.24 Mr Atkins suggested that, given the complex nature of what was being considered, the recommendation should be reworded to provide clarity as to the reasons why Schools' Forum was making the recommendation and the rationale behind it. He said this could also apply to phrasing around capping and scaling and possibly the transfer to the schools' block. Mr Parvin thanked Mr Atkins for his valid suggestion and said he would provide some context.
- 72.25 The Chair thanked the Education and Skills Business Manager and the Formula Funding Committee for the work they had done and said they were not easy decisions to make. He felt that the lack of comments was testament to the fact that the decisions were good ones and well argued.

AGREED that

- (a) The transfer of up to 0.5% of the final value of the Schools Block as an ongoing contribution to the costs of SEND Support Services, once the final DSG values are released in December.
- (b) The that funding values for 2021/22 be set in line with the principles outlined in the report; and these be the basis for the wider consultation with schools.
- (c) The delegation of final decisions on the values to the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services be noted once final funding became known in

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December 2020, in order to enable the required Cabinet report to be prepared and submitted to the 12 January 2021 meeting, and the submission of the necessary return to the ESFA by 21 January 2021.

- (d) A further report be received at the 13 January 2021 meeting on the outcome of the consultation with schools and final funding values to be used for 2021/22.

73. 2020/21 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES

73.1 Mr Parvin asked members to ensure they had all future meeting dates in their diary. There was a virtual meeting of the Additional Educational Needs Subcommittee on Wednesday, 2 December at 9.30 am and if anyone would like to be involved, they should contact him. Sara Wild expressed an interest on behalf of herself and Andrea Mead which was noted by Mr Parvin.

73.2 Mr Deane-Hall commented that in terms of geography and time management he found virtual meetings to be advantageous and hoped there would be an option, going forward, for those who were further away to join future meetings remotely.

74. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would take place on Wednesday, 13 January at 9:30 am.

CHAIR_____

DATE_____

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