

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a virtual meeting of the Schools' Forum on Wednesday, 13 January 2021 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

B Ryder, Berwick Middle
Amy Crawley, on behalf of Neil
Rodgers, James Calvert Spence

Governor Representatives

K Faulkner, Collingwood School and
Media Arts College
B Watson, St Robert's RC First

I Walker, Duchess' High
G Wilkins, St Wilfrid's RC Primary

Academies Representatives

G Atkins, Hadrian Learning Trust
A Hardie, NCEA Trust

S Wild, NCEA Castle
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 - Not present

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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
C Ponting	Senior Manager, Schools HR
A Russell	Principal Accountant

75. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 75.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager advised members that Elaine Chaplin had resigned from the Schools' Forum as Early Years Representative due to having moved her employment to North Tyneside and a replacement was actively being sought. It was noted that the Deputy Director of Education would pick this up.

76. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from F Hartland, G Renner-Thomson and N Taylor. A Hardie had advised that he would be late due to another commitment.

77. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 18 November 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising:

- 77.1 Minute 69.1: In response to a request for an update regarding the retrieval of public money from Bright Tribe, Members were advised that Councillor Renner-Thompson was pursuing this with the DfE and an update would be provided when available.

78. COMMUNICATION

- 78.1 A copy of a press release entitled 'School funding boost confirmed for every local authority in England' had been circulated for information. Implications for Northumberland would be discussed at agenda item 6.
- 78.2 On 22 December a request had been received from f40 for examples of COVID 19 costs and savings which were affecting schools in Northumberland. If Forum members were able to share some individual examples (as highlighted in the paper) the Education and Skills Business Manager or the Principal Accountant would be happy to help shape that information for submission.

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- 78.3 The Chair said that would be very helpful and encouraged schools to do this. The Principal Accountant advised that she had been visiting schools doing indicative budgets visits and her team would be aware of those struggling most due to the impact of COVID 19. They would contact those schools to see if the schools could provide some examples.
- 78.4 D Wylie said some of her school's items of expenditure were not in the guidance as claimable and had been refused. These choices had been positive in that they had enabled her school to remain COVID free for the whole of last term and to bring children back early in the summer term and she queried if it was worth sharing that or if it was only for items listed in the guidelines as claimable. In response Mr Parvin said the key DfE guidance was specifically around free school meals, premises and cleaning but there were areas that didn't fall into those categories and he encouraged her to share that information with him. The Chair agreed stating it was important to make representations about things that were not so obvious and this was echoed by the Interim Director of Education and Skills who said evidence was key.
- 78.5 Mr Parvin advised that submissions were required by Friday, 22 January so work would need to be carried out within the next few days.

79. SETTING THE DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) 2021/22

- 79.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the above report which informed the Schools' Forum of the DSG settlement for 2021/22, as provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on 17 December 2020 and the proposed formula values for the allocation of funds to schools for 2021/22. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed Minutes as Agenda Item 6.)
- 79.2 A report had gone to Cabinet sharing the key principles and results of the consultation in terms of the proposals and the direction of travel in relation to the proposals for next year. The headline figure received was £203 million which was £16 million higher than the previous year but, as pointed out at November's meeting, schools should be careful when drawing comparisons due to the inclusion of the Teachers Pay and Pension Grant (TPPG) which had historically been paid as a separate grant.
- 79.3 In principle the concept that schools would receive this money as part of an overall block grant where they had freedom to spend it provided greater flexibilities to schools and a lot of work had been done to identify that the average grants allocated covered the costs schools had incurred. It did, however, account for more than half of the increase. Essentially there was a like for like increase of £7 million (3.8%) but that did not mean that schools were in receipt of 3.8% across the County, that increase was differentiated according to the outcomes of the funding formula, one of the key influences being the increase in the minimum per pupil funding.

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- 79.4 As briefed in November, members would recall there was a larger increase of 6% to the minimum of per pupil funding in primary to bring it up to the previous level of £4,000 before later adjustments and that had impacted on how funding was distributed or would be distributed for 2021/22. There was no discretion or flexibility in that and it was the most significant factor within this year's formula. Details were set out in Annex 1 at the back of the report.
- 79.5 There had been a decrease of 55 in overall pupil numbers and a shift in pupils from primary to secondary. It was also evident within the figures that there was an increase in deprivation funding due to increased primary and secondary numbers attracting free school meals and also as a result of new Index of Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) formulas being introduced. Data was reviewed in 2019 and 2021/22 would be the first year in which the updated data would be used.
- 79.6 The Chair queried if NCC had looked at the trend with regard to the shift in pupil numbers and if the impact of this had been considered. In response Mr Parvin said pupil planning was part of NCC funding and projections of up to 6 years in advance were looked at.
- 79.7 The Head of School Organisation and Resources said the Council still did a school organisation plan and this was currently being refreshed. It was slightly behind schedule due to the COVID 19 response but a report would be taken to the Family and Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March and would look at predictions across the whole of Northumberland in detail. The Chair said this would be a very interesting document and thanked Mrs Aviston for offering to share it with Schools' Forum when it was complete.
- 79.8 Mr Parvin referred to Section 4 on page 2 of the report which outlined the consultation with schools as shared at November's meeting. In terms of the four questions asked, amendments had been made and some additional information provided. The overall number of responses had been disappointing but this may have represented implicit agreement with the approach agreed in consultation with Schools' Forum. Details of responses were set out in the table at 4.3 of the report. In the absence of any general consensus from the consultation in relation to the level of MFG, the maximum 2%, in order to provide a maximum level of general increase to all schools, was felt to be the most appropriate level.
- 79.9 In terms of the Early Years Block, no figures were available at the November meeting. There had been a modest increase in the Early Years figures overall but the figure received in late December was a provisional one. The Early Years allocation was based on the January census averaged over 2 years so whilst there was an indicative figure based on January 2020 those figures would be further revised in January 2021 and subsequently in January 2022.
- 79.10 Paragraph 6 set out the overall High Needs Block figures. This figure would be revised as there were significant levels of recoupment deductions due to import/export level adjustments reflecting the movement of high needs pupils and

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students between the Local Authority and other providers such as Academies and Special Post 16 and FE Institutions. There was still more work to be done on the High Needs Budget. The team had met to set next year's budget but the circumstances around it remained challenging.

- 79.11 Provision would need to be set aside for the new free school opening in September 2022 so it was about how that was managed on a medium term basis. In line with Recommendation 1 as set out at the end of Section 6, a more detailed report would be brought to the meeting on 24 February if members were in agreement.
- 79.12 The Chair read out Recommendation 1 and no objections were put forward.
- 79.13 In terms of the Schools Block, based on the primary units of funding and historical information, the figure for 2021/22 also included the TPPG funding and was not directly comparable but a total Schools Grant allocation of £203.1 million had been received. £970,000 did not represent 0.5% of the total figure of £201 million, this was after the TPPG element had been accounted for and was allocated in its entirety directly to schools. The actual figures was slightly less than 0.5% of the total amount.
- 79.14 A projected figure of £201.8 million had been highlighted to Schools' Forum in November and work was being done in the background before submission to the ESFA on 21 February to look at how to most appropriately apportion the balance to benefit the maximum number of schools in line with the principles set around moving to the NFF.
- 79.15 As outlined previously a 2% MFG would be set. No disapplication requests had been made to the ESFA but funding would be retained for the schools which had received additional sparsity funding based on road distance criteria and didn't qualify 'as the crow flies'.
- 79.16 Last year a growth fund had been set aside to deal with pupil movement arising from reorganisation or other school moves and changes rather than allocating and guessing ahead. This had given the flexibility to identify where funding was needed and allocate accordingly. The growth fund had not been drawn on this year but it was proposed to take it forward to give that flexibility in future years. It was not anticipated that additional contributions to the fund would be needed for 2021/22 and further information about the use of the growth fund would be brought to the Schools' Forum when it was decided to draw that down.
- 79.17 The previous report had sought delegated powers to deal with the very tight timescale between the receipt of the funding information in late December, the need to go to Cabinet and return to the EFSA on 21 January. From a school's perspective the deadline for confirming schools budget shares was 28 February, the next Forum meeting was scheduled for 24 February so information would be circulated as soon as possible following that meeting.

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- 79.18 In response to a question from the Chair, Mr Parvin confirmed this was the standard method of approval as used in previous years and was the most pragmatic approach which could be taken given the timescales involved.
- 79.19 Reference was made to Table 1 on page 7, column (e) which showed the proposed formula values which were unchanged since the report in November. As outlined previously final values may need to be looked at where Northumberland remained out of line, for example free school meals and the level of capping and scaling in relation to allocating residual funding. This would be brought back to the next meeting.
- 79.20 In terms of de-delegation it was important to highlight that certain services could have funding centrally retained by the de-delegation of funding with the agreement of maintained schools representatives of Schools' Forum. Academies were able to purchase these services on an SLA or 'pay as you go' basis.
- 79.21 Historically there had been five services that had received a contribution via de-delegation, four of which were highlighted in the table on page 8 of the report and the other being behaviour support. In terms of the new Northumberland Inclusive Education Services model, there was an issue around behaviour support and this had been removed from de-delegated funding this year with a proposal that it be moved to the High Needs Block. More information would be included when discussing the High Needs budget at the meeting in February.
- 79.22 De-delegated funding was being requested for the remaining four services. An estimated amount had been provided but it was anticipated this would remain accurate. It was important to note that, as in the past 2 or 3 years, the per pupil contribution had been retained at the same level. With regard to the impact on schools, approval was sought from maintained schools' representatives for the contribution for the four services highlighted. Levels were in line with 2020/21 and included in Annex A.
- 79.23 In response to Keith Faulkner's comments about Trade Union facility time and how it was accounted for, the Senior Manager, Schools HR advised members there was a robust procedure in place with fees being agreed on an annual basis. The process was much more stringent than the previous model, very few timesheets were used and officers were able to monitor and predict the budget much more closely. This process was mirrored by other authorities and, as required by the Government, Northumberland reported back about Trade Union Facility time at national level. Ms Ponting was confident that all funding could be accounted for and going forward Schools' Forum would receive a periodic report to show how the SLA worked in more detail and to give assurance that it was working well.
- 79.24 Mr Parvin reiterated that academies and special schools could buy in at the same rate as maintained schools.
- 79.25 The Chair read out Recommendation 2 and no objections were put forward.

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- 79.26 Mr Parvin referred to the Central Schools Services Block which had been split into two parts, ongoing statutory responsibilities and historic commitments. Following representations to the ESFA that funding allocated for historic commitments was not adequate, the figure subsequently notified was £130,000 higher than the original provisional allocation. This remained a concern and would continue to be monitored and managed. The Chair said it was good news that the representations had been effective.
- 79.27 Reference was made to Annex 1 at the back of the report which set out the figures discussed in parts of the report. The DfE published figure of £264 million included deductions made by the ESFA from the High Needs Block and was now online. A breakdown of the rates in relation to eligible pupil funding and de-delegation calculation was also included.
- 79.28 Mr Woolhouse said if next year's Early Years funding was based on this year's number of students, was COVID having an impact on numbers there and would this cause problems next year? In response Mr Parvin said for the current year support had been provided to nurseries based on attendance and historic attendance from 12 months previously and funding had been received at around the same level as in 2020/21. Given the concerns and focus on nurseries this would be kept under scrutiny and nurseries would be supported as much as possible.
- 79.29 Mr Deane-Hall said funding for school based nurseries and had been well supported by NCC in terms of looking at historic numbers over the course of the year but obviously there had been a catastrophic hole in nursery funding from fees not coming through from parentally funded places and there was a significant worry that if funding was based on pupils currently attending there would be a huge problem in terms of viability. Moving forward, the Deputy Director of Education had provided reassurance that funding would be available at the level nurseries would normally be operating at notwithstanding the pandemic.
- 79.30 The Interim Director of Education agreed with the previous comments and said a census was due later in the year for early years which was about them projecting forward for future funding on a live model so the model numbers would be taken and where there were funded places support would continue. Challenges around COVID included issues such as capacity, for example if staff were shielding this could limit the number of pupils nurseries were able to take at a particular point. There could also be challenges around having to double fund in the short term as money followed the child, however, NCC had committed to ensuring funding was stable for planning moving forward.
- 79.31 In terms of the private provider option, D Wylie queried if there was any indication in terms of the overall supply across the county of which private providers were sustaining themselves through these difficult times and whether any were able to help. The Chair added that wrap around care was often provided by private providers. In response the Interim Director of Education said she did have a full picture of who was operating, attendances across the places available and where there were pinch points currently. It was almost a year into the pandemic and

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challenges associated with it. Private nurseries and child minders had been hard hit financially and some support was available for them through short term business grants.

79.32 In response to a request from the Chair, the Interim Director of Education agreed to provide a briefing around the challenges faced by nurseries and early years at the next meeting.

79.33 Mr Deane-Hall said private providers could access grants or cash amounts as a business and had different funding streams to school based nurseries. As there were unique problems to each side, these would need to be looked at individually. There were problems around the entirety of the early years settings but there were different issues being faced. In response the Interim Director of Education said her team would cover all of these aspects. She felt there would be further challenges ahead and the Forum would be kept fully informed.

79.34 The Chair asked for endorsement of the paper on the DSG as outlined.

AGREED that:

- a) The various budgets within the High Needs Block be set at the meeting on 24 February 2021.
- b) Schools' Members of the Schools' Forum representing maintained mainstream schools agreed on a phase by phase basis to the de-delegation in respect of the five services listed in the table on page 8 of the report using the per unit values and estimated overall values as set out in the final column of Annex 1.

80. 2020/21 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES

80.1 The work programme and meeting dates were attached at item 7 for information. Mr Parvin advised members that the meeting in February was crucial and reminded them it had been pushed back due to the half term holidays.

81. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would take place on Wednesday, 24 February at 9:30 am.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

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