

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a meeting of the **Schools' Forum** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Friday 17 February 2017 at 9.30 a.m.

PRESENT

Mr. M. Brown

Chairman in the Chair

(Governor, Richard Coates CE Middle School, Ponteland)

Headteacher Representatives

Mr. S. Griffiths (Bedlingtonshire High School)

Mr. C. Bradshaw (Barndale House School)

Mrs. F. A. Penny (St Peter's & St Paul's RC Primary School, Cramlington)

Mr. M. Deane-Hall
(Wooler First School)

Mr. G. Atkins Hadrian Learning Trust - rep. Hexham Middle

Governor Representatives

Mr. M. Bone (Sub. rep. for C. Pearson -Morpeth Abbeyfields First School)

Mr. K. Faulkner (Collingwood Special School, Morpeth)

Mr. M. Hodgson (Harbottle CE First School)

Mr I Walker (The Duchess's High School, Alnwick)

Mr. G. J. Wilkins (Blyth St Wilfrid's RC Primary School)

Trades Union Representatives

Mr. R. E. Woolhouse

Academies Representatives

Mrs. G. J. Evans (Bede Academy, Blyth)

Mr. A. Day (Northumberland Church of England Academy)

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Church of England Diocese

Mrs. E. Bell

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
Mr. D. Street	Commissioner, Early Years & Primary Education
Mr. D. Cookson	Commissioner, Secondary Education
Mrs. J. Walker	Head of Inclusion Services
Miss A. Russell	Principal Accountant (on behalf of Mrs. A. Elsdon)
Mrs. L. Papaioannou	Democratic Services Officer and Secretary of the Schools' Forum

1. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed Mr Colin Bradshaw of Barndale House Special School to his first meeting, in place of Mr Kevin Burdis of Cleaswell Hill School, who had resigned.

Tribute was paid to the long and dedicated service of the Secretary to the Schools' Forum who was leaving the County Council at the end of February 2017. Her knowledge and experience from 2006 to date would be a miss and she was wished well for the future.

The School Funding and Business Relationship Manager reported that a review of membership in relation to the number of pupils across the phases of schools had been undertaken, to reflect the changing position of some schools converting to Academies during 2017.

The vacancies and changes required were noted, as follows:

First/Primary Schools - 2 Headteacher vacancies, and 1 Governor vacancy from 1 April following a school conversion to academy on 1 April 2017;

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Middle Schools representation - need to reduce by one member, and there is one vacancy for a Governor.

High Schools representation - need to reduce by one member.

Academies - 3 vacancies.

It was noted that:

Mr. G. Atkins was appointed in the capacity of Middle School Headteacher, but his school had converted to an academy. He indicated his wish to become an academy representative and queried the process. It was noted that the Academies as a group make their own appointments and notify the Forum.

Mr. S. Griffiths was a Headteacher representative of a High School, that was expected to convert to an academy in 2017.

Mr.C. Pearson was a Governor representative of a First School that was expected to convert to an academy on 1 April 2017.

Regulations set out the need for 29 members of the Schools' Forum in various sectors and groups.

Members of the Schools' Forum recommended that consideration be given to securing future representation relating to the geographic localities, as well as to all phases of education.

The School Funding and Business Relationship Manager agreed to circulate a membership list by localities, to determine the areas of vacancies.

The Director of Education and Skills reminded members of the significance of the Schools' Forum and of the opportunity for existing members to publicise the importance of liaison with schools.

The Chairman voiced his disappointment regarding the proposals for Ponteland schools. He reminded Schools Forum that he attended as a Middle School Governor and reported that his school would begin its transition to Primary with the September Y5 intake destined to move on in Y7. He felt he would no longer be a suitable Middle School representative and would stand down from the Forum with effect from 31 August 2017.

RESOLVED that

(a) all members of the Schools' Forum be asked to confirm their continued membership going forward;

(b) an invitation for expressions of interest be circulated to all schools via E-courier, to seek nominations to filling the various vacant positions of the Schools' Forum.

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2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs. F. Hartland (Kielder First School), Mr. K. McGrane (Ponteland High School), Mrs. M. Pedley (Governor, Newbrough CE First School), Mrs. S. Clement (Blyth Croftway Primary Academy), Mrs. D. Wylie (Cramlington Village Primary School), Dr. R. Vaughan (The 3 Rivers Learning Trust), Mr. C. Pearson (Abbeyfields First School), Mrs. K. Morrison (Rascals, Early Years PVI rep), Mr. T. Dexter (PRU), and Mrs. A. Elsdon (Director of Corporate Resources).

3. MINUTES

With reference to Minute No.5 on page 5, *Setting the DSG Budget*, the Commissioner for Early Years and Primary Education commented that “the actual funding allocation to Northumberland had increased, however, the amounts were **at** the national minimum level (not less than).

With reference to the same item, on page 7 of the minutes, second paragraph, Dr. A. Johnson added to the sentence “Furthermore, it was noted that the new National Funding Formula contained a minimum funding guarantee, **but this may not be continued beyond 2020.**”

RESOLVED that, subject to the above two amendments, the minutes of the meeting of the Schools’ Forum held on Wednesday, 18 January 2017, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

(a) With reference to Minute No. 3, members requested a further update on the position at Haydon Bridge High School. The Director of Education and Skills reported that the Interim Executive Board (IEB) at the school had voted to resign and stand down with effect from 17 February 2017. The Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) had been notified and the Department for Education (DfE) had implemented its own IEB and comprising three people closely linked to Bright Tribe Trust and would assume leadership of the school with effect from 17 February 2017. The implications of this were many, not least that DfE would become employers of the staff at the school. The first formal meeting of the IEB was to be held on 28 February, to focus on the process of academisation.

Two outstanding issues remained to be resolved - the land transfer to Bright Tribe Trust on a freehold basis and the issue of the residential facility at Ridley Hall. The budgetary position remained a concern, and the losses incurred

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related to the running costs of the school, as there were simply insufficient pupils and not enough income to support the staffing structure. The school budget had been de-delegated some while ago.

With regard to the process of academisation of the school, the LA had sought legal advice with regard to pursuing Judicial Review (JR), and had written to the DfE, giving them 14 days to respond, with regard to whether their actions had been reasonable.

At this stage, it was not known whether Haltwhistle was part of the Bright Tribe academy as yet. It was understood that Bright Tribe had received £1.3m to become the Northumberland hub of the Academy Trust.

Some members of the Forum expressed the view that the principle of seeking a JR was laudable, but noted that it would be very costly. The Director of Education and Skills outlined the issue as a matter of principle to highlight to the public that the actions of the DfE had been unreasonable. Legal advice indicated the potential good case of the LA in challenging;

- the process itself; and
- the LA proposals for schools in Hexham and Haydon Bridge having many merits, for which no reasons had been given for their refusal.

It was noted that any costs for JR would be taken from the core budget of the County Council and not the schools' funding. The matter of JR would be a Council decision to take. Having contacted colleagues in neighbouring authorities, who shared the concern of Bright Tribe as an organisation, no other authority had agreed to jointly seek JR.

It was noted that paper 8(b) referred to the budget deficit at the school of £633,000 to be met from the Council's core budget. The school roll at Haydon Bridge had reduced to 418 pupils, mainly due to a lack of confidence in Bright Tribe and the declining birth rate in the area. Before a school converts to academy, there was often a need to restructure, and the LA would have to pick up the costs - however, the LA had rejected paying the costs of a restructure in this case. The RSC had indicated re-delegating the budget back to Bright Tribe.

RESOLVED that the position be noted.

(b) Clarification of Deficits. A Briefing Note for the Schools' Forum was circulated, outlining a breakdown of the Historic Commitments 2017/18. The DfE expected these to be significantly decreased by 2020. Confirmation was given that, following analysis, contributions to Children's Services in respect of residential places at Independent Special Schools had not been double counted. Assurance was given that social care costs had not been included as education costs.

With regard to the breakdown of costs, those under Miscellaneous - these related to legal work associated with academy conversions, school

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reorganisations and restructuring. In future, it was hoped to impose a charge on these to mitigate costs. The Head of School Organisation and Resources reported that a bid for funding had been submitted to the DfE to mitigate that expenditure relating to academy conversions.

5. COMMUNICATION

(a) Communication with the Schools' Forum

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

(b) Draft Minutes from Committee meetings:

- Formula Funding Committee - no meeting held.
- Additional Educational Needs Committee - no meeting held.

6. REVISIONS TO THE DSG BUDGET 2017-18

Members of the Schools' Forum were requested to consider the report and agree revisions to the expenditure within the DSG for 2017/18 and, following consultation, the Early Years formula values for 2017/18 (a copy of the report is filed with the signed minutes).

Members of the Schools' Forum considered the report and appendices which:

- provided an update on the Schools Block for 2017/18;
- sought approval for the Early Years formula funding rates following consultation with the schools and early years providers;
- provided clarification on the Historic Commitments.

The Director of Education and Skills gave a brief outline of the background to the small revisions to the DSG for 2017-18 since the last meeting.

RESOLVED that the two specific recommendations in the report be approved, as follows:

Recommendation 1 - The approval of the school funding formula for 2017/18 by the DfE be noted and the revised annex 3 and annex 4 be approved;

Recommendation 2 - The funding rates for the Early Years formula for 2017/18 be set using Option B, at the values shown in the report.

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7. SETTING THE HIGH NEEDS BUDGET 2017/18

The Schools' Forum were asked to agree the detailed allocation of the High Needs Block within DSG for 2017/18.

The Director of Education and Skills reported that in the current financial year, the forecasted outturn for the High Needs Block was £1.8m more than the budget. One proposal to fund the forecast overspend was to reduce all schools AWPU funding (by 1.5%) in order to subsidise the High Needs Block. This would mean much reduced funding for all schools in 2018/19. The report set out the position in more detail.

It was noted that the 2016/17 projected deficit would be reduced by using the carry forward from 2015/16 and other underspends. The DfE had given an additional allocation of £1.6m for High Needs in 2017/18. Action had already been taken, or was being put in place, to reduce or prevent further overspends. Page 4 of the report highlighted proposed expenditure in 2017/18 and 2018/19 as a modelling exercise.

At this point, the SEND Service SLA Bundle was tabled to all at the meeting. It was made clear that the SLA bundle contained non-statutory services only. Reference was made to the table on page 5 of the bundle as a possible solution. It was noted that the impact of this would be most significant on small schools who may be able to afford a SLA. It was recommended that the AEN Sub-Committee should meet to review the detail of the impact of the Bundle in practice.

Mr. Day proposed there should be a slightly fairer system to all, to pay by proportionality, and that the percentage of SEN in schools be considered. He suggested that the package in the SLA bundle was disproportionately expensive for small schools of less than 99 pupils.

Mr. Bone suggested that in order to try and drive a behaviour change and increase uptake in SLA services, there should be a revision to the weightings in the amounts in the package, so that pressure could be relieved in smaller schools and larger schools could pay more in proportion.

It was hoped that small schools would work together, in order to secure a group package SLA. In principle, members of the Schools' Forum recommended the SEND Services SLA Bundle be circulated to all schools as a model to address the pressure in the High Needs Block.

RESOLVED that the specific recommendations set out in the report be agreed and that the impact of the SEND Services SLA Bundle be carefully reviewed by the AEN Sub-Committee at their meeting on 8 March 2017.

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8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- **SEND Services SLA Bundle**

It was noted that the bundle had been considered in conjunction with the agenda item Setting the Dedicated Schools Grant 2017/18 above.

- **Use of the Contingency Fund**

The Director of Education and Skills introduced the paper and pointed out the relevant paragraphs from the DfE document which clearly set out the treatment of surplus/deficits when maintained schools were converting to academy status.

At the previous meeting the Schools Forum had approved the setting up of a contingency fund to subsidise potential deficits. This could be utilised in respect of potential deficits resulting from the Alnwick re-organisation and school closures, with the approval of the Schools Forum

This paper clarifies the decision taken at the previous Schools Forum meeting.

- **Response to consultation - Schools National Funding Formula**

The Director of Education and Skills reported that Northumberland was part of the F40 group of poorly funded authorities and their draft joint response to the consultation was circulated (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes).

It was noted that the deadline for responding to the Government's consultation was 22 March 2017. It was hoped that the Schools Forum would decide upon a collective approach.

In addition and separate from the national funding consultation, the Director of Education and Skills circulated a drafted letter addressed to the Secretary of State for Education which was to be circulated to all schools, for use individually. The letter outlined the significant financial pressures faced in Northumberland, compounded by the historically low funding base when compared with many other areas on the country. Members of the Schools' Forum agreed that the draft letter should be circulated to all 178 schools in Northumberland for information and inviting them to respond.

Mr. Day said he was aware that the National Governors' Association had also

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circulated a similar letter, that had encouraged governors to respond individually.

It was recommended that the Formula Funding Sub-Committee should consider the information and provide a collective response. Any interested member of the Schools' Forum was also to be invited to the Formula Funding Sub-Committee meeting, on 7 March 2017.

RESOLVED that a meeting of the Formula Funding Sub-Committee be held to consider the information and provide a collective response to the Schools National Funding Formula consultation, to which any interested member of the Schools' Forum be invited to attend, if they so wished.

- (a) the report going to Northumberland County Council Cabinet on 7 February 2017 proposing the introduction of a charge to schools converting to academy status in order to recoup the costs to the local authority in relation to the academy conversion process be noted; and
- (b) the views expressed by members of the Schools' Forum, ahead of consultation with schools on a proposed amendment to the Northumberland Scheme for the Financing of Schools in the event that Cabinet approve the proposal, be conveyed to the Cabinet.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the next meeting of the Schools' Forum be held on the **5 July 2017** at 9.30 a.m. in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth.

It was noted that the proposed dates for meetings of the Forum's sub-committees are:

- Formula Funding Committee - 7 March 2017 at 9.30 a.m.
- Additional Needs Committee - 8 March 2017 at 2. 00 p.m.

CHAIRMAN

DATE

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