

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools' Forum held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 20 November 2019 at 9:30 am.

PRESENT

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

Headteacher Representatives

M Deane-Hall, Glendale Middle
M Hall, The Duchess Community
High

F Hartland, Kielder First
B Ryder, Berwick Middle

Governor Representatives

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

I Walker, Governor, The Duchess
Community High
B Watson, St Robert's RC First
G Wilkins, St Wilfrid's RC Primary

Academies Representatives

G Atkins, Hadrian Learning Trust
E Potts, Adderlane Academy

D Warburton, Bede Academy
S Wild, Castle School (NCEA Trust)

Early Years' Representative - E Chaplin

Trades Union Representative - R E Woolhouse

16 - 19 Provider of Education Representative - J Bell

Northumberland County Council Elected Members - None present

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OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
D Jackson	Service Director - Education and Skills
K Norris	Democratic Services Officer
B Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
A Russell	Principal Accountant
D Street	Commissioner for Early Years & Primary
N Taylor	Head of Inclusive Education Services

Observers: D Baldwin, Chair of North Tyneside's Schools' Forum, T Cameron, Administration Finance Assistant, C Ponting, Senior Manager, Schools HR.

24. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 24.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager welcomed Elaine Chaplin, the new early years representative, to the Forum.
- 24.2 Members were informed that Kieran McGrane, Academy representative, had resigned from the Forum due to increasing work commitments which left a vacancy in this group. If members were aware of any interest, through respective networks, they were asked to contact the Education and Skills Business Manager or the Clerk to the Forum.
- 24.3 The Chair said that Kieran McGrane had been a valued member of Schools' Forum for a number of years and would be missed. He would write to Mr McGrane on behalf of the Forum to convey thanks for the contributions he had made and asked that this also be placed on record.
- 24.4 Reference was made to an example of a revised nameplate to show name, position and sector. This was approved and would be provided at the next meeting.

AGREED that the information be noted.

25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from S Hemingsley, D Wylie, Councillor W Daley, and D Illingworth.

26. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

- 26.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 2 October 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising:

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- 26.2 Minute 16.2: Haydon Bridge - In response to a question the Director of Education and Skills said that no monies had been repaid by Bright Tribe but it was his understanding that the Department for Education (DfE) was taking legal action against them.
- 26.3 Minute 21.11: The Director of Education and Skills referred to the action where it had been agreed that he provide a briefing to outline how funding had previously been allocated and the potential implications of the move to the new NFF system, however, he had been unable to attend the last meeting of the High Needs Subcommittee. There was now a draft High Needs Strategy but as rules of purdah were in place, he would be unable to update the Forum until after the election and would do so at January's meeting.

27. COMMUNICATION

(a) Consultation Response to Implementation of Minimum Per Pupil Funding

- 27.1 The above was attached for information (copy filed with the signed Minutes at Agenda Item 5).
- 27.2 The Education and Skills Business Manager said it had been made clear to the DfE that the response had the support of NCC Schools' Forum. Reference was made in the response to schools often having more pupils in the higher age groups and how this was not reflected in the proposed changes.

(b) Draft Minutes of the High Needs Subcommittee, 23 October 2019

- 27.2 G Wilkins, Chair of the High Needs Subcommittee, presented the above (copy filed with the signed Minutes at Agenda Item 5). There was a forecast overspend of £911k by the end of the year, a reduction of £500k on the 2018/19 year end position of a £1.4 million deficit, and he referred to the pressures arising from exclusions, the large number of EHCPs and a further 160 EHCP current applications . However, progress had been made and strict monitoring was taking place. He emphasised the need for pressure to be put on politicians to provide extra funding.
- 27.3 On a positive note, the Chair said it was good news that the percentage transfer from school funding to high needs was decreasing and was forecast to decrease further in future years.
- 27.4 The Director of Education and Skills referred to the next meeting of the High Needs Subcommittee which was scheduled for 10 December and said, unfortunately, he could not attend on that date. It was agreed that alternative dates would be discussed after the meeting.
- 27.5 In response to a question about having special needs provision in mainstream schools, members were advised that a report was going to Family and Children's Scrutiny Committee the following week setting out proposals to establish two Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARP) at Seaton Sluice First School and Astley

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High School. This was a pilot scheme with the intention of carrying out further work with schools to determine the need for ARPs across the whole county. Members would be able to view committee papers on the Council's website the following day.

- 27.6 In response to a question about the new special school in Blyth, it was stated that progress was being made on all levels. A number of Academy Trusts had expressed an interest in running the school and a moderation meeting had taken place. Due to purdah, no further information could be released at this time but further details would be reported to the next meeting.
- 27.7 The report of the Task and Finish Group, looking at exclusions, had not yet been to Cabinet but exclusions had dropped by 28% and were on a downward trend. Thanks were conveyed to the schools involved and the progress made.

(c) Draft Minutes of Funding Formula Subcommittee, 5 November 2019

- 27.8 I Walker, Chair of the Formula Funding Sub Committee, presented the above (copy attached to the signed Minutes at Agenda Item 5). Discussion had taken place on applying funding formula factors in a different way and an update on the formula itself (including proposed options). These would be discussed in detail at Agenda item 7.
- 27.9 The Education and Skills Business Manager referred to the four options stating that option 4 (direct move to the NFF) was dropped after discussion as it was felt it would not provide a gradual and smooth transition. Options 1, 2 and 3 were considered, with examples, but the Subcommittee had not met since so no proposal had been put forward.
- 27.10 Ben Watson asked that the Draft Subcommittee Minutes be amended to reflect that he was representing St Robert's RC First School, Morpeth and not the Seaton Valley Federation.

AGREED that the information be noted.

28. 2019/20 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT MONITORING

- 28.1 A Russell, Principal Accountant, summarised the above report (attached to the signed Minutes as Agenda item 6). Reference was made to:
- Overspend on Schools Block due to children in independent settings with social care needs. It was noted that this would constantly change. Funding for Longridge Towers was also within this budget.
 - Early Years Block was currently on target but the head count was difficult to predict and work was being done in that regard.
 - Forecast overspend of £524k on High Needs Block (shortfall between deficit carried forward less reductions to budget identified to meet the amount).
 - Forecast overspend on special sixth form funding which had been merged into the DSG. No funds had been set aside as the Council had not been

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aware of it but would look to rectify this once the next DSG allocation was released.

- In terms of independent special schools, there were currently 182 placements across a number providers which had risen by four since the report was written. The number was rising and meetings would take place with social care colleagues to discuss this. It continued to be an area of on-going pressure as did alternative provision.
- There had been reductions in expenditure on EHCP/STAR funding to all sectors and also across services within the Virtual school which had been restructured.
- There was a forecast underspend of £314,000 to the Schools Block and the contingency budget currently had very few commitments. Schools' Forum had agreed to set aside some funding for exclusion support.
- In summary it was considered that the position was better than had been anticipated for this time of year.

28.2 In response to a request for clarification, the Forum was advised that Longridge Towers was used to provide education to secondary aged pupils who lived on Holy Island and cost around £100,000 per year. This had been looked at on various occasions and was still considered to be the most cost effective method available.

28.3 With regard to special school sixth form funding, DSG funding had increased but, because of adjustments elsewhere, that change had not been picked up initially by officers. Funding was based upon £10,000 per place so it was not quite the same as for maintained school sixth forms.

28.4 With regard to independent special schools, and the rising number of placements, planned meetings with social care colleagues to discuss individual circumstances were welcomed in order to ensure the appropriate criteria was being met. It was felt that the underspend on the EHCP/STAR budget was positive but a question was raised as to whether this had gone too far and if budgets should be going to individuals? In response the Education and Skills Business Manager said, historically at Northumberland, top up funding had been paid to students without a care plan, however, short term funding should not last longer than 9 months and there had been a systematic review. This had resulted in a structured plan being put in place and some students had come out of the system altogether. It was acknowledged that some pupils had moved to EHC Plans and continued to receive funding, though savings had arisen where a plan was not required and financial support was no longer necessary.

28.5 In response to a question about funding from the Schools Block for exclusions, the Director of Education and Skills said he would like to discuss the findings of the Task and Finish Group with headteachers. Schools' Forum had supported the request to fund additional posts within the Exclusion Team and this was being implemented. At present a tender was out for a new framework around alternative provision and information on that would be brought to a future meeting of the Forum when the outcome of the tender process was known. This was only used when needed.

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AGREED that the information be noted.

29. SCHOOL FUNDING

- 29.1 The report provided further additional information in respect of the continuing implementation of the National Funding Formula, the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and associated 2020/21 Schools Funding Information. (A copy of the report is filed with the signed minutes of the meeting as agenda item 7.)
- 29.2 The Education and Skills Business Manager apologised for the late circulation of the paper. Although data used in the report was based on October 2018 data (final figures based on October 2019 census data would not be issued until mid/late December), key decisions were required about how the budget should be set. He said it was important for the Forum to digest the recommendations put forward and then review the report in the context of those recommendations.
- 29.3 The recommendation in the report was to agree the transfer of up to 0.5% of the final value of the Schools Block to the High Needs Block which was a reduction from the 1% transfer in 2018/19 and 2019/20. Subject to comments, agreement was being sought that funding values for 2020/21 be set in line with the principles outlined in the report. The Education and Skills Business Manager reinforced that it was a key consultation meeting to influence the report for Cabinet on 14 January and a key opportunity for members to influence that. Final decisions on the values would be delegated to the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services once final funding became known in order to enable the required Cabinet report to be prepared and submitted to the 14 January meeting and the submission of the necessary return to the ESFA by 21 January 2020. A further report would be brought to the next meeting of Schools' Forum on 15 January.
- 29.4 In response to a question it was confirmed that delegated powers had been approved in the past so that any necessary minor adjustments could be made to balance the budget which would be decided by Cabinet. Figures would change when the results of the 2019 census were available and the funding guarantees offered by the DfE were based on "per pupil" funding.
- 29.5 A comparison had been made of 2018/19 and 2019/20 figures as set out in the table at the top of page 2 in the report. It was noted that no early years (EY) figures were available to date but it had been indicated there would be an increase in EY funding equating to 1.8%. There had been a cut in funding for the Central Schools Services Block in 2020/21.
- 29.6 As highlighted, the most significant figure was the introduction of the new minimum funding per pupil rate accounting for the distribution of £1.4 million funding which was £850,000 higher than last year. Not all schools would benefit but 21 schools in Northumberland (1 in 7) would benefit in 2021 if implemented in line with NFF.

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- 29.7 While the costs arising from any changes to the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG), were not substantial, it could be significant to schools receiving the lowest level of per pupil funding increase where the MFG could be used to increase the funding for those schools. In response to a question the Education and Skills Business Manager stated that MFG would continue as part of the Schools Funding system in some format after the NFF was fully implemented.
- 29.8 Reference was made to sparsity being allocated on the basis of two key criteria, details of which were set out in paragraph 6 of the report. A slide presentation was provided to show details of an exercise carried out to identify schools qualifying on the basis of pupil numbers but who were under the minimum average distance figure and therefore not currently receiving sparsity. Examples were given of using road distances rather than 'as the crow flies' which had resulted in a further six schools meeting the pupil distance criteria (as listed in the table at the bottom of page 3 of the report).
- 29.9 A disapplication request had been submitted to and agreed by the DfE but following a request for further information as to whether this would attract additional funding, the DfE was non-committal and said it was reviewing the pupil distance criteria.
- 29.10 After further discussion it was pointed out that the DfE had been informed on various occasions in the past about Northumberland's unique position with regard to sparsity but this had made no difference and the Council was now proposing to use this criteria to distribute its DSG.29.11. In response to a question it was stated that MFG would not have a significant influence on those schools as they generally were receiving below average increases. Sparsity was an issue for Northumberland and should be highlighted.
- 29.12 The Education and Skills Business Manager further proposed that for the schools meeting the DfE sparsity criteria, the full NFF approach should be adopted, rather than the tapered approach as used previously by Northumberland. This could affect up to 49 schools, who could potentially see an increase in their sparsity funding. The estimated cost was £500,000, but it was recommended adopting the NFF approach at this stage as sparsity was such a challenge for Northumberland.
- 29.13 Any increases arising from additional sparsity funding could potentially be subject to capping and scaling depending on the overall levels of per pupil increase.
- 29.14 Discussion ensued about the reasons why remote schools needed extra funding to make them economically viable and the problems they faced.
- 29.15 Reference was made to paragraph 8 on page 4 of the report setting out the proposed new way of working with regard to SEND support from September 2020. Nicola Taylor, the recently appointed Head of Inclusive Education Services, would have a full overview of the service and would be in a position to provide further information to the meeting of Schools' Forum in January. Mrs Taylor said SLAs were

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sometimes a barrier and officers were looking to offer core services to enable schools to intervene earlier in order to 'even the playing field' for access to services. It was hoped that by tapping into other local reserves they could meet needs in a more efficient way.

- 29.16 As outlined in the report, the reduction in funding to the Central Services Block had not been anticipated. Representations had been made to the EFSA about on-going capital costs and pension commitments which remained a concern.
- 29.17 With reference to paragraph 11 on page 6 of the report, De-delegation, no significant changes were anticipated for 2021.
- 29.18 The potential implications for Northumberland were set out in paragraph 12 on pages 6, 7 and 8 of the report. Three options had been developed and were illustrative in order to demonstrate the potential impact of changes to the funding values and other elements within the Funding Formula. In each of the 3 examples given an estimated DSG figure of £183.8 million was distributed to provide a small contingency while awaiting the final settlement.
- 29.19 The Education and Skills Business Manager summarised Options 1, 2 and 3 as set out in the report. He said it was important to emphasise that capping and scaling did not impact on schools receiving minimum per pupil funding.
- 29.20 A number of appendices were included with the report. Reference was made to Appendix A which highlighted some of the key differences between the options outlined. Where the Council was in line with NFF it was pointed out that it would make no sense to deviate from that. With regard to the questions in Appendix D, the importance of questions 1 and 1.1 were emphasised as it was considered, with the agreement of Schools' Forum, that the Council should continue with a phased approach and how that should proceed.
- 29.21 The Chair said that option 3 seemed to be the fairest option as it would continue to adopt a phased approach to NFF. He asked if any members of the Forum were against it. Discussion ensued and, in response to comments, the Education and Skills Business Manager pointed out that, with regards to Kielder Primary School, data did not show the transition from First to Primary. Option 2 created a greater spread of increase than option 3 which essentially lifted some of the bottom schools in terms of increase. Only 16 schools would receive less than 2% compared to 28 schools in option 1.
- 29.22 In response to comments about not having had time to look at the papers in detail, the Education and Skills Business Manager said he would be happy to take comments via the School consultation following the Forum meeting but a recommendation about which option to adopt was required from the Forum in order to move forward and share the consultation paper accordingly. The Chair added that a decision was needed but comments could be received after the meeting.

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- 29.23 In terms of deprivation funding, it was acknowledged that option 3 would generally produce lower figures for schools with higher deprivation levels but only to schools receiving increases over 4% and this would distribute funding more evenly.
- 29.24 With regard to the basic per pupil allocation, it was pointed out that there had been significant changes in the NFF level for 2020/21. It was a question of whether Northumberland wished to maintain values over the NFF ones and at what levels.
- 29.25 R Woolhouse said a number of schools may not prefer option 3 and asked if it would be an overall package. In response the Chair asked the Forum if they wished to approve option 3 in principal depending upon conclusion of other issues which would be considered separately, such as sparsity, minimum per pupil funding and MFG. Capping and scaling would be taken into consideration and, while MFG was a significant factor in formula funding last year, it would be less significant this year due to the overall increase in resources. It may therefore be appropriate to explore a different level of it.
- 29.26 In relation to sparsity, the Chair said there were two elements; removing the taper and the inclusion of the additional six schools identified as an exceptional factor to increase the profile. Members agreed that, from a strategic point of view, this made sense but said it should be looked at again next year and not agreed to indefinitely.
- 29.27 Members agreed the transfer of up to 0.5% from the schools block to the high needs block once the final DSG values were released.

AGREED that

1. A transfer of up to 0.5% of the final value of the 2020/21 Schools Block to the High Needs block.
2. Proposed 2020/21 formula funding values for Northumberland be based on Option 3 involving the use of higher values for APWU and deprivation values used previously for Northumberland, with the application of capping and scaling used to ensure overall affordability and in respect of Ponteland Middle School and Meadowdale Academy, who were restructuring to become primary schools with effect from 1 September 2020.
3. The potential use of a MFG value higher than the 0.5% minimum be explored to support those schools receiving the lowest overall levels of per pupil increase subject to overall affordability.
4. The decision to delegate the final decision on the final formula values to the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, once the final funding became known in December 2019, be noted, in order to enable the required report to be prepared and submitted to the 14 January 2020 Cabinet meeting.

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5. A further report be submitted to the 15 January Schools' Forum meeting on the final formula values to be used for 2020/21.

30. 2020/21 DISAPPLICATION REQUESTS

- 30.1 The purpose of the report was to consult with Schools' Forum on two disapplication requests to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) in relation to the 2020/21 Schools Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in line with the estimated overall DSG for 2019/20 and the proposed allocation of funds to schools for 2019/20. (Copy of the report attached to the signed Minutes as Agenda Item 8.)
- 30.2 It was noted that discussions about the inclusion of 6 further schools in relation to sparsity criteria had been discussed under the previous agenda item.
- 30.3 With regard to Ponteland Middle School and Meadowdale Academy which were restructuring to become primary schools with effect from 1 September 2020, the Education and Skills Business Manager said pupil movement was more challenging than anticipated as entry was to all classes from reception to year 6 and this made funding difficult.
- 30.4 There had been Initial discussions with the Funding Formula Subcommittee and the EFSA seeking advice about taking this forward. They had suggested that a final budget was not set at this time and it be looked at again in the summer term when further information would be available in relation to likely September pupil numbers following national offers day. Consultation had taken place with the schools involved but no response had been received from either school involved at the time of the meeting.
- 30.5 The Chair said this was a strategic re-organisation and asked Schools' Forum for its support.

AGREED that Schools' Forum note and support:

1. the disapplication requests made in respect of Ponteland Middle School and Meadowdale Academy, who are restructuring to become primary schools with effect from 1 September 2020;
2. the disapplication request in respect of the inclusion of 6 further schools in relation to sparsity criteria as they meet the average year group size and also the minimum average distance criteria if measured by road distance, as permitted by the ESFA.

31. WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES

- 31.1 Reference was made to the above (a copy of which is attached to the signed Minutes as agenda item 9). Dates were provided for the 2020/21 civic year.

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AGREED that the information be noted.

CHAIR_____

DATE_____

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