

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a virtual meeting of the Schools' Forum on Wednesday, 30 September 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

B Ryder, Berwick Middle

Governor Representatives

I Walker, Duchess' High
B Watson, St Robert's RC First

G Wilkins, St Wilfrid's RC Primary

Academies Representatives

G Atkins, Hadrian Learning Trust
A Hardie, NCEA

C Pearson, Three Rivers Learning Trust
S Wild, NCEA Castle School

Early Years' Representative - Not present

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
H Bowers	Democratic Services Officer
A Kingham	Interim Director of Education and Skills
B Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
C Ponting	Senior Manager, Schools HR
A Russell	Principal Accountant
D Street	Commissioner for Early Years & Primary

57. **PROTOCOL FOR COUNCIL MEETINGS HELD REMOTELY BY ELECTRONIC MEANS**

- 57.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson, the newly appointed Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People and Audrey Kingham, Interim Director of Education and Skills. Members were informed that due to two meetings taking place simultaneously, the Schools Forum meeting would be recorded internally. Members were reminded that microphones should be switched to mute unless they intended to speak.

58. **MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE**

- 58.1 Members were informed that there were still vacancies following some resignations. If members knew of anyone interested in being involved with the Schools Forum, to contact the Education and Skills Manager. The Chair hoped that the vacancies would be filled before the next meeting in November.

AGREED that the information be noted and a replacement for the vacancies of maintained schools governor representatives be actively sought.

59. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from J Bell, E Chaplin, M Hall, F Hartland, S Heminsley, D Illingworth, C McEvoy-Carr, N Taylor and A Thelwell.

60. **MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

- 60.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 1 July 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising:

- 60.2 Minute 51.2: The position regarding the retrieval of public money from Bright Tribe was queried and if that would be taken on Board by the new Portfolio Holder. Sue Aviston, Head of Schools Organisation believed that Central Government had

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withdrawn the claim for fraud. Councillor Renner-Thompson added that he had been in recent discussion with Cath McEvoy-Carr and this was still being pursued.

- 60.3 Minute 51.3: The Head of Schools Organisation advised of the success in gaining funding on the running of the Free School. Prosper Academy Trust had been chosen as the trust to take that forward however, this would not take place until the funding agreement was confirmed by the Secretary of State. Consultation would be carried out in the community and the design and business case was in progress on the school site at Princess Louise in Blyth. It was hoped that this would be completed by September 2022. A partnership working approach with the Trust would be taken and she and the Interim Director of Education and Skills would sit on the Project Board together with a number of local authority officers.
- 60.4 Minute 54.6/54.7: The Chair referred to loss of income and queried when the department might release some of the catch-up funds. The Education and Skills Manager explained that there were two elements to the fund. One being the exceptional expenditure funding, which contained three different criteria - premises, cleaning, and additional costs for free school meals which was not recoverable through the voucher scheme and a fourth category which covered other costs. The DfE had advised that this would be subject to further scrutiny, and whilst a minority of schools had received funding, many schools had not. It was possible that it could be November before this was resolved. The catch-up funds based on maintained schools, was paid in 3 tranches - autumn, spring and summer terms, with the first payment being in September.
- 60.5 In response to a query regarding loss of income for schools and the implication this could have on the forum setting up a contingency fund, the Education and Skills Manager stated that it would be difficult for the forum to set up but would continue to monitor. The Chair requested that officers took note of the situation. The Interim Director of Skills and Education stated that colleagues had continued to lobby the DfE over the summer. Councillor Renner-Thompson added that work was being carried out at a political level and a request regarding school funding would be sent to the Government from the LA7 authorities.
- 60.6 It was advised that there had recently been three rounds of additional grant funding to early years providers and private fee settings. The first round had not hit enough early years providers to support, but there had been additional significant funding in the second and third round.
- 60.7 Mr Deane-Hall referred to the loss of income and suggested that schools should be advised on how to manage income and existing resources with the creation of a Covid Cost Centre. The Interim Head of Education and Skills said she and the Commissioner for Early Years and Primary Schools had attended locality meetings with Head Teachers and had advised that a detailed record should be kept on cost impact. Mr Street added that virtual training would be carried out this term. Information would be in the E Courier.

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The Chair stated that it was important to continue to track the situation, understand what the impact was and keep pressure at a departmental and political level.

61. COMMUNICATION

- 61.1 Members were referred to the recent communication regarding the F40 group which was set up around the 40 lowest funded local authorities for education in England. Much of the content was applicable to our schools and highlighted some of the discussion already taken place regarding additional costs and the practical challenges to schools in light of the Covid situation.

62.OVERALL MAINTAINED SCHOOL BALANCES 2019/20

- 62.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the report, a copy of which had been circulated with agenda papers as Agenda Item 6 and was filed with the signed Minutes of the meeting.
- 62.2 The report informed the Schools Forum of the position regarding School Balances as at 31 March 2020.
- 62.3 Members were informed of the aggregated balances of maintained schools. To ensure continuity, any schools that had been academised throughout the year had been omitted from the figures to give a like for like comparison. The summary on page 1 and 2 showed there was an overall fall in the level of balances which had been split between the respective phases. Mr Parvin pointed out that the surplus balances in the primary phase were due to the small cohort of schools which were more prone to variation. The report reflected the challenges seen during 2010/20 as previously there had been no uplift in individual funding rates that could be passed on to schools. However there had been a more modest increase for the current year 2019/20 but this had been affected by significant challenges arising from the Covid situation.

Members were reminded that historically, details of individual schools were not published and those schools that were in current deficit would continue to be addressed. As it was, individual school detailed balances were published by DfE in December and in the public domain.

- 62.4 Mr Atkins understood that small schools varied year on year and that there were sensitivities around individual schools. However, it would be helpful for the Schools Forum if they knew what procedures were in place to work with schools.
- 62.5 The Interim Director of Education and Skills referred to Mr Atkins suggestion and stated she had recently attended meetings with officers where a plan had been put together to support challenges, together with training in November and a framework with an officer support network. Additionally, there would be Chair and Vice Chair Governor updates with training. She added that it was important to remind Governing Bodies of their responsibility to finance and budgets. The support

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challenge framework would set out expectations and what support schools could get. She added that this could be brought back to a further forum or the details circulated.

- 62.6 From a personal point of view the Chair stated that it was incumbent upon Governing Bodies to constantly consider viability for their schools, particularly smaller schools.
- 62.7 The Education and Skills Manager referred members to the previous meeting in July where the step was taken to change the scheme for financing schools and the specific steps taken to provide a clearer framework and criteria.

The following agenda item was brought forward as the officer was unable to present the report due to technical difficulties.

63. NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA (NFF) UPDATE

- 63.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the report, a copy of which had been circulated with agenda papers as Agenda Item 8 and was filed with the signed Minutes of the meeting.
- 63.2 The report provided a briefing in relation to the initial School Funding announcement made on 20 July and the potential implications for Northumberland.
- 63.3 The Education and Skills Manager referred to the initial announcements made in July and the impact that may have for schools. The £14 million funding was across the board for every aspect of education, and although inflation was not particularly high at present, it would account for one third to one half of any increase from one year to the next.
- 63.4 The £1 billion Covid catch up fund was separate and additional to the £14.4 billion and should not impact on the overall settlement in December. It was anticipated that there would be an overall increase of 2 – 3% in per pupil funding. The key impact in school funding would remain driven by pupil numbers which currently accounted for more than 75% of the basic pupil unit funding.

(David Street left the meeting at 10:01 am).

- 63.5 Members were referred to the last year's increase in the minimum per pupil funding levels, which were set to rise again this year. The figures were shown at the bottom of page 1 of the report. Mr Parvin explained the reason the primary rate was rising at a higher percentage than the secondary rate was due to the previous ministerial pledge to move minimum levels to £4,000.
- 63.6 Essentially the 2-3% increase in DSG would result in an extra £3.7 to £5.6 million based on the previous DSG figure. Members were reminded that the final 21/22

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figure would be based on the October 2020 census, and schools' census data should be as accurate and comprehensive as possible.

- 63.7 The Teachers' Pay and Pension Grants would be rolled into the overall funding, based on a pupil basis. There were some concerns that it may not reflect individual school positions and account for a larger element of the 40% increase and would continue to be a challenging financial situation for schools.
- 63.8 Mr Parvin pointed out that the published DfE figures were not necessarily comparable, but figures could be looked at when additional work was carried out on the funding formula.
- 63.9 There had been an average increase of 10% within the High Needs block, which was between £2.9 and £4.4 million which was due to the impact of the Teachers Pay and Pension. Further information was still awaited.
- 63.10 There had been a small increase in on going responsibilities within the Central School Services Block (CSSB), e.g. for place planning and admissions. In the historic element, a significant cut of 20% had been highlighted last year which had again been repeated this year. This took the figure down by £300,000 (figures shown in section 6 of the report) and historic responsibilities funding below long-term commitments. The ESFA had indicated they would preserve prudential borrowing and capital and historic termination costs and representations were being made to the ESFA for additional support.
- 63.11 A Formula Funding Committee was set up for 14 October, with a subsequent meeting ahead of the Schools Forum in November with key consultation to inform Cabinet in January and the DfE in February.
- 63.12 Andrea Mead referred to the increase in costs in High Needs and asked if the High Needs Funding Committee could reconsider the bandings and stated she would be happy to take part in the meeting if any information was required. Sara Wilds and Audrey Kingham added that they would be happy to take part in that meeting also.
- 63.13. The Education and Skills Manager informed members that a SEN and further DSG monitoring report would be presented to the next Forum meeting. A further date would be provided following the next Schools Forum Committee for a further meeting.

(G Atkins left the meeting at 10.23 am)

(D Street re-joined the meeting)

- 63.14 Sue Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources updated the group on the Task and Finish Group which had been put on hold due to lock down. Work had started again, and an action plan was being developed by the Education Improvement Board who would monitor outcomes and actions for the Task and Finish Group together with a working party of Head Teachers. Thanks, were

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conveyed to School Forum members who had agreed contingencies to employ additional support workers. The team were continuing to have a good impact with an improvement in permanent exclusions with joined up wraparound working. Some specific transition work had also been carried out with a school in Bedlington helping children settle back into their new environment after lockdown.

64. 2019/20 DSG OUTTURN

- 64.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the report, a copy of which had been circulated with agenda papers as Agenda Item 7 and was filed with the signed Minutes of the meeting.
- 64.2 The report provided details of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) outturn position for 2019/20, together with the implications of the outturn highlighted by significant cost pressures within the budget
- 64.3 The Education and Skills Manager reported that there had been a further reduction in the deficit, at the year ending 19/20.
- 64.4 At the meeting in February an overspend of £6.75 million had been predicted. The final position had improved by £0.607 million which saw an overall reduction of £0.629 million, compared to the previous financial year. Whilst there was additional high needs funding for 20/21, there was also a £900,000 reduction in the transfer from the schools block to high needs block. Pressures remained specifically around high needs because of increasing numbers and plans recorded, and the number of pupils supported. This was a national picture.
- 64.5 There continued to be challenges around alternative provision and permanent exclusions, whilst the numbers of permanent exclusions had reduced, a number of pupils continued to be supported on an ongoing basis. The overall number of pupils supported, continued to rise.
- 64.6 As special school places continued being full, placements continued to be increased in independent special schools at a higher-level cost which had resulted in an overspend of £400,000.
- 64.7 Sixth form grants and changes in the regulations had previously been reported to Schools Forum. Schools were reminded that the transfer for the current financial year had been reduced from 1% to 0.5%.
- 64.8 Mr Parvin referred to Appendix 1 attached to the report – Trade Union Facility Time and stated that historically there had been an agreed underspend which could be carried from one year to the next. There had been an increase this year, due to the success of recovering outstanding income and if the balance transfer was allowed, the HR team would freeze the pupil rate charge to schools.

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- 64.9 Christine Ponting, Schools Manager, HR explained that some of the underspend had been linked to lack of activity due to lockdown. There had also been a couple of Trade Union representatives who would normally claim against the fund, had secured work elsewhere with one retiring. It was hoped to reappoint more representatives. She further added that as Covid restrictions were lifted, there was the possibility of spending more this year, but would hopefully that would balance out.
- 64.10 In response to a query regarding allocation of funding for DLA not being claimed and ringfenced, Mr Parvin advised that had been permitted through the Early Years Child Care Providers.
- 64.11 Sara Wilds, Castle School requested a breakdown of placements to independent special schools from the High Needs Subcommittee.
- 64.12. Mr G Wilkins referred to the SEN core offer document reported at February's meeting which was supposed to have been circulated to member of Schools Forum. This had not been received and requested that members were updated. The Interim Director of Education and Skills would follow this up.

AGREED that the Schools Forum:

- a) Approve that the overspend on the DSG for 2019/20 will have the first call on the DSG settlement for 2020/21.
- b) Approve the carry forward of the 2019/20 Trade Union Facility surplus of £46,738 in line with the report attached at Appendix A
- c) Note the ongoing monitoring of High Needs funding.

65. 2020/21 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES

The Education and Skills Manager informed members that as the meeting of 17 February 2021 clashed with the Half Term Holiday, the Schools Forum meeting date had been changed to Wednesday 24 February 2021.

66. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would take place on Wednesday 18 November at 9:30 am.

CHAIR_____

DATE_____

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