

# **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

## **SCHOOLS' FORUM**

At a meeting of the **Schools' Forum** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Thursday 29 September 2016 at 2.30 p.m.

### **PRESENT**

Mr. M. Brown  
Governor Representative  
(Ponteland Richard Coates C E Middle School)

### **Headteacher Representatives**

Mrs. H. Blythe (Choppington Primary School)	Mr. K. P. McGrane (Ponteland High School)
Mrs. F. G. Hartland (Kielder First School)	Mr. M. Deane-Hall (Wooler First School)
Mr. K. Burdis, (Cleaswell Hill School)	

### **Governor Representatives**

Mr. C. Pearson (Morpeth Abbeyfields First School)	Mr I Walker (The Duchess's High School, Alnwick)
Mr. K. Faulkner (Collingwood Special School, Morpeth)	Mr. G. J. Wilkins (Blyth St Wilfrid's RC Primary School)

### **Trades Union Representatives**

Mrs. J. M. Guthrie	Mr. R. E. Woolhouse
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### **Academies Representatives**

Mrs. D. W. Wylie, Cramlington Village Primary School (Free School)	Mr. A. C. Day, Northumberland Church of England Academy
	Mrs. S. Clement, Blyth Croftway Primary Academy

### **Early Years/PVI Representatives**

Ms. K. A. Morrison

Ch.'s Initials.....

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### **Roman Catholic Diocese**

Mrs. F. A. Penny

Headteacher, Cramlington St Peter's R. C.  
Middle and St. Paul's R. C. First Schools

### **Church of England Diocese**

R. Bishopp

### **Pupil Referral Unit Representative**

T. Dexter

### **Elected Member as Observer**

Councillor G. R. Arckless

Cabinet Portfolio Holder for  
Children's Services

### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Mrs. S. Aviston	Capital Projects Officer (Schools)
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. Cookson	Commissioner, Secondary Schools
Ms. E. Sinclair	Work Shadow for D. Cookson
Mr. D. Street	Commissioner, Primary & Early Years
Ms. S. Dent	Principal Accountant (on behalf of Mrs. A. Elsdon)
Mrs. L. Papaioannou	Democratic Services Officer and Secretary of the Schools' Forum

#### **1. MEMBERSHIP**

The Secretary of the Schools' Forum reported the following changes in membership:

Appointments:

Two Academy representatives - Mrs. D. Wylie, Headteacher of Cramlington Village Primary (Free) School and Mrs. L. Rule, Governor of Pax Christi Catholic Academy representing St Benet Biscop RC High School,

Ch.'s Initials.....

One First School Headteacher - Mrs. H. Blythe of Choppington Primary School and One Special School Governor - Mr. K. Faulkner of Morpeth Collingwood School.

The Chairman welcomed Mrs. Wylie, Mrs. Blythe and Mr. Faulkner to their first meeting of the Schools' Forum.

It was noted that the following vacancies remained on the Schools' Forum:

One Middle School Governor

Two First/Primary School representatives (1 Governor and 1 Headteacher).

The Secretary to the Schools' Forum confirmed that she had written directly to the Headteachers of Berwick and Tweedmouth Middle Schools and had invited them to nominate a Governor to the Forum. Despite no initial expressions of interest, the Headteacher of Berwick Middle School had agreed to make a further attempt to seek representation from the area.

All First and Primary Schools had been written to about the remaining two vacancies on the Forum, with a note about the under-represented areas of Prudhoe, Coquet and Seaton Valley in particular. Only two expressions of interest had been received from:

- A Governor of Newbrough CE First School (in the Haydon Bridge partnership) and a Governor of Stamfordham First School (in the Ponteland partnership).

Given the fact that there were already two representatives on the Forum from the Ponteland partnership, it was agreed to hold back appointing a further representative from this area at present, bearing in mind those areas without representation. However, it was **AGREED** to appoint the Governor of Newbrough CE First School to one of the two vacant positions for First/Primary representatives.

**RESOLVED** that further efforts continue to be made to fill the remaining vacancies for a Middle School Governor representing the Berwick area, and a First/Primary representative from one of the under-represented partnerships.

## 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr. G. Atkins (Headteacher, Hexham Middle School), Mrs. S. Clement (Headteacher Blyth Croftway Primary Academy), Mr. S. Griffiths (Headteacher, Bedlingtonshire High School), Mr. M. Hodgson (Governor, Harbottle CE First School), Mrs. H. Norris (Post 16 Provider of Education), Dr. R. Vaughan (Governor, The Three Rivers Learning Trust), Mrs. G. Evans (Headteacher, The Bede Academy), Mrs. L. Rule (Governor of St Benet Biscop Roman Catholic Academy) and Mrs. A. Elsdon (Director of Corporate Resources).

Ch.'s Initials.....

### 3. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 18 May 2016, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

### 4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

With reference to Minute No. 5, *Matters Arising from the Minutes* (page 5), it was noted that the SEND Strategic Statement featured later on the agenda for this meeting.

In connection with the same Minute No. 5, Mr. G. Wilkins confirmed he had been nominated as a Governor Member onto the Working Group to discuss the sustainability of small First and Primary schools in Northumberland, and that he had been invited to the meeting taking place on 4 October 2016.

In connection with Minute No. 10, *Early Years Funding Update for 2016/17*, page 9, the Chairman confirmed that he had written to the Secretary of State for Education on two issues - concern about inadequate funding for early years, and the delay in the Academy conversion at Haydon Bridge High School. To date, he had received no response.

At this point, members requested an update on the position at Haydon Bridge High School. The Director of Education reported that an Academy Order had been issued and that Bright Tribe had been appointed as the sponsor - although they had yet to sign and confirm this. The Director of Education and the Deputy Chief Executive had held numerous meetings with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) about the delay in the situation and had also extended an open invitation to Bright Tribe to talk about their issues with the local authority. There had also been an open invitation for them to attend a meeting of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) at the school, but to date there had been no response from either Bright Tribe or the Commissioner. The predicted budget shortfall of at least £300,000 needed to be picked up. Currently the school is still operating as a LA maintained school, with an Acting Headteacher in post. Bright Tribe had appointed two consultants and had expected the LA to pay for them. This was proving frustrating and difficult. The uncertain situation had continued for 18 months and the LA needed to consider other options. The Deputy Chief Executive had expressed concern to the Regional Schools Commissioner 10 days ago, and still had received no response.

Another issue related to the school budget that had been de-delegated from the IEB to the LA. The IEB was in a difficult position, however, the deficit budget needed to continue to pay staff and the LA was running the school

Ch.'s Initials.....

budget as in the previous year, whilst attempting to reduce costs. The Director of Education had written to express concern about the unacceptable position to the RSC, and the national and regional Academies Commissioners.

The Unison Trade Union representative expressed concern for the staff given the duration of this issue and felt it was really worrying that Bright Tribe were not engaging in communication. The Director of Education said it was very difficult for him to report to the Schools' Forum. He understood that Bright Tribe were interested in forming a Multi-Academy Trust with Haltwhistle school but, as yet, they was no agreement with Haltwhistle or with any other local schools as part of the group. It was **AGREED** that an updated report on the position be provided at the next meeting of the Schools' Forum.

With regard to Minute No. 12, Work Programme, page 11, it was noted that a report on Longridge Towers schooling pupils from Holy Island was to be discussed later on the agenda for this meeting.

In response to the requests in Minute No. 5, Matters Arising of the meeting held on 18 May 2016, the School Funding and Business Relationship Manager tabled copies of the following additional reports:

- a detailed breakdown of DSG variances in overspend, as requested by G. Atkins
- a detailed breakdown of the deprivation variances in the different factors on the report of post-MFG budget
- Revised DSG carry forward 2015-16 figures and High Needs Top-Up Funding
- Approved Licensed Deficit Budgets
- Work Programme 2016-17

**RESOLVED** that

- (a) an updated report on the position at Haydon Bridge High School be submitted to the next meeting of the Schools' Forum; and
- (b) the High Needs Top-Up Funding issue be revisited at the next meeting of the Schools' Forum.

## **5. COMMUNICATION**

### **(a) Communication with the Schools' Forum**

The Chairman reported receipt of two items of communication to be considered by the School's Forum:

- (a) Professional Standards for Teaching Assistants

Ch.'s Initials.....

Mrs. Guthrie of Unison tabled a report, dated June 2016, which was being circulated to all Headteachers in advance of the big launch next week. Whilst noting the professional standards were non-statutory, nevertheless, she believed that all schools should be encouraged to use them as professional standards for teaching assistants, alongside the statutory standards for teachers and Headteachers.

(b) Trade Unions letter about facilities cover.

Mr Woolhouse commented that this letter was in the process of being distributed to all schools.

It was agreed to consider both items under Any Other Business at the end of the meeting.

**(b) Draft Minutes from Committee meetings:**

- Formula Funding Committee - no meeting held.
- Additional Educational Needs Committee - the draft minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 June 2016 were circulated and received, for information.
- It was noted that there had been no minutes taken at the meeting held on 13 July 2016, at which a review was undertaken into the exceptional costs in relation to SEND. Mrs. F. Penny commented that the additional educational costs appeared to be enormous and the AEN Committee had asked Mr. A. Carrick, Commissioner for SEND, to look into the matter and report back. Furthermore, out of a number of samples of behaviour and mental health needs, not all costings had been broken down correctly into the educational aspects, as a lot were related to social care and health costs. The Chairman outlined that Mr. A. Carrick had agreed to give a presentation to the members of the Schools' Forum later in the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the draft minutes of the meeting of the AEN Committee, held on 14 June 2016, be received for information, and that a presentation be received later in the meeting on the High Needs Funding Update.

**6. PRESENTATION - PROVISIONAL EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES 2016**

Members of the Schools' Forum received a presentation from Dr. Andy Johnson, the Director of Education and Skills, on the Provisional Educational Outcomes 2016 (a copy of the PowerPoint presentation slides is filed with the signed minutes).

The Director of Education and Skills reminded members this was his annual presentation about how the money the Schools' Forum had allocated for

Ch.'s Initials.....

teaching and learning had been spent in the academic year 2015-16. It was noted that some of the data was unvalidated and members were asked to keep the contents confidential. Finalised data would be published in November in Northumberland and nationally from January 2017. Headteacher and Chairs of Governors were also being briefed on the results.

The presentation outlined the progress and outcomes at:

- The Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS)
- Phonics Test Year 1
- Key Stage 1
- Progress made from Reception to Key Stage 1
- Key Stage 2
- School by School Variation
- Secondary Outcomes
- GCSE Headlines (unvalidated)
- Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 Expected Progress
- Post 16 Achievement - Academic and Vocational
- Outcomes achieved by pupils receiving SEN support, and
- Outcomes achieved by pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans or Statements of Special Educational Needs.

In response to a member's query, the Director of Education and Skills agreed to undertake an individual analysis of Post-16 numbers and trends in Sixth Forms and the various towns.

**RESOLVED** that the presentation be received and the information be noted.

## **7. FUNDING STREAMS FOR EDUCATION FUNCTIONS (This item was deferred from 29 June 2016)**

An updated report was tabled at the meeting (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes).

The School Funding and Business Relationship Manager reported that the information provided in Section 4 Schools Budget Expenditure sets out how the educational budget is reported to the DfE. It was noted that the budget headings must be used as stated in the report.

Paragraph 3 of the report showed the allocation of funding to the Local Authority and any adjustments, such as in the High Needs Block. The report showed how much was overspent in the High Needs block by £0.74m.

It was noted that the information was difficult to understand, although it set out what the LA received in grant funding and how it was allocated to schools.

Ch.'s Initials.....

**RESOLVED** that the information on the funding streams contained in the report be noted as context for the National Funding Formula changes.

## **8. FUNDING UPDATE**

Consideration was given to the information included in the report in respect of the latest update from the Department for Education (DfE) regarding the National Funding Formula (NFF), rural schools, Pupil Premium and Historic Commitments (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes).

The Schools Funding and Business Relationship Manager reported that an indicative amount had been proposed for Northumberland which was broadly the same as last year, but it was frustrating not knowing the Government's intentions about a national funding formula. It was anticipated that a further DfE report would be published in November 2016 and the details were awaited.

There was similar uncertainty around the Early Years national formula and until an updated report was received from the DfE, it was unlikely that the Formula Funding Committee needed to meet.

At this point, the Commissioner for Primary and Early Years provided an update on the Early Years National Formula position. Reference was made to the Government's consultation from 11 August, which closed for receipt of responses by 22 September. He outlined the LA responses to the consultation and asked members of the Schools' Forum to consider some of the principles in the consultation. There was expected to be an increase in funding for early years, with some flexibility around the national formula. There was to be a transitional approach, like the MFG, to cushion the blow in disparity of funding.

It was noted that, historically, Northumberland was one of the poorest funded authorities. As the concept was to provide fairer funding across the whole County, it was hoped there would be more funds generally to passport to schools. It was widely acknowledged that some current providers of early years were struggling, and it was anticipated that there would be some areas with less provision or none at all from September 2017.

Headteachers of small First Schools in Northumberland on the Schools' Forum highlighted the problems of providing 30 hours per week early years education in the rural schools, with insufficient funding to pay the staff, which was not sustainable. Ratios showed there were not enough children in the rural facilities to make it financially viable.

A further report was to be submitted to the next meeting of the Schools' Forum for decision.

Ch.'s Initials.....



**RESOLVED** that

- (a) it be noted that a consultation on an Early Years National Funding Formula was announced on 11 August 2016 and was the subject of a separate report; 6
- (b) on behalf of the Schools' Forum, the Formula Funding Committee be authorised to start work on the funding formula for 2017/18, in order to identify a strategy and priorities to assist the LA in taking decisions; and
- (c) an additional meeting of the Schools' Forum be scheduled to be held in November with only one agenda item; to look at school finances and the DSG.

## **9. SCHOOL BALANCES 31 MARCH 2016**

The report informed members of the Schools' Forum of the position regarding School Balances as at 31 March 2016 (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes).

Two additional reports in connection with Approved Licensed Deficit Budgets and Surplus Budgets were tabled at the meeting (copies of which are also filed with the signed minutes). It was noted that the size of the deficits had increased significantly from £737,000 to £1.172m - an increase of 59%. The individual schools had outlined their reasons why they were holding such surplus balances, and the reasons were vast. A member of the Forum suggested it would be useful to have a percentage figure of the overall budget next to the surplus balance. Similarly, members of the Forum requested those schools with a deficit budget to provide details of their plans to rectify the situation.

it was noted that when a school converted to an academy, any deficit budget transferred to the LA as DSG, whereas any surplus would be retained by the academy.

**RESOLVED** that the contents of the report and attached appendices be noted.

## **10. PUPIL PREMIUM UPDATE**

Mr. D. Cookson, Commissioner for Secondary Education and Pupil Premium Champion, presented the report, setting out the facts and data from the DfE at July 2016 (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes). He outlined the work being undertaken with schools to ensure that Pupil Premium moeny is being spent most effectively.

Ch.'s Initials.....

Furthermore, in response to the specific request by the Schools Forum at their meeting of 18 May 2016, an additional report was tabled to the meeting from the Virtual Schools Headteacher, Ms J. Walker, which provided further explanation of the arrangements for distribution of Pupil Premium Plus Grant 2016-17 (a copy of which is also filed with the signed minutes). Members were grateful for the explanation of the logic behind the £400 top slice in such funding.

The reports were received for information as there was no decision required by the Schools' Forum.

**RESOLVED** that the information in the reports be received and noted.

## **11. HIGH NEEDS FUNDING UPDATE - SEND FUNDING CHALLENGES AND OPTIONS 2017+**

Members of the Schools' Forum received a presentation from Mr Alan Carrick, Commissioner for SEND, on SEND Funding Challenges and Options 2017+, in which he recommended proposals for consideration regarding the SEN overspend in the High Needs block. (A copy of the presentation is filed with the signed minutes).

Mr. Carrick outlined the ever-growing number of children with complex needs year on year in the High Needs Block. Reference was made to the issue last year, which had been mitigated by the use of reserves. Action needed to be taken to stem the accumulating pressure on the High Needs Block in Northumberland. Slides 7, 8 and 9 outlined the proposed solution and other solutions considered. Slide 10 referred to the recommendations to reverse the funding deficit into a position of affordability and potential growth.

The Director of Education referred to an article in the Times Educational Supplement, dated 26 September 2016, about Cumbria County Council facing a projected £8m black hole in SEND budget for rural schools and their overspends. It was anticipated that a similar position would be faced in Northumberland without action being taken. In previous years, Northumberland had made use of reserves, and from underspends, however, as these were now spent, further measures needed to be discussed. It was agreed to circulate the newspaper article via email after the meeting.

The following comments and responses were made:

- the system needed to be realistic whilst at the same time matching the requirements that parents have as expectations;
- the costs in some schools are huge and quite unsustainable;
- there were real difficulties in small schools and those in rural settings;
- the Government should be strongly advised about the inequity in the SEND funding and SEN Element 2 funding which is notional;

Ch.'s Initials.....

- there was insufficient funding nationally in education to keep pace with salaries and inflation;
- Northumberland had not been profligate yet the funding was insufficient to meet the complex high needs of children in the County;
- Northumberland was considered a moderate LA and was not identifying more children with SEND needs to attend out-County special schools;
- there needed to be an option for Schools' Forum to consider, a mechanism to address the disproportionate number of learners with SEND at every level;
- to take £2.3m out of the Schools Block would cause further significant pressures elsewhere - and many schools were already in deficit budget situations;
- the danger of a proposed Service Level Agreement (SLA) was that small schools may not be able to afford it, whereas larger schools may well incorporate it into its budget deficit;
- it was noted that the formula was determined by central Government and there were certain formula factors to generate the notional SEN amount;
- there was no additional money, although a notional funding formula needed to be determined; and
- it was anticipated that the Education Funding Agency would make an announcement in October 2016 about the essentials and the local arrangements.

**RESOLVED** that the information in the presentation be received and noted and that the next meeting of the Schools' Forum be dedicated to considering this challenging issue and options for 2017 as the main agenda item. An additional meeting should be scheduled in November to discuss this issue.

## **12. HOLY ISLAND AND LONGRIDGE TOWERS REPORT**

The report informed members of the Schools' Forum of the background leading to the provision of education and boarding for children resident on Holy Island at Longridge Towers School. The report also informed of the projected numbers for forthcoming years and the current costs of boarding fees at Longridge Towers to the County Council. (A copy of the report is filed with the signed minutes).

The Director of Education and Skills reported that he had been to Holy Island and met the Headteacher of Holy Island First School. He was due to meet the Headteacher of Longridge Towers School in the next week to try to negotiate the fees in an attempt to save some money. He agreed to report back to the Schools' Forum in due course.

[N.B. Immediately following the meeting, Mr. A. Carrick, Commissioner for SEND, reported that, in response to a specific request in the AEN Committee

Ch.'s Initials.....

minutes of 14 June 2016, a total of £7,600 SEN Funding had been given to Longridge Towers School for two pupils with special educational needs.]

**RESOLVED** that the information in the report be noted.

**13. URGENT BUSINESS**

Members of the Forum requested that the additional papers tabled at the meeting be sent out electronically.

**14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**RESOLVED** that the next meeting of the Schools' Forum be held on Tuesday 1 November 2016 at 9.30 a.m. in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth.

**CHAIRMAN** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_

Ch.'s Initials.....