

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a meeting of the **Schools' Forum** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 18 May 2016 at 9.30 a.m.

PRESENT

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

Headteacher Representatives

Mr. G. Atkins (Hexham Middle School)	Mr. K. P. McGrane (Ponteland High School)
Mrs. V. Cunningham (Morpeth St Robert's R.C. 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. M. Hodgson (Harbottle CE First School) (later)	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

Dr. R. Vaughan, The Three Rivers Learning Trust, Morpeth (part) and Mr. P. Carvin, Substitute rep. for Dr. R. Vaughan, The Three Rivers Learning Trust, Morpeth (remaining part)	Mr. A. C. Day, Northumberland Church of England Academy Mrs. S. Clement, Blyth Croftway Primary Academy
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Early Years/PVI Representatives

Ms. K. A. Morrison

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

16-19 Provider of Education Representative

Mrs. H. Norris

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

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Mr. M. Brown be re-elected Chairman of the Schools' Forum for a further two year term of office, in line with the Regulations.

Mr. M. Brown in the Chair

2. UPDATE ON MEMBERSHIP

Members of the Schools' Forum were informed of the following changes:

Two resignations had been received since the last meeting from Mr. D. Pye, governor of Berwick Middle School, and Mr. M. Eldridge, governor of Bedlington Whitley Memorial C E First School.

Reference was also made to the remaining vacancies on the Schools' Forum:

One Special School Governor representative

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

One Middle School Governor representative

Two Academy Governor representatives (or 1 Headteacher and 1 Governor)

Consideration was also given to the expression of interest in the Academy Headteacher position that had been received from Mrs Deborah Wylie, Principal of Cramlington Village Primary School (Free School).

Members also recalled the two nominations previously received from NAHSH (Northumberland Association of High and Secondary Headteachers).

It was **AGREED to appoint:**

Mrs Deborah Wylie, Principal of CVPS to the Academy Headteacher position; and Mrs Louise Rule, governor of Pax Christi Academy (St Benet Biscop RC High School) Bedlington, to the Academy governor position.

Concern was expressed about the lack of representation on the Forum from the school partnerships of Berwick, Prudhoe, Coquet and Seaton Valley. The Director of Education and Skills was keen to maintain a wide representation from all phases of education as well as geographical coverage.

The Secretary of the Schools' Forum was requested to write directly to the Headteachers of Berwick and Tweedmouth Middle Schools and invite them to nominate a Governor to the Forum, and to the Headteachers of First and Primary Schools in the under-represented areas of Prudhoe, Coquet and Seaton Valley to seek expressions of interest to fill the vacancies for 1 Governor and 1 Headteacher.

RESOLVED that efforts continue to be made to fill the remaining vacancies.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Miss G. Evans (Headteacher The Bede Academy), Mrs. F. G. Hartland (Headteacher, Kielder First School), Councillor G. R. Arckless, Mrs. A. Elsdon (Director of Corporate Resources), Mrs. J. M. Guthrie (Unison) Mrs D Lally (Deputy Chief Executive and DCS), Mr. D. Jackson and Mr. A. Carrick (Commissioners of Education).

3. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

None.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Tuesday, 23 February 2016, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

In connection with the penultimate paragraph of Minute No. 5, page 4, and in response to a request for an update on the Holy Island issue, the Director of Education and Skills stated that it had been difficult to arrange a meeting, but he was still committed to doing so. It was agreed to provide an update at a future meeting.

With reference to the same Minute No. 5, page 5, and reference to the schools in receipt of MFG, the School Funding and Business Relationship Manager confirmed that she had looked at the post-MFG budget for all schools and had compared the formula funding for 2016/17 with 2015/16 to see where there were any increases in each formula factor and tabled two reports to the meeting (copies of which are filed with the signed minutes). It was agreed that members should receive the reports to digest the contents and for due consideration to be given at the next meeting of the Schools' Forum, in anticipation of the announcement of the National Funding Formula details.

Mr. K. McGrane requested the addition of a column outlining the number of pupils on roll at each small school be added to the reports of post-MFG budget. He also requested a detailed breakdown of the deprivation in the different factors, as it would be useful to have an explanation of the variances. The School Funding and Business Relationship Manager agreed to provide the information to the next meeting.

As a subsidiary to that, Mr. Woolhouse said he was aware that a small working group of members had been established to look into the sustainability of small First and Primary Schools in Northumberland, and he wondered if a representative of the Schools' Forum was on it. In response, the Director of Education and Skills stated that the working group had been established as a discussion group of cross-party elected members to comment on the impact of the White Paper on the sustainability of small rural schools and how they can remain open in the future. However, because of the delay in the details of the National Funding Formula 2019/20 from the White Paper, the first meeting of the working group was due to have taken place in April, but had been postponed until late June or possibly even September. The mission was to keep rural schools open and make it a positive process. The Chairman proposed it would be useful to have a linked representative between the elected members' working group and the Formula Funding Committee of the Schools' Forum. Mr. G. Wilkins was happy to be nominated as a Governor member of the Formula Funding Committee to be on the working group. Coincidentally, it was noted that Mr. R. Woolhouse was on both the working group and the Formula Funding Committee.

With reference to the third paragraph on page 9 of Minute No. 9, SEND Strategic Statement, Dr. Vaughan raised again the capital element of EHC's not being covered in the report and reminded members that Mr. Alan Carrick, Education Commissioner for SEND, had agreed to provide a report to the Schools' Forum.

Mrs. F. Penny confirmed that an issue had been raised at the AEN Committee about a Northumberland child in Year 8 from an Academy requiring a hoist in school to meet his needs, and questioned where would the funding come from to provide that. There had been much heated discussion at the AEN Committee about the funding for High Needs being able to cover all schools. The members of the AEN Committee felt it needed further explanation and clarification as to whether the Academy should find capital from other sources to make alterations to the building for a child with specific SEN. However, it was also noted that capital funding was not within the remit of the Committee nor the Schools' Forum and no further comment was made.

The Director of Education and Skills apologised for the absence of the Commissioner for SEND, and said he was aware that the High Needs block funding was to ensure there were adequate staff and resources in school buildings, but he agreed to investigate the matter and report back to the next meeting.

In connection with Minute No.10, members requested an update on the budget position at Haydon Bridge High School. The Director of Education and Skills responded that it was thought that the school would become one of a group of academies sponsored by Bright Tribe. However, despite various meetings with the DfE, he was unable to say at this stage when this would happen, although he hoped very strongly that it would take place before September. Essentially, Bright Tribe wanted the LA to pay additional costs on reorganisation and the LA was not in a position to subsidise the reorganisation costs of the school amounting to around £300,000. The LA was powerless in this regard, as it was in the DfE process. Members remained concerned that the uncertain position had gone on for so long at Haydon Bridge and that the deficit budget was growing on a daily basis. The Principal Accountant of Corporate Resources confirmed that the school's budget deficit was continually monitored and was currently around £350,000. It was noted that the LA and the Interim Executive Board (IEB) had written to the Schools' Commissioner for Academies expressing concerns and referred to the ongoing uncertainty for pupils' and parents. It was also suggested that, should there be no confirmation by 31 May 2016, then the Chairman of the Schools' Forum should write to the Schools' Commissioner for Academies (Janet Renou), the Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan MP) and the Minister for Academisation (Lord Nash).

6. COMMUNICATION

- (a) Communication with Schools' Forum – there had been none since the last meeting.

(b) Draft Minutes from Committees

- **Formula Funding Committee** – it was agreed that the draft minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2016 be circulated retrospectively, via email after the meeting.

Mr. I. Walker, as Chairman of the Committee, reported that the Committee had looked at the changes proposed in relation to the formula funding and had completed a response to the DfE – which is documented elsewhere on the agenda for today's meeting of the Schools' Forum.

Mr. Wilkins commented that it was a great pity that the Government had not included any figures within its stage 1 consultation document to provide a complete picture, and he felt it was wrong to move to a stage 2 consultation.

- **Additional Educational Needs Committee** – it was agreed that the draft minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2016 be circulated retrospectively, via email after the meeting.

Mrs. F. Penny provided a verbal update of the meeting held on 10 May, at which the main discussion had related to the high needs of pupils and about them falling out of the system. The Director of Education's clarification of the provision of equipment may have curtailed that discussion.

The Chairman referred to having received a paper entitled SEND Strategic Group and asked for further information.

The Director of Education commented that the authority was expecting, quite soon, a Special Educational Needs Inspection to be carried out by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission. It had been announced this month that the first authority to be inspected was Bolton in Lancashire and the inspection would last one week. A period of five days' notice would be given, and no overall grading position provided at the end. The inspection would concentrate on the SEND Code of Practice. Claire Brown (Education officer) was co-ordinating a strategic group, whose purpose was to prepare an evaluation of the current position, in preparation for the inspection.

Mr. A. Day of NCEA confirmed he was a member of the SEND Strategic Group as a Headteacher, and would provide a link to the Schools' Forum, to ensure there was a co-ordinated response between the NHS and educational aspects of the group.

Mrs. Penny said that the AEN Committee believed the roles were distinct and were content that Mr Day was a member of the SEND Strategic Group to provide a link, as the Committee had more pressing matters of the allocation of high needs funding to deal with.

RESOLVED that

- (a) there were no minutes of the meeting of the Formula Funding Committee, held on 13 April 2016, as the completed response to the National Funding

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Formula, as circulated and received for information, was the evidence from the meeting;

(b) the draft minutes of the meeting of the AEN Committee, held on 10 May 2016, be circulated and received for information, in retrospect.

7. SCHOOLS NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA CONSULTATION – STAGE 1

Members of the Schools' Forum received the following documents and the LA response to the consultation:

- (a) Schools National Funding formula – Government consultation Stage 1
- (b) School Revenue Funding – current funding arrangements
- (c) LA response

(copies of which are filed with the signed minutes).

The Director of Education outlined the information in the consultation and presented the LA response to that consultation.

Mr Wilkins recalled the three hour meeting of the Formula Funding Committee to consider the consultation, and he complimented those involved in compiling the excellent response from the LA.

Mr Woolhouse stated that it had not been an easy document to respond to the principles, not helped by the fact that a second round of consultation was to follow shortly afterwards. He acknowledged and thanked the staff involved for compiling a response.

Dr Vaughan commented in relation to the LA response to Question 16(a) and the response Yes, and reiterated the point that the Area Cost Adjustment should not just be about Chelsea, as it relates very much to other areas as well. He stressed that every opportunity should be taken to draw attention to this point, wherever possible.

The Director of Education expressed the view that if the Northern Powerhouse was to be a success, then it was implied that the schools in the North should improve. There was a suggestion to take money away from schools in London and the South-East to redress the balance in the North, or, find additional funding to address the issues in schools in the Northern Powerhouse area.

Mr. Day was encouraged to read the responses to Question 6 (a) and (b) in relation to a factor for those children with English as a second language. He believed there should be more encouragement for white British deprived children in order to be able to respond to their needs.

The Director of Education agreed that, broadly speaking, research showed that children with English as an additional language generally wanted to attend school and had high attendance, studied well and completed their homework on time, with their parents being very supportive and attending parents' evenings in school.

Whereas this was in contrast to those children living in deprived areas with even more needs.

RESOLVED that the reports be received and the LA response be noted.

8. HIGH NEEDS FUNDING FORMULA AND OTHER REFORMS – CONSULTATION

Consideration was given to the following documents and the LA response to the consultation:

- (a) High Needs funding formula and other reforms – Government consultation – Stage 1
- (b) Schools and High Needs Funding Reform – The case for change and consultation summary
- (c) LA response

(copies of which are filed with the signed Minutes).

Notwithstanding the fact that there appeared to be a typographical error in the response to Question 10 stating Yes when it should say No, and therefore supporting the narrative of the response, the members of the Schools' Forum acknowledged that the LA response was a good piece of work and commended those involved.

RESOLVED that the reports be received and the LA response be noted.

9. PROVISIONAL DSG OUTTURN 2015/16

Consideration was given to the Provisional Dedicated Schools Grant(DSG) Outturn Statement 2015/16 which was tabled at the meeting (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes).

The attention of members was drawn to paragraph 3 of the report, which indicated that Northumberland will be spending around £1.186m above its allocation for 2016-17, primarily relating to the high needs block overspend and in meeting the Haydon Bridge High School budget deficit. This will leave a working balance of only £0.171m. There was an emphasis on the need to review other spending given the much reduced carry forward.

Paragraph 4.2 of the report related to the redetermination of school budget shares and in particular the revaluation of a business rates bill for New Delaval Primary School, which would have placed the school budget in deficit. The regulations allowed the LA to undertake a redetermination in special circumstances and, therefore, in this case the carry forward had been reduced by £0.194m in respect of business rates.

It was noted that almost all budget heads in the Schools Block had closed with a surplus, with the exception of the SEN Home to School Transport budget which showed a deficit of £0.223m. A further review of this block was to be undertaken.

The High Needs Block had been expected to return a possible deficit due to increased demand for Top-Up funding, but this had not materialised. Further monitoring of that budget would be undertaken in relation to the movement of pupils and the financial impact.

Mr. Graeme Atkins requested that the Schools' Forum be given a more detailed explanation of the variances in overspends of last year along with a report of potential target areas to reduce future spending, in order to have a clearer understanding of the need to make savings when compared with the expenditure.

Mr. Colin Pearson said that a lot of schools in Northumberland depended upon the LA for financial advice on their budgets and many would be ill-prepared and, therefore, there was a need to consider offering them help to anticipate and deal with directly this shortfall in funding eventuality. He also asked about the situation for providing for Secondary pupils from Holy Island, as there was no secondary school for funding to go to for them.

In response, the Director of Education and Skills said he had no wish to cause panic, but some basis guidelines were being prepared about what could happen in the likelihood of, say, a 12% cut in the DSG budget next year and how to manage to control the costs. It was understood that a deficit budget required a two year action plan before it could be authorised as a deficit budget. Efforts were being made to see if any internal efficiencies could be made to the central services block of funding. He had been holding back until the picture about the national funding formula had been made clearer, and once the statutory services to be provided by the LA had been determined by Government.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the report be received and adopted; and
- (b) a more detailed DSG breakdown of expenditure for 2015-16 be provided for consideration at the next meeting of the Schools' Forum.

10. EARLY YEARS FUNDING UPDATE FOR 2016/17

Members of the Schools' Forum considered a report which provided an update on the early years funding for 2016-17 (a copy of the report is filed with the signed minutes).

Mr. D. Street, Commissioner for Primary and Early Years Education, commented that the paper had been written for the 415 providers in order to give an overview of what had happened and to clarify the position for their understanding.

Mrs Katie Morrison reported that she had received feedback and that PVI providers were seeking information about who to contact at the LA in order to express their concerns. Small PVI providers had been able to offer a service for early years for 3-4 year old children at a rate that was cheaper than at schools, yet the unavoidable changes in funding rates placed additional strains on PVI providers, who feared they may well go bust and disappear altogether. If PVI providers disappeared, the

knock-on effect would be more costly to schools who would have to extend their provision. Members of the Schools' Forum were made aware that a lot of providers, especially in the rural areas, would not be able to survive. The sparsity factor in schools was also a particular concern.

Mr. Mike Deane-Hall raised the issue of the longer term impact on rural areas in terms of the economy and numbers in the local community, and the potential difficulty given the rural decline. There needed to be support for the numbers of pupils in the rural areas and the challenge in terms of staffing for early years for 38 weeks of the year. In terms of lack of consistency, he stated that the Middle School at which he is Headteacher received an amount of sparsity factor funding, but the First School did not, and yet they were housed in the same building.

The Director of Education and Skills expressed the view that, having attended national meetings regarding Early Years Funding, the Secretary of State for Education had made two things clear:

- it had not yet been decided what the early years funding would be; and
- almost a tacit attempt was being made to drive all early years provision centrally into schools.

The Director did not think the LA could help in the circumstances. In the longer term, it was understood that early years would become nationally funded once again. The worry was understood that small PVI providers could no longer be sustained, particularly in the rural areas. His advice was that individual providers should write to their local Members of Parliament to stress the need to Government to increase the pot of money for small setting providers of early years education and, furthermore, to request the Government to undertake a consultation in relation to Early Years – as this seemed to be an anomaly given that consultations had been held in relation to High Needs and Schools National Formula Funding.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the Chairman of the Schools' Forum would write to the Secretary of State for Education to outline the concerns expressed.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the report be received; and
- (b) on behalf of the Schools' Forum, the Chairman would write to express concerns to the Secretary of State for Education.

11. POLICY – PUPIL PREMIUM PLUS FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN 2016/17

Members of the Schools' Forum received a report on the arrangements for the dispersal of the Pupil Premium Plus from Northumberland's Virtual School for the financial year 2016-17 (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes).

Members of the Forum expressed the view that a 21% top slice of Virtual School dispersals seemed overly excessive, considering that £400 of funding was supposed to follow a pupil and not be retained by the Virtual School.

The Director of Education and Skills agreed to ask the Head of the Virtual School to provide a more detailed explanation at the next meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be received and the Head of the Virtual School be requested to provide a more detailed explanation at the next meeting of the Schools' Forum.

12. WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2016/17

A copy of the Work Programme for meetings of the Schools' Forum in 2016/17 was tabled to members at the meeting (a copy of which is filed with the signed minutes).

Following discussion, it was agreed to add the following to the Work Programme:

14 September 2016 meeting:

A report on the use of Longridge Towers school and the financial impact.

20 October 2016 meeting:

Linked to the indicative formula for 2017/18, add in a report looking at anomalies in per pupil funding and very small schools, along with funding tightening in general and planning for potential deficits in budgets.

It was noted that a number of issues link together in this report especially in relation to the notion of sparsity factors and rural schools, which is an issue specific to Northumberland.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above additional reports being included, the Work Programme for 2016/17 be received and adopted.

13. URGENT BUSINESS

(a) DfE Press Release: Next Steps to spread educational excellence everywhere announced

The Director of Education and Skills circulated a press release relating to the sparsity funding factor information. He anticipated that there would be a set sparsity factor used across all LAs and a definition provided about what is eligible for it.

It was also noted that the Government's White Paper stated that by 2020 there would no longer be a need to have a Schools' Forum, once every school is made to convert to become an academy.

RESOLVED that the information be received and noted.

(b) Schools' Forum meetings open to the public

The Chairman said that whilst the papers for meetings of the Schools' Forum were available on the Northumberland County Council website, it did also state that the meetings were closed, when in fact they should be open to the public.

It was agreed to investigate and correct the information displayed on the website.

(c) Membership

Mrs Vivian Cunningham announced her retirement from teaching at the end of July 2016, which would result in a further vacancy for a First or Primary School Headteacher on the Schools' Forum.

During consideration of the three vacancies and the nominations received from Cleaswell Hill School and Collingwood School, it was agreed to

- Appoint Mrs Hilda Blythe, Headteacher of Choppington First School and governor of Cleaswell Hill School to fill one of the the vacant First/Primary Headteacher positions;
- Appoint Mr. Keith Faulkner, governor of Morpeth Collingwood School to the Special School Governor vacancy; and
- Thank Mr Barry Lyden, governor of Cleaswell Hill School for his interest but in view of the fact that there are already two representatives of Cleaswell Hill on the Schools' Forum, he was unable to be appointed at this time.

14. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the next meeting of the Schools' Forum be held on Wednesday, 29 June 2016 at 9.30 a.m. in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth.

CHAIRMAN _____

DATE _____

	ACTIONS	
Minute No.		Initials/Name
2.	Membership	L. P.
	Write to Headteachers of Berwick and Tweedmouth Middle Schools and to Headteachers of First and Primary Schools in the under-represented areas of Coquet, Prudhoe and Seaton Delaval.	
5.	SEND Strategic Statement – reference to capital element of EHCs not covered in the report. Also – High Needs block funding being used to ensure adequate staff and resources in school buildings.	A. Carrick

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9.	More detailed DSG breakdown of expenditure for 2015-16 and explanation of the variances in overspends of last year.	A. W.
10.	Early Years Funding Update	M. B.
	The Chair of the Forum to write to express concerns to the Secretary of State for Education.	
12.	A report on Longridge Towers and the financial impact.	S. A.