

# **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

## **SCHOOLS' FORUM**

At a meeting of the **Schools' Forum** held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 17 January 2018 at 9:30 am.

### **PRESENT**

C Pearson (Chair)  
Governor, Abbeyfields Three Rivers Trust

#### **Headteacher Representatives**

C Bradshaw	J Kennedy
S Connolly	K McGrane
F G Hartland	T Allen (substitute for C Davison)

#### **Governor Representatives**

S Harker	I Walker
M Hodgson	G Wilkins

#### **Academies Representatives**

G Atkins	D Wylie
D Warburton (substitute for G Evans)	

#### **Early Years Representative**

K Morrison

#### **Public Referral Unit Representative**

T Dexter

#### **Trades Union Representatives**

R E Woolhouse

#### **Northumberland County Council Elected Members (Observers)**

W Daley	N Oliver
---------	----------

Ch.'s Initials.....

---

## OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
S Barron	Head of SEND Strategies
D Cookson	Commissioner for Secondary Education and Post 16 Provision
K Norris	Democratic Services Officer
B Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
A Russell	Principal Accountant
W Stewart	Lead HR Adviser - Schools
D Street	Commissioner for Early Years and Primary

### 1. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 1.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager welcomed new members from Prudhoe West.
- 1.2 There was one vacancy for an academy governor outstanding. As seven schools were due to convert to academies in the coming months, the position would be considered on 1 April and new appointments made at that time.
- 1.3 Graham Wilkins said his appointment had been made in February 2014 and, although his 4 year term was coming to an end, he would be willing to continue. The Head of School Organisation and Resources welcomed Mr Wilkins' comments and said his position would be reviewed as part of the appointment process.
- 1.4 Following a restructure within the Council and new appointments made, Daljit Lally had been confirmed as Chief Executive and Cath McEvoy appointed as Executive Director of Children's Services. The process of appointing a Director of Education, who would be a Senior Officer in the Schools' Forum, was underway. Andy Johnson would continue until 31 March after which he would be employed for projects on a part time basis.

### 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from M Allan, C Davison, A Day, M Deane-Hall, G Evans, J Guthrie, M Hall and from officers A Johnson and A Whitehead.

### 3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 14 November 2017, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendments:

K Faulkner, Governor Representative be added to the list of those present.

Ch.'s Initials.....

Page 2, paragraph 3.1, the word 'litigation' at the end of the second sentence be replaced with 'mitigation'.

- 3.2 With regard to paragraph 4.12 (b), officers had received an invitation to attend a conference on Monday, 26 March 2018 held by the F40 groups, representing the lowest funded education authorities in England. Feedback would subsequently be provided to the May Schools' Forum and scheduled into the work programme.
- 3.3 In terms of the Haydon Bridge Partnership, it was agreed by the Family and Children's' Services Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in December that a two-stage process of informal consultation take place to look at how education would be structured in the west of Northumberland. The first phase was now underway. There had also been a request from the Deputy Leader and Member of Children's Services to submit an application for the authority to run Haydon Bridge school, subject to DfE approval, and it was hoped that consultation on that would take place by the end of this week.
- 3.4 It was confirmed that Haydon Bridge school was still losing money and had a predicted deficit of £1.4 million which would be the responsibility of the local authority.
- 3.5 The Deputy Leader and Member for Children's Services suggested that the comprehensive document, which gave details of the financial position of Haydon Bridge and provided information on school placements, be circulated to members of the Forum in order to give them more context.
- 3.6 It was confirmed that the new IEB was not yet in place but HR were going out to meet with the schools the following week after which further information would be forthcoming. The consultation was scheduled for 19 February.
- 3.7 The Education and Skills Business Manager said the date of the next meeting had been scheduled as 11 December 2017 but, given that the Schools consultation had been in agreement with the recommendations of the Schools' Forum, the meeting was considered unnecessary. An email cancelling that meeting, along with the results of the consultation exercise and the draft 14 November minutes, had been circulated. He requested that if anyone had any queries with those results they should let him know.
- 3.8 With regard to paragraph 6.3 regarding charges made to Trusts when adopting new schools, clarification was provided that it was a £5,000 minimum charge per school (not conversion) which would be reviewed on a 12 monthly basis. This was felt to be reasonable as it represented 20% of the conversion grant received by schools and in every case the legal fees had been in excess of £5000 per school, ranging between £5,500 and £138,000. This was without taking into consideration the Council's internal costs in terms of officer time.

Ch.'s Initials.....

#### **4. COMMUNICATION**

##### **Devolution of North of Tyne - Consultation**

- 4.1 Reference was made to a joint letter from Newcastle City Council, North Tyneside Council and Northumberland County Council regarding a devolution deal for the North of Tyne. (A copy of the letter is attached to the signed minutes as agenda Item 5.)
- 4.2 Members of the Schools' Forum were encouraged to take part in the consultation. It was suggested that a consolidated view from the Forum would carry more weight but individual views could also be put forward. The Head of School Organisation and Resources agreed to draft a response for circulation.
- 4.3 Work was currently underway to put together a North of Tyne Education Challenge bid and it was agreed that a more detailed brief about the Education Challenge be circulated as there was no reference to it in the devolution letter regarding the consultation.

##### **RESOLVED** that

- 1) A suggested response to the consultation be circulated ahead of the consultation deadline of Monday, 5 February 2018.
- 2) A more detailed brief about the Education Challenge be circulated to members of the Schools' Forum.

#### **5. SETTING THE 2018/19 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT**

- 5.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the above report which informed members of the Schools' Forum of the estimated overall DSG for 2018/19 and asked them for their views on the way in which it should be spent. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed minutes as agenda item 6.)
- 5.2 Reference was made to the figure at the end of paragraph 4, which stated that the Early Years Block budget be set at the DfE allocation of £16,560.604 as detailed in Annex 1.
- 5.3 In November members of the Schools' Forum agreed in principle for the transfer of up to 1% of the Schools Block to the High Needs block. It was highlighted at the time that the majority of that funding was returned to schools as top up funding.

Ch.'s Initials.....

- 5.4 Because High Needs Funding did not meet the current level of demand, that would need to be taken into account when setting the 2018/19 High Needs Block and work was ongoing to ensure that was reflected in the budget.
- 5.5 Essentially it was recommended that the budget for the High Needs Block be set at £29,109,134 and that the detailed breakdown of that funding into various services be set at the meeting of Schools' Forum on 20 February 2018.
- 5.6 At the time of writing the report, approval from the Secretary of State for the transfer of 1% to the High Needs Block had not been received, therefore, it was stated that only a provisional budget for the Schools Block could be set. If approval was not given, funding would need to be redistributed in line with principles agreed by Schools' Forum.
- 5.7 It was proposed that for any changes required, values be adjusted in line with the previously agreed principles of moving towards NFF values in a phased approach, so that proposed 2018/19 Formula Factor values that were lower than previous 2017/18 NCC values would be increased in order to allocate any additional funding.
- 5.8 Table 1 set out proposed formula factor values.
- 5.9 The agreement of the Schools' Forum was needed for the contingency plan, should the Secretary of State not approve the 1% transfer request.
- 5.10 Mr McGrane queried the redistribution of priorities stating he had initially been encouraged that priorities and principles would be considered until it had been said they would revert to those previously agreed. He acknowledged the challenges but felt there was a danger of falling behind if they did not move towards NFF values more robustly.
- 5.11 Mr Atkins referred to the fourth paragraph on page 4 of the report and said it would be helpful to know the implications for each school as some would gain and some would lose. He said there had been a change to what was proposed in December 2017.
- 5.12 The Education and Skills Manager stated that, historically, NCC had taken a decision around respective formula values and assigned greater weight to some values, for example to Primary and KS4 values and around some of the deprivation figures used in line with the previous Schools' Forum decision and outcome of the consultation to adopt a "phased approach". Until 2020/21 the local authority retained some flexibility so it was felt appropriate to stay nearer to the previously approved NCC values, should it be necessary to redistribute any further funding to schools.
- 5.13 Mr McGrane said it had been made clear in the consultation that the redistribution of priorities should be revisited and they be set against education priorities rather than NCC values.

Ch.'s Initials.....

- 5.15 In response to comments that the Formula Funding Committee could be asked to look at it, the Education and Skills Business Manager said there was insufficient time to fundamentally change this prior to the deadline for submission on 19 January 2018. The principles previously agreed had been used. However, he would welcome the opportunity to work with the Formula Funding Committee for future decisions, as to how Northumberland's priorities could be reflected in the respective formula values. It was noted that a Primary Schools representative was needed for the committee.
- 5.16 Views of the Schools' Forum would be noted but the final decision lay with elected members of NCC.
- 5.17 It was queried what would happen to the High Needs Block if the request for 1% was not approved and it was noted that among the potential consequences and actions was the carry forward of the deficit to the following year. As stated previously work was ongoing around the High Needs Block budget for 2018/19.
- 5.18 It was confirmed that split site funding had been considered and was part of the growth, premises and mobility column in Annex 1.
- 5.19 Reference was made to paragraph 7, De-Delegation, for which a decision was required. It was noted that the only change to cash values was for trade union facility time for which £3.15 per pupil was considered a more accurate figure for providing support.

**RESOLVED** that:the following recommendations go forward to Cabinet taking into account the comments made about the redistribution of priorities made by members of the Schools' Forum.

- 1) The various budgets within the High Needs Block be set at the meeting on 20 February 2018;
- 2) Schools' Members of the Schools' Forum representing mainstream schools agreed on a phase by phase basis to the de-delegation in respect of the following five services:

Determination of FSM Eligibility  
 Core Behaviour Support Services  
 EAL  
 Trades Union Facility Time  
 Contingency Fund for School Restructure and Reorganisation costs

for 2018/19 using the funding values as set out in the final column of Table 1.

Ch.'s Initials.....

## 6. SEN UPDATE

- 6.1 Sam Barron, Head of SEND Strategies, introduced herself to Members of the Schools' Forum stating that she had joined the Council in September 2017 and her post was split between education and health. She was currently collating the development plan around the SEN consultation for improved communications across all levels with a joined up workforce to ensure there was transparency around the decision making process.
- 6.2 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the report, the purpose of which was to consult the Schools' Forum regarding the SEN Top Up Payment Policy which sought to clarify and confirm the processes for the payment of Top Up funding. (A copy of the report and appendix are attached to the signed minutes as agenda item 7.)
- 6.3 In response to a question it was confirmed that early years provision would be looked at as part of the review.
- 6.4 It was important to have a process in place. As outlined in the draft policy, it was anticipated that the vast majority of Top Up Funding would be paid in conjunction with an Education Health and Care Plan but there may be some circumstances where it would be awarded without that being in place. However, that would be in exceptional cases such as where specific additional support was required on a short term basis.
- 6.5 A deadline of 2 weeks was set for comments on the SEN Top Up Payment Policy.
- 6.6 Clarification was sought on early years provision and the availability of rapid help to enable children to be school ready. It was felt there was no rapid response as many professionals preferred to wait until a child was at the end of Reception year before an assessment was made.
- 6.7 The Commissioner for Early Years and Primary said that educational needs for children with special needs had to be ensured and a lot of work was currently being carried out to make changes regarding arrangements for early years children.
- 6.8 In response to further concerns and comments about the availability of funding, it was stated that Top Up funding was there for times of acute difficulty and to provide resources. However, consultation showed there was not enough transparency and the system should be more streamlined.
- 6.9 The Northumberland CCG was very much aware of the long waiting list and had identified additional funding. There was an action plan in place but operationally it was proving difficult.
- 6.8 Further discussion ensued and the Chair said everyone recognised the good intentions but some indication of when changes would be made was needed.

Ch.'s Initials.....

- 6.9 It was noted that feedback was provided if an application for Top Up Funding was rejected.
- 6.7 A member stated that sometimes a child would be excluded, which was not necessarily the best option for that child, but it was the only option to benefit the rest of the children in the class.
- 6.8 Mr Dexter from the Pupil Referral Unit stated that there were no previous intervention strategies in place and 75% of pupils referred to them would go to a special school which took around 20 weeks. If assessment had happened earlier, support could have been given earlier.
- 6.9 The Head of SEND Strategies suggested that it would be beneficial to circulate the Action Plan. It was agreed that was a good idea and that a presentation be made at a future meeting.
- 6.10 It was noted that more members of the AEN Sub Committee were needed and volunteers were required. Suzanne Connolly, Deborah Wylie and Graham Wilkins put themselves forward to become members and the Chair asked Tom Dexter if he could identify some volunteers.
- 6.11 In the past there had been problems regarding the recording of accurate information for Top Up funding. School census data would be used to check that pupils requiring Top Up funding were still at the same school or if they had transferred. Therefore school census returns would need to be accurate and systematically recorded. The speed of the process was reliant on sharing of school census data directly with the data team.
- 6.12 Deborah Wylie raised concerns about data protection issues and the sharing of sensitive information. Discussion ensued and it was confirmed that NCC had a Data Policy Officer and assurance was given regarding the safety of such information.
- 6.13 The Education and Skills Business Manager requested that any further comments be submitted to him by 31 January.

**RESOLVED** that the adoption of the SEN Top Up Payment Policy be noted, subject to any comments received.

## 7. **2018 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES**

- 7.1 Reference was made to the Schools' Forum Work Programme for 2018 (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes as agenda item 8).
- 7.2 It was noted that, wherever possible, meetings would be held on a Wednesday at 9:30 am.

Ch.'s Initials.....

- 7.3 There were two Sub Committees: Formula Funding Sub Committee and Additional Educational Needs Sub Committee, dates for which were to be confirmed.
- 7.4 With regard to the Action Plan for the SEN Top Up Payment Policy, it was suggested that a presentation be made, firstly, at the Additional Educational Needs Sub Committee and then provided to a future meeting of the Schools' Forum.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

8. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Schools' Forum would take place on Tuesday, 20 February 2018 at 9:30 am in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth.

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

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

Ch.'s Initials.....