

# **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

## **SCHOOLS' FORUM**

At a meeting of the Schools' Forum held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 4 July 2018 at 9:30 am.

### **PRESENT**

C Pearson (Chair)  
Director, Three Rivers Learning Trust

#### **Headteacher Representatives**

M Allan  
C Bradshaw  
C Davison

M Hall  
F G Hartland  
J Kennedy

#### **Governor Representatives**

S Harker  
S Heminsley (substitute for  
M Pedley)

I Walker  
B Watson  
G Wilkins

#### **Academies Representatives**

G Atkins

J Roberts  
(substitute for G Evans)

#### **Early Years' Representative**

K Morrison

#### **Trades Union Representatives**

R E Woolhouse

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

W Daley

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## OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
S Barron	Head of SEND Strategies
D Jackson	Service Director - Education and Skills
K Norris	Democratic Services Officer
B Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
R Pickering	Senior SEND Manager

### 1. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed Dean Jackson, Service Director - Education and Skills, to his first meeting of the Schools' Forum. He also welcomed Ben Watson who was the first School Business Manager representative.
- 1.2 It was noted that Helen Norris was leaving her role as Director of 14-16 and Career College at Northumberland College and had resigned from the Schools' Forum. Jo Cooper, Assistant Principal Education and Training, Northumberland College, had been nominated to replace her. As there would be no other names put forward for this category, members of the Schools' Forum were asked to approve her appointment. It was duly agreed to appoint Jo Cooper to the Schools' Forum as the representative of post 16 education.
- 1.3 It was noted that Gwyneth Evans would be leaving her role as Principal at Bede Academy in September and had resigned from the Schools' Forum. Julie Roberts would be taking over as interim Principal in September and had requested to become a member of the Schools' Forum. It was agreed that the Education and Skills Business Manager would consult with all academies to determine if there were any other nominees.

### 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from S Connelly, A Day, M Deane-Hall, T Dexter, K McGrane, K Faulkner and D Wylie.

### 3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 20 February 2018, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendments:
  1. Colin Pearson should be listed as Director, Three Rivers Learning Trust
  2. Colin Bradshaw was in attendance.

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- 3.2 The Service Director - Education and Skills referred to paragraph 1.2 and advised that Graham Reiter had been appointed as Services Director - Children's Social Care.
- 3.3 With regard to education in the West of Northumberland and the consultation which had recently closed, Councillor Daley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, said this would be discussed at the Family and Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee the following morning. There was a proposal that no changes be made to the current structure of schools in the Hexham Partnership and that Haydon Bridge be aligned to the primary/second model with the potential closure of Bellingham Middle School. This would be discussed by Scrutiny then the committee's recommendations would go to the next Cabinet meeting. Full details of the report to the Family and Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee were available on the Council's website.
- 3.4 In response to concerns raised about the deficit accrued at Haydon Bridge High School, the Head of School Organisation and Resources said it had been proposed to write off the debt and an extra £1.54 million had been requested from NCC reserves to support the school through the transition period. If approved, changes would take place from September 2019.
- 3.5 It was noted that there had been an Acting Regional Schools Commissioner for the last 18 months and now that the substantive commissioner was back in post, it was hoped that the good working relationship with the Council would continue. The Executive Director of Children's Services had met with her the previous week regarding the next wave of free schools. Wave 14 would soon be published and would focus on SEND and Alternative Provision. Officers awaited the details and their potential implications for Northumberland and the North of Tyne with interest. The Schools' Forum would be kept informed.

#### **4. COMMUNICATION**

##### **F40 Update**

- 4.1 A copy of the School Funding Briefing Paper - May 2018 was circulated with the agenda papers for information. Discussion took place about the range of different problems faced by the 3 authorities in the North of Tyne and Northumberland's unique urban/rural split. It was stated that F40 recognised the diversity of the area and the key issue overall would be the amount of funding available. As the Education Challenge developed the issue of devolved powers would need to be explored.

##### **AEN Sub Committee Minutes 7 March 2018**

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- 4.2 A copy of the above Minutes were circulated with the agenda papers for information and were presented by Graham Wilkins, Chair of the meeting. Reference was made to item 8, SEN Strategy National Funding, and concerns raised about overspend and the consistency of decisions made by Panels regarding top up funding. The Head of Send Strategies said the function of the Panel was to advise the Council on how to spend additional funding. Headteachers and representatives from Health and Social Care had been asked to review operation of the Panels. Terms of reference and membership were now in place and training had been arranged which would address consistency, however, members were welcome to attend Panels to observe. Mr Wilkins suggested that the Terms of Reference should be brought to the Schools' Forum for approval.

#### **AEN Sub Committee Draft Minutes 13 June 2018**

- 4.3 A copy of the above draft minutes were circulated with the agenda papers for information and were presented by the Education and Skills Business Manager in the absence of Keith Faulkner who had chaired the meeting. Discussion had taken place regarding SEN data and the importance of recording accurate data in the school census had been emphasised.
- 4.4 It was noted that the SENCO conference was looking to redesign the SEN process and the Schools' Forum would be kept updated.
- 4.5 Detailed discussion ensued about pressures on schools and keeping the budget under control. The Service Director - Education and Skills referred to a visit by representatives of the DfE the previous week which had been a fact finding mission to understand local issues and concerns. Officers had made as strong a case as possible and the DfE representatives had taken notes stating they would put a case forward to the Treasury for more funding to be made available for the high needs block. It was hoped that the Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds, would visit Northumberland so that officers could raise key issues regarding Northumberland's unique position with him.
- 4.6 Pressure around low bands was not so acute and further information regarding that would be brought to September's meeting.

#### **5. FAIR FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS AND THE IMPACT OF THE MINIMUM FUNDING GUARANTEE**

- 5.1 Graeme Atkins, Executive Headteacher - Hadrian Learning Trust presented the above report (attached to the signed minutes as agenda item 6) to the Forum with the following information being noted:
- The specific concern was that the current National Funding Formula (NFF) did not distinguish year groups and averaged out the distinction between key stage 3 and key stage 4 minimum per pupil funding.

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- The figure of £4,800 was unfair to high schools, the reasons for which were set out in detail within the report, and for high schools to be treated fairly the average minimum funding guarantee should be £5,200.
- There were only 40 high schools in the country affected but this was potentially significant for each individual school.
- Guy Operman MP had written to the DfE on behalf of the Hadrian Learning Trust and some schools had approached the DfE direct but so far there had not been an encouraging response.

5.2 The Education and Skills Business Manager agreed that the position outlined in the report did discriminate against the 3 tier system and said there would be a further announcement later this month regarding the 2019/20 National Funding Formula.

5.3 Jane Kennedy, the Headteacher of Corbridge Middle School, said she had recently been appointed to the Steering Committee for the National Middle Schools' Forum who were very supportive to sorting out this issue. She referred to correspondence from Nigel Wyatt, the Executive Officer of the National Middle Schools' Forum in which it was stated that the DfE had accepted the potential unfairness to upper schools of the current plans and were happy to be quoted on that. In response Mr Atkins said there had been a dampening down of enthusiasm since then and if nothing positive was forthcoming in the announcement later this month, more pressure should be applied.

5.4 The Education and Skills Business Manager suggested that some dates should be set for meetings of the Formula Funding Committee at which this issue could be picked up. Discussion took place about membership of the committee, it was noted that Ben Watson had been appointed to it and Jane Kennedy was happy to join. The Chair asked the Education and Skills Business Manager if he could identify anyone else who may be interested.

## **6. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT OUTTURN 2017/18**

6.1 The report provided members of the Schools' Forum with details of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) outturn position for 2017/18, together with the implications of the outturn highlighted by significant pressures within the budget (copy attached to the signed minutes as agenda item 7).

6.2 The report highlighted 3 specific recommendations and it was noted that:

- £1.7 million had been rolled forward from last year which was reflected as overspend.
- Table 4.1 showed the final year end position but the outturn report was still subject to Audit.
- The budget for facility time was managed by HR in conjunction with trade union colleagues. Due to the possibility of a reduction in the de-delegated

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budget, members of the Schools' Forum were being asked to agree that the budget surplus be carried forward.

- There had been an improvement in the position of the High Needs block and greater scrutiny had been introduced. If there was a long term commitment for children in expensive placements, it would only be in exceptional circumstances that they would be taken out but officers would need to look at where the next round of children could be placed.

- 6.3 It was year 1 of an interim 2 year period so issues needed to be addressed in a very tight window.
- 6.4 All schools, including academies, must have a special education health care plan in place. It was a possibility that places would become more expensive and discussion would take place around funding, banding etc.
- 6.5 The Local Authority remained as commissioners for academies.

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the overspend on the DSG for 2017/18 would have the first call on the DSG settlement for 2018/19;
- b) the 2018/19 Trade Union Facility Surplus of £9,472, in line with the report attached at Appendix A, be carried forward;
- c) the ongoing monitoring of High Needs funding be monitored.

## **7. REVIEW OF SCHEMES FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS**

- 7.1 The report referred to the revised draft of the Scheme for Financing Schools, the key document that set out the financial relationship between Northumberland County Council and its maintained schools (copy attached to the signed minutes as agenda item 8).
- 7.2 The Education and Skills Business Manager said the DfE had been concerned there was scope for Local Authorities to transfer deficits into loans which could then transfer to academy trusts and wanted to ensure that could not happen. It was noted that there was a loan scheme in place in Northumberland but it only operated to support school capital improvement. Paragraph 4.10 had been amended to reflect that.
- 7.3 In response to a question as to how that would affect borrowing for Hexham Priory it was stated that it had been agreed that ongoing commitments could continue and historic commitments would be paid from the schools block. The asset would still belong to the Local Authority as the freehold would not be transferred.

**RESOLVED** that approval be given to the report and the proposed draft of the Scheme for Financing Schools be adopted.

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**8. SCHOOLS' FORUM SELF ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT**

- 8.1 The report referred to a Schools' Forum self assessment toolkit which was provided in 2015 by the Education Funding Agency to local authority officers and elected members as a framework for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their Schools' Forum.
- 8.2 The Chair stated that it was considered to be best practice to use it and suggested that members look at it over the summer and bring some recommendations back to the Forum.
- 8.3 The Education and Skills Business Manager stated that a review had been carried out in 2015 and it was now appropriate to revisit that. Comments from members of the Forum were invited to take this forward and he asked for these to be emailed to him direct.
- 8.4 It was agreed that the Chair of the Schools' Forum would meet with the Chairs of the Additional Needs Sub Committee and Formula Funding Sub Committee to discuss further.

**9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 9.1 Councillor Daley circulated information regarding the Northumberland County Council Transforming Education Awards 2018 and encouraged members of the Forum to promote it so that there would be a good range of nominees. It had previously been sent by email to headteachers.
- 9.2 In response to a query it was noted that the first category included early years provision.

**10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Schools' Forum would take place on Wednesday, 26 September 2018 at 9.30 am.

CHAIR \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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