

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools' Forum held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 16 January 2019 at 9:30 am.

PRESENT

C Pearson (Chair)
Director, Three Rivers Learning Trust

Headteacher Representatives

C Bradshaw
M Deane-Hall
M Hall
F G Hartland

J Kennedy
K McGrane
E Potts (substitute for
C Hodgson)

Governor Representatives

K Faulkner
S Harker
S Heminsley

I Walker
B Watson
G Wilkins

Academies Representatives

G Atkins
S Wild

D Wylie

Early Years' Representative

K Morrison

Trades Union Representatives

R E Woolhouse

16 - 19 Provider of Education Representative

J Bell (substitute for J Cooper)

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Northumberland County Council Elected Members (Observers) - none present

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
D Jackson	Service Director - Education and Skills
K Norris	Democratic Services Officer
B Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
A Russell	Principal Accountant
D Street	Commissioner for Early Years and Primary

31. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 31.1 The Chair welcomed Sara Wild to the Schools' Forum who had been appointed as the Special Academy Representative. It was noted that Sara was the Principal of the NCEA Castle School.

32. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Marianne Allan, Suzanne Connolly, Councillor Wayne Daley, Sam Barron and Wendy Stewart.

33. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

- 33.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 21 November 2018, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising:

- 33.2 Minute 23.2: Clarification had been sought on the written feedback from the schools' adjudicator regarding Bellingham Middle School. The admissions portal was now closed and an update would be provided at the next meeting of the Forum on 13 February.
- 33.3 Minute 23.4: North of Tyne developments - Further information would be provided after the next meeting on Friday, 25 January.
- 33.4 Minute 25.1: The second meeting of the FACS Exclusions Task and Finish Group was due to take place on Thursday. The plan was to hold five meetings, the first three of which would be 'listening' meetings and the final two for drafting the Northumberland plan which would be published in April.

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- 33.5 Minute 25.9: Communication about the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) was being sent out to Head Teachers. The Head Teacher of the PRU was currently on sick leave but an experienced person was covering his post; otherwise, sickness levels had improved and a number of employees had returned to work.

34. COMMUNICATION

- 34.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager said there were no specific issues to report. Information had been circulated from the F40 Group regarding a late announcement about additional funding and a survey was currently being compiled. Further information would be provided at the meeting of the Schools' Forum in February.

35. SCHOOL CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE

- 35.1 Sue Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources, introduced the above report which updated members of the Forum on progress regarding delivery of the School Capital Investment Programme. (A copy of the report is filed with the signed minutes of the meeting.)
- 35.2 It was stated that the Council had invested or agreed to invest over £42.9m in delivering the schools capital programme since May 2017 with 70 projects delivered in 64 schools across the county. The Schools Capital Investment Programme (SCIP) addressed the backlog of maintenance work in schools and was funded from a capital allocation from central government. The Council had received an allocation annually since 2011 and £5.89 million of capital project had been delivered in the last 16 months. Details of the projects and their value were set out in the report.
- 35.3 Information was also provided on the Early Years Capital Grant funding to grow capacity for free childcare for the 3 to 4 year old children of working parents, Basic Need grant funding to grow capacity in a number of schools across the county and the reorganisation of partnerships in Alnwick and Ponteland.
- 35.4 Discussion took place about subsequent investment into schools and the funding provided to increase the number of special school places with an extension to Hexham Priory and the creation of the Ashdale unit in Ashington. Forum Members were encouraged to look at the Ashdale unit in Ashington as it was considered to be one of the Council's 'flagship' provisions and well worth a visit.
- 35.5 It was noted that the new build at Morpeth First School was progressing well and praise was given to the contractor who was doing an excellent job and working well with the local community.

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- 35.6 With regard to the Haydon Bridge area reorganisation, planning permission had been granted the previous day for the extension at Otterburn school and the application for new windows and roofing at Humshaugh school would be determined at committee next month.
- 35.7 A slide presentation was also provided showing photographs of various projects across Northumberland (a copy of which would be filed with the signed minutes).
- 35.8 In response to a question, it was stated that there would be a major capital investment across the whole of the schools estate. Government was allocating money in a different way and strategically there was more money available for big projects. Councils would be awarded further capital funding for maintenance of schools but individual amounts had not yet been announced. It was confirmed that health and safety took priority at all times.
- 35.9 In response to a query regarding whether Northumberland had a strategic approach to attract funding for the Free School Programme, it was confirmed that there was currently an application for a free special school. It was stated there was £17 million in the Council Capital Programme to invest in growing capacity in our special schools.
- 35.10 A site for a special school in Blyth had been identified through the Free School Wave 13 Programme and it was felt the Council was in a strong position to be successful in its bid. The next wave of free schools would be announced sometime after March.
- 35.11 In response to comments that a large amount of capital funding was allocated to extend existing provision, it was pointed out that a Free School application was a long process and there was not always land available. The Department of Education (DfE) would not accept speculative builds so it was about deliverability and best value.

RESOLVED that the content of the report and benefits to Northumberland Maintained Schools be noted.

36. SCHOOL BALANCES INFORMATION

- 36.1 Bruce Parvin, Education and Skills Manager, introduced the above report which updated members of the Forum on the latest 2017/18 information published by the DfE regarding the revenue balances held by local authority maintained schools. It was noted that there was no equivalent information published for academies as academy balances were held and reported on by the Trust, not at individual school level. (A copy of the report is filed with the signed minutes of the meeting.)

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- 36.2 Reference was made to the hyperlink in the report which provided more detailed information.
- 36.3 Appendix A gave a comparison of school level revenue balances for all local authority maintained schools by local authorities in England for the year 2017-18. It was noted that Northumberland's balances were lower than the national average, the large number of smaller schools in Northumberland being a contributory factor.
- 36.4 The figures reflected a total of 150 schools, 111 of which were in surplus, 34 in deficit and 5 schools that broke even.
- 36.5 Steve Heminsley stated that Northumberland was a smaller Authority and requested if it was possible to provide analysis showing balances as a % of annual School Block grant. The Education and Skills Manager said that was a useful suggestion. Newcastle and Middlesbrough were the only authorities in the north east which had average revenue balances per school above the national average .
- 36.6 The Chair raised concerns about the misuse of statistics by the press and suggested there should be a communication strategy to address this issue, should it occur in Northumberland. In response, it was stated that the local press often picked up on national reports but the Council had a good relationship with local reporters and could request that issues be put into context. In the context of national coverage of the recent Education Policy Institute (EPI) report, Northumberland did not have any schools which it considered to have excessive surplus balances. It was recognised that a level of balances was appropriate for medium term financial planning.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

37. SETTING THE DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) 2019/20

- 37.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the above report which provided information to the Schools' Forum about the estimated overall DSG for 2019/20 and the proposed allocation of funds to Schools for 2019/20. Background information was provided. (A copy of the report is filed with the signed minutes of the meeting.)
- 37.2 **Early Years Block** - It was noted that the Early Years National Funding Formula hourly rate had not changed since 2017/18 and the 'pass through' level of funding was at the same percentage as in 2018/19. The Early Years block was driven by activity and figures were indicative. It had been agreed to set formula funding values at the same level as 2018/19 with the exception of IDACI supplement, as detailed in Annex 2 of the report.

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- 37.3 The Forum was advised that IDACI (postcodes) had been used to allocate supplements for disadvantaged children. It was stated that this had been underestimated resulting in an overspend of 2% which equated to approximately £270K. This was because the number of children living in disadvantaged postcodes was higher than the estimates made when the bands were calculated. The children were also attending for more hours than estimated because of the universal offer of 30 hours childcare.
- 37.4 The situation would need to be reviewed as the formula agreed by the Forum two years ago was causing the Authority to overspend. A consultation exercise was being carried out on how to best meet the objectives whilst reducing costs. Four options/solutions were set out in Annex 2 of the report.
- 37.5 With regard to option 3 - Replace IDACI payments with a Pupil Premium Plus payment - the Chair queried if there would be an incentive for schools to encourage parents to receive pupil premiums. In response, it was stated that there was currently a 70% take up. There was additional funding from the DfE for early years which was currently not being taken up, as parents needed to sign up, so there would be an incentive for providers and schools. The Forum would need to consider if that would target the appropriate children.
- 37.6 Concerns were raised that instead of celebrating that disadvantaged children were attending, the budget deficit may mean that the number be reduced by 15%. In response it was stated that it was up to the Forum to decide; however, the formula had overspent and if figures were not reduced, there would be a knock on effect over every provider.
- 37.7 On a point of clarification it was noted that only 3 and 4 year olds received IDACI payments.
- 37.8 Detailed discussion ensued and comments from the Forum included the following:
- If option 2 was chosen some providers could face a 10-15% cut in overall funding, as illustrated by the table within Option 3;
 - Option 3 would see some providers receive an increase in funding, however, there were a number of negatives and it would have a negative impact upon the children it was intended to help;
 - It was an opportunity to address the unfairness of the IDACI system;
 - Take up of pupil premium should be encouraged but there must be some mitigation.
 - Parental experience when applying for pupil premium was sometimes difficult and improving that would be beneficial.
 - It could be good investment to preserve funding at a higher level for 2, 3 and 4 year olds.
 - Looking beyond April, the North East Education Challenge was keen to have an impact and look at deprivation.

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- 37.9 The only other option, in addition to those listed, was to find other means of funding to address the over spending in IDACI payments.
- 37.10 It was suggested that a meeting of the Formula Funding Subcommittee should take place before February's meeting as discussion needed further analysis. Any other members of the Forum who wished to attend would be welcome.
- 37.11 **High Needs Block** - Details of the latest indicative High Needs Block allocation were set out in paragraph 5 of the report. It was noted that the figure included additional High Needs funding of £613,233 announced in December but that did not address the pressures outlined. Work was continuing on the detail of the total requirements within the High Needs Block and it was recommended that the total 2019/20 budget be set with a detailed breakdown of that funding into the various services being provided to the meeting of the Schools' Forum in February.
- 37.12 Recommendation 1, as set out on page 3 of the report, was agreed.
- 37.13 **Schools Block** - Details of funding for the Schools Block were set out in paragraph 6 of the report. A report to November's meeting of the Schools' Forum had highlighted that the figure was less than the equivalent figure last year, however, following discussions with the DoE to highlight anomalies, it was noted that, although the figure was £200,997 less than the 2018/19 equivalent figure, it was now £759,633 higher than the provisional figure previously reported.
- 37.14 Proposed Formula Funding Values for 2019/20 were set out in Table 1 on page 5 of the report.
- 37.15 Further to the revised figures, G Atkins queried if it was still intended to reduce the 1% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. K McGrane added that it had been reluctantly agreed to transfer 1% so, given that there was now additional funding, it would be reasonable to review that figure to, for example, 0.7%. In response the Education and Skills Business Manager said it took time to turn things around and £1.2 million would not clear the deficit to the Local Authority, it would only reduce it by that amount.
- 37.16 Discussion ensued about pressure on the High Needs budget and increasing demand on it. Clarification was requested regarding what the overspend would be by the end of March and it was stated that a precise figure would be provided at the meeting on 13 February.
- 37.17 The Chair pointed out that the Schools' Forum could only make recommendations and decisions were made by Cabinet. It was suggested that, due to the changed situation, the Formula Funding Subcommittee could look at this and report back to the February meeting, however this was not possible in the context of required Cabinet timescales for decision. Formal consultation had taken place at the

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November meeting and subsequently with schools. It was understood that schools were keen to seek a reduction in the % transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block and that was the target for 2020/21.

37.18 **De-Delegation** - Details were provided in paragraph 7 of the report. It was noted that cash values had essentially remained the same since 2017/18 except for the Trade Union Facility Time figure for which a 3.2% increase had been requested. R Woolhouse reported some problems encountered by the Trade Union in receiving payments owed but said the situation was improving. While agreeing the delegated figures, some members expressed a desire to see the Facility Time figure maintained at the same value in 2020/21 as was set 2020.

37.19 Recommendation 2, as set out in the report, was agreed.

37.20 **Central Schools Services Block** - Details were provided in paragraph 8 of the report. It was noted that the allocation was 1.1% lower than the 2018/19 allocation and details of the budget would be provided to the meeting of the Schools' Forum in February.

RESOLVED that

- (1) A meeting of the Formula Funding Subcommittee be arranged urgently to discuss the options regarding the Early Years funding consultation and the 1% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. Any other members of the Forum who wished to attend would be welcome. Reports to be brought to the meeting of the Schools' Forum on 13 February.
- (2) The various budgets within the High Needs Block be set the at meeting of the Schools' Forum on 13 February.
- (3) Schools Members of the Schools' Forum representing maintained mainstream schools agree on a phase by phase basis to the de-delegation in respect of the five services listed in the report for 2018/19 using the funding values as set out in the final column of Table 1 of the report.

38. 2019 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES

38.1 The 2019 Work Programme was attached for information. It was noted that dates may need to be reviewed in order to ensure meetings did not clash with SACRE as it was important that Councillor Daley could attend.

39. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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It was noted that the next meeting of the Schools' Forum would take place on Wednesday, 13 February 2019 at 9.30 am in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth.

CHAIR_____

DATE_____

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