

# **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

## **SCHOOLS' FORUM**

At a virtual meeting of the Schools' Forum on Wednesday, 1 July 2020 at 9:30 am.

### **PRESENT**

C Pearson (in the Chair)  
Trustee, Three Rivers Learning Trust

#### **Headteacher Representatives**

M Deane-Hall, Wooler First  
F Hartland, Kielder First

A Mead, Cramlington Hillcrest  
B Ryder, Berwick Middle

#### **Governor Representatives**

K Faulkner, Collingwood Special  
I Walker, Duchess' High

B Watson, St Robert's RC First  
G Wilkins, St Wilfrid's RC Primary

#### **Academies Representatives**

A Hardie, NCEA  
E Potts (sub for C Hodgson, West  
Prudhoe Academy)

S Wild, NCEA Castle School

**Early Years' Representative** - Not present

**Trades Union Representative** - R E Woolhouse

**16 - 19 Provider of Education Representative** - Not present

**Northumberland County Council Elected Member** - Councillor W Daley

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## OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
D Jackson	Director of Education and Skills
K Norris	Democratic Services Officer
B Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
R Pickering	Senior SEND Manager
A Russell	Principal Accountant
D Street	Commissioner for Early Years & Primary
N Taylor	Head of Inclusive Education Services

### 48. **PROTOCOL FOR COUNCIL MEETINGS HELD REMOTELY BY ELECTRONIC MEANS**

- 48.1 Members were reminded that the Schools' Forum was a public meeting and was being live streamed. The protocol had been circulated with the agenda papers for information.

### 49. **MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE**

- 49.1 Members were advised that a vacancy had arisen for a maintained schools governor representative. Stephen Harker, James Calvert Spence College, had been a governor member of the Schools' Forum for the last four years but was unable to continue beyond his term of office and had therefore resigned. The Education and Skills Business Manager and the Chair had both been in contact with Mr Harker to thank him for his valuable contributions over the years. A replacement member would be sought over the course of the summer and in advance of the next meeting. It was noted that Mr Harker had been very complimentary about the work of the Schools' Forum and how much he had enjoyed being a member.
- 49.2 Following the resignation of Kieren McGrane, a vacancy had occurred for an academy representative of the Schools' Forum and a warm welcome was extended to new member, Mr Alan Hardie, Chief Executive, of Northumberland Church of England Academy Trust (NCEA).

**AGREED** that the information be noted and a replacement for the vacancy of maintained schools governor representative be actively sought.

### 50. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from G Atkins, E Chaplin, S Harker, S Heminsley, C Ponting and A Thelwell.

### 51. **MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

- 51.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 15 January 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

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## **Matters Arising:**

- 51.2 Minute 41.3: It was queried if there was any update regarding discussions to retrieve public money from Bright Tribe and if any money had been received. Councillor Daley said no money had been received and no update was available at this time. Recent events had taken over the priorities of the DfE; however, he would write to the DfE again with a similar request to those previously made.
- 51.3 Minute 41.4: An update was requested on the running of the Free School. The Head of School Organisation and Resources advised that, as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown, no update was available at this time regarding the outcome of the interviews held. In terms of the implementation of the new school, the key priority was around construction of the new building and work was still being undertaken in order to progress with the capital project.
- 51.4 Minute 43.12: The Education and Skills Business Manager advised that details of the SEND core offer was circulated to all schools via E Courier immediately following February half term. Most, if not all, Schools' Forum Members would have been in receipt of E Courier, however, it could be arranged to circulate the SEND core offer specifically to Schools' Forum members.
- 51.5 Page 6 - Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) items: The Education and Skills Business Manager advised that work in relation to final details was ongoing in Corporate Finance but the position reported in February was on track and there had been a further reduction in the DSG deficit. The Director of Education and Skills said a task had been set to reduce the deficit on the high needs block and good progress had been made. He acknowledged that additional funding had been received from Central Government and referred to the launch of a free 'point of access' SEN offer for next year and the ambition of the Forum to ensure that no child in the county was unable to access additional help because of the school's budget. In general good inroads had been made into the deficit and the high needs block was increasingly being utilised in a much more efficient way.

## **52. COMMUNICATION**

- 52.1 Reference was made to a daily bulletin maintained by the Council for headteachers during the Covid-19 disruption and a number of other forums, including weekly meetings with headteachers, information from which had been consolidated into the weekly E Courier. The need for a co-ordinated approach had been evident from the beginning of lockdown and officers had worked extremely hard to get the best, most relevant and filtered information out to schools.
- 52.2 The Director of Education and Skills said the crisis had brought the Authority and all schools closer together as a collective whole. He hoped that the trust established between them would continue to grow with Schools' Forum having a key role in supporting headteachers to have more involvement in the strategic direction of education in Northumberland. This was endorsed by the Chair and Councillor Daley who echoed the comments made. Councillor Daley reiterated that a huge

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number of schools had been closed, then re-opened within 48 hours for vulnerable children and those of key workers, and said there had been a superb effort all round to make this happen which was much appreciated. He praised the efforts of all involved and the central team at County Council who had been exemplary in making sure everything was done right for Northumberland.

52.3 Councillor Daley said he was aware that the Director of Education and Skills was leaving the Authority and acknowledged the impact and significant improvements Mr Jackson had made, highlighting some of his achievements. This was Mr Jackson's last meeting of Schools' Forum and Councillor Daley asked that it be placed on record, both on a personal level and on behalf of Schools' Forum, that Mr Jackson had done phenomenal work for the County and would be greatly missed. This was endorsed by the Chair.

### 53. **SCHEME FOR FINANCING MAINTAINED SCHOOLS 2020/21.**

53.1 The Education and Skills Business Manager introduced the above report, a copy of which had been circulated with agenda papers as Agenda Item 7 and was filed with the signed Minutes of the meeting.

53.2 The covering report outlined why this review was done on an annual basis. There were two key drivers to any changes to the scheme for maintained schools.

53.3 The first driver was that the EFSA would direct certain revisions, two of which they had asked to be included, as highlighted in paragraph 4.1. The information on the treatment of community powers, as part of schools expenditure, was not surprising and would not involve any radical changes. It was highlighted that risk protection arrangements (RPAs) via the ESFA had been in place for academies for some time. The ESFA had decided this offer should also be opened up to local authority maintained schools and one or two of them had pursued that option, and that was now reflected in the scheme for financing maintained schools.

53.4 The second driver was whether there was anything the Council could do to improve or clarify the scheme for schools. The Council had taken the opportunity to be more explicit around the process of supporting schools in financial difficulties and those causing concern. Pages 1 and 2 of the scheme highlighted the steps the Council would work through before the ultimate step of removing a schools delegated budget.

53.4 With regard to the draft circulated, changes were tracked in red to make it easier for Forum members to see where amendments had been made. When the final scheme was published on the website the tracking would be removed.

53.5 As outlined on page 2, the process was specific, stages 2 to 4 were very prescriptive and there was little flexibility in relation to those. In terms of promoting a better working relationship between the Local Authority and schools, it was felt better to include an initial letter of concern and hopefully, in the vast majority of cases, that would be where financial challenges would be addressed at an early stage.

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- 54.5 A question was raised about the Government's response to the financial impact on schools, the loss of income and concerns about deficits going forward. In response the Education and Skills Business Manager referred to the online claim form which had been published by the EFSA the previous week and circulated, along with guidance, by E Courier. He encouraged schools to take advantage of that and include any eligible exceptional expenditure that could be claimed in relation to Covid-19.
- 54.5 In relation to the wider financial picture, the DSG report in February reported the headline education budgets for 2021/22 and beyond which were indicative at that stage.
- 54.6 Mr Deane-Hall referred to schools losing income around the normal budget setting process, for example lettings and the loss of paid nursery places. He could not find any information relating to this which was of concern when these were accounted for within a school's budget planning process. Mr Ben Watson echoed those concerns which included catering and said loss of income did not seem to be covered at all.
- 54.7 The Director of Education and Skills said he had a meeting with the DfE that afternoon to raise a number of concerns and would be more than happy to take those issues to them.
- 54.8 In summary the Chair said he did not want to anticipate the agenda for September's meeting but perhaps an update could be provided to bring everything into focus.

**AGREED** that Schools' Forum approve the draft Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools.

## **55. 2020/21 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING DATES**

The Education and Skills Business Manager referred to some items which had been deferred from this meeting to the next meeting in September including the DSG Outturn. It was not yet known if September's meeting would be virtual or by suitably socially distanced means elsewhere, however, the intention was to have that meeting and to have a full agenda at that point.

## **56. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 56.1 The next meeting was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 30 September at 9:30 am.

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

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

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