

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS' FORUM

At a meeting of the **Schools' Forum** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 27 September 2017 at 1.30 p.m.

PRESENT

Headteacher Representatives

Mrs M Allan
Mr C Bradshaw
Mr M Deane-Hall
Mr M Hall

Mrs F G Hartland
Mrs J Kennedy
Mr K McGrane

Governor Representatives

Mrs L Elliott
Mr K Faulkner
Mr S Harker

Mrs M Pedley
Mr I Walker
Mr G Wilkins

Roman Catholic Diocese Representative

Mrs F A Penny

Academies Representatives

Mr G Atkins
Mrs G Evans

Mr C Pearson
Mrs D Wylie

Early Years Representative

Mrs K Morrison

Trades Union Representatives

Mrs J Guthrie

Mr R E Woolhouse

Ch.'s Initials.....

Northumberland County Council Elected Members (Observers)

Councillor N Oliver

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs S Aviston	Head of School Organisation and Resources
Dr A Johnson	Interim Director of Children's Services
Mrs K Norris	Democratic Services Officer
Mr B Parvin	Education and Skills Business Manager
Mrs A Russell	Principal Accountant
Mr D Street	Commissioner for Early Years and Primary

1. MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

- 1.1 Dr Andy Johnson, Interim Director of Children's Services, opened the meeting as no Chair was yet in place. He welcomed new members Maurice Hall, Head Teacher, The Duchess High School, Leigh Elliott, Governor, Ashington Learning Partnership (Bothal and Central Primary), Suzanne Connolly, Head Teacher, Felton C of E school, Marianne Allan, Head Teacher, Cambois Primary School and Stephen Harker, Governor, James Calvert Spence College.
- 1.2 It was noted that a vacancy remained on the Forum for an Academy representative and that Shirley Clements had left Croftway Primary School so there was now a vacancy for a First/Primary School Head Teacher.
- 1.3 Members were advised that the Schools' Forum was crucial for Local Authorities to obtain views and, although they were representing their own school, they were also representing all schools in Northumberland. He thanked them for doing so and said they were relied upon to disseminate information from the Schools' Forum which would become increasingly important over the next 2 years.

Election of Chair

- 1.4 One nomination had been received from Colin Pearson, Governor, Abbeyfields which had been seconded by Felicity Penny. Upon being put to the vote members unanimously agreed that Mr Pearson be appointed as Chair.

Mr C Pearson (Chair in the Chair)

- 1.5 The following partnerships did not have any representation on the Schools' Forum:
 - Prudhoe
 - Seaton Valley

Ch.'s Initials.....

The Chair echoed the comments of the Interim Director of Children's Services and said the importance of the Schools' Forum should not be underestimated.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs E Bell, Mr D Cookson, Mr A Day, Councillor W Daley, Mrs A Elsdon, Mrs D Lally, Mrs H Norris and Mrs A Whitehead.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

3.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Forum held on Wednesday, 12 July 2017, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, and signed by the Chair subject to Mrs F G Hartland being included in the list of those present.

3.2 The Interim Director of Children's Services confirmed that there were no further updates regarding the Haydon Bridge Partnership but information was expected from the Regional Schools Commission soon. He could not comment on information published by the press other than to say that the quote made by the council was accurate.

3.3 With regard to Nunnykirk school, work was ongoing and a video conference was taking place later that afternoon with representatives of the school after which more information may be forthcoming.

4. COMMUNICATION

(a) Communication with Schools' Forum

Nothing to report.

(b) Communication from the following Committee meetings:

- Formula Funding Committee - Ian Walker
- Additional Needs Committee - Felicity Penny.

No meetings had been held.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Ch.'s Initials.....

- 5.1 The Terms of Reference for the Schools' Forum had been reviewed and updated and it was noted there were no significant changes (copy attached to the signed Minutes as Agenda item 6).
- 5.2 Terms of Reference for the Formula Funding Committee and Additional Needs Committee would also be reviewed. After comments from members, it was agreed that the membership for those committees should be reviewed and that a programme of dates be developed.
- 5.3 The Chair commented that it would be beneficial to have some broad proposals in place by the next meeting and asked each sub-committee to prepare something.
- 5.4 In response to a question regarding voting rights, the Interim Director of Children's Services referred to paragraph 2.9 of the report but said that further clarification would be provided.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the Terms of Reference for the Schools' Forum be agreed;
- (b) a review of the Terms of Reference for the Formula Funding Committee and Additional Needs Committee take place and that each committee propose what they think to be appropriate in addition a programme of dates for each meeting be developed;
- (c) further clarification be provided with regard to voting rights and membership by the sub-committees, in the meantime an open invitation was extended to forum members to attend the sub-committees, members were invited to express an interest in attending one of the two sub-committees.

6. DSG MONITORING 2017-18

- 6.1 Bruce Parvin, Education and Skills Business Manager, introduced the above report which provided members with an analysis of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) as at 31 July 2017, together with the implications for the 2017/18 DSG budget (copy filed with the signed Minutes as Agenda item 7).
- 6.2 The estimated overspend of almost £3 million was attributed to a number of pressures and key issues had been highlighted in the report, a significant part of which related to pressure on the High Needs Block.
- 6.3 Local Authorities were allowed to transfer a maximum of 0.5% from the Schools Block and savings would be made from reducing contributions to jointly commissioned services with children's social care including those bullet pointed within the conclusion of the report.

Ch.'s Initials.....

- 6.4 It was pointed out that this did not mean cuts to jointly commissioned services, as payments would be made from other budgets.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

7. UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA

- 7.1 The Interim Director of Children's Services introduced the above report which asked members to note the information provided pending further information on the implications of the National Funding Formula for Northumberland (copy filed with the signed minutes).
- 7.2 Information from the Government had been published later than expected and it was a very complex picture. The report highlighted important changes.
- 7.3 Reference was made to paragraph 40 on page 6 of the report. It was noted that a different baseline had been used to calculate figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20. The Education Services Grant had been gradually removed from the Local Authority and replaced by the new Central School Services Block. Appendix A showed the percentage increase for schools in Northumberland.
- 7.4 The Forum was asked to bear in mind that schools were funded by the number of pupils enrolled so if they were to lose pupils they would receive less money and if they were to gain pupils they would receive more money. The Government had given flexibility to the Schools' Forum to have a local formula and had decided to allow a transition period before a national formula came into place. Information was provided in the operational guidance and in the high needs technical guidance.
- 7.5 On a point of clarification it was stated that the baseline was fixed but there was flexibility regarding what each individual school would receive. It was not known what would happen after 2019/20.
- 7.6 The £1.3 bn extra funding was welcomed but it was noted that the national funding formula did not take into account changing roles. There were still inconsistencies and challenges ahead such as teacher's pay increases, inflation and reducing pupil numbers which would all put pressure on budgets. It was further noted that the sparsity factor was crucial to Northumberland but the relatively minor changes to funding from this factor for individual schools would have little impact on reducing the pressure on individual schools.
- 7.7 In response to questions the following information was provided:
- If a school had exactly the same number of pupils with the same characteristics they should be in line for a minimum of 0.5% increase in funding. However, figures in Appendix A related to the Schools Block

Ch.'s Initials.....

only and were therefore potentially misleading as the high needs block also needed to be considered as did any local adjustments.

- There was a gains cap so a school could not gain more than 5.6%.
- There was a discussion around the figure of £3 million for Central Services, it was explained that this had previously been provided separately to the authority from the Educational services Grant.

7.8 Discussion ensued as to why some schools received more funding than others and it was suggested that case studies or further clarification would have been useful. In the main it was explained that the differences could be put down to the difference in cohorts of different schools, for examples the numbers in different key stages or those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Concerns were raised regarding vulnerable schools and the significant disparity across Northumberland.

7.9 In response to comments it was noted that the schools listed in Appendix A which were now closed, had not closed until August. These pupils would now be attending other schools and therefore the new schools would gain the additional funding. It was further noted that the illustrative figures were now in the public domain.

7.10 Reference was then made to paragraph 11 of the report which set out the main questions on which the Schools' Forum would be consulted regarding local decisions. Meetings of the Formula Funding and Additional Needs Sub Committees would be arranged as soon as possible so that they could make recommendations to the Schools' Forum. The Chair suggested that the Sub Committees should meet before the next meeting of the Schools' Forum on 18 October.

7.11 In response to comments the Interim Director of Children's Services said consideration should be given to a review of the f40 group, a pressure group who had made recommendations to Government about tweaks on how funding formula should look. It was reiterated that it was not known what would happen after 2019/20.

7.12 In response to a question it was stated that a primary school with less than 110 pupils was officially considered to be a small school by the department for education but the Government's view was that an average primary school had around 220 pupils, therefore this had been taken into account when funding arrangements were discussed by the department for education.

RESOLVED that the information be noted and appropriate action taken by the sub-committees.

8. SCHOOL BALANCES AS AT 31 MARCH 2017

8.1 The report informed members of the position regarding school balances as at 31 March 2017 (a copy of the report is filed with the signed Minutes as Agenda item 9).

Ch.'s Initials.....

8.2 The Education and Skills Business Manager summarised the report and asked members to be mindful that there would be a different number of schools involved in respective phases. It was noted that the number of schools with a deficit closing balance had increased and the size of the overall deficits had more than doubled in the 12 months to March 2017. The number of schools with a surplus closing balance had decreased and the size of the overall surpluses had also decreased.

8.3 In response to questions the following information was provided:

- Schools were essentially tasked to set plans and were subject to scrutiny;
- 4 schools had moved from surplus to deficit and 28 schools remained in deficit.
- There was more intensive scrutiny and support for schools with a growing deficit.
- The number of schools that were able to generate a surplus was decreasing at an alarming rate and concerns were growing as to what would happen once the bank account was empty.
- Enrolments had a huge impact, a reception class of 25 to 30 pupils would not be affected as significantly by a loss of 5 pupils in comparison to a class of 3 going down from 8 pupils.

RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and this be built into the work of the sub-committee and Forum.

9. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) UPDATE

9.1 The report updated the Schools' Forum regarding SEN pressures and the potential financial implications arising (a copy of the report is attached to the signed Minutes as Agenda Item 10).

9.2 The Education and Skills Business Manager provided some background information and details of the current position as set out in the report.

9.3 In response to queries regarding top up funding it was stated that each school received funding for every child with SEN and that element of funding should enable the school to cope with the number of children it had with SEN as devised by the formula. However, each school was able to apply for additional top up funding if it had more than the calculated number of pupils with SEND. The graph on page 2 of the report indicated that the number of schools applying for top up funding had increased and was putting pressure on the high needs funding block. It was noted that top up funding had changed significantly in 2013.

9.4 Out of County Placements were also putting pressure on funding with the number of funded placements having increased by 53% in the last two years.

Ch.'s Initials.....

Northumberland's special schools were all either good or outstanding and the Council was keen to increase their capacity to provide quality SEN education within the County. Work was being undertaken to address that but further places within the County would not be available for 12 months. Placements outside of the county impacted on expenditure in terms of home to school transport but also impacted on students commuting during rush hour with long travel times.

- 9.5 The Interim Director of Children's Services stated that he had written several letters to schools asking them to complete census returns and 40 schools had not responded, despite having been written to on three separate occasions. In his last letter he had informed them that their funding would be withdrawn if they did not provide the required information.
- 9.6 Discussion ensued about possible reasons why they had not responded including problems with data codes and issues of confidentiality. However it was re-iterated that these schools were not ones who had challenged the contents of the letters - they had simply not responded. In response it was stated that clarification was needed on what information academies could share, the Director agreed to seek clarification about this issue from the RSC, although currently it appeared that only one academy had identified a problem with the request.
- 9.7 Concerns were also raised by the Director about the mismatch of information received, for example there had been elements of double funding where two schools had claimed for the same pupil and many incidents where schools used the wrong codes for pupils SEND (despite having been reminded about the codes on three separate occasions).
- 9.8 A member suggested that the Interim Director of Children's Services should write to the Head Teachers and Governors of the schools in question once again. This was agreed.
- 9.9 In summary it was stated that in light of the new proposals in relation to the High Needs Block, to do nothing was not an option and it was recommended that the Additional Needs Sub Committee should carry out further work in that area in order to consider how it could be addressed for Northumberland. It was acknowledged that it was a huge task and noted that Sue Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources and Samantha Barron, Partnership Development Manager for SEND would facilitate the meetings.
- 9.10 In response to comments it was noted that the Council had applied for a free school last year but had been unsuccessful. It was suggested that the Sub Committee may wish to carry out a review of special schools, how many pupils they had etc. Development of the Dales School and an extension at Hexham Priory were referred to in the report, however, further expansion could result in further funding problems.

Ch.'s Initials.....

RESOLVED that the information be noted and the sub-committee report back on the detailed work thought necessary.

10. INCLUSION BUDGET UPDATE

- 10.1 The report informed the Schools' Forum of the position regarding school balances as at 31 March 2017 (a copy of the report is filed with the signed Minutes as Agenda item 11).
- 10.2 The Interim Director of Children's Services stated that permanent exclusions in Northumberland had risen sharply in the last few months. Statutory fair access arrangements for hard to place pupils had been reviewed and a Pupil Placement Panel had been introduced which would be reviewed again in October. Of 89 referrals to the Panel, 76 pupils were successfully placed in new schools and 13 were permanently excluded. However, if the current position was to continue additional pressure would be put on the budget. Officers were meeting with secondary Head Teachers again to talk to them about inclusion and exclusion and looking at pupil place planning. It was stated that the rise in primary exclusions although much smaller was also of concern.
- 10.3 One member believed that it appeared to be easy to exclude children from primary schools in Northumberland in comparison to schools in other authorities. However, it was pointed out that exclusion policies were national and statutory and in the hands of governing bodies. Comments were made about academies apparently having a zero tolerance approach. It was stated that academies could not be forced to take pupils if they did not sign up to fair access policies or pupil placement panels but the Local Authority could write to the RSC or Secretary of State in that regard.

RESOLVED that the information in the report be noted and acted upon by the sub-committees when they made recommendations.

11. SCHOOLS' FORUM WORK PROGRAMME

- 11.1 The Work Programme provided dates and times of future meetings of the Schools' Forum along with details of agenda items (copy enclosed with the signed Minutes as Agenda item 12).
- 11.2 Discussion ensued about membership and dates for the Formula Funding Sub Committee and the Additional Needs Sub Committee.
- 11.3 It was suggested that:
- a meeting of the Additional Needs Sub Committee take place on Wednesday, 11 October in the afternoon.
 - a meeting of the Formula Funding Sub Committee take place on Friday, 13 October at 1.30 pm.

Ch.'s Initials.....

Further details would follow.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the next meeting of the Schools' Forum be held on **Wednesday, 18 October 2017 at 9:30 am** in Committee Room 1.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

Ch.'s Initials.....