

Durham County Council Schools Forum Meeting, 26 March 2024 – Draft Minutes and matters arising

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Purpose of the Report

- 1 Minutes of a meeting of the Durham Schools Forum held on 26 March 2024, face to face at the Durham Leadership Centre at 9:30 am, Shirley Quinn in the Chair.

Present

- Lisa Jenkins, Nursery Headteacher
- Helen Tait, Primary Headteacher
- Nicola Murray, Primary Headteacher

- Mark Watson, Primary Headteacher
- Nicola James, Primary Headteacher
- Alice Hassall, Primary Headteacher
- Bethan Smith, Primary Headteacher
- Charlotte Ferguson, Primary Headteacher
- Bethan Smith, Primary Headteacher
- Shirley Quinn, Primary Governor (Chair)
- Paul Marsden, Secondary Headteacher
- Professor Simon Morris, Secondary Governor
- Rachel Grimwood, Special School Headteacher
- Philip Chater, Special School Governor
- Mick Little, Special Academy Member
- Helen Ashton, Academy Member
- Kevin Brennan, Academy Member
- Kerrie Whelan, Alternative Provision Academy
- Lindsey Vollans, CE Diocese
- David Glew, UNISON Representative
- Les Timbey, GMB Representative
- Ian Bain, NEU Representative
- Dan Lister, NASUWT Representative
- Melanie Stubbs, Looked After Children /Special Educational Needs / Hospital Education Member
- Rob Davisworth, council officer (Head of Corporate Finance & Commercial Services)
- Jim Murray, council officer (Head of Education and Skills)

- Martyn Stenton, council officer (SEND and Inclusion)
- David Shirer, council officer (Asst Finance Manager, CYPS Finance)
- David Watchman, council officer (Finance Manager, CYPS Finance)
- Zoey Ridley, council officer (Schools' Inspection Monitoring Review Officer and Clerk to the Schools Forum)

Apologies for absence

- Rachel Butler, Primary Headteacher
- Natalie Maughan, Primary Headteacher
- Dr Sandra Whitton, Primary Headteacher
- Janet Willis, Academy Member
- Ken Neild, Academy Member
- Lesley Candler, PRU Representative
- Michael Tiplady, RC Diocese Representative
- Wendy Pattison, DASH Observer

Apologies for absence

- 2 Shirley Quinn welcomed members to the face-to-face Forum meeting and introductions were made.
- 3 The apologies for absence were acknowledged and agreed.

Minutes of Schools Forum, 23 November 2023 and matters arising

- 4 The minutes to be amended to the correct spelling of Ian Bain.
- 5 Ian Bain referred to Trade Union Facility time costs and academies.
- 6 David Shirer advised that in the November meeting it was reported that in the past charges had been lower because of the use of unspent reserves. This would not be possible in 2024-25 and this has resulted in the rate of de-delegation increasing from £1 per pupil to £6.00 per pupil. This decision was made based on the number of meetings required by unions.

- 7 David states that academies buy into a service level agreement at the same rate as maintained schools and that there is no scope to change this.
- 8 Rachel Grimwood referred to paragraph 44 which mentions further consultation with all special school headteachers will take place in January 2024. Rachel pointed out this has not yet taken place and should have been included within the outstanding action points.
- 9 Martyn Stenton said these meetings will be scheduled and agreed it should have been included in the outstanding actions. **[Action]**
- 10 The minutes of the meeting were agreed as a true record and there were no further matters arising.

Outstanding actions points

- 11 The outstanding action points refer to issues that have been noted from previous meetings. Updates on progress are included in the report. Once complete the items will be removed.
- 12 Rachel Grimwood stated the outstanding actions are not very clear and it is difficult to look back through the detail.
- 13 Paul Marsden agreed with Rachel.
- 14 It was agreed these would be changed into an actions log.
- 15 Members of the forum noted the report.

Executive Summary

- 16 Members of the forum noted the report.

School Funding 2024-25

- 17 David Shirer presented this report which outlines the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations for the Schools and Central School Services Blocks for the financial year 2024/25 as per the latest update received from the Department of Education (DfE) in December 2023.
- 18 David noted that the executive summary within the report was from last year's report and apologised that this had not been updated.
- 19 Members of the Forum approved the following final budget allocations for the Central School Services Block:

- (i) Former ESG: Education Welfare, £304,000
- (ii) Former ESG: Asset Management, £60,000
- (iii) Former ESG: Statutory/Regulatory Duties, £668,000
- (iv) Copyright Licences, £532,000
- (v) School Admissions, £602,000
- (vi) Schools Forum, £48,000
- (vii) Teachers Pension Employers Contributions, £338,000
- (viii) Prudential borrowing, £430,000

20 Members of the forum noted the report.

Early Years Funding 2024/25

21 David Watchman presented this report which provides details of indicative Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Early Years Block (EYB) funding for 2024/25, including the new entitlement to funded childcare for working parents of children under 3, and also outlines the details of the proposed formula for distribution of funding to EY Providers in Durham in 2024/25.

22 The report was circulated in advance of the meeting in order to obtain early feedback to the proposals and so that there is sufficient time to consider responses prior to the final date for notifying initial budgets to providers by 31 March 2024.

23 The deadline for comments to be made was 21st March and none were received.

24 Members of the forum noted the report.

HNB funding and SEND and Inclusion Update (Standing Item)

25 Martyn Stenton presented this report which sets out the financial position of the High Needs Block (HNB) for County Durham based upon the latest forecast information.

26 Martyn discussed the issue of local authorities not being able to supplement high needs expenditure directly from their own resources, however additional funding can be identified from other sources.

- 27 Martyn shared a list of possible additional funding areas to consider and asked Members to discuss these within small groups for 5 minutes.
- 28 Members provided feedback on their group discussions and the following suggestions and thoughts were shared:
- (i) If top up funding is removed this would surely increase costs associated with EHCPs.
 - (ii) It might be a good idea to look at schools with expertise who can provide support to others at a reduced cost.
 - (iii) Introduce a revised model on supporting mainstream provision.
 - (iv) Cross cutting joint procurement with schools.
 - (v) Carry out a deep dive into certain areas to find out what the money is being spent on.
 - (vi) More clarity is needed on contribution from partners.
 - (vii) Consistency is needed in the top up money claimed.
 - (viii) Review of transport costs and investment opportunities.
 - (ix) Need a longer-term plan to support transition of Y6 from a small school into a large school in Y7.
 - (x) Concerns that schools will not have a significant carry forward or a long-term budget plan should a cap be introduced.
 - (xi) Parental choice is an issue resulting in some children being in mainstream that should not be there, and other children being in special schools who do not need to be there. Could this issue be addressed in the future?
 - (xii) Modelling of 0.5% and 0.25% transfer out of the Schools Block.
 - (xiii) Increasing charges for services would be a disadvantage for schools with the most challenging pupils and a transfer from Schools Block may be a fairer approach.
 - (xiv) A review of early intervention may not have much impact.
 - (xv) Are independent special schools providing value for money.
 - (xvi) Taking money away from schools is not the answer.

- (xvii) Falling pupil numbers is having an impact on funding also.
- 29 Martyn thanked Members for their contribution and thoughts.
- 30 The DfE have advised local authorities to plan for HNB funding increases of 3% in future years. This will cause a significant funding gap in Durham.
- 31 Further work will be carried out on the modelling of a transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block so that Members can see how this affects individual schools.
- 32 Jim Murray informed Members that there are two independent providers trying to move into the area.
- 33 Jim reassured Members that the Council are currently exploring options to expand the capacity of special schools. This includes the use of the old Cotsford Primary site plus 2-3 other projects. Solutions are also being considered to avoid having to use high-cost placements.
- 34 Martyn said that wider consultations will take place in the near future.
[ACTION]
- 35 David Watchman said that the modelling of a transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block will be provided to Members at the meeting in June. A decision on any proposed transfer would be made at the September meeting. **[ACTION]**
- 36 Members of the Forum noted the report.

Forum Membership

- 37 This provides an update on the Forum membership.
- 38 Since the report was written there have been a number of changes, which include:
- Natalie Maughan has now been elected as a substantive primary headteacher representative for a term which will run 20th March 2024 to 19th March 2028.
 - Claire Oates has resigned as an academy representative.
 - Dave Stone has been appointed as an academy representative for a term which will run 21st March 2024 to 20th March 2028.
- 39 Members of the forum noted the report.

Schools Forum Constitution

- 40 David Shirer presented this report which recommends that members approve an update to the Constitution of the Schools Forum in respect of the number of Academy and School Members and a minor amendment.
- 41 The Schools Forum Constitution is reviewed annually in particular to take account of the number of schools that convert to academy status.
- 42 An issue had been raised at the November meeting about meetings not being quorate. A question had been raised about whether there could be a separate quorum for maintained members, to allow them to vote on decisions restricted to those members when the meeting as a whole was not quorate. Schools Forum guidance about quorums means that this cannot be done.
- 43 Dan Lister advised that the voting structure is not clear. Dan asked if voting is affected by the reduction in the number of primary members.
- 44 David said that voting was not affected by the reduction in primary members.
- 45 Members approved an increase in the number of Academy Members from twenty to twenty-three.
- 46 Members approved a decrease in the number of Primary Governor Members from six to five.
- 47 Members approved the removal of a restriction on online meetings.
- 48 Members noted the report.

Other Updates (verbal)

- 49 David Shirer informed Members that the Council are considering looking at the timing of future Forum meetings.
- 50 Originally meetings were set around Cabinet meetings as there was a need to consult with Cabinet Members about the mainstream primary and secondary funding formula. This is no longer an issue because the formula usually follows the National Funding Formula.
- 51 The Council are considering changing the November meeting so that it is held at the end of January and the March meeting to be a little earlier

in the month. This is to allow better consultation from the timing of the release of funding rates.

- 52 Further information on future meeting dates to be provided at the June meeting. **[ACTION]**
- 53 It was asked if the Early Years consultation could be sent out to Members earlier as this will help with budget setting.
- 54 David Watchman advised the timing of the Early Years consultation will all depend on when the DfE release the information. The timing of the current consultation was unavoidable due to the Council only receiving the information at the end of December therefore the deadlines were very tight.
- 55 There were no other updates.

Any other business

- 56 There was no other business.

Date and Time of Next Meeting

- 57 Wednesday 26 June 2024, 9:30 am, online via Microsoft Teams.

Contact

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