



CUMBERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

11 June 2024

via Microsoft Teams

PRESENT

Danny Gee (PRUs)

David Grimshaw (Maintained Primary Schools)

Elaine Lynch (Cumberland Portfolio Holder – Lifelong Learning & Development)

Chris McAree (Secondary Academy)

Jennifer Rowlands (Maintained Secondary – representing Tom Hailwood)

Michael Smillie (Secondary Academy)

Kris Williams (Special Academy)

Officers in Attendance:

Emma Hamer (AD – Education and Skills)

Susan Milburn (Group Accountant – Education & Inclusion)

Claire Marshall (Group Accountant – Children's Social care & Education)

Sophie Scott (Finance)

Lesley Nixon (Senior Manager – Learning Improvement Service)

Nicola Shiels (Forum Support)

Observers:

None

Apologies for Absence

Amanda Chew (Finance Manager)

Andy Curtis (Teachers' Professional Associations – NASUWT)

Rhiannon Hughes (Maintained Nursery)

Nerissa Nicholas (Maintained Primary)

Sally Senejko (Senior Manager – SEND, Education & Inclusion)

PART 1: ITEMS LIKELY TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Each member of Schools Forum introduced themselves to the group.

It was noted that two requests for items to be considered under any other business had been agreed – membership and teachers' pay award.

1. Exclusion of Press and Public

It was agreed that all items would be considered in the public domain.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest at this stage.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

At the meeting held on 21 March, there was a question about intelligence held by the LA in respect of schools that could potentially fall into an Ofsted category at the next inspection and of those schools with a deficit budget, which might be at risk? It had been agreed that a report would be presented to the June meeting. However, as a result of closedown, it had been agreed that this item should be deferred until a later meeting.

Subject to a spelling correction, the minutes of the meetings of the Schools Forum held on 21 March 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. LA Scheme for Financing Schools

A report setting out a number of amendments to the Cumberland LA Scheme for Financing Schools and Pupil Referral Units (Scheme) was presented. Schools Forum were asked to note the amendments which would come into effect from June 2024.

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (SSFA 1998) required that local authorities maintained a Scheme setting out the financial relationship between them and the schools that it maintained. DfE had updated the guidance for schools in March 2023 and as a result, the following had been updated in the scheme:

- 3.6 Borrowing by schools – following the introduction of if the international financial standard IFRS 16 Leases, all leases to be classified as borrowing and would require Secretary of State approval. General consent had been provided for maintained schools for the most common leases including telephony, IT equipment, catering and cleaning, furniture, bathroom and sanitary items, gym equipment, LED lighting systems, vehicles for the use of the schools and temporary classrooms and equivalent structures (not land leases).
- Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) – minor changes to update the SFVS checklist included a change in accounting regulations and a minor change to wording. Consultation with maintained schools and approval of the scheme by Schools Forum was not needed for these changes.

It was noted that the changes were technical but that a simple, straight forward briefing would be included in the next communication with schools.

The maintained schools' School Forum representative member noted the amendments and the revised scheme.

5. DSG Management Plan

A report summarising the DSG Management Plan that was submitted to DfE in February 2024 was presented. The submission of a DSG Management Plan was included within the DSG conditions of grant. Furthermore, authorities, such as Cumberland, that were part of the Delivering Better Value in SEND programme were also required to submit a management plan.

The Management Plan set out Cumberland's forecast DSG income and expenditure for 2023-24 to 2029-30. The forecast included both a mitigated and unmitigated deficit position with savings initiatives totalling £24.349m included in the mitigated forecast. Despite these mitigations, the DSG deficit was forecast to increase to £34.616m by 2029-30.

The DSG Management Plan submitted in February 2024, was prepared using the 2023-24 Q2 forecast outturn position as the starting point and expenditure was categorised in line with s251 returns. Pupil and EHCP numbers included in the plan were based on current numbers with forecasts based on information provided by a firm of consultants working with the SEND team. In accordance with DfE advice, costs and income were assumed to increase by 3% pa.

Mitigations that have been modelled in the plan included:

- Increasing Resource Provision places by 105 by January 2027;
- Implementing an AP in Schools pilot, initially in 1 primary school in September 2024, extending to 2 primaries in September 2025;
- Implementing an AP in Schools pilot, initially in 1 secondary school in September 2024, extending to 2 secondaries in September 2025.

The mitigations modelled within the plan totalled £24.349m cumulatively up to 2029-30 with the deficit rising to £34.616m. However, the deficit was forecast to rise to £58.965m by 2029-30 if no action was taken. The DSG Statutory override was due to end in March 2026 at which point DSG deficits would be included on the LAs balance sheet.

The DSG Management Plan would be refreshed each quarter in line with the corporate monitoring timetable and presented to Schools Forum termly.

As previously noted, this was a national issue that was impacting on other local authorities as well as Cumberland. However, there was further work to do in terms of the mitigations in the plan and a SEND Strategy as well as a sufficiency strategy for SEND places was being developed. Budget and LA deficits were a major issue and there was an expectation that more LAs would issue S114 notices.

Schools Forum noted the DSG Management Plan as submitted in February 2024.

6. Date of Next Meeting

- i) The next meeting of the Schools Forum would be held on 16 September 2024, starting at 9.30am. It was likely to be held via Microsoft Teams; final arrangements would be circulated prior to the meeting.

- ii) A proposed schedule of dates for meetings of the Cumberland Schools Forum and associated working groups would be circulated to members of the Schools Forum for comment.

7. Any Other Business

- i) Membership – there were still some constituencies that were not represented. Efforts would be made to secure representatives to join the Schools Forum to fill current vacancies. Future meetings were also discussed and it was agreed that, where possible, there should be a change to a mix of in person and online meetings.
- ii) Teachers' Pay Award – The STRB would not now be available until after the general election. This was contributing to some uncertainty for schools in relation to budget planning, particularly in relation to the teachers' pay award,
- iii) F4 Group Membership – The LA had now joined this group.
- iv) HNB Working Group – The HNB Working Group should begin to meet again with a meeting to be scheduled before the end of the summer term.

There were no other items of business.

NS/E&S
July 2024