



CUMBERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 November 2023 via Microsoft Teams

PRESENT

Andy Curtis (Teachers' Professional Associations)
Danny Gee (PRUs)
David Grimshaw (Maintained Primary)
Tom Hailwood (Maintained Primary)
Chris McAree (Secondary Academy)
Nerissa Nicholas (Maintained Primary)
Michael Smillie (Secondary Academy)

Officers in Attendance:

Dan Barton	(AD – Education and Skills)
Susan Milburn	(Group Accountant – Education & Inclusion)
Amanda Chew	(Finance Manager)
Simon Nicholson	(Group Accountant – Adult & Children's Social Care)
Sophie Scott	(Finance)
Sally Senejko	(Senior Manager – SEND, Education & Inclusion)
Nicola Shiels	(Forum Support)

Observers:

None

Apologies for Absence

Rhiannon Hughes (Maintained Nursery)
Elaine Lynch (Cumberland Portfolio Holder – Lifelong Learning & Development)
Lesley Nixon (Senior Manager – Learning Improvement Service)
Kris Williams (Special Schools)

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

This was an additional single item meeting to consider proposed criteria to allocate a small amount of additional funding to support schools in financial difficulty.

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. Schools Funding Formula 2024-25 – Consultation Outcome

A report that provided details of the funding provided by DfE for Schools in Financial Difficulty and the proposed methodology for allocating Cumberland's allocation of £371,579 to schools was considered.

In July 2023 ESFA announced £40m of additional funding to support individual schools in financial difficulties. Further detail was provided in October 2023 when it was announced that £20m would be used to top up the existing financial support available to academies. The remaining £20m would be allocated between local authorities who have aggregated school-level deficits as a proportion of their total maintained schools' income above 1%. Cumberland Council's allocation is £371,579.

ESFA had not prescribed how the funding should be allocated to schools other than Schools Forum should be informed of the methodology that the LA used to allocate the funding. However, the methodology for allocating funds to schools needed to be simple, transparent and not burdensome given that the funding had to be allocated to schools by 31 March 2024.

In modelling potential methodologies the following principles had been considered:

- Only schools in deficit as at 31 March 2023 would be considered for funding;
- Schools' deficit as a percentage of their income would be considered;
- The methodology would exclude those schools where there had been a lack of engagement with the LA or it appeared the deficit had arisen as a result of poor practice;
- Due to the varied and complex reasons for any school to be in deficit, a simple and transparent approach would be taken.

Schools Forum members had been asked to suggest methodologies for allocating funding; some of the suggestions had been used but others, whilst valid, would have been overly burdensome given the low level of funding compared to the net deficit and because the funding is one off.

As at 31 March 2023 19 schools were in deficit, with deficits ranging from £139 to £963,579. Three methods for allocating funding had been considered.

- Model 1 – allocate funding to every school in deficit in proportion to the percentage of a school's deficit compared to income and ensuring no school received more than its deficit.
- Model 2 – allocate funding to those schools that have reduced their deficit between 2021-22 and 2022-23. Six schools would receive funding under this methodology.
- Model 3 – allocate as model 2 but also allocate to those schools where the deficit may have increased but the deficit as a percentage of income had not increased by more than 10%, or for schools newly in deficit the deficit was less than 10% of income. Seventeen schools would receive funding under this methodology.

The LA would decide how to allocate the funding but was seeking a steer from Schools Forum.

In discussing the various options Forum members had differing opinions about the option that they would support. It was noted that there were multiple reasons for a school to be in deficit and it was difficult to know how any addition funding would affect that position. The level of a deficit could also fluctuate and a school could be on track when something unexpected put back the progress that was being made.

Having taken account of the views of each member, Schools Forum recommended that model 3 should be used to allocate the £371,579 to schools in financial difficulty.

E&S/NS
January 2024