



CUMBERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 November 2023 via Microsoft Teams

PRESENT

Danny Gee (PRUs)
David Grimshaw (Maintained Primary)
Elaine Lynch (Cumberland Portfolio Holder – Lifelong Learning & Development)
Chris McAree (Secondary Academy)
Jennifer Rowlands (Representing Tom Hailwood – Maintained Secondary)
Michael Smillie (Secondary Academy)
Kris Williams (Special Schools)

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)
Lesley Nixon	(Senior Manager – Learning Improvement Service)
Nicola Shiels	(Forum Support)

Observers:

None

Apologies for Absence

Nerissa Nicholas (Maintained Primary)

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

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

A revised version of the draft minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 18 September had been circulated prior to the meeting. Subject to this being confirmed, the minutes of the meeting of the Schools Forum held on 18 September 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. Schools Funding Formula 2024-25 – Consultation Outcome

A report that set out the Schools Forum consultation with all Cumberland schools and academies on the school funding formula for 2024/25 was presented.

On 17 July 2023 the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) announced details of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding arrangements for 2024-25. These figures were amended on 6 October 2023 following the an error by ESFA relating to pupil numbers and affordability of the National Funding Formula (NFF). Following the update to the indicative funding figures published by the ESFA in October the information included in the consultation was updated and the consultation was extended slightly.

Schools Forum were asked to review the results of the consultation and make a recommendation to the Cumberland Executive on the formula that should be used in 2024-25 to allocate funding to schools and academies and the principles to apply if there was a shortfall or a balance remaining in the Schools Block after calculating the school budget shares.

The consultation opened on 25 September for a period of 3 weeks. However, on 6 October the ESFA announced that it had made an error relating to pupil numbers and affordability of the NFF and published revised provisional Schools Block DSG allocations for local authorities. The impact of the ESFA error was a reduction in the NFF factor values which were originally to increase by 2.4% after taking into account the roll in of the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant but the increase had now reduced to 1.4%.

The figures in the Schools Forum consultation with Cumberland schools and academies were revised and the deadline for responding was extended to Friday 20 October 2023.

In total 26 schools had responded to the consultation with 23 (88%) agreeing with the Schools Forum recommendation that the NFF should be used to allocate funding to schools in 2024-25. A total of 17 (65%) agreed that if there was a shortfall in the Schools Block the basic per pupil factor values in the formula should be reduced. A total of 24 (92%) respondents agreed that a transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block should be actioned if there was a balance remaining in the Schools Block.

A summary of the results and comments made by respondents were set out in Appendix 3 of the report.

Although the number of schools responding to the consultation was low there was clear support for the proposals. Schools Forum were asked to consider the outcome of the consultation and to make a recommendation the Executive with the final decision on the school funding formula for 2024-25 to be taken by Cumberland Executive on 12 December 2023.

Schools Forum recommended that:

- i) The NFF was implemented in Cumberland in full in 2024-25, impacting maintained schools from April 2024 and academies from September 2024;
- ii) After taking into account the growth fund budget, any residual balance up to a maximum of 0.5% to be transferred from the Schools Block into the High Needs Block;
- iii) Any balance remaining in the Schools block after transfer of a maximum of 0.5% to be allocated to schools through the school funding formula, and;
- iv) If the NFF was not affordable, the basic per pupil factor values in the formula would be reduced.

5. Maintained Schools De-Delegation 2024-25

In July 2022, DfE confirmed that de-delegation would continue to be an option for maintained schools in 2024-25.

The maintained Schools Forum representatives were required, on an annual basis, to decide on the de-delegation options and were asked to vote on the options for 2024-25 separately, by primary and secondary phase.

The services under the de-delegated budgets also impacted maintained PRUs, special schools and nursery schools and therefore in Cumberland an element was centrally retained in both the Early Years and High Needs Block for these services, although there was no de-delegation process for these two areas. The split of these budgets across the blocks was based on pupil numbers.

Services de-delegated for primary and secondary in 2023-24 were contingencies, staff costs and insurance; library services and school improvement were also de-delegated for primary schools but not for secondary schools. Contingencies included exceptional unforeseen costs, schools in financial difficulties and costs relating to new, re-organised or closed schools. Staff costs included teacher maternity and union duties reimbursements.

To date, no schools had converted to academy status this year to date although one school had a provisional conversion date of 1 November and the de-delegated budget associated with this school was £0.015m but it was not proposed to change the value of the de-delegated budgets as a significant majority were linked to staff pay and therefore it was recommended that, as in previous years, they continue at the same level to allow for pay inflation and other cost pressures due to rising prices.

The Council's current insurance contracts for property and vehicle insurance and liability and fidelity guarantee insurances commenced on 1 April 2023 and were for a period of 3 years ending 31 March 2026. As the Schools Forum representatives for maintained schools agreed to continue to de-delegate for insurance in 2023-24 the next opportunity to consider new insurance options for maintained schools would be 2026.

Maintained school representatives were asked to vote separately for the primary and secondary phases on whether to also continue to de-delegate budgets for the Contingency, Staffing, Library services and School Improvement in 2024-25 with the decision being binding for all schools in that phase.

It was noted if Schools Forum did not agree the de-delegated budgets and/or propose revised de-delegated budgets there was a risk that this would impact on continuity of services for maintained schools who would need to seek alternative arrangements to continue to access the same level of services that they currently received from these budgets.

The Schools Forum representatives for maintained schools recommended:

- i) that the following services should be de-delegated for 2024-25:

De-Delegated Service	Primary	Secondary
Contingencies	Yes	Yes
Staff Costs	Yes	Yes
Insurance	Yes	Yes
Library Services	Yes	No
School Improvement	Yes	No

- ii) that the proposed 2024-25 de-delegated budgets for Cumberland were as set out in paragraph 4.5 of the report.

6. Proposed Early Years Funding Formula 2024-25

A report that set out the modelling of the proposed new local funding formulae for 2-year olds and Under 2s for 2024-25 was presented. The report also included the draft consultation with Cumberland early years providers including maintained schools, academies and private, voluntary and independent (PVIs) providers.

It was proposed that the new funding formulae comprised of an hourly base rate and the mandatory deprivation supplement. No changes were proposed to the existing 3-4 year old funding formula, however a new methodology was proposed for calculating the deprivation supplement which would reach more disadvantaged children than the current methodology.

The modelling and proposed hourly rates at provider level were based on the illustrative local authority level hourly rates published by the DfE in its consultation on funding the new free entitlements for 2-year olds and Under 2s. Therefore, the proposed funding formulae rates at provider level were indicative and subject to the final local authority level hourly rates being confirmed.

It was also proposed that £0.072m of the new 2-year-old and Under 2s funding was centrally retained to support the roll out of the new entitlements. The Schools Forum was asked to support this proposal in principle, subject to the final LA level rates being confirmed and the draft consultation seeking views on the proposals from early years providers. It was proposed that the consultation would open on Thursday 9 November for a period of 3 weeks.

The consultation outcome would be presented at the 16 January 2024 meeting when Schools Forum would be asked to make a recommendation to Executive who would decide on the final new funding formulae at its meeting on 13 February 2024.

Currently all parents of 3-4 year olds could access 15 hours of free early education for 38 weeks of the year and working parents could access an additional 15 hours of free entitlement. Parents of disadvantaged 2-year olds could access 15 hours of free entitlement. The extension of the free entitlement meant that all working parents would be able to access 30 hours of free entitlement for 38 weeks of the year from the term after their child turns 9 months old. This would be rolled out in stages.

The DfE had consulted local authorities and early years providers on its proposals for funding local authorities for the new early years free entitlement and were proposing to apply the same funding rules to the new 2-year old and Under 2s funding which currently applied to the 3-4 year old funding.

LA's must use a universal base rate of funding for all providers regardless of type; they must plan to pass-through at least 95% of the funding that it received in 2024-25 to early years providers (rising to 97% from 2025/26) and LAs were required to establish a SEN Inclusion Fund to support children who were taking up the 3-4 year old free entitlements, targeted at children with lower level and emerging SEN.

The LA currently passed on the full hourly funding rate it received for disadvantaged 2-year olds to early years providers. In 2024-25 local authorities would be allowed to retain up to 5% of the new funding it received for 2-year olds and Under 2s centrally with the support of Schools Forum.

Having considered the level of funding required for central services and the inclusion fund, it was proposed that £0.072m of the new funding was retained centrally to support the early years staffing team.

Currently, the SEN Inclusion Fund budget for disadvantaged 2-year olds was £0.026m. Based on estimated take-up of the new free entitlements it was anticipated that £0.174m (split as £0.128m for 2-year olds and £0.046m for Under 2s) would be required.

It was proposed that the new funding formulae at provider level would be made up of an hourly base rate and the mandatory deprivation supplement mirroring the current 3-4 year old funding formula; it was not proposed to use any of the other optional supplements available for local authorities.

The current deprivation supplement for the 3-4 year old funding formula was £0.21 per hour. It was proposed to use the same rate for the new 2-year old and Under 2s funding formulae but to change the methodology used to allocate the supplement to providers to target more disadvantaged children. It was proposed to allocate the supplement to providers using IDACI by allocating it to children whose postcodes were in the IDACI Bands A to F. This would target funding to those children living in the 37.5% most deprived areas.

After taking into consideration the proposed centrally retained budgets, the SEN Inclusion fund and the estimated funding channelled through the deprivation supplement of £0.21 per hour the proposed base rate for the 2-year olds has been calculated as £7.00 and £9.59 for the Under 2s.

It was recognised that the proposed combined base rate of £7.00 plus the deprivation supplement of £0.21 which totalled £7.21 for the 2 year olds was lower than the current funding rate that providers received of £7.24 for disadvantaged 2 year olds.

This was partly due to the new funding formula used by the DfE to calculate the LA level funding rate.

Consideration had been given to increasing the deprivation supplement rate of £0.21 to a level that would uplift the combined base and deprivation rate to £7.24. However, as the funding available for the funding formula was a fixed amount, the more funding allocated through the deprivation supplement, the lower the amount of funding available for the base rate.

The local authority was obliged to consult providers on any changes to existing and new early years funding formulae. Subject to Schools Forum supporting the proposals set out in the report, a draft consultation document had been prepared that would seek views from maintained schools, academies and PVIs. The consultation paper included four questions but Schools Forum could recommend additional or amended questions.

In discussing the report Schools Forum members commented on the complexity of the proposed formula and thanked LA colleagues for the work that was done to present information clearly. Reassurance was also given that colleagues would be available to support providers, help explain the proposed changes and respond to queries.

Schools Forum recommended:

- i) that the proposed centrally retained budget of £0.072m;
- ii) early years providers be consulted on the proposed new funding formulae for 2-year olds and Under 2s and new methodology for calculating the deprivation supplement; and
- iii) that the draft consultation document at Appendix 1 which included 4 recommended questions to ask early years providers be agreed.

7. **Delivering Better Value for SEND**

A short update on Delivering Better Value in SEND was presented.

The Delivering Better Value in SEND programme was commissioned to identify the changes a Local Authority could make to support children and young people with SEND.

Two initial workstreams had been further developed and split into a project plan of six workstreams:

- 1 – Training and Development
- 2 – Data Analysis
- 3 – Prevention & Early Intervention
- 4 – Stakeholder & Partnership Work
- 5 – Infrastructure/Provision Strategy
- 6 – Capacity Building

The initial priorities are:

- Develop a Teaching Assistant Academy to drive recruitment and retention;
- Develop and Implement revised SEND Involvement Process; and
- Increase the number of Schools offering Resourced Provision places.

Progress had been made against each of these along with many other workstream elements and at a recent monitoring meeting the DfE confirmed they were happy with the plans and progress to date.

Schools Forum noted the update report.

8. Dates of Future Meetings

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

9. Any Other Business

i) Dan Barton – This was Dan's last meeting before leaving to move to a new position with Leeds City Council.

Chris McAree took the opportunity to thank Dan for all the work he'd done with the Forum and also as Assistant Director since 2017.

ii) Schools in Financial Difficulty – The LA had been allocated a small amount of funding to be used to support schools in financial difficulty. A set of criteria to allocate the funding would be developed and brought back to Forum for consultation and agreement. An additional, single item, meeting would be arranged to consider the criteria, date and invitation to be circulated.

E&S/NS
December 2023