



North Tyneside Council

Quadrant, The Silverlink North, Cobalt Business Park,
North Tyneside, NE27 0BY
Tel: 0345 2000 101

Item 3 Minutes

Meeting Schools Forum **Date** 25th September 2024
Location Via Microsoft Teams
Present

✓ Present D Deputy A Apologies O Absent
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Name	Organisation	Representing	10.07.2024	25.09.2024
Angi Gibson	Hadrian Park Primary School	Primary	✓	D (Tim Jones)
Anthony Gollings	St Thomas More	RC Diocese	✓	✓
Claire Withers	Fordley Primary School	Primary	✓	✓
Colette Bland	St Mary's RC Primary School (NS)	Academy	A	✓
Colleen Ward	Coquet Park First School	Primary	✓	✓
Daniel Jamieson	Burnside Community College	Secondary	✓	✓
David Watson	St Thomas More	Academy	✓	✓
Diane Turner	Tyne Coast	16-19 Provider	O	O
Finn Wilcock	Southridge First School	Primary	✓	A
Gavin Storey	Cullercoats Primary School	Primary	✓	✓
Gillian Tawes	Shiremoor Primary School	Governor - Primary	✓	✓
Jane Lowe	Monkseaton Middle School	Governor - Secondary	✓	✓
Joanne Thompson	Holystone Out of School	Early Years PVI	✓	✓
Jonathan Heath	John Spence High School	Academy	✓	✓
John Croft	Sir James Knott	Nursery	✓	A
John Newport	Marden Bridge Middle School	Middle	✓	✓
John Ord	Greenfields Primary School	Governor - Primary	A	✓
Justina Terreta	Beaconhill Primary School	Special Heads	N/A	✓
Karen Croskery	North Tyneside Student Support Service	PRU	A	✓
Kelly Holbrook	Longbenton High School	Secondary	✓	✓
Kerry Lillico	Grasmere Academy	Academy	A	O
Laura Baggett	Monkhouse Primary School	Primary	✓	✓
Lesley Griffin	Wellfield Middle School	Governor - Primary	A	✓
Louise Bradford	C of E Diocese	C of E Diocese	✓	✓
Matt Snape	Marden High School	Secondary	✓	✓
Peter Gannon	Silverdale School	Special	A	A
Phil Kemp	Trade Unions	Trade Unions	D (Claire MacLeod)	D (Claire MacLeod)
Philip Sanderson	Kings Priory	Academy	✓	✓
Stephen Baines	Holystone Primary	Primary	✓	✓
Steve Wilson	Whitley Bay High School	High	✓	✓
Wayne Myers	Richardson Dees Primary	Primary	✓	✓

In Attendance:				
Julie Firth	Director of Children's Services	NTC	✓	✓
Jon Ritchie	Director of Resources	NTC	A	✓
Andrew Brown	Principle Accountant, Finance	NTC	✓	✓
Christina Ponting	Senior Manager - Schools HR	NTC	✓	✓
David Mason	Head of Finance – Deputy S151 Officer	NTC	✓	✓
Diane Thompson	Senior Accountant – Schools Finance	NTC	✓	✓
Jane Cross	Senior Business Partner, Finance	NTC	✓	✓
Ian Wilkinson	Strategic Lead, Education and Inclusion Review	NTC	A	✓
Lisa Ramshaw	Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion	NTC	✓	A
Mark Mirfin	Assistant Director, Commissioning, Partnerships and Transformation	NTC	✓	✓
Mark Taylor	Head of Service, Children and Families Commissioning	NTC	N/A	N/A
April Gibbs-Thorn	Administration Officer – Schools Forum	NTC	✓	✓

Minutes of Meeting

Ref	Item	Action
1.	Welcome and Apologies	Julie Firth
	<p>JF welcomed everyone to the meeting and issued a reminder that the meeting is live streamed to the public on the Authority's YouTube Channel.</p> <p>A reminder of roles and responsibilities for Forum Members was provided.</p> <p>See table above for apologies.</p>	
2.	Election and appointment of Chair and Vice Chair	Christina Ponting
	<p>CP noted the yearly election of a Chair and Vice Chair for Schools Forum. Positions held for a 12-month period.</p> <p>Election of Chair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominations were requested. • David Watson was nominated for position of Chair. This was supported by Forum. • David Watson was duly elected as Chair. <p>Election of Vice Chair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominations were requested. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jonathan Heath was nominated for position of Vice Chair. This was supported by Forum. Jonathan Heath was duly elected as Vice Chair. 	
3.	Attendance Register / Membership	Christina Ponting
	<p>Attendance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> See table above. <p>Membership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forum welcomed new member - Justina Terreta, Special School Heads Representative. CP outlined that there is a current vacancy for membership, and confirmed this will be discussed with the specific locality outside of Forum. A number of memberships requiring renewal will also be contacted outside of Forum. 	
4.	Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising	
	<p>Minutes of the last meeting were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.</p> <p>Matters arising to be addressed in the Schools Finance Update.</p>	
5.	Declarations of Interest	
	None	
6.	Annual Review of Schools Forum Constitution	Christina Ponting
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CP explained that each year a consultation and review is carried out on the Schools Forum Constitution, and this is informed by DfE guidance. As the DfE guidance is often eagerly anticipated but not received, it means that the consultation and review is deferred to the November 2024 Schools Forum meeting. CP suggested that a formal decision is made to move the consultation and review to each November meeting on a permanent basis. <p>Recommendations</p> <p>Schools Forum is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue with annual review and consultation and move this to each November meeting. <p>AGREED</p>	
7.	Schools Finance Update	Andrew Brown
	<p>AB talked through the presentation which provided an update on progress against 2024/25 Budget Monitoring 1 for schools.</p>	

2024/25 Schools Budget Monitoring 1

- 2023/2024 had a financial year-end deficit of £2.930m. It should be noted that as North Tyneside had received additional Schools in Financial Difficulty funding of £1.868m from the DfE, the underlying deficit figure would have been £4.798m.
- In terms of 2024/2025 budget plans, there is a projected deficit of £9.707m across maintained schools; an increase of £6.777m from the reported £2.930m year-end deficit balance for 2023/24.
- It is crucial that Schools and the Authority work closely to complete the 2024/2025 Budget Monitor 1 to gather accurate financial information. The aspirational deadline is 31 October 2024.
- AB noted that there have been issues with the financial system migration, and the Authority is working very hard with the Schools and SBS colleagues to resolve the system issues.
- The Finance team would like to thank Schools, Leaders and staff for their patience. Further communications will be issued.

2024/2025 Deficit Schools

- The projected budget deficit of £9.707m includes 16 deficit schools.
- There are 7 new schools, 2 in structural deficit, and 3 schools identified for SRMA support.
- Deficit clinics are taking place, and 5 remaining clinics are scheduled for September 2024.
- Actions from the deficit clinics will be reviewed with the identified schools and once the Budget Monitor 1 projection has been reached, Authority staff will be reviewing and issuing License Deficit Agreements as soon as possible.
- A Schools Forum Finance sub-group will be held on Friday 30 September 2024. A total of 6 schools will be coming to the meeting to undertake Schools in Financial Difficulty bids and the team look forward to meeting the schools.

SRMA Feedback from Schools

- As previously noted in Schools Forum, surveys have been issued to all schools who have taken part in the SRMA process.
- There is a constant plea to schools to fulfil feedback and thereby inform future processes. Some feedback highlights on the SRMA procedure were listed as below:

- a supportive non-threatening process
- an opportunity to review VFM and Staffing Structures
- helps to highlight funding issues
- helpful benchmarking
- lots of information required
- assurance for school and governors
- The process is very much an advisory one and schools are required to provide a significant amount of information as was noted in the feedback. AB stressed that as much information that can be put in, will be significantly reflected in what is gained from the process.
- There is a template that Finance and other staff provide to the designated SRMA before their visit. Moving forward and learning from the feedback received to date, this template will be shared with schools before they receive a visit.
- AB outlined his thanks to Heads across the Borough for their co-operation and collaboration with the Finance Team.

DISCUSSION

- Anthony Gollings wished to discuss the SRMA visits already having taken place and queried the expectation of schools following those visits and asked if there is an expectation for schools to set balanced budget plans this year/next year.
- AB noted that an SRMA Visit will not immediately reverse a school's position. The SRMA is a health check, whereby it gives assurance to the involved school that they are doing everything in their power to focus on efficiencies. The visit gives assurance that the school is doing everything in their power to address those issues deemed as controllable. Things that are uncontrollable would include government legislation or funding regimes. The SRMA does not list specific actions, it is considered a health check.
- The Chair asked if the feeling is that the vast majority of schools are doing the right things. AB noted that with regards to exit reports from SRMA's these have only contained minor recommendations. It is free advice from the SRMA, they are trusted and experts in their field. It is considered a health check.
- Jon Ritche wished to note that in the discussions with DfE as a Local Authority around how we address some of the challenges being faced, if we were not using the SRMA process it would make the request for additional funding a much more difficult process. Jon stressed the need to continue the process.

	<p>The SRMA process indicates we are taking all reasonable steps to address challenges and strengthens our hands.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stephen Baines commented that as a school who had taken part in the SRMA process, it was very reassuring to know that the school was not being profligate with their money. There were no specific recommendations. • It was a very useful process and exceptionally reassuring to the Governors to understand that the school was being as careful as they could be. <p>Recommendations</p> <p>Schools Forum is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acknowledge the pressure on schools and the update on budget monitoring 1 <p>NOTED</p>	
<p>8.</p>	<p>DFE Safety Valve Update</p> <p>Intervention Programme Update Jane Cross/Mark Mirfin</p>	
	<p>2024/2025 High Needs Block</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jane Cross and Mark Mirfin talked through the presentation. • It was noted that the High Needs block ended 2023/2024 with a pressure of £10.494m. This included Safety Valve funding of £9.750m received up to 31 March 2024. • 2024/2025 is the second year of the Safety Valve intervention programme and the forecast for the High Needs Block is £10.516m, representing an anticipated pressure of £0.279m against the original DSG Management Plan. • MM stressed the complexity of the budget and gave an outline of some of the key pressures. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Higher numbers of children and young people educated in maintained special school provision (note that the Authority is now in line with regional but higher than national). b) On completion of the DSG management plan, a review had been carried out on commissioned services, and those commissioned services sitting under Schools, have now been TUPE'd into the Authority. This was recognised as being a sensitive time and the process took longer than anticipated thus resulting in the necessary delays of the review of funded commissioned services. 	

Savings coming from that review came from modelled efficiencies relating to a single point of contact; a Centre of Excellence with a single point of access to a range of services.

Phase One is now complete, and all colleagues have undergone TUPE Transfer into the Authority under Lisa Ramshaw. Phase Two has commenced and is now looking at the review of those services and what would be behind a single access point.

- c) There are a higher number of EHCP plans than expected and forecast in the DSG management plan. It should be noted that growth has stemmed but that the rate of that growth is higher than expected. The growth in EHCPs for 2022 and 2023 were lower than regional and national.

The DfE has been advised that the Year One groundwork has been completed but it will take time to see the impact of that work. For example, a lot of work has been carried out on the development in graduated approach and the Early Years Inclusion service.

- The second of three returns have now been made for 2024/25; the Authority awaits the outcome from the second return, including on whether the DfE will release the second of three payments. As the Authority submitted its second return on time, and because the DfE approved the first return, the payment after the first return will be released by 31 October 2025.

DSG Management Plan

- The Authority have committed to a remodelling of the DSG management plan as good practice. The Authority has launched a survey, and schools are encouraged to complete and return.
- The Authority wants to look at alternative initiatives and mitigations which could be explored through an Invest to Save model that would make a difference to school settings, children, pupils and families.
- MM encouraged that schools complete the survey between now and October half term.
- The SEND Inclusion Strategy runs to the end of 2024. This survey will co-inform the SEND Inclusion Strategy moving forward.

NT Local Funding Consultation

- A delay in information on provisional funding allocations from the DfE has caused a delay in the timeline of formal consultation.
- The formal consultation will be opened on 2025/2026 funding and will focus on the concept of a few areas:
 - a) the continued use of the National Funding Formula.
 - b) if schools are happy for the Authority to set minimum funding guarantees and capping based on affordability.
- The Authority would also like to consult on options around growth and falling rolls. Some comments from Headteachers have queried if there is scope to move even further away from National Funding Formula with these two amounts.
- The Consultation will again focus on the transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. The Authority is in current discussions with the DfE on alternative options to allocate the 0.5% and initial conversations have indicated there may be a way to disapply the minimum funding guarantee.
- All topics will be raised with the Schools Forum Sub-Group on 30th September.
- The consultation will be live from 7th -25th October 2024.
- The result of the consultation will be presented to Schools Forum on Wednesday 13th November 2024 and the official vote on the 0.5% transfer will take place.

DISCUSSION

- The Chair noted it would have been much better if indicative figures had been received from the DfE and this would enable informed comment/decisions around the 0.5% transfer in terms of affordability and pressures. The delay is frustrating. The Chair noted that he had raised the question if the consultation timeline could be delayed and therefore consultation close could be extended. To date, it has been advised a delay is not possible.
- Jane Cross empathised with colleagues and schools' frustration and stated that she would raise this point again as a challenge with contacts at the DfE and EFSA.

Recommendations

Schools Forum is asked to:

JC

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acknowledge the plans for consulting with schools on the 2025/26 National Funding Formula NOTED • acknowledge the pressure on the High Needs block and the update for the Authority's Safety Valve Intervention Programme. NOTED 	
	<p>Any Other Business</p>	
	<p>Monkseaton High School</p> <p>Julie Firth gave a verbal update on the position of Monkseaton High School.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepublication consultation commenced last week, around the future of Monkseaton High School with meetings being held with the Governing Body, Headteacher and staff team as well as pupils. • A series of consultation meetings have been arranged with parents of the school in the coming weeks. The consultation is open to 30 October 2024, and we are looking for viable options on how to continue to keep the school open (option one), as an alternative to school closure (option two). • The Authority has pushed the challenge back to the DfE in terms of a request to revisit Academy Trusts to see if anyone would be interested in coming forward to secure the future of the school. • Jon Ritchie addressed the significance of deficits on the Authority budget. When a school is to close or academise with a deficit balance that balance is expected to lie with the Local Authority, although the Authority continues to lobby the DfE for additional funding. In recent discussions, the DfE suggested that the deficit could fall on the DSG, via the route of Schools in Financial Difficulties. Given the scale of the deficit, the Authority told the DfE this would not apply in this situation, which they accepted. Therefore, unless further support is given by the DfE, it is assumed that the deficit will fall on the payers of Council Tax in North Tyneside. • JR further noted that the situation highlights the importance of deficit discussions and licenced deficit agreements. It is a balance between allowing schools the opportunity to try and get out of deficit in a 3-year period. However, if the deficit looks like it will not recover there will be a point in time when the route of closure may have to be undertaken. JR stressed this is not a position anyone wanted to be in and acknowledged the importance of a responsible financial 	

	<p>stability plan and the impacts involved on the Authority's overall finances.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JF highlighted the support for pupils in terms of their education and around their anxieties and noted this is a key factor for the Authority, along with the support for the staff and leadership team throughout the process. • The Chair offered support on behalf of Schools Forum members and Headteachers in any way necessary and reiterated the point that systems and processes are in place, to try to mitigate the risk of growing deficits in the budgets set by schools <p>Schools Forum Sub-Finance Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CP reminded Forum of the Schools Forum Sub-Finance Group and outlined that membership is voluntary. If anyone is interested in joining the Group, they can contact JC, AB and/or CP for further information. • Current membership is as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stephen Baines ○ David Watson ○ Phillip Sanderson ○ Steve Wilson ○ John Newport ○ Gavin Storey ○ Laura Baggett ○ John Ord ○ Colleen Ward ○ Matt Snape ○ Kelly Holbrook • The Chair noted that membership currently appears to be weighted towards Middle/Secondary and strongly encouraged Primary colleagues to consider joining the Group. 	
10.	Date and Time of Next Meeting	
	Wednesday 13 November 2024 at 12:30pm via Microsoft Teams	