

Durham County Council Schools Forum Meeting, 24 September 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 24 September 2024, at Education Development Centre, Shirly Quinn in the Chair.

Present

- Shirley Quinn, Primary School Governor
- Ian Bain, NEU Representative
- Danielle James, Maintained Pupil Referral Unit Substitute
- Bethan Smith, Primary Headteacher

- Christine Varty, Primary School Governor
- Philip Chater, Special School Governor
- David Stone, Academy Member
- Les Timbey, GMB Representative
- Melanie Stubbs, Looked After Children/Special Educational Needs/Hospital Education Manager
- Andy Collishaw, Academy Member
- Dr Sandra Whitton, Primary Headteacher
- Rachel Grimwood, Special Headteacher
- Kelly-Ann Lee, Nursery Headteacher Substitute
- Alice Hassall, Primary Headteacher
- Natalie Maughan, Primary Headteacher
- Dan Lister, NASUWT Representative
- Rachel Butler, Primary Headteacher
- Professor Simon Morris, Secondary Governor
- Michael Tiplady, Roman Catholic Diocese Member
- David Shirer, Council Officer (Asst Finance Manager, CYPS Finance)
- David Watchman, Council Officer (Finance Manager, CYPS Finance)
- Jim Murray, Council Officer (Head of Education and Skills)
- Martyn Stenton, Council Officer (SEND and Inclusion)
- Rob Davisworth, Council Officer (Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services)
- Zoey Ridley, Council Officer (School Inspection Monitoring Review Officer)
- Karen O'Brien, Council Officer (Education Durham – Governance Services and Clerk to the Schools Forum)

Apologies for absence

- Lisa Jenkins, Nursery Headteacher
- Councillor Ted Henderson, Elected Member (observer)
- Jane Henderson, Academy Member
- Karen Oliver, Academy Member
- Paul Marsden, Secondary Headteacher
- Janet Willis, Academy Member
- Mick Little, Special Academy Member
- Charlotte Ferguson, Primary Headteacher

2 The apologies for absence were acknowledged and agreed.

3 Shirley Quinn welcomed everyone to the meeting and all members introduced themselves.

4 David Shirer introduced Karen O'Brien who is taking over the role of Clerk to the Schools Forum and offered the Forum thanks to Zoey Ridley for the support she has provided to the Forum during her role as Clerk.

5 Shirley Quinn advised she had received a request to bring forward item 9 on the agenda as Jim Murray had to leave the meeting early.

6 Members of the Forum agreed to this request.

De-delegation for School Improvement Services

7 Jim Murray presented this report which outlined the business case to continue with key school improvement and support services available to schools through de-delegation of school improvement funding in the 2025-26 financial year.

8 Sandra Whitton advised Members that the cost to a school if they had 200 children would be £1,700 and said that this would be a nominal amount in real terms.

9 David Shirer explained that the Forum was not quorate, however, as voting on the recommendations in respect of primary de-delegation is restricted to primary school members (Headteachers and Governors

from maintained schools) this could go ahead as there was a quorate of primary school members.

- 10 Members were asked to approve de-delegation for Contingencies for 2025-26 at the continued rate for Primary at £8.50 per pupil, equivalent to circa £176,000 of de-delegation – ALL AGREED
- 11 Members of the forum noted the report.

Minutes of School Forum, 10 July 2024 and matters arising

- 12 Sandra Whitton said that point 32 on the minutes should have been highlighted as an action.
- 13 David Watchman explained that an analysis of the information had been included in the minutes as a postscript.
- 14 The minutes of the meeting were agreed as a true record and there were no further matters arising.

Outstanding action points

- 15 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 after 6 months.
- 16 Members of the forum noted the report.

Executive Summary

- 17 Members of the forum noted the report.

Scheme of Delegation

- 18 David Shirer presented this report which requested that members representing maintained schools, (headteachers, governors and the representative of the Pupil Referral Unit), approve a revised Scheme for the Financing of Schools in County Durham, to comply with current statutory guidance. The scheme has been amended to take account of changes affecting leasing.
- 19 Rachel Grimwood asked whether special schools continue with their current arrangements via the Council.
- 20 David replied yes.

- 21 Sandra Whitton asked if there would be a charge for looking for value for money on leases.
- 22 David explained that the Local Authority provide free advice to schools on leasing arrangements, and he confirmed there would be no cost to schools. It is part of an agreement in place with the Council's leasing advisors.
- 23 Rob Davisworth informed Members that this year it has been introduced where it is in the Council's interest to collect lease data which includes schools. Rob reassured Members the cost of collecting this data would not fall back on schools.
- 24 Andy Collishaw said the changes proposed are in line with the requirements in the academies handbook published by the ESFA.
- 25 David Shirer advised that the forum was inquorate, but requested that maintained school members vote on whether those present approved of the revised Scheme for the Financing of Schools in County Durham, to comply with current statutory guidance – ALL AGREED
- 26 Postscript: as there were twelve members present from maintained schools, out of a total of 23 maintained school members, there was a quorum of members for this vote.

Dedicated Schools Grant forecast at Quarter 1

- 27 David Watchman presented this report which outlines the forecast outturn position for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2024-25 based on the position as at 30 June 2024.
- 28 David explained that a better understanding of the situation would be gained in Quarter 2 however, the overspend is expected to increase.
- 29 Sandra Whitton advised that she had attended a meeting with Paul Shadforth, Durham Association of Primary Heads (DAPH) and Durham Association of Secondary Heads (DASH) where discussions took place on how the HNB funding could be reduced, suggestions are currently being looked at.
- 30 Members of the forum noted the report.

HNB funding and SEND and Inclusion Update

- 31 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 and an update on the progress of projects within Phase Two of the High Needs Block Sustainability Programme.

- 32 Martyn informed Members that a short briefing for special schools will be arranged in the near future and that a survey will be sent to all schools. This will allow the production of a more detailed report that can be reported to Members at the meeting in January. Martyn hoped that all schools would complete the survey.
- 33 Rob explained that the HNB deficit is highly unsustainable and that there is significant lobbying of the Government around this.
- 34 Sandra Whitton explained that managing the expectations of parents is a major issue for schools and asked if there was any support the Local Authority could provide in explaining to parents that schools are doing all they can to support children with limited resources.
- 35 Martyn explained that the Local Authority recognised that it is a difficult situation for schools and Delivering Better Value (DBV) funding is being used to support with this.
- 36 Rob advised that the home to school transport is another area of increasing high spend.
- 37 Sandra said that children attending special schools being automatically entitled to transport needs to be looked at because sometimes this is the deciding factor for parents as to where they want their child to attend.
- 38 Rob replied that the Council is looking at options for parental contributions to transport costs.
- 39 Rachel Butler said some parents weren't taking up offers from local hubs so schools weren't getting value for money from the SEND SLA. Rachel added that there are schools which have staff who can do the same as what they would get from the SLA.
- 40 Natalie Maughan said that some parents feel that schools should fix everything and therefore won't go to other services or take children to appointments. Natalie felt that it would be more beneficial for services to go into schools where they could see a number of pupils on the same day.

- 41 Andy Collishaw said that the Schools Forum could potentially bankrupt the Council by decisions made around the HNB and asked what is going to be done about it.
- 42 Rob explained that up to March 2026 the Government allowed the deficit to be held in a separate reserve. After this time, if there was no alternative solution from the DfE, the deficit held in the separate reserve would need to be written off from Council's reserve, which would wipe out these reserves.
- 43 Rob explained that the Government are being lobbied but that the full engagement of the forum was needed to support this.
- 44 Martyn explained that further ideas on how to reduce the deficit were required and encouraged schools to complete the aforementioned survey. It might be that schools will be asked to suggest which saving would be the least worst option.
- 45 Members of the forum noted the report.
- 46 PowerPoint slides from the meetings with primary and secondary headteachers will be shared with members of the forum.
- 47 Postscript: the slides are attached to the minutes.

Mainstream School Funding 2025-26

- 48 David Shirer gave a verbal update explaining that there was no information on the National Funding Formula, (which provides the main funding for mainstream primary and secondary schools and academies), and this wasn't expected until the autumn budget statement on 30 October.
- 49 Once information is received members of the forum will receive a briefing and, if appropriate, an additional meeting will be arranged. Members can request a meeting if they wish following the briefing.
- 50 Members of the forum noted the update.

De-delegation for Trade Union Facility Time

- 51 David Shirer presented this report which set out the recommend rate of de-delegation for 2025-26 for maintained primary and secondary schools in respect of trade union facility time.

- 52 Rachel Grimwood advised that special schools had recently received an email advising them of their contribution, she queried whether this should have been brought to the Schools Forum.
- 53 David Shirer explained that Forum permission was not required as special schools have been offered an SLA for trade union facility time. This report covered de-delegation for maintained mainstream primary and secondary schools.
- 54 Sandra Whitton queried what happened to any surplus from the funds.
- 55 David explained that any surplus was carried forward and was taken into account when setting rates.
- 56 Sandra asked if the trade union subscriptions paid by staff went towards this cost.
- 57 David said that Union subscriptions did not contribute to these costs but were used for trade union activities which are not funded by de-delegation.
- 58 Maintained primary and secondary Member were asked to approve the de-delegation for Trade Union Facility Time at a rate of £4.00 per pupil for 2025-26 – AGREED.
- 59 Members of the forum noted the report.

Forum Membership

- 60 David Shirer presented this report which provides an overview of changes to the membership of the Forum and an updated schedule of Schools Forum members.
- 61 David Shirer explained that a concern had been raised that substitute members do not get contacted when a member cannot attend the meeting.
- 62 It was suggested that in future when apologies are received Karen O'Brien will contact all the substitutes to see if anyone can attend; the first to respond will be invited to attend. Members raised no objection to this, and the constitution will be updated next year to include this arrangement.
- 63 Les Timbey queried why academy members don't have their academy name on the membership list, and queried what was being done to

contact academies to look for representatives as there are currently 13 academy member vacancies.

- 64 David explained that academy members aren't restricted to Headteachers or Governors and may not be from a specific academy. David advised that academies are contacted to ask them to nominate members.
- 65 Les asked if on the membership list could show the trust that academy members were from. No objections were received from academy members and it was agreed to add these details.
- 66 Postscript: these details have been added to the membership report for the January 2025 meeting. Details are:
- Madeleine Hope, Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust
 - Jane Henderson, Ribbon Academy Trust
 - Janet Willis, Stanley Learning Partnership
 - Lee Alexander, North East Learning Trust
 - Andy Collishaw, New College Durham Academy Trust
 - Karen Oliver, Together Learning Partnership
 - Kevin Brennan, Eden Learning Trust
 - Helen Ashton, Together Learning Partnership
 - Dave Stone, Advance Learning Partnership
- 67 Sandra Whitton advised that Helen Tait is no longer a Primary Headteacher and needs to be removed from the membership list.
- 68 Members of the forum noted the report.

Any other business

69 There was no other business.

Date and Time of Next Meeting

70 Tuesday 28 January 2025, 9:30 am, online via Microsoft Teams.

Contact

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