

# **THE CUMBRIAN SCHOOLS' FORUM**

## **Draft MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON**

**16 March 2022**

**via Microsoft Teams**

### **PRESENT**

**Claire Birkett (West Maintained Primary)**

**Huw Davies (Primary Academy)**

**David Grimshaw (North Maintained Primary)**

**Matt Hardwick (South Maintained Secondary)**

**Daniel Hinton (Special Schools)**

**James Jackson (West Secondary Academy)**

**David Natrass (North Maintained Primary)**

**Ian Nicol (South Maintained Primary)**

**Vanessa O'Dea (CE Diocese)**

**Alan Rutter (Teachers Professional Associations)**

**Sue Sanderson (Cabinet Member – Schools and Learning)**

**David Spruce (North Maintained Primary)**

**Cathy Styles (South Maintained Primary)**

**Carly Wallace Lawman (Special Academy – representing Richard Aindow)**

**Ruth Webster (South Maintained Primary)**

**Kris Williams (North Secondary Academy)**

### **Officers in Attendance:**

**Dan Barton (AD – Education and Skills)**

**Lynda Poole (Learning Improvement)**

**Sally Senejko (Senior Manager – Inclusion)**

**Daniel Walker (Project Officer – Inclusion)**

**Susan Milburn (Group Accountant – People)**

**Amanda Chew (Finance Manager)**

**Nicola Shiels (Forum Support)**

### **Observers:**

**None**

### **Apologies for Absence**

**Richard Aindow (Special Academies – represented by Carly Wallace Lawman)**

**Lisa Balderstone (PRU)**

**Jane Faulkner (PVI)**

**Rachel Field (West Maintained Primary)**

**Stephen Gilby (North Maintained Secondary)**

**John McAuley (RC Diocese)**

## **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**

The minutes of the meetings of the Schools Forum held on 18 January 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

### **4. Working Group Minutes**

The minutes of the combined meeting of the School Budgets and SEN Working Groups held on 9 February 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

Schools Forum noted the decision by the combined working Groups to recommend that Option 1 – to pay a one-off £1 payment to all teachers and school leaders in Cumbrian Schools at the top of their pay range or those that had had no pay progression through the pay range in 2021-22 by 31 March 2022 be approved.

There were no other matters arising.

### **5. Geographical Inequalities in Demand for Independent Specialist Placements**

A report was presented that aimed to demonstrate the differing demand for Independent Specialist Placements (ISPs). Schools Forum were asked to note the content of the report and consider how inclusive practice strategies could be developed by Schools Forum in collaboration with the mainstream schools represented to level out the demand for ISPs and support students to remain in settings within Cumbria.

Across Cumbria there were significant geographic differences in the number of young people placed with ISPs. ISPs were expensive with day places costing an average of £58,429 and residential places an average of £75,373 in 2021-22 with 22% of the total HNB DSG being spent on ISPs. Children and young people were more likely to be placed in an ISP when living in Barrow and South Lakes.

To demonstrate demands across the county, in December 2021 112 young people were in day placements and 50 in residential placements. Early analysis was showing geographical differences in where in the county the requests were coming from.

Offices were trying to work collaboratively with schools to keep young people in local communities with peers but there would always be some young people that needed to be in these provisions; there were also some concerns about instances of schools suggesting that families consider these provisions.

Early work on a breakdown of pupil needs, social care involvement, CLA, etc had started to identify trends and gather evidence rather than basing on anecdotal information but further work was needed on this.

The purpose of the report was to make Schools Forum aware of the issues and costs, including transport costs, so they can be shared more broadly with schools. It was helpful, as school providers, to understand the implications of children and young people being in this type of provision, particularly for the longer term.

Other ongoing work included:

- Development of more comms for HTs, flowcharts important for frontline workers, HTs and SENCOs. Breakdown of need – can share at a later stage. Not always one size fits all; very complex.
  - Majority of ISP requests as a result of need not being met in school which can lead to crisis. Working to roll out an outreach service to address issues earlier which will help to reduce instances of crisis and movement of children and young people.
  - Early intervention project at Sandgate, AP places in north and south, increasing RP places, increasing special school places and work to expand provision that already have available.
- Longer term strategic mapping – number of EHCPs increasing to 2026 before start to plateau. Considering free schools and provision in other areas and looking to work with schools who want to help, are able to meet need and have capacity to place.

There was a discussion about protocols that are in place and there was agreement that protocols needed to be clearer and communicated with schools. It was also suggested that it would be good for colleagues from SEND teams to become more familiar with schools in terms of the building, physical environment, layout, facilities, etc. as this knowledge would be helpful in informing decisions about potential placements.

Issues associated with the breakdown of placements followed by breakdown of trust and communication between parents and carers and LA should be addressed; it was noted that this was not a specific Cumbria issue but a national issue. There were also some unexplained issues/drivers to consider including why some maintained schools are able to meet need when others are not able to.

It was important to keep the conversation going and to work with colleagues to find ways to do things differently whilst also understanding the consequences.

Schools Forum noted the report and colleagues were asked to contact Dan Barton, Sally Senejko, Daniel Walker or Sue Sanderson with possible ideas, suggestions or inputs.

## 6. **LA Scheme for Financing Schools Revisions**

A report was presented that updated Schools Forum on the outcome of the consultation with maintained schools on the revisions and amendments to the Cumbria LA Scheme for Financing Schools/PRUs.

Local authorities were required to publish schemes for financing schools setting out the financial relationship between them and the schools they maintain. In making any changes to their schemes, local authorities must consult all schools in their area and receive the approval of the members of their Schools Forum representing maintained schools.

The Scheme applies to all Cumbrian maintained schools and pupil referral units; it does not apply to academies. Academies are directly accountable to the Department for Education in terms of compliance with financial regulations.

At the meeting of Schools Forum held on 18 January a number of revisions and amendments to the LA Scheme were presented. These included the following proposed changes:

- 4.9 Licenced Deficits
- Section 4.10 Loan Schemes
- Section 4.5 Planning for Deficit budgets and Annex J Challenge and Support Process for Schools with Deficit Budgets
- Annex A – Responsibilities for Repairs and Maintenance
- Annex H – Financial Regulations for Schools/PRUs – Appendix c – Becoming a Chequebook School – Section 6 Maternity/Adoption Leave Reimbursements

A 3 week consultation with maintained schools/PRUs on the proposed changes opened on 24 January; one response in favour of the loan scheme policy was received from a secondary headteacher. There were no other comments in respect of the other proposed changes.

The maintained school representatives of Schools Forum considered and took account of the outcome of the consultation with maintained schools and approved the draft LA Scheme for Financing Schools.

## **7. High Needs Block Q2 Budget Monitoring 2021-22**

A report was presented that provided an update on the High Needs (HN) block deficit as at 31 December 2021 which was forecast to rise compared to the closing deficit at the end of the financial year 2020-21.

A balanced High Needs budget had been set for 2021-22 with no planned transfer to reserves. As reported to Schools Forum at its meeting held on 17 January 2021 the initial budget available for the HN Block was £51.109m made up of £49.521m provisional HN block allocation from central government and £1.558m transferred in from the Schools Block. Since the initial budget was set the HN block allocation had been updated to reflect adjusted recoument for HN places.

Performance against the High Needs Block budget was monitored monthly with reports presented to senior management, and to Cabinet on a quarterly basis, as well as to each Schools Forum meeting. The projection against the budget as at Q3 showed that the budget was projected to overspend by £6.519m as at 31 March 2022.

The main in-year pressures related to the EHCP top-up payments, the cost of specialist independent day and other placements including post 16, invest to save initiatives, special schools and individual non-material variances.

The pressure against the High Needs Block continued to be due to specific budget pressures relating to the growth in demand for Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) for children and young people with SEN which had continued to rise month on month increasing by a total of 1,407 from 2,929 as at April 2018 to 4,336 as at December 2021. The majority of children and young people with EHCPs were educated in mainstream schools and colleges.

The report set out the impact of the Invest to Save Initiatives for the period 2018-19 to 2020-21 as well as a projection for 2021-22. Invest to save initiatives had covered 4 main areas – the expansion of Special School places, exceptional EHCP packages, alternative provision in schools and new AP centres in Barrow and Carlisle.

The Schools Forum noted the report and the current projection on the High Needs budget as at 31 December 2021.

#### **8. De-Delegated Contingency Fund Budget Monitoring 2021-22**

A report presenting the forecast outturn position on the de-delegated contingency budget for the 2021-22 financial year as at 31 December 2021 was considered. The budget was currently projected to overspend by £0.210m and in accordance with the Dedicated Schools Grant conditions, the overspend on the de-delegated contingencies budget as at 31 March 2022 would be carried forward into the Dedicated Schools Grant earmarked reserve.

As this was a de-delegated budget it therefore only related to maintained schools and not academies.

The de-delegated contingency budget for 2021-22 was £0.666m. DfE guidance stated that the contingency budget could be used for three purposes:

- Circumstances which were unforeseen when the school's budget share was initially determined.
- Schools in financial difficulties
- Additional costs relating to new, reorganised or closing schools

#### **Circumstances which were unforeseen when the school's budget share was initially determined.**

The main areas of expenditure related to St Bridget's, Parton temporary site costs due to the landslip investigations. The remaining costs related to ill health retirements, settlement agreements and other staff termination costs in schools in line with the agreed policy, administration costs relating to the administration of the Teachers Annual Return and temporary accommodation costs at the Gillford Centre PRU.

The Schools Forum noted the forecast outturn position as at Q3 for the contingencies budget 2021-22.

#### **9. Date of Next Meeting**

- i) The next meeting of the Schools Forum would be held on Wednesday 8 June 2022. The meeting would begin at 9.30am and was likely to be via Microsoft Teams. Final arrangements would be circulated prior to the meeting.

#### **10. Any Other Business**

Local Government Reorganisation – there was a short discussion about what Forum needed to do in preparation for local government reform in April 2023.

The current Forum would cease to exist and two new Forums would be created – one for each new local authority area. Work would also be needed in relation to budgets and the HNB deficit.

It was proposed that a paper setting out proposals and timelines would be presented to the next meeting in June.

E&S/NS  
May 2022