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# SCHOOLS' FORUM

Thursday 7 March 2024 – 10am

Conference Suite, CETL

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## *A G E N D A*

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| 1. | Apologies  | Chair              |
| 2. | Minutes from Schools' Forum meeting on 15 <sup>th</sup> February and Matters Arising | Chair              |
| 3. | Funding to Support Cluster Work (D)  | Danielle Swainston |
| 4. | Early Years Provider Payment Process (I)   | Penny Thompson     |

Date and Time of Next Forum Meeting – Thursday  
27 June 2024, 1pm CETL Conference Suite

**Schools’ Forum Meeting**  
**15 February 2024**

**Attendees:**

**Members**

Carole Bradley (CB) (Academy Primary)  
 Chris Connor (CC) (Maintained Primary)  
 Tracey Gibson (TG) (Academy – Secondary)  
 John Hardy (JH) (Academy – Primary)  
 Phil Pritchard (PP) (Academy – Primary)  
 Toni Ray (TR) (Early Years)  
 Jane Reid (JR)  
 Linda Richardson (LR) (Early Years)  
 Emma Rutherford (ER) (Horizon School)  
 Sue Sharpe (SS) (Primary)  
 Chris Simmons (CS) (Academy Trustee)  
 Mark Tilling (Chair) (Maintained Secondary)  
 Lee Walker (LW) (Academy – Primary)  
 Zoe Westley (ZW) (Academy – Special)  
 Vicki Wilson (CoE Diocese)  
 Leanne Yates (LY) (Maintained Primary)

**Local Authority Officers**

Julie Reed (JR) – Admissions  
 Sandra Shears (SSh) -  
 Children’s Finance  
 Fiona Stobbs (FS) – Senior  
 Advisor Inclusion / SEND  
 Jo Stubbs (JS) – Administrator  
 Penny Thompson (PT) – Head  
 of Housing  
 Jane Watt (JWa) - Children’s  
 Finance  
 Amanda Whitehead (AW) –  
 Assistant Director Education

	<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>1</b>	<p><b>Apologies -</b></p> <p>Apologies were submitted by the following and accepted by Forum:</p> <p>Sara Crawshaw (RC Diocese)                      Lisa Greig (Academy – Special)                      Joanne Wilson (Academy – Primary)</p>	
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Minutes of the Last Meeting – 7 December 2023 – and Matters Arising</b></p> <p>Indicative Schools Block Budget Models 2024/25 – calculations following the release of October 2023 census data meant that a 2.5% cap would now need to be applied. JWa explained that this was unexpected but was explained by an increase in pupil characteristics such as deprivation compared to the October 2022 census. Therefore, although pupil volumes were in line with estimates, the increase in characteristics to be funded through the formula effectively increased the “cost” of school budgets,</p>	

	<p>therefore requiring the cap to make the extra cost affordable. The Chair suggested that a refresh of the school budget listing confirming the final school budget amounts be circulated to members.</p> <p>Looked After Children Pupil Premium – SS indicated that her comment had related to concern around front line services rather than an increase in back office services</p> <p>Outstanding Actions Logs – both were still pending</p> <p>Log of Schools Forum Recommendations and Committee decisions – a report (Dedicated Schools Grant – School Budget Shares 2024/25 and Central School Services Block 2024/25) had been approved at a meeting of Children’s Services Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024.</p> <p>Minutes approved.</p>	<p><b>JWa</b></p>
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p><b>Pupil Numbers / Projections</b></p> <p>Details were given of birth rates since 2003/04 and future pupil projections. These showed estimated drops in primary numbers and an increase in secondary numbers. Details were given of projected future numbers of primary pupils in each of the 3 planning areas. Members were advised that the number of in-year admission requests were increasing year on year, particularly requests from families arriving from overseas. Housing developments were also having an impact on children moving schools within the borough.</p> <p>SS queried whether modelling could be carried out on children arriving from outside the authority. JR advised that this was not possible as these were unknown numbers but the Department for Education were aware this was an issue across the UK. It was notable that while birth rates in the UK were falling other factors were having an impact.</p> <p>The Chair asked if home schooling statistics could be included in future as there was a potential for those children to return to mainstream schooling at any point. ER confirmed that there were currently more than 220 children being home-schooled in Hartlepool, a 100% increase on the previous year.</p> <p>TG referred to the impact on St Hilds and Manor Community Academy caused by parents failing to complete the Y7 application forms by the deadline. This led to pupils being allocated to St Hilds that lived some distance from the school. JR confirmed that parents were sent reminders to complete the forms and primary schools would assist. Unfortunately some parents did not wish to engage.</p> <p>TG noted that English Martyrs were reducing their published admission number and queried whether any of the other secondaries were planning</p>	

	<p>something similar. JR advised that all secondaries were responsible for their individual PAN and none had indicated any plans of this sort.</p> <p>The Chair commented that 70-80 mid-term admissions annually was not unusual.</p> <p>SS referred to housing developments and future school place planning but queried whether consideration was given to an increase in families moving in the town centre from out of the borough. JR indicated that empty housing was not factored in but acknowledged this was a factor. PT confirmed there were currently 1200 empty properties in Hartlepool, many in the town centre and Victoria ward areas. Hartlepool was one of the cheapest areas in the country in terms of rents and is currently at full capacity on asylum accommodation. She would share this information with JR following the meeting.</p> <p><b>Decision</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That the report be noted</li> </ul>	
<p><b>4</b></p>	<p><b>Dedicated Schools Grant – Early Years Block 2024/25</b></p> <p>Members are annually asked to consider the results of the consultation on proposed changes to local early year’s funding formulas and funding levels for providers. However additional funding entitlements had been introduced for 2024/25 specifically the introduction of 2 year entitlements for working parents from 1<sup>st</sup> April and entitlements for children aged 9 months to 2 years from 1<sup>st</sup> September. This was in addition to existing provisions for 3-4 year olds and disadvantaged 2 year olds. The authority has a choice of implementing 2 separate rates for the 2 year old provision or a single rate which covered disadvantaged children and those with working parents.</p> <p>Changes had also been introduced to the structure of hourly rate payments to providers meaning at least 95% must be passed to providers with up to 5% used to administer the expanded early year’s offer. DfE decided to change this from the planned 97% and delay the change until new entitlements were embedded. There should also be an appropriate level of contingency if payments to providers exceed census funding levels, a SEN inclusion fund and additional financial support for those at greater levels of deprivation. Additional funding for teacher pay and pension increases from September 2023 has been provided for the 3-4 hourly rate. The funding for teacher pay increases from September 2019 had previously been a separate grant. The new funding could be included as a supplement for settings with qualifying teachers only or added to the base rate to benefit all providers.</p> <p>Indicative funding for 2024/25 showed a total of £9,651,399. At the September meeting Forum had supported a retention of 3% of Early Years Funding following DfE indication that the maximum retention</p>	

allowed would reduce to this amount. However they had subsequently indicated that this would not be feasible until the new entitlements were embedded. Therefore a 4% retention was proposed as it was felt that 3% was no longer affordable at this stage.

The following hourly rates were proposed:

### **Three to Four year old provision**

- Total funded hourly rate of £5.63 with 23p retained by the LA and a base rate of £5.10.
- 1p deprivation supplement, 2p contingency and 3p SEN inclusion.
- 25p new funding for Teacher's pay to be added to the overall base rate rather than existing 24p teacher pay/pension supplement

### **Two year old provision**

- Single 2 year old provision rate across disadvantaged and working parents.
- Total funded hourly rate of £8.02 with 32p retained by the LA and a base rate of £7.57.
- 10p contingency and 3p SEN inclusion.
- Deprivation supplement applied to the base rate.

### **Under 2 year old provision**

- Total funded hourly rate of £10.95 with 44p retained by the LA and a base rate of £10.38.
- 10p contingency and 3p SEN inclusion.

Consultation with providers had taken place between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> January and had shown the following:

- 76% supported a pass-through rate of 96%.
- 71% agreed that funding for deprivation should be part of the base rate for 2 year old and under 2 year old provision.
- 90% supported a contingency fund.
- 86% supported a SEN inclusion fund.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 67% supported a single rate for 2 year old provision.</li> <li>• 92% supported the addition of teachers pay increases to the base rate for 3-4 year old provision.</li> </ul> <p>The chair noted that any recommendations would be forwarded to Children’s Services Committee for final consideration and approval</p> <p>JH referred to issues with staffing in day care and the impact potentially 1200 additional places for children could have. PT confirmed that pupil premium monies would be expanded to include children over 9 months however those parents eligible would need to identify themselves in order that the additional funding be given to the school. There was a campaign around auto enrolment which members were supportive of. Forum Members gave their strong support to the implementation of auto-enrolment as they are fully aware of the issues with the current system to record eligibility.</p> <p>TR commented that these changes would have a huge impact and might result in early years providers feeling unable to take 3-4 year olds due to the rate differences.</p> <p><b>Decision</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That the report and consultation responses be noted.</li> <li>• That the centrally retained budget be set at 4%.</li> <li>• That the hourly rate for 3-4 year old provision be set at £5.63 (including 25p teachers’ pay to the base rate) as proposed in the report.</li> <li>• That a single hourly rate for 2 year old provision be set at £8.02 as proposed in the report.</li> <li>• That a single hourly rate for under 2 year old provision be set at £10.95 as proposed in the report</li> <li>• That Forum strongly support the introduction of auto-enrolment for pupil premium to Children’s Services Committee using data already centrally available.</li> </ul>	<p><b>MT</b></p>
<p><b>5</b></p>	<p><b>High Needs Block (HNB) Projected Outturn 2023/24</b></p> <p>JWa updated members on the projected outturn for high needs services for 2023/24. Based on spending to the end of quarter 3 and estimated expenditure this ranged from £3.632m to £3.268m overspend. This was an increase of at least £1m since the last estimate. Reasons for this were</p>	

	<p>primarily based on anticipated overspends on independent school fees, out of authority top ups, exclusions and top-up funding and support.</p> <p>Details of proposed savings of £600K which will be proposed to Children’s Services Committee at their March meeting were also included. Members acknowledged the need for savings but expressed concern that funding levels were at crisis point particularly given issues around children accessing private sector provision. Schools were being asked to do more with less which could be challenging with SEMH pupils. Less funding may mean more challenging behaviours and additional exclusions leading to more costly provision settings. CS felt there needed to be political lobbying on this matter as the line had already been crossed. The Chair noted a number of Council’s were going bankrupt on the basis of increased costs for children’s services and there needed to be earlier investment and intervention.</p> <p>ZW asked why special school inflation had originally been assessed at 6% as opposed to 4% in other budget areas. JWa explained that this was purely a timing issue – the review of special school costs had taken place when inflation forecasts were running at a higher rate.</p> <p><b>Decision</b></p> <p>That the report be noted</p>	
<p><b>6</b></p>	<p><b>Permanently Excluded Pupils (PEXs)</b></p> <p>Members were given details on the current position and expected trajectory for permanent exclusions in the Borough. The local authority has a legal duty to provide excluded pupils with full time appropriate education. This has usually been provided through the Horizon School which has funding for 40 places. There is further funding available for places at alternative provision although this is more costly. There are currently 67 students on roll at Horizon. So far this academic year 27 students have been permanently excluded and it is estimated that if this continues there will have been 63 exclusions for 2023/24. There were 37 in 2022/23. There is forecast to be a £239K overspend for 2023/24 and while this would be offset by an underspend from the previous year this offset will not be available moving forward. Any overspend would add to the High Needs Block deficit potentially wiping out any savings coming out of the review. If exclusions do not reduce, officers would be forced to recommend a Schools Block transfer to the High Needs Block in 2025/26 to cover the current cost of children within the provision. A funding increase of £250k in 2024/25 was proposed to Forum. This would not however allow for any further increases and is a short term solution.</p> <p>The Council’s Executive Director of Children’s and Joint Commissioning Services would be meeting with the heads of secondary schools to discuss these issues and look for possible solutions but there needed to</p>	

	<p>be further discussion regards possible solutions and support. The Regional School Commissioner had met with HBC representatives and offered their assistance as this was an issue across the region. CS queried whether the number of PEX could be broken down into key stages but AW felt this might lead to schools being blamed. The Chair suggested that this matter be referred to the Education Panel for discussion. AW was happy to take this to the next meeting if this was the wish of the Forum.</p> <p>LY accepted that there should not be blame but felt that the reasons for PEXs needed to be outlined in order that there be some accountability particularly in terms of unmet needs. SS agreed that there needed to be consistency and consideration as to what could be done to keep vulnerable children in mainstream education as the current situation was not cost effective. The Chair noted he had recently been unable to prove prejudice in an appeal case due to additional support in place at his school.</p> <p>ER advised that they were researching the reasons for all PEX including interviews with the school (including the primary school for Y7 PEX), child, parents and social care. This was a massive piece of work but it was hoped that this would show ways to reverse the situation and keep these children in mainstream education. She did not want to blame anyone but ultimately the decision to exclude lay with the school and was therefore their responsibility. TG acknowledged this but noted the massive increase in challenging behaviours since covid and highlighted the numbers at her school on the cusp of PEX. ZW suggested that there may be a lack of knowledge in how to deal with challenging behaviour citing examples where children in her provision had been doing well, moved onward and been excluded almost immediately. There needed to be a change in how these issues were dealt with. CS suggested that the transition from primary to secondary education be looked at as this could be difficult for children to cope with.</p> <p><b>Decision</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That an additional £250K funding be approved for Horizon and Alternate Provision</li> <li>• That this item be taken to the Hartlepool Education Partnership for further discussions to consider ways to limit PEX numbers.</li> <li>• That consideration of a transfer from Schools Block to High Needs Block in 2025/26 be noted.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>7</b></p>	<p><b>Statutory Accounts Closure Process 2023/24</b></p> <p>Members were advised that under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 local authorities were required to produce their statutory accounts by 31<sup>st</sup> May each year. In order to facilitate this it was necessary that</p>	



	<p>individual schools make their systems available for local authority finance staff to complete preliminary close visits during the first week in April which is during the school Easter break. This could be done in person or remotely but would necessitate as member of school staff being available for approximately 1 hour between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> April. Local authority finance staff would contact school administrators to organise visits and minimise disruption.</p> <p>SS noted that this was the third year in a row that school staff had been asked to come in during a leave period.</p> <p><b>Decision</b></p> <p>That the report be noted</p> <p>That head teachers of maintained schools are aware of the requirement for adequate school cover to support the closure of accounts over Easter 2024.</p>	
<p><b>8</b></p>	<p><b>Any Other Business</b></p> <p><b>Dedicated Schools Grant (Former Education Services Grant rate per pupil) – Disapplication Request</b> – SSh confirmed that this disapplication request had been approved by the Secretary of State.</p>	
<p><b>9</b></p>	<p><b>Date and Time of next Forum meeting – Thursday 7 March at 10am, CETL Conference Suite</b></p>	

**OUTSTANDING ACTIONS LOG**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Owner</b>
01/03/23	Develop 3 year recovery plan for High Needs Block spending	Schools Forum
18/10/23	Provide case studies for pupils placed in Independent Schools (SEMH information previously provided)	Danielle Swainston



## Financial Year 2023/24: Children’s Services Committee – Log of Schools’ Forum Recommendations and Committee Decisions

Last Updated: 5 December 2023

Committee Date	Report	Recommendation and Decision Details
14/11/23	Dedicated Schools Grant (Former Education Services Grant rate per pupil) – Disapplication Request	<p>The Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Agreed the 2024/25 funding rate at £60 per pupil/place.</li> <li>b) Agreed to submit the disapplication request to the Secretary of State to set the Education Services General Duties rate at £60 per pupil/place for 2024/25.</li> <li>c) Noted this will be the eighth consecutive year the local authority has applied for disapplication and that the previous seven applications have been successful.</li> <li>d)</li> </ul>
23/01/24	Dedicated Schools Grant SCHOOL BUDGET SHARES 2024/25 AND CENTRAL SCHOOL SERVICES BLOCK 2024/25	<p>The Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Noted the agreement by Schools’ Forum to centrally retain funding of £0.595m, with the residual £0.097m being transferred to the Schools Block as outlined in paragraph 5.5;</li> <li>b) Noted the agreement by Schools’ Forum to transfer the 2024/25 growth funding of £0.334m to the High Needs Block as outlined in paragraph 4.2;</li> <li>c) Noted the recommendation by Schools’ Forum to allocate the sparsity factor at 100% in line with the NFF as outlined in section 6 of the report;</li> <li>d) Agreed the MFG to be used for 2024/25 as outlined in paragraph 6.1 of the report and noting the recommendation from Schools’</li> </ul>

		<p>Forum of applying an MFG of 0.5%, alongside an appropriate cap which has been calculated at 2.5%;</p> <p>e) Approved the ISB for 2024/25 as summarised in the table at paragraph 6.2 of the report.</p>
		a)

**Report to Hartlepool Schools' Forum 7 March 2024**  
**From Danielle Swainston (Assistant Director – Joint Commissioning)**

**Item 3: Funding to support cluster work**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to request funding that was previously badged as “SEMH” funding to support the new cluster arrangements.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 The cluster approach, as discussed previously at Schools Forum and through the HNB review group, has started with a number of activities:
- Development day with all schools to discuss our collective approach to Ordinarily Available Provision
  - Development day with schools and stakeholders to discuss the development of a consistent Ordinarily Available offer across all mainstream provision
  - IPS panel has moved to a townwide “Seeking Support Panel” to trial the new approach on a townwide basis – one meeting has taken place and another meeting is to take place in March
  - From April it is intended that each cluster will have a seeking support panel to review requests for support. Funding decisions will continue to be made by the Local Authority through a townwide meeting however the clusters will recommend the support needed.
- 2.2 It is acknowledged that capacity for SENDCOs is really limited, however it is critical for SENDCOs to be involved if we want this new approach to be embedded and effective. Discussions have taken place about allocating funding to the clusters for them to create some capacity to support this process.
- 2.3 It has also been discussed in the High Needs Block Review group that it would be beneficial to pump prime the cluster arrangements with additional funding allocated to each cluster. This would enable clusters to support different ways of working or support individual children while the cluster worked through reviews which may release other funding.

**3. Proposals**

- 3.1 There is funding available of £742,916 which is allocated to SEMH developments. This is historic schools funding and therefore Schools Forum are able to decide how it can be used. The funding was set aside in 2015/16 and has not been used since 2021/22.
- 3.2 The following proposals would create capacity to support the cluster approach. For all options, it will be up to each cluster how they wish to use the funding to create capacity.

### 3.3 Options for consideration are:

Option	Description	2024/25 Cost	2025/26 Cost	Total Cost
1a	£30k allocated to each cluster for <b>one</b> year	£150k	Nil	<b>£150k</b>
2a	£50k allocated to each cluster for <b>one</b> year	£250k	Nil	<b>£250k</b>
3a	£30k allocated to each cluster for <b>two</b> years	£150k	£150k	<b>£300k</b>
4a	£40k allocated to each cluster for <b>two</b> years	£200k	£200k	<b>£400k</b>

3.4 It is important to note that the funding proposals presented in the table above represent one-off funding. Therefore, any plans for use of the funding must not place reliance on ongoing budget from the high needs block as this will place further pressure on the block.

3.5 The following proposals would allow pump prime funding allocations to each cluster. A total amount of £250k is proposed across the clusters for pump priming. However, should Forum agree the allocation, there are options on how this amount should be shared across each cluster. Options for consideration are:

Option	Description	2024/25 Cost	2025/26 Cost	Total Cost
1b	Fixed amount to each cluster eg £50k	£250k	Nil	<b>£250k</b>
2b	Amount allocated on number of pupils eg £250k	£250k	Nil	<b>£250k</b>
3b	Amount allocated on number of pupils who are SEN support eg £250k split across the five clusters	£250k	Nil	<b>£250k</b>

3.6 As with the proposals for creation of capacity at paragraph 3.3, the £250k above is one-off funding and plans for spending must reflect this so as to avoid placing additional pressure on the high needs block.

3.7 Should Forum agree to fund both the creation of capacity and the pump priming proposals, the cost of a preferred option would range from £400k to £650k. This would leave residual funding in the SEMH fund of between £343k and £93k.

## 4. Recommendations

4.1 Forum are asked to review the options set out above and decide on allocation of funding for:

- Creating capacity to support cluster approach (section 3.3)
- Pump prime funding allocations (section 3.5)

**Item 4: Early Years Provider Payment Process**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 With the significant expansion of early year's entitlements from April 2024, the Council has reviewed its payment arrangements to providers.
- 1.2 The current payment process relies heavily on manual processing and must be streamlined in order to meet the demands of the higher volumes that will arise from the expansion in 2024/25.

**2. Payment Process from 1 April 2024**

- 2.1 From April 2024, academies and all other third party providers will be paid on the basis of headcount information from the EYES system. System extracts will generate payments via BACS, thereby automating the payment process.

**3. Aligning Payments for Maintained School Settings with New Payment Process**

- 3.1 Maintained schools will continue to be paid via journal. However, we intend to move away from payment by term to payments each month, using the same EYES system extract that will be used for external providers and academies.
- 3.2 Maintained school settings are currently paid on the basis of census numbers (January, May and October) as opposed to monthly headcount data in the EYES system.
- 3.3 Implementing this change will mean that all settings are paid on an equivalent basis across the sector.

**4. Recommendations**

- 4.1 Schools' Forum is asked to note the contents of this report and the change in payment arrangements from April 2024.