

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

SCHOOLS FORUM

9 November 2023

PRESENT: - B Lawrance (Chairman)

School Representatives

Mr B Lawrance, Mr R Biglands, Mrs D Senior and Mr A Sutherland

Academy Representatives

Mr D Flowitt, Mr D Keogh and Mr P Raspin

PVI Representatives

Mrs C Williams

Non School Representatives

Dr H Beverley

Elected Representatives

Cllr J Reed

Local Authority Officers

Mrs T Falshaw, Mrs J Flintoff, Mrs R Maughan, Mrs W Holmes, Ms J Standing and Mrs A Dawson (Secretary).

The meeting was held at Church Square House, Scunthorpe.

1000 WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS/APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Ms R Abbott, Mrs M Potterton, Mr L Riley, Mrs A Nuttall, Mrs R Stephenson and Mrs A Cvijetic.

1001 DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND PERSONAL OR PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS (IF ANY)

There were no declarations of Disposable Pecuniary Interests and Personal or Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

1002 MINUTES AND ACTIONS FROM LAST MEETING FOR APPROVAL

That the minutes of the last meeting held on 21 September 2023, having been printed and circulated amongst the members, be taken as read and correctly recorded, and be signed by the Chair.

1003 MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

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The Secretary advised that there were now two governor representative vacancies on the Forum. The primary academy vacancy was still to be filled and Petula Whittaker had stepped down from all her governor responsibilities due to illness, leaving a maintained governor (special) position vacant. There would shortly be further information on the vacancies going out to governors and they would also be mentioned at the upcoming North Lincolnshire Association of Governing Bodies (NLAG) AGM.

The Secondary Academy vacancy remained unfilled, despite being raised previously. Further information would be circulated in the hope of attracting some interest to the position.

Following the non-attendance for a full year of one of the PVI representatives, Nicola Raines had spoken to them to ascertain if they wished to remain on the forum. The representative advised that they were happy to attend in future, unless there was someone else that would like to take up the position. There was a meeting due to take place imminently with the sector so the possibility of a vacancy would be raised in order to see if there was any interest.

1004 SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA 2024/2025

Mrs R Maughan presented the report.

In July 2023 the Department for Education (DfE) first published provisional National Funding Formula (NFF) allocations at local authority level for schools, high needs and central school services funding blocks for 2024-25. In October 2023 the DfE further published an amended provisional NFF in light of a technical error. The factor values needed to be reduced due to the incorrect processing of pupil numbers in the initial calculations. This error meant the overall cost of the schools NFF was underestimated.

The 2024-25 funding allocation was the final year of the government's three year funding settlement, announced at the 2021 Spending Review and was the second year of transition to direct schools NFF.

In 2024-25 councils were being directed to bring their local formula a further 10% closer to the NFF. The Forum has been supportive of the North Lincolnshire funding formula being close to the NFF for several years and it now matched where appropriate with some flexibility remaining over the sparsity factor methodology. The table at appendix 1 to the report gave details of the factor values.

The report highlighted the key changes in 2024-25.

Discussion ensued on the options relating to the sparsity factor.

All schools would be consulted on funding formula proposals during November and December 2023 and any feedback would be reported at the January 2024 meeting of the Forum.

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Resolved – (a) that the application of the MFG at 0.5%, the maximum permissible level, so long as it was affordable, be endorsed; (b) that a decision on the sparsity factor be deferred until January 2024; (c) that the exceptional premises factor be continued, subject to it meeting the required criteria, and (d) that final proposals for schools funding be submitted to the next meeting in January 2024 on receipt of the final funding allocations in December 2023.

1005 **DE-DELEGATION OF BUDGETS 2024/25**

Mrs T Falshaw presented the report.

As part of the Department for Education's School Funding Reforms introduced from April 2013, councils were directed to delegate specific budgets to schools and academies.

Funding for de-delegated services must be allocated through the formula but could be passed back, or de-delegated for mainstream primary and secondary schools with Schools Forum approval.

De-delegation did not apply to special schools, or pupil referral units (PRUs). However, those schools and academies would have the option to buyback these services at a cost based on the same amount per pupil as for maintained primary and secondary schools.

In the case of special schools and PRUs, the funding to buy such services would be included in any top-up payments. Any decisions made to de-delegate in 2023 – 2024 related to that year only, new decisions would be required for any service to be de-delegated in 2024 – 2025.

Forum members for primary and secondary schools must decide separately for each phase whether each service should be provided centrally; the decision would apply to all maintained mainstream schools in that phase. Members must agree on fixed contributions for the services so that funding could then be removed through the formula before school budgets were issued.

Since 2022 – 2023, Forums had been able to agree de-delegated funding for councils' core school improvement activities in relation to maintained schools. From 2023 – 2024, the school improvement monitoring and brokering grant was no longer being paid to councils.

The report set out details of services that could be de-delegated and those which were currently de-delegated in North Lincolnshire.

Resolved – a) That the proposal to de-delegate budgets as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be agreed by members representing the primary maintained schools phase, and (b) that the proposal to de-delegate budgets, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be agreed by members representing

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the secondary maintained schools phase.

1006 TRADE UNION FACILITY TIME FUNDING

Mrs T Falshaw presented the report.

There was currently a Trade Union Facility Time (TUFT) agreement in place which set out the guiding principles on how TUFT would be used to promote positive employee relations and how TUFT funding would be allocated in schools and participating academies.

TUFT funding was pooled centrally for maintained schools and academies which chose to participate in the agreement. Having a central fund in place meant that all staff in schools had access to experienced trade union representatives.

The de-delegation funded the ongoing central approach to reimburse individual schools that employed teachers who needed to be released to carry out trade union duties. There were now five trade unions who were part of the TUFT agreement and could therefore draw on the pooled funding to release their local officers.

Currently the de-delegation was calculated using £2.79 per pupil per year at each maintained school and academy that chose to participate. The per pupil figure had not been revisited in several years despite pay increases and this now meant that there was not sufficient funding to cover the full cost of local officer provision.

The existing TUFT agreement provided for reimbursement on the basis of the actual hourly rate of the supply cover (either agency or in-house), up to a maximum of the hourly rate of the representative being released, and subject to an overall maximum of UPS3. This was not meeting the full cost of the current local officer provision.

The report gave options in relation to the per pupil rate.

A discussion ensued around the existing agreement.

Resolved - That Option 2, set out in the report at paragraph 3.2, to increase the current per pupil rate by 28.3% to £3.58 be approved for one year, on the proviso that the Trade Union Facility Time (TUFT) agreement be revisited with some urgency.

1007 CHANGES TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FUNDING

Mrs J Flintoff presented the report.

All councils had a statutory duty to maintain standards in schools under the 1996 Education Act. In North Lincolnshire strong and effective partnerships had driven a robust approach to school improvement and mutual accountability.

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The School Improvement team were responsible for ensuring standards in schools of all designations across the authority, for brokering and assuring any external support and providing bespoke specialist challenge and support for schools of concern. Until 2023, the team were part funded through the government's Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) under the Local Authority Monitoring and Brokering (LAMB) Grant, with the remainder funded through core council budgets.

Following consultation in November 2021, the Department for Education announced the decision in January 2022 that ESFA school improvement funding would be reduced by 50% for that financial year and removed in 2023/24 and determined that councils should seek to de-delegate funding from schools for core school improvement activity.

In 2022/23 the council met the reduction in funding through core funding and in 2023/24 the complete cost of the substantive school improvement service was met through core council funding.

School improvement service delivery funded solely from core council revenue meant that the continuity of service was more vulnerable to changes in political and wider council priorities. It was suggested that the service could be funded through de-delegation for maintained schools, with a traded offer to academies.

Discussion ensued on the options set out in the report. Mrs T Falshaw suggested that to allow for further consultation with schools, the potential to use earmarked reserves in 2023/24 could be discussed.

Resolved – a) That the proposal to strengthen the funding arrangements for School Improvement through de-delegation be supported in principle, and b) that the option to use earmarked reserves 2023/24, thus allowing time to consult with all mainstream schools be explored.

1008 **UPDATE ON THE USE OF DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT**

Mrs J Flintoff presented the report.

The Dedicated Schools Grant Central Services Historic Commitments element currently funded three main strands of work:

- Peer Leader Programme/external SIPs
- Learning networks: largely delegated to the Primary Consortium and Secondary Heads and Principals
- Schools' contribution to the Children's MARS board

The DSG for historic commitments 2023/24 was a total of £149,504, for the last financial year the funding was £186,880, a reduction of £37,376.

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In the last financial year, Learning Networks funding was used to fund the Primary Consortium to develop the role and reach of Primary Curriculum Pioneers, and to fund Secondary Heads and Principals to work together to improve outcomes for secondary aged children. The remainder of the funding was used to fund central education opportunities such as primary engineering and green education projects.

Following consultation with those participating in the Peer Leadership Programme, headteachers agreed unanimously to continue to provide support to another school without the release fee of £1,200 per school. This was agreed with the commitment from the council to fund release time for headteachers, particularly in small schools where prohibitive costs would prevent them from participating without funding to support their release time from a teaching commitment. During the consultation, it was suggested that some funding could instead be put into central training and development for school leaders to further strengthen the programme.

Further analysis of the SIPs/Peer Leader funding element revealed that up to £80,000 had been used to pay for external sourced School Improvement Officers in previous years. This role was now undertaken by a recently retired peer leader headteacher, which provided flexible capacity when required.

Discussion took place on the various options set out in the report.

Resolved – That Option 2, as set out in the report at paragraph 2.2, be approved.

1009 **REPORTS FOR NEXT MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM**

Mrs J Flintoff advised that intensive meetings had taken place with a view to producing a high needs funding report, to look at three specific aspects; high needs banding, resources provision within mainstream settings and strengthening central support for schools by expanding specialist teams. It was anticipated that a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Forum.