

DARLINGTON SCHOOLS FORUM
12th January 2015

MINUTES OF MEETING TUESDAY 6TH OCTOBER 2015

MEMBERS PRESENT:

P King (Federation of Mowden Schools (in the Chair)); R Gartland (Education Village); C Devine (Beaumont Hill); C Thompson (West Park Academy); J Moorhouse (Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle); K Kelly (Rise Carr College); J Thompson (Borough Road Nursery); S Welsh (Whinfield Primary); S Davidson (Longfield Academy); W Aitken (Durham & Newcastle Diocese); P Ayto (Reid Street Primary); A Pringleton (Corporation Road Community Primary School); M Regan (Carmel College); C Peacock (Holy Family RC Primary School Academy); S Johnson (Longfield Academy of Sport); M Fryer (Hummersknott Academy); A Crumpton (Danesmoor House Day Nursery(PVI)); E Calvert (William House Nursery (PVI)); Paul Richardson (16-19)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Rachel Kershaw (Head of School and Pupil Support Services); Brett Nielsen (Finance Manager, Neighbourhood Services and Resources Group); Eleanor Marshall (School Forum Monitoring and Support Officer); Elaine Sayers (Finance Officer).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Cyndi Hughes (Lead Member Children and Young People).

APOLOGIES

Sam Towle (DSMS), Craig Alderson (High Coniscliffe C of E Primary) and Dean Judson (Hurworth School).

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. A round of introductions took place. New members made themselves known to the Forum.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest expressed.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising.

The minutes (previously circulated) of the Schools Forum meeting held 19th May were agreed as a true record.

3. School Funding Formula 2016/17

The Forum referred to a previously circulated report. The Finance Manager pointed out to the Forum that there have been limited changes to the guidance produced by the EFA in July for the funding formula in 2016/17. It was therefore suggested that the same formula factors be used in the 2016/17 formula as had been used in 2015/16. The figures presented were for the provisional formula submission in October, Forum will be presented with a update in January which will provide the actual school budgets for 2016/17. This may require a revisit of the unit values in order to provide a balanced budget.

The Forum agreed to use the same factors in the 2016/17 formula as used in the current (15/16) formula.

4. Budget Setting 2016/17

The Forum referred to a previously circulated paper. The Finance Manager talked Forum through the contents of the paper and explained that the budget will be subject to change once the DSG allocations have been confirmed by the EFA in December. At this stage the budget will be updated to reflect budget need in 16/17 and the actual school funding formula. The Forum will be further updated in January when a revised budget position will be put forward for approval.

The Forum noted the content of the report.

5. Budget Update 2015/16

The Forum referred to a previously circulated paper, the details of which confirmed the current position of the 2015/16 Dedicated School Grant. It was pointed out that only one term's census details were known so far, therefore, a number of projections included were estimated year-end figures. A further update will be provided at the January meeting.

The Forum noted the content of the report.

6. DfE Research on Funding for Young People with Special Educational Needs

The Forum referred to a previously circulated report. The report contained the findings of a representative group of 13 local education systems who had undertaken research on behalf of the DfE. The point of the research was to review SEN funding arrangements and practices to inform potential future reforms of SEN funding.

It was noted that the £10,000 per place funding arrangement ensures stability, consistency and fairness for schools with resource bases. Top up funding provides flexibility however because this is based on historic high needs spend data, the top-up may not actually match levels of need. Also schools' view is that the system for allocating SEN funding generally is poor and it is also unclear how the current system contributes to improvement outcomes.

The issues facing Darlington are common to the Local Authorities surveyed. The report sent to the DfE contained key recommendations and 17 proposals were put forward.

The key recommendation is for the DfE to remove the allocation of high needs based upon historic levels, and move to a formulaic approach, however this needs modelling. Because the use of notional SEN budgets vary considerably it is also proposed that the 'core' notional budget element is removed, but there should be clearer guidance and criteria/expectations of what all schools should provide for SEN Support prior to the need to move to high needs funding to meet children/young people's needs.

The Forum will be updated once a response has been received from the DfE.

7. School Forum Officer – Work Update

The Forum referred to a previously circulated report. The School Forum Officer talked Forum through the contents of the report, explaining and expanding on the work being undertaken reviewing the High Needs services, Commissioning activity and SEN Policy and the upcoming ASD Strategy review.

The School Forum Officer explained that the focus for Autumn term was the start of the new resource base process which includes monitoring and the implementation of the resource base panels to approve place requests and receive monitoring reports. Budget meetings will also be held to feed into the review of 2016/17 budget setting. The Officer answered questions and asked that the Forum note the progress on the review of services and next steps as set out in the paper.

8. Any Other Business

Marchbank Free School

It was asked that the Forum consider supporting the expansion of Marchbank Free School. This would increase the number of places at the school from 30 to 42 and the age range from 4 – 11 to 5 – 11. It was suggested that the Local Authority may commission up to half of the places.

A discussion took place, although broadly supported it was noted that Forum were aware of possible risks in particular in terms of future funding being available as the EFA currently pay the place element.

The Forum will await further clarification on funding from the Education Funding Agency.

George Dent Nursery

It was noted that in the last meeting (held 19th May 2015) the Forum had agreed to fund £13,000 for George Dent's rent for the financial year 2015/16. A request was put forward that this becomes a permanent arrangement. It was suggested that when the lease is up in 12 months and the rent is next reviewed there could be a significant increase in this cost. The Forum will need to give this consideration in deciding future early years funding.

Date/Time/Location of next meeting.

12th January 2016 – 2pm Committee Room 1