



## RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The following is a record of the decisions taken at the meeting of **CABINET** held on **Wednesday 13 December 2023**. The decisions will come into force and may be implemented from **Tuesday 2 January 2024** unless the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or its Committees object to any such decision and call it in.

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### **‘Think Autism in County Durham’ Strategy – Update Report**

#### **Summary**

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People’s Services and Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services which provided an update as to progress following the refresh of ‘Think Autism in County Durham’: Autism Strategy for Children, Young People and Adults into an updated strategy for 2023 – 2026.

In September 2018, the Health and Wellbeing Board agreed that there should be a combined all age ‘Think Autism in County Durham’ Action Plan and an overarching all-age strategy, which was developed by both the Autism Strategy Implementation Group (ASIG) and Children and Young People Autism Steering groups. These two strategic groups were then combined into one overarching Autism Steering Group.

Think Autism in County Durham: Autism Strategy for Children, Young People and Adults 2018/19 – 2020/21 was presented to Durham County Council’s Cabinet on 3 April 2019 then launched soon after in April 2019 during Autism Awareness week. It was the first all age autism strategy in County Durham.

The COVID Pandemic affected progress against the aims of this strategy and also caused extra stress and anxiety for many autistic people who struggled with the constant changing of rules and restrictions to help manage the control of the virus. As life began to return to normal following the lifting of many COVID restrictions, the priorities of the strategy were revisited, and six new workgroups were created to look at key areas.

The National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults 2021 to 2026 was published in July 2021, building on the previous Think Autism Strategy. Whilst much of the County Durham 2019 Strategy was reflected in this, the refreshed Think Autism in County Durham 2023-26 is completely

aligned with the more recent all age national strategy, and workgroups are being refreshed in accordance with this.

One example of this is the increased focus in the national strategy on criminal justice, which it was felt did not feature as prominently in the County Durham strategy.

## **Decision**

The Cabinet:

- a) agreed the findings of the report and the updated strategy, and;
- b) supported communications and awareness raising as part of National Autism Awareness Week in Spring 2024.

## **Mainstream Primary and Secondary Formula Funding 2024/25**

### **Summary**

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services and Corporate Director of Resources which provided an overview of the forecast Dedicated Schools Grant School Block and proposed local formula for allocating funding to individual schools in 2024/25, where the proposal is that the council continues to align the local mainstream primary and secondary formula funding in 2024/25 with the National Funding Formula.

The Schools Block is part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and is the main source of funding for the mainstream primary and secondary funding formula. This provides the bulk of funding for these schools.

Mainstream primary and secondary funding formulas are set locally by each local authority and are used to allocate funding to individual schools. There is a single formula that applies for both primary and secondary schools, both maintained and non-maintained (academies).

The DfE intends to replace local formulas by the National Funding Formula (NFF) no later than 2027/28. The NFF already exists and is currently used to determine allocations of Schools Block funding to each local authority. When the NFF replaces local formulas, it will be known as the Direct NFF.

Local formulas cannot fully replicate the NFF at this stage because Schools Block allocations make use of historic data, whereas local formulas use the most recent data.

Funding regulations limit the discretion of local authorities when setting local formulas and requires that these formulas distribute the majority of funding through pupil-led factors. Regulations also require local formulas to either mirror the NFF (matching it as closely as possible), or to move their formulas closer to the NFF from year to year in the lead up to 2027/28.

The local formula in Durham in 2023/24 is already aligned to the National Funding Formula (NFF).

Initial information in relation to funding levels for 2024/25 was published by the Department for Education (DfE) in July 2023, but was revised in October 2023, to correct an error in the pupil numbers used in the original funding announcements.

The DfE adjusted for this error by continuing with the same funding envelope, but reducing funding per pupil, so that the increased (correct) pupil numbers could be funded from within the funding envelope originally announced.

Nationally, core school funding, which includes the Schools Block and High Needs Block will increase in 2024/25 to £59.6 billion, representing a 2.7% (£1.6 bn) increase on the funding made available in 2023/24.

A separate grant, the Teachers Pay Additional Grant, is being paid from September 2023 until the end of the 2024/25 financial year. This will provide £1.3 billion of additional funding.

For 2024/25 it is recommended that the council continues to set a local formula that is aligned to the NFF.

The local formula factor values will be finalised in January, following confirmation of funding and the receipt of schools data from the DfE. The full local formula will be included in the MTFP(14) and 2024/25 budget report in February 2024.

The council is planning to use growth funding to support one school experiencing basic need growth in pupil numbers (Framwellgate Primary).

The Cabinet:

- a) agreed that in 2024/25 the local formula continues to be aligned to the National Funding Formula;
- b) noted that the formula factors will be finalised upon receipt of the finance settlement, including funding and school data, which will be used to set the local formula according to the approach agreed in (a);

- c) agreed to the adjustment for basic need growth funding for Framwellgate Primary School in 2024/25 and noted that this is the last year this adjustment will be required; and
- d) noted that the detailed formula will be included in the MTFP(14) and 2024/25 budget report in February 2024.

Helen Bradley  
Head of Legal & Democratic Services  
15 December 2023