

Minutes Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, Queen's Park High School, Chester, 11 December 2017 approved 15 January 2018 meeting

Present:

Marie Allen
Cheryl Bullen
David Charlton (Chair)
Sarah Curtis
Kate Docherty
Steve Dool
John Freeman
Greg Foster
Carol Gahan
Duncan Haworth
Luci Jones
Francis Kwateng
John Murray
Andy Stewart
Katie Tyrie
Sue Yates
Harry Ziman

Representing:

Academies - Special
Primary headteachers
Secondary headteachers
Primary headteachers
Primary headteachers
Academies - Primary/Secondary
Secondary governors
Unions
Primary governors
Primary governors
Academies - Primary/Secondary
Primary governors
Academies - Primary/Secondary
Pupil Referral Units (PRU)
Nursery headteachers
Secondary headteachers
Academies - Primary/Secondary

Officers:

Natalie Cole
Charlotte Fenn (Clerk)
Mark Parkinson

Official observers:

Councillor Meardon

Observers/public:

None

1. Introductions and Apologies

Apologies were received from Paula Adolph, Sue Anderson, Hilary Berry, David Curry, Kerry Kirkwood, Sarah Lee, Kath Lloyd, Kathryn Mageria, Sue Pearson, David Rowlands and Caroline Vile.

David Charlton reported that Sue Lawson, Commissioning, had been due to attend the meeting to co-present the item on Early Year Funding but was unable to due to the weather.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising of Last Meeting

2.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on the 9 October 2017 were agreed as a correct record subject to the following clarification by David Charlton under item 2.2.1. It was noted that the 2% pay rise related to the top and bottom of the main pay scale and not all teachers pay.

2.2 Matters Arising

2.2.1 Item 5 Schools Forum High Needs Sub Group Report on Special Educational Needs (SEN) Funding for Mainstream and Special Schools

David Charlton sought confirmation as to whether officers had the statistical data regarding how many pupils in special schools should be in mainstream. Mark Parkinson, Director of Education, apologised for not bringing the data to the meeting but agreed to circulate the information by email.

David Charlton asked if the audit of SEN funding had taken place. Mark Parkinson confirmed that the audit was taking place and expected it to be completed by the end of term with a report to be presented to the High Needs sub group in January.

3. Early Years Funding Update

Natalie Cole, Finance Manager, presented to Forum members a PowerPoint briefing on the early years national funding formula implemented in April 2017, as background information, to help inform Forum members.

It was noted that this presentation had been given to early years providers earlier in the year as there had been some confusion regarding the amount they had expected to receive.

4. Early Years Funding Formula (EYFF) for 2018-2019

Natalie Cole introduced the paper which detailed the requirements of the funding of the three and four year old universal and additional entitlements for local authorities for 2018-2019 through the EYFF. Forum members' attention was drawn to the key requirements on local authority funding of providers outlined in paragraph 5. It was noted that little action was required as most of the requirements had already been met in 2017-2018.

Natalie Cole referred Forum members to the benchmarking data in appendix B which had been reviewed by the Schools Forum finance sub group in November. It was noted that the average hourly rate allocated to providers was lower than the England average and of statistical neighbours, and this was largely attributed to the local authority receiving the minimum hourly allocation of £4.30. Councillor Meardon questioned whether the SEN inclusion funding only applied to the first 15 hours. Mark Parkinson responded that the authority did not receive extra funding to implement the additional 15 hours but did give out higher SEN inclusion funding than other local authorities.

Harry Ziman questioned what happened to any unspent funds. Natalie responded that they did not get any headroom for an under or overspend as the allocation was adjusted to reflect actual take up.

It was noted that the High Needs sub group had questioned the impact on outcomes of the SEN inclusion funding and had recommended that the Early Years reference group be tasked with reviewing the impact of the SEN funding and use of supplements. It was suggested that the group could also look at practices in other local authorities.

David Charlton informed the Forum that Sue Anderson, as she had not been able to attend the meeting due to the weather, had phoned through two questions that she wished the Forum to address.

As the early years funding rate was set until 2020 but costs were spiralling, particularly with the increases in minimum wage, Sue was asking if the Forum or Council would write to the Minister lobbying on their behalf for a re-think on the policy. David Charlton asked if any Forum members would be prepared to write on behalf of early years providers. Councillor Meardon informed Forum that she was happy to write to Ministers and had been in contact with Chris Matheson, MP, who had been campaigning on this issue. Katie Tyrie also agreed to write to her local MP and informed Forum that this funding crisis had also been raised at the APPG (All Party Parliamentary Group) meeting she had recently attended.

Forum members acknowledged that credit had to be given to the Early Years team who had worked with the private, voluntary and independent early years' providers to enable them

offer the 30 hours. Katie informed the group that the presentation had been helpful as it provided clarity regarding early years funding. David Charlton acknowledged that this was an area of funding that many of the group were unfamiliar with and offered Katie further support from the Forum if required.

The second request from Sue Anderson was for CWAC to stop referring to "free childcare" in their publicity materials, and call it "funded" childcare instead. "Free" was misleading as parents expected to get free childcare with no extra cost for add-ons when providers had to charge for some elements of the provision. Councillor Meardon reported that she believed the government had recently been challenged by Trading Standards on their wording of "free childcare" provision, as there was an entitlement for the first 15 hours but an eligibility for the second 15 hours.

It was noted that the Schools Forum could not approve this change of wording but Mark Parkinson felt it was doable and agreed to take it back to Sue Lawson to check out if there were any issues in implementing these changes.

Resolved that the Schools Forum:

- i. approved, in line with the earlier review of the EYFF by the Early Years Reference Group, the continuation of the current local EYFF for 2018-2019 (vote: unanimous);
- ii. approved the base rate for 2018-2019 be increased from additional funding made available from the removal of the flexibility supplement and increase in pass through rate (vote: unanimous); and
- iii. tasked the Early Years Reference Group to review the 2017-2018 benchmarking data and the impact on outcomes of the use of supplements in the EYFF and of allocations from the SEN Inclusion Fund (vote: unanimous).

5. Consultation with Schools on High Needs Funding Arrangements 2018-2019 – Update

Natalie Cole briefed Forum members on the outcome and responses to the Consultation which ended on 30 November:

- 26 responds, the majority being from mainstream primary, there had also been multiple responses from 2 schools;
- recommendation (a) - proposed transfer of 0.5% of funding from schools block to high needs block - 19 agreed, 7 disagreed;
- recommendation (b) - proposed reduction of mainstream top up funding rates - 17 agreed, 9 disagreed;
- recommendation (c) - proposed efficiency factor on special school top up rates - 19 agreed, 6 disagreed, 1 undecided;
- recommendation (d) - allocation of funding to support workforce development – 20 agreed, 6 disagreed.

It was noted from the comments that for recommendation (b), schools that disagreed felt that they were getting a double hit; recommendation (c) schools in the main, other than special schools, felt that the surplus special school balances added weight to the proposal and one school had looked at 2 slightly different ways of operating the proposal; recommendation (d) was a mixed response partly due to the limited information provided in the consultation document, some schools felt they needed more before they could support the recommendation.

Natalie Cole informed the Forum that the decision from the Secretary of State regarding the application to disapply MFG was expected around January/February.

David Charlton asked Forum members if there was a need to rethink the proposals, in light of the consultation responses. The Forum agreed that the responses did not warrant a change to the proposals.

David Charlton reported that he had received a letter from a school, raising concerns that it was difficult for schools to comment on anything other than their own school's situation when responding to consultations. It was noted that the Schools Forum needed to get the message out to schools that Forum's role was to look at all the options and consider the impact on all schools when putting forward proposals and making difficult decisions on behalf of schools.

6. Initial Planning for DSG Allocations for 2018-2019 and Budget Setting

Natalie Cole introduced the paper which provided estimates on the calculation of the indicative DGS allocation for 2018-2019 and set out initial budget proposals for the next financial year.

Forum members' attention was drawn to appendices A-C which provided the indicative allocations and further details relating to the four funding blocks for 2018-2019 (schools block, high needs block, early years block and the new central school services block).

It was noted that the schools block funding for 2018-2019 would be based on last year's data set as the DfE were unable to turn around revised figures in the available timeframe. The decision not to update the per-pupil unit rates to represent the pupil demographics might mean that the LA would have to adjust the per-pupil unit rate quoted under appendix C.

Natalie Cole took Forum members' through the high needs block funding factors and provisional allocation outlined in appendix A. It was noted that if the funding floor factor fell out as part of the hard formula this would create a £2.5m funding gap. It was also noted that as £16m was based on historic spend the funding would not keep pace with population changes.

Natalie Cole referred Forum members to the central school service block details under appendix B and C. It was reported that the reduced funding to this block would be managed through the changes to the Education Welfare Service. It was noted that the historic commitments were protected for two years but their usage, including the combined budgets agreed annually by Schools Forum, could not be changed. Forum members were reminded that the blocks were ring fenced and funds could not be moved between blocks; unspent historic funding would be lost the following year.

Forum members' attention was drawn to appendix D which set out policy options and technical adjustments and included decisions already taken by the Schools Forum. It was noted that some of the adjustment figures were not available and once incorporated might have an impact on the basic entitlement figure; final figures would be presented to Forum at the January meeting.

Resolved that the Schools Forum:-

- i. approved the initial DSG budget proposals; and

- ii. note the next steps for confirming the DSG budget proposals for 2018-2019.

7. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2017-2018 Forecast Mid-Year Review

David Charlton introduced the paper and drew Forum members' attention to the fact that the net underspend position was due mainly to the underspend forecast for de-delegated schools budget which masked an underlying overspend which would be met from DSG reserves.

Resolved that the Schools Forum note the mid-year review position on the DSG.

8. Any Other Business

8.1 Free Early Years Entitlement for Two Year Olds Under Universal Credit Consultation

David Charlton referred to an email received from Sue Lawson and reported that the LA had received notification of a consultation on 'Free early years entitlement for two year olds under Universal Credit', response deadline 15 January 2018. Sue Lawson had proposed that, as there were only two questions, she would send the document and guidance out to all of our settings and invite comments from the Early Years reference group and formulate a response for the LA.

8.2 Academies Representative

David Charlton informed Forum members that this would have been Sarah Lee's last meeting as she was retiring at the end of term. On behalf of the Forum, David thanked Sarah for her contribution over the many years of her involvement with Schools Forum.

Schools Forum requested that the Schools Forum Clerk organise an election to seek a new Academies representative to fill the resulting vacancy.

9. Next meeting

Next Schools Forum meeting Monday 15 January 2018 Queen's Park High School 4.30 - 6.30.