

Draft minutes Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, Queen's Park High School, Chester, 13 March 2017 subject to final approval July 2017 meeting

Present:

Paula Adolph
Sue Anderson

Hilary Berry
Cheryl Bullen
David Charlton (Chair)
Sarah Curtis
Ian Devereux-Roberts (sub for Chris Priddey)
Kate Docherty
Steve Dool
John Freeman
Duncan Haworth
Sarah Lee
Heather Lewis (sub for Carol Gahan)
Kathryn Magiera
Samantha Myers-Whittaker
John Murray
David Rowlands
Katie Tyrie
Caroline Vile
Sarah Worthington
Sue Yates
Harry Ziman

Representing:

PVI (Private, voluntary and independent) early years' providers
CWAPH Chair
Primary headteachers
Secondary headteachers
Primary headteachers
Primary headteachers
Primary headteachers
Academies
Secondary governors
Primary governors
Academies
Primary governors
Diocese
Special headteachers
Academies
Secondary governors
Nursery headteachers
Diocese
Primary headteachers
Secondary headteachers
Academies

Officers:

Natalie Cole
Charlotte Fenn (Clerk)
Debbie Gittins
Mark Parkinson
Paul Plested

Official observers:

Councillor Meardon

Observers/public:

1 Introductions and apologies

Apologies were received from David Curry, Carol Gahan, Kath Lloyd, Sian Thomas (Philip Hopwood, Luci Jones & Sue Pearson not reported at meeting).

Heather Lewis, substituting for Carol Gahan, was welcomed to her first meeting.

David Charlton informed members that he and Harry Ziman had been re-elected as Chair and Vice-chair unopposed prior to the last meeting, but due to an oversight this had not been reported.

2 Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

2.1 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2017 were agreed as a correct record. Harry Ziman questioned whether the Forum would receive minutes from part two of the meeting, from which the public had been excluded, for approval. It was agreed that they would be presented at the next meeting.

2.2.1 Early years single funding formula (EYSFF)

David Charlton reminded Forum members that it had been agreed at the December 2016 meeting that the Early Years Finance sub group would put forward recommendations for the local EYSFF to Schools Forum to approve via virtual vote. David reported that Forum had voted to support the proposals (all 17 votes received were in support of the proposals). David thanked colleagues for taking the time to respond and vote on the proposals.

2.2.2 Item 7 Education funding: Stage two Consultations

Councillor Meardon reported that a campaign entitled 'Stop School cuts in Cheshire West and Chester' had been launched in the last few days and could be followed on twitter and facebook; a coalition of parents, teachers and local politicians were campaign for fair funding. It was also noted that a demonstration was due to take place on 25 March at 1.00 pm at the Cross in Chester and any Headteachers willing to speak at the demo should contact Councillor Meardon via email.

3 Education Funding: Stage two Consultations

David Charlton introduced the item and reported that he and a colleague had meet with DfE Ministers last week to discuss the impact of the national schools funding formula proposals on CWAC secondary schools. Ministers seemed to be keen to look at the deminimus amount of £4,800 for secondary suggested by grammar schools. Paul Plested reported that the equivalent primary figure was around £3,720 and budget modelling on these figures would suggest some gainers in both primary and secondary schools.

It was noted that CWAPH colleagues had also recently meet with Nick Gibbs, Minister of State at the Department for Education; Councillor Meardon, Chris Matheson MP and Justin Madders MP were meeting with Nick Gibbs tomorrow (14 March 2017) to discuss school funding cuts; Nick Gibbs was also visiting two primary schools in June 2017.

David Charlton reported that the draft responses had been considered by the Finance sub group and drew Forums' attention to the national funding formula response in appendix A and sought comments.

Forum members voiced concerns that the Consultation document was too technical for parents and it would not be helpful for an emotional response to be submitted; parents needed to be equipped with the national arguments in order to send a measured response. Councillor Meardon informed Forum members that there was a link on the Campaign site to formats to help parents write a response to the consultation.

Paul Plested drew Forum members' attention to page 21 and the response against the proposed funding floor; this might appear counter intuitive but would avoid locking in historical differences for those schools that had reserved high funding for a long time, e.g. Tower Hamlets' schools.

Harry Ziman suggested that an addition be made, under question one, drawing on the recent National Audit Office report identifying 8% inflation cost pressures on schools.

Concerns were also raised that ring-fencing the Schools Block did not account for the creation of any new Alternative Provision or special schools where the full costs would be met from the High Needs Block. Reference was made to the two proposed free schools in the area which would have a significant financial impact on an already over stretched High Needs Block.

Forum member's opinions varied in regard to supporting the ring-fencing of the Schools Block; David Charlton put to a vote to retain the proposed response against ring-fencing the Schools Block under question 14 (vote: 15 for, 3 against).

In general Forum members considered the draft response well put together. Officers agreed to amend the wording in both consultation responses to include reference to the National Audit Office report and the impact of new Alternative Provision and Special schools before submission.

Paul Plested informed the group that historic spend accounted for 50% of the High Needs funding but there was no evidence as to how this figure had been arrived at; locking in historical funding would mean over or under funded LA's would remain so.

Forum members' attention was drawn to paragraph 6 which listed other formula factors making up the High Needs funding in addition to the basic per pupil entitlement of £4k which had been arrived at by averaging the various AWPUs. It was noted there was nothing in the consultation documentation to say how the formula factors had been arrived at. It was also unclear as to how growth in demand might be funded.

David Charlton drew Forum members' attention to the High Needs draft response in appendix B. Harry Ziman commented that it should also be noted in the response that the principles behind the formula should be based on evidence.

Resolved that the Schools Forum agreed that the

- i. responses in appendix A and B be submitted by the 22 March deadline subject to the additions cited during discussions (vote: unanimous); and
- ii. amended version of the consultation submissions be circulated to Schools Forum members to provide a framework for others to base a response on.

4 Special Educational Needs (SEN) funding for Mainstream and Special Schools – Funding for the High Needs Block 2017-2018

Debbie Gittins, Senior Manager SEN, introduced the report which set out proposed changes to the SEN processes and allocations from the High Needs Block for 2017-2018 in order to manage costs in the future. It was noted that the proposals had been discussed at the Schools Forum Finance sub group meeting on 28 February 2017.

Forum members' attention was drawn to paragraph 5; the proposed changes for the process of allocating funding for 2017-2018 were discussed by the Forum.

It was noted that the special schools attendance data had not been available in

order to provide a fuller picture for Forum as the Officer responsible for the data was currently on paternity leave.

Forum members felt that proposal 5d, to recoup a proportion of top up funding where children had not attended school, was unacceptable and raised a number of concerns. Comments included that the interests of the children needed to be thought of and each individual child's case looked at; there should not be a blanket policy over such areas as medical needs; more work needed doing to identify and address the reasons for non-attendance; outlay costs already put in place for a child, for example employee contracts, had not been taken into account; the proposals needed to be shaped so they didn't incentive pupils going to special schools rather than mainstream.

Debbie Gittins informed Forum that parents wanted to know where the top up funding was going when children were not attending school.

Forum members also felt that more detail was needed regarding exceptions under proposal 5b, in year transfers.

Questions were raised as to whether the proposals to recoup top up funding would save money or create more work. Debbie Gittins responded that she was not sure as this was the first round, however Officers would be monitoring and requesting evidence of appropriate spending on individual pupils with more rigour than previously.

It was suggested that schools needed to challenge parents regarding their preference of a special school as to whether it was by choice or necessity; there was a presumption in law of mainstream education.

Comments were made that most parents favour special schools as they attract more funding; but it was also felt that parents didn't know what else was out there and mainstream schools should take the opportunity to show parents around their school.

Forum members felt that parents, as stakeholders, should be consulted on the proposed changes.

Other issues raised during discussions included, paper work presented to panel not being fit for purpose, and the low reintegration of special pupils back into mainstream school which was an area Ofsted might pick up on.

Comments were made regarding 'misappropriation of funds' from elsewhere to pay for resources while waiting for an EHCP, in this case the child was ultimately excluded. Debbie Gittins reminded colleagues that the notional SEN funding was not ring-fenced.

Mark Parkinson acknowledged Forum members comments and concerns but reminded them that the proposals had been put forward as the £1m overspend had to be resolved, and stressed that a solution had to be found quickly. It was noted that the funding problem was not just for the SEN team to resolve; schools and the LA needed to work together and not against each other.

Forum members were keen to support the suggestion of a working group and agreed that a High Needs sub group be set up. The following membership was agreed; Sue Yates, Steve Dool, Sarah Curtis, Kate Docherty, Hilary Berry, Sam Myers-Whittaker or CWASSH vice chair, John Freeman or Harry Ziman and support from Officers. It was also agreed that SENCO's might be called upon to provide information, where necessary. The remit of the sub group would be to explore the issues and come up with solutions to address the overspend.

Resolved that the Schools Forum agreed

- i. to set up a High Needs sub group, chaired by a Schools Forum member and supported by Officers, to find alternative proposals to address the 1m overspend;
- ii. Proposed commissioned places in special schools for 2017-2018; and
- iii. Proposed changes to special school band funding rate for 2017-2018.

5 Central spend budgets 2017-2018

Natalie Cole introduced the report which outlined the proposed level of prescribed central spend budget for 2017-2108.

Forum members' attention was drawn to appendix B and the proposed changes to the centrally held budgets.

It was noted that the central expenditure on children under 5 (1.3.1) had been decreased to meet the cap imposed by the new national funding formula. Mark Parkinson informed the Forum that an Early Years restructure consultation had been launched that day which would result in a reduction in the Early Years team; this was a sensitive issue as it would have an impact on support given to early years providers.

The changes included a reduction in the contribution to combined budgets (1.4.1) and the addition of a falling rolls fund (1.4.5) as agreed at the January Forum meeting. It was noted that line 1.4.8 'Fees to independent schools without SEN' was not an extra budget but a re-designation within the Section 251 statement, previously included within the SEN independent fees.

Clarification was sought as to why the LA was placing non SEN pupils in independent schools. Officers responded that this would relate to the educational provision of pupils placed in secure units.

It was noted that no funding for 'central provision within school budgets' (1.5.1-1.5.3) had been retained for 2017-2018 but this area would be revisited next year.

Resolved that the Schools Forum approve the proposed changes to the level of central spend budget for 2017-2018 for the activities defined in Section 251 statement.

6 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2016-2017 Forecast Third Review

Paul Plested took Forum members through the paper which provided an update on the financial forecast outturn position for centrally held DSG.

It was noted that the adjusted net overspend forecast of £0.120m would be the first call on the 2017-2018 budget. This figure took into account the prior year rates 'windfall' and assumption that sufficient additional funding would be received in 2017-2018 to meet the 3-4 year old overspend.

Resolved that the Schools Forum note the Third Review position of the DSG.

7 Any Other Business

None to report.

8 Next meeting

David Charlton reported that provisional meeting dates for the next academic year would be circulated by the Clerk before the July meeting. It was noted that these dates may be subject to cancellation, due to the uncertainty regarding the role of the Schools Forum and the proposed move to a national funding formula for schools.

Next meeting Monday 3 July 2017 Queen's Park High School 4.30 - 6.30.