

Approved Minutes Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, Queen's Park High School, Chester, 9 October 2017

Present:

Marie Allen
Sue Anderson

Hilary Berry
Cheryl Bullen
David Charlton (Chair)
David Curry
Sarah Curtis
Ian Devereux-Roberts
Kate Docherty
Steve Dool
John Freeman
Carol Gahan
Duncan Haworth
Luci Jones
Kath Lloyd
Samantha Myers-Whittaker
John Murray
Sue Pearson
David Rowlands
Andy Stewart
Caroline Vile
Sarah Worthington
Sue Yates
Harry Ziman

Representing:

Academies - Special
PVI (Private, voluntary and independent) early years' providers
CWAPH Chair
Primary headteachers
Secondary headteachers
Secondary headteachers
Primary headteachers
Primary headteachers
Primary headteachers
Academies - Primary/Secondary
Secondary governors
Primary governors
Primary governors
Academies - Primary/Secondary
Primary governors
Special headteachers
Academies - Primary/Secondary
Primary governors
Secondary governors
Pupil Referral Units (PRU)
Dioceses
Primary headteachers
Secondary headteachers
Academies - Primary/Secondary

Officers:

Natalie Cole
Charlotte Fenn (Clerk)
Debbie Gittins
Anna Jones
Sharon McKeown
Paul Plested
Mark Parkinson

Official observers:

Observers/public:
Councillor Gibbon

1. Introductions and apologies

Apologies were received from Paula Adolph, Philip Hopwood, Francis Kwateng, Sarah Lee, Kathryn Mageria and Katie Tyrrie (not reported at meeting).

David Charlton reported that Chris Priddey had resigned as Primary Headteachers' representative, Ian Devereux-Roberts had taken over the role and Kate Docherty taken over Chris's role on the Finance sub group on a temporary basis; Andy Stewart, The Bridge PRU, had taken over from Sian Thomas as the PRU representative, Sian would act as the PRU substitute.

David Charlton welcomed Councillor Gibbon, Shadow Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, to the meeting as an observer and introduced Anna Jones, Departmental Finance Manager – Peoples. Anna would be taking over Paul Plested's role on the Schools Forum as Paul was taking on project work within Transactional Services. On behalf of the Schools Forum, David thanked Paul for his support and valued contribution over the years. Paul responded that he had worked with many colleagues over the years and in particular had enjoyed working with the Forum.

2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

2.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on the 3 July 2017 were agreed as a correct record subject to the following correction:

Under present, Kath Lloyd was representing Primary governors and not Primary headteachers.

2.2 Matters Arising

2.2.1 Item 2.3 Matters Arising

It was noted that teachers on the top and bottom of the main pay scale had received a 2% pay rise rather than a 1% pay cap.

2.2.2 Item 9.1 Early Years Funding Consultation

Natalie Cole reported that officers were not in a position to provide further information regarding Early Years Specialist Support until Shelia Little's replacement was in post (Early Years Specialist Support Team Manager).

It was noted that the Early Years reference group had decided there was no need to consult as no formula changes had been proposed.

Sue Anderson raised concerns regarding the funding rate for early years settings being set to 2020 and asked how many early years settings had closed and raised concerns that no one was lobbying on their behalf regarding the funding impact long term.

Mark Parkinson responded that he was not aware of any issue with early years settings closing. Schools Forum Clerk was asked to seek confirmation from Sue Lawson regarding the number of closures.

It was acknowledged that concerns around Early Years funding received less of a high profile; officers agreed to ask Sue Lawson to attend the December Schools Forum meeting and present a paper on the Early Years proposals and implications and share the presentations provided at the workshops held for early years settings.

3. Children and Families - Basic Needs Capital Programme 2017-2018

David Charlton declared an interest, as his school was receiving funding as part of the programme, and offered to stand down as chair for the item; Schools Forum members were happy for David to continue as chair.

Sharon McKeown was welcomed to the meeting and introduced herself as the new Children Services Liaison Manager.

Sharon took Forum members through the report which provided an update on the Children and Families Basic Need Capital Programme.

Duncan Haworth questioned why there was no mention of the housing development in Ledsham and the new free school. Sharon responded that, the school was an ESFA proposal therefore it does not feature within the Local Authority's capital programme.

Harry Ziman questioned whether the school transport and admissions policies were working together.

Mark Parkinson reported that both services came under the same team (Education Infrastructure) and were taken into account when planning the basic needs capital programme. It was noted that home to school transport was funded from Council budgets and not DSG.

Resolved that Schools Forum note the paper.

4. School Funding Arrangements 2018-2019

Natalie Cole introduced the report which provided Schools Forum with details on the school funding arrangements for 2018-2019; details on the impact on Cheshire West and Chester and proposals for consulting with schools and Schools Forum on the arrangements for 2018-2019.

Natalie drew Forum members' attention to the changes, outlined in paragraph 4, made by government to the original proposals in response to the consultation feedback; however it was noted that some areas, in particular high needs and growing schools, had not been addressed by the proposals.

Forum members noted that, although the government's intention was to move to a hard national formula in 2020, it was unclear what would happen as this came under the next Comprehensive Funding Review and the DfE would not commit to what the changes would be.

Mark Parkinson made Forum members aware that the Local Authority would need to find the funds for the first year of the proposed free school in Ledsham due to lagged pupil numbers based funding. The Council had feedback comments regarding the need to fund local authorities appropriately as estates and demand for school places increased.

Forum members' attention was drawn to appendix A which compared the CWAC current local funding formula values for 2017-2018 with the national funding formula values for 2018-2019. It was noted that the fundamental difference was that more had been allocated through the deprivation factor, though CWAC did not benefit from this change.

David Charlton drew Forum members' attention to the 'CWAC Consultation with Schools on School Funding for the Financial Year 2018-2019' documentation and modelling which had been circulated separately from the main papers.

It was noted that the school budget illustrative figures, circulated by the DfE showing a cash increase of 0.5%, were misleading as there was no mechanism to replicate the increase; the MFG would need to be set at plus 0.5% for this to be achieved. The 0.5% increase had been allocated to enable local authorities to manage the move to a national funding formula.

David Charlton led discussions and sought comments on the three questions set out in the Consultation document.

The general consensus of the group was to apply the Schools National Funding Formula, but concerns were raised as to what impact this might have on some schools. Natalie advised Forum that schools would get some protection from the minimum funding guarantee (MFG) but pointed out that no guidance was available as to what protection would be available from 2020 when the hard formula was due to be implemented.

Questions were raised as to the impact on schools with high deprivation and low prior attainment. It was noted that schools would gain on FSM but lose on the lump sum.

Forum members asked if officers knew what other local authorities were proposing. Natalie informed the group that a number of local authorities in the North West were sticking to their local formulas as they felt the national formula was not targeting funding where needed locally or able to address local issues.

The group considered the impact on the various options for setting the MFG level. Forum was reminded that the MFG did not protect schools from loss of funding due to falling pupil numbers. Natalie informed Forum that she was happy for Heads to contact her if they needed the modelling explaining.

Natalie Cole drew Forum members' attention to the minimum per pupil factor modelling. It was noted that the factor would be managed separately within the primary & secondary sector funding envelopes. The group discussed the pros and cons of adopting the factor as outlined in the consultation document.

Concerns were raised that the official communication had not helped the reality and some schools and governors were still working on the assumption that they would receive the funding as set out in the government's announcement. It was acknowledged that the Forum needed to get the message across that this was not the case.

Following Forum discussions Harry Ziman put forward a resolution to recommend model 6 which implemented the Schools National Funding Formula for 2018-2019 with MFG set at -1.5, subject to the outcomes of the consultation to be considered at the next Finance sub group meeting.

Resolved that the Schools Forum make the following recommendations, subject to feedback from the Consultation due to end on 18 October 2017, that the Local Authority:

- i. implements the Schools National Funding Formula for the soft formula in 2018-2019 (vote: unanimous) ;
- ii. applies protection against a year on year reduction in per pupil levels of funding of -1.5% (vote: unanimous);
- iii. implements the Minimum per pupil funding factor to pass on the additional transitional funding allocated through the Schools National Funding Formula (vote: majority, 1 abstention);
- iv. Task the Finance sub group to review the Consultation feedback at their meeting on 18 October 2017 and put forward the final recommendations;
- v. Task the Chair to send out a communication to schools outlining the Schools Forum proposed recommendations and stating that it was not possible to reproduce a formula that would generate the funding for each school as set out in the government's announcement.

5. Schools Forum High Needs Sub group report on Special Educational Needs (SEN) Funding for Mainstream and Special Schools

Sue Yates presented the paper on behalf of the High Needs sub group and summarised the work carried out by the group and the recommendations as outlined in the paper.

It was noted that the group had looked at models across both mainstream and special schools for the most effective way of making savings, some of which may not be palatable to all.

Harry Ziman questioned what the impact of transferring 0.5% from the schools block to the high needs block would have in light of discussions on agenda item 4.

Officers agreed to provide two further models to illustrate the impact of the recommendations, one using the NFF in 2018-2019 with -1.5% MFG and minimum per pupil levels and the second reflecting the 0.5% schools block transfer to high needs.

David Charlton reported that he had received correspondence from a special school requesting that the increased pressure the proposed new 70 place free school would have on the High Needs block be brought to the Schools Forum attention. Mark Parkinson reminded Forum that funding for any new free school would have to be found from the High Needs block as there would be no interplay between blocks at that stage and it may be necessary to reduce top up funding by 10%. Agreeing the new free school was a DfE decision, however, it was noted that officers had made it clear to the DfE that they would be seeking comments from Schools Forum regarding the proposed free school.

Kate Docherty questioned whether there was yet any clarity regarding pupils moving to an alternative provision free school and coming off the school's role; it was noted that this was still unclear and had yet to be clarified.

John Murray commended the High Needs sub group on the work they had done.

It was noted that the proposals had been scrutinised by the Finance sub group prior to coming to Forum and they had questioned whether they were in fact radical enough; if the proposals were not taken up there would need to be a 50% cut to top up rates.

Mark Parkinson reminded Forum that the issues regarding increasing spend on SEN had been flagged with Forum for several years; officers had managed to avoid overspend by finding savings. Mark stressed that if the current inclusion issues were not addressed these funding issues would come back and would have to be brought back to Forum to resolve. It was noted that only one third of SENCO's attended the recent SENCO training and improved attendance could only be achieved by schools exercising leadership and management. Mark drew Forum's attention to appendix A which compared the percentage of CWAC pupils with plans attending mainstream, academy or free schools or special schools with the English average. It was noted that CWAC continued to have higher percentages of pupils attending special schools and a lower percentage of pupils attending mainstream schools than the average in England.

Questions were raised as to, statistically, how many pupils in special schools should be in mainstream. Officers were not able to provide the actual figures but agreed to bring back the data at a future meeting.

Debbie Gittins informed Forum members that the number of Out of Borough places was starting to grow and Sam Myers-Whittaker confirmed that special schools had no more space for pupils.

It was noted that the continuing growth in SEN pupils was consistent across the North West.

Questions were raised as to what mechanisms there were to bring back special school pupils into mainstream. Debbie Gittins confirmed that one of the main issues was getting parents on board and gaining their confidence.

David Charlton requested that colleagues' feedback any other views they may have to the High Need sub group.

Debbie Gittins drew Forum members' attention to the audit of SEN funding outlined in paragraph 6.7 and thanked Kate Docherty's school for piloting the audit. Debbie sought support from Forum to encourage selected schools to engage with the audit.

David Charlton thanked the High Needs sub group for the work they had done putting together the proposals.

Resolved that the Schools Forum

- i. note the ceasing top up funding without a plan after two years as agreed in March 2017;
- ii. note officers to undertake a pilot piece of work to consider top up funding and low attendance;

- iii. endorsed recouping the difference in top up funding where the alternative provision costs commissioned by a school for an individual pupil is less than the element 3 funding (vote unanimous);
- iv. note the naming of provision;
- v. note that in year transfers proposals do not demonstrate a cost saving and are not for consideration;
- vi. note the proposed commissioned places in Special schools 2017-2018 agreed in March 2017;
- vii. note the proposed changes to special school band funding rate for 2017-2018 agreed in March 2017 with Forum approving a 1.5% reduction to Special school top up rates;
- viii. agree, in principle to the allocation of funding to deliver work on inclusion and workforce development in mainstream schools (vote unanimous);
- ix. agree the transfer of 0.5% of funding from the schools block to the high needs block in line with the recent funding guidance (vote unanimous);
- x. note the 0.5% increase to the high needs block following the recent funding guidance;
- xi. agree the proposed 3% reduction in mainstream funding across all bands (vote unanimous);
- xii. agree the proposal to consult with the special schools to apply an efficiency factor reduction to band fund rates(vote unanimous);
- xiii. agree that top up funding without a plan agreed prior to 2014 is agreed for two years only to bring it in line with two year top up funding process for requests after 2014 (vote unanimous); and
- xiv. support the audit of SEN funding to be undertaken by internal audit and Associate School Improvement Advisors (vote unanimous).

6. Final allocation of the DSG 2017-2018

David Charlton introduced the paper and asked if Forum members needed any clarification.

Resolved that the Schools Forum note

- i. the amendments to the DSG allocation for the high needs and early years funding blocks; and
- ii. the adjustments to centrally held budgets for 2017-2018.

7. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2017-2018 Forecast Outturn at First Review

David Charlton introduced the paper and asked if Forum members needed any clarification.

Resolved that the Schools Forum note the First Review position on the DSG.

8. Any Other Business

None to report.

9. Next meeting

Next Schools Forum meeting Monday 11 December 2017 Queen's Park High School 4.30 - 6.30.

Approved