

**Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, Queen's Park High School,
Chester 8 July 2019 - approved 8 October 2019**

Members	Representing	Attendance
Schools and Academies		
Marie Allen	Academies - special	Attended
Alan Brown	Primary headteachers	Attended
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Attended
Sarah Curtis	Primary headteachers	Attended
Stephanie Cade	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
John Freeman	Secondary governors	Apologies
Kate Docherty	Primary headteachers	Attended
David Nield	Primary governors	Attended
Phil Hopwood	Special governors	Attended
Mike Holland	Secondary headteachers	Attended
Kath Lloyd	Primary governors	Apologies
Mike McCann	Special headteachers	Attended
John Murray (Chair)	Academies - mainstream	Attended
David Rowlands	Secondary governors	Attended
Andy Stewart	PRU	Attended
Katie Tyrie	Nursery headteachers	Attended
Lyndsay Watterson	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Susan Yarnall	Primary governors	Apologies
Ian Devereux Roberts	Primary headteachers	Attended
Sarah Worthington	Primary headteachers	Absent
David Bradburn	Primary governors	Attended
Duncan Haworth	Primary governors	Attended
Amanda Harrison	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Harry Ziman	Academies - mainstream	Absent
Jason Lowe	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Non Schools		
Hilary Berry	CWAPH	Attended
Kathryn Magiera	Diocese	Absent
Paula Adolph	PVI	Absent
Sue Anderson	PVI	Attended
Caroline Vile	Diocese	Apologies
Greg Foster	Unions	Absent
Geoff Wright	Unions	Absent
Vacancy	16-19 providers	Vacancy
Non-voting Observers		
Councillor Nicole Meardon	Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Attended
Officers in attendance		
Mark Parkinson	Director of Education	
Natalie Cole	Finance Manager	
Charlotte Fenn	Clerk	
Public/Observers		
Councillor Jill Houlbrook	Shadow Cabinet Member for Children and Families	
Sue Tomlinson	CWAPH Vice-chair	

1. Introductions and apologies

Apologies were noted from Stephanie Cade, John Freeman, Amanda Harrison, Susan Yarnall, Caroline Vile (not reported at meeting) and Kath Lloyd (not reported at meeting).

John Murray welcomed the following new members to the meeting. Alan Brown, primary headteacher representative, elected following the retirement of Cheryl Bullen, and David Neild, primary governor representative, elected following the resignation of Carol Gahan.

Forum members noted the election of Stephanie Cade, academies representative, following Luci Jones' term of office ending, the resignation of Sarah Worthington, primary headteacher representative, and the retirement of the CWAPH chair, Hilary Berry, as of 31 August 2019. It was also noted that the new CWAPH chair from September would be Sue Tomlinson and Rob Pullen working as a job share.

Councillor Jill Houlbrook and Sue Tomlinson were welcomed to the meeting as observers.

John Murray reported that Duncan Haworth had agreed to take over as Schools Forum Chair from September and John Freeman as vice chair; no other nominations had been put forward.

2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 11 February 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on the 11 February 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

2.2 Matters arising

Item 7 Increasing funding for schools petition

Councillor Meardon reported that the f40 group were involved in campaigning for increasing yearly years funding as well as school funding.

3. F40 School Funding Update

Councillor Meardon briefed Forum on the recent f40 campaign meeting in London, and briefing for MPs around school funding issues making reference to the briefing notes circulated with the agenda. It was noted that there was some uncertainty as to whether the next Comprehensive Spending Review, due in the autumn, would take place due to Brexit and a possible general election. F40 were working alongside other groups, including Worthless and parent groups. It was noted that f40 were a cross party group and a letter had been sent to the Government raising funding concerns. Councillor reported that the f40 were

campaigning for activity led formulae, funding future proofing, removal of locked in historical inequities, increase in early years funding, rolling three year budgets, review of the home to school transport policy, as well as parity between MATS. Case studies had also been given to MPs. They were also asking for additional high needs funding and structural changes to allow flexibility between the funding blocks.

John Murray asked Forum members if there were any examples of funding issues e.g. services/activities schools could no longer provide, that Councillor Meardon could use as part of the campaign. Hilary Berry responded that CWAPH could put together some examples without naming schools to protect their identity.

Forum members commented that f40's campaign had been very effectively presented in the presentation to MPs and urged them to keep pushing this agenda.

4. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2018-2019 – Final Outturn

Natalie Cole introduced the report which detailed the 2018-2019 final outturn position for the centrally held DSG budget.

Forum's attention was drawn to the table on page 10 which summarised the main variances at final outturn compared to the Third Review. In response to a question seeking clarification regarding staff vacancies underspend, Mark Parkinson stated that this was due to delays in recruitment and maternity leave.

It was noted that the central spend block had not received an increase over several years.

Natalie drew Forum members' attention to the proposals as outlined in paragraph eight.

Resolved that the Forum

- i. note the final outturn on the 2018-2019 centrally held DSG; and
- ii. endorse the planned allocation and retention of the unspent reserve as recommended by the Schools Forum Finance Sub Group (Vote: unanimous).

5. Maintained School Balances Financial Year 2018-2019 and Academy Balances 2017-2018

Natalie Cole introduced the report which provided the final outturn position of maintained schools for the 2018-2019 financial year and academy balances for the latest reported position for the 2017-2018 academic and financial year accounts.

Forum members' attention was drawn to the table under paragraph four which summarised the school balances outturn position.

Natalie referred Forum members to the separate analysis of school balances document which provided a breakdown of all maintained school balances. It was noted that the number of schools in deficit had increased.

Forum members were also referred to the academies balances in appendix A.

Forum members had a discussion on the implications of the reported balances. It was noted that there was a wide range of balances and it was difficult to draw conclusions, the increases could be due to a number of reasons such as financial management, restructuring, capital, future funding uncertainties. It was acknowledged that some schools may be reluctant to commit to recurring expenditure due to the current funding uncertainties but it was also noted that one off initiatives could benefit all, e.g. workforce development to build capacity, putting back something into the system.

It was noted that the number of schools holding balances in excess of the balance control mechanism (BCM) thresholds (no longer in operation) for the last three years had increased. Natalie sought views from Forum regarding reinstating the BCM or any other suggestions as how to address the excess balances. It was acknowledged that clawed back funds from schools with balances in excess of the thresholds would be redistributed to all schools including academies that were not subject to the same caps on balances.

Mark Parkinson pointed out that it was difficult for Council Meardon to campaign with the f40 group for extra school funding when excessive balances were being reported.

Hilary Berry agreed to take back the concerns raised regarding primary school balances to CWAPH and feedback any solutions to Natalie.

Concerns regarding the increasing deficits were also acknowledged. It was noted that budgets were a big challenge for small schools and there had been an increase in the number of Notices of Concern issued.

Resolved that the Schools Forum note

- i. the outturn position and movement in balances for both schools and academies; and
- ii. the mechanisms in place to support schools with deficit balances (maintained schools only).

6. Review of Growth Fund criteria for schools and academies

Natalie Cole took Forum through the report which reviewed the Growth Fund criteria in the context of the need for increased capacity in the secondary sector and pressure on the current budget.

Natalie drew Forum members' attention to the recommended revisions to the criteria in paragraph eight in particular to the affordability criteria relating to school surplus balances which could be applied across maintained schools and academies.

It was noted that the growth fund was only intended to solve temporary funding issues.

Forum members questioned whether the LA could get more Section 106 funding. Mark Parkinson responded that the issues were down to timing, the number of surplus places, some developments taking longer than expected and pupil yield's not as predicted.

David Curry raised concerns regarding the impact of the affordability criteria and schools in year budget planning; schools needed to be aware of the changes and whether they were eligible or not. Officers acknowledged these concerns and agreed to get a communication out to schools.

Resolved that the Schools Forum approved the revisions to the Growth Fund criteria for submission to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (Vote: unanimous).

7. Directed revisions to Schemes for Financing Schools for 2019-2020

Natalie Cole introduced the item and took Forum members through the report which updated the Schools Forum on the Directed Revisions to Schemes for Financing Schools issued by the Department for Education (DfE) which were to be incorporated in the Cheshire West and Chester Scheme.

Natalie referred Forum members to appendix A which detailed the updates required to reflect current policy positions and changes in legislation.

Natalie sought Forum's view on changing the date for budgets to be submitted to the local authority from 1 June to 1 May, as outlined in paragraph eight, with an initial budget plan agreed by the Governing Body by the end of spring term. It was noted that some governing bodies had not as yet agreed their budget plans and warning notices had been issued.

Questions were raised as to whether schools would have enough information to be able to complete budget plans to this timescale. Natalie assured Forum that schools would have enough local information to submit a draft budget plan by the end of spring term, revisiting it once carry forward figures were available in time for the May deadline.

It was acknowledged that Governing Body meeting dates may need to be revised to fit in with the new deadlines.

Resolved that the Schools Forum

- i. approve the revisions to the scheme which will be reflected in the updated Scheme to be published July 2019; and
- ii. endorse a consultation with all schools in the autumn term on amending the date for submission of budget plans (Vote: unanimous).

8. Call for evidence on Government consultation on SEND and AP provision

John Murray introduced the item. The Government was holding a consultation on how the financial arrangements work for the provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and for those who need alternative provision.

Forum members discussed the consultation documentation.

Sarah Curtis reported that she had collated responses from SENCOs and agreed to send them to the Schools Forum clerk to be incorporated into a Schools Forum response along with the response submitted by Kate Docherty.

Mark Parkinson urged Forum members to encourage schools to respond to the consultation. Comments for the Schools Forum response were to be sent to the clerk.

9. Annual review of the Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum's membership, constitution and terms of reference

Charlotte Fenn introduced the item. It was noted that no formal revisions to the Schools Forum regulations had been issued and officers had determined that the pupil ration did not warrant a revision to the membership at this time.

John Murray drew members' attention to the Finance and High Needs sub group membership in appendix three and four. Following the recent retirements and resignations Forum members reviewed the current membership and agreed the following new members:-

Finance sub group

Lyndsey Watterson - secondary head teacher representative

High Needs sub group

Mike Holland - secondary head teacher representative

Andrew Stewart – PRU representative

It was agreed that the Schools Forum clerk should seek new governor representatives for both sub groups, via email, as not all governor representatives were present at the meeting.

It was noted that the High Needs sub group had not met for some time but would be called upon to meet in the autumn after the SEND consultation.

Resolved that the Schools Forum

- i. note that there were no changes to the constitution and terms of reference; and
- ii. agreed the revised membership of the Finance and High Needs sub groups as outlined above.

10. Any Other Business

SEND Consultation

Mark Parkinson brought to the Schools Forums' attention the SEND Consultation taking place following the recent review. The authority was running three consultation events of which the first had been today (8 July). Findings of the consultation would be presented to Cabinet in November and then brought to Schools Forum in December or January. The consultation ended on 12 September.

St Mary's Nursery Deficit

Katie Tyrie raised concerns regarding her schools deficit as stated in the analysis of school balances document (ref item five). It was noted that part of the deficit was as a result of the school not having their rates paid.

Retirements

Presentations were made to Hilary Berry, CWAPH Chair, and John Murray, Schools Forum Chair and Principal Chester Catholic High School; both were retiring from their roles at the end of August.

11. Next meeting

Tuesday 8 October 2019.