

Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, virtual meeting, on 11 October 2022 - subject to final approval

Members	Representing	Attendance
Schools and Academies		
Vacancy	Primary headteachers	Vacancy
Vacancy	Primary headteachers	Vacancy
Beth Hacking	Primary headteachers	Apologies
Ian Devereux-Roberts	Primary headteachers	Attended
Kate Docherty	Primary headteachers	Attended
Sharon Broughton	Primary governors	Attended
Duncan Haworth (Chair)	Primary governors	Attended
Lisa Rigby	Primary governors	Apologies
David Nield	Primary governors	Attended
Nick Lacey	Primary governors	Attended
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Attended
Martin Hill	Secondary headteachers	Apologies
David Rowlands	Secondary governors	Attended
Rob Williams	Secondary governors	Apologies
Neil Oxley	Special headteachers	Attended
Philip Hopwood	Special governors	Absent
Andy Stewart	PRU	Attended
Deborah Beaumont	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Sarah Connolly	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Darran Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Luci Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Helen Studley	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Vacancy	Academies - mainstream	Vacancy
Emma Leach	Academies - special	Attended
Non Schools		
Cat Hirst	PVI early years providers	Attended
Angela Thornton	PVI early years providers	Apologies
Kathryn Magiera	Diocese	Absent
Caroline Vile	Diocese	Attended
Greg Foster	Unions	Apologies
Geoff Wright	Unions	Absent
Rob Pullen	CWAPH	Attended
Vacancy	16-19 providers	Vacancy
Official Observers		
Councillor Robert Cernik	Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Attended
Officers in attendance		
Helen Brackenbury	Director Children and Families	
Natalie Cole	Finance Manager	
Carolyn Davis	Senior Manager - Education and Inclusion	
Charlotte Fenn	Clerk	
Debbie Murphy	Acting Head of Education and Inclusion	
Observer		
Councillor Razia Daniels	Shadow Cabinet Member for Children and Families	

1. Introductions and apologies

Apologies were noted.

Duncan Haworth reported the following membership changes:

Resignations:

Julie Chambers Primary Head
Sarah Curtis Primary Head
Alan Brown Primary Head

New representatives:

Beth Hacking Cherry Grove Primary Primary Heads
Martin Hill Helsby HS Secondary Heads

Re-elected:

Geoff Wright Unions

Duncan thanked Julie Chambers, Sarah Curtis and Alan Brown, on behalf of Schools Forum, for their time and contribution to Forum work over the years and welcomed Emma Leach to her first meeting.

2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 5 July 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on the 5 July 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

2.2 Matters arising

2.2.1 Item 3 Apprenticeship Levy

Duncan Haworth sought confirmation from Forum as to whether any further suggestions as to how to use the levy more effectively has been shared with Rosemary Hodgson following her presentation. No new suggestions had been put forward.

2.2.2 Item 4 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2021-2022 Final Outturn

Duncan confirmed that further development of a DSG recovery plan would be covered under item 9.

2.2.3 Item 7 Government Consultation on Implementing the direct national funding formula

Duncan confirmed that a Schools Forum response had been submitted which mirrored that of the Council's final response.

3. Education – Capital Programme 2022-2026

Carolyn Davis presented the report on behalf of Janine Smart who had been unable to attend the meeting. The report provided an update on the Education Basic Need Capital Programme.

The Council received the annual Basic Need grant to enable them to meet their sufficiency duties and could be used for maintained schools, free schools, academies and new schools.

It was noted that the forecasts through the School Capacity (SCAP) returns, 5-year forecast for Primary and Secondary, looking at how many places were being delivered and how many were still needed. It was noted that information about the 2024-2025 grant would not be available until the new year.

With reference to paragraph 9, Carolyn apologised that the report only had the scorecard for primary schools and would ensure that the secondary schools scorecard was circulated.

It was noted that, in general, parental preference was well met in CW&C compared with other Councils; the Council's 3-year forecast had been slightly over and as a result the methodology for collecting the data was being reviewed.

Carolyn also reported that the data collected was based on planning areas, as highlighted in appendix 1, and the Capital Development team would be contacting schools shortly to look at the data and places needed.

Ian Devereux-Roberts sought clarification as to why there had been such a large increase in grant in 2021-2022, £24.75 million. Carolyn responded that it was likely to have been due to a large increase in need. It was also noted that the team were looking at more focused areas, as now allowed by the DfE, and identifying pockets of pupils in places which had been previously masked by the old methodology.

David Nield sought clarification as to whether the Council had a 'free hand' or were directed by the DfE in terms of actual schools providing extra places. Carolyn confirmed that there was not directive and extra places were based on where there was a need.

Rob Pullen questioned whether the large Wrexham Road development had been factored into the forecasts and what was the timescale for additional provision. Carolyn confirmed that all housing developments were factored into the forecasts using a child yield formula negotiated with the developers. Carolyn thought the additional provision was from September 2024 but would need to seek confirmation. It was noted that the Council had a 10-year building plan as forecasting went beyond the DfE requirements.

Resolved that Schools Forum note the paper.

4. Update on Council Financial Position

Natalie Cole provided a brief slide presentation on the challenges facing the council and outlined the process being undertaken regarding funding gap proposals and timeline.

Forum was informed that the financial position did not impact directly on Schools, as they were grant funded, but would impact on central services.

The challenges facing the council included significant inflationary pressures, continued increase in demand led pressures requiring additional growth and significant uncertainty over existing funding from Central Government.

Over the next four years the council was facing a financial shortfall of £105 million, which would be partly bridged by Council and business tax rates and existing saving proposals resulting in a £42.1 million funding gap.

The following timelines was noted: -

- Medium Term Financial Strategy Report to Cabinet – 12 October 2022
- Public engagement on budget proposals for 2023-2024 & 2024-2025 – late October 2022 to early December 2022
- Chancellor's Autumn Budget – 23 November 2022?
- Financial Settlement – late December 2022
- Budget Council – 16 February 2023

Forum and schools were encouraged to participate in the consultation.

David Nield sought clarification as to the consultation's format and how residents would be targeted or notified of the consultation. Natalie confirmed that the consultation would be online and assumed notification would be done through the post and social media, as in the past, but would follow up on this query. Natalie also confirmed that the consultation would be circulated to Schools Forum once available.

It was noted that a further update would be brought to Forum at the December meeting.

5. School Funding Arrangements for 2023-2024

Natalie Cole introduced the report which provided Schools Forum with details on the school funding arrangements for 2023-2024, the impact on Cheshire West and Chester and proposals for consulting with schools and Schools Forum.

Natalie went through the funding arrangements for 2023-2024 outlined in paragraphs 5-7. The DfE expected to have moved to the direct national funding formulae (NFF) by 2027-2028. It was noted that since the local formula for CW&C already mirrored the NFF, no changes were necessary to meet these requirements.

Natalie explained that, due to a technical adjustment, the 2022-2023 schools supplementary grant for mainstream schools has been rolled into the schools NFF, previously it had been administered as a separate grant.

Natalie drew Forums' attention to paragraph 14 and the DfE guidance to help local authorities review their notional SEN budget calculations. A review would be undertaken and presented to Schools Forum in December. It was noted that when the last review

was undertaken the notional SEN came out as average compared with other local authorities.

Rob Pullen asked if the guidance had been published and Natalie confirmed that it had.

Natalie stated that there was guidance around which formula factors would be expected to be included as part of the notional SEN budget; as part of the review officers would be looking at SEN need, prevalence of deprivation and how closely defined.

Forums' attention was drawn to paragraph 15 and the exceptional circumstances optional formula factor. The local authority would need to submit a new disapplication request for consideration to maintain the two existing exceptional circumstances in CW&C.

David Rowlands declared an interest as a Governor at Upton High which received a special allocation for its sports club contract under the exceptional circumstances' formula factor.

Resolved that Schools Forum: -

- i. note the report, in particular the proposals put forward by the Finance Sub Group not to further consult with schools on the schools block funding formula as no changes are proposed. Consultation would be held with schools on the decisions to be taken by Schools Forum on other funding elements for the December meeting; and
- ii. recommend to Cabinet that the Schools Block funding formula continuing to mirror the Schools National Funding Formula (SNFF) values for 2023-2024.

6. Final Allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2022-2023

Natalie Cole introduced the report which confirmed the final allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2022-2023.

It was noted that the net £7 million decrease, shown in table 1, related mainly to the school's supplementary grant for mainstream schools, originally included with the indicative DSG allocation but then received as a separate grant.

Natalie referred Forum to Table 2 under paragraph 7 which highlighted the changes and action taken from the draft allocation used in budget setting for this financial year.

It was noted that the import/export adjustment for high needs places in other authorities was a pressure against the high needs post 16 budget. The authority exports more than imports post 16 high needs places, and this was an area which was difficult to forecast.

There were no questions raised by Forum to report.

Resolve that Schools Forum note the amendments to the DSG allocation for the high

needs and early years funding blocks and the adjustments to centrally held budgets for 2022-2023.

7. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2022-2023 Forecast Outturn at First Review

Natalie Cole took Forum through the report which provided an update on the financial forecast outturn position for 2022-2023 for centrally held DSG as reported at the First Review.

It was noted that officers were working towards a solution to recover the current deficit, and this had been taken into account on the wider council's resources.

There were no comments from Forum to report.

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

8. Early Years Funding Formula Consultation and proposal for 2023-2024

Natalie Cole presented the report on behalf of Bo White who was unable to attend the meeting. The report provided an overview of the recent Early Years Funding Formula (EYFF) Consultation for the funding of three- and four-year-old universal and extended entitlements.

It was noted that the consultation was undertaken in response to the DfE recent national consultation to change the way the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) was calculated and distributed to local councils, in particular the proposal to roll in the Early Years Teacher Pay and Pensions Grants (EY TPPG) to the Early Years Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) which, if agreed, may result in changes to the local funding formula.

The consultation sought views from providers on whether or not they were in agreement that the funding for EY TPPG should be included within the universal base rate or passed to providers in the form of a new Quality supplement for providers with additional cost pressures associated with the employment of qualified teaching staff.

It was noted that it had been difficult for officers to draw any conclusions or use the feedback from the consultation constructively to inform the proposals due to the low response rate, 26 responses out of around 280 providers (9%).

Natalie drew Forums' attention to the proposed CW&C Funding Formula including the removal of Quality Supplement as outlined in Table 2.

There were no comments from Forum to report.

Resolved that Schools Forum: -

- i. note the removal of the old Quality supplement that has been phased out over a two-year period, as agreed by Council members in 2021; and

- ii. endorse the recommendation to await the outcome of the national consultation and whether or not the proposal for the Early Years Teacher Pay and Pension Grant (EY TPPG) to be rolled into the Early Years block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is agreed and local councils encouraged to consider the use of a quality supplement in their local formulas for the redistribution of this funding. Should this be the case the council would seek to introduce a new quality supplement for this purpose and work with the Early Years Reference Group (EYRG) to develop an application process to facilitate the appropriate targeting of this new supplement.

9. Brief Update – SEND Review Final Report

Following on from the previous item, Debbie Murphy informed Forum that Sarah Lister, Manager - Early Years Team, had been assigned as an Area Lead and members of the team have been assigned as experts, working with other local authorities to support their settings with improving practice and thereby quality assurance.

Debbie Murphy reported that the final SEND review report by Jonathan Wilding contained 10 recommendations split into 4 themes.

- 1) Restructuring and redesign of the team due to growth of SEN needs – additional funds to be approved.
- 2) Sufficiency and commissioning process - contract officer, less spot purchases more collective commissioning
- 3) Targeting support at specific points e.g., transition
- 4) Inclusion – more inclusive practices in mainstream schools, evidence that some pupils in special schools could be incorporated into mainstream.

Helen Brackenbury also informed Forum that the report would be going to Corporate Management Board for approval, but any additional resources required would be subject to approval at full Council in February 2023.

David Rowlands voiced concerns regarding the liaison between primary and secondary, some schools were not aware of the pupil's issues.

Debbie Murphy challenged this assumption as in part it was due to transition visits being reduced as a result of Covid. A best practice guide was being produced.

Ian Devereux-Roberts voiced concerns regarding reassigning pupils to mainstream, this would be a significant challenge for the authority to persuade parents of a child who had been in special provision for some time and might be inappropriate unless the child was ready to move.

Debbie reassured Forum that the proposal was more about how to move forward than moving current pupils.

Officers would provide a further update at the December meeting.

10. Any Other Business

None to report.

11. Next meeting

Next Schools Forum meeting Tuesday 6 December 2022 – virtual.

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