

Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, virtual meeting, on 20 October 2020 - subject to approval at next meeting

Members	Representing	Attendance
Schools and Academies		
Alan Brown	Primary headteachers	Attended
Julie Chambers	Primary headteachers	Attended
Sarah Curtis	Primary headteachers	Attended
Ian Devereux Roberts	Primary headteachers	Attended
Kate Docherty	Primary headteachers	Attended
Duncan Haworth (Chair)	Primary governors	Attended
Helen Hill	Primary governors	Apologies
Kath Lloyd	Primary governors	Attended
David Nield	Primary governors	Attended
Vacancy	Primary governors	Vacancy
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Apologies
Mike Holland	Secondary headteachers	Attended
John Freeman	Secondary governors	Attended
David Rowlands	Secondary governors	Attended
Mike McCann	Special headteachers	Attended
Phil Hopwood	Special governors	Absent
Katie Tyrie	Nursery headteachers	Attended
Andy Stewart	PRU	Attended
Sarah Connolly	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Darran Jones	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Luci Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Jason Lowe	Academies - mainstream	Absent
Helen Studley	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Lyndsay Watterson	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Marie Allen	Academies - special	Attended
Non Schools		
Sue Anderson	PVI early years providers	Attended
Kathryn Magiera	Diocese	Absent
Caroline Vile	Diocese	Apologies
Greg Foster	Unions	Absent
Geoff Wright	Unions	Absent
Rob Pullen	CWAPH	Attended
Cat Hirst	PVI early years providers	Attended
Vacancy	16-19 providers	Vacancy
Official Observers		
Councillor Robert Cernik	Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Attended
Officers in attendance		
David McNaught	Director of Education and Inclusion	
Natalie Cole	Finance Manager	
Charlotte Fenn	Clerk	
Observer		
Councillor Razia Daniels	Shadow Cabinet Member for Children and Families	

1. Introductions and apologies

Apologies were noted.

Duncan Haworth reported the following update to Schools Forum membership:

New PVI reps

Cat Hirst Guilden Sutton Day Nursery - replacing Paula Adolph PVI rep
Angela Thornton Dandelions - new named PVI substitute rep

Re-elected reps

Duncan Haworth Primary Governor - term of office extended for further four years

Philip Hopwood Special Governor - term of office extended for further four years

Resignation

Paul Healey Primary Governor, Eaton Primary School.

Duncan also reported that this would be Kath Lloyd's last meeting, as her term of office was due to end 4 December and Kath was not re-standing for election. Duncan thanked Kath for her time and contribution to the work of Schools Forum.

Nominations were being sought, by the Schools Forum Clerk, to fill the vacancies.

2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 7 July 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on the 7 July 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

2.2 Matters arising

2.2.1 2.2.3 Item 5 Special Educational Needs (SEN) funding for mainstream and special schools - funding from the High Needs block 2020-2021

Duncan reported that the Schools Forum High Needs subgroup had met on 22 September 2020 to review where decisions were up to regarding the High Needs block. David McNaught was considering the next steps and would consult further with school colleagues and report back to High Needs subgroup.

2.2.2 Item 5 Maintained School Balances Financial Year 2019-2020 and Academy Balances 2018-2019

Heads Association representatives had been tasked with discussing excess surplus balances with colleagues and to report challenges and concerns at the next Schools Forum meeting. The following comments were noted:

Mike McCann reported that the balances data had been circulated to colleagues and was due to be discussed at the next CWASSH meeting.

Mike Holland reported that balances had been discussed at CWASH and no concerns had been expressed; schools had specific reasons for the balances. It had also been stressed that it was difficult to 'plead poverty' when there were balances in school budgets.

The CWAPH representative was not present at the time to report back.

It was agreed that the item be revisited at the next Schools Forum for a further update from Heads Association reps.

3. School Funding Arrangements for 2021-2022

Natalie Cole introduced the report which provided details on the school funding arrangements for 2021-2022, the impact on Cheshire West and Chester and proposals for consulting with schools and Schools Forum on the arrangements for 2021-2022.

Natalie took Forum through the report. It was noted that there was no announcement on the Early Years Block which was expected in December. Natalie drew Forum's attention to paragraph 8 and the changes to the Schools Block allocation, in particular to the addition of the teachers' pay grant (TPG) and the teachers' pension employer contribution grant (TPECG) which had been added to the national funding formula from 2021-2022 to streamline the grants.

Resolved that the Schools Forum note the report, in particular the proposals that had been put forward by the Finance Subgroup to commence consultation with schools.

Refer to item 4 for Schools Forum's recommendations on the Schools Block funding formula following the consultation outcome.

4. Summary of responses to consultation on school funding formula 2021-2022

Natalie referred Forum members to the separate document, circulated prior to the meeting, summarising the responses to the consultation which ended on 16 October 2020. Forum's attention was drawn to the summary of the number of responses on the last page of the report. In total there had been 50 responses, but it was noted that some schools had submitted more than one response.

Natalie reported, based on the responses, the following conclusions from the overall position:

Q1 - clear support for retaining the MFG protection at 0.5%

Q2 - clear support for transferring funds to high needs

Q3a - clear support for retaining current de-delegation options for primary and secondary

Q3b - secondary supported leaving this as an individual school decision whether to opt into the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA), rather than opting in collectively. The primary view was more mixed, though the opt in collectively responses were pretty evenly distributed and so there may be some merit in the primary sector consulting wider with schools as the decision needed to be taken in January 2021.

Resolved that the Schools Forum make the following recommendations on the Schools Block funding formula following the consultation outcome:

- i. retain the MFG protection at 0.5% (vote unanimous);
- ii. transfer up to 0.5% funds from the schools block to high needs block (vote unanimous);
- iii. retain current Primary de-delegation options (vote unanimous);
- iv. retain current Secondary de-delegation options (vote unanimous);
- v. opting into the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) remain as an individual Primary school decision (vote unanimous); and
- vi. opting into the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) remain as an individual Secondary school decision (vote unanimous).

5. Final Allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2020-2021

Natalie Cole introduced the item reporting the final allocation of the DSG for 2020-2021. Forum members' attention was drawn to table 2 which outlined the adjustments to DSG and subsequent budget adjustment actions.

Natalie reported a £0.324 million unbudgeted reduction in the High Needs block as a result of an import/export adjustment for post 16 high needs places in other authorities. This had not been included in the budget setting as there was currently no data available for forecasting the movement of post 16 pupils.

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 2020-2021.

6. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2020-2021 Forecast Outturn at First Review

Natalie Cole took Forum members through the report which provided an update on the financial forecast outturn position for 2020-2021 for centrally held DSG as reported at the First Review.

Natalie referred Forum members to paragraph 3 which outlined the key variances attributing to the net overspend of £0.712 million forecast which included the impact from the import/export adjustment for post 16 high needs places. Natalie reported that officers were currently working on finalising the second review where the forecast position was likely to be worse reflecting closer to £1 million overspend.

Natalie reminded Forum members' that the authorities with a DSG overspend would need to complete a DfE template to agree a recovery plan. Natalie agreed to bring the template to the next Forum.

A question was raised as to whether the DfE could instruct the authority to clawback balances from schools to reduce the overspend. Natalie responded that at this stage it was not known what the DfE's requirements would be but would expect a medium or long-term plan to be put in place to manage demand.

Sue Anderson asked if the £0.426 million balance in reserves could be use as a temporary funding arrangement for Early Years, like this autumn term. Natalie responded that it was too early to say as the Early Years headcount data had not yet been processed but as summer term payments had been higher than last year, further additional funding was unlikely to be affordable.

Sarah Curtis asked what impact the new Independent Free school might have. David McNaught responded that there would be several issues, one being transport costs and that we had already hit the tipping point and needed a new vision and collective view on SEN provision. David acknowledged that the situation becoming more challenging, had COVID not hit us, a conversation would already have started looking at inclusion across the borough, something substantial needed to be done.

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

7. Any Other Business

Feedback on COVID related pressures

David McNaught sought views on how schools were managing COVID related costs. The following comments were noted:

Maternity cover – doubling up on costs as staff member coming out of class early at 28 weeks, normally you would move staff around school, but you can't currently have the staff moving between bubbles.

Maternity cover – using catch up funding and working in smaller groups.

Dinner duty – more dinner duty required resulting in less break time and preparation time for staff. Currently doing an exercise for governors on extra costs which would pass on to David McNaught.

Knock on cost where staff are self-isolating – some pupils had multiple support e.g. class teacher / teaching assistant / phonics catch-up teacher.

Before and after school clubs – demand had fallen but school still bearing costs, unable to furlough all staff as some had other roles; looking at whether can continue to run the before and after club.

Huge extra costs for Early Years as receiving limited support & no extra COVID funding, some staff have been furloughed, can't work in small bubbles, if a setting closes would they keep their funding.

Cost of replacement teacher while staff off for a week waiting for test results.

Heating costs while keeping windows open for ventilation.

Unable to cover high staff absences – would need to send pupils home.

Early years – parents delaying start dates, reducing hours or not taking up a place was having an impact on staffing as too many staff on the books. Parents opting for more informal childcare arrangements.

Support staff doing extended provision as the current provider couldn't continue.

Natalie Cole proposed using the primary maternity de-delegated fund to support additional maternity costs as the fund was forecasting an underspend and agreed to cost up the proposal.

Natalie reported that, following the first round of COVID claims in the summer, half had been agreed and paid by the DfE, the remaining ones were being scrutinised as a number may not be eligible; outstanding claims were expected to be settled in the next six weeks. It was noted that there was uncertainty around what could be claimed in the next round but would probably be evidence based. Forum members were advised that schools should keep clear records of COVID related extra spend.

Councillor Cernik commented that having a list of cost pressures leading up to Christmas and beyond would be very useful. David McNaught requested Forum members feedback any specific cases, current or expected costs in the future to Schools Forum Clerk.

8. Next meeting

Tuesday 8 December 2020 4.30 - 6.30 Virtual.