

Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, virtual meeting, on 8 February 2022, subject to final approval 5 July Schools Forum

Members	Representing	Attendance
Schools and Academies		
Alan Brown	Primary headteachers	Attended
Julie Chambers	Primary headteachers	Absent
Sarah Curtis	Primary headteachers	Attended
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	Attended
David Nield	Primary governors	Attended
Nick Lacey	Primary governors	Absent
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Attended
Mike Holland	Secondary headteachers	Attended
David Rowlands	Secondary governors	Attended
Rob Williams	Secondary governors	Absent
Mike McCann	Special headteachers	Attended
Philip Hopwood	Special governors	Attended
Andy Stewart	PRU	Attended
Deborah Beaumont	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Sarah Connolly	Academies - mainstream	Absent
Darran Jones	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Steve Ellis	Academies - mainstream	Substitute
Luci Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Jason Lowe	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Helen Studley	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Marie Allen	Academies - special	Attended
Non Schools		
Sue Anderson	PVI early years providers	Attended
Angela Thornton	PVI early years providers	Attended
Kathryn Magiera	Diocese	Absent
Caroline Vile	Diocese	Attended
Greg Foster	Unions	Attended
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		
Amera Choudhary	Commissioning Officer	
Natalie Cole	Finance Manager	
Charlotte Fenn	Clerk	
Emma Meekin	Commissioning Manager	
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.

2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting**2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 18 January 2022**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 18 January 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

2.2 Matters arising**2.2.1 Item 3 School Information Management System (SIMS) Update and Options**

Forum members asked if there was a further update regarding SIMS. Natalie Cole reported that they had no further information.

Some Forum members commented they were aware of schools receiving their contracts with the six-month break clause option, should they sign up by 20 February 2022; some schools, as part of due diligence, were looking at other systems.

3. Arrangements for funding from the High Needs Block 2022-2023

Natalie Cole went through the key points in the report to update Schools Forum on proposed arrangements for allocations from the High Needs Block for commissioned services, places and top up funding.

Forum members' attention was drawn to the table in paragraph 5 which outlined the allocation to budgets to fund current expenditure and further growth and investment. Forum's attention was also drawn to the table in paragraph 7 which showed the demand for high needs places and gaps in provision for September 2022. It was noted that the proposals to address the gaps would be considered through a combination of increased place numbers and new provisions to be finalised by the Local Authority Priority Working Group.

It was noted that the supplementary funding was being treated as additional high needs funding and not as an amount per school. £300k supplementary funding had been earmarked for exceptional inflationary cost pressures for providers who could demonstrate that additional national insurance and energy costs could not be afforded from the planned use of reserves.

Forum's attention was also drawn to Appendix A and existing exceptional funding arrangements.

Natalie sought Forum's view on the proposals.

David Rowlands commented that they would find it difficult to better these proposals. Mike McCann was appreciative of the conversation officers had with special school colleagues regarding realigning commissioned place numbers and reviewing top up funding rates.

Resolved that Schools Forum endorse the: -

- i. proposed approach to allocating funding for further investment; and
- ii. proposals for high needs funding arrangements for schools.

4. Improving Children's Speech, Language and Communication in Schools

Emma Meekin introduced the item and took Forum members through the report circulated, separately, prior to the meeting.

The report provided information and data on the needs of children and young people in relation to speech, language and communication, service demand and service delivery and proposals to improve service provision.

Emma sought Forums view on the proposals.

David Nield asked which was seen as the highest priority. Emma responded that they worked together as identification support and would be difficult to separate; however, officers could have a look at a mix of proposals.

David Rowlands supported the proposals and felt the two functions should be developed together, i.e., the need to diagnose early and spread the skills within the schools but leave the more complex cases to the professionals.

Questions were raised as to the cost of the proposals. Natalie Cole responded there was a £200k investment from September, the options in the paper reflected the full year cost and the full year commitment would need to be factored into next year. It was noted that the spend might increase incrementally whilst appointing staff.

In response to a question as to whether there was going to be availability of funding going forward beyond 2022-2023, Natalie confirmed that if the project continued it would be the first commitment on funds in future years.

Forum members liked the online option for Infant Language Link.

Questions were asked as to the percentage of appointments missed and the reasons. Emma responded that often families struggled and did not engage with taking children to appointments, services did not have the capacity to follow up missed appointments.

It was noted that Forum would like to take forward all the proposals, but Forum acknowledged that this might not be affordable and felt it best to focus on and develop the areas which would have the greatest effect and best value.

5. Early Years Funding for 2022-2023

Natalie Cole introduced the report which detailed the proposed budget allocation for the early years block and funding of the two, three and four year old entitlements through the Early Years Funding Formula (EYFF) and Early Years Inclusion Support Fund (EYISF).

Natalie took Forum through the proposed budget allocations outlined in the paper and drew Forum members' attention to appendix A which outlined the proposed Cheshire West and Chester 2022-2023 Early Years Single Funding Formula.

It was noted that appendix B entitled Early Years Inclusion Support Funding was for information as the current assessment framework remained unchanged.

Natalie sought comments from Forum.

Sue Anderson felt that despite the implied investment in early years funding, the Early Years sector was not in a good situation with a slight increase this year followed by a decrease in funding and the impact of the reduced Quality supplement.

Natalie sought to clarify Sue's comment regarding decreasing funding; Natalie was not aware of a proposed decrease in funding; however, the birth rate was declining which would impact on funding.

Natalie provided clarified regarding the impact of the reduced quality supplement. Providers with staff members holding an appropriate Qualified Teacher Status would have a 12p reduction on the quality supplement from 25p to 13p but once these funds were redistributed, they would get 10p back through the increased base rate. £70,000 was being redistributed.

Angela Thornton commented that it was an issue of equality, spending was high on funding speech and language therapy in school, if got speech and language right in early years they might need to spend less later. Also, funding was not considering the cost-of-living increase.

Sue Anderson acknowledged that Officers could not do anything else and accepted they were working within the funds available but felt it was going to be a difficult year for early years providers.

Natalie appreciated and acknowledged the comments made by Forum.

Resolved that the Schools Forum endorse the increase in base rate funding for 2022-2023.

6. Schools Financial Value Standard 2021-2022

Natalie Cole introduced the report which provided an update to Schools Forum on the requirements of the Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) submission for maintained schools for 2021-2022 which was due to be submitted to the Local Authority by 31 March 2022.

It was noted that the report was for information and representatives of maintained schools and Governing Bodies were asked to share the update with their representative bodies.

Natalie reported that a training session had been done that morning which had been attended by approximately 40 schools. Further guidance had been sent out on slides as part of the training and Natalie was happy to pick up any questions from schools.

Natalie also requested that schools access the most recent guidance as there were several new questions. Forum members' attention was drawn to appendix A which summarised the changes to checklist questions.

It was noted that schools no longer need to complete the data for the dashboard review; the dashboard for each school was publicly available. The DfE was also providing further analysis through the View My Financial Insights (VFMI) tool.

Forum members sought clarification regarding the new requirement for recording related party transactions and whether a nil return was required.

Philip Hopwood confirmed that schools were only required to put information on their website if schools had staff paid more than £100k.

7. Any Other Business

None to report.

8. Next meeting

Next Schools Forum meeting Tuesday 5 July 2022.