

Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, held at Queen's Park High School, Chester, on 14 January 2020 approved at 10 February meeting

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	Apologies
Kate Docherty	Primary headteachers	Attended
Duncan Haworth (Chair)	Primary governors	Attended
Helen Hill	Primary governors	Attended
Paul Healey	Primary governors	Attended
Kath Lloyd	Primary governors	Apologies
David Nield	Primary governors	Attended
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Attended
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	Apologies
Andy Stewart	PRU	Attended
Vacancy	Academies - mainstream	Vacancy
Vacancy	Academies - mainstream	Vacancy
Luci Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Jason Lowe	Academies - mainstream	Absent
Helen Studley	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Lyndsay Watterson	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Marie Allen	Academies - special	Attended
Non Schools		
Paula Adolph	PVI early years providers	Absent
Sue Anderson	PVI early years providers	Apologies
Kathryn Magiera	Diocese	Absent
Caroline Vile	Diocese	Absent
Greg Foster	Unions	Attended
Geoff Wright	Unions	Absent
Rob Pullen	CWAPH	Attended
Vacancy	16-19 providers	Vacancy
Non-voting Observers		
Councillor Nicole Meardon	Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Absent
Officers in attendance		
Mark Parkinson	Director of Education and Inclusion (job share)	
David McNaught	Director of Education and Inclusion (job share)	
Natalie Cole	Finance Manager	
Charlotte Fenn	Clerk	
Debbie Freeman	SEN Manager	

1. Introductions and apologies

Apologies were noted.

Duncan Haworth introduced and welcomed to the meeting three new representatives:

Helen Studley	The Samara Trust representing mainstream Academies
Helen Hill	Woodlands Primary representing primary governors
Paul Healey	Eaton Primary representing primary governors

Duncan reported the following Academy representative resignations:

Amanda Harrison	The Winsford Academy (The Fallibroome Trust)
Stephanie Cade	Concordia Multi Academy Trust

It was noted that the Clerk would seek nominations and conduct an election to fill the vacancies.

2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 10 December 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on the 10 December 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

2.2 Matters arising

2.2.1 Item 2.2.3 Implementing mandatory minimum per pupil funding levels Government consultation

Natalie Cole reported to Schools Forum on the DfE's response to the recent consultation on implementing mandatory minimum per pupil funding levels. The DfE had acknowledged the issues raised by many LA's, including CW&C, about the lack of funding for small and rural schools. It was noted that the DfE were considering ways to ensure the NFF (National Funding Formula) better supported these schools.

2.2.2 Item 2.2.5 Early Years Provider Hub

Natalie Cole reported that a communication had not been sent to PVI settings as there was nothing new to communicate. The current Early Years Provider Hub had agreed to process the January payments to Early Years settings, as normal, whilst the LA was seeking a new provider.

2.2.3 Item 5 Any Other Business - Funding Gypsy Romany Traveller (GRT) Pupils

Mark Parkinson reported that a letter had not yet been drafted as Officers were awaiting a response from Sharon Wyatt, Horn's Mill Primary School. Officers would follow this up.

3. High Needs Review

Mark Parkinson introduced the report which broadly outlined the potential financial implications of the outcomes from the High Needs Review.

Mark summarised the background to and phases of the High Needs review as outlined in paragraphs two to eight. It was noted that work would continue on the outcomes of the review over the next few years making sure SEN pupils were better supported. Mark reported the 10 recommendations related to key areas of development but were by no means all that was being done around SEN. It was acknowledged that the number of SEN pupils continued to rise and finances were stretched but in raw terms the LA was in a better position than many other authorities.

Mark referred Forum members to paragraph nine, which outlined the 10 recommendations, and went through the financial implications.

It was noted that the 0-25 Inclusion Framework (ref recommendation one and two) had been well received by SENCOs and parents, providing transparency and ensuring SEN funds were used fairly and equitably. Mark made reference to appendix 1 which gave an example of the post 16 framework as an illustration of what was being done to clarify needs and the level of provision.

Mark made reference to a proposed £200,000 transfer from the Schools block to High Needs block (recommendation three) to develop models and demonstrate what works to increase levels of outreach from special schools and promote inclusion in mainstream. It was noted that, following the 2013 review, high quality local provision had been developed reducing out of borough placements but special schools were now full.

Debbie Freeman informed Forum that recommendations three and four were closely linked; as well as looking at outreach models they would be looking at resource provision and how to support primary pupils transferring to secondary schools rather than special schools.

Mark acknowledged David Curry's concerns for the need to frame the language used differently so as not to infer blame; in some cases secondary schools did not take pupils as it was not the right setting for them.

It was noted that with the right match, MLD pupils could have their needs met in secondary schools, however, it was acknowledged that secondary staff were becoming deskilled as most MLD pupils went to Special school MLD provision.

Sarah Curtis raised an issue regarding not receiving additional element two funding when taking a SEN pupil in year and cited a recent case in her school. Mark acknowledged the comment; it was something that would need to be worked through as part of the modelling to solve practicalities.

Mike McCann responded that there was also a perverse disincentive as special schools lost top-up funding when a pupil moved to mainstream, though this would not prevent a pupil moving when appropriate.

Mark reported that recommendation five and changes to top-up funding would be included in a further High Needs paper to be presented at the February Forum meeting.

Mark made reference to recommendation seven and remodelling residential provision. It was acknowledged that the authority's residential provision was good or outstanding and well received by parents. Mike McCann was keen to engage with the remodelling as the need had been identified in a previous review but not moved forward. It was noted that Sarah Banks, Senior Manager, Disable Children's Service, would be addressing this area.

Mark informed Forum, referencing recommendation eight, that the challenge for his team was to develop a post-16 offer, similar to that offered out of borough, locally and cheaper.

It was acknowledged that continued investment in workforce development at all levels and building confidence in our staff was important (reference recommendation nine). It was noted that no specific financial provision had been put in place yet but would be looked at alongside addressing how to sustain resources moving into the future.

Mark reminded Forum that governors and leaders need to engage with the process and investing in staff.

Resolved that the Schools Forum agreed to the direction of travel outlined in the report in response to the High Needs Review recommendations.

4. Indicative Dedicated Schools Grant Allocations for 2020-2021 and Budget Setting Proposals

Natalie Cole introduced the report which confirmed the indicative DSG allocation for 2020-2021 and the budget proposals for the next financial year.

Natalie explained that the paper was the same as the one discussed at the December Forum but now had the revised allocations subsequently provided by the ESFA.

Natalie referred Forum members to the budget planning proposals on page 48 and the proposal to transfer £200,000 from the Schools block to the High Needs block that had been referenced under the High Needs review, item three.

Sarah Curtis questioned what impact the two proposed independent special schools opening in Chester would have on the high needs budget. It was noted that these schools provided provision for autistic children. Mark Parkinson responded that this could increase demand on the high needs budget especially if there was a year on year increase in demand for autism provision.

Natalie drew Forums attention to the continuation of funding the Duke of Edinburgh programme proposal in paragraph 11. David Curry reported that CWASH unanimously supported and valued the Duke of Edinburgh programme. Lyndsay Watterson added that her school could not have done without the risk assessment and support network provided through Edsential. It was noted that there was also a strong drive from parents for pupils to take part in the Duke of Edinburgh programme, if there were additional costs this might discourage pupils from participation. No other alternatives to funding other than via the Schools block were put forward by Forum.

The Chair put the proposals set out in the paper to the vote.

Resolved that the Schools Forum:

- i. approve the draft DSG budget proposals in Appendix B (vote: unanimous);
- ii. approve the transfer of £200k from the schools block to high needs block to create a fund to develop new models of provision to promote inclusion in mainstream schools especially for children with MLD in line with the outcome of the High Needs Review; (vote: unanimous)
- iii. agree to transfer £25,000 from Schools block to fund the Duke of Edinburgh programme for one year and review funding options next year (vote: unanimous); and
- iv. note the next steps for confirming the DSG budget proposals for 2020-2021.

5. Draft of 2020-2021 School Funding Formula for January Submission

Natalie Cole introduced the report which detailed the draft School Funding Formula for 2020-2021 and tabled the draft 2020-2021 school allocations compared with 2019-2020 for illustrative purposes only and not to be circulated further.

It was noted that the draft school allocations did not include premises factor rates, PFI or split sites factors which were still to be confirmed. Natalie drew Forum members' attention to the prior attainment allocations which showed that a number of schools would receive a reduction in this funding. A change in the data set resulting in a drop in pupils attracting this funding would adversely affect primary schools. It was noted these schools would be protected by a positive MFG (0.5%) but would not get the 4% promised by the DfE.

Natalie referred Forum members to appendix B which summarised the funding by factor for each sector and pointed out that this was the first time for some years that there had been a reduction in primary pupil numbers. It was noted that, broadly, the number of primary pupils had stabilised, pupil growth was now moving into secondary. Natalie Cole informed Forum that the primary/secondary funding ratio of 1:25 was now average.

Natalie provided an update on the recent review of the split site criteria and proposed changes. It was noted the criteria and values had been in place since 2013. Two schools were eligible for funding under the current criteria, Hartford High and Darnhall Primary.

It was noted that as part of the review Natalie had sought, from the two schools, their evaluation of additional costs of operating a split site and benchmarked them against similar schools to ascertain what was additional.

Having reviewed split site criteria used by other authorities it was proposed that

- The additional allowance will continue to apply only in exceptional circumstances and will be limited to schools operating sites separated by an adopted highway.
- The value of the allocation would include a consideration of the additional costs associated with the duplication of facilities, supplies and services, additional staffing resources and inter-site travel.

- The criteria will recognise where increasing distance and number of buildings increases the additional costs to the school
- any revisions to this formula factor remain affordable from within the premises and growth allocation rather than from the NFF factors funding all schools.

Mike Holland raised concerns that changing the criteria might open the authority to challenge.

It was noted that Hartford High was having a new building next financial year resulting in a level of savings; although it would still be a split site it would not fall into the new criteria.

Natalie proposed that Hartford High be allowed a transitional year for 2020-2021 with the allocation reducing in September and the allowance being removed in full in 2021-2022.

It was noted that Darnhall Primary and Woodlands Primary would be eligible under the new criteria and the proposal was to allocate £35,000 to each school.

Resolved that the Schools Forum (School, Academy and PVI representatives) approve:

- i. the principles on which the funding formula is based for final submission to the ESFA, as outline in the paper: and
- ii. the changes to the split site criteria and transitional funding for Hartford HS.

6. Combined Budgets Expenditure

Natalie Cole introduced the report which outlined the proposed allocation of the combined budgets element of the DSG for 2020-2021 which also included the former miscellaneous budget items.

Natalie drew Forum members' attention to the reduction of the Schools' Improvement and Intervention team DSG funding, as outlined in table 1. It was noted that the LA was putting in funding to reinstate most of the reduction (subject to Council approval).

Resolved that the Schools' Forum agree the allocation and configuration of the combined budgets element of the DSG and the miscellaneous expenditure for the 2020-2021 financial year as outlined in the paper, (for the Duke of Edinburgh programme funding refer to item 4 resolution).

7. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2019-2020 Forecast Outturn at Third Review

Natalie Cole introduced the report which provided an update on the financial forecast outturn position for 2019-2020 for centrally held DSG as reported at the Third Review.

It was noted that the position had significantly improved from the forecast overspend position at the Second Review (not previously reported) due to the updated costs for post 16 high needs students.

Natalie reported that the SEN team were reviewing why the funds put aside for post 16 high needs students had not been required.

Resolved that the Forum note the Third Review position on the DSG.

8. AOB – Agree Chair for 11 February 2020 meeting

Duncan Haworth reported that neither he nor the vice chair were able to attend the February meeting therefore a Chair needed to be agreed. It had also been brought to his attention that there was a clash with the CWAPH conference. With the resulting low attendance there was also the possibility of the Forum not being quorate.

It was noted that the meeting might be moved to Monday 10 February and Forum would be informed once a decision had been made.

9. Next meeting

February date to be confirmed.