

Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, virtual meeting, on 19 October 2021

| Members | Representing | Attendance |
|-------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Schools and Academies | | |
| Alan Brown | Primary headteachers | Attended |
| Julie Chambers | Primary headteachers | Apologies |
| 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 |
| Vacancy | Primary governors | Vacancy |
| David Nield | Primary governors | Attended |
| Nick Lacey | Primary governors | Attended |
| David Curry | Secondary headteachers | Attended |
| Mike Holland | Secondary headteachers | Attended |
| John Freeman | Secondary governors | Attended |
| Rob Williams | Secondary governors | Attended |
| Mike McCann | Special headteachers | Attended |
| Philip Hopwood | Special governors | Absent |
| Andy Stewart | PRU | Apologies |
| Sian Thomas | PRU | Substitute |
| Deborah Beaumont | Academies - mainstream | Attended |
| Sarah Connolly | Academies - mainstream | Attended |
| Darran Jones | Academies - mainstream | Attended |
| Luci Jones | Academies - mainstream | Apologies |
| Jason Lowe | Academies - mainstream | Attended |
| Helen Studley | Academies - mainstream | Apologies |
| Marie Allen | Academies - special | Attended |
| Non Schools | | |
| Sue Anderson | PVI early years providers | Attended |
| Kathryn Magiera | Diocese | Absent |
| Caroline Vile | Diocese | Attended |
| Greg Foster | Unions | Absent |
| Geoff Wright | Unions | Absent |
| Rob Pullen | CWAPH | Attended |
| Cat Hirst | PVI early years providers | Apologies |
| Angela Thornton | PVI early years providers | Substitute |
| Vacancy | 16-19 providers | Vacancy |
| Official Observers | | |
| Councillor Robert Cernik | Cabinet Member for Children and Families | Absent |
| Officers in attendance | | |
| Luisa Braig | Social Finance | |
| Michaela Bridge | Manager, Education Access Team & Alternative Provision | |
| Natalie Cole | Finance Manager | |
| Charlotte Fenn | Clerk | |
| Cathy Madge | Social Finance | |
| Debbie Murphy | Acting Head of Education and Inclusion | |
| Bo White | Early Years Commissioner - Education | |

Observer

Councillor Razia Daniels Shadow Cabinet Member for Children and Families

1. Introductions and apologies

Apologies and substitutes were noted.

Duncan reported the following updates to Schools Forum membership:

Deborah Beaumont, Winsford Academy, The Fallibroome Trust, Academies representative replacing Lyndsay Watterson;
David Curry re-elected as Secondary Headteacher's representative;
Duncan Haworth re-elected as Chair; and
John Freeman re-elected as Vice-chair.

2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 6 July 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on the 6 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

2.2 Matters arising

2.2.1 Item 8 Schools NFF consultation on sparsity factor - Consultation response

Duncan reported that, following the recent consultation, it was noted that the DfE had agreed the proposed changes to the sparsity factor and more schools would be eligible to receive sparsity funding in 2022-2023.

2.2.2 Item 10 Next meeting

Duncan confirmed that the current guidance remained that wherever possible we should continue to hold virtual meetings.

3. Social Finance Averting Exclusions Project

Michaela Bridge introduced co-presenters Luisa Braig and Cathy Madge from Social Finance, a non-profit organisation, and took Forum members through their business model for averting exclusions. The model demonstrated how it would be self-funding and possible savings by doing something different with top-up funding. Copy of the presentation was to be circulated to Schools Forum.

Following analysis of exclusions data, the pilot was taking place in three secondary Ellesmere Port schools as their pupils were most representative of pupils who were likely to be excluded under two key types of exclusions that could be treated early, persistent verbal abuse and disruptive behaviour.

Forum members asked if less admissions and the impact on funding at The Bridge had been factored in. Michaela responded that the pilot would not have any impact on the main base funding as they would be reprioritising top-up funding. The Bridge would be commissioned to provide interventions; amongst other things savings could be made on

transport costs for pupils placed in out of borough provision. Though there was a caveat that if the pilot did not work out the exclusions would still need support.

A question was raised as to what would happen to The Bridge if the pilot was successful and there was less need for The Bridge. It was noted that the freed-up capacity would enable The Bridge to carry out more interventions and bring in revenue from that funding stream.

Resolved that Schools Forum note the project and requested that Michaela Bridge report back progress to CWEIB (Cheshire West Education Improvement Board).

4. Early Years Funding Formula Consultation and proposal for 2022-2023

Bo White introduced the report which 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.

Bo provided some background. There were almost 300 early years providers across the borough, half were PVI (Private, Voluntary & Independent), 100 child minders and 44 nursery units in schools. Providers had feedback over the last three years that the base rate was low and requested it be increased.

It was noted, from the benchmarking data for 2019-20, CW&C were a clear outlier with the lowest base rate and one of the few authorities paying the QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) supplement.

Forum members' attention was drawn to table 1 outlining the key requirements on local authority funding of providers in 2022-2023.

The consultation sought views from providers on the three current supplements which made up the funding formula in addition to the universal base rate. Bo took Schools Forum members through the key findings from the consultation outlined in paragraph 8 and the proposed changes outlined in table 2.

Sue Anderson acknowledged the amount of work that had been put into producing the paper but raised concerns regarding the 44% who would be worse off following the phasing out of the Quality supplement. Sue noted that settings had been rated as good or outstanding because of the qualified teachers they employed & continued to employ in order to maintain their rating and with the cost of living going up they could not afford to lose any funding. Sue felt unable to support the proposal. Sue also stated that she had repeatedly asked the LA to lobby, on behalf of settings, for more funding but had seen no evidence of this.

Natalie Cole responded that funding concerns had been raised through the f40 group of which CW&C were a member.

Angela Thornton was in agreement with Sue Anderson's comments. Angela also requested that settings be notified of the funding rate by Christmas, instead of April, as they were running a business and needed to look at reducing costs.

Natalie Cole explained that the DfE timeframe did not allow for earlier notification; DfE figures were received in December and taken to January Forum prior to the rate being finalised at Full Council in February. Currently the January census headcount was used for deprivation, however the new model would remove the delay and uncertainty. It was also noted that CW&C have a complicated formula, more so than other authorities, adding to delays. The proposal addressed the consultation feedback that the base rate was too low, officers understood the funding issues but had to work within the finite funding available.

Sue commented that it was a shame the consultation response had been so low. Natalie surmised that the response was low because the formula was too complicated.

Kate Docherty acknowledged that Bo had a difficult job but understood the needs of the wider group, however felt that the paper should have shown the actual financial impact on each provider, to see, for example, if some sectors were more disadvantaged; high quality teaching was not an area they wished to lose. Kate also had reservations regarding phasing out of the Quality supplement but understood the bigger picture.

Bo confirmed that modelling had been done at individual provider level to see the impact. It was also noted that the provider impact, paragraph 18- 20, had been shown as percentages because the hours claimed varied widely.

Sue Anderson acknowledged that the proposed deprivation methodology made sense but questioned whether they were hitting people twice i.e. were the some providers dipping out on the quality supplement.

Angela Thornton raised concerns regarding the modelling and impact data, as provider claims differ year on year, and felt that the report was not being transparent.

Officers responded that the report utilised the data available, it was not possible to mitigate against changes in pupil take up, and the report was trying to articulate what was a very complicated area as all settings are different.

David Nield asked if there was any correlation between providers rated good or outstanding and those which employed qualified teachers. Bo responded that 50% were in receipt of the quality supplement but they were not seeing any clear benefits.

Bo asked Forum if they had any views regarding the two-tier supplement. In response to a question regarding what impact removing the lower level would have, it was noted that the impact would be minimal.

Resolved that Schools Forum:

- i. endorse the recommended changes to the deprivation methodology to be altered so that an hourly uplift is applied to the rate for individual children (residing in the top 30% Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) postcodes) in real time rather than a proportional rate based on historic headcount data;
- ii. voice their concerns and reservations regarding the recommendation that

the Quality supplement be phased out over a two year period, halving in year one with consideration of full removal in year two, and ask the Council to consider if this is the right thing to do; and

- iii. endorse the recommendation that the rurality supplement remain in place at the current level.

5. School Information Management System Update and Options

Item deferred to December's meeting; Officers had not got all the data required for the report.

6. School Funding Arrangements 2022-2023

Natalie Cole took Forum through the report which provided details on the school funding arrangements for 2022-2023.

It was noted that this was the last year of the three-year government commitment to a £7.1 billion increase in funding.

Forum's attention was drawn to paragraphs 15-16 and the proposal not to further consult with schools as there were no changes in the formula factors from 2021-2022 for the LA to consider.

Forum had no questions regarding the paper.

Resolved that Schools Forum:

- i. note the report;
- ii. endorse the Finance Subgroup proposal not to further consult with schools; and
- iii. recommend the Schools Block funding formula continuing to mirror the Schools National Funding Formula (SNFF) values for 2022-2023.

7. Final Allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2021-2022

Natalie Cole introduced the report to Forum highlighting the changes from the draft allocation used in budget setting for this financial year.

Natalie referred Forum to table 2 which outlined the adjustments made to budgets in accordance with the reason for the change in the allocation.

It was noted that there had been no update to Early Years Block funding in the July settlement. Due to Covid, termly headcounts were being submitted and the final early years allocation was expected in December.

Forum had no questions regarding the paper.

Resolved 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 2021-2022.

8. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2021-2022 Forecast Outturn at First Review

Natalie Cole went through the report which provided an update on the financial forecast outturn position for 2021-2022 for centrally held DSG as reported at the First Review.

It was noted that the forecast was based on the position as at July 2021. The key variance related to pressure from tribunals and increase in the number of cases judged in favour of independent school placements. These costs had been mitigated by vacancies within the service.

Forum had no questions regarding the paper.

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

9. Response to Fair school funding for all: completing our reforms to the National Funding Formula

Forum members noted the consultation response submitted by Schools Forum finance subgroup on behalf of Schools Forum.

10. Any Other Business

Duncan Haworth informed Forum that John Freeman was stepping down as secondary governor representative and this was his last meeting. Duncan thanked John for his many years of service on Schools Forum.

11. Next meeting

7 December 2021 4.30 - 6.30 virtual.