

Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, virtual meeting, on 8 February 2021 - approval at 6 July Forum

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
Kerry Forrester	Primary headteachers	Substitute
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
Lisa Rigby	Primary governors	Substitute
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Attended
Mike Holland	Secondary headteachers	Apologies
John Freeman	Secondary governors	Attended
Rob Williams	Secondary governors	Attended
Mike McCann	Special headteachers	Attended
Philip Hopwood	Special governors	Attended
Katie Tyrie	Nursery headteachers	Attended
Andy Stewart	PRU	Attended
Sarah Connolly	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Darran Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Luci Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Jason Lowe	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Helen Studley	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Lyndsay Watterson	Academies - mainstream	Attended
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	Absent
Vacancy	16-19 providers	Vacancy
Official Observers		
Councillor Robert Cernik	Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Attended
Officers in attendance		
Natalie Cole	Finance Manager	
Charlotte Fenn	Clerk	
Debbie Freeman	Senior Manager SEN	
Mark Nixon	SEN Manager, EHCP	
Bo White	Early Years Commissioner	
David McNaught	Director of Education and Inclusion	Apologies

Observer

Councillor Razia Daniels Shadow Cabinet Member for Children and Families

1. Introductions and apologies

Apologies and substitutes were noted.

Duncan Haworth reported the following updates to Schools Forum membership:

Resignation

Helen Hill Primary Governor

Term of office extended

Sue Anderson PVI

Greg Foster Unions

2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 12 January 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on the 12 January 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

2.2 Matters arising

None to report.

3. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Budget Setting Proposals 2021-2022

Natalie Cole introduced the report which presented the DSG budget proposals for the next financial year.

Schools Forum members' attention was drawn to appendix A which set out the draft budget proposals. It was noted that proposals two and three were to meet existing levels of expenditure and proposal five reviewed 2020 -2021 budgets required to set an in year balanced budget.

Sue Anderson sought clarification regarding whether Early Years would receive the £400k temporary funding as previously. Natalie Cole responded that as reported at the January meeting there was still uncertainty regarding funding levels as officers were waiting for the pupil census data and further guidance from the DfE. The spring term 2021 funding would be capped at 85% of January 2020 take-up, leaving local authorities to bridge any gap in take up.

In response to Philip Hopwood's question regarding the DSG recovery plan, Natalie informed Forum that no guidance had been provided as to a set timeline for recovery, but it was clear that there was a big piece of work to carry out, following the High Needs review outcomes, over the next year to address the ongoing annual increases in High Needs spend.

David Neild questioned how accurate the Third Review forecast figures were. Natalie responded that it was difficult to forecast as High Needs was a demand led budget, with no buffer; pupils placed at an Independent school could cost £100,000.

It was also noted that the Government had announced they were to carry out a High Needs funding review.

Natalie drew forum members' attention to appendix B which outlined changes to centrally held budgets.

Philip Hopwood asked if there was any nonfinancial impact as a result of the reduction in centrally held funds. Natalie responded as far as she was aware initiatives were not ceasing but would be supported by the School Intervention Manager reprioritising their budget.

It was noted that a review of the Duke of Edinburgh service level agreement had not been taken forward, but discussions were due to take place in 2021-2022 on how Edsential could move to a traded service.

Resolved that the Schools Forum

- i. endorse the draft DSG budget proposals in Appendix A for approval by Council;
- ii. approve the central spend budgets in Appendix B;
- iii. agree the proposal to review future funding arrangements for the Duke of Edinburgh programme; and
- iv. note the next steps for confirming the DSG budget proposals and DSG recovery plan.

4. Early Years Funding for 2021-2022

Natalie Cole introduced the report and took Forum through the proposed budget allocation for the early years block and funding of the two, three and four-year-old entitlements for 2021-2022 through the Early Years Funding Formula (EYFF) and Early Years Inclusion Support Fund (EYISF).

Bo White reported that the membership of the Early Years Reference group had been reviewed and they now had full membership. Their first priority was to review the groups terms of reference, as they had not been reviewed since first established, then relook at the funding formula and the sustainability of the sector going forward.

Resolved that Schools Forum approve the increase in base rate funding for 2021-2022.

5. Arrangements for funding from the High Needs Block 2021-2022

Debbie Freeman introduced the report which updated Schools Forum on proposed arrangements for allocations from the High Needs Block for 2021-2022 for commissioned places and top up funding.

Forum members' attention was drawn to top up funding in paragraph 4 & appendix D. It was noted that when benchmarked CW&C was an outlier with higher top up funding than other local authorities

Mark Nixon took Forum members through the data analysis and main themes set out in paragraph 7 and appendix E.

David Nield asked whether the natural consequence of reducing band B funding would result in more EHC plans in the future and would the workload be manageable.

Debbie Freeman responded that officers were aware that there would be some increase in work; most local authorities were moving away from the top up model and more to the statutory process and plans. Mark Nixon commented that he expected to see a similar pattern to when the bands were reduced from four to three of an initial increase in plans then falling back to current levels.

Attention was drawn to appendix A and commissioned places in special schools and resource provision. Mike McCann recognised that there was an increasing trend in special schools where the numbers on roll were over the commissioned places and questioned whether historical data might be of use to illustrate the impact of this trend and meeting the needs of pupils. Mike also raised the issue of finding space to accommodate the additional pupils.

Debbie Freeman acknowledged the concerns of colleagues and reported that the local authority had some SEND Capital funds and where best to provide places was part of the High Needs Strategic Review.

Philip Hopwood asked whether, following on from the review and going down the route of increasing SEN pupils in mainstream schools, would there be any unintentional consequences.

Debbie Freeman responded that there was a significant level of top up funding but there was no process to monitor outcomes, progress, or accountability. In order to ensure equality and fairness it might be more appropriate to go down the assessment route.

David Nield asked whether other local authorities were allocating the mainstreamed grants on a similar basis. Natalie Cole responded that CW&C were consistent with other local authorities.

In response to the recommendations Schools Forum considered it:

- i. sensible to retain current top up funding rates, commissioned places and exceptional funding arrangements in Appendices A, B and C, unchanged from 2020-2021;
- ii. the right way forward for top up funding without an EHCP to be allocated at Band A only from April 2021; and
- iii. the right way forward for allocations of mainstreamed Teacher's Pay Grant (TPG) and Teacher's Pension Employer Contributions Grant (TPECG) to special and alternative provision schools to be allocated as a lump sum.

6. Introduction to the DFE DSG management tool

Natalie Cole introduced the item and referred Forum members to the DSG recovery plan template, circulated separately, and explained the process.

It was noted that the template had been populated with some of the existing pupil data and financials and would continue to be updated during the summer term and brought back to Forum at regular points. Natalie informed Forum members that the data used would be published data and not include specific schools; the recovery plan would be available to Members as part of the governance process for signing off.

It was noted that the recovery plan strategy would be developed from the High Needs Strategic Review outcomes and the workstream working groups. The 2021-2022 information and forecast would be completed by the end of March. It was noted that some data had been pre-populated by the DfE but didn't take account of changes to the way data was collected. Forum members attention was drawn to the EHCP and top up trend data on page 6.

Natalie informed Forum members that the recovery plan would be co-produced with interested parties.

David Nield asked how much extra work was involved in pulling together the recovery plan. Natalie responded that only local authorities in deficit were required to complete the template, but the amount of work was significant. However, we were late in coming to this stage as the template was already in use by many other local authorities and as the DfE was about to hold a SEND review imminently it was hoped the DfE was already making progress on some solutions.

Natalie sought Forum members view on how they wished the recovery plan to be communicated to them and suggested it be shared annually as part of the budget setting process.

7. Any Other Business

None to report

8. Next meeting

6 July 2021 4.30 - 6.30 virtual.