

**Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, Queen's Park High School,  
Chester 8 October 2019 minutes approved 10 December 2019**

<b>Members</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
<b>Schools and Academies</b>		
Alan Brown	Primary headteachers	Attended
Julie Chambers	Primary headteachers	Attended
Sarah Curtis	Primary headteachers	Apologies
Ian Devereux Roberts	Primary headteachers	Attended
Kate Docherty	Primary headteachers	Attended
Duncan Haworth	Primary governors	Apologies
Kath Lloyd	Primary governors	Apologies
David Nield	Primary governors	Attended
Vacancy	Primary governors	Vacancy
Vacancy	Primary governors	Vacancy
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Attended
Mike Holland	Secondary headteachers	Attended
John Freeman (Chair)	Secondary governors	Attended
David Rowlands	Secondary governors	Attended
Mike McCann	Special headteachers	Absent
Peter Gaskell	Special governors	Substitute
Phil Hopwood	Special governors	Apologies
Katie Tyrrie	Nursery headteachers	Apologies
Andy Stewart	PRU	Attended
Stephanie Cade	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Amanda Harrison	Academies - mainstream	Absent
Luci Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Jason Lowe	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Lyndsay Watterson	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Vacancy	Academies - mainstream	Vacancy
Marie Allen	Academies - special	Attended
<b>Non Schools</b>		
Paula Adolph	PVI	Absent
Sue Anderson	PVI	Attended
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
<b>Non-voting Observers</b>		
Councillor Nicole Meardon	Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Absent
<b>Officers in attendance</b>		
Mark Parkinson	Director of Education and Inclusion	
Natalie Cole	Finance Manager	
Charlotte Fenn	Clerk	
Rosemary Hodgson	HR Officer	
<b>Public/Observers</b>		
None		

## 1. Introductions and apologies

Apologies were noted from Stephanie Cade, Sarah Curtis, Duncan Haworth, Philip Hopwood (substitute Peter Gaskell), Kath Lloyd, Jason Lowe (not reported at meeting) and Katie Tyrie.

John Freeman reported the following changes in membership and welcomed the new members:

Member	Representing	Taking over from
Luci Jones	Academies - mainstream	John Murray
Rob Pullen	CWAPH chair	Hilary Berry
Julie Chambers	Primary heads	Sarah Worthington
Kathryn Magiera	Diocese	standing for a further term

John Freeman reported the following resignations:

Member	Representing
Dave Bradburn	Primary Governors
Sue Yarnall	Primary Governors
Harry Ziman	Academies – mainstream

It was noted that Harry Ziman had written a few words which he wished to be shared with Forum members and officers which would be circulated by the Clerk.

## 2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

### 2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 8 July 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on the 8 July 2019 were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

Kath Lloyd had sent her apologies but this had been omitted from the minutes.

### 2.2 Matters arising

#### Item 10 - Any other business – St Mary's Nursery

Natalie Cole clarified the statement made regarding St Mary's Nursery's rates, it was noted that, under the current funding arrangements, Primary and Secondary schools were funded for rates whereas Nurseries were not.

## 3 Apprenticeship levy

Rosemary Hodgson provided a presentation which included a brief outline of who contributed to the levy, what the fund could be used for, apprenticeship standards, challenges associated with utilising the funds and how to encourage schools to use the levy. There were a number of restrictions on how funds could be spent which created financial and resource pressure on schools wishing to

use the levy. The funds could not be used for wages, travel and subsidiary costs, managerial costs or costs of setting up an apprenticeship programme.

Forum members welcomed the suggestion of show casing examples and asked as to what approximate costs could be claimed. Rosemary responded that there were funding brackets for different types of apprenticeships.

It was noted that an SEN apprenticeship was in the early developmental stage. It was also noted that there were opportunities for existing staff.

Questions were asked as to what expectations there were that an apprentice would stay on as a staff member. Rosemary responded that there was an expectation in the Apprenticeship Standards that the apprentice would move into a role but this did not happen in all cases. It was also noted that the number of apprenticeships in schools was not known as not all schools bought into HR services.

Mark Parkinson encouraged Forum members to speak with their colleagues and get more involved with the apprenticeship levy and not miss the opportunity of accessing the funds. It was noted that the funding was time sensitive and expired after two years; concerns were raised that it might be lost. It was also noted that the lack of use of the funds was a national issue. Forum members felt, in part, this was due to the number of regulations being a barrier.

#### **4 School Funding Arrangements for 2020-2021**

Natalie Cole introduced the report which contained details on the school funding arrangements for 2020-2021 and the impact on Cheshire West and Chester and proposals for consulting with schools and Schools Forum on the arrangements for 2020-2021.

It was noted that a two week consultation would be held during October, subject to receiving the necessary DfE figures.

Natalie went through the changes to the Schools and High Needs blocks funding arrangements outlined in the report. It was noted that the level of funding for the Central Schools Services block had not yet been announced. Forum was reminded that the government expected the historic element of this block to start reducing from 2020-2021, further information about how this would be approached would be brought back to Forum in January.

Forum members' attention was drawn to paragraph 16 and the five aspects of the funding formula to be covered by the consultation following consideration by the Schools Forum Finance sub group. It was noted that a recommendation would need to be made by Schools Forum by the end of October to meet the timeframes for November Cabinet.

Forum were informed that changes to de-delegation arrangements for SIMS licences would be consulted on with a move to direct charging to schools. This was being considered as more schools were now opting out of SIMS and

purchasing other systems. Schools would still get the beneficial rates of a block contract.

**Resolved that the Schools Forum note**

- i. the report, in particular the proposals that have been put forward by the Finance Sub Group to commence consultation with schools; and
- ii. that Forum is required to make a recommendation on the Schools Block funding formula following the consultation and will be asked to hold a virtual vote or to delegate to the Finance sub group later in October.

**5 Implementing mandatory minimum per pupil funding levels Government consultation**

Natalie Cole introduced the item. The DfE was consulting on how to implement the minimum per pupil funding levels in the National Funding Formula (NFF) on a mandatory basis. Natalie informed Forum members that the consultation had been discussed with the Finance sub group at their last meeting and the response drafted for consideration by Schools Forum. It was noted that the consultation applied to primary and secondary schools and not special schools.

Natalie explained that the methodology to calculate the per pupil funding levels had changed and brought Forums attention to the response to question three and the example demonstrating the concerns raised as to the impact of the proposed changes. Forum also acknowledged the comment that the inclusion of the lump sum, to the calculation, would have a disproportionate effect on small schools who already struggled to be financially viable.

Questions were raised as to whether our schools benefit from the sparsity factor. It was noted that only five schools fell into the defined criteria.

Natalie sought comments and amendments from Forum members. Forum considered the response to be fair and had no amendments.

**Resolved that Schools Forum** agree the consultation response as presented and its submission on behalf of the Forum.

**6 Final Allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2019-2020**

Natalie Cole introduced the item which reported on the final allocation of the DSG for 2019-2020 as published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Natalie highlighted the changes and referred Forum members to table two which outlined the adjustments to the DSG allocation from the draft allocation used in budget setting for this financial year.

**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 2019-2020.

## **7 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2019-2020 Forecast Outturn at First 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 First Review. It was noted that this was the position as at July, officers were currently working on the mid-year position.

Natalie referred Forum members to paragraph three which outlined the key reasons for the net overspend of £0.5m.

Forum members discussed the increased forecast costs for out of borough placements. It was noted that previously the authority had reversed the trend for placements out of borough but now the authority's special schools were full and this was creeping up. It was acknowledged that there were some children in special schools who could have their needs met in mainstream with the right support and skilled staff.

It was noted that when bench marked against other authorities, out of borough placements were lower (though creeping up), and the number of special schools higher.

It was acknowledged that more children were coming through the system with special educational needs. A growing number of children failed to thrive following the transition from both early years to primary and primary to secondary due to a number of factors, resources being one of them.

A question was raised as to the ratio between out of borough placements and special school places. Forum was referred to the recent High Needs Review report on the Council's website [High Needs Review](#).

A question was asked as to what was being done to mitigate the forecast overspend against staffing costs across Children and Families directorate. Mark Parkinson responded that managing the pressures through vacancy management was no longer sustainable; a bid had been put into the authority for additional funding. It was noted that the additional funding announcement from the DfE was for schools and not central funding.

Natalie Cole commented that, despite the reported overspend, the authority was in a better position than some other authorities. Mark Parkinson stated that this was, in part, due to good management and School Forum should be proud of the difficult decision making that they had to undertake. Thanks were expressed by the chair for all the good work of the officers involved in assisting the work of the Forum.

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

## **8 Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) 2019-2020**

Natalie Cole referred Forum members to the tabled report entitled 'Briefing note – New SFVS framework for 2019-20'. It was noted that these changes applied to maintained schools and not academies.

Forum members' attention was drawn to the new dashboard and the proposed changes and communications for CW&C schools outlined in the briefing note. The changes were to ensure schools were operating key controls and policies; it had been noted that some schools did not have key policies in place. Some internal audit findings needed to be addressed across all schools and there was a need to improve evidence and minuting of key controls being actioned.

Forum members acknowledged that the change to the questions would be helpful to governors to address the key points.

Forum members discussed the proposed changes and put forward some suggested refinements.

It was noted that the new requirement for budget monitoring to be carried out six times a year could be undertaken by a subcommittee; some governing bodies already did this and could be used as an example of good practice.

Comments were made that the red/green dashboard ratings were an issue for colour blind people. It was noted that the colour coding was as per the DfE.

Natalie informed Forum that three briefing sessions, for schools, would be held after half term.

## **9 Early Years Provider Hub**

Natalie Cole provided a verbal report on the current status of the Early Years Provider 30 hours eligibility checker system. The authority had received a grant to procure a system and had commissioned OpenObjects, who were now withdrawing from the market. A new system would need to be procured, as a matter of urgency, in order to process provider payments in January. Two other providers have been considered, Capita and Servelec. Capita did not give the full functionality required whereas Servelec did and had the added advantage that other Servelec modules are already in use. The authority had also canvassed the views of other authorities to see what their alternative plans were. ICT's conclusion was to adopt Servelec.

It was noted that some small authorities were opting for a manual process but with 200 plus providers this option was not considered viable.

Natalie informed Forum members that £15,000 implementation costs would be funded by the ICT Capital budget, leaving an estimated budget gap of £52,000 made up of £45,000 module cost and £8,000 annual support and maintenance.

Natalie referred Forum members back to item 6 and the £0.295m early years adjustment payment of which £0.128m was a benefit for 2019-2020 and put forward a proposal that these funds should be used towards the funding gap.

Sue Anderson raised concerns as PVI's were already stretched and asked whether provider details would be transferred to the new system and what training there would be. Natalie was unable to answer the question but acknowledged the concerns and agreed that information would be sent to PVI's as soon as possible.

Mark Parkinson informed Forum members that any legal redress received would be put back into the DSG to offset costs.

The Chair put the proposal to the vote.

**Resolved that Schools Forum** agreed the proposal to fund the £52,000 funding gap from the Early Years adjustment allocation. (Vote: unanimous)

## **10 Any Other Business**

None to report.

## **11 Next meeting**

Next meeting Tuesday 10 December 2019, venue tbc.