

**Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, Queen's Park High School, Chester, 9 July 2018 - Approved at 8 October meeting.**

**Present:**

Marie Allen  
Sue Anderson  
Hilary Berry  
David Charlton (Chair)  
David Curry  
Sarah Curtis  
Steve Dool  
Kate Docherty  
Kerry Forrester (sub for Ian Devereux Roberts)  
Carol Gahan  
Duncan Haworth  
Philip Hopwood  
Luci Jones  
Francis Kwateng  
Kath Lloyd  
Jason Lowe  
Mike McCann  
John Murray  
Andy Stewart  
Katie Tyrie  
Sue Yates

**Representing:**

Academies - Special  
PVI  
CWAPH Chair  
Secondary headteachers  
Secondary headteachers  
Primary headteachers  
Academies - Primary/Secondary  
Primary headteachers  
Primary headteachers  
  
Primary governors  
Primary governors  
Special governors  
Academies - Primary/Secondary  
Primary governors  
Primary governors  
Academies - Primary/Secondary  
Special headteachers  
Academies - Primary/Secondary  
PRU  
Nursery headteacher  
Secondary headteachers

**Officers:**

Natalie Cole  
Charlotte Fenn (Clerk)  
Debbie Gittins  
Anna Jones  
Mark Parkinson  
Debbie Steele

**Official observers:**

**Observers/public:**

**1. Introductions and Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cheryl Bullen, Ian Devereux Roberts, John Freeman, Kathryn Magiera, Councillor Meardon, Sue Pearson (not reported at meeting), David Rowlands, Caroline Vile and Harry Ziman.

David Charlton welcomed the following new members to the meeting; Mike McCann, Headteacher Greenbank School, who had taken over from Sam Myers-Whittaker as CWASSH (Cheshire West Association of Special School Headteachers) Chair and special schools representative and Jason Lowe, Headteacher Tarporley High School and sixth form College, who had filled the Academies representative vacancy.

David also welcomed Debbie Steele to the meeting; Debbie would be taking over Debbie Gittins' role as SEN Senior Manager on her retirement.

David informed Forum that this would be his last meeting before his retirement; the Clerk would be seeking nominations for a chair, to be in place prior to the next meeting.

**2. Minutes and Matters Arising of Last Meeting**

**2.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2018**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

## **2.2 Matters Arising**

### **2.2.1 Item 2.2.3 Item 7 Any Other Business - Academy Representative Vacancy (primary/secondary)**

David Charlton confirmed that the vacancy in question had now been filled by Jason Lowe, as reported above.

### **2.2.2 Item 4 Special Educational Needs (SEN) Funding for Mainstream and Special Schools – Funding from the High Needs Block 2018-2019**

David Charlton drew Forum members' attention to the letter tabled from Mike McCann CWASSH Chair entitled 'Response from CWASSH to Schools Forum in relation to: Consultation of High Needs funding requirement for 2018-2019'. It was noted that all 10 Special Schools had supported the letter written by CWASSH.

Forum members were given the opportunity to comment on the CWASSH letter.

Duncan Haworth asked where the lack of support from CWASSH for the efficiency factor had left us regarding the High Needs overspend. Natalie Cole reported that the permitted -1.5 per cent reduction had been applied to all special schools and the budget set, however this budget may be unachievable and officers were expecting an overspend. The only other option to reduce the overspend would have been a further reduction in the top up funding for mainstream schools.

Sue Yates asked for clarification from Mike McCann regarding what CWASSH saw as the next steps to resolving the high needs overspend. Mike McCann had no immediate solutions but responded that further clarification was required as to where the high needs pressures were, he was willing to work with the other Associations to look at what could be done.

Sue Yates, as a member of the high needs sub group, voiced her disillusionment that despite all the hard work the sub group had put into to coming up with options to address the overspend not all sectors had been willing to play their part, many schools, including her own had felt the impact of the recommendations that had been implemented. Mike pointed out that special schools were also under financial pressures as outlined in the CWASSH letter.

Kate Docherty, member of the high needs sub group, voiced her disappointment that they had reached this position and felt they were being 'held to ransom'. Sue Yates supported Kate's comments; the collegiate response from CWASSH did not reflect what had been communicated as part of the high needs sub group discussions.

David Charlton acknowledged that high needs was an area that the Schools Forum would need to return to; it was noted that The Russett has been amenable to a greater cut than the -1.5 per cent but lower than the proposed cut, this may be something that could be looked at moving forward.

### **2.2.1 3. Any Other Business - Non-teaching staff pay award**

David Charlton reported that the rumours of a proposed pay raise, from 1 April, for some non-teaching pay scales of around 9% had in fact been a reality for some lower grade staff.

## **3. SIMS framework/contract update**

Mark Parkinson, Director of Education, provided a verbal update on behalf of Carolyn Davis, Senior Manager, Education Infrastructure.

Mark reminded Forum that a task and finish group had been set up some years ago to look at SIMS and other options but with limited success. The current SIMS contract, which was due to expire on 31 March 2019, had been procured through a Hertfordshire framework. It was noted that there may be an option to extend the current contract for 12 months through the Hertfordshire framework but officers were waiting for confirmation that was the case. If the contract could be extended then officers were proposing to take up that option as the current contract was still providing good value for money. If the contract could not be extended then officers would need to start a procurement process imminently and the first task would be to draw up a specification.

David Charlton sought views from Forum members as to whether they were happy to continue to 'piggyback' onto Hertfordshire's framework. The general consensus was that it would be prudent to extend the current contract.

Forum members asked how many schools currently do not use SIMS. Officers did not know the exact figure but would find out.

Mark advised the group that if they wanted to explore whether SIMS was the right system they would need to do so soon. They also needed to consider whether they would still get value for money if IT services had to support more than one system.

David suggested that, based on past experience, the process to get a specification for a new system could take two years.

David asked Forum members if they had any perception as to whether their schools would want to look at other systems. Hilary Berry felt that there would be a desire from primary schools to look at other systems. John Murray reported that secondary schools had looked at other options but had decided to stay with SIMS albeit if a little 'clunky'. Mike McCann confirmed that a number of special schools already used Arbor.

It was noted that a remote access online version of SIMS was due to come out shortly. Andy Stewart informed Forum that one of the key reasons for the PRU moving over to Arbor was that it could be accessed remotely.

It was agreed that a task and finish group be set up to work with officers to ensure that all essential and desirable requirements were captured in the specification. It was felt that a minimum of two members from each sector (excluding Academies as they did not benefit from the contract) with a mixture of SIMS and Arbor users would be appropriate. Sarah Curtis and Kerry Forrester volunteered to represent primary schools but suggested the inclusion of business managers with hands on experience of using the systems be included.

**Resolved that the Schools Forum** task the Clerk to liaise with Carolyn Davis, Senior Manager, Education Infrastructure regarding setting up the task and finish group and seeking representatives from CWASH, CWASSH and Business Managers.

#### **4. Reducing Inequalities – Improving Self-Regulation and Academic Resilience in Early Years**

Mark Parkinson introduced the paper as Sarah Lister, Manager - Early Years Team, was unable to attend the meeting. The report outlined a proposal to establish centrally retained Dedicated Schools Grant funding for a dedicated person to implement the Leuven scales.

Natalie Cole, Finance Manager, made reference to paragraph 13, which outlined how the post would be funded from an increase to the Early Years Block following an updated allocation which reflected the take up of the 30 hours extended entitlement. It was noted that the increase to central spend was still within the permitted limit.

Mark sought the views from Forum on the proposal. A number of concerns were raised by Forum members.

Sue Anderson was not convinced that, having just lost a number of consultants, the new post would help address the identified gap and suggested that there was a greater need for a special needs consultant rather than one looking at the Leuven scale. Sue also highlighted that the data in the report reflected last year's figures, new ones were due out on Monday and might show a different picture.

Kerry Forrester was concerned that we were just collecting more data when what was needed were interventions.

A number of Forum members supported suggestions that there was a need to refocus resources on special needs, oracy projects and SALT (Speech and Language Therapy).

David Charlton summed up the feeling of the Forum; colleagues were not unsympathetic to making an appointment but questioned if the post was focused on the right area and should be considered further by the Early Years reference group and the Early Years Strategy group before being brought back to Forum. Mark agreed to liaise with Sarah Lister to move this forward as requested.

**Resolved that the Schools Forum** task officers to present the proposal to the Early Years reference group and the Early Years Strategy group to seek their views before being brought back to Schools Forum for a final decision.

## **5. SEND Update on High Need Strategic Review and SEND Funding Audit Summary**

Debbie Gittins introduced the report which provided an update on the progress of the High Needs Strategic Review and a summary of the SEND Funding Audit.

Forum members' attention was drawn to appendix A and the high needs review timescales. It was noted that, due to the governance procedure, any proposed changes to numbers in provision or type of provision could not be implemented until 2020. It was noted that the High Needs review report would be brought to Schools Forum in due course.

Debbie confirmed that the SEND funding audit report had been sent to all schools. Forum members' attention was drawn to the SEND review website link [www.thesendreview.com](http://www.thesendreview.com) included in the report which gave access to a School self-review of SEN site created by a London consortium. Local Area inspections are resulting in high number of letters of action being issued to Local Authorities and this may increase the focus on SEND in school inspections, therefore schools may wish to consider using the London self-review tool.

Forum members acknowledged that the report was very comprehensive and would have a positive impact if SENCOs were reflecting on and using the recommendations, but questioned whether the report would have filtered down to SENCOs.

Forum members reflected on the best way to ensure the report was shared with SENCOs and agreed it should be promoted through the Headteacher Associations.

Debbie flagged that currently the LA had no direct access to SENCO's however an exercise mapping SENCO networks was currently being undertaken, which was due to be completed by September.

It was noted that there were two SENCO networks being set up through teaching school alliances, one of which Sarah Curtis was involved with ; Sarah and Debbie agreed to liaise regarding promoting the report through the networks.

Mark reminded colleagues that the LA had provided training for SENCOs previously, though not all SENCOs attended, however the LA was not planning to repeat this training as funds were being used for other projects. However 'train the trainer' initiatives focusing on EHC plans and person centred outcomes would be of value.

#### **Resolved that the Schools Forum:**

- i. note the contents of the High Needs Strategic Review briefing update, in particular the timescales of any actions arising from the review recommendation;
- ii. task Headteachers Association's with promoting the recommendations in the SEND funding audit; and
- iii. task officers to promote the recommendations in the SEND funding audit through the SENCO networks.

#### **6. DSG 2017-2018 final outturn**

Natalie Cole took Forum members through the paper which reported on the 2017-2018 final outturn position for the centrally held DSG budget and outlined proposals as to how the underspend be allocated.

Natalie drew Forum members' attention to a number of variances not evident at the Third Review which resulted in a more favourable outturn position than previously forecasted, outlined in paragraph 4(v).

Mark Parkinson provided further details regarding the work on transitions by CWEIB and the Exclusions task group referred to in the proposals under paragraph 9.

It was noted that transition was a recurring theme identified by CWEIB and a project outline was to be worked up. The exclusions task group had been triggered following Forum discussions around the amount of funding allocated to the Bridge. The group had met twice, so far, and were looking at, amongst other things, how to avoid exclusions, why some pupils struggled to cope at school, interventions and identifying actions.

It was noted that the willingness for all schools to take on board any actions identified was key to this initiative.

The groups' membership comprised representatives from schools (though no special reps currently) and various services including CIN (Children in Need), Karen Cove, Early Help and Prevention, Michaela Bridge, Exclusions & Education Access and Natalie Cole, Finance.

Forum members were reminded that the LA had to have in place provision for excluded pupils i.e. the PRU or they could face legal challenges.

### **Resolve that the Schools Forum:**

- i. note the final outturn on the 2017-2018 centrally held DSG; and
- ii. endorse the planned allocation and retention of the unspent reserve as recommended by The Schools Forum Finance Sub Group and detailed in paragraph 10 (vote unanimous).

## **7. Financial year 2017-2018 analysis of schools balances (including Academies)**

Natalie Cole introduced the paper which provided the final outturn position of maintained schools in the Borough for the 2017-2018 financial year and academy balances for the latest reported position for the 2016-2017 academic and financial year accounts.

Natalie highlighted the comment in paragraph 13 that these were balances held at a defined point in time and do not represent the financial viability of academies and in the absence of further context, do not explain the way an academy is operating or represent future spending plans or pressures.

It was noted that the overall position showed an increase in balances, this was mainly due to three schools converting to academies, one of which was in deficit.

Francis Kwateng raised concerns over the plight of small schools in deficit and asked how they could be helped out of a deficit position.

Officers responded that options were limited, funds could not be moved between schools nor could a deficit be written off; schools needed to increase pupil numbers, operate on a better structure, consider federations and sharing resources. Their first challenge was to balance the budget in year, which some schools were struggling to do, before reducing the deficit. Small schools had the added pressure put on them by parents, governors and the community to keep them open. It was noted that academisation would not resolve the issue unless they became part of a MAT (Multi Academy Trust) where resources could be moved between schools.

Forum were informed that there was a small schools working group, facilitated by Hilary Berry, who were planning to set up a conference in autumn to share best practice.

Forum members commented that the high number of carry forwards, over the benchmark threshold of five and eight per cent, made it difficult to claim schools were underfunded and undermines the current political agenda and questioned what could be done. There seemed to be a lack of parity between academies and maintained schools being held to account. Questions were also raised as to how aware governing bodies were of excessive carry forwards.

It was noted that schools with consistency carry forwards were more of a concern than one-offs. The forward plans for schools that held excess balances over the bench mark threshold for the last three years were being reviewed by officers. Headteacher's of schools projecting sustained balances going forward would be written to in the autumn and officers agree to copy in the Chair of Governors.

**Resolved that the Schools Forum** note the outturn position and movement in balances for both schools and academies and the mechanisms in place to support schools with deficit balances.

## **8. Annual review of Schools Forum membership, constitution and terms of reference – including sub group membership**

David Charlton introduced the report which reviewed the Schools Forum's membership, constitution and terms of reference to ensure that the composition of the Schools Forum was compliant with the regulations.

Forum members' attention was drawn to the revised membership in table 1. The current pupil ratio warranted a reduction of secondary representatives by one and a corresponding increase in academy representatives. It was noted that David Charlton's secondary vacancy would not be filled but an academy representative would be sought by the clerk in due course.

Forum members' were referred to page 20, table 2 and the revised finance sub group membership changes (three governors - primary, secondary, special reduced to two governors). The removal of the requirement of a special governor to attend was done for practical reasons as there was only one special governor on the Forum. Duncan Haworth would remain on the sub group and the clerk was requested to contact governor representatives not present at the meeting and seek a secondary representative.

A correction was noted to appendix 4 High Needs sub group membership; Kate Docherty was down as CWAPH Chair where as it should have read 'Kate Docherty or CWAPH Chair.

Forum reviewed the current High Needs sub group membership and agreed the following changes/additions:

Mike McCann or Alison Ashley (sub)  
Francis Kwateng  
Andy Stewart  
CWAPH chair - observer  
Katie Tyrie - observer

### **Resolved that the Schools Forum:**

- i. note the changes to the Schools Forum's members; and
- ii. agree the proposed changes to the Schools Forum finance sub-group membership

## **9. Directed revisions to schemes for financing schools**

Natalie Cole introduced the report which provided an update to the Schools Forum on the Directed Revisions to Schemes for Financing Schools issued by the Department for Education (DfE) in March 2018 which were to be incorporated in the Cheshire West and Chester Scheme.

Forum members' attention was drawn to paragraph 6-8 and the updates to the guidance. It was noted that in respect of the guidance in paragraph 6, reflecting changes on balances of closing schools, CWAC did not have school closures only academy conversations.

Natalie informed Forum members that the change in guidance to allow a de-delegated budget for early retirement and redundancy costs to be created (paragraph 7-8) had been discussed with the finance sub group but there was no willingness to pursue this option given the complexities involved in agreeing contributions and managing requests against the budget.

### **Resolved that the Schools Forum:**

- i. approve the revisions to the scheme to be reflected in the updated Scheme published July 2018; and
- ii. did not wish to pursue the option to allow a de-delegated budget for early retirement and redundancy costs to be created.

## **10. f40 National funding formula (NFF) briefing paper**

David Charlton introduced the item. David had hoped Councillor Meardon, who was a member of the f40 committee, would have been present at Forum to provide further information but had been unable to attend.

Forum members were urged to read the paper as it 'opened ones eyes' to the challenges schools would face moving forward under the NFF, including what little leverage the LA would have to make schools inclusive.

## **11. Any Other Business**

### **11.1 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN)**

Francis Kwateng sought clarification regarding how the funds received from FPN fines were used and requested that the paper work be reviewed as currently it was excessive.

Officers responded that the fines contributed towards the costs of processing the FPNs including legal representation. Concerns regarding the paper work would be passed onto the appropriate department.

### **11.2 Speech/Presentation - Schools Forum Chair**

John Murray spoke on behalf of the Schools Forum and reflected on David's significant contribution to schools over his 10 year tenureship as Schools Forum Chair and presented David with a leaving gift.

David thanked colleagues and reflected on how the role of Chair and the Forum had changed over the years.

## **12. Next meeting**

Next meeting 8 October 2018.