

Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, virtual meeting, on 10 October 2023

Members	Representing	Attendance
Schools and Academies		
Jan Diamond	Primary headteachers	Attended
Nicky Dowling	Primary headteachers	Attended
Vacancy	Primary headteachers	Vacancy
Kate Docherty	Primary headteachers	Attended
Beth Hacking	Primary headteachers	Apologies
Sharon Broughton	Primary governors	Absent
Lisa Rigby	Primary governors	Absent
Vacancy	Primary governors	Vacancy
Nick Lacey	Primary governors	Attended
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Attended
David Rowlands (Vice Chair)	Secondary governors	Attended
Vacancy	Secondary governors	Absent
Neil Oxley	Special headteachers	Attended
Philip Hopwood	Special governors	Apologies
Andy Stewart	PRU	Apologies
Sian Thomas	PRU	Substitute
Deborah Beaumont	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Simon Faircloth	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Darran Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Duncan Haworth (Chair)	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Helen Studley	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Cathryn McKeagney	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Vacancy	Academies - mainstream	Vacancy
Vacancy	Academies - mainstream	Vacancy
Michelle Duval	Academies - special	Attended
Non Schools		
Cat Hirst	PVI early years providers	Absent
Vacancy	PVI early years providers	Vacancy
Kathryn Magiera	Diocese	Absent
Caroline Vile	Diocese	Apologies
Greg Foster	Unions	Apologies
Geoff Wright	Unions	Absent
Ian Devereux Roberts	CWAPH	Attended
Vacancy	16-19 providers	Vacancy
Official Observers		
Councillor Adam Langan	Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Absent
	Education Skills & Funding Agency	Absent
Invited Observer		
Councillor Lynn Stocks	Shadow Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Apologies
Officers in attendance		
Helen Brackenbury	Acting Deputy Chief Executive (Health and Wellbeing)	
Debbie Edwards	Head of Education and Inclusion	
Charlotte Fenn	Clerk	

Debra Goodall
Janine Smart
Lynsey Taylor
Bo White

Head of Health and Wellbeing Finance
School Admissions and Capital Development Manager
Finance Manager
Early Years Commissioner

1. Introductions and apologies

Duncan Haworth informed Forum that the meeting was being recorded.

Duncan reported that he had been re-elected as Schools Forum Chair for a further term of office.

Duncan welcomed Lynsey Taylor and Debra Goodall to their first meeting, and they introduced themselves.

Apologies and substitutes were noted.

Duncan reported the following updates to Forum membership: -

- Kate Docherty re-elected for another term of office as Primary Head representative.
- Duncan Haworth elected as mainstream Academy representative and had resigned as Primary governor representative.
- David Curry was continuing as Secondary Head representative and Martin Hill had stepped down, following the review and revision of Schools Forum membership - item 7 last meeting.

2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 4 July 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on the 4 July 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

2.2 Matters arising

Item 7 Annual review of the Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum's membership, constitution, and terms of reference

Duncan reported that nominations were being sought to fill the vacancies following the recent changes in membership and the deadline was Friday 13 October 2023.

3. Education – Capital Programme 2023-2027

Janine Smart introduced the report which contained an update on the Education Basic Need Capital Programme and provided a brief overview of the content.

Janine drew Forum members attention to the link to the DfE interactive scorecard, now available online, which provided an overview of primary and secondary sectors regarding quantity, pupil forecast accuracy, preference around admissions, quality of places and capital cost and comparisons nationally and with other Local Authorities.

Janine referred Forum members to the table in appendix 1 which identified the planning areas and sectors, number of places to be provided and when. It also gave an indication of the areas where data was being looked at to give an indication of future needs on those areas. It was noted that there were a significant number of places being added in both primary and secondary sectors.

No comments or questions from Forum to report.

Resolved that the Schools Forum note the paper.

4. Early Years Funding Formula (EYFF) Consultation and proposal for 2024-2025

Bo White introduced the report which provided an overview of the recent Early Years Funding Formula (EYFF) Consultation in relation to expansion of the early years entitlements to working families of 2-year-olds and under and went through the core elements.

Forum members' attention was drawn to table 1 that set out the rules and regulations that local authorities must follow which CW&C were compliant with regarding three- and four-year-olds.

Bo referenced the current EYFF for allocating funding for three- and four-year-old entitlements for 2023-2024 as shown in Table 2. The proposals for the new entitlements for 2-year-olds and under 2-year olds was to adopt the existing local deprivation and rurality supplement with separate base rates for the younger provision as government had proposed some illustrative hourly rates of around £7-£8 for two-year-olds and around £10 per hour for babies to reflect staffing ratios.

The consultation feedback showed a majority consensus in agreement to the proposals from providers.

Bo referred forum members to table 3 which showed the proposed composition of formulae for each of the three funding entitlements alongside the existing 3- and 4-year-old funding formula, there would be different base rates for each of the entitlements.

Bo stated that in terms of the impact on providers it was felt that the rates looked favourable and more simplistic to be applied in a consistent manor, deprivation supplement was still appropriate as it was important to provide a financial incentive to providers to support families, the rurality supplement would also apply given this was our biggest challenge in recruitment and retention as rural providers continued to struggle, Bo also acknowledged that this was a sector wide issue.

Bo referred Forum to the full breakdown of consultation responses in appendix B. It was noted that comments were largely focused on the different levels of funding between the different age groups which was proving to be a little contentious and funding levels for three and four-year olds being below the market rate. Officers were aware of this and had highlighted this as a risk in the past.

Bo acknowledged that as these were very new entitlements, what the new demand would be and the impact on providers was unknown at this stage, they may wish to consider a contingency fund.

Duncan Haworth acknowledged that at this stage there was nothing else Forum could do but accept that what comes out of the national discussion would be put to Forum. Bo commented that they were waiting for the rules and regulations to be set and were anticipating that the three to four years olds criteria would be applied to the new formula, we would be able to set our deprivation supplement to any level and make decisions as to which other supplements wish to use.

David Rowlands voiced his concerns regarding the reference to deprived areas as it was people who were deprived, if they did not live in what was classified as a deprived area their chances of getting the help they need was reduced. Bo acknowledged David's comments but stated currently that was the best tool they had to determine deprivation. Bo also referred to early years pupil premium which providers could claim for, depending on families' economic circumstances.

Resolved that Schools Forum

- i. note the proposals set out in the national EYFF consultation; and
- ii. endorse the recommendation to adopt the existing local Deprivation and Rurality supplements in the formulae for the new entitlements for 2-year-olds and under 2-year-olds and await the outcome of the national consultation and whether or not the proposal for all current rules local authorities must follow when setting their own local funding formulae for the new entitlements is agreed. Should this be the case we would seek to introduce the new formulae consistent with our existing 3- and 4-year-old formula from April 2024.

5. School Funding Arrangements for 2024-2025

Lynsey Taylor reported that the DfE had informed the Council yesterday (9 October 2023) that they had made errors in the calculations they had published in July, so the report had been revised to incorporate the revised calculations. A copy would be circulated after the meeting.

Lynsey shared the revised report on screen and went through the recommendations and highlights which included the summary of the change in CW&C allocation announced to date in paragraph 5, increases reflected in paragraph 6 and the approach to setting the school block funding formula under paragraph 11. It was noted that the finance tables in appendix A & B had been updated and showed the illustrative funding allocations and funding factors.

Neil Oxley sought clarification regarding the statement that 'the high needs NFF will ensure that every local authority receives at least a 3% increase per head' as to whether special schools funding would therefore increase by 3% per head. Lynsey reported that the LA passed on as much as they could to schools but this was not the final allocation

and was just illustrative at this stage; funding would be consulted on in December when the final allocations were received and figures worked out.

David Rowlands asked if we were working on the assumption that only children in Special schools had these higher needs or do we recognise that some of the children in broader education also have higher needs and may need extra funding. Debbie Edwards responded that the high needs funding supported a range of different projects in schools and special schools, how the funding was to be distributed had not been determined yet, but it was across the whole spectrum and not just special schools that benefited from the high needs funding.

David Rowlands commented that they were all aware that the demand for funding for special needs tended to increase far faster than the funds and this had been the pattern for several years, and asked if there were any signs of a change in that. Lynsey responded that demand was outstripping the funds available, and we were in a deficit overall as government funding was not keeping up with demand. Government were being kept informed that this was the situation. Debbie commented that it was important to note that we are running in a deficit as we, as a Council, are taking the view that we are supporting children where they need supporting and this is a national crisis in terms of all local authorities receiving the appropriate funding. Debbie reassured colleagues that children were not being penalised with the deficit position of budgets across the country.

It was noted that the local authority will need to submit disapplication requests for the two exceptional circumstances in Cheshire West & Chester. Those being Upton-by-Chester High School sports facilities and Wincham Primary School rental of a hall. The submission date for local authorities to submit any application for exceptional circumstances to the ESFA is 17 November 2023. Officers will liaise with these schools directly to review the applications to maintain the existing exceptional circumstances in the Borough.

Resolved that that Schools Forum

- i. note the report, in particular the proposals that have been put forward by the Finance Subgroup not to further consult with schools on the schools block funding formula as no changes are proposed. Consultation will be held with schools on the decisions to be taken by Schools Forum on other funding elements for the December meeting; and
- ii. endorsed the Schools Block funding formula continuing to mirror the Schools National Funding Formula (SNFF) values for 2024-2025.

6. Final Allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2023-2024

Lynsey Taylor went through the report which contained the final allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2023-2024 as published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in July 2023.

Reference was made to table 1 which summarised the changes to the final DSG allocation and final allocation in table 2 after academy recoupment deductions in relation to de-delegation and rates liabilities.

No questions or comments from Forum to note.

Resolved that the 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 2023-2024.

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7. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2023-2024 Forecast Outturn at First Review

Lynsey Taylor introduced the report which provided an update on the financial forecast outturn position for 2023-2024 for centrally held DSG as reported at the First Review.

Lynsey drew Forums attention to the overall outturn position pressure of £3.9m and the forecast overspends outlined in paragraph 3.

No questions or comments from Forum to note.

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

8. Any Other Business

Helen Brackenbury thanked Lynsey and Debra, who were both new to CW&C, and the work done today following the announcement from the DfE. It was acknowledged that Lynsey had tried to make sure colleagues had the revised position in the time allowed but that questions might arise following a comparison of reports. Any questions should be directed to Lynsey, Debra or Helen.

9. Next meeting

Next Schools Forum meeting Tuesday 5 December 2023.