

Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, virtual meeting, on 5 July 2022 subject to approval at 11 October Schools Forum

Members	Representing	Attendance
Schools and Academies		
Alan Brown	Primary headteachers	Attended
Julie Chambers	Primary headteachers	Absent
Sarah Curtis	Primary headteachers	Attended
Ian Devereux Roberts	Primary headteachers	Apologies
Kate Docherty	Primary headteachers	Attended
Sharon Broughton	Primary governors	Attended
Duncan Haworth (Chair)	Primary governors	Attended
Lisa Rigby	Primary governors	Absent
David Nield	Primary governors	Attended
Nick Lacey	Primary governors	Attended
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Attended
Mike Holland	Secondary headteachers	Attended
David Rowlands	Secondary governors	Attended
Rob Williams	Secondary governors	Attended
Mike McCann	Special headteachers	Attended
Philip Hopwood	Special governors	Attended
Andy Stewart	PRU	Absent
Deborah Beaumont	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Sarah Connolly	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Darran Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Luci Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Vacancy	Academies - mainstream	Vacancy
Helen Studley	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Vacancy	Academies - special	Vacancy
Michelle Duval	Academies - special	Substitute
Non Schools		
Vacancy	PVI early years providers	Vacancy
Angela Thornton	PVI early years providers	Apologies
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
Official Observers		
Councillor Robert Cernik	Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Attended
Officers in attendance		
Natalie Cole	Finance Manager	
Charlotte Fenn	Clerk	
Rosemary Hodgson	Senior HR Manager	
Debbie Murphy	Acting Head of Education and Inclusion	
Kate Thomson	HR Lead- Schools Team	

Observer

Councillor Razia Daniels

Shadow Cabinet Member for Children and Families

1. Introductions and apologies

Apologies were noted.

Belated apologies were noted from Nick Lacey for the February meeting as he had been unable to send them on the day.

Duncan Haworth reported the following membership changes:

Marie Allen, Special Schools Academy representative term of office had ended - Emma Leach, The Russett School, would be the new representative from September with Michelle Duval Cloughwood as the reserve.

Jason Lowe, Academies representative, term of office had ended – the Schools Forum clerk would seek nominees to fill the vacancy and an election will be held if appropriate.

Mike Holland was standing down as secondary Heads representative at the end of this academic year – the secondary Heads association would be seeking a new representative.

Duncan thanked, Marie, Jason and Mike, on behalf of Schools Forum, for their contribution to Forum work over the years.

2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting**2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 8 February 2022**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 8 February 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

2.2 Matters arising

No matters arising to report.

3. Apprenticeship Levy

Rosemary Hodgson provided a PowerPoint presentation on the apprenticeship levy which covered background to the scheme, where the money went, what it could be used for, the principles of apprenticeships, apprenticeship standards, finding apprenticeship providers, current position, and apprenticeship challenges in schools.

Rosemary reported that part of the reason for bringing the item to Schools Forum was to help promote and increase awareness. Apprenticeship starts were low within schools and current contributions exceeded the spend. It was noted that any unspent levy goes back to government after 24 months, therefore there was a need to consider how we

can maximise the spend. It was also noted that Rosemary had been to see Heads and Business managers to promote apprenticeships at every opportunity.

Rosemary posed several questions for Forum to comment on:

- How can we use the levy more effectively?
- What are some of the challenges you are facing?
- Could we enable aided, foundation and academy schools to access our levy?
- Could we allow other community organisations to bid for our levy funds?

Forum members voiced their concerns over the possibility of levy funds going back to central government and acknowledged that anything that could be done to change this would be good. The following comments were noted by Rosemary:

- make the apprenticeship option more visible to schools and encourage schools to consider when appointing staff
- issues having to balance on the job learning
- issue of affordability of employing an apprentice due to the funding restrictions
- help promote by providing a list of types of apprenticeships available in schools for leadership teams and governors
- currently not on governors' agenda to consider apprenticeships when appointing staff
- have a breakdown of what levy can be used for to share with governors
- promote best practice and share heads experiences where it has worked
- share examples/case studies

Rosemary thanked Forum for their comments and asked if they had anymore thoughts to email her.

4. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2021-2022 Final Outturn

Natalie Cole introduced the item and took Forum through the report on the 2021-2022 final outturn position for the centrally held DSG budget and reserve.

It was noted that the final overspend figure had decreased from the position reported at Third Review.

Forum members' attention was drawn to the table in paragraph 6 which summarised the main variances and changes from the position at Third Review and paragraph 7 which summarised the cumulative overspend position on the centrally held DSG reserve.

It was noted that officers would be taking forward further development of a DSG recovery plan over summer term for 2023-2024 following the outcome of the external SEND review.

Forum had no questions regarding the report.

Resolved that Schools Forum note the final outturn on the 2021-2022 centrally held DSG and reserve and next steps.

5. Maintained School Balances Financial Year 2021-2022 and Academy Balances 2020-2021

Natalie Cole took Forum through the report which provided the final outturn position of maintained schools in the Borough for the 2021-2022 financial year and included academy balances for the latest reported position for the 2020-2021 academic and financial year accounts.

Forum members' attention was drawn to the outturn position, in paragraphs 4-5, of maintained schools and the movement in school balances as outlined in paragraphs 6-9.

It was noted that heads associations had raised concerns with regards to the level of surplus balances in schools and the lack of context behind the outturn positions.

Natalie reminded Forum that all maintained school accounts were published and publicly accessible and there was no facility for schools to add context to their financial position and encouraged schools to ensure that sufficient challenge and discussion was undertaken by the Governing Body and minutes kept.

Natalie sought Forum's view on the two proposed actions to review schools with surplus balances as outlined in paragraph 12. The authority would review those balances where they have been over the scheme threshold for three or more years and approved committed balances identified for specific purposes would be accounted for on a separate cost centre for each school and monitored by Schools Finance Team.

It was noted that the Academies balances, as shown in appendix A, in the absence of further context, same as with maintained school balances, did not explain the way the academy was operating or represent future spending plans or pressures.

Greg Foster questioned the accuracy of the Academies balances having just reviewed balances on Company House website, one school, for example, had a 9 million discrepancy. Natalie explained that to present a comparable balance to that of maintained schools, the balances reported were only for the general unrestricted and restricted funds and excluded pension liabilities and capital funds.

Resolved that Schools Forum

- i. note the outturn position and movement in balances for both schools and academies; and
- ii. endorse the actions to review schools with surplus balances.

6. Directed revisions to schemes for financing schools

Natalie Cole provided a verbal report for Forum to note.

There were no directed revisions from the DfE. There was only one change in the statutory guidance which would need to be reflected in the local scheme: Section 5.8

Borrowing by schools - the reference to the Salix Scheme had been removed, as this scheme has now closed. The Scheme would be updated before being republished.

7. Government Consultation on Implementing the direct national funding formula

Natalie Cole introduced the report and referred Forum members to the link within the report where the full consultation document could be found.

It was noted that the consultation was due to close on 9 September 2022, was briefly discussed at the Schools Forum Finance Subgroup on 14 June and that the draft response was from the Council's point of view and sought to show how the changes would affect Cheshire West and Chester schools.

Natalie went through the report which summarised the key points of the consultation; interaction between the direct National Funding Formula (NFF) and funding for high needs, growth and falling rolls funding, premises funding, the minimum funding guarantee (MFG) under the direct NFF and the annual funding cycle.

Natalie sought feedback from Forum as to any changes or additions they would like included in the response.

David Rowlands commented that having discussed this as a member of the finance subgroup felt that having less local discretion would have an impact on high needs pupils' being educated in the appropriate settings and asked how this could best be addressed. Debbie Murphy responded that, following the recent SEND review and SEND Inspection, an action plan was in place which included creating additional capacity in special schools amongst other priorities.

Duncan Haworth sought guidance from Forum members as to how they wished to proceed with regard to submitting a response to the consultation. Questions were raised as to whether a statement should be added to the Council's response that it had been endorsed by Schools Forum but it was felt that the more responses submitted the better and it would show that the Forum had discussed the consultation.

Resolved that School Forum would submit their own response which mirrored that of the Council's final response.

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

Charlotte Fenn took Forum through the report to review the Schools Forum's membership, constitution and terms of reference and ensure that the composition of the Schools Forum was compliant with the regulations.

There were no comments from Forum to report.

Resolved that Schools Forum note:

- i. that officers have determined that the pupil ration does not warrant a revision in the Schools Forum membership at this time; and
- ii. there are no changes to the constitution and terms of reference.

9. Any Other Business

None to report.

10. Next meeting

Next Schools Forum meeting Tuesday 11 October 2022.

Forum members noted the scheduled dates for the next academic year and had a discussion as to whether to reinstate face to face meetings. It was generally felt that there should be a mixture of face to face and virtual meetings whilst also taking into consideration the levels of covid.

11 October meeting to be virtual but would be reviewed near the time.