

Cheshire West & Chester Council

## **Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum**

Tuesday 3 December 2024  
4.30pm – 6.30 pm

Virtual Meeting

Schools Forum Clerk  
Children and Families  
Cheshire West and Chester Council  
Telephone 07584 206913



## **Notes for members of the public**

### **Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum**

The Council welcomes and encourages you to be at its meetings and Committees.

You are requested to remain quiet whilst the meeting is taking place.

The agenda is sometimes divided into two parts. You are allowed to stay for the first part. When the Forum is ready to deal with the second part you will need to leave the meeting because the business will be of a confidential nature, for example, dealing with individual people, contracts and financial affairs of other parties.

Members of the public wishing to attend Schools Forum meetings should contact the Schools Forum Clerk:

Email: [school.relationshipteam@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:school.relationshipteam@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

Telephone: 07584 206913

## Agenda for Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum 3 December 2024

|    |        |   |                |                    |
|----|--------|---|----------------|--------------------|
| 1. | 4.30   | Introductions and apologies   |                |                    |
| 2. | 4.35   | Minutes and matters arising of last meeting<br><br>2.1 To agree the minutes held 8 October 2024<br><br>2.2 Matters arising<br>2.2.1 Arrangements for funding from the High Needs Block 2024-2025 – additional response to DfE |                | Page 4-8           |
| 3. | 4.50   | Education – Basic Need Capital Programme 2024-2028  | Sharon McKeown | Page 9-11          |
| 4. | 5.10   | School Funding Arrangements 2025-2026 / Initial Planning for DSG Allocations for 2025-2026 and Budget Setting – <b>subject to DfE funding announcement expected late November</b>   | Lynsey Taylor  | Paper to be tabled |
| 5. | 6.00   | Reinstating the High Needs finance subgroup   | Debbie Edwards | Page 12            |
| 6. | 6.20   | Any Other Business  |                |                    |
| 7. | 6.30   | Next meeting: Tuesday 14 January 2025   |                |                    |
|    | Finish | Schedule of meetings 2024-25  |                | Page 13            |

**Cheshire West and Chester  
Schools Forum  
3 December 2024**

**Agenda item 2**

**Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools' Forum on 8 October 2024**

| <b>Members</b>                | <b>Representing</b>                          | <b>Attendance</b> |
|-------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| <b>Schools and Academies</b>  |  |                   |
| Jan Diamond                   | Primary headteachers                         | Apologies         |
| Kerry Forrester               | Primary headteachers                         | Substitute        |
| Nicky Dowling                 | Primary headteachers                         | Attended          |
| Kate Docherty                 | Primary headteachers                         | Attended          |
| Beth Hacking                  | Primary headteachers                         | Absent            |
| Michelle Ashfield             | Primary headteachers                         | Attended          |
| Sharon Broughton              | Primary governors                            | Absent            |
| Lisa Rigby                    | Primary governors                            | Absent            |
| Vacancy                       | Primary governors                            | Vacancy           |
| Vacancy                       | Primary governors                            | Vacancy           |
| David Curry                   | Secondary headteachers                       | Attended          |
| David Rowlands (Vice Chair)   | Secondary governors                          | Attended          |
| Vacancy                       | Secondary governors                          | Vacancy           |
| Neil Oxley                    | Special headteachers                         | Attended          |
| Philip Hopwood                | Special governors                            | Attended          |
| Andy Stewart                  | PRU  | Apologies         |
| Deborah Beaumont              | Academies - mainstream                       | Apologies         |
| Simon Faircloth               | Academies - mainstream                       | Apologies         |
| Duncan Haworth (Chair)        | Academies - mainstream                       | Attended          |
| Cathryn McKeagney             | Academies - mainstream                       | Attended          |
| Karen Vitalis                 | Academies - mainstream                       | Attended          |
| Vacancy                       | Academies - mainstream                       | Vacancy           |
| Vacancy                       | Academies - mainstream                       | Vacancy           |
| Vacancy                       | Academies - mainstream                       | Vacancy           |
| Michelle Duval                | Academies - special                          | Attended          |
| <b>Non Schools</b>            |  |                   |
| Natasha Kirkwood              | PVI early years providers                    | Apologies         |
| Paula Adolph                  | PVI early years providers                    | Apologies         |
| Kathryn Magiera               | Diocese                                      | Absent            |
| Caroline Vile                 | Diocese                                      | Absent            |
| Greg Foster                   | Unions                                       | Apologies         |
| Geoff Wright                  | Unions                                       | Absent            |
| Ian Devereux Roberts          | CWAPH  | Apologies         |
| Vacancy                       | 16-19 providers                              | Vacancy           |
| <b>Official Observers</b>     |  |                   |
| Councillor Adam Langan        | Cabinet Member Children & Families           | Absent            |
|                               | Education Skills & Funding Agency            | Absent            |
| <b>Officers in attendance</b> |  |                   |
| Nicholas Ajaegbu              | Senior Finance Manager - Children & Families |                   |

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Helen Brackenbury | Executive Director of Children & Families |
| Charlotte Fenn    | Clerk                                     |
| Debbie Edwards    | Head of Education and Inclusion           |
| Bo White          | Early Years Commissioner – Education      |

## 1. Introductions and apologies

Apologies were noted.

Duncan Haworth reported the following updates to membership:

Karen Vitalis, resignation wef 1 November 2024 as moving to a new job;  
Sharon Broughton’s term of office ends on 3 November 2024.

Karen was thanked for her contribution to Schools Forum, as this was her last meeting.

## 2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

### 2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 16 July 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

### 2.2 Matters arising

#### 2.2.1 Arrangements for funding from the High Needs Block 2024-2025

Duncan confirmed that a list of pupil numbers, in special schools, had been circulated after the meeting and a letter was sent, as agreed, to the DfE regarding funding; the response from the DfE had been circulated with the papers.

David Rowlands commented that the DfE response was predictable enough and we were duly ‘patted on the head’ and Forum should acknowledge the response saying that we look forward to the imbalance in current funding for CW&C swinging in our favour.

Philip Hopwood concurred with the response going back to encourage them to support and suggested might also flag the fact that insufficient funding might drive us to put more special needs young people into fee paying schools that were about to be charged VAT putting additional pressure on the system, although as Philip acknowledged CW&C wouldn’t be charged the VAT.

David Rowlands wished to thank those colleagues who contributed to the letter sent to the DfE.

**Resolved that the Schools Forum write to the DfE again with the additional comments.**

### **3. Early Years Funding Formula Consultation and proposal for 2024-2025**

Bo White took Forum members through the report which provided an overview of the recent Early Years Funding Consultation in relation to the frequency of early years funding payments to early years providers. The report had only just been approved and circulated following the closure of the consultation on the 30<sup>th</sup> September. It was noted that the consultation did not affect maintained schools as they received their funding separately by journal transfer.

Bo drew Forum members' attention to the five Early Years Entitlements as outlined in paragraph three. It was noted that the funding of the Early Years Entitlements was distributed through our local early years funding formulae and no changes were proposed to those formulae at this time.

The funding must be administered in relation to certain criteria, and the authority remain compliant with all the elements which were set out in table 1.

It was noted that the proposal would support the cash flow of providers as a much higher proportion of their income would now be provided through the funded entitlements and also mitigate the risk to the local authority as the quantum of funding has significantly increased as a result of the expansion of the entitlements and this change would minimise any potential impact of any movement in the sector.

Bo drew Forums' attention to the consultation and feedback under paragraphs 21- 25. The consultation asked funded providers to state to what extent each of the 3 possible payment options would have on their businesses and then to rank them in order of most beneficial. The consultation was relatively well responded to by 38% of funded providers, compared to previous consultations where the level of engagement has been much lower.

Forums attention was drawn to the detailed analysis of the consultation responses in appendix A.

There were no comments or questions to note.

#### **Resolved that Schools Forum**

- i. note the proposals set out in the national Childminder consultation for the stronger enforcement of the recommendation for to local authorities to pay childcare providers monthly, in particular childminders; and
- ii. endorse the recommendation to move to monthly payments for early years providers.

### **4. Final Allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2024-2025**

Nicholas Ajaegbu introduced the report to the Forum which outlined the final allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2024-2025, highlighting the differences from the indicative allocation used in budget setting for this financial year.

It was noted there the only change had been a slight reduction in the early years block of £366k.

There were no comments or questions to note.

**Resolved that Schools Forum note** the amendments to the DSG allocation for the schools block, high needs and early years funding blocks for 2024-2025.

## **5. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2024-2025 Forecast Outturn at First Review**

Nicholas Ajaegbu introduced the report which provided an update on the financial forecast outturn position for 2024-2025 for centrally held DSG as reported at the First Review.

It was noted that an overspend was forecast mainly on the high needs block, with the main pressures being high needs top up funding and independent and non-maintained schools, with some underspends mitigating slightly the overall overspend position. It was noted that the high needs pressures were increasing. Looking at the reserves balance and the current pressures the total deficit was forecast at just over £17 million. The Higher Needs Transformation, Sustainability and Improvement project was on going to try and mitigate the deficit and manage demand and cost pressures.

David Rowlands commented that one would hope that the continuing costs pressures must sooner or later be met by funding from National Government.

As the two items were linked, Neil Oxley sought clarification regarding agenda item 4, and the high needs reduction in table two. Nicholas confirmed it was part of the recoument for academies.

Nicky Dowling asked where she could find comparable figures for local authorities and statistical neighbours in terms of finding out how well we were managing, which authorities were doing better etc, so that the data was more meaningful. Nicholas responded that the Section 251 outturn for councils was used for bench marking budgets and expenditure and a link could be sent.

David Rowlands commented that with the Section 251 information Forum might be better armed to do a further response to the letter to the DfE on funding, if it showed that we were comparatively less well funded than the bulk of authorities that would reinforce our argument.

Nicholas responded that there were a lot of Councils that were in a similar position to us. Debbie Edwards added that it was worth noting that CW&C were part of the f40 group where it was recognised nationally that this group of authorities were perhaps not funded as others; the f40 group might be an area to explore.

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

## **6. Any Other Business**

Debbie Edwards expressed her sincere thanks to Helen Brackenbury as potentially this would be her last Schools Forum meeting. Debbie thanked Helen for her leadership and support offered to all in Education and wished her well in her new career.

Duncan thanked Helen on behalf of Schools Forum.

**7. Next meeting**

It was noted that an extra meeting had been put into the calendar on 12 November 2024 on the assumption that there would be, by then, a national funding allocation. It was also noted the turnround for Finance to produce papers would be quite tight. Forum would be notified, as soon as possible, if the meeting wasn't going ahead.

**Agenda item 3**

**Education – Capital Programme 2024-2028**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to share with the Schools Forum an update on the Education Basic Need Capital Programme.

**Recommendations**

2. The Schools Forum is asked to note the paper.

**Introduction and Context**

3. The Education Basic Need capital programme supports the development of the educational environment by improving, enlarging or replacing assets in a planned and structured way so that children and young people learn in the best possible environment. This continues to contribute to raising educational standards, improving school attendance and young people’s involvement in positive activities as well as making buildings more energy efficient and fit for purpose. Schools that are well maintained can inspire children and young people to achieve and can enable teachers to concentrate on teaching and learning.

**Capital Programme Update – Basic Need**

4. Basic need funding is the grant money allocated to local authorities each year to help them fulfil their duty to make sure there are enough school places for children in their local area. This includes maintained schools, free schools or academies and by establishing new schools. The allocations are based on forecasts submitted to DfE of pupil numbers in future years (SCAP) to establish whether there is sufficient capacity to accommodate those pupils.
5. In Cheshire West and Chester we have qualified to receive the following amounts of basic need funding over a 7 year period;

| <b>Basic Need Funding:</b> |            |
|----------------------------|------------|
| <b>Year</b>                | <b>£'m</b> |
| 2019-2020                  | 1.14       |
| 2020-2021                  | 0          |
| 2021-2022                  | 24.75      |
| 2022-2023                  | 2.24       |
| 2023-2024                  | 4.94       |
| 2024-2025                  | 0          |
| 2025-2026                  | 0.62       |

6. The 2025-2026 allocation has been generated by the forecasts submitted to DfE in 2022 (SCAP 22). The allocation recognises that there is a need for additional places than that we have previously been funded. As with all SCAP returns the data considers a 5 year forecast for Primary and 7 year forecast for Secondary. Over this period of time, annual returns will be submitted and evaluated to see if sufficient funding has been provided to supply the places.

### **Grant Conditions**

7. The grant is technically un-ring-fenced, meaning the only formal requirement placed on it is that it must be used for capital expenditure and not revenue. However, there is an expectation by DfE that it will be spent on the creation of pupil places. The Council is required to submit an annual return to DfE stating the investment we have made in our schools for the creation of pupil places and comparing that to the amount of grant received.
8. The DfE compile a scorecard to provide a snapshot of each local authority's progress towards ensuring there are sufficient good school places in each local authority area across England.
9. The scorecards show how many places have been delivered or are planned to be delivered, provide information about the quality of the places between set time periods, forecasting accuracy of local authorities, how well parental preference is met and the cost of providing places in their area. This year the DfE have created the scorecard as an interactive tool available on line, the scorecard for Cheshire West and Chester can be access via [Local Authority School Places Scorecards \(shinyapps.io\)](https://shinyapps.io/Local-Authority-School-Places-Scorecards/).

### **Cheshire West & Chester Capital Programme 2024-2028**

10. The previous Education Capital Programme was originally drawn up in 2014-2015 the programme delivered places across 48 schools. The programme identified a forecasted portfolio of works which was then continually monitored and altered to ensure that it continued to target towards demand.
11. In 2021 a new Education Capital Programme was developed and included in the Councils budget report, this programme is reviewed and updated annually against forecasted demand. The programme identifies School Planning areas with an estimated number of places required, for the investment of the available grant allocations, this can be seen in appendix 1.
12. The planning areas listed within the 'Planning areas – schools to be confirmed' are being reviewed against the most recent forecasts (SCAP 24) and to identify where the pupil place demand could be met.
13. Planning area data will be shared with schools over the coming weeks, any areas that remain to be a priority for investment will be highlighted in these meetings.
14. As with the previous programme, the priority areas identified for future years will remain in the programme and will continue to be monitored through the review of data that

supports the pupil place planning process to ensure that investment will be made in the areas where it is needed. This may result in alterations to the planning areas stated in future years.

15. This revised programme has been drafted utilising data that would have formed part of SCAP 23.

## Appendix 1

| Planning area                                   | Deliver by year | Estimated No. Places |
|---|-----------------|----------------------|
| <b>Active schemes</b>                           |                 |                      |
| Chester North Primary                           | 2024            | 0                    |
| Chester North West Secondary                    | 2024            | 90*                  |
| Chester South East Secondary                    | 2024            | 80                   |
| Helsby Secondary                                | 2024            | 25*                  |
| PRU- Ellesmere Port                             | 2025            | n/a                  |
| Neston Primary                                  | 2025            | 8                    |
| Tarporley and Tattenhall Secondary              | 2025            | 150                  |
| Chester Rural South Primary                     | 2026            | n/a                  |
| Chester South Primary                           | 2026            | 210                  |
| Chester South Primary                           | TBC             | 60*                  |
| Chester South Primary                           | TBC             | 105                  |
| Ellesmere Port West Primary                     | TBC             | 210                  |
| Ellesmere Port West Primary                     | TBC             | 105                  |
|   |                 |                      |
|   |                 |                      |
| <b>Planning Areas - Schools to be confirmed</b> |                 |                      |
| Secondary - Chester (all areas)                 | TBC             | TBC                  |
| Secondary - Neston                              | TBC             | TBC                  |
| Primary - Ellesmere Port                        | TBC             | TBC                  |
| Primary - Chester and Chester rural             | TBC             | TBC                  |
| Primary - Winsford                              | TBC             | TBC                  |
| Primary - Helsby                                | TBC             | TBC                  |
| Primary - Neston                                | TBC             | TBC                  |

\*Temporary increase in numbers

**Cheshire West and Chester  
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**Agenda item 5**

**Reinstating the Schools Forum High Needs Finance Subgroup**

**Recommendations that Schools Forum**

- i. review Terms of Reference and membership; and
- ii. reinstate High Needs finance subgroup.

**Terms of Reference:**

1. To find alternative proposals to address the high needs block overspend
2. To provide detailed examination of issues identified by the Schools Forum
3. To make recommendations to the Schools Forum

**Membership**

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Chair                 | tba  |
| Secondary Headteacher | David Curry                                |
| Primary Headteacher   | tbc  |
| Primary Headteacher   | Kate Docherty                              |
| CWASSH Chair          | Neil Oxley or Jude McGuinness (vice chair) |
| Secondary Governor    | David Rowlands                             |
| Primary Governor      | tbc  |
| PRU                   | Andrew Stewart                             |

**Observers:**

CWAPH Chair

Non Schools Forum member – previously Head of Blacon High School

Local Authority Officers as appropriate

**Cheshire West and Chester  
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**Agenda item 7**

**Schedule of meetings 2024-2025**

**Schools Forum – all meetings 4.30pm – 6.30pm**

| <b>Date</b>             | <b>Venue</b> | <b>Proposed agenda</b>  |
|-------------------------|--------------|---|
| Tuesday 14 January 2025 | MS Teams     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicative Dedicated Schools Grant Allocations for 2025-2026</li> <li>• Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget setting 2025-2026</li> <li>• Draft of 2025-2026 School Funding Formula for January Submission</li> <li>• De-delegation – Proposals for 2025-2026</li> <li>• DSG 2024-2025 Forecast Outturn at Third Review</li> <li>• Update - SEND HN programme</li> </ul> |
| Monday 10 February 2025 | MS Teams     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Years Funding for 2025-2026</li> <li>• Arrangements for funding from the High Needs Block 2025-2026</li> </ul>   |
| Tuesday 1 July 2025     | MS Teams     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DSG 2024-2025 outturn</li> <li>• School balances at the end of 2024-2025 (with appendices for schools and academies)</li> <li>• Directed revisions to schemes for financing schools</li> <li>• Annual review of Schools Forum membership, constitution, and terms of reference</li> </ul>  |

**Schools Forum Finance Subgroup**

| <b>Date</b>             | <b>Time</b>    | <b>Venue</b> |
|-------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Tuesday 21 January 2025 | 2.00 – 4.00 pm | MS Teams     |
| Tuesday 10 June 2025    | 2.00 – 4.00 pm | MS Teams     |

**Schools Forum High Needs Finance Subgroup – being reviewed**