

**Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, virtual meeting, on 17 January 2023 – approved at 13 February Forum**

<b>Members</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
<b>Schools and Academies</b>		
Jan Diamond	Primary headteachers	Attended
Nicky Dowling	Primary headteachers	Attended
Ian Devereux-Roberts	Primary headteachers	Attended
Kate Docherty	Primary headteachers	Attended
Beth Hacking	Primary headteachers	Attended
Sharon Broughton	Primary governors	Absent
Duncan Haworth (Chair)	Primary governors	Attended
Lisa Rigby	Primary governors	Absent
David Nield	Primary governors	Attended
Nick Lacey	Primary governors	Absent
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Attended
Martin Hill	Secondary headteachers	Apologies
David Rowlands	Secondary governors	Attended
Rob Williams	Secondary governors	Apologies
Neil Oxley	Special headteachers	Attended
Philip Hopwood	Special governors	Attended
Andy Stewart	PRU	Attended
Deborah Beaumont	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Simon Faircloth	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Darran Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Luci Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Helen Studley	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Cathryn McKeagney	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Emma Leach	Academies - special	Attended
<b>Non Schools</b>		
Cat Hirst	PVI early years providers	Absent
Vacancy	PVI early years providers	Vacancy
Kathryn Magiera	Diocese	Absent
Caroline Vile	Diocese	Apologies
Greg Foster	Unions	Attended
Geoff Wright	Unions	Absent
Rob Pullen	CWAPH	Attended
Vacancy	16-19 providers	Vacancy
<b>Official Observers</b>		
Councillor Robert Cernik	Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Attended
<b>Officers in attendance</b>		
Helen Brackenbury	Director Children and Families	
Natalie Cole	Finance Manager	
Charlotte Fenn	Clerk	
Debbie Edwards	Head of Education and Inclusion	
Christine Ridley Thomas	Senior Manager School Intervention Co-ordination & Schools Causing Concern	

## **Observers**

Councillor Razia Daniels  
Mitchel Hatton

Shadow Cabinet Member for Children and Families  
Schools Finance

## **1. Introductions and apologies**

Apologies were noted.

Duncan Haworth reported the following membership changes:

### **Resignations:**

Sarah Connolly                      Concordia MAT

### **New representatives:**

Simon Faircloth	Concordia MAT	Academies
Cathryn McKeagney	The Catholic High School, Chester	Academies
Nicky Dowling	Highfield Community Primary School	Primary Heads
Jan Diamond	Hartford Manor Primary School & Nursery	Primary Heads

Duncan welcomed new members to their first meeting and explained the protocol for virtual meetings.

## **2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting**

### **2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 11 October 2022**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 11 October 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

### **2.2 Matters arising**

#### **2.2.1 Item 4 - Update on Council Financial Position**

Natalie Cole reported that as the December Schools Forum meeting had been cancelled and the consultation period had now concluded it would not be possible to provide an update at this stage. The budget proposals were currently going through Scrutiny prior to Full Council in February; a further update on the Council's financial position would be brought to February Schools Forum.

#### **2.2.2 Item 9 - Brief Update – SEND Review Final Report**

Debbie Edwards briefly outlined the 10 recommendations which had been shared at the last Schools Forum Finance subgroup. The recommendations had been split under four themes:

Theme 1: Service Restructure and Redesign

Theme 2: Sufficiency and Commissioning

Theme 3: Targeting support for the most vulnerable learners

Theme 4: Communicating the Vision and Building the Strategic Alliance of Support for Inclusion

It was noted that the final structure under theme 1 had not been shared with the affected team and therefore was confidential until the staff consultation started on the 30 January.

Implementation of the recommendations was proposed to start in the summer term supported by Jonathan Wilding for approximately 12 months, subject to approval at full Council in February 2023 of any additional resource requirements.

Natalie Cole provided a brief outline on the financial impact. The benefit and financial implications of the recommendations were modelled against an 'as-is' projection, which assumed a continuation of increasing demand and costs. The target operating model was based on the reduction of demand for Education Health Care Plans and associated commissioned places, placement costs and top up funding and was projected to balance the in-year budget in 2026-2027. It was noted that the recommendations and investment could not immediately address this position and there was likely to be a three-year period where annual overspends of between £1m-£2m are unavoidable; costly placements in independent placement provision could not be reduced until there was internal capacity to move pupils into by increasing inclusion and support in mainstream.

David Rowlands' commented that the schemes made sense but communication between all those working with the pupils was crucial so not to work in a silo.

Debbie Edwards acknowledged David Nield's comment that the recommendations were effectively saying that more pupils needed to be educated in mainstream or we would be in more of a financial 'mess'.

Philp Hopwood sought clarification on several points in particular what the evidence was for moving pupils into mainstream, was it demand led, was the needs profile changing or was it financial?

Debbie Edwards responded that it was not just financial, numbers were raising nationally, where the needs of children and families could be met it was appropriate for them to be educated in borough. Comorbidity had increased and pupils had more complex needs. One of the questions that needed addressing was, are we providing the right training for our staff to support pupils to be educated along with other pupils in mainstream schools.

It was noted that if all the external schools funding was redistributed amongst CW&C schools it would support more pupils, the cost of an external school could be significantly high. Debbie acknowledged that more work needed doing to build parents confidence that their child's needs could be met in mainstream schools.

Philip acknowledged Debbie's response but felt that having not seen the review he did not feel reassured by what he had heard presented at Forum and felt the comments were contradictory especially as the data reflected an increase in child with more complex needs.

Further to David Rowlands' comment, regarding communication, Helen Brackenbury acknowledged that this area was challenging with the level of Education Health Care

Plans increasing exponentially and parents and colleague's frustrations at not knowing their child's progress through the system. Communication was key to ensuring parents felt informed and reassured.

David Nield asked how CW&C compared to the national benchmark in relation to pupils going into external provision.

Debbie responded that CW&C were well supported by Special schools and had higher special provision than other Local Authorities and most schools wished to be inclusive. All our special schools were good or outstanding and were in demand, but we needed to convey to parents that our maintained schools were equally suitable compared to independent schools.

Nicky Dowling asked what the key drivers were for the independent sector.

Debbie responded that there were several factors including aggressive marketing tactics, word of mouth by parents and friends, evidence of heads suggesting schools and schools having the opportunity of saying they couldn't meet a pupil's needs.

It was also noted that a big pull was that some independent schools were paying legal fees for the tribunal process.

### **3. Indicative Dedicated Schools Grant Allocations for 2023-2024**

Natalie Cole introduced the report which detailed the provisional allocation figures for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2023-2024.

Natalie drew Forum members' attention to paragraph 5 which outlined the changes to the allocation which had led to an increase in available funding of £20.802m.

There were no comments from Forum to report.

**Resolved that** Schools Forum note the indicative allocations which would inform the schools block funding formula and DSG budget proposals for 2023-2024 in further agenda items.

### **4. Dedicated Schools Grant Budget Setting Proposals 2023-2024**

Natalie Cole introduced the report which presents the DSG budget proposals for the next financial year based on the allocations outlined in item 3 and included details of central expenditure budgets.

Forum's attention was drawn to paragraph 5 and the table which showed that the responses received to the consultation were largely in support of maintaining the 0.5% transfer from schools block to high needs block for 2023-2024.

Natalie went through the budget proposals, for approval by Schools Forum, for the schools block, high needs, early years and central services spend as outlined in Appendix B page 20.

Natalie drew Forum's attention to the four changes in the Central spend budgets outlined in Appendix B table1.

It was noted that this was the first time the budget had been set higher than the funds available.

There were no comments from Forum to report.

### **Resolved that Schools Forum**

- i. Approve the continuation of the existing 0.5% transfer from schools block to high needs block for 2023-2024 (vote: unanimous):
- ii. Endorse the draft DSG budget proposals in Appendix B for approval by Council (vote: unanimous); and
- iii. Approve the central spend budgets in Appendix B (vote: unanimous)

## **5. Draft of 2023-2024 School Funding Formula for January Submission**

Natalie Cole introduced the report which detailed the draft School Funding Formula for 2023-2024 taking into account the decisions taken previously on the principles of the local funding formula and the October 2022 census data provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

Natalie went through the paper by exception as most of the decisions had been agreed or endorsed previously.

It was noted that the formula would be based on pupil numbers and demographics taken from the October 2022 census and the formula factors as listed in appendix A. There needed to be a slight reduction to the national funding formulae (NFF) rates of £6 to meet the overall affordability of the schools block allocation. The Notional SEN guidance was reviewed by the Schools Forum Finance Sub Group at the December 2022 meeting and it was concluded that, as calculations complied with the guidance and were in line with other local authority allocations, there was no need to change the current calculation.

Forum members also noted that the 2023-2024 school funding figures in Appendix D were draft and subject to ESFA and Council approvals.

Rob Pullen sought clarification regarding why there was a significant change in funding for Alvanley and Manley Primary. Natalie confirmed that this was due mainly to the amalgamation of the school and reduction in the lump sum, the school had been aware of the impact on funding prior to the amalgamation.

**Resolved that Schools Forum** (School, Academy and PVI representatives) endorse the draft funding formula submission to the ESFA (vote: unanimous).

## **6. De-delegation proposals for 2023-2024**

Natalie Cole introduced the report which outlined the services to be considered for de-delegated by maintained schools for 2023-2024.

Natalie referred Forum members to the recommendations which listed the services currently under consideration for de-delegated. It was noted that decisions to de-delegate A-D had been taken since 2013, whereas School improvement was de-delegated for the first-time last year.

Forum members were referred to the consultation outcomes for A-D in paragraph 5. It was noted that maintained schools had been consulted on 4 options, outlined in Appendix B, for de-delegating School improvement, following the DfE decision to remove the School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering (SIMB) grant funding from April 2023. The weighted scores and ranking of options, in paragraph 10, were noted.

Christine Ridley Thomas was invited to talk through the options. It was noted that, as part of the consultation, the additional information on the impact of school improvement de-delegation options and reduced funding, as seen in Appendix B, had been shared with schools. As well as ASIA (Associate School Improvement Adviser) and SSL (Specialist Subject Leaders) support, schools currently also had access to enhanced leadership support, governance reviews as well as funding for additional support for schools who entered the Schools Causing Concern process.

Rob Pullen reported that a meeting had been held, last week, for primary schools to discuss the options. Primary colleagues had been concerned that, due to the timing of the consultation, not all schools had fully understood what the de-delegated options provided and felt that the consultation responses may not be reflective of schools' actual feelings. Rob had conducted a poll at the meeting with the following results – 9 voted for option 1 and 6 voted for option 2; the poll had been first preference only and not ranked.

Nicky Dowling reported that she had responded to the consultation and attended the meeting. Nicky also declared an interest as she worked as an ASIA. She commented that a targeted school would only receive one ASIA visit per year under option 3; as a Head she felt one visit was not enough and as an ASIA had concerns as to how affective this could be and wasn't value for money. Option 2 was better value for money. She was also disappointed at the low response to the consultation.

Kate Docherty shared Nicky's concerns, having the support of the local authority was reassuring and felt that culling the service was extreme, option 2 was preferable to option 3.

Ian Devereux-Roberts agreed with Kate's comments, all schools were in financial difficulties but in the interest of fairness option 2 was preferable.

There were no comments to report from secondary or special representatives.

**Resolved that** Schools Forum (maintained school representatives) agreed the services to be de-delegated to the Local Authority for 2023-2024 as detailed for:

- a) Contingencies to cover the cost of staff on suspension (primary and secondary separately)

Primary Vote: Yes - unanimous  
Secondary Vote: Yes – unanimous

- b) Free school meals eligibility assessments (primary and secondary separately)  
Primary Vote: Yes - unanimous  
Secondary Vote: Yes – unanimous
- c) Covering the cost of staff on for maternity/paternity/adoption leave (primary only)  
Primary Vote: Yes - unanimous
- d) Pooling of funding to cover the costs of trade union facilities time (primary and secondary separately)  
Primary Vote: Yes – unanimous  
Secondary Vote: Yes – unanimous
- e) School improvement team (primary, secondary and special/ alternative provision separately)  
Primary Vote:  
Option 1 -1  
**Option 2 -5 – option agreed**  
Option 3 -0  
Option 4 -0  
Secondary Vote:  
Option 1 -0  
Option 2 -0  
**Option 3 -2 – option agreed**  
Option 4 -0  
Special/alternative provision Vote:  
Option 1 -0  
Option 2 -0  
**Option 3 -3 – option agreed**  
Option 4 -0

## 7. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2022-2023 Forecast Outturn at Third Review

Natalie Cole went through the report which provided an update on the financial forecast outturn position for 2022-2023 for centrally held DSG as reported at the Third Review of Financial Performance.

There were no comments from Forum to report.

**Resolved that Schools Forum note the Third Review position on the DSG and next steps.**

## 8. Any Other Business

**Fischer Family Trust (FFT)**

Christine Ridley Thomas provided a brief update regarding the funding of FFT for 2023-2024 onwards. It was noted that, as referenced under item 4, the funding stream which the LA had historically used to fund the subscription for all schools to access FFT would cease from the end of March 2023.

FFT have offered the LA 3 options; buy a subscription on behalf of all primary and secondary schools; buy a subscription solely on behalf of all primary schools or buy a subscription solely on behalf of all secondary schools.

If schools wished to continue to pay for FFT, buying it through the local authority could reduce the rate as opposed to the individual cost per school, however the current usage data for primary schools indicated that there were not enough schools to make is value for money. It was noted that if bought through the LA access could be switched off to schools not wishing to use it.

Christine was taking the proposal through the heads associations, that week, to see if interested in buying through the LA. It was noted that if the LA was to purchase, on behalf of schools, Schools Forum approval would need to be sought at the February meeting.

David Curry confirmed that he could take FFT to CWASH this Thursday and asked what the subscription rates might be.

Christine replied that secondary was around £1,000 – £2,000 and primary £200 - £800.

## **9. Next meeting**

Next Schools Forum meeting Monday 13 February 2023 – virtual.