

**Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, virtual meeting, on 6 July 2021 – subject to approval at 19 October Schools Forum**

<b>Members</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
<b>Schools and Academies</b>		
Alan Brown	Primary headteachers	Attended
Julie Chambers	Primary headteachers	Attended
Sarah Curtis	Primary headteachers	Apologies
Ian Devereux Roberts	Primary headteachers	Apologies
Kate Docherty	Primary headteachers	Attended
Kerry Forrester	Primary headteachers	Substitute
Sharon Broughton	Primary governors	Attended
Duncan Haworth (Chair)	Primary governors	Attended
Vacancy	Primary governors	Vacancy
David Nield	Primary governors	Attended
Nick Lacey	Primary governors	Attended
Lisa Rigby	Primary governors	Substitute
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Attended
Mike Holland	Secondary headteachers	Attended
John Freeman	Secondary governors	Attended
Rob Williams	Secondary governors	Attended
Mike McCann	Special headteachers	Attended
Philip Hopwood	Special governors	Attended
Katie Tyrie	Nursery headteachers	Apologies
Andy Stewart	PRU	Attended
Sarah Connolly	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Darran Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Luci Jones	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Jason Lowe	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Helen Studley	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Lyndsay Watterson	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Marie Allen	Academies - special	Attended
<b>Non Schools</b>		
Sue Anderson	PVI early years providers	Attended
Kathryn Magiera	Diocese	Absent
Caroline Vile	Diocese	Attended
Greg Foster	Unions	Absent
Geoff Wright	Unions	Absent
Rob Pullen	CWAPH	Attended
Cat Hirst	PVI early years providers	Apologies
Vacancy	16-19 providers	Vacancy
<b>Official Observers</b>		
Councillor Robert Cernik	Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Attended
<b>Officers in attendance</b>		
Natalie Cole	Finance Manager	
Charlotte Fenn	Clerk	
Debbie Freeman	Senior Manager SEN	
Debbie Murphy	Acting Head of Education and Inclusion	

## **Observer**

Councillor Razia Daniels     Shadow Cabinet Member for Children and Families

### **1. Introductions and apologies**

Apologies and substitutes were noted.

Duncan Haworth reminded Forum members of the meeting protocols for comments and voting.

Duncan reported the following updates to Schools Forum membership:

#### **Resignations**

Lyndsay Watterson     Head Queen's Park High School wef 31/8/2021

Katie Tyrie             Head St Mary's Nursery wef 31/8/2021

#### **Term of office extended**

Andy Stewart The Bridge PRU

Sian Thomas continue as PRU substitute

#### **Term of office ended/new representatives being sought**

Marie Allen Special Academies - carrying on as representative while Special Academies seeking representative & substitute

Geoff Wright Unions – carrying on as representative while JCNP seeking representative

Duncan welcomed to the meeting Debbie Murphy, Acting Head of Education and Inclusion, covering for David McNaught while on sabbatical.

Duncan reported that he had been notified that Andrea Latheron-Cassule, ESFA observer, would be attending to monitor schools forums as part of a scrutiny exercise, but was not yet in attendance.

Duncan, on behalf of Schools Forum, thanked Lyndsay and Katie for the work done over many years and wished them well for the future.

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

#### **2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 8 February 2021**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 8 February 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

#### **2.2 Matters arising**

None to report.

### **3. Update on SEND proposals and implementation of the High Needs Strategic Review**

Debbie Freeman introduced the item and took Forum through the report on progress with developing SEND proposals arising from the High Needs Strategic Review.

The Local Authority have received confirmation of SEND capital allocations available from 2021-2022. Forum members attention was drawn to the table on page 9 listing proposals to increase special school capacity to meet increased demand and develop alternative models of provision.

Debbie referred Forum to paragraph 5 which outlined the revenue proposals for increasing specialist place provision and drew their attention to the SEND outreach support offer outlined in appendix A, which included outreach, in reach, CPD and School to School Support. It was noted that the introduction of the outreach offer was from September 2021, for mainstream schools, and requests would be made by completing a request form.

Debbie sought views and comments from Forum on the proposals.

Mike McCann reported that schools were already getting phone calls from parents and it would be helpful if officers could get the message out that the offer started from September and guidance on how to apply. Debbie acknowledge Mike's concerns and confirmed that guidance would be sent out.

It was also noted that some schools still needed to recruit the necessary staff to fulfil the offer.

Sue Anderson sought clarification as to whether the outreach extended to PVI's. Debbie responded that officers were looking at this with the Early Years Special Support team to see where it would be appropriate to seek support from.

Rob Williams commented that it was a clear paper, if there were the resources, the services should be developed, and the proposals were to be applauded.

Rob Pullen confirmed that the proposals had been widely appreciated by Primary colleagues, but they had questions around resources and longevity. Debbie acknowledged that the additional offer may generate more demand and the offer would be reviewed termly.

**Resolved that Schools Forum noted the paper.**

#### **4. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2020-2021 Final Outturn**

Natalie Cole introduced the item and took Schools Forum through the report the 2020-2021 final outturn position for the centrally held DSG budget and reserve.

It was noted that the overspend was largely due to increased spend on High Needs provision and Early Years entitlements.

Forum's attention was drawn to the table in paragraph 7 which summarised the cumulative position on the centrally held DSG reserve including the current year variances and agreed use of reserves in 2020-2021.

It was noted that officers would be taking forward the development of the DSG recovery plan over summer term and this would take into account the DfE funding announcement and guidance for 2022-2023 which officers were awaiting.

**Resolved that Schools Forum** note the final outturn on the 2020-2021 centrally held DSG and reserve.

## **5. Maintained School Balances Financial Year 2020-2021 and Academy Balances 2019-2020**

Natalie Cole introduced the report and took Schools Forum through the final outturn position of maintained schools in the Borough for the 2020-2021 financial year.

Natalie drew Forums attention to paragraph 4 and the summary of maintained schools' balances by sector. It was noted that there was a significant increase in school balances of £7.2m, this was partly due to lower utility and building costs and an increase in grant income and High Needs funding; there had also been a significant reduction in schools in deficit. Natalie reported that the picture was the same across schools in other North West Local Authorities. No action was to be taken to clawback or redistribute the balances.

David Nield sought clarification regarding the underspent High Needs income. Natalie surmised that this was due to funds being allocated during the summer term where there had been an increase in the number of assessments but schools had not put planned initiatives in place as the child had not been attending school.

Rob Pullen commented that it was worth noting that not all had made savings, some had lost income where they normally provided wrap around provision. Natalie responded that the majority of schools were better off and had focused on what had to provide due to Covid but had not taken into account what not spending on but acknowledged that it had been a difficult year to plan anything.

Alan Brown concurred with Rob's comments and added that he had picked up from colleagues that some had extra staffing costs due to staff covering bubbles, staff isolating and an increase in staff being called in for medical appointments, which didn't trigger the insurance as only short absences; also loss of income from before and after school clubs. In Alan's case there were also the additional costs of taking on higher qualified staff to deal with the number of pupils with complex needs and extra costs not covered by High Needs.

**Resolved that 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 (maintained schools only).

## **6. Updated guidance on the Scheme for Financing Schools for 2021-2022**

Natalie Cole introduced the item and took Forum members through the scheme changes outlined in the paper.

It was noted that approval for the revisions to the scheme was being sought from maintained schools only.

David Nield sought clarification regarding paragraph 11d and the reference to the use of purchase cards for items under £50. Natalie acknowledged there was an error and the amount should be £500. Following the introduction of Unit4, a letter had been sent out to schools advising them that, where possible, purchase cards should be used for items under £500.

**Resolved that Schools Forum** (maintained schools only) approved the revisions to the scheme which will be reflected in the updated Scheme to be published July 2021 (vote: unanimous).

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

Charlotte Fenn took Forum members through the report and the updates to the membership, constitution, and terms of reference.

**Resolved that the 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;
- ii. Forum will no-longer require a Nursery School representative as of 1 September 2021;
- iii. the changes to the constitution and terms of reference to make permanent provisions to enable schools forums meetings to be held remotely (Appendix 1 – paragraph 8 -9); and
- iv. the Early Years reference groups' revised membership.

## **8. Schools NFF consultation on sparsity factor**

Natalie Cole referred Forum members to the two separate documents on Schools NFF consultation on sparsity factor and provided a verbal update.

It was noted that supporting small schools was an issue for CW&C and only five schools received funding under the current sparsity funding formula.

In March the authority submitted a response to the consultation supporting the expanding of the mechanism to determine sparsity. Currently part of the funding formula calculation was based on the average distance 'as the crow flies' and not by road which did not take into account such factors as rivers.

The DfE are now proposing to begin measuring sparsity distances by road journeys rather than 'as the crow flies' and increase the tapered funding from £45,000 to £55,000.

The results of the consultation had not yet been published but Natalie had heard of favourable responses to the consultation.

David Nield commented that the proposals seemed evidently sensible and would benefit the council.

**Resolved that Schools Forum note the verbal update.**

## **9. Any Other Business**

None to report.

## **10. Next meeting**

19 October 2021 4.30 - 6.30 virtual.

John Freeman questioned why all the meetings were online, as parish councils' meetings now had to be face to face. Charlotte Fenn responded that provision had been made, within the regulations, to allow forum meetings to continue to be held remotely. Officers were waiting for further guidance from Cheshire West and Chester regarding how to proceed with meetings moving forward; online meetings would also reduce our carbon footprint.

David Nield suggested Forum consider one face to face meeting a year. Duncan Haworth said the position would be kept under review based on the agenda items.